In search of repair
Critical white responses to whiteness as a theological problem – a South African contribution

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Introduction

White theologians and philosophers write numerous articles and books on theodicy, asking why God permits massive suffering, but they hardly ever mention the horrendous crimes Whites have committed against people of colour in the modern world. Why do White theologians ignore racism? This is a haunting question—especially since a few White scholars in other disciplines (such as sociology, literature, history and anthropology) do engage with the phenomenon of racism. Why not theologians? Shouldn’t they be the first to attack this evil? (Cone, 2004, p. 142)

James Cone can in many ways be considered the ‘father’ of black theology. His words had a profound influence on the church struggle against apartheid in South Africa. The words below are born from facing the critique against white theologians that we fail to engage race consciously in theology – more specifically, we fail to consciously engage the critical perspectives of black theologians on race and its implications for the whiteness of theology. James Cone, through his life work, perhaps provided the most persistent calling out of this silence.

However, Cone is not alone in his concern. In South Africa, black theologians have been questioning the inability of reigning theological modes to provide an adequate response to white racism. This includes those modes emerging after the end of apartheid, such as theologies of reconstruction and public theology (Maluleke, 1994; Maluleke, 2005, 119; Vellem, 2007; Vellem, 2010).

The problem is perhaps even more pronounced for those involved in systematic theology. Reflecting on the relationship between systematic theology and gender Sarah Coakley writes:

It is perhaps even more common (conversely) for systematic theologians to be dismissive, even derogatory, about theologians interested in feminism and gender. It is rare indeed – although not completely unknown – for systematic theologians of any stature to take the category of gender as even a significant locus for discussion; and when they do, they tend to import a gender theory from the secular realm without a sufficiently critical theological assessment of it.

(Coakley, 2013, p. 34)

The point here is not some comparison to relate which would be ‘most ignored’,¹ but the parallel is important. Systematic theologians are not generally engaged with questions such as gender and race,

¹ It is however significant that a recent South African overview on the state of systematic theology, under the section on theological anthropology, highlight reflections on gender and disability respectively, yet remains silent
and when they are, these categories are not engaged in explicitly theological language. While I claim no disciplinary ‘purity’, and indeed would be highly sceptical of any such claim, the chapters below is an explicit attempt at thinking through questions of race and whiteness in terms of Christian theology. This is in part a direct development from being confronted with my own lack of language to name race and whiteness in specifically theological terms during my master’s research (Van Wyngaard, 2012, pp. 34-47).

Jamaican poet Safiya Sinclair describes the responsibility of writers with the following words: “[w]riters must probe the wound that made them.” Kameron Carter, who will be a key guide in chapter 1, connects this with an understanding of the task of theology as “probe[ing] the Christian wound that has produced us all.” I draw on Sinclair’s comment with great hesitancy. She continues by saying that “[i]f you have no wounds, then maybe your efforts are better served elsewhere.” As Carter hints, our being produced, here as black and white, as racial beings in a racist world, is out of a wound, a ruptured humanity, as I will again argue throughout the dissertation, and a wound which is Christian in the making, but also working to produce a distorted Christianity. This wound needs to be probed, and its particular theological nature needs to be probed. For too long white theologians have withdrawn from this probing or refused to probe the particular way in which their own location as both white and theologian is deeply tied to the very production and reproduction of this wound. I write here, quite specifically, to try and point towards ways in which white theologians can take up this task of probing, a task which, Sinclair reminds us, a cloud of black witnesses has been taking up, and next to whom I hope to find a way of probing. And perhaps such probing might contribute to the slow work of repair.

1 Background and social location

The idea that those who write should be clear on their own social location is no longer strange. Yet, the mere biographical naming of social location or listing of multiple identity markers as a ‘disclaimer’ is most explicitly not what is the concern here. This entire thesis is however built on a premise of being

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1 https://pen.org/pen-ten-safiya-sinclair/ [accessed 3 October 2017].
2 It was also Carter, who when making this comment, directed me to the interview with Sinclair, https://www.facebook.com/jkameroncarter/posts/10154979077205418 [accessed 3 October 2017].
3 Philosopher Linda Alcoff points out that when the practice of acknowledging social location becomes mere autobiographical information is presented as ‘disclaimer against ignorance’ then this results in a deformed form of noting where we work from (Alcoff, 1991, p. 25).
critically conscious of how whiteness informs theology and developing such consciousness for the same of a particular responsibility.

So I work as a white South African Christian theologian (all four of these markers being important) attempting to articulate a theological framework for the work which white South Africans should do in a racialised context marked by centuries of white racism.

I take the call of Gloria Anzaldúa seriously, that we be clear on our stake in writing and reflecting (Mignolo, 2012, p. 42). This work cannot be disconnected from the fact that I am an ordained minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, a church that continues to be haunted by its theological support of apartheid. While I remain critical of the inability to become conscious of how our own whiteness continues to inform our theology, public witness, and church practice, I also engage this work from a sense of commitment and responsibility to “critically accompany the church” (Bosch, 1982, p. 27) in thinking about its own greatest sin.

This study happens both in a particular place and a particular time. I submitted my application for the Desmond Tutu Doctoral Training Programme in August 2014, writing my final proposal and motivation as the news of the killing of Michael Brown was flowing in. #BlackLivesMatter became a vital movement in emphasising the ongoing systemic racism in the United States of America, but also elsewhere. #Rhodesmustfall and #Feesmustfall captured the South African social and political imagination, focusing attention, among other things, on questions of race on academic campuses. A significant part of my research time was spent in The Netherlands. I arrived in Amsterdam for the first time within days of the boat disaster which claimed the lives of 800 migrants. During this period debates around Zwarte Piet also became particularly pronounced, and it coincided with the publication of Gloria Wekker’s fascinating analysis of Dutch whiteness (Wekker, 2016), calling out this refusal of acknowledging racism in the Dutch context.

5 I am not blind to the fact that my identity is not only this. I could have added here able-bodied, male, heterosexual, Afrikaner, ordained, urban, employed, lecturer at a university, part of an intellectual class etc. Yet in keeping to Alcoff’s critique of such references to identity acting as mere disclaimer, I remain cautious of a mere listing of what is not being probed here.

6 These questions more explicitly informed my own research in the years prior to the work on this thesis (Van Wyngaard, 2012; Van Wyngaard, 2014a; Van Wyngaard, 2014b).

7 Jacob Boersema traced the way the South African movements were connected to its US counterparts, and also the explicit anti-racist thrust in #Rhodesmustfall (Boersema, 2017).

While these events inevitably informed my own reflections during this time, the research topic preceded these events and was born from an earlier recognition of the depth of the crisis of race and whiteness in South Africa. While Southern Africa, South Africa in a particular way, has been deformed by racial ideologies for many centuries, the debate on whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa became already particularly acute and public in the past decade.

Given the place of South Africa in a global imagination on the struggle against racism, a brief note on the relationship between whiteness and apartheid in describing the problem is in order. While situated in the context of what is described as a post-apartheid South Africa, this is not a study in response to apartheid. Apartheid was a political system of legalised racism. While it has a history that is often traced to the mission policy of the Dutch Reformed Church and is formed by a legal framework of British colonialism, it exists as a formal period from 1948-1994. This study is concerned with whiteness, and I will consciously trace this as an idea beyond apartheid as a political system.

In the postscript to, arguably, the most well-known book on the church struggle against apartheid, Steve de Gruchy responded to Marxist critiques on The Church Struggle’s emphasis on race and silence on issues of class. Apart from the fact that such a separation in any direction is not necessarily helpful in South Africa, De Gruchy’s summary of the work illustrates the problem which needs to be unpacked: “because the book used ‘race’ rather than ‘class’ as its primary analytical tool, the history focused upon the church and its response to racism and apartheid rather than colonialism and capitalism” (De Gruchy & De Gruchy, 2004, p. xxvii). While racism is not equated with apartheid, the close relationship between the two, as if the colonialist moment was in essence not tied to racism, risks supporting the idea that racism was the issue of apartheid South Africa. In my analysis below colonialism and racism will be closely intertwined.

Racism continues to plague South Africa decades after the end of legal apartheid. South Africa remains a divided society (Barolsky, 2013, p. 383), and extreme poverty continues to affect mostly black South Africans (Wale, 2013, pp. 15-16). Race continues to structure our public discourse and debates, and

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9 Some of my own reflections on what was transpiring can be found here [https://mycontemplations.wordpress.com/2015/10/23/today-i-saw-unionbuildings-feesmustfall/](https://mycontemplations.wordpress.com/2015/10/23/today-i-saw-unionbuildings-feesmustfall/) [accessed 17 June 2019]. I was also closely involved with the process that lead to the document A call for Critical Engagement, calling for a theological engagement with the student movements - [https://www.up.ac.za/centre-for-contextual-ministry/news/post_2387906-a-call-for-critical-engagement](https://www.up.ac.za/centre-for-contextual-ministry/news/post_2387906-a-call-for-critical-engagement) [accessed 17 June 2019].

10 [http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/columnists/2014/07/30/sa-should-try-reconciliation--for-real-this-time](http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/columnists/2014/07/30/sa-should-try-reconciliation--for-real-this-time) [accessed 12 February 2015].
residential patterns, including many new developments that continue to reflect a racial pattern (Ballard, 2004a; Ballard, 2004b). The Reformed Churches in South Africa remain segregated, quite specifically, the Dutch Reformed Church remains for all intents and purposes a white church. Yet all of this leads to the main concern of this thesis: white South African theologians continue to reflect an inability to theologically interrogate race and our own whiteness.

Already notions such as ‘race’, ‘racism’, and ‘whiteness’ have appeared a number of times in the text. One possible logic of approaching a problem such as this is to start with a particular ‘authoritative’ definitions of these key concepts out of which the analysis can then proceed. I am hesitant to approach the study in this manner. Notions such as race, ethnicity, tribe, nation, people, etc. are notoriously slippery, and defining them is like ‘pinning a jellyfish to the wall’. Kate Crehan’s description of the problem of clear definition of class in Marx and Gramsci might assist in understanding the place of defining race in a study such as this: since class is the very object of study in Marx and Gramsci, the whole corpus serves as a thick description of the notion, so that a simple definition is impossible (Crehan, 2016, p. xi). Rather than attempt a fixed definition, each chapter and interlocutor will contribute layers and nuance to the very understanding of these notions.

Part of the complexity of fixed definitions of race and racism is that it is, among other things, produced together with particular nationalisms (Garner, 2007, p. 22), and that racial identities and the meaning of associated terminology takes on vastly different forms in different contexts. Of particular importance below is that, built on an argument that will be discussed in detail in chapter 3, the international reader will note a refusal to make use of apartheid racial categorisation (White, African, Coloured, Indian), but that I rather speak of black and white only, with the content of these notions becoming a fundamental part of the argument to follow.

The matter is further complicated by the increasing awareness that race, class, gender, religion, and multiple other aspects of identity never exist in isolation but intersect and inform each other in complex ways. Each of these intersections deserve a sustained critical analysis. On the other hand, race, racism,

11 The metaphor used by Dorian Llywelyn early in Toward a Catholic theology of nationality when discussing the difficulty with some of these notions (Llywelyn, 2010, pp. 24-32). Llywelyn himself does not touch on the complexity of race, but seems to use this as if the meaning of race itself is fixed, describing how ethnic was conflated with race in the 20th century (Llywelyn, 2010, p. 25).

12 The use of a collective ‘black’ to refer to all those oppressed in a white racist system is generally accepted in South African discourse. This is for example followed in the National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (National Action Plan to Combat Racism, 2019, p. 15)
and whiteness has its “own inner logic” (Kritzinger, 2008, p. 2) which also deserves our sustained attention. It is the need for critical engagement with whiteness in particular by white systematic theologians that I sought to turn my attention to in this research.

The limitations that this choice entail did however become increasingly visible towards the end of this research problem. The intersection of theology with an embodied identity intimately tied to the oppression of others over centuries has drawn my own attention even more to the urgent need to explore the multifaceted nature of how our theologies continue to underlie the multifaceted relations of oppression in which we are embedded. The importance of expanding the analysis below through an increasing emphasis on its intersection with multiple structures of power and oppression would be a key aspect of further research.

2 Research method and question

The project will work on retrieval and systematisation of theologies which critically interrogate whiteness together with critical white theologies and the constructive work of developing theological possibilities which would cut through the faultiness of colonialism and modern racism as these are enacted in contemporary whiteness. Most of the research will be descriptive and consist of an analysis of the work of key theologians working on the intersection of race and theology. The final part will have a constructive theological character.

The main research question that shaped this study was why is whiteness a particularly theological problem and what would an appropriate theological response from white theologians look like?

These questions were asked repeatedly in dialogue with different theologians, trying to develop a deeper understanding of race in general and whiteness in particular as theological problems, and exploring different white attempts at developing theological responses to the challenge of black theology. Most specifically, the study was designed to focus attention on particular attempts by white South African theologians working in tandem with the early phases of South African black theology to analyse their work in terms of whiteness as a theological problem. Out of this, key constructive elements of a theology that could critically interrogate and contribute to the disruption of whiteness will be proposed.
3 Structure

The thesis develops through five chapters, with each of the first four chapters asking what theological problems with race in general and whiteness in particular are discerned by the interlocutors engaged. In response, each chapter discerns aspects of what a theology which disrupts the whiteness of theology would look like.

Chapter 1 and 3 form a unit by looking at two particular instances where African-American/black theologians worked to describe the theological problem of race in general and whiteness in particular, in the context of the USA and South Africa. Chapter 2 and 4 form a unit by looking at white attempts at a theological disruption of whiteness or a construction of a theology which disrupts the problem of whiteness, using examples from continental Europe and the USA in the one chapter and focusing on South Africa in the other.

In chapter 1, I focus on the so-called Duke school of race and theology, the books of Kameron Carter and William Jennings published in 2008 and 2010 respectively. The chapter reads them together but does this consciously from a South African context. The focus of the chapters is quite specifically on their respective and joined attempts at describing whiteness as a theological problem in colonialism and modernity. This is particularly related to their thesis on the relationship between whiteness and Christian supersessionism, but also the way in which space and bodies were being recreated in racial imagination.

In chapter 2, I focus on the work of two white theologians who at different points were singled out by James Cone for their particular work at interpreting and working out the implications of black theology for those who are white: The Dutch theologians Theo Witvliet and the US theologian Jim Perkinson. I trace the development of their respective attempts to consciously respond to black theology, among other things tracing a divergence in their work in response to Charles Long. This assists in highlighting key questions which a white theologians consciously responding to the problem of whiteness will have to consider.

Chapter 3 turns the focus to South Africa, and in particular to the 1970s and 1980s attempt by black theology of liberation to theologically engage the problem of whiteness and white racism. I start this chapter with a theological analysis of the writings of the black consciousness leader Steve Biko, specifically in terms of the notion ‘true humanity’, and then proceed to focus on how this was worked out in more formal systematic theology through the black theology of Simon Maimela and Takatso
Mofokeng. In their respective projects, I highlight how different theological proposals on how to speak of ‘true humanity’ in the context of white racism were arrived at.

Chapter 4 then turns to three white theologians from the same period, analysing the way in which they heard the challenge of black consciousness and black theology. Beyers Naudé, Albert Nolan, and Klippies Kritzinger. These represent key white theologians working in close proximity or direct response to the emerging black theology under apartheid, and to some extent beyond apartheid. While Naudé and Nolan respectively played prominent roles in the Christian Institute and Institute of Contextual Theology, Kritzinger became the first white theologian to attempt to consciously work out the implications of black theology for those who are white in a sustained manner.

While these four chapters focus attention on detailed analysis of key themes or periods from the work of these ten theologians, chapter 5 then proceeds to draw together a constructive proposal from this analysis, focusing attention on questions of soteriology, space, and the human. Here I bring together the problem of how race informed Christian soteriology with the connection between bodies and space that will be argued throughout chapters 1-4.
Chapter 1 – Whiteness as a theological problem: Carter and Jennings

1 Introduction

In what has become a famous class in South African systematic theology Jaap Durand asked his students to explain what the particular theological problem with apartheid was. Russel Botman tells the story in his own words:

As a student of Professor Jaap Durand in the year 1978, I was challenged, together with the rest of the class, to come to a theological evaluation of the problem of apartheid. He refused to accept our usual legal (“apartheid is a crime against humanity”), political (“apartheid is undemocratic”) and economic (“apartheid is an exploitation of human and natural resources”) condemnations of apartheid. Together we revisited Karl Barth’s theology. Eventually, our class arrived at the idea that apartheid takes its point of departure in the irreconcilability of people. That represented the theological centre of the problem of Apartheid. (Botman, 2006, p. 240)

One way of positioning this chapter is by saying that the chapter attempts to ask a question similar to the question Durand posed, yet asks this question beyond apartheid – perhaps beyond as both back in time beyond apartheid but also into the present beyond apartheid. It is not apartheid which is my focus, although throughout this dissertation it is never far from the surface, but race itself, or whiteness more particularly. This chapter attempts to come to a theological evaluation of the problem of whiteness. Or posed as a question: why is whiteness a particularly theological problem?

The question already determines how we will respond. The choice to ask the question of whiteness rather than apartheid already shifts our gaze. But the answer we give to either question also determines how we will seek to respond to the theological problem. If we diagnose the problem as the inherent irreconcilability of people, then our response will almost inevitably look towards the reconciliation of these people. Regardless of whether the theological evaluation was sound, the question itself, the theological problem with apartheid, frames a particular response by determining what should receive our attention. Yet beyond apartheid, on both sides, whiteness is found as the problem more difficult to diagnose but increasingly recognised as exactly this: a problem. But why is this a theological problem?

Jay Kameron Carter and Willie James Jennings will in this chapter serve as guides for responding to this question. Through their work, I will indicate one way of naming whiteness as a particularly theological
problem, which will frame later chapters exploring ways in which white theologians have attempted to respond to just such a problem.¹³

2 Reading Jennings & Carter

Carter and Jennings’ work is often referred to as the Duke school on race and theology.¹⁴ In more poetic language, “The recent works by Duke University scholars J. Kameron Carter and Willie James Jennings are bombshells in theology, helping to peer beneath the shiny veneer of so much of Christian theology into the dark abyss of Christian history” (Walgenbach, 2013, p. 212) or “[t]o say that [their work] have taken the contemporary theological world by storm would not be an overstatement.” (Lim, 2014, p. 387)

On Carter in particular, when *The Christian Century* asked a number of theologians to point out the essential theology books from 1985-2010, *Race* is mentioned twice. Amos Yong states that “Carter’s book drops like a bombshell on the playground of 21st-century theologians (to echo Karl Adams’s words on Barth’s *Römerbrief*)”¹⁵ while George Hunsinger says that *Race* “sets the agenda for theology and race for at least the next 25 years”.¹⁶

Stanley Hauerwas, also from Duke, comments on the work of Carter and Jennings in explaining his understanding of the relationship between theology and ethics and how this related to work on race. While explaining his position that Christian ethics should remain theological by being embedded in Christology, Hauerwas responds to criticism that he failed to attend concretely enough with issues of justice (race, gender and economic justice):

I also sensed that, at least early in the civil rights movement, it was time for white people to listen. I feared that too often we (that is, white people) thought we could discover our moral identity by showing clearly that for once we were on the “right side.” It is, of course, important to be on the “right side,” but I also thought and continue to think that the theological issues

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¹³ I briefly engaged the work of Jennings and Carter during my earlier master’s research (Van Wyngaard, 2012, pp. 34-47). Their influence in drawing my attention to specific theological questions around the formation of modern whiteness added a personal motivation to return to their work in more detail for this study.

¹⁴ In some instances Brian Bantum would be added as a third voice in this school (Ramirez, 2014, p. 380) but I follow Draper (Draper, 2014) who keeps to the two more senior colleagues.


¹⁶ [https://www.christiancentury.org/reviews/2010-09/george-hunsinger-5-picks](https://www.christiancentury.org/reviews/2010-09/george-hunsinger-5-picks) [accessed 20 August 2015]. While Hunsinger’s comments highlights the importance of Carter’s work, it risks suggesting a fundamental break with a critique that has been coming for many decades prior to Carter. Carter’s work is however explicitly positions as an extension of the earlier work of African-American scholars such as Cornel West, Albert Raboteau, Charles Long and James Cone.
surrounding questions of race, as the work of my colleagues Jay Carter and William Jennings
demonstrate, are more challenging than simply finding the right side. (Hauerwas, 2012, p. 302)

While the emphasis on listening is important,\textsuperscript{17} this does not get white theologians ‘off the hook’ on
silence concerning racism, since the particular responsibility of white theologians to critically engage
whiteness remains, whether during the civil rights movement or thereafter, or under apartheid or
thereafter. This is at the heart of this thesis, but I will return to it in particular in chapters two and four.
But Hauerwas is correct in pointing out the dangers of limiting work for racial justice to being on the
“right side” of individual movements. Indeed “the theological issues surrounding questions of race... are
more challenging than simply finding the right side” and these need to be revealed and transformed if
we are to move towards justice. As Hauerwas points out, Carter and Jennings (together with others who
will be mentioned throughout this dissertation) assist us in doing exactly this, but emphasising this more
challenging work raise the question of how white theologians can participate in doing this challenging
work of uncovering the theological questions surrounding race (particularly the theological question of
whiteness) and of disrupting theologies which perpetuate such a being in the world.

While merely anecdotal at this stage, this brief reflection already hints at the significance of their work.
It is the challenge of this dissertation to not only listen to Carter, Jennings, and others who are
attempting to engage the race as a theological problem but to pick up the challenge presented and
respond as a white theologian. But I pick up on the cue of Hauerwas and others and start by asking what
exactly the \textit{theological} problem is that Carter and Jennings assist us in understanding. As the
introductions, both to the dissertation and to this chapter, indicate, this is the question which haunts
this dissertation, and as I will indicate below, it is exactly this question which Jennings and Carter seek to
illuminate.

\textit{Andrew Draper’s A Theology of Race and Place: An Analysis of the Duke Divinity School of Theological
Race Theory} was the first dissertation exclusively focused on an analysis of the work of Carter and
Jennings, more particularly, exclusively an analysis of \textit{Race and Christian Imagination} (Draper, 2014).\textsuperscript{18}

In particular, Draper focuses on analysing Carter’s work in dialogue with African-American religious
scholarship (Part II of \textit{Race}) and indicate that \textit{Race} should be read as a subtle subversion of Milbank. This

\textsuperscript{17} I explore this in more detail in an article titled \textit{Whiteness and Public Theology: an exploration of listening} (van
Wyngaard, 2015b).
\textsuperscript{18} This was later published as \textit{A Theology of Race and Place: Liberation and Reconciliation in the Works of Jennings
and Carter}.
second point Draper argues by indicating that Carter’s critique of Kant (chapter 2 of *Race*) as making Christ white by making Christ a figure in continuation with the Greek philosophers is also applicable to Milbank, and that Carter subverts this by emphasising that Jesus should be read within a non-supersessionist theology of Israel.

Draper follows a similar line of argument when analysing Jennings, indicating how Jennings’ work should be read together with cultural studies, in particular, the work of Walter Mignolo, but that Jennings seeks to indicate the theology at work in people often studied within cultural studies, in particular studies on José de Acosta. Jennings is shown to be a subtle critic of Hauwerwas by indicating Jennings’ critique of MacIntyre’s Virtue Ethics, again pointing out that MacIntyre read Christianity as a continuation of Ancient Greek philosophy while Jennings wants to read Christianity within the story of Israel, which is the story of YHWH. (Draper, 2014, p. 253)

Draper’s argument is mostly focused on discerning the ecclesiological implications of Jennings and Carter’s work, and in order to do this, he focuses in particular on Jennings’ notion of “joining” in order to develop an ecclesiological proposal around practices of eating together. This is developed in close dialogue with Draper’s own experience as an inner-city pastor in “an urban community that is predominantly black and white. The primary focus of our church, our lives, and our education has been reconciliation across ethnic lines, particularly across the black-white divide” (Draper, 2014, p. 3).

However, from a South African context, their work has not received sustained attention yet. In part, the argument below is a first attempt at making a connection from a South African context, and as I will argue in the section below, my reading of their work is explicitly formed by this Southern and South African context. I will do this in part by reading them together in a particular way. While such a reading together is not strange, the choice needs to be interrogated for a moment, even if only to clarify how I propose to continue.

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19 Given Hauerwas’ comments mentioned above, Draper’s argument on Jennings’ subtle but conscious subversion of Hauerwas is perhaps ironic. If Draper is correct then this does not merely serve as example of a more attentive posture of listening (Hauerwas should have been able to pick up the subtle critique), but more particularly to a more conscious response (Hauerwas cannot withdraw into a listening posture but is challenged to transform his theology into one which responds not to the problem of Constantinianism *per se* but to the more acute modern problem of the “color of Constantinianism” (Carter, 2008, p. 230) – to repeat the criticism of Carter on Yoder).

20 Jennings delivered a keynote address at the 2017 Theological Society of South Africa, and his work has slowly received more attention in teaching – see for example this project from students of St. Augustines College in Johannesburg drawing on his work ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJMaD5asqts&t [accessed 23 May 2017]]). To date I am not aware of any attention paid to the work of Carter from within South Africa.
The preceding paragraphs repeatedly mentioned Carter and Jennings in the same sentence, mentioned as if synonymous, and my argument could have proceeded by merely building on this. Consciously arguing for reading them together however, forces us to notice the distinct aspects of their work – to not make them synonymous too quickly – highlighting differences in their focus and approach in order to better describe how they do in fact want to argue very similar theological points. Before indicating some of these differences, differences which will impact the structure of my argument in the rest of this chapter, I want to argue for reading them together. I will indeed repeat others who mention “Jennings and Carter” together, but I want to indicate before analysing their arguments that if we read them together simply as “significant theologians on race” we miss what binds their work together as well as the breadth and depth of what they wish to accomplish.

In their respective books which will form the main focus of the rest of this chapter, we do not find any references to published works of the other. However, they both acknowledge the importance of the relationship with the other, and both mention conversations with the other which have had a key impact on their respective works. Specific aspects of this acknowledgement will become important in pointing out their similar focus but also in the later analysis of the depth of the disruption of academic theology that they, in fact, argue for.

Jennings was an external committee member for Carter’s dissertation which later developed into Race (Carter, 2008, p. v), but it is as an ongoing conversation partner that Carter acknowledges Jennings in particular (Carter, 2008, pp. vi-vii). Jennings mirrors this acknowledgement (Jennings, 2010, p. ix). The deeply personal language with which they indicate indebtedness to each other is perhaps more indicative of how their work is caught up in conversation with the other than what a mere academic reference would have been. These examples clearly illustrate this relationship:

This line of reasoning on whiteness as an accomplishment that culminates in closure is indebted to an engaging and deftly illuminating conversation, again, with my friend and fellow theologian, Willie James Jennings. Over lunch, we discussed his and my research... (Carter, 2008, p. 437)

And in reverse:

I want to offer a special thanks to the Rev. Dr. J. Kameron Carter, who continues to be a wonderful conversation partner for me as I have been working out the ideas presented here. (Jennings, 2010, p. ix)
As will be discussed in detail below, both Carter and Jennings seek to describe race, and more particularly whiteness, as a theological problem. They share a conviction that this has not yet been adequately done. Both describe this theological problem as emerging from within the older problem of Christian supersessionism. Furthermore, they both work towards not merely a critique of the theological problem of modern whiteness, but of the whiteness of modern theology, arguing for the need to reorient the entire field of theology due to its continuing embeddedness within a white/colonial framework.

Alongside these similarities, we need to acknowledge certain differences in their foci. Carter and Jennings respectively take up whiteness as a theological problem in relation to Enlightenment and Colonialism (Draper, 2014, p. 87). To state this slightly differently and perhaps more accurately, Carter describe the modern theological problem of whiteness in relation to the European (and North American) metropole and Jennings in relation to the moments of geographic displacement and contact at the edge of colonial empires. While a historic theological development might possibly be traced from early Southern Europe to Kant, which could allow reading Jennings and Carter as describing merely different historical epochs, such a reading does not adequately account for Colenso in Jennings’ account, who lives in the wake of Kant and the Enlightenment - to name but the most obvious problem. I therefore suggest that a key to reading their accounts of the origin of race and the theological problem of whiteness is by accounting for the geographic difference between whiteness formed through a process of voluntary dislocation in the spaces of colonial imperial conquest (Jennings) and whiteness formed in

21 Carter hints at such a possible historical line by explicitly indicating the connection between these two moments in his introduction: “It is worth reiterating that what I engage here is a moment within initial maturing of modernity’s racial-theological vision of the human. I do not discuss the early colonialist vision that took hold just about three centuries prior to the Kantian, essentially Protestant, Enlightenment—racial vision in the late eighteenth century. This earlier moment had a Roman Catholic, essentially Southern European, infancy.” (Carter, 2008, p. 5) Although Race was published in 2008 and Christian Imagination in 2010, the already mentioned close personal relationship between Jennings and Carter and the ongoing scholarly discussion they both acknowledge almost by necessity leave the reader suspecting that Carter would have been aware of the coming exploration of this period by Jennings. Draper (Draper, 2014, p. 115) reads a hint towards Jennings into Carter’s words that “[T]heir [the pre-Enlightenment, Southern European racial visions,] theological consideration must therefore await another, not too far off, day.” (Carter, 2008, p. 6). Taken on its own, this phrase can however also imply that Carter see this as part of his own ongoing project, given that he considers Race to be the first instalment of a trilogy (McInturf, 2009, p. 83). A closer read of the broader paragraph suggests that Carter is not merely (or perhaps even primarily) pointing towards Jennings’ work (although his work would not be excluded). The particular Southern European moment Carter points towards is found between 1442 and 1492 and a “‘dark Atlantic’ triangulated between Europe, the west coast of Africa, and the Americas” (Carter, 2008, p. 5). Jennings’ own account starts in 1492, as we will discuss below.
the heart of Enlightenment Europe (Carter), even while these two processes remain ever intertwined and inform each other.

Jennings describes the theological problem of whiteness with a focus on theological work at the moment of colonial contact. As will be described in more detail below, that is what binds together the figures of Zurara, Valignano, Acosta and Colenso in the first half of his book. Carter describes the same problem but focuses on its mature metropolitan development in the work of Immanuel Kant.

While it should be clear that reading Jennings and Carter together is justified, this difference in foci structures my discussion below. *Race* will provide the framework for understanding the relationship between whiteness and Christian supersessionism, and *Christian Imagination* will take me beyond Carter’s work into my own context. Said differently, while it is indeed Carter’s text which provides the theological scaffolding for a response to the questions which this chapter asks, Jennings’ work within this scaffolding will bring me closer to a response by taking me out of the North Atlantic in general and Europe in particular. Here the way I choose to read them together is explicitly formed by my own location – it is from this South African perspective that I need to make sense of the formation of whiteness at the edge of colonial empires – whether Dutch or British – and in the wake of apartheid.

While Carter will reveal how a Christian supersessionist theology is intertwined with whiteness in Europe, the *Judenfrage* is also the *Rassenfrage* (Carter, 2008, p. 80), Jennings will reveal how colonial whiteness moving out of Europa is carried by a supersessionist theology which forms itself into a universal theology of whiteness, disconnected from particular place and constantly, ruthlessly and without being able to imagine that any part of the earth could escape this, dislocating all bodies from particular places.

3 Introduction to *Race and Christian Imagination*

I introduce the broader structure of *Race and Christian Imagination* not primarily as a summary of the books but as a guide to how I will read each argument, and also a map within which I can position the particular aspects of their work which I will be highlighting below. To introduce their work in a single chapter necessarily implies a very particular focus – in the case of this argument drawing out their understanding of whiteness as a theological problem. A brief overview of the structure of their broader argument does, however, assist in situating this.
3.1 Race

An overview of Race along the various types of texts drawn into his argument allows the complexity of Carter’s argument to be better presented than would a mere linear overview. If Carter’s complex argument bears witness to the weight that written texts can bear, it simultaneously reveals the limits that a text, which is of necessity structured linearly, with introductions, bodies and conclusions, presents.

Carter engages five different sources in his analysis: Patristic theology, genealogies of race, Immanuel Kant, African-American religious scholarship and antebellum slave literature. His sections on genealogies of race (chapter 1, West & Foucault) and African-American religious scholarship (chapters 3-5, Raboteau, Cone & Long) follow a pattern of analysis and affirmation in order to build on particular points, combined with critique and ultimate evaluation of these interlocutors as unable to adequately reveal whiteness as a theological problem or at risk of reproducing elements of the theological problem of whiteness which Carter wishes to highlight.

But it is Carter’s reading of the church fathers Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximum the Confessor (Prelude, interlude and postlude) together with the antebellum Afro-Christian literature/theology of Briton Hammon, Frederick Douglass and Jarena Lee (chapters 6-8) which form the theological categories which make his analysis possible and provide the possibility for a theology not bound to whiteness – which is finally what Carter is searching for.

Chapter 2 on Immanuel Kant is in many ways unique within the broader argument, and the hinge on which his entire argument is built, and will be the focus of my discussion below. In Carter’s analysis of Kant he seeks to make a contribution to genealogies of race by indicating the genealogical moment of whiteness to be a theological moment. Carter reveals this theological moment as supersessionist. Christ is disconnected from Jewish roots and becomes the symbol of whiteness. Furthermore, a particular understanding of rational Christianity replaces Israel as the mediating space for God’s work of salvation. Carter’s account of a Kantian white Christology becomes the lynchpin for the entire argument. The genealogies of West and Foucault bring Carter to the brink of such an analysis, and his next step is the description of this theological moment. Carter’s evaluation of African-American religious scholarship is to a large extent done through the lens of his own portrayal of whiteness as a theological problem. To the extent that Raboteau, Cone and Long were able to articulate aspects of Carter’s analysis they are affirmed, yet criticised where they failed to do this. The prelude, interlude and postlude on the Eastern
Patristics provide the theological background which allows Carter to describe whiteness as a theological problem in this way, but also to discern a possible theology not bound by whiteness. And it is against the background of the problem described in Kant, through the patristics, and the earlier theologies not bound to this problem, that Carter can read antebellum literature and note a possible reorientation of modern theology which will take it out of the gravity well of whiteness.

Regardless of whether the experience of being on the darker side of modernity, and his reading of Afro-Christian literature, allowed him to read the church fathers in a particular way, or whether his reading of the church fathers allowed him to articulate a particular theological problem with Kant, a limitation to African-American religious scholarship and a possible reforming moment in antebellum Afro-Christian literature, the effect of his reading of the church fathers together with his selected antebellum Afro-Christian literature is that he presents the theological problem of whiteness as one which is theologically problematic and a modern representative of a heretical break within the Christian tradition. His challenge then becomes one not of ethical change but of theological reformation – and of challenging a modernity pseudo-theologically functioning within whiteness.

3.2 The Christian Imagination

To state that Jennings’ account is deeply Christian might be considered overly vague but still of immense importance, at the very least due to the explicit title given to the book. It is not only that Jennings places his own story within an intimate Christian existence, but rather that Jennings’ discerns a constantly present Christian imagination of intimacy even in the most unlikely places. The key white characters in his introductory narrative, white Reformed evangelists and white Reformed lecturers, are both simultaneous examples of a deeply distorted Christian imagination of social existence, but also examples of a latent imagination of Christian intimacy. While the slower conceptual work of describing the problem and possible responses which Jennings discerns will be taken up below, the immediate point of concern that is driving Jennings’ entire narrative is a deep conviction and a haunting suspicion that a Christian imagination should and could lead to an imagining of social space which is not marked by the constant reproduction of relations of domination and oppression, of distance and aloofness, but rather

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22 For example, when introducing his parents, to whom the book is also dedicated he writes, “Ivory and Mary loved Jesus. To say they were devout Christians is simply too pale a descriptor. A far more accurate characterization would be, ‘There were Ivory, Mary, and Jesus.’” (Jennings, 2010, p. 1). Draper (Draper, 2014) reflects extensively on Jennings’ use of personal narratives in Christian Imagination, taking this as example for his own doctoral work. However, even in Draper’s detailed description the key role of Mary, mother of Willie Jennings, as the archetype of the kind of life a Christian imagination makes possible is not noted.
by intimacy and joining. While the relation Jennings depicts between the white Reformed evangelists and his mother Mary might be described as that of two Christianities, one white and one black, this does not adequately take account of the fact that even within this interaction Jennings notes a Christianity “bound to compelling gestures of connection, belonging, and invitation” (Jennings, 2010, p. 4). In brief, the actions of the evangelists and lecturers simultaneously reveal patterns of a deeply distorted social imagination but also the possibilities of a deeper connection.

In critical interdisciplinary dialogue with decolonial scholars, Jennings is seeking to show that a Christian imagination should open us up to a cosmopolitan identity. While Jennings rarely returns to the notion of cosmopolitanism in this way, he explicitly positions his own work within the search for such a cosmopolitan citizenship, while being suspicious of an “imagined democratic spirit” and seeking a Christological grounding for this cosmopolitan identity (Jennings, 2010, pp. 10-11). But “cosmopolitan citizenship” alone does not adequately describe what Jennings will argue for. The Christian imagination is one which should intuit social intimacy. It is indeed erotic imagery (Draper, 2014, p. 28). That the deepest possibility and greatest risk of such a Christian imagination are often not clearly distinguishable is pointed out in the narratives in the introduction, but repeated in the descriptions of actors throughout The Christian Imagination. Perhaps the question driving the entire book is not stated in highly theoretical language at all, but in the utter confusion about the relationship between the white Reformed evangelists and his mother Mary: “Why did they not know us? They should have known us very well.” (Jennings, 2010, p. 3) The point is that it is not simply the distorted social space of a racialised world which concerns Jennings, but rather that this is embodied within a Christian faith which not only should work with a different imagination but which continues to manifest in particular moments the possibilities for deeper intimacy.

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23 While the narrative is told from his own perspective, and the interaction between the evangelists and himself is in itself strange, it really is his mother who form the central character at this moment.
24 I’m not suggesting that Jennings is arguing that these white characters will be the source of his imagined Christianity, because they certainly are not. Rather, Jennings just points out that within this distorted Christian imagination the nagging question and possibility of Christian intimacy is still visible. Perhaps Jennings is best understood at this point as saying, it is visible “even here”, because the real example of where Jennings see this imagination at work is in his mother Mary and her relationship to the Bible and the dirt.
25 See the reference to the De-Colonial Cosmopolitanism workshop in the acknowledgements (Jennings, 2010, p. ix) and Draper’s (Draper, 2014, pp. 180-192) analysis of the absolute importance of Jennings’ relation to fellow Duke scholar Walter Mignolo.
26 Jennings states that “Christianity marks the post where … we will find … a life already prepared and offered to us” in contrast to searches for a “new ground” for cosmopolitan citizenship (Jennings, 2010, p. 11). It should be clear, and his argument throughout the book will confirm this, that Jennings is presenting us with a Christological argument for cosmopolitan citizenship.
What should be added to this is that the white Reformed lecturers which Jennings also uses as examples of where a Christian imagination of intimacy is at work also embodies this distorted social imagination infecting Christianity in their classrooms in particular. I will not be able to explore this aspect of Jennings’ work in this dissertation, although I touch on this when describing whiteness as an act of universalised interpretation, but its importance should not be overlooked: ultimately Jennings is writing as a lecturer in theology and a dean, with a deep concern for students and the ways in which theological education reproduces the distorted social vision which Jennings describes.

If we focus on similar patterns in Jennings’ analysis of primary interlocutors rather than on the sections of the book the following emerges: Jennings’ work is primarily a reading of sources which originate at the point of colonial contact - mostly of European theologians but also of Equiano the African slave who bought his own freedom. What Jennings narrates is moments within the process of colonial contact in which the problem of race in general and whiteness, in particular, is being theologically constructed and challenged.

Chapter 1 to 3 move primarily through the Portuguese, Spanish and British empires and trace a theological account of whiteness through moments of colonial contact and dislocation of bodies – both forced dislocation of colonised bodies and voluntary dislocation of European bodies. While chapter 1 bears the name of Zurara, the chronicler of Prince Henry of Portugal, the chapter also draws deeply from the narrative of Valignano, the Italian-born yet Portuguese employed Jesuit, before turning to anthropological accounts of people still living in close proximity of the land. Chapter 1 will already

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27 Jennings relates a beautiful narrative of his trial sermon as a student, where a group of lecturers walked up to him and each in turn clasped his hand and said “Willie, thank you for the Word of God”. While not simply rejecting critical reflections that the relation between black student and white lecturer was merely another instance of Jennings inhabiting a colonised subjectivity, being rewarded for saying the words and performing the actions expected of him, there is also an ancient reminder of the possibility of intimacy which is more important in Jennings’ account. The importance of this moment is best accentuated by the deeply personal connection between this moment of intimacy and his mother Mary’s actions in her garden which functions as a deeply personal example of the Christian social imagination.

28 While I emphasise theological education, which is also of primary concern in Jennings’ work, it actually refers to the broader problem of the way in which scholarship itself creates an imagined identity forgetful of “historical existence and the social conditions that make possible [the] continued existence as a scholar” (Jennings, 2010, p. 295).

29 Valignano’s name is not contained in the title of a chapter, but chapter 1 spends about 16 pages on Zurara and 8 on Valignano. Valignano’s significance merely in the space given to his account should not be overlooked, but more importantly, through Valignano Jennings describes one of his central arguments: the connection between his racial scale and supersessionist thinking. While Draper (Draper, 2014), focusing on Jennings’ interdisciplinary relations, can ignore Valignano in his analysis, an overview of Jennings’ description of whiteness as a theological problem embedded in supersessionist thinking cannot ignore the pages where Valignano serves as example.
introduce the themes which Jennings will build out in each of the subsequent chapters: a racial scale, dislocation from geographic space and a process of remaking the world in the name of whiteness.

Chapter 2 and 3 attend to Acosta and Colenso respectively, representing authoritative church figures and theologians positioned next to power at the edge of the Spanish and British empires respectively. Through each Jennings will trace how theology is performed in the service of whiteness and how whiteness performs theologically in colonial processes. But these chapters also reveal a progression which is not merely, or even primarily, historical. Colenso’s conversion will form the turning point in Jennings’ argument. That is the moment when Colenso turns to challenge whiteness and sets his life, and the life of his family, on a course of inevitable confrontation as he moves from one mode of translation to another.

Chapter 4 on Equiano will take us beyond Colenso’s challenge to whiteness, although moving us earlier in time. In Equiano Jennings will trace the possibilities of the Christian intimacy which he envisions, but and reveals how such an intimacy becomes distorted and drawn into an economy of exchange. The final chapters do not resolve the limits which marked Equiano’s work, limits which continue to mark the contemporary world.

Each of Jennings main characters in the first half of the book, Zurara, Valignano, Acosta and Colenso are positioned next to the power of the ruling elite in order to enact the power of interpretation.\textsuperscript{30} They interpret theologically, and while doing this interpretation they are positioned at the space where an emerging colonial empire is in direct contact with those being subjugated. They serve as examples which aid a theological description, not necessarily as representatives which reveal a clear historical development.

Jennings goes to great lengths to emphasise the central ecclesial place which each of his theological characters occupy. They are not mere examples to prove a point. These characters theologically represent and have the authority to theologically represent, key moments in the emergence of colonial empires. While Zurara is “not an official theologian of the church” he is no marginal figure either. He is the official chronicler of Prince Henry of Portugal at the moment when Portugal emerges as a maritime empire. He has access to an impressive library and is well versed in theology and from this position as

\textsuperscript{30} See for example the description of Zurara: “Zurara did not share in Henry’s power, but he shared the stage with Henry, and in that sense he manifested his own power, the power of the storyteller” and later “Zurara writes as one seated next to power” (Jennings, 2010, pp. 16-17).
chronicler at the dawn of colonialism he gives “the only real account of official history, a theological account” (Jennings, 2010, pp. 16-17). Valignano is a Jesuit vicar-general occupying a most prestigious missionary position – missionary to Japan (Jennings, 2010, p. 31). Jennings takes care to emphasise his orthodoxy, intellectual capability and ecclesial commitment (Jennings, 2010, p. 35). Acosta is a Jesuit theologian and “Christian intellectual of the highest order” and one of the most important bearers of Christianity into the colonial world (Jennings, 2010, p. 68). Lastly, while the later charges of heresy against Colenso may cloud this fact, Colenso too came to the margin of the empire of his day, the British Empire, a bishop of the Church of England, deeply committed to his faith and the church and a foremost intellectual (Jennings, 2010, pp. 119-120). Jennings goes to great lengths to emphasise that his examples cannot be dismissed as marginal to the story of Western Christianity in the process of colonial empire building.

Jennings describes his own work as “theological analysis of theology’s social performances” (Jennings, 2010, p. 10). While this methodical emphasis in itself would require far more careful analysis, what Jennings’ work attempts is partly to break down a divide between theology and society which gives the impression that theology somehow transcends the social – this can be the result of either a theological commitment to the privately religious or to academic theology. Theology in itself is read as a social phenomenon with theological implications. His characters perform theological acts as social acts. While Jennings accepts the social descriptions of these characters he particularly seeks to describe the theological implications of a theology performed socially.

Below I will trace a number of points from Jennings and Carter’s argument: in Race, I will read the prelude on Irenaeus and chapter 2 on Kant together to provide a first response to whiteness as a theological problem. Jennings will then take me beyond Carter, or more particularly, Jennings will take me out of Europe and the Europe-US binary in a way which Carter’s account of whiteness cannot do. Jennings can do this by theologically tracing the dislocation which marks whiteness in among other places the colony of Natal, in what would later become known as South Africa.

4 Whiteness as a theological problem and problem of theology

Carter sets the agenda in no uncertain terms: “whiteness itself [is] the core theological problem of our times” (Carter, 2008, p. 6). But to understand this as such their dual critique must be noted. Key to

31 In a later interview Carter both acknowledge the doubts he at times has with his use of the definite article before “theological problem”; might this not be too strong a claim to make? But he then reaffirms this stance, stating that “the question of race is the question of the human” (McInturf, 2009, p. 86). For my own purposes it is not of
both Carter and Jennings’ account is that whiteness is not only a theological problem, implying that it was constructed theologically, but that theology as a discipline was thoroughly transformed through the “discursive enterprise of helping to racially constitute the modern world” (Carter, 2008, p. 3). Whiteness is therefore not a theological mistake which can be merely rectified so that we can proceed with ‘business as usual’. Responding to this theological problem requires the thorough transformation of theology as a discourse.

The distinction is subtle yet of immense importance if we are to understand the depth of their diagnosis. To refer to whiteness and modern theology as if these constitute two phenomena which can be neatly separated so that the possibility exists for a theological critique of whiteness would in their analysis be an inadequate description of the problem, and in its inadequacy lack the capacity to present a vision of a future not bound to a racial scale. Argued more directly in Carter’s contribution to the Cambridge Companion on Evangelical Theology, the key to Carter’s argument is that if whiteness is theologically constructed then it requires a “feat of theological imagination” to rectify this problem (Carter, 2007, p. 188).

While more explicit in Carter, both Jennings and Carter’s work is primarily Christological. Given the modern problem of race - which they describe as a theological problem, more particularly as a Christological problem - they seek to take the first steps of displacing the modern white Christ and articulating a Christology from within a Christian theology of Israel.32

Paul Lim has raised questions about whether the historical link made between fourth-century supersessionism and the emergence of modern empires around the sixteenth century can be argued theologically without indicating its development in the centuries between. With reference to particularly Jennings’ work he argues: “As a theological hook, this idea works superbly well; yet, as an analytical tool for historical inquiry, I see the requisite fuzziness that can problematize the overall salutary nature of this type of explanatory matrix.” (Lim, 2014, p. 390) Similarly, we can ask whether the movements
determining importance whether the definite or indefinite article would prove to be correct, whether whiteness is ‘the’ problem or ‘a’ problem of theology. What is important is that the theological problem of whiteness, and the result of this problem, is one which white theologians have a particular responsibility to critically engage, but it is exactly this responsibility which at this stage is not being taken up.

32 A Christian theology of Israel is something which remains outstanding. Carter mentions this as an important part of his future work and provide an initial bibliography which might assist in such a project (Carter, 2008, p. 410).
between voices from different periods and geographic regions in Jennings’ work can offer a full historical account.

However, Jennings’ response to Lim’s critique together with a comment he makes in the introduction to chapter 4 of *Christian Imagination* might further clarify his initial insistence that his work should not be read as a full historical description and also clarify aspects of my approach in this section. In response to Lim Jennings merely acknowledge that he is indeed correct: “how one gives a historical account of these matters for theology is exceedingly difficult, as Dr. Lim in his very learned and generous essay suggests. I feel the limitations that Dr. Lim so astutely notes. How does one capture a problem so massive that it extends itself over the horizon and becomes the horizon itself?” (Jennings, 2014, p. 452). Furthermore, when introducing Equiano Jennings makes a distinction between a historical and a theological account. While Equiano chronologically lives between Acosta and Colenso (chapter 2 and 3 of *Christian Imagination*), “theologically he comes after them all” (Jennings, 2010, p. 171). For Jennings, this theological description is the conscious focus of The Christian Imagination (Jennings, 2010, p. 9).

To briefly turn to Carter, he describes his own work as an “initial instalment in filling this significant lacuna [(one is hard-pressed to find an adequate theological account of the modern problem of race)]” (Carter, 2008, p. 3). He argues that theology should be at the “center of an interrogation of the modern problem of race” (Carter, 2008, p. 42). He furthermore uses notions such as “analogy” to describe how he connects early church resources with the modern problem of race. Of primary importance for how I trace his arguments below, the gnostic heresy and Irenaeus’ response to it function as an “analogy” (Carter, 2008, pp. 7, 382) for the later Kantian racial problem. In short, as an analogy, it assists in highlighting the deep theological problems and how a rational Christianity was embedded within a racial imagination.

Following the above mentioned geographic differentiation between Carter’s description of Kant and Jennings’ description of Zurara, Valignano, Acosta and Colenso, I read Carter’s description of the maturation of the theological problem of whiteness in the metropolitan centre, and out of this read Jennings as providing a lens for tracing how this theological problem is transformed in the process of European dislocation to the margins or various colonial empires. It is, however, important to note that I

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33 Elsewhere ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Z0bKi0Keog](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Z0bKi0Keog) [accessed 15 June 2016]) Carter describes this as a “reading together” with Irenaeus. The point is that Carter consider his work analogous with that of Irenaeus in that Irenaeus discerned a similar theological problem in his time to the theological problem that Carter discerned in modernity.
do not present this in itself as a description of South African whiteness, although it does potentially contribute to such a description, here it just lays a foundation through Carter and Jennings in a way which could assist the process of articulating the theological problem of whiteness within a South African context. In brief: Carter presents the background against which I read the work of Jennings, which brings me closer to whiteness maintained in the colonies of European empires, of which colonial Southern Africa is part, and apartheid a colonial space of a ‘special type’.

I, therefore, propose reading Carter and Jennings together as a theological description of whiteness through two moves. Carter assists me in seeing how Christian supersessionism replaces Israel with Europe and the Jewish Jesus with a white Christ so that Europeans marked aesthetically as white becomes the beginning and end of humanity. Jennings assists me in noting the kind of theological moves whiteness needs to make when no longer bound to European space. Even while the “maturation” which Carter describes might not be noticeable in Jennings’ examples (including Colenso which comes after Kant), the moments Jennings focuses attention on in his theological description can only make sense when read from within the supersessionist theology which Carter so eloquently describes.

With this as background, I now proceed to trace Carter’s description of whiteness as a theological problem through an examination of the analogy between Irenaeus’ account of Gnosticism and Kant. From within the theological world which Carter assists me in describing I then move to Jennings’ description of the problem in order to trace white theologies accompanying the voluntary and forced displacements of colonialism.

5 Carter

This section primarily reads the prelude and chapter 2 of Race together. I point out that Carter provides a theological structure in the prelude which illuminates his reading of Kant in chapter 2. Carter does not propose a historical link between 2nd century Gnosticism and modern racial supersessionism, but theologically they function in a similar way, which not only assists in describing whiteness as a theological problem but also reveals the first steps of a theology which might escape the gravity well of whiteness.

The purpose of Carter’s use of Eastern Patristics is not immediately obvious. Throughout the argument it is clear that Carter gives a certain weight to them, reads them with a certain authority, although the authority that Carter gives to them is not merely due to their position within the church, but also due to a particular sensibility which he discerns among the particular early church theologians he reads – a
theological reading of scripture against the grain of the social order, a hermeneutic for which he finds an analogy in the antebellum literature that he will discuss in part III.

More particularly, in the prelude where Irenaeus is introduced, Carter is explicit that his work is not focused on a mere exposition of Irenaeus (and by implication the same is assumed of the theologians that will be introduced in the interlude and postlude) for its own sake, or even of Irenaeus’ critique of Velantinianism. It is rather focused on reading Irenaeus in a way which will provide assistance in “coming to theological terms with a contemporary problem... the modern problem of imagining the human being in racial terms, and within these terms positioning whiteness as supreme” (Carter, 2008, p. 12). Carter repeats this point a number of times. Irenaeus’ critique of Velantinian Gnosticism “provides a way of similarly diagnosing how modern racial discourse generally and whiteness in particular (...) was born within and subsequently functioned inside the discourse of theology” (Carter, 2008, p. 13) and the problems of “ancient Gnosticism have an analogue in how the modern neo-Gnosticism of racial discourse and practice work” (Carter, 2008, p. 15).³⁴ It should, therefore, be clear that the prelude on Irenaeus and chapter 2 on Kant should be read as intertwined and the first as an analogy for the second.

Therefore, in order to come to terms with Carter’s answer to the question I posed at the beginning of this chapter, I start with the prelude. Through this, I take the first steps in articulating an account of the theological problem of whiteness.

At the heart of Carter’s argument is that whiteness as a theological problem is made theologically possible from within the logic of Christian supersessionism. European Christianity can imagine itself as a Christianity constituted by and of itself only by rejecting gentile existence and thus dislodging itself from a covenantal identity and replacing this with the European geographic area and body as the conceptual framework from which to imagine Christian identity. The equation of Christian, white, and European is made possible by the rejection of being gentiles drawn into Israel’s covenantal relationship with YHWH through Christ. Rather, the oriental Jesus is theologically transformed into the occidental Christ. In the

³⁴ Later Carter argued that Irenaeus response to the Gnostics rejection of Israel is particularly suited for diagnosing the problem with Kantian thought. As will be pointed out below, in Kant Carter finds a problem which closely resemble that which Irenaeus faced, and Carter therefore proposes that his own work will closely resemble what Irenaeus wanted to do, although Carter will be working from “this side of modernity” (Carter, 2008, p. 23).
work of Kant Carter is able to show how the modern problem of race developed from within this theological conviction about the place of Europe and its white people.\textsuperscript{35}

While post-Shoah\textsuperscript{36} Christian theology has seen a sustained theological discussion on Christian supersessionism, and a growing number of churches explicitly rejecting this as a theological mistake,\textsuperscript{37} Carter’s work comes into this discussion by simultaneously drawing on attempted non-supersessionist theologies as a possible way beyond the theological impasse created by whiteness, but also as a critique of the fact that these theologies do not adequately describe “how the general problem of modern racial discourse and the specific theological problem of whiteness on the one hand and the problem of Christian supersessionism on the other articulate each other” (Carter, 2008, p. 383).\textsuperscript{38} Whiteness as a modern theological problem is for Carter (and Jennings) the contemporary arena where Christian supersessionism is seen functioning, and it informs the Shoah, the decisive event which forced the church to face the implication of this theological mistake, yet those seeking to upturn Christian supersessionism do not take account of the theological problem of whiteness and the ongoing material effects of this problem. Stated differently, if Soulen’s claim that in supersessionism “the church has had to confess a failure of teaching and practice that has few parallels in Christian history” (Soulen, 1999, p. 26) then Jennings and Carter would claim that not only does whiteness and its resulting racism present such a parallel, it is in fact wholly intertwined with the problem which Soulen describes.

However, there is a second point of critique which Carter seems to present against Soulen, although it is presented mostly through silence – Carter and Soulen (here standing as an important representative voice of one attempt at formulating a Christian theology of Israel) differ in their reading of the early church in general, and of Irenaeus in particular. For Soulen, “Irenaeus’ vision of the Christian story is

\textsuperscript{35} I do not wish to propose a simple monolithic whiteness existing within Europe at that time (nor in the present). Nell Irwin Painter describes this internal strive around who defines whiteness, and therefore who is excluded from whiteness, in detail (Painter, 2010). Some of these internal distinctions are found within Kant as well when distinguishing between white brunettes and white noble blonds from northern Europe (Carter, 2008, p. 88) or the distinction between oriental, western and Finnish whites (Carter, 2008, p. 91). But as Carter would argue, such distinctions should not hide the binaries which constantly feed them, whether between whites and ‘Negros’ or whites and Jews.

\textsuperscript{36} The Hebrew term for “Utter Destruction” which is considered preferable for the term Holocaust (Ochs, 2011, p. 1)

\textsuperscript{37} This change in the church’s stance towards Israel is what forms the foundation for R Kendall Soulen’s work on supersessionism. He takes the church’s position as starting point and then attempts to work out a possible systematic theology in response by highlighting the supersessionism in various theologians throughout history (Soulen, 1996, p. x; Soulen, 1999).

\textsuperscript{38} This critique is made in particular of Soulen, but Carter’s claim could hold for a broader theological debate. In many ways this is the particular novel theological contribution Carter claims to make in Part I of Race,
profoundly supersessionist” (Soulen, 1996, p. 48) while Carter, as discussed in detail below, draws on Irenaeus to provide an analogy for his exposition of the supersessionism of Kant. Carter’s criticism might be visible through his acknowledgement of Soulen’s work while completely ignoring Soulen in his particular treatment of Irenaeus. More explicitly, when treating Gregory of Nyssa (a section of Carter’s work that will not receive attention here), Carter points to Soulen as an example of what he considers to be a mistaken view that Chalcedonian Christianity is by necessity supersessionist towards Israel (Carter, 2008, pp. 238, 434).

I mention this second point since this assists us in understanding Carter’s position concerning the early church: while Soulen would argue that a rejection of supersessionism would imply a radical revision of Christian doctrine on all levels (Soulen, 1999, p. 26), Carter argues not only that a non-supersessionist reading of Chalcedonian Christology is possible, but that Afro-Christianity provides a particular faithful enactment of such a theological stance, which not only responds to supersessionism but also to its most important contemporary effect: modern whiteness. It is with this in mind that I turn to Carter’s exposition of Irenaeus.

5.1 Irenaeus: sketching the analogy

Irenaeus’ strong response to Valentinians and Carter’s interest in Irenaeus concerns the difference in claims of material existence between Christianity and Gnosticism. It is a struggle over the meaning of

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39 Carter’s chapter on Irenaeus is far more detailed than Soulen’s overview, yet the total absence of any reference is significant.
40 Carter does acknowledge that Soulen’s later work presents a change in this view.
41 In this Carter attempts to do what Jewish philosopher and theologian Peter Ochs argues to indeed be possible: that “there is a way for Christians to rededicate themselves to the gospel message and to the classical patristic doctrines of the church without at the same time revisiting classical Christian supersessionism” (Ochs, 2011, p. 1). While Ochs explores postliberal theology as such a possibility, Carter will both make an additional claim, that it is possible for Christians to rededicate themselves to their faith without repeating white racist Christianity, and that Afro-Christianity is an example of such a faith that does not revisit Christian supersessionism nor Christian whiteness.
42 At this point a risk of drawing on the notion “gnostic” in this fashion needs to be acknowledged. As a vague pejorative notion implying that which is not orthodox and when used as a lens of modern society applied to a very diverse group of voices it may be said that this notion is less than helpful, and it should certainly be said that it should not be used without a very clear understanding of what is meant. On the other hand, a clear description of Carter’s account of the theological problem of whiteness cannot ignore that he indeed does draw on this notion and that his use of this notion connects vital elements of his argument (for my purposes in particular it connects Irenaeus, Kant and Cone). However, it is a particular aspects of Valentinianism which Carter highlights: its relation to Israel, Kant’s analogous supersessionism, and Irenaeus, Cone and Carter’s own Christian theology of Israel and its implication for the modern problem of race. I therefore refrain from getting drawn into technical arguments on the appropriateness of describing modern theology in general as ‘gnostic’ but I do follow Carter’s use of this term in order to illuminate his argument (See Dermont Moran’s critical review of Gnostic Return in Modernity and Gnostic Apocalypse (Dermont, 2002) on which Carter draw for his analysis of Irenaeus (Carter, 2008, p. 382)).
the body (politic). This is a struggle of Christology while Christology simultaneously is the “discursive 
site of negotiating the meaning of material existence” (Carter, 2008, p. 12) within which Carter is able to 
explain why whiteness is a particularly theological problem. Together with a questionable Christology, 
questionable not merely due to being unorthodox but due to the serious concerns this raise for material 
existence, a problematic anthropology is embedded within Gnosticism (Carter, 2008, p. 14).

The specific aspect of Gnosticism which Carter is concerned with is its construction of human beings into 
three different “classes” or “natures”. The mythology of how these three natures came about does not 
concern us here, what is important for Carter’s argument is that these natures constitute essential 
distinctions between different human beings (not different aspects of a single human being), that in 
Irenaeus’ description of the Gnostic creation story a distinction is made between the two “upper” 
natures (those not “thoroughly constrained by the body”), and that this distinction rests theologically on 
a particular understanding of the God of Israel. The truly elect, the Gnostics, bypassed the God of Israel 
in the process of creation and received the ‘spiritual element’ without being contaminated by material 
reality (Carter, 2008, pp. 18-19).

Irenaeus’ problem with the Gnostics introduces the issue which Carter will return to again and again: 
scriptural exegesis (Carter, 2008, p. 20). Most importantly this is what binds together the Eastern 
Patristics and Antebellum literature of his constructive proposal for a theology not bound to modern 
whiteness. The particular exegetical problem which Carter wants to get at is that Gnostic exegesis 
allowed the severance of Christianity from its Jewish roots, thus arguing for a “true” election which 
gathers those who received the spiritual element (Carter, 2008, p. 22) and are thus not contaminated by 
the God of Israel.

The first part of Irenaeus’ response is well known since it was an important early account leading to 
Chalcedonian Christology - no distinction can be made between Christ and Jesus, between Christ as 
God and the body of Jesus. The Trinitarian “unity-in-distinction” allows the invisible Father to become 

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43 Carter will refer to the “body (politic)” or “body politic” throughout Race. He describe this as “the body both 
individually and as a sociopolitical arrangement” (Carter, 2008, p. 11).

44 At this point the question of Carter’s relationship to orthodoxy become most acute. Carter’s Christological 
exposition unapologetically follows that which would be considered orthodox, and in doing so he construct an 
analogy which both rejects Kantian Christology (thus positioning it as heretical within a Christian theological 
imagination) and affirms Cone in part and Jarena Lee in particular. While it may be possible to attempt an 
argument on which comes first in Carter’s theology, patristic theology or the theological rejection of white racism, 
the answer is possibly that these two aspects of his work form each other, the one determining what Carter would 
affirm in the other.
visible in the Son’s materiality (Carter, 2008, pp. 24-26). “[T]he one and the same Jesus Christ is the
singular embodiment of what it means to be divine and human.” (Carter, 2008, p. 26)

The second part has received less attention in the tradition after Irenaeus, but is of even deeper
significance for Carter’s argument, highlighting both the constructive theology Carter will start to
develop in Race and also the illumination which Irenaeus provides for the problem with Kant’s racial
thought. This concerns Irenaeus’ use of the Pauline notion of ‘recapitulation’, which Carter will draw on
as foundational for his rejection of white supersessionism.

Irenaeus is credited with recapitulation as a theory of atonement, which is usually connected with
Ephesians 1:1045: “With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will,
according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up
all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”46 Recapitulation is the English translation of
anakephalaïōsis, from the “[l]ate Latin recapitulātus (past participle of recapitulāre)”.47 Recapitulation
refers to a summary, such as the head of a legal argument, or to follow the NRSV, to “gather up all
things” or to follow Carter’s final description into contemporary English, to “cut short” (Carter, 2008, pp.
27, 33) a longer narrative in order to provide a more effective and clear communication of the same
idea. This is also explained with words such as a brief epitome or résumé,48 perhaps easiest understood
as a “condensed account”.49

The argument which Carter picks up from Irenaeus’ response to the Gnostics involves the triad creation-
Israel-Christ, where Israel50 is a recapitulation of creation and Christ of Israel. The gospels provide a
condensed account of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, Christ’s flesh provides a condensed account
of the Old Testament Law (Carter, 2008, p. 26) and Christ’s life through its various stages a condensed
account of the generations of human existence across time and space (Carter, 2008, p. 28). But as a
condensed account this is exactly not a supersessionist replacement of Israel with Christianity (Carter,

45 Carter points out that it is not merely in Ephesians 1:10, but also in Romans 13:9, and actually throughout
scripture but in particular in Paul where Irenaeus finds this idea.
46 Ephesians 1:8b-10, NRSV.
48 Carter picks these words up from John Behr’s The Way to Nicaea (Carter, 2008, pp. 27, 383).
http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/r%C3%A9sum%C3%A9 [accessed 15 September 2015].
50 It is vital to note that Carter does not refer to the modern state of Israel when using the designation. He writes:
“[M]ust ever so quickly add that a Jewish theological covenantalism is not be confused with modern Zionism in the
state of Israel. I speak of the former, not the latter. In its own way modern Zionism is deeply problematic,
particularly in relationship to the Palestinians. I will resist going down that road” (Carter, 2008, p. 399).
2008, p. 27) since the condensed account would be unintelligible if not read as exactly a condensed account of Israel, or more particularly, of God’s covenantal relationship with Israel. On the other hand, by connecting Christ with Adam (following the well-known Pauline argument in Romans 5), Christ provides a condensed account of creation (the generations of human existence across space and time). Again, in its condensed form, the Word of God does not tyrannically take over the words of creation (Carter, 2008, p. 29) but provides a more clear and effective presentation. Simultaneously Israel should be understood as a condensed account of creation itself. But a final step in this process of recapitulation, of producing in a condensed form, as I have described it, should be noted: The life of Christ not only provides a condensed version of all the generations of humanity but creation should be read as a recapitulation, a condensed version of Trinitarian love. The pre-existent Christ then not only becomes the second Adam but also the source of all creation.

Carter’s own summary is worth quoting in full:

In arguing this way, it is as if Irenaeus is saying that the recapitulation of all things in Christ occurs in a concentric feedback loop. Creation itself is a concentrated expression of the love the Father has for the eternal Son through the Holy Spirit. That is, it is a condensed narrative that captures without diluting the rhetorical plotline of the depths of God’s love for the Son, a love that embraces within itself even that which is not God (i.e., creation). In this sense, creation in its own way recapitulates the divine life as the “structure of supreme love.” But then as if even this condensed story were still too prolix, YHWH presents the story of Israel, beginning with the call of Abram-become-Abraham to create ex nihilo a people who before did not exist, as a compendium of the story of creation, which too came into being. And so to grasp the story of Israel is to grasp the story of creation. And finally again, in an effort to contain what yet appears to be too elongated a narrative filled with plot twists, reversals, and surprises, Christ himself

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51 It is outside the focus of this argument to turn my attention to an ecological reading of this equation between the generations of humans and creation. In passing it is however important to note well-known concerns of Christian anthropocentrism in such a formulation. Without this being the focus, and without engaging this particular instance, it will however become important to note that Jennings’ argument does contain embedded within it an ecological emphasis in his rejection of whiteness which Carter’s argument does not show a sensitivity towards. While beyond the scope of this thesis altogether, I do not think that this is accidental but rather that the different foci of *Christian Imagination* and *Race* inevitably lead to a difference in emphasis on this point. Of particular concern in Jennings account is white dislocation from land in relationship to native peoples who continue to live in close relationship to the land. The “dark triangle” which determines Carter’s work does not force such an alternative relationship to land to the fore.

52 At this point Carter goes beyond Irenaeus, following Bonhoeffer’s lectures on creation and developing them into his Christology in order to argue for “impure” existence.
“cuts short” the story of Israel into the résumé of his own material body and historical life, only then to have this loop back to the story of creation, but now under the aspect of the second Eve. He is the biography of this people and as such is the biography of creation. But in so being, he proves to be God’s own autobiography, God’s writing of Godself. (Carter, 2008, p. 33)

Carter notes three possible ways in which creation, Israel and Christ might be related (Carter, 2008, pp. 33-34). In the first, creation contains in condensed form the entire narrative of God’s love, and Israel and Christ is read through this concentrated narrative. The second and third differ in that these are not linear readings but synchronic readings which read the narrative through the middle or eschaton. In the second, Israel mediates between creation and Christ, being a condensed account of creation and the mediating causality for Christ. In the third Christ as eschaton concentrates the beginning and the middle and is therefore also first. The point is however not to choose between these readings. All three possible readings can remain on the table simultaneously. It is, however, the second reading, the first synchronic reading, that will form the lens through which Carter is able to reveal what made whiteness possible (Carter, 2008, p. 35).

The main point is however that creation, Israel and Christ should always remain together, that Christian theology can at no point read these disconnected from each other. “Irenaeus’ grand theological point is that if any one of the aspects of the concentric relationships between creation, Israel, and Christ is lost, theology as a discourse becomes distorted into a Gnostic or Gnostic-like discourse of death.” (Carter, 2008, p. 34) It is exactly in its distortion of this relationship that whiteness can be read through the analogy Carter sketches in dialogue with Irenaeus. Kant’s philosophy and Christology will in Carter’s reading bring this into maturation, and in the development of a thoroughly racial Christology – severed from its Jewish roots – Christ will become white.

But in order to point out how this analogy functions, we need to understand the place that this analogy has within Carter’s argument. It is presented as a prelude, underlying the further argument. Chapter 1, which I will not engage in any detail, presents genealogical accounts of race developed by West and Foucault. Carter argues that while both West and Foucault’s genealogy brings us to the edge of a recognition of what is theological about modern racial discourse, neither are able to take the step to describe this (Carter, 2008, pp. 52, 75). In his analysis of Kant Carter wants to argue that which he believes both West and Foucault point towards yet cannot develop: the origin of whiteness as a feat of theological imagination; thus that whiteness is a/the theological problem of modernity. The Irenaeus-Gnostic analogy will do for Carter what West and Foucault could not: shed light on the theological
mistake which creates the space in which white supremacy can be constructed and defended. The point is that if Israel does not retain its mediating role between creation and Christ Israel gets superseded by something else. In modern racial discourse, this will be Europe and whiteness. To that, we now turn.

5.2 Kant through Irenaeus analogy

An evaluation of Carter’s stronger claims concerning the integrity of Kant’s project would fall outside what this chapter or dissertation can deliver. While Kant’s racial ideas, which are also racist, ideas can hardly be denied, some do argue that these can be separated from his critical philosophy. Among other things Carter wants to indicate that they do cross-pollinate, and he does this by showing the pseudo-theological character of Kant’s work on race (Carter, 2008, pp. 42, 389). Through this argument, a doubtful shadow is cast over the modern project of Enlightenment.

But I turn my attention to Carter’s analysis of Kant in order to concentrate the argument on Carter’s particular answer to why race in general and whiteness, in particular, are a problem of theology. In order to focus attention on this answer, I look at Carter’s analysis of Kant through the Irenaeus analogy sketched in the previous section. Through this, I will outline Carter’s theological description of how Christian supersessionism allowed a racial theology to develop. In brief, I will attempt to describe how it is possible to think of the Jewish Jesus as a white Christ.

While Carter’s analysis of Kant takes on a different structure, I concentrate my reading through the lens of the Irenaeus theological analogy sketched above since this assist in clearly illuminating Carter’s description of modernity’s particularly theological problem of whiteness. I read his account through the just mentioned relationship of creation, Israel, and Christ in Irenaeus’ ideas on recapitulation, and in particular the second possible concentric relation, where Israel is both a condensed account of creation

53 Before falling into a repeating debate asking “but was Kant racist?” (not that this in itself would be entirely illegitimate), it is important to hear Nigerian philosopher Emmanuel Eze’s reminder: “I ask, then, not if Hume of Kant, as individuals was racist. It is more philosophically interesting, I believe, to inquire about the ways in which modern philosophy articulated and used the idea of race, and to what ends.” (Eze, 2001, p. 21)
54 Dutch philosopher Pauline Kleingeld (Kleingeld, 2007) makes a detailed argument tracing the changes in Kant’s racial language. Also refusing approaches which argues for an easy bracketing out of Kant’s racial thought from his political vision, she however argues that we need to allow the later disappearance of explicit race-language to indicate a shift in Kant’s racial ideas. In brief, Kant changes his mind. No mention is however made of the place of Jews in Kant’s racial imagination in her argument. By insisting that the Jewish question and the question of race should indeed be read together (and on the most brutal level the connections between the German genocide on the Herero’s and the Jews remind that such a connection should not be refused too quickly, these can both function in important ways as less than fully human in the construction of a normative whiteness), Carter makes a connection between the earlier lectures on race and the later vision of Enlightenment. In this way a continuation in the construction of whiteness can be indicated.
and the mediating conditionality of Christ. I, therefore, structure this section according to the proton, telos, and mediating conditionality, which allow a concentrated account illustrating whiteness as a theological problem. This will furthermore allow me to point out a particular limitation in Carter’s theological account when read from a South African context, a limitation that Jennings will assist me in pushing beyond.

5.2.1 Proton

Kant is most emphatically not busy with a mere attempt at describing the races, but rather focusing on the purpose of race. It is not that modernity creates an aesthetic gaze through which distant people would be categorised. While such a racial scale is not ‘natural’ and timeless in the way often popularly understood, Kant does inherit such a scale. That races exist and that they are structured around dark and light bodies is simply self-evident for Kant (Carter, 2008, p. 84). Modernity does attempt to naturalise this by claiming racial ideas to be scientific, and it is exactly as a “scientific” account that the naturalisation of “race” can be assumed. But the more important point is the meaning modernity develops in interpreting this assumed fact (Carter, 2008, p. 83). This meaning is deeply tied to ideas about development and the ultimate goal of humanity. Following the analogy of Irenaeus, what Carter describes is a pseudo-theology of modernity where interpretations of the past and present are formed by convictions about the goal of humanity – what I would describe as quasi-eschatological - the idea that whiteness draws history to its ultimate end.

55 This will become obvious in the discussion of Jennings’ notion of the “racial scale” below. For this moment I merely point out that the idea that race has “always been with us” is false, and that a negative evaluation of darker people does precede more developed racial ideologies (see Rattansi, 2007).

56 Carter points this out for Kant (Carter, 2008, p. 86), but this naturalisation continued into the 20th century as race science, and is making a resurgence in 21st century explorations of inherent genetic markers which would serve as a “scientific” account of humanity as raced (see for example Painter, 2010, pp. 390-394).

57 For Carter it is modernity itself, and the racial discourse which is vital in the construction of modernity, which should be described as pseudotheological. Carter understands pseudotheology to be closely equivalent to Irenaeus’ metalēpsis, which he used to chart “how ancient Gnosticism deformed and thereby parodies Christian theology by abstracting Christianity from its Jewish roots” (Carter, 2008, p. 385), and modernity is then pseudotheological in that it “functions by assembling and then reassembling – and, in this way, appropriating for its own ends – the claims embedded in the Christian narrative about social life together as creatures before a Creator.” (Carter, 2008, p. 387) Modernity, for Carter, is then a parody of the theological (Carter, 2008, p. 40) and in his analysis Kant’s language reveals exactly this (Carter, 2008, p. 81). Quasi-theology functions synonymously with pseudotheology in Carter’s work (Carter, 2008, pp. 40, 77, 387).

58 Carter mostly steers clear of eschatological language, describing it rather as a teleological idea. But that this teleology function eschatologically is pointed out by Carter (Carter, 2008, p. 89) and he also uses the language of “hope” to describe this process (Carter, 2008, pp. 80-81, 109).
Kant’s argument is made within a Christian religious environment, as can be seen in that he reads white people through the scriptural symbolism of Adam and Eve, arguing that Adam and Eve aesthetically most closely reflected white people; those found “between the 31st and 52nd degrees latitude in the old world” (Carter, 2008, p. 88). But this is just an approximation. The argument is not that white people are the original prototype of humanity, but that they are closest to this original creation. Noting this distinction is important since this ties with the process of enlightenment and with the more important teleological argument, Carter makes concerning race. The biblical Adam and Eve (or original first humans) contained the seeds for all the possible human races, but humanity will develop into races only later.

Carter’s analysis of Kant describes an anthropology which teaches that the human species were created with all racial characteristics inherent to it. Raciation is when people then develop into one of the possible racial group that were potentially present within the original humans. While Kant speculates on a possible climatic cause for the process of raciation, it is important to note that climate only triggers this process, it does not by itself cause racial characteristics, all of which are potentially found in the original Adam and Eve. But, once the process of raciation happened it was irreversible. Once a group becomes a race the process is finalised, making the characteristics portrayed inherent to that race. All the races except that of whites, which is not (yet) a race, have already gone through the process of raciation and have developed into inferior races, they no longer have the potential for developing into the perfect race.

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59 Thus from Southern Europe/Northern tip of Africa up to Prussia of Kant’s time, or current Germany, and excluding Africa to the south and Scandinavia to the north.

60 It is important to note that Kant’s basic assumption is explicitly monogenetic, that is, the one human species develop into different races (Carter, 2008, p. 87). While polygenetic theological arguments for race can indeed be found in history (Painter, 2010, pp. 70, 114-115), the modern construction of race should not be reduced to a problem of a polygenetic view of creation. For example, David Kelsey seems to easily take rejections of polygenesis as a rejection of a racist creation theology (Kelsey, 2009, pp. 260-261). The problem is that the intersection of modern theology and race is easily downplayed by focusing attention on examples of polygenetic theologies, since these can clearly be indicated as being well beyond the confines of orthodoxy, and the project of “main-stream” theology can then be bracketed out from such “racist theologies”. For that reason I highlight that Kant is presenting us with an explicitly monogenetic argument, and that this monogenetic account provided modernity with is “first fully developed [, rigorously scientific and philosophically sophisticated] theory of race” (Carter, 2008, pp. 41, 388).

61 The crude biological descriptions of a white race which isn’t a race as the base form of humanity make this aspect the easiest to dismiss. That such a description has absolutely no foundation in biology or the evolution of the human species is common knowledge today and that a genetic distinction which would group the human species into racial groups does not exist has been well documented. While such biological accounts might be
The important point for our purposes is that race functions as an inherent and irreversible deviation within the human species. The races (and here the fact that white people from the “old world” are not a race becomes of the utmost importance), identified aesthetically through mainly pigmentation, exhibit inherent qualities (or rather lack of qualities) concerned with their ability to receive education, inherent motivation and ability to bring about change in society (Carter, 2008, p. 91). But Kant’s white people, while not the prototype, are not yet fixed as a race either, and therefore still have the capacity to evolve towards the ultimate expression of humanity. It is not only climate which will bring this about but rather enlightenment.

The logic at work is therefore that the original human contained the potential qualities to live in any climate of the world, but once the inherent potential of a particular race becomes solidified, it stunts the possibility of all other qualities. It is only white people who are not yet stunted, and who are still in the process of being raced. It is only those who are white who still carry within them all the potential of the human species and that therefore have the potential to become the ultimate race. This process should be nurtured and steered towards its goal, and enlightenment is both the process of such nurturing and the goal towards which the developing white race need to be steered. It is this goal and the process of nurturing to which I turn following the Irenaeun analogy which reveals this as theological.

5.2.2 Telos

As pointed out in the previous section, Carter highlights a racial teleology in Kant’s account of the origin of the human. This implies that the species is oriented towards raciation, although raciation still needs to happen. Within the original human the seeds of all the races, including the perfect white race, are already present. But it is a white Christ and an accompanying vision of the cosmopolis that serves to make whiteness the ultimate telos of the human species.

So if the races are not formed in creation, at the beginning, but develop in time, and if white people are the closest to the original prototype but not yet developed into a race, then our attention needs to shift towards what the ultimate purpose of whiteness should be, which is also that which it should be steered towards.

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rejected, we can however note a modern imagination still thinking of whiteness as not only the goal but also the origin of that which is truly human, with that which is not white constructed as deviant from this norm.
Politically Kant is arguing for the cosmopolis, an ethico-civil world communion of (white)62 people united under laws of virtue and based on pure reason (Carter, 2008, p. 109). This cosmopolitical society is not a-religious, but rather tied to a particular understanding of religion, a universal religion which is the internal rational morality rather than the external law which guides society. Here then Christianity is not only politically and racially the mediation of the cosmopolis and of whiteness, but Christianity also presages the coming cosmopolis - it gives reason to the hope for the coming cosmopolis (Carter, 2008, p. 113).

In Kant’s project of enlightenment Christ as moral teacher becomes the figure representing the ultimate end of enlightened humanity. A differentiation is made between what Jesus taught as a Jew for Jews and what Jesus taught as universal moral teacher (Carter, 2008, p. 119), the second being of ultimate importance and identified with the project of enlightenment. As universal moral teacher “Christ’s wisdom is continuous with, though it represents a purer form of, the wisdom of the Greek philosophers.” (Carter, 2008, p. 117) Read in contrast with Carter’s account of Irenaeus we see that rather than a recapitulation of and providing a condensed account of Israel’s covenantal history, Christ becomes the “urmoment in the coming of Western civilisation” (Carter, 2008, p. 117). Severed from Jewish roots Christ becomes the figure of rational Christianity and a figure of the Occident.63

As a prototype of whiteness Christ then functions not only as symbol of what the species ought to become but also as enabler to make this possible (Carter, 2008, p. 114). Disconnected from Jewish roots Christ reveals what is already present within the species, and racially what the perfect race should become. This is the key point: the Christ that functions as the image of the whiteness that the human should become, as well as the assurance that this is indeed the ultimate goal of the human, is not the Jewish rabbi but Christ in as much as Christ becomes the ultimate form of Greek wisdom, and so the foundation of the emerging occidental space. It is Christ severed from his Jewish roots. The Jewish

62 Here again it is important to emphasise the racial in Carter’s reading of Kant, since what Carter highlights is that Kant is concerned not with conflict between nations as such, but with conflict between white nations which risks destroying the species.

63 In Draper’s (Draper, 2014, pp. 109-111) insightful analysis of Carter he points out that this is also an implicit critique on Radical Orthodoxy. Carter, a former student of Milbank, yet severely critical of Milbank’s project (although his criticism is almost “diplomatically” left in the endnotes), is working out a Christian theology which builds on Israel and is mediated through Afro-Christian women as a rejection of Milbank’s Christian theology in which a white male elite mediates a Christian vision built on Greek philosophy. In spite of similarities between Carter’s work and that of Milbank, Carter is therefore presenting Radical Orthodoxy as a perpetuation of the theological problem of whiteness in spite of its rejection of modernity.
particularity of Jesus needs to be stripped down to find the core of moral religion associated with the white Christ. In this way, Christ becomes the *telos* around which whiteness is theologically structured.

A note might be in order at this point about the more explicit artistic representation of a white-skinned blue-eyed (blond-haired) Jesus. While this image is obviously disconnected from history, reducing the problem of a white Jesus to these visible presentations hides how Christ has been made to represent whiteness regardless of how Jesus is visibly imagined. It is not that a critique of this imaging is misplaced, it is indeed important and part of the dismantling of a Christianity made equivalent to whiteness, but this in itself does not dismantle a white Christology.

While Carter prefers to identify this as teleology rather than eschatology, it is exactly as a pseudo-eschatology that we can make sense of this genealogical moment of whiteness that Carter describes. Whiteness is ‘already and not yet’; a “present reality, and yet it is also still moving toward and awaiting perfection” (Carter, 2008, p. 89). Christ as moral teacher, not as Jewish rabbi, is the first instance of whiteness, revealing what whiteness ought to become and enabling it into existence (Carter, 2008, p. 114). The picture sketched is one in which whiteness represents the original purpose of the human species and a white Christ present the goal of perfecting whiteness.

5.2.3 *Mediating conditionality*

Reading through the analogy of Irenaeus’ understanding of recapitulation, the question then becomes what moves the human species (or at least the remnant white race which is not a race) towards the inherent potential of becoming a perfect race, a moral cosmopolitan society, made possible through the white Christ as its first instantiation and rational Christianity as proof of its possibility?

Part of the purpose of Carter’s reading of Kant is to reveal that Kant’s later work which emphasised politics is really a continuation of his earlier work on the perfection of the white race. The “political advance of Western civilization” (Carter, 2008, p. 96) is a continuation of the search for the inner potential for racial perfection found in the original humans. Carter reveals the process of enlightenment, *aufklärung*, as embedded within Kant’s racial and religious interpretation of the human species: as the mediation of whiteness towards its ultimate end (Carter, 2008, p. 90). This group of people who best retain the original genus of the human species and is being drawn towards the hoped-for global cosmopolitical society represented by the white Christ of rational Christianity also become the mediating conditionality within which this can happen. In short, Christianity replaces Israel as the covenantal people representing a condensed account of God’s creation. No longer a gentile people
drawn into a covenant not their own, Christianity, or at least a certain rational Christianity, becomes the mediating conditionality within which humanity can move to its ultimate moral end, through a process of enlightenment towards a universal moral society for which the white Christ is the foundational expression.

Carter indicates how Kant’s anthropology, described as ‘pragmatic anthropology’, is not primarily concerned with what “‘nature’ makes of the human being”, but rather with what the human being “can or should make of himself” (Carter, 2008, pp. 98-99). Of importance is that within Kant’s understanding of the organism the species as a whole is not simply given over to mechanistic laws but that the species has the capacity to organise in ways that will impact on the possible natural predispositions mentioned above (Carter, 2008, pp. 83-85). Within the structure of my argument, the point is then that the possibility exists to actively participate in the process of raciation, in the formation of the perfect white race.64

Thus not only is Jesus severed from his Jewish roots, Israel as covenantal community which mediates the possibility for the revelation in Christ, Israel as covenantal community for which a condensed account is found in the gospels and Christ, is replaced, superseded, by Europe and rational Christianity, and Enlightenment becomes the process by which the telos of the human species, as revealed in the white Christ as the first instance of the perfect race, will be brought to its fulfilment.

At this point, the dark implications of enlightenment can be noted. Kant’s later political work is in response to questions on whether Jewish people within European society can be fully integrated into the nation. The answer he gives is “yes”, but it would involve the “euthanasia of Judaism”. It involves accepting Christ as a moral teacher, stripped of his Jewish particularity, and the destruction of any racial or religious particularity of the Jewish people. In brief, for those who are not white, being integrated into the cosmopolis is only possible through immense violence (Carter, 2008, pp. 118-121).

64 It is within this vision that Kant’s concern over racial purity should be understood, given that the perfect white race is in the process of developing (and Western civilization and Enlightenment is a key step in this process), intermixing is of great concern, since this would work against Kant’s teleology (Carter, 2008, pp. 94-95). The main anxiety if with the Jewish “alien within” but Kant will reveal the same anxieties about the “alien without” and the risk associated with moving white people that have not yet completed the process of perfect raciation into colonies where there is the chance of mulattic contamination. The policing of bodies, in the first place Jewish bodies within the white nation, but in similar fashion all non-white bodies (Carter, 2008, p. 108), becomes key to the process of perfecting the human species – which is the perfecting of the white race. The policing of bodies is therefore fundamental to modernity and the purpose of modernity.
However, for Carter an argument from Kant’s earlier work on race needs to be read together with this, an argument that is fundamental to Carter’s critique. There is a theological connection between darker people and Jews. They are the alien without and the alien within the body politic against which whiteness is constituted (Carter, 2008, p. 81). What connects them is that they are both conceived as a problem on the teleological path of “the hoped-for modern cosmopolis, the perfect world order in which the ideal of the unity of the species actualises itself in the perfection of a race type, the white race” (Carter, 2008, p. 81). The vision Carter describes is one in which the racial arc of the universe bends towards whiteness, or perhaps we could better say that whiteness itself bends the universe in on itself. The “consummation of all things within the economic, political, and aesthetic – in short, within the structural – reality called ‘whiteness’” (Carter, 2008, p. 89) is the teleological end which Carter describes.

Within this teleology, we then find Carter’s strong claim that Kant is arguing that all races except that of whites will be stamped out. Carter in effect notes a genocidal impulse in Kant’s thought in which the teleology of whiteness has as its underside the annihilation of all other races.

I will not repeat Carter’s detailed exegesis of Kant, except for a few notes on his sources and the implication. Differences between Kant’s private notes and his student’s notes of lectures seem to imply that these views remained private (yet not necessarily implying any doubt on Kant’s part (Carter, 2008, p. 401). Suffice to say that in Kant’s teleology all except whites will be “stamped out… they will undergo an inner rotting or decay leading to their utter eradication” (Carter, 2008, p. 92). Careful analysis convinces Carter that this ‘stamped out’, while presented in the passive, is still imagined as intertwined with the “advance of Western civilization” (Carter, 2008, p. 93). Thus the advance of Western civilisation and the stamping out of all other races are flip sides of the same process. The white race will inhabit all the earth and all others races will be “stamped out”.

But whether through genocide, as Carter highlights in Kant’s earlier work, or through a form of integration which requires the death of particularity, as Carter highlights in Kant’s later writings in response to the Jewish people within the body politic, modernity assumes whiteness, that is “not merely and banally as pigment but as structural-aesthetic order and as a socio-political arrangement” (Carter, 2008, p. 89), to quasi-eschatologically be what would and should finally encompass the whole globe.

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65 To invert Martin Luther King’s well-known phrase, as used by Jennings in a 2013 lecture, *Theology’s Crippled Imagination* ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSJAlkJURpU [accessed 10 June 2016]])
Structured through Carter’s reading of Irenaeus’ interpretation of recapitulation, we can then clearly see how Carter discerns a Christian supersessionist logic at work in the theological incubation of race in general and whiteness in particular. Christianity is decoupled from its Jewish roots in order to become both the hope for the coming cosmopolis, which is also a vision of the perfect white race, and therefore of whiteness as a structure of society, and replaces Israel as the mediating conditionality of Christ’s work of atonement. Western culture becomes that to which Christ points and the process of Enlightenment and rational Christianity the space within which humanity will be guided towards this ultimate goal. Reading this together with Irenaeus,

In this articulation, Christianity is reimagined as “racially” severed from and ethnographically triumphant over its oriental Jewish roots. Functioning in the modern world as a revitalized Gnosticism, or more specifically as a kind of neo-Marcionism (see this book’s prologue), Christianity, reconstituted as the moral religion par excellence of reason, extols a Jesus who, rather than disclosing YHWH of the God of Israel as the ground of redemption for Jews and Gentiles alike, instead affirms what the human species “can or should make of itself”. (Carter, 2008, p. 107)

5.3 In summary and transition...

The purpose of the previous section was to describe what the answer would be that Kameron Carter’s Race, as key contemporary argument on theology and race, would give to the question on what the particularly theological problem of whiteness is. At this point, I can, therefore, provide one element of an answer to this question. Whiteness is a particularly theological problem because European space and white bodies take the place of Israel in salvation history and Christ is remade as white. In taking over the mediating role of Israel and radically reimagining the eschaton in the image of whiteness, whiteness becomes a doctrine of creation, forcing the entire earth to be recreated in its image – conceptually, but also materially. The dark side of modernity that Carter illuminates is a theological vision whereby the earth ultimately not only belongs to those who are white but where the human species ultimately should be only white if it is to attain its goal. In retrospect Christ, in this supersessionist imagination, is revealed as the decisive moment for the coming of whiteness, and Christianity becomes pure ideology in support of a racist imagination. The upshot of Carter’s argument is that a Christian racial imagination was made possible by a Christian theology which no longer reads itself from within the covenantal identity of Israel.
While this captures a particular interpretation of the theological process behind the construction of whiteness, in brief, there is a specific moment in the formation of whiteness that remains bracketed in this reading, to which I will now have to turn.

In approaching his conclusion to Part I of Race, Carter notes about what he described that “[i]t is this process that constitutes the Western metropole as white and in relationship to the colony as non-white” (Carter, 2008, pp. 120-121). But at exactly this point Carter’s description of how this theological problem is being performed reaches its limits for the purpose of my argument.

Carter has argued that “the ultimate source of Kant’s anxiety over the Jews” (Carter, 2008, p. 105) rests in their proximity: they are living within the occident, poised to contaminate the occident: “The occident risks mulattic contamination” (Carter, 2008, p. 105). In parallel to this, Kant feared that the fragile emerging whiteness might not survive when placed in the colony (Carter, 2008, p. 94), fearing that a mulattic contamination would be the inevitable result of white people placed among non-white people across the world. But history has proven that whiteness perpetuates itself without the need for existence in European space and life in the Western metropole. Indeed Carter’s analysis highlights that Kant also envisions the global domination of whiteness, although he has anxieties about the potential contamination that might occur in the process, Carter’s interlocutors mean that what happens to whiteness in the colony is not explored. Jennings’ description of the theological problem of whiteness when dislocated out of the geographic space called Europe does, however, provide a framework which can assist such a move.

The question is in part whether Carter’s equation between the Judenfragen and the Rassenfragen can adequately capture the way whiteness is constructed outside of the Western metropole, where the question is not that of the “alien within” nor the “alien without” but rather that of “whiteness amidst

66 Where the USA takes over the role of British imperialism, I would argue that that becomes the Western metropole and North American space becomes white space. In a lecture discussing a future publication Carter points to the writings of Thomas Jefferson, and among other points, notes how Jefferson is in particular attempting to construct the emerging United States within the Americas as parallel to Europe ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9LqDqLv-nc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9LqDqLv-nc) [accessed 16 June 2016]). The political reality of South Africa would however necessitate a different relationship to the Western metropole and European space, one which today we know resulted in the rise of apartheid and white minority rule, the construction of white enclaves, spaces where purity could be maintained, exactly due to the fact that the broader geographic space could not be described as white by any stretch of the imagination.

67 I am not implying that Jennings describes apartheid nor the particularity of South African whiteness (in spite of his use of Colenso as one moment in his theological description), but his work will assist in providing a framework within which to understand how the theological problem of whiteness is reimagined when dislocated from European geography, a question which is of obvious relevance to South African whiteness.
the alien”. Carter’s analysis, while of utmost importance for debates of theology and race, is totally caught up in the European-North American discourse, and the whiteness Carter describes and to which Carter responds is then the whiteness at the heart of “empire” (whether the whiteness at the heart of colonial Europe or of capitalist United States of America). What Carter’s account does not assist us with is what happens to the theological problem of whiteness when white bodies chose to displace themselves away from the geographic and political-economic area which has identified Christ wholly to itself. If Europe is Christian, what happens when white Europeans leave Europe (and the extension of Europe into North America)? While it is exactly whiteness which justifies the colonial project on a number of levels there is also some concern about what such a displacement would mean for those who are white – that their whiteness will be contaminated, their purity compromised. At exactly this point Jennings will, however, assist us.

6  Jennings

Carter’s description of whiteness as a supersessionist theology has explicit parallels in the theological construction of whiteness in South Africa. Afrikaner appropriation of Old Testament themes of “election”, “volk” and “promised land” should already alert us to such possibilities. But an immediate distinction should also alert us to possible problems in reading Carter’s theological account on South African soil: Carter’s description assumes the metropole while South African (particularly Afrikaner) whiteness is constructed consciously through the laager. While the centrality of European geographic space remains important in constructing whiteness up to the present, the movements away from

68 This section was presented in revised form at a public lecture at the University of Free State on 11 April 2019.
69 At this point I refer explicitly to theological, rather than pseudotheological. The Afrikaner theological construction of whiteness makes no attempt at presenting itself as anything other than theological. Apart from Colenso, who will be mentioned below and represent the Anglican theological debate, we can turn to the well-known case of Johannes du Plessis as case study of how South African theology of the 19th and 20th century explicitly rejected modernity and its theological articulations. However, the argument Carter makes is not that white supersessionism only rises with modernity, it is rather that he attempts to argue that modernity is pseudotheological exactly in being a supersessionist theology, and that modern racism should be understood against that background.
70 While “people” would be the closest translation, this does not adequately capture the meaning of the Afrikaans.
71 Again, I retain the Afrikaans original. The laager refer to a circle of wagons drawn together in an attempt to more easily protect the group. This image has been popular for both positive and critical description of Afrikaners in particular and best capture a perspective of being a small group under constant threat from “swart gevaar”, the ANC, violent crime or an endless list of other threats. This narrative of being under threat is a key element of constructing the Afrikaner self and whiteness in South Africa, particularly as it overlaps with Afrikaner ethnic identity. In an earlier publication I pointed out how the laager is also a soteriological symbol and how the underlying idea of salvation through white withdrawal and drawing together continues to function in contemporary South Africa (Van Wyngaard, 2015a).
Europe has profound implications for the construction of whiteness as well (Steyn, 2005). Furthermore, there are important differences between North American and South African whiteness which needs to be taken into account.

But while Jennings and Carter are constantly read together, it is exactly at this point where they diverge. Jennings seeks to trace the development of whiteness in its movement out of Europe, even though this movement is exactly what would form whiteness in Europe: colonialism. I will begin by providing an outline of three important concepts in Jennings’ account of whiteness as a theological problem: the racial scale, (in)voluntary dislocation and the universal interpreter. After this, I will briefly touch on Jennings’ argument on supersessionism, since Jennings, together with Carter, see supersessionism as the theological problem out of which a theology of white supremacy can develop.

Draper’s analysis of Jennings’ relation to history and cultural studies is key to my own account. Jennings accepts the historical account of his sources provided by scholars in other disciplines. His theological work does not require nor propose a different historical reading. Read as a theological account it does, however, bring him to different conclusions (Draper, 2014, pp. 179-180). It is this theological account, or rather, key theological descriptions which Jennings develops by drawing on historical moments, that I will focus on.

Underlying Jennings’ theological account is an argument on how Christian supersessionism informs modern racism: “in supersessionist thinking the church replaces Israel in the mind and heart of God. It will take my entire treatment, each chapter adding layers to my account of this decisive distortion, to describe the awesome effects of this way of thinking on the imagination of Christians” (Jennings, 2010, pp. 32-33). Through this Jennings is both embedded inside the narrative of the modern maturation of race which Carter describes through a patristic analogy, but also sketches aspects that precede this maturation. Yet for my particular purposes, Carter provides a description of the theological problem within which Jennings situate his own discussion on the origin of race, and against this background, I read Jennings in order to move out of Europe and into colonised places.\(^{72}\)

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\(^{72}\) While doing this I have to point out that the colony (at least as symbol of the process of colonialism) is a key element for making Europe into the white racialised space that it was/is. It would therefore be entirely possible to turn my account in on itself to then go from how the whiteness constructed in the moments of colonial encounter found its way back into the self-description of whiteness in Europe, but my own account does not require this turn back to itself, since my account moves from this moment of encounter to the solidifying of whiteness within a colonial space of a ‘special type’ that will later be named apartheid.
However, to see this we need to first follow Jennings’ account on how race serves to draw all the people of the world into a single vision, a vision organised around whiteness.

6.1 Racial scale

That race implies a structuring of the world along a hierarchy where white is supreme and black the polar opposite is often taken as foundational to modern racism. More careful accounts would, however, remind that it is not always that clear what we mean by white and black and who is allowed inside whiteness and who relegated to blackness. Painter’s (Painter, 2010) History of White People contains numerous examples of the exceptions, yet simultaneously reveals how exceptions prove a racial logic over time; meaning that while whiteness is not a monolithic construct, and numerous examples can be named of how Europe constructed itself through an understanding of being comprised of various “races”, the way in which whiteness over time includes groups which at earlier times were considered to be of a different race yet share the aesthetic markers which define whiteness forces us to more carefully consider the importance of these aesthetic markers.

As Linda Alcoff argues, race differs from class and ethnicity exactly in its visibility and the impossibility of it being hidden (Alcoff, 2006). Jennings takes us to a moment of origin for a racial aesthetic given theological meaning, attempting to describe why such an aesthetic carried meaning and what it implied.

At this point a broader argument to which Jennings contributes in part through The Christian Imagination should be mentioned: when do we have the inception of race? While it is generally accepted that race as an idea and organising principle is not eternal, that has not been with us throughout the history of humanity, some debate continues on whether race has its origin around the early period of colonialism or the Enlightenment. Jennings argues for the earlier date (Jennings, 2010, p. 289), even while settling a mere question of dating is far from the focus of his work.

The important question is how such a racial aesthetic came to have meaning. What Jennings draws our attention towards, in particular through the examples of Zurara and Valignano, is how this aesthetic hermeneutic allows a single scale onto which all of humanity could be mapped. This single point already

73 For example, while class is indeed often visible, it can be hidden through the adoption of a particular accent or learning to speak about topics in a way appropriate for a different class position. While not impossible to hide race, to “pass” for being part of another race is more difficult and often impossible.

74 Again, Painter’s (Painter, 2010) work illustrates this fact, not in small part through tracing the process of slavery internal to Europe and how this over time changed to the point where black flesh and slave identity became synonymous.
hints towards the coming two aspects which I will discuss, since this aesthetic mapping implies that
human bodies are disconnected from the space in which they exist in determining identity, and this
aesthetic provides a universal interpretation applicable to the entire world, or more accurately, the
world becomes a single space through such an aesthetic mapping of all of humanity: Europeans and
Africans (and over time all people) can be described at the same time (Jennings, 2010, p. 24). To draw
these points together in Jennings’ own words: “Scale here refers to the possibility … of seeing and
touching multiple peoples and their lands at once and thinking them together.” (Jennings, 2010, pp. 25-
26)

This aesthetic serves to answer a theological question: where do the people “discovered” through
colonial contact fit into God’s plan of salvation? Answering this question involves using available
markers of salvation – Jewish and Muslim identity. Jews and Muslims are not only considered the polar
opposite of Christian identity, but great anxiety also exists about Jews and Muslims converting to
Christianity and living in the midst of European Christendom. Christian identity is always suspect in
converted Jews or Muslims – the suspicion always exists that they might return to their original religion
or might even practice Judaism or Islam in secret. This suspicion can be transferred over multiple
generations to the children or converted Jews or Muslims. Christian identity is however fully positioned
within European identity, made possible since Europe is read in supersessionist ways as the new Israel. It
is this theological hermeneutic within which African people need to be fitted, and they are connected to
Jewish and Muslim identities as not Christian and when converted constantly suspect (Jennings, 2010,
pp. 33-36).

Race then functions as a soteriological shorthand. The question of who is Christian and who is not can
be answered by reflecting on aesthetic markers.

What the racial scale therefore does is to tie the unknown (Africans) to the known (Jews), and to give
theological meaning to aesthetic markers so that aesthetic markers typical of the European body
become the sign of the election which was read in a supersessionist way as no longer referring to Israel
but to Christian Europe. The effect is visible through the history of the colonial world: white and
Christian is synonymous. It is then at this point that I read Jennings within Carter’s theological account of
race, while the following point takes me beyond Carter’s description of Kant.
6.2 Dislocation and a doctrine of private property

The very move to interpret the bodies of all of humanity inside a single aesthetic scale reveals a theological problem which in many ways precedes the soteriological discernment which this scale allows. It allows a distorted vision of creation to take hold in Christian thought. Repeatedly Jennings argues that the “deepest theological problem” (Jennings, 2010, p. 25) or “deepest theological distortion” (Jennings, 2010, p. 39) involves the way in which bodies were theologically separated from place. Towards the end of his argument, he states that “[O]ne of the first factors in rendering the Christians impotent and unleashing segregated mentality into the social imagination of Christians was the loss of a world where people were bound to land.” (Jennings, 2010, p. 248)

Jennings locates this problem within the doctrines of creation and incarnation in particular (Jennings, 2010, p. 28). Locating this problem doctrinally does not imply any kind of creedal alteration, but as Jennings points out in relation to Acosta, it is the way the logic of doctrines is performed that is fundamentally being altered in the process of colonial dislocation (Jennings, 2010, p. 71). Briefly stated, if the doctrine of creation ex nihilo “means that all things carry inherent possibilities of continuity and discontinuity” (Jennings, 2010, p. 28) and if Christ the Creator is located in time and space, and salvation is, therefore “embodied in the here and now”, the representative of Christ can delegate the task of reshaping landscapes and their peoples (Jennings, 2010, p. 28).

The inherent instability of creation means that all things may be altered in order to bring them to proper order towards saved existence. Church and realm ... stand between peoples and land and determine a new relationship between them, dislodging particular identities from particular places. Through a soteriological vision, church and realm discern all people to exist on the horizon of theological identities. (Jennings, 2010, p. 29)

The point is perhaps best illustrated at the very hinge between Jennings’ dominant narrative of colonialism and a brief detour into the last moments of a world not yet fully marked by this distortion: the Yup’ik Eskimos, Iroquis, and Ju/wasi and /Gwi San-people (Jennings, 2010, pp. 39-58). His argument which started on the shores of Portugal in a description of Zurara and moved to Japan with Valignano visiting the most powerful ruler in Japan together with a black slave, ends with Jennings’ summary: “The deepest theological distortion taking place is that the earth, the ground, spaces, and places are being removed as living organisers of identity and as facilitators of identity” (Jennings, 2010, p. 39). Later he

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75 In the context of this argument Nicolas V.
emphasises that “the earth itself was barred from being a constant signifier of identity” (Jennings, 2010, p. 43). The result is that bodily aesthetic markers are tasked with the process of defining identities dislocated from space.

But it is not only that people become defined separate from land through such a racial lens, land is also marked “as a separate reality from the reality of a people” (Jennings, 2010, p. 50). The two processes are deeply intertwined and the result, as far as land is concerned, is that the earth can be measured in the potential economic value of the land.

The central problem tying Jennings’ characters together is dislocation. He states this quite explicitly in the introduction by saying that “the majority of the chapters build around various peoples and their approach to their new situation in the newfound worlds” (Jennings, 2010, p. 9). The project of colonialism is inherently about dislocation – for all those involved. Jennings describes this process of dislocation around a distinction between voluntary and forced dislocation. For example, “Valignano entered this moment of dislocation by choice, the slave by force.” (Jennings, 2010, p. 39). The racial scale is made possible by the uncoupling of identity from space, and “the first point of uncoupling is the European himself” (Jennings, 2010, p. 30).

But mere bodily dislocation does not adequately describe the problem. In the chapter on Acosta, the key character which assists Jennings in describing the theology which transforms a colonial spatial imagination in the process of voluntary dislocation, Jennings responds to the question of whose space Acosta entered as follows: “Whose world did José de Acosta enter as he disembarked onto Peruvian soil? He stepped into the Inca and Andean world only in a qualified sense. Primarily, Acosta brought his world with him...” (Jennings, 2010, p. 72).

It is not only that European vision destroys indigenous vision of land. The quickly expanding world of European Christianity with the ‘discovery of the new world’ also reveals limitations to received theology. While “Acosta’s laugh”, as chapter two is titled, refers to Acosta’s response to the mistaken geographic speculations of Aristotle (Jennings, 2010, p. 84), it is in the mistaken speculations of ancient Christian thought that Jennings sees Acosta primarily responding to. Jennings’ argument is that the doctrine of

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76 This emphasis seem to confirm Draper’s analysis that the chapter on Acosta forms Jennings’ key description of the problem (Draper, 2014, p. 184). While the initial description of Zurara might leave the impression that chapter 1 does not involve a similar “new situation in the newfound worlds” the chapter quickly moves to particularly Valignano to elaborate on how an aesthetic racial scale functioned theologically, thus tying this chapter into the pattern of focusing on what happens in the process of voluntary and involuntary dislocation.
creation always refers to “real-world places, or it refers to nothing at all” (Jennings, 2010, p. 85), and Acosta’s work will reveal an attempt at finding a doctrine of creation no longer bound to the limitations of European space.

Jennings attempts to describe a theological process which leads to the salvation of oppressed people. While not always equally explicit (yet sometimes indeed explicitly so), a chronological process is perceived in which the material dislocation of indigenous people is followed by their relocation into Christianity, with the first being a necessity for the second. This is a theological vision, where empire and church are wholly intertwined, where forced dislocation is not merely justified by the hope of an eventual spiritual relocation into Christian identity, but where such a material dislocation is a pre-requisite, an inevitability, in the Christianising of the world.

Zurara makes sense of the dislocation of African bodies to Portugal through a process of slavery, and the suffering that is accompanied in this by reading its goal salvifically: “African captivity leads to African salvation” (Jennings, 2010, p. 20). At heart, these are questions of theodicy and providence. How does European Christianity make theological sense of the suffering of colonised peoples, and where is God in this process?

The response to the first should be clear at this stage of the argument. Where the suffering of people as a result of colonialism and slavery is noted (and it is important that quite often this was not the case) this is placed within a theological frame where bodily suffering is “justified” through spiritual salvation. But where is God in all of this?

Acosta draws colonialism into God’s providence through an argument that God consciously created the ‘new world’ with excessive natural wealth in order to draw European Christianity to this place where else they would have had no desire to go (Jennings, 2010, pp. 92-93). It is then not merely a question of theodicy and noting God’s work through suffering, but rather that the very act of displacement was part of God’s divine providential “plan” of bringing salvation (and enriching the church).

The barely hidden point (not in Jennings’ argument but in the logic of displacement) is that any attempt at defining identity in close relation to place need to be opposed violently. All people must be drawn into a world where space and place both cannot and may not define identity. At this point, Jennings’ racial scale will take us right into the heart of the contemporary economic crisis, the environmental movement, and multiple debates on land-rights – not least that occurring in South Africa.
Jennings’ description of the result of this displacement, tied to the racial scale, moves close to Carter’
description of the theological problem of whiteness:

Europeans established a new organizing reality for identities, themselves. ... Before this agency
would yield the “idea of race,” “the scientific concept of race,” the “social principle of race,” or
even a fully formed “racial optic” of the world, it was a theological form – an inverted, distorted
vision of creation that reduced theological anthropology to commodified bodies. In this
inversion, whiteness replaces the earth as the signifier of identities. (Jennings, 2010, p. 58)

Thus, the process of thinking the whole world together requires uncoupling bodies from place.
Simultaneously, the consequence of uncoupling the earth from the people that inhabit it is that land
becomes available for commodification. Where this leads is not simply that bodies are given identity in
relation to its own bodily markers, but that the identity of all is determined in relation to white bodies,77
and as Jennings points out later, to private property (with white male owners) (Jennings, 2010, pp. 225-
226, 235). This for Jennings is at the heart of the ‘whiteness hermeneutic’ and how it relates to theology.
Particular bodies are dislodged from particular places through a racialised soteriological vision where
race is tied to a theological identity (Jennings, 2010, p. 138). The effect is a missionary Christianity where
becoming Christian has as a pre-requisite dislodging identities tied to particular place and drawing all
bodies into a theological vision of the world where identity is determined by how they are related to a
Christianity read through European space and to white bodies simultaneously voluntarily dislocated
through colonial conquest. This is Jennings central claim: that the thinking together of people through
race happened by disconnecting people from place, and that this process enfolds within a theological
vision and discernment of salvation.

If this is the case then the only way we will be able to learn to adequately respond to the modern
problem of race is if we simultaneously respond to how this is tied to our spatial imagination:

Until one begins to reflect on the interconnected turnings of space and the formation of racial
being as mirrored processes, every attempt to destabilize racial identity, argue for a common

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77 Jennings will repeat this point throughout his argument. In the Andeans the conquering pastoralists introduced
“a new point of evaluation for indigenous agriculturalist practices: themselves” (Jennings, 2010, p. 77); Acosta
replaces ancient “philosophical and theological geographic authority with another geographic authority, himself”
(Jennings, 2010, p. 86) – in Acosta’s case Jennings’ comment is of particular importance, reminding that it is also
European relation to space which is disrupted.
humanity, and claim race as fiction, social construction, or essentialized nonsense will be superficial at best.

Theorists and theories of race will not touch ground until they reckon deeply with the foundations of racial imaginings in the deployment of an altered theological vision of creation. We must narrate not simply the alteration of bodies but of space itself. (Jennings, 2010, p. 63)

However, this material and bodily disruption are fundamentally intertwined with the question of epistemology, knowledge production, and indeed, theological discernment. By what intellectual process does this disruption occur?

6.3 Ownership of knowledge: the universal interpreter

Throughout Jennings’ account, his focus is on those who write, those who interpret and give meaning to the changing world and the world changed through colonialism. It is not primarily those with the power to effect the colonial project, but those who attempt to make sense of these events, those who interpret and give meaning to these events, that he wants to explore. And this attempt at interpreting is a particularly theological attempt.

Behind Jennings’ work there is a particular concern with the practice of being a Christian intellectual, perhaps a theologian as well, but definitely not limited to theology. His concern is with the spaces of theological formation (and in effect also broader academic formation) that was formed since these perpetuate the distorted Christian imagination that he seeks to illuminate. A distorted pedagogy and hermeneutic theologically justified in the places of the expansion of empire therefore not only further develops Jennings’ argument on how race and theology are intertwined in its inception – he also sees this distortion playing itself out in the classroom and in Christian intellectual formation.

78 This point is perhaps best illustrated with brief quotes from Jennings’ description of key characters: “Zurara writes as one seated next to power” (Jennings, 2010, p. 17); “Viceroy Toledo is crucial because José de Acosta arrived to do theological work at the beginning of his reign. In fact, Acosta joined Toledo for part of the viceroy’s visita.” (Jennings, 2010, p. 75) This does not imply that Jennings envisions a seamless collaboration between church and state. As much as these are intertwined, he also explores the deep conflict between these visions. This is particularly the case with Colenso, but also visible with Acosta (Jennings, 2010, p. 83).

79 In the same pattern as the previous footnote, the point can be seen in looking at Jennings’ description of key characters: “Zurara was a Christian intellectual at the dawn of the age of European colonialism, charged with offering the only real account of official history, a theological account” (Jennings, 2010, p. 16); “Acosta thus fashioned a theological vision for the New World that drew its life from Christian orthodoxy and its power from conquests” (Jennings, 2010, p. 83)
So it is to the one interpreting, or rather, the position from where the world is being interpreted, that we need to finally turn. That whiteness becomes the position from which all are interpreted, and that this interpretation happens within and through a disrupted spatial imagination (a disruption not only of colonised space but of European space as well) is already noted. But Jennings reveals a theological vision which justifies this interpretation as universal and silences indigenous knowledge and interpretation. Where Jennings takes us into is the key theological practices of pedagogy and translation, and how these are tied with the development of race and the disruption of Christian intimacy.

As a Christian theological vision draws colonial conquest into an emerging white and European narration of God’s providential care, there is a theological impossibility at work in colonial theology that Jennings wants to illuminate. For Acosta what is impossible is that indigenous knowledge can speak about its own origin. “He cannot imagine a theological appropriation of native knowledge as an act of theological reflection itself. Such an act is prohibited by his deep commitment to a Western episteme that is emerging at the precise moment of colonial emergence” (Jennings, 2010, p. 91). While everything can be read inside a doctrine of providence (e.g. the invention of the compass can be read providentially (Jennings, 2010, p. 90)), Andean sacrality and religion fall fully outside God’s salvific work and within the realm of the demonic (Jennings, 2010, p. 96). Acosta’s inability to draw on indigenous knowledge for theological reflection marks a procedure that will continue for hundreds of years – he will speak for the indigenous peoples (Jennings, 2010, p. 91).

The problem Jennings wants to illuminate is however only clearly visible when we see it transformed into modern enlightened sensibilities. While such a demonic discernment continues throughout the colonial period – and indeed, it can be found right into the popular religious discourses of the present – it doesn’t sit well with later interpretations. Colenso provides a clear example of how this discernment is rejected, while the rejection theologically repeats the very colonial problem that gave birth to what was just discussed. Colenso is an example of an Enlightenment generosity which can discern a universal religious experience. However, “[w]hat looks like a radical, antiethnocentric vision of Christian faith is in fact profoundly imperialist. Colenso’s universalism undermines all forms of identity except that of the colonialist.” (Jennings, 2010, p. 145)

The ‘speaking for’ here takes on a different form, but in effect reproduces a similar problem. Rather than an intimate community Jennings discerns in an Enlightenment generous universalism, as embodied by Colenso, a didactic use of colonial subjects. He discerns not the demonic, but a universal religiosity. In a different way, there is no room for the particular theological questions and interpretations emerging
outside of the Western world – at best it serves as confirmation and example in the production of dominant white theologies (Jennings, 2010, pp. 150-154).

On the one hand, Jennings notes a similar supersessionism informing both a colonial reading of indigenous religiosity as demonic as well as a drawing into Enlightenment universality all particular religious expressions – to that I return below. On the other hand, through this layered narrative, Jennings discerns a crisis of theology as discourse – an inversion of pedagogy and discipleship.

It is not that Jennings denies that Christianity is a teaching faith. Rather, what he proposes is that teaching in Christianity finds its place within formation, but that the Christianity that emerges from colonial missionary Christianity inverts this relationship so that theology functions as constant evaluation of a world made into perpetual students. Theology becomes tied to pedagogy for the formation of colonial subjects in ways which would disrupt the possibility of white and European Christianity to note and grapple with theology emerging from within a process of formation in a particular place among particular people. At the edges of empire, where Jennings focuses his attention, the result of this is a colonial Christianity in refusal of submitting to indigenous culture or knowledge, of submitting to a particular place (Jennings, 2010, pp. 91, 148).

6.4 Jennings on Christian supersessionism

While repeatedly hinted towards, I need to lastly turn to how Jennings situates this problem within a white supersessionist imagination. Central to Jennings’ argument on Christian supersessionism is that a Christian reading of election as an act of divine initiative, a matter of grace, allowed the freedom of God to elect Israel to be interpreted as a freedom of God to be detached from Israel and elect another. Within colonial European imagination, the implication becomes that “we are chosen by God”. In this imagination, Israel then becomes an ethnic group seeking to possess land. Israel’s identity is not bound to God’s involvement with Israel but to their ethnic identity and land possession (Jennings, 2010, p. 254).

At a number of points, Jennings briefly touches on the work a supersessionist Christian imagination does. As pointed out in the discussion of Jennings’ ‘racial scale’ above, Jewish identity becomes a key marker in the construction of a racial hermeneutic of the world. However, the work of a supersessionist imagination is not simply a Christian rejection of Jewish faith, but rather that when Israel is taken out of a Christian imagination of formation it leaves a conceptual vacuum which is then filled by Europe. Israel
is no longer the compass through which divine election is read, it is read through Europe (Jennings, 2010, p. 33).

Jennings returns to supersessionism when discussing Acosta’s discernment of idolatry in the people of the Andean as well as Colenso’s discernment of a generalised universal religious experience. The problem for Jennings is not with a Christian discernment of idolatry, but rather that idolatry is done not from the perspective of Israel, but from Israel superseded in European Christianity. The effect is that European Christianity cannot read itself as gentile, cannot note the similarities between European and Andean people as both, from the perspective of Israel, are gentile peoples. Rather, Acosta’s evaluative lens is as if “from the position of the ones to whom the revelation of the one true God was given, Israel” (Jennings, 2010, p. 97). The effect is that he precludes possibilities for intimacy inherent to a Christian identity – a shared gentile existence. When this discernment turns modern, it is exactly a continuation of this earlier colonial gaze (in spite of the vast differences between discerning the demonic and discerning a universal religious experience) because all are read inside a European enlightened vision which supersedes Israel exactly in becoming universal (Jennings, 2010, pp. 140-141). In spite of its seeming generosity of spirit, it makes itself the reference of evaluation for all theological questioning and production, again refusing an intimacy that might have joined particular people. What we see is how Christian supersessionism is drawn into the construction of a Christianity which is white – meaning that it becomes the point or evaluation for all the earth.

At no point does Jennings suggest some form of a quick reversal of this problem. There is no simple reconnection of people to place proposed, and merely announcing European Christianity as gentile, bypassing the difficult conceptual work of reimagining the very space in which we exist, risks the reproduction of the very ethnic imagination which has been formed in a supersessionist Christian imagination where Europe takes the place of Israel. Nonetheless, it is indeed such a Christian theology of Israel where Jennings wishes to draw us. What he argues for is that Christ can never be disconnected from Israel, since doing this allows Christ to be remade into a redemptive vision of any and every people (Jennings, 2010, p. 259). Rather, Christ draws gentiles close to God’s covenant with Israel, even while this covenant remains a Jewish covenant. Given the effect that rejecting the gentile existence and superseding God’s election of Israel has had in the formation of race and the colonial Christian

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80 In a discussion of the translation of Psalms into 18th century English by Isaac Watts Jennings traces how this same imagination allow Watts to read Britain into the place of Israel in the Psalms, so that Britain becomes the place from which God works for the redemption of people (Jennings, 2010, pp. 211-220).
imagination, Jennings proposes that this is the very place where we should start the work of repair if we are to have any hope for a future communion. Jennings wants to argue for a Christian identity rooted in a remembrance that we are gentile people, people drawn into a covenant and a story which are not ours.

However, one point in Jennings’ argument which has received serious criticism from readers who agree with the general thrust of his argument concerns his description of God’s violence (Nielsen, 2014, pp. 13-14). As part of his initial steps towards a Christian theology of Israel Jennings argues that God justified the violence of conquest when the people of God conquered Canaan, but that this is part of a process of “YHWH... seizing the reins of violence and bringing it into subjection to the divine word” (Jennings, 2010, p. 257). Thus, God justifies violence in the process of drawing all violent processes to an end. Without engaging here in a debate about violence, in particularly the Hebrew scriptures, and while acknowledging that a case might be made that such a reading insists that it may never be reversed, that we may never argue backwards from human conquest and give this divine justification (Draper, 2014, pp. 198-199), the question remains whether the people of faith need not be willing to more readily acknowledge the problems with violence in our holy texts, and whether Jennings’ text should not have allowed for this criticism.

This point can be further clarified by raising the question also in relation to Carter’s analogy probed above. Carter seems unable to adequately describe the discontinuity between Christ and Israel, and at this point, I would add that the discontinuity between Israel and creation, and between creation and Trinitarian love should also be probed. Does the condensed accounts each provide of the former not also contain distortions, changes and corrections? In short, is it possible to follow the arguments of Carter and Jennings, and yet insist on a critical tension between Christ and Israel, without repeating the supersessionism of the church over Israel? The question is really if every instance of theological justification for colonial subjugation implies a distortion of the biblical text, or whether the text itself allows such a violent reading, which would then ask that the people of faith find ways of not merely reading scripture theologically against the grain of society but also reading scripture theologically against the grain of scripture? Carter and Jennings seem hesitant to take such a route.81

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81 I mention this here in part because if is at the heart of an ongoing theological debate introduced by black theology of liberation in South Africa which I will touch on in chapter 3. The question concerns whether the problem of colonial theologies can be reduced to problematic interpretations of the Bible, or whether the Bible
6.5  Whiteness as a problem of/for theology

This brings us to the second moment of answering the first question of the chapter: why is whiteness a theological problem? Carter and Jennings describe this problem both as a problem of theology and a problem for theology. It is a theological problem both because it is through theology as a discourse that whiteness is constructed but also because theology as discourse is distorted in ways analogous to the Gnostic problem of the early church (Carter, 2008, p. 34). So while I will now briefly trace a second answer following the first, this also moves me towards the mirror articulation of the problem, that whiteness is a theological problem as a problem for theology as a discourse.

What Jennings is describing is a process of “the enfolding of theology inside racialized existence, inside whiteness” (Jennings, 2010, p. 85). Theology functioning within colonial conquest and expansion shows its inability to deal with the particularities of peoples in particular places and to imagine an intimacy which does not first need to draw all people into the colonial order.

Throughout the argument, Jennings’ hesitancy of any quick solutions to this problem is placed side by side with his deep faith in the possibilities for the Christian imagination to move towards intimacy. The two should be read together. It is only by understanding Jennings’ vision of Christian intimacy that we can understand the depth of the problem he perceives and the accompanying hesitancy towards easy reconciliations. It is exactly because he discerns that Christian theology and faith was supposed to be and do something fundamentally different than what it was formed into within colonial racial imagination that he proceeds with such a “theological analysis of theology’s social performance” (Jennings, 2010, p. 10).

Thus this theological problem is a deeply distorted Christian imagination. In Colenso he describes “a pattern of turning away from indigenous theological questions, shunning the necessary intimacy needed for a serious grappling with those questions” (Jennings, 2010, p. 150). It is a continuation of a perpetual refusal to recognise shared heathen existence, born of a white supersessionist imagination, making European space and knowledge the idolatrous place from which discernment of God’s work occurs.

7  Conclusion

In trying to capture one way of describing the depths of the problem of whiteness in Christian theology, the theological problem has been described as a process whereby Europe supersedes Israel in the

itself is at times written in justification of ruling elites. Here the Bible is described as a “site of struggle”. I will touch on this again in chapter 3.
salvific work of Christ, so that Christ becomes the telos of Europe and essentially white, even while Jesus remains a figure of the orient. This becomes the ground within which a theological anthropology which considers human bodies as raced bodies and the white body as superior to all can develop.

It is only when the depth of this problem is noted that we can start to evaluate attempts at response. While the chapters that follow are not intended as responses to the particular theological arguments presented above (implying the details of a supersessionist theology or the particularities in a distorted doctrine of creation), the framing provided here forms the backgrounds against which I start to evaluate attempts at responding to race in general and whiteness in particular. In that process, I turn first to two white theologians, one of continental European and another of North American background, widely regarded as providing some of the best examples of what a white theological response to the challenge black theology posed to white theology in the 20th century might look like. Jennings description of Colenso’s turning away from indigenous theological questions, resulting in a rejection of the required intimacy which would allow a serious grappling with those questions takes us into this chapter. The question becomes in fact what it would look like for white theologians to not repeat this pattern.
Chapter 2 – White responses to whiteness as a theological problem: Witvliet and Perkinson

1 Introduction

The previous chapter argued that race in general, and whiteness in particular, is a specifically theological problem – even while it is also a social, ethical, political and economic problem. The aim was partly to situate the questions of this project firmly within the field of theology in general, and systematic theology in particular. As will become clear in the chapter to come, Carter & Jennings’ accounts are by no means the only description of race as a theological problem. Other theological questions have been raised, and some of these will be introduced into the arguments to follow. However, it should at this point be clear why race and whiteness are being interrogated in a study of Christian theology.

But as noted in the introduction, this dissertation is also quite specifically responding to the silence of white theologians in critically responding to race, and seeking a more responsible theological response to race from white theologians in the South African context specifically, but also in the broader global context. In taking the first step towards making a proposal for such a response, this chapter will explore two key white theologians who consciously attempted to respond to black theology.

James Cone directs our attention in this chapter. In two separate instances, he highlights the work of Theo Witvliet and James Perkinson in response to black theology. In a festschrift to Witvliet, he writes: “No other white European interpreter of liberation theology equals his sharp spirit and deep involvement. His book, The way of the black Messiah, is the most informative and challenging interpretation of black theology written by a white theologian.” (Cone, 2000, p. 58) Some years later, when again returning to the problem of white theologians’ lack of critical engagement with race, he then proceeds to describe James W. Perkinson as “the only white theologian who has critically engaged white supremacy politically and theologically” (Cone, 2012, p. 94).

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82 The comparison of Witvliet and Perkinson’s interpretation of Long was presented at a conference on Religion and Racial Justice in Soweto, South Africa, in August 2018.

83 There are signs this this question is receiving increasing attention. Of particular significance, Sarah Coakley has indicated that she will turn her attention to questions of race in the second volume of her four-volume systematic theology (Coakley, 2015). This has not been published to date. Jennifer Harvey’s Dear White Christians (Harvey, 2014) is another recent example, although more explicitly ethical in nature. However, Witvliet and Perkinson remain exceptional examples of such a sustained engagement preceding the period in which my own research grew.
On the other hand, and while we need to be hesitant to read too much into the different formulations Cone uses in response to Perkinson and Witvliet (“critically engage white supremacy” vs. “interpretation of black theology”), there is a difference in approach between Witvliet and Perkinson that I will trace in the chapter below. Perkinson acknowledges the importance of Witvliet’s work but notes certain limitations to Witvliet’s approach. His question to Witvliet simultaneously situates his own project and highlights the focus of this thesis, and therefore needs mentioning at this point: While Witvliet explores the challenge of black theology in detail, Perkinson argues that his work does not explore the whiteness which black theology names:

Of particular importance for the [Perkinson’s] project here is Witvliet’s careful delineation of the field of encounter (between whites and blacks) in terms of the difference Black Theology represents for the theology “we already know”. This latter species – styling itself as “just theology” – must actually be understood as “white theology”. (Perkinson, 2004, p. 38)

Perkinson’s evaluation, while not necessarily incorrect, is not the final word on the matter however, if only due to the fact that the language barrier limited what Perkinson evaluated. In his own way Witvliet’s later work – available only in Dutch – turns the gaze on to Europe. Witvliet and Perkinson, therefore, allow a first exploration of constructive ways in which white theologians can respond to the challenge of whiteness, or more specifically, the challenge of black theology, as that place in theology where the problem of whiteness has been explored in a sustained manner during the second half of the twentieth century.

Witvliet has often been mentioned in South African theology - mostly by black theologians from the late 1980s and early 1990s. These references are always positive, but mostly just drawing from either of his two initial books as reference for a particular point. He was also on the editorial board of the (short-lived) Journal of Black Theology in South Africa. These factors all contributed to a choice to present

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84 Witvliet is aware of this problem. He explicitly mentions it (Witvliet, 1987, p. 281). However, as will be pointed out below, Witvliet’s approach seems to reproduce the idea of a specific normative theological thread, which he inevitably reads from modern European theology.

85 Since this study formed part of the Desmond Tutu – Vrije Universiteit Doctoral Training Programme, which allowed and required that I live and study in The Netherlands for an extensive part of my Doctoral studies, Witvliet also provided an interesting ‘local’ interlocutor. ‘Local’ refers here to where I found myself while doing part of this research, even if not the local context out of which I am thinking through the question of race.

86 See for example (Goba, 1988; Mosoma, 1992; Koopman, 2008; Maimela, 1994; Botha, et al., 1994). Klippies Kritzinger also mentions Witvliet in almost every instance where he discusses the problem of whiteness.

87 Chapter 3 will look at the work of the two editors of this journal, Simon Maimela and Takatso Mofokeng.
Witvliet together with Perkinson as examples of possible ways in which white theologians can attempt to respond to the questions and critiques presented by black theology, and more specifically to race in general and whiteness in particular as a theological problem.

Perkinson, on the other hand, has received very little attention in the South African context. Given the connection between black theology in the United States and South Africa (Hopkins, 1989) (well known, and on which I will briefly touch in chapter 3), Perkinson’s response to US black theology provides an important parallel to constructing a potential response to black theology in South Africa – in different ways the task of chapters three, four and five.

Through a critical evaluation of these two white theologians responding to race in general and whiteness in particular, both in dialogue with and responding to the challenge of black theology, I will start to illustrate aspects of what is important in the kind of work which this thesis forms a part of. This is not the final word on the topic but will provide a lens with which to look at the work explored in chapter 4 – where I will turn to white theologians in the last years of the struggle against apartheid who attempted a similar theological response.

I will discuss each of them separately, starting with Witvliet and moving to Perkinson. I will then briefly highlight key differences and note some implications emerging from the analysis.

2 Theo Witvliet and the paradox of the Enlightenment

2.1 Introduction

While Witvliet’s interest throughout his career has been on liberation theologies and contextual theologies from outside Europe in general, it is black theology in particular that he focused on most. A Place in the Sun (Witvliet, 1985, originally published in 1984) contained chapters on black theology, African theology, Caribbean theology and theology in the Rastafarian movement, Latin American liberation theology and Asian theology. However, it is black theology which received the longest treatment, and the questions of race typical of black theology emerged again in different forms in the chapters on African and Caribbean theology (e.g. Witvliet, 1985, pp. 89, 115-116). A Place in the Sun is then followed by The Way of the Black Messiah (Witvliet, 1987, originally published in 1985), a book length treatment of black theology in the United States of America and some of its implications.

88 While his work on whiteness is briefly mentioned by West (West, 2012), and received a slightly longer discussion by Snyman (Snyman, 2008), a more sustained interaction with his argument seems to be warranted.
In a Festschrift for Witvliet at the end of his career at the University of Amsterdam, the editors explicitly state about Witvliet: “In particular, the deeply influential tensions between Western and non-Western Christianity, more specifically between black and white theology, determined the agenda of his thinking and writing.” (Boer, et al., 2000, p. 9). So it is to a white theologian who has engaged and responded to black theology for a large part of his academic career that I will first turn. Witvliet is Dutch, white and conscious of this fact, and with great care and attention listens to the challenge that black theologians bring to questions of theology and race. So how does he hear this challenge? What does he do with it? And how does he think through what the implications are for his own white theology?

Manuela Kalsky, a doctoral student of Witvliet, reflects on Witvliet’s classes on third world theologies of liberation by recalling that in Witvliet’s class it was not allowed to visit third world theologies as mere tourists, or to annex its insights, rather it had to be listened to as a hermeneutical challenge for your own theology. (Kalsky, 2000, p. 71) But what exactly was the challenge that Witvliet picked up? How does it impact on white European theology?

As I explain in the overview below, Witvliet has extensively published academically over a period now spanning more than five decades. A thorough analysis of the developments in his five books and multiple academic articles, not to mention his extensive journalistic work, would require a study on its own. Numerous themes in his work will, therefore, remain outside the focus of this section, or merely pass by on the horizon of what is presented. In attempting to focus on his response to black theology I will structure the discussion around three key elements of his work:

1) Ecumenism as place of encounter.
2) The empty middle as a hermeneutic lens.
3) The paradox of the Enlightenment.

2.2 Overview

In an essay on Sartre from 1980 something of what Witvliet intended to do with his own work, and more specifically what I seek to focus on within his work, is expressed explicitly. He describe Sartre as one who not only fought against racism, but also saw himself through the eyes of others, to see his whiteness (“He discovered his own skin color: white”90) and observed both what Europe has meant for people from Africa and Asia, but also how he himself continues to profit from an economic system which builds

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89 “Vooral de diep ingripende spanningen tussen westers en niet-westerse Christendom, meer in her bijzonder tussen zwarte en witten theologie, bepaalden de agenda van zijn denken en schrijven”
90 “Hij ontdekte zijn eigen huidskleur: blank”
on racism (Witvliet, 1980, p. 501). In the years following this essay, Witvliet will publish his most detailed analyses of black theology, consciously attempting to hear the voice of the ‘other’.

Witvliet’s five volumes were published in three periods: two pairs - one in the middle 1980s and another around the turn of the century - and the last publication in 2017. It is the first books that are known in discussions on black theology, but my analysis is explicitly an attempt at seeing how the arguments in the first two books are extended into the later work. My brief overview here, therefore, sketches some of the connections justifying such an exploration.

Early in his academic career, Witvliet published *A Place in the Sun*, which developed from his lectures on contextual theology (Witvliet, 1985, p. ix), and shortly afterwards his doctoral thesis, *The Way of the Black Messiah*. These books were both translated into English soon after their Dutch publication. While a constant stream of articles and chapters appeared in the ensuing years, it is just before and after his retirement in 2000 that Witvliet published two more volumes, this time focused on Europe and ‘Western Christianity’ – *Gebroken Traditie* (Witvliet, 1999) and *Het geheim van het lege midden* (Witvliet, 2003). These were never translated into English, and therefore remain generally unknown in the research on theology and race where Witvliet’s earlier work was discussed. Most recently, and 14 years after the publication of *Het geheim van het lege midden*, Witvliet published his fifth book, a study on the humanism of Martin Buber, titled *Kwaliteit van Leven* (Witvliet, 2017).

That there is an intended connection between the earlier and later pair is made explicit. For example, while James Cone is mostly absent in *Gebroken Traditie*, Witvliet concludes by referring to the work of South African born black artist Azaria Mbatha on the black Christ, and in particular on the empty middle, as the one pointing the way towards the future. Here, in the final pages of the last publication before his retirement from the University of Amsterdam, the black Messiah returns:

> The art of Mbatha, however, refers to a new space that is visible in the fifteenth station of the Stations of the Cross for Africa... The work of Mbatha, which has been placed in the triptych between the philosopher [Adorno] and the theologian [Barth], reveals both thinkers to be

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91 *A Place in the Sun* was originally published in 1984 in Dutch as *Een Plaats onder de Zon. Bewrijdingstheologie in de derde wereld*, and *The Way of the Black Messiah* in 1985 as *De Weg van de Zwarte Messias*. I will use the English translations of these texts in this chapter, since it is these translated editions which have been read and discussed outside of The Netherlands and in dialogue with black theology. For Witvliet this also seems to have been the intention, as he writes in the preface to the English edition of *The Way of the Black Messiah*, “At least the people about whom I write, first of all the black theologians, can read what I have to say about them.” (Witvliet, 1987, p. vii)
representatives of a modern European culture in which the way of the Black Messiah is invisible ... Mbatha portrays the *beeldverbod* through his representation of the 'empty middle' of the fifteenth Station of the Cross. (Witvliet, 1999, p. 283)

Witvliet will then continue to explore exactly this notion of a *lege midden* (empty middle) in his book from 2003, leaving a formal thread coming from his earliest work into the second book of the second pair.

*Kwaliteit van Leven* clearly extends the work started in the pair of publications around the turn of the century. He draws on concepts such as the *beeldverbod* in dialogue with Buber, emphasising community in ways reminding of earlier work on the empty centre. He mostly draws on Buber to think through the question of the ‘other’. Witvliet also makes a brief detour back to *The Way of the Black Messiah* when reconsidering the debate between black nationalism and the beloved community which was central to his earlier work.

I introduce his main works in this way to indicate that there are clear markers that while developing over a period of more than three decades, there are key themes that occur throughout his life, and that the questions which black theology raised for him in his early academic career continue to be in his mind throughout his work. How he responds to these questions is my concern below.

One other essay that needs mentioning here is a 1992 publication titled *Europa en de anderen*. Published as part of the 500 years remembrance of the start of the colonial period, Witvliet here not only explicitly focuses on Europe, attempting to problematise Europe, but he also introduces the work of the historian of religion Charles Long. This essay will be drawn into and further elaborated in *Gebroke Traditie* as well, but what is important is that at that moment, around the middle of the period from the publication of the first to the second pair of books, Witvliet developed both a slight hesitancy about speaking of black theology and explicitly argues for the inevitability of working from within the Enlightenment. While I will only discuss this conceptual choice after the sections on ecumenism and the

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92 Since no direct translation of this concept is found in English, and the longer “ban on images” both cause for awkward translation and does not clearly capture the meaning, I retain this in the original. The *beeldverbod* however refers to the commandment not to make images of God, worked out into anthropological meaning in some of Witvliet’s later work.

93 “De kunst van Mbatha verwijst echter naar een nieuwe ruimte, die zichtbaar wordt in de vijftiende statie van de Afrikaanse kruisweg... Het werk van Mbatha, dat in het drieluik is geplaatst tussen filosoof [Adorno] en theoloog [Barth], maakt echter beide denkers tot vertegenwoordigers van een moderne, Europese cultuur waarin de weg van de zwarte Messias onzichtbaar is... Mbatha brengt het beeldverbod in beeld door zijn voorstelling van het ‘lege midden’ van de vijftiende statie van de kruisweg.”
empty middle, Long as a hinge between the 1984-1985 books and the 1999-2003 books needs to be noted throughout my analysis.

Thus my question is how Witvliet picks up the challenge of contextual theology in general and black theology in particular when he turns his attention from the ‘other’ to the ‘self’ – western Christianity and the European context. By tracing the continuities and discontinuities in his work, simultaneously noting the fact that, as Cone states, Witvliet is the white theologian from the European continent that has developed the most interesting interpretation of black theology, but also pointing out the limitations of this project in his later work on Europe, I will illustrate one particular possibility of white theologians and Christians responding to the theological challenge brought by black theology against whiteness in Christianity and white Christianity.

2.3 Ecumenism as place of encounter

Witvliet was a lecturer and professor at the University of Amsterdam throughout his academic career – 1977-2000. As church journalist, preceding these years, he was also involved in ecumenical events. One of these, which he explicitly names as leading to the desire to write The Way of the Black Messiah, was a 1973 symposium in dialogue with black theology and Latin American liberation theology, which was also attended by around 50 European theologians. Witvliet notes the particular struggle of white European theologians to grapple with the hermeneutical challenge which black and Latin American

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94 From 1977 until 1987, the period in which, The way of the Black Messiah was written and published, in ecumenism. Thereafter he was appointment to professor in Religion and Society, which changed to Theological Encyclopaedia in 1990 (Boer, et al., 2000, p. 135). These appointments are partly important in light of Witvliet’s comment on the fact that in The Netherlands of the 1970s and 1980s it is, “significantly enough” only missiologists and ecumenists who are showing interest in black theology (Witvliet, 1987, p. 286). While appointed as lecturer in ecumenism, The way of the black messiah has an explicitly doctrinal focus. Later he again insisted that the confrontation of how mission and cultural imperialism went together cannot be left to missiology and ecumenism, but should confront theological, systematic theology as a whole (Witvliet, 1999, p. 75).

95 We observe a certain vagueness in how Witvliet refers to whiteness. He quotes James Cone from the end of the already mentioned 1973 WCC meeting as saying “What is black theology? Or, what is Latin American theology of liberation? This is what Europeans want to know. Or, if I’m in America, this is what white people want to know.” (Witvliet, 1974, p. 197) Whether this is a direct quote or a paraphrase is not clear, and given that Cone would have spoken in English, what the exact formulation is that Cone would have used it even less clear, so my focus is not on Cone but rather on Witvliet’s use of these words. Witvliet does not discuss this distinction between European and white, and in other places he does clearly refer to himself and to Europeans as white (see the reference to “blank” in relation to Sartre above). A page earlier another potential synonym is found. Witvliet writes “If a western theologian wants to go into dialogue with a black theologian” (Witvliet, 1974, p. 196), but whether ‘Western’ here refers to white, how it relates to European or white earlier, and the different ways black is opposed to each of these, is not clear.
liberation theologians were posing (Witvliet, 1987, p. ix). One thread that runs throughout the two pairs of books, and throughout Witvliet’s entire career, is an attempt at making sense of contextual theologies in general, and of black theology specifically, from within an ecumenical space.

Key to Witvliet’s entire project is the hermeneutical challenge posed by the “other”. While this is not limited to ecumenical encounter – to encounter between those who profess to be Christian, whether on a local, national, or international level – it is the questions that emerges when Christians encounter each other that receives particular attention in his work. Witvliet describes this as a hermeneutical problem or the problem of knowing the other (Witvliet, 1992b).

The central focus of his first three books is around ecumenical encounter. As a consequence the first section of my analysis, it will focus on ecumenism as place of encounter and dialogue, and more specifically, a place where Western European theologians hear the challenge of theologies of liberation. In order to situate this ecumenical locus within his theological frame, I start with outlining how Witvliet uses the Chalcedonian Definition to define the relation between the particularity and universality of theological claims, which leads him to insist on ecumenism as both sociologically and theologically the place where white theologians can hear the challenge of black theology.

2.3.1 Chalcedon as hermeneutic for reading black theology of liberation

A key line running throughout Witvliet’s work concerns the relationship between universality and particularity, developed in relation to Chalcedonian Christology, and drawn into the work of thinking through how black theology would have implications for European theology. Witvliet draws from the following key part of the Chalcedonian Definition:

...one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognised in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ;

His focus will be specifically on the criteria “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation” – in Witvliet’s work translated as “unconfused, unchanged, undivided,

96 Elsewhere he indicates that the word that best described this event is “incommunicatie”, an impossibility of communication (Witvliet, 1974, p. 197).
unseparated” and often shortened to “unconfused and undivided”. What Witvliet seeks to do is to draw from such an incarnational theology as a lens for reading contextual and liberation theologies in general, and black theology in particular. These two notions Witvliet will relate to the universality and particularity of theological claims, and to how theology emerging from particular contexts can speak to the church universal. From this, a theology in which a white European theologian can hear the challenge of black theology can then be developed.

Chapter 1 of The Way of the Black Messiah concludes with a section explicitly focused on ‘Chalcedon’ as a condition for a hermeneutic of liberation (Witvliet, 1987, pp. 61-75). Witvliet accepts the Chalcedonian Definition as normative, as setting the limits within which theology is to be done, and as such as what informs the methodology of the kind of theology which he proposes for his engagement with black theology.

The one side of this lies with an emphasis on “undivided and unseparated”, which should reject any separation of “Word and world” in doing theology. This is an insistence, no longer strange today, on a theology fully committed to this world. On the other hand “unconfused and unchanged” calls up the Barthian critique of religion and warns against denying the gulf between modern bourgeois society and “the appearance of God’s love for humanity in the midst of a specific people (the people of Israel), in a specific person (the Jew Jesus of Nazareth)” (Witvliet, 1987, p. 65). Both, however, are a commitment to history – the present context and the particular history of God’s revelation.

The theological frame within which Witvliet thinks through the engagement with contextual theologies and black theology of liberation insists on the particularity of the one doing theology, both as a limitation to what we can see, but also as a commitment which we should hold to – we must speak in the particular about this world when doing theology. Simultaneously, it insists on the universality of God’s incarnation into this world, doing so specifically by stressing the particularity of this revelation in history – in Israel and Jesus.

This reading of the incarnation allows for a particular openness to the diversity of theological voices while drawing all into a universal logic – although importantly this universality is found in a story which is not our own, the particular story of God’s relationship with Israel and Jesus: “Both elements of truth

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97 When revisiting this in Gebroken Traditie, he clarifies this further by arguing that confessions and dogmas themselves are not the centre of the tradition, but rather delineate the limits or borders of the tradition, the middle, to which we will return from a different perspective below, is always hidden, while present in praise and doxology (Witvliet, 1999, p. 165).
need to be maintained: the story of God’s humanity comes to us as one of the many stories in which our consciousness is entangled (‘undivided’) and this story is a unique story because of the uniqueness of the name (‘unconfused’).” (Witvliet, 1987, p. 72) Particular earthly experience and context on the one hand and universal, wholly other, revelation (but always within a particular moment in history) on the other hand need to be kept together in our theological methodology.

It is within this theological commitment and methodology that we see how Witvliet attempts to hold together without confusion a number of notions: history and eschatology (Witvliet, 1987, p. 37), social analysis and theological outline,98 but most importantly for my argument here, particularity and universality.99 A detailed analysis of how particularity relates to history and social analysis or universality with eschatology and theological outline cannot be expanded upon here. Rather, what is important is Witvliet’s point that in each case “[t]heir mutual relationship can best be explained by the well-known Christological formulation of Chalcedon: unconfused and undivided” (Witvliet, 1987, p. 37).100

My main concern here is to frame Witvliet’s key proposal for how (or more properly ‘where’) white theologians can hear the challenge of black theology, for which I focus on the relation between particularity and universality.

The preface to A place in the Sun opens up the basic elements of how Witvliet draws these notions together. All theologies of liberation start with a very particular situation in mind. But it has a universal dimension, and this universal dimension is found in its specific commitment to the “rejected of the earth”. Through this commitment, it does justice to the gospel. Witvliet then continues to write that “[w]e are concerned with this universal dimension, but... it is only accessible to those who take the trouble to grasp the particularity seriously and put up with it” (Witvliet, 1985, p. viii). The preface repeatedly refers to ‘we’, ‘us’, and ‘our’, without ever seeing the need to name this “we”. However, the book emerges from a University of Amsterdam syllabus and as a Dutch text has a fairly limited ‘we’ as the initial audience. When later returning to the relation between particularity and universality he names this we as “Western European” (Witvliet, 1985, p. 41). The point is however that Witvliet is

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98 This he does with explicit reference to Chalcedon when discussing the dialogue between Moltmann and Sobrino, and trying to explain why they differ (Witvliet, 1987, p. 57). Elsewhere this relation becomes social analysis/theory and scripture (Witvliet, 1987, pp. 19, 28).

99 These are further related to his three dialectics which conclude the chapters of part three of The Way of the Black Messiah, each time marked by a “towards”: cross and resurrection, particularity and universality, love and power.

100 In this quote referring to “historical connection of things and the commitment of faith”, which in the paragraph is related to history and eschatology, faith and reason, and social analysis and belief (Witvliet, 1987, pp. 36-37).
constructing a hermeneutic which argues for a certain universal dimension which all theologies of liberation speak to, but that hearing this universal dimension requires the slow work of understanding the particular claims that it makes.

It is exactly in keeping together the particularity and universality of theology in general, but of contextual and liberation theologies in particular, that Witvliet finds a way within his European theological frame to pick up the challenge of liberation theologies. Yes, European theologians are bound up with “Third World” theologians “through historical, economic, political, cultural and economic ties”, an implicit recognition of the colonial history to which Witvliet, and my own analysis, will return to in more detail in dialogue with Long and the Enlightenment. But the universal theological claim coming from the particular experience of different contextual theologies also has implications for the whole church and for all theology (Witvliet, 1985, pp. viii, 41). For example, in his analysis of black theology in the United States, Witvliet indicates how the particular commitment to black liberation leads to the universal call “and why not every man?” (Witvliet, 1987, p. 98). It is exactly a commitment to black liberation which allows black theology of liberation to think through the theological implication of the call to liberation as it relates to all of humanity.

There is an important mirror to Witvliet’s argument: a theology that claims to be universal is in fact exactly particular. More specifically this refers to the critique of black theology that a theology that claims to be universal is particularly white, disregarding the experiences of those of all colours and hues, racialised as “other” in a white supremacist world (Witvliet, 1987, p. 4).101

Perhaps this theological frame and Witvliet’s very specific drawing together of interlocutors to present his thought, it best captured when towards the end of his explicit reflection on the Chalcedonian Definition he writes:

> It is not a matter of playing off the Barthian concern for the distinctive logic of the Word against the call of Latin American theologians in particular for rational analysis of structures of domination and dependence. On the contrary, each element needs the other and each is directed towards the other. The one does not go without the other. Only in their mutual

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101 Witvliet’s own descriptions of “people whose skin colour is different” does not do justice to the complexity of racialisation.
connection can they give that mobility to theological reflection which puts it in a position to follow the movement of the messianic kingdom. (Witvliet, 1987, p. 74)

Barthian theology and Latin American liberation theology do not merely stand in as examples for different approaches to theology. Rather, within Witvliet’s broader project this is exactly what he wants to bring together, keep in dialogue, and through this present a way forward. That would be keeping to the “unconfused, unchanged, undivided, unseparated” nature of Christ.

But if black theology of liberation’s contribution to the universal of theology is exactly in its particularity, then this should be kept in tension with Witvliet’s commitment that “Systematic theology may not consist of attempts by people to integrate their own story into an overarching story about God” (Witvliet, 1987, p. 61). Without a doubt, this is for Witvliet primarily a critique on the trajectory of dominant European theology, of the bourgeois religion which Barth also criticised. He responds by making the story of others of primary importance in his own project. But it is also a commitment that Witvliet expects of black theology of liberation, and other contextual theologies – that it must remain open to the story of others (Witvliet, 1987, p. 67).

2.3.2 Ecumenism as place

Drawing from this tension between particularity and universality, Witvliet argues that it is exactly the particularity of the struggle of black theology which draws it towards a universal commitment to the liberation of all. Therefore “black theology is an ecumenical theology par excellence” and the “locus of a dialogue with black theology is ecumenism” (Witvliet, 1987, p. 98).

Within the Chalcedonian space, Witvliet uses as a lens, where both our particular experience and God’s wholly other story remain in constant tension, the way Witvliet proposes for possibly hearing God’s wholly other story is through constant listening to and dialogue with the particular stories of those with very different experiences and perspectives from ourselves. To be clear, such a dialogue is not a nice addition to the normal work of theology in Witvliet’s mind. The only possibility theology as a discourse has of speaking about God without reproducing ideology is through constant dialogue with ‘the other’. The place where such an encounter may occur is both sociological and theological ecumenism.102

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102 Further illustrating this, when analysing the work of Theo Sundermeier and Miroslav Volf, in each case Witvliet’s critique of and constructive proposal to their work concerns ecumenism as place. For Sundermeier he says that within Christian perspective the only possible locus for intercultural encounter can be ecumenism (Witvliet, 1999,
What Witvliet proposes throughout his work is the possibility for ecumenicity, on a local, national or international level, to be a space where voices from very different contexts and social locations can encounter each other, and where we can learn to understand one another in spite of vast differences. Quite specifically, ecumenism could be, as it was for Witvliet personally, the place where the critical voice of black theology can be heard.

Ecumenism also forms the place where the intersecting liberation voices hear each other. This concretely goes back to the well-known 1975 *Theology in the Americas* meeting in Detroit, where the early dialogue between Latin American, black and feminist theologians of liberation highlighted the particularity of each approach, and the lacunas around each (Witvliet, 1987, p. 19).\(^{103}\) Theologies of liberation also need to meet ecumenically, bringing their particularities into dialogue.

Witvliet is not naïve about the problems of ‘real ecumenism’ or ‘ecumenism as it is’ (Witvliet, 1987, p. 89). In analysing the history of how the World Council of Churches dealt with race he concludes that “in this organisation, as also in other ecumenical institutions and associations, conflicting tendencies are at work which mean that ecumenism can be the hermeneutical locus of real encounter with forms of liberation theology only on certain conditions” (Witvliet, 1987, p. 98).\(^{104}\) Witvliet’s insistence on ecumenism as per definition, that place where Christians from very different contexts can meet, should therefore not be read as per implication seeing various ecumenical bodies as being such a place. Perhaps we should rather turn this around and say that for Witvliet those places where Christians from very different backgrounds are in dialogue in such a way that the particularity of each voice is taken seriously is ecumenism.

Thus in spite of the fact that Witvliet’s work draws from the concrete examples of attempts at ecumenical dialogue between European theologians and early theologians of liberation on the one hand, and dialogues between theologies of liberation on the other, there is in fact little by way of concrete example of how such ecumenical encounter informs the transformation of white theologians more broadly. It is rather a principled theological argument for ecumenism as place that is being worked

\(^{103}\) The work of Delores Williams (Williams, 1993), which Witvliet would discuss later to highlight the womanist critique of earlier black theology (Witvliet, 1999, p. 184), illustrate how such intersecting positions of oppression can simultaneously become the particular situation from which theology develops.

\(^{104}\) In his later work he also notes the tendency in Dutch churches to not relate ecumenically with migrant churches, but rather diaconally (Witvliet, 2003, pp. 74-76).
out, and later a more detailed reflection on how such a place should be theologically imagined that we find.

2.4 Power and the empty middle

This “spatial” focus – on ecumenism as “place” of encounter – is exactly what Witvliet seeks to work out in more detail in his publications around the turn of the century. How should this place be conceptually formed? The main metaphor, again a spatial metaphor (Witvliet, 1999, p. 278), around which Witvliet will work this out is that of the empty middle. It is this empty middle as the constructive proposal for the place which Witvliet seeks to create, at least conceptually, that we need to turn our attention to next.

2.4.1 The empty middle

If for Witvliet ecumenism is the place in which people who are in different ways drawn together by the process of European colonialism (and the modern missionary expansion of the church that accompanied this) might encounter each other in openness towards each other, then the empty middle is the guiding metaphor for what might happen in that encounter. In Gebroken Traditie the empty middle is explored in dialogue with the work of philosopher Theodor Adorno, artist Azaria Mbatha, and theologian Karl Barth. For Witvliet it is, however, the middle of this exploration which is key to his understanding of the empty middle. Towards the end of Gebroken Traditie he writes:

The philosophy of Adorno and the theology of Barth cannot be brought to a synthesis. The tension remains between the philosopher, who takes his starting point in the universal and tries to do justice to the particular, and the theologian, who takes his point of departure in the specificity of a particular event and seeks to show the universal implications later. However, the work of Mbatha, placed in the triptych between philosopher and theologian, makes both thinkers representative of a modern European culture in which the way of the Black Messiah remains invisible. (Witvliet, 1999, p. 283)

This paragraph already hints at key aspects of what will be discussed in the next sections – the relationship with the Enlightenment and the way of the black Messiah in Europe. However, it is

105 “De filosofie van Adorno en de theologie van Barth zijn niet tot een synthese te brengen. De spanning blijft tussen de filosoof, die zijn vertrekpunt neemt in het universele en van daaruit tracht recht te doen aan het bijzondere, en de theoloog, die zijn vertrekpunt neemt in de particulariteit van een specifieke gebeuren en daarvan de universele strekking wil later zien. Het werk van Mbatha, dat in het drieluik is geplaatst tussen filosoof en theoloog, maakt echter beide denkers tot vertegenwoordigers van een moderne, Europese cultuur waarin de weg van de zwarte Messias onzichtbaar is.”
Witvliet’s explicit focus on Mbatha and the empty middle that is of immediate concern. Starting my exploration of the empty middle with Mbatha captures Witvliet’s intent, but Mbatha’s work as a South African artist, and Witvliet’s attempt to grapple with its implications as a white theologian, also anticipate aspects of my own work in chapter three.

Witvliet’s focus is on Mbatha’s 1995 *Stations of the Cross for Africa*. My concern is not in the first place with Mbatha’s art, but rather, with how Witvliet’s theology engages and draws from Mbatha’s stations of the cross. Most specifically, I want to focus on a problem in Witvliet’s interpretation, not primarily for the sake of highlighting the problem, but rather because it highlights a particular way in which white theologians respond to the problem of race, and through this seek to probe the limits of Witvliet’s approach.

Of concern for Witvliet is that Mbatha includes a fifteenth station to the traditional fourteen stations of the cross. In this fifteenth station, titled *Jesus rises from the dead*, the focus is on an empty middle, which Witvliet draws from to further develop his own ecumenical theology and hoped-for dialogue.

![Plate 02: Atelope Mbatha, Stations of the Cross for Africa, Station XV - Jesus Rises from the Dead, 1995, Linocut, Gauteng Regional Legislature. Photo Anthea Pocken](image)

The fifteenth station, the focus of Witvliet’s work, consists of three elements: an empty circle, a crowd gathered around the empty circle, and in the foreground a black and white person embracing and
kissing. Witvliet notes the absence of the risen Christ in this representation of the resurrection – always present but not presented – and that these three aspects each constitute the other: while people gather around the empty middle, there is no empty middle without those gathered around it, and the group would not have been a group without the act of embrace presented in the foreground (Witvliet, 1999, p. 229). A fourth element which Witvliet does not mention is the group outside the circle who observes the act of embrace.

While the empty middle will be mentioned repeatedly both in the 1999 and 2003 texts, when interpreting Mbatha’s work Witvliet notes that the circle is not empty. Rather, the circle represents Christ, the one who disappears after breaking the bread and thanking God (Luke 24), and the circle, therefore, refers to a eucharistic gathering (Witvliet, 1999, pp. 234-235). But, Witvliet argues later, Christ is also in the people gathering in the circle, and in the black and white individuals embracing in the foreground. Important for Witvliet is that the empty centre implies that the centre of power remains unoccupied (Witvliet, 1999, p. 239).

At this point, a particular problem with Witvliet’s interpretation of Mbatha’s Stations of the Cross for Africa must, however, be noted. Witvliet only mentioned one addition to the fourteen stations, while Mbatha had two. Witvliet writes: “A stations of the cross usually has fourteen stations. At the stations of the cross of Azaria Mbatha, this is different: he adds a fifteenth station.” (Witvliet, 1999, p. 231). This fifteenth station is later explicitly mentioned as the last station (Witvliet, 1999, pp. 232, 238), and reflected on as the whole point of the Stations of the Cross for Africa (Witvliet, 1999, p. 248). But in reality, Mbatha added a sixteenth station. The fact that Witvliet did not know this creates immediate problems with his interpretation of Mbatha, but that is not my primary concern. Noting station XVI can highlight Witvliet’s own theological project, which could draw from station XV as the culmination of the

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106 The figures in the embrace draws from earlier works – Crucifixion/Reconciliation from 1967-1968 and Between Hope and Despair from the 1980s – in which the estrangements of these figures were depicted (MacDonald, 2016, p. 108). For Crucifixion/Reconciliation Mbatha has confirmed that the black figure represents himself (MacDonald, 2016, p. 92).

107 “Een kruisweg heeft gewoonlijk veertien staties... Bij de kruisweg van Azaria Mbatha is dat anders: hij voegt een vijftiende statie toe.”

108 It remains unclear how these two versions came into existence. Witvliet mentions a Danish publication, Afrikander Kreuzweg, in which fifteen stations are presented, and that he draws extensively from work by two students from the Hendrik Kraemer Institute presented in June 1996. The other source he draws from for Mbatha’s work that of Werner Eichel, precedes Stations of the Cross for Africa (Witvliet, 1999, p. 231). There is no reason to suspect that station XVI is consciously left out. Witvliet seems to have had access to a version which in fact did only have the first 15 stations.
stations, and a possible limit to Witvliet's work – since he might have needed to make a very different theological argument had he been aware of station XVI.

Station sixteen in part duplicates station fifteen. The act of embrace and kissing is left out. Those gathered outside the circle and in front of the circle looking outwards from the image are reproduced, now looking at the viewer, not observing the act of embrace. Most importantly, while the circle is still present, it is no longer empty. Inside the circle is the emblem of the United Nations with a black and white hand holding each other over it. My purpose is not to provide a fully worked out theological reading of Mbatha’s work here, but given the importance of the empty middle the silence on station XVI in Witvliet’s work is worth noting, and I will briefly attempt to sketch possible implications of extending Witvliet’s analysis to include station 16.

It will not be saying too much to argue that if Witvliet sees in station XV the pre-requisite of embrace for the gathering of people around the empty circle, then in Mbatha’s station XVI we have to add the reorganisation of the global world order – of the structure of society globally – as pre-requisite for such a gathering. In his 1993 article on the future of South African foreign policy, Nelson Mandela explicitly called for a restructuring of the United Nations as part of the making of a more democratic world. He writes that “[t]he United Nations should not be dominated by a single power or group of powers, or else
its legitimacy will continuously be called into question” (Mandela, 1993, p. 89). To see in Mbatha’s art an explicit call for such a restructuring of the global relations of power as a fundamental part of making a more humane society should therefore not come as a surprise. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, in his interpretation of Nelson Mandela as a decolonial humanist, places this call by Mandela within a longer trajectory of working for a more humane and democratic world (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016, p. 139).

I took this route of highlighting the implications of Witvliet’s use of the fifteen-station rather than the sixteen-station Stations of the Cross for Africa because the difference between Stations of the cross for Africa ending at station fifteen and station sixteen illuminates a particular choice in Witvliet’s work, a choice which his South African interlocutor in this instance does not necessarily share, and a choice which has particular implications for how white theologians respond to black theology, black consciousness, and black power.

If ecumenism is the place where the hermeneutical challenge of black theology is to be heard and engaged, then we have to remain conscious of how international ecumenism and the history of the World Council of Churches are not disconnected from global relations of power and the history of the United Nations. For Mbatha the empty middle is associated with resurrection – Jesus rises from the dead, but in line with the salvific narrative, resurrection is not the final word. What follows resurrection is ascension, church, and return. Mbatha titles the more overtly political station XVI Reconciliation.

What is raised by noting either station XV or XVI as the concluding moment of Mbatha’s Stations of the Cross is whether the focus on gathering around the empty circle, even when that circle is occupied Christologically, doesn’t inevitably reproduce the power that precedes such a gathering – in returning to Witvliet’s earlier work: whiteness. It is clear that station XVI is also a Christological moment, Reconciliation, as a moment in the stations of the cross. We could also name this Pentecost, or ecclesia – the gathering of a concrete community after the Resurrection. As The Acts of the Apostles has reminded its readers over millennia, this gathering involved quite explicitly working out the implication of the resurrection on our relations of power within this resurrection community. Mbatha’s vision of reconciliation seems to explicitly require a restructuring of power.

Here indeed we need to start moving beyond Witvliet. For Witvliet it is the empty circle that constitutes the final moment. Witvliet is in no way naïve about the colonial history and the hierarchical relations

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109 This call was repeated in Mandela’s 1995 speech at the United Nations - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOr4F2eNDq8 [accessed 10 August 2017].
which the Enlightenment produced and which informs this gathering around the empty circle. He is not unfamiliar with the problem of how reconciliation and black power are related in the work of Cone and the history of the United States civil rights movement.

What Witvliet’s empty circle can do is provide a theological and ecumenical vision\textsuperscript{110} for a gathering of equals for the sake of listening and doing the difficult work of knowing the ‘other’. This might open up the possibilities of doing the difficult work of confronting the eurocentrism within the self, but it does not in and of itself allow envisioning the theological and political process of forming a world which is not founded on this eurocentrism. The \textit{Stations of the Cross for Africa}, however, seem to call for this further work as well. In fact, the empty circle as \textit{Resurrection}\textsuperscript{111} can be described as eschatology – while having as a pre-requisite the real forgiveness and embrace of black and white, the concrete work of reconciliation happens not around the empty circle, but around a different political arrangement which has the empty circle as a backdrop, as hope.

In part, I will return to this tension in chapter 3. Regardless of the questions raised concerning the empty middle, what Witvliet seeks to work out concerning how such a meeting of equals might be contemplated within a Christian imagination still needs to be unpacked. Witvliet’s question to which we need to turn is not unrelated to Jennings’ driving question “why did they not know us?” For Witvliet the question is, “how can I truly know the other?” or “how can we understand each other?”

\subsection*{2.4.2 A hermeneutics of mutual understanding}

The hermeneutical quest for understanding those who are ‘other’ than ourselves runs throughout Witvliet’s work. From the beginning it is the hermeneutical challenge resulting from a meeting between European and liberation theologians which draws Witvliet’s attention – in brief, European theologians fail to understand what is being said by different liberation theologians.

In the midst of reflecting on the problem of the Enlightenment and our understanding of the ‘other’ – to which I return below, Witvliet makes this brief comment which illustrates his own focus: “The attempt to achieve a hermeneutics of (mutual) recognition based on the Biblical covenantal idea deserves to be seriously investigated” (Witvliet, 1999, p. 74). It is not the search for what is biblical, or questions on whether such a covenantal idea might do the kind of work Witvliet has in mind which I want to highlight.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{110} This ecumenical vision does not remain limited to a gathering of Christians (Witvliet, 2003, p. 147), although such a broader engagement across faith traditions does not receive sustained reflection.} \footnote{\textsuperscript{111} Mbatha’s title for station XV.}
here, even though that does deserve reflection. Rather, it is the strong emphasis on “mutuality”, highlighted by its insertion in parentheses, that we need to note.

Perhaps the most developed reflection on this hermeneutic of mutual understanding is found in Witvliet’s most recent book on Martin Buber’s humanism – most specifically, for this argument, in Witvliet’s attempt to go beyond Buber by drawing from Buber that which was not said but which rightly should have been expected: namely, the relation between “us and them”. While Buber is known for his work on the relation “I and Thou”, Witvliet notes the strange silence in Buber’s work on “the world of the ‘us’”.112 Given the importance of communities in Buber’s writing, this silence can barely be understood (Witvliet, 2017, p. 65).

Witvliet seeks to trace the potential for reflecting on this “us” through Buber’s work, focusing in particular on Buber’s attempts to think through Jewish and Arab community in Palestine – searching for ways for Jews and Palestinians to be in a community of equals. What Witvliet highlights, in the end, is that “a person is someone who is in relation to other persons and is capable of real encounter”113 (Witvliet, 2017, p. 79). What Witvliet seeks to envision is a continuation of his past work and the argument above: a community which is not bound to fixed identity but which is open to others yet not afraid of the loss of identity for the self (Witvliet, 2017, p. 80).

A brief personal reflection then illuminates Witvliet’s entire project on the ecumenical encounter as the place in which the challenge of black theology should be heard and the place where people who are very different can meet each other:

For Buber community does not mean that people share the same norms and values. It is exactly important not to silence personal, cultural, ethnic or religious contradictions, but to commit to accepting each other as a person. The latter is an art, but it is worth the effort. That’s also my own experience. I did not often experience real community. But the few times that I really felt something of communion were exactly those moments where people from different backgrounds and cultures were together. (Witvliet, 2017, p. 81)114

112 “de wereld van het ‘wij”’
113 “Een persoon is iemand die in relatie treedt tot andere personen en in staat is tot echt ontmoeting”
114 “Gemeenschap betekent voor Buber niet dat men dezelfde normen en waarden deelt. Het is juist van belang om persoonlijke, culturele, etnische of religieuze tegenstellingen niet uit de weg te gaan, maar uit te houden doordat elkaar als persoon te blijven accepteren. Dat laatste is een kunst, maar het loont de moeite. Dat is ook mijn eigen ervaring. Echte gemeenschap hebt ik niet vaak meegemaakt. Maar de enkele keren dat ik echt iets van
It is then not incidental that the very next paragraph detours to briefly revisit King’s beloved community and the tension with black nationalism, which received sustained analysis in *The Way of the Black Messiah*. What Witvliet develops as a place to hear the challenge against racism, a place where, so he believes, people can gather without anyone taking up the power of the middle, is also an account of what he himself experienced as the gift of community. In a context where “otherness” continues to be presented as opposition to community, where migrants into The Netherlands continue to be considered a threat to the community, Witvliet situates true community exactly within a relationship with those from very different backgrounds.\textsuperscript{115}

However, the limits of Witvliet’s hermeneutic, as it relates to the challenge of black theology to white Christians, become visible at this point. Briefly revisiting (in only a few sentences) the debate between Malcolm X and Martin Luther King which Witvliet explored at length in *The Way of the Black Messiah*, in particular around the dialectic of power and love, Witvliet, 30 years later, makes clear that it is the beloved community of King that would allow the kind of relationality that he sees in the work of Buber, since black nationalism inevitably posits “us” against “them” (Witvliet, 2017, p. 81) – a kind of opposition which he already rejected (Witvliet, 2017, p. 79).

A key critique from Carter on the possibility of drawing on Buber to disrupt whiteness becomes important at this point. Carter, while discussing the work of James Cone, refers to Cone’s use of Buber to present the work of black faith as transforming “a relationship in which black people are cast as Its into relationships that recognise them as Thous” (Carter, 2008, p. 189). However, the key problem that Carter points out, and to which he would attempt to respond, is that it normalises the “I”. “[I]n I-Thou structures, the I relates to the other but allows it a separate-but-equal status in relation to itself as I. In this way, the I positions the other as Thou. But something more than this is needed, for on its own, this really is only a settlement with whiteness, not its overcoming” (Carter, 2008, p. 190).

Witvliet’s ecumenical dialogue and hermeneutic of mutual understanding runs into the very same problem. While it allows for a deeply respectful dialogue with others, and allow others space to truly bring their own voice to be heard around the empty middle, it also makes such a settlement with whiteness possible.

\textsuperscript{115} Later in the book he will link Buber’s emphasis on equality explicitly to Dutch questions on how migrants should be accepted (Witvliet, 2017, p. 130).
By pushing beyond the “I-Thou” and trying to think through its implications for an “Us-Them” Witvliet hints at a possible break, where the I is drawn into a We and the We is found in the community with those different from the I. Witvliet’s community is however at most “experiments in community” (Witvliet, 2017, pp. 81-82). As the next section will start to show, there are limits to which the communion that Witvliet names inform an epistemology that draws from this “us” constituted of people from very different backgrounds.

Witvliet’s main point is that contrary to contemporary emphases on “networks”, he holds to the concept of community since community implies a fixed place (Witvliet, 2017, p. 80). This emphasis on fixed place opens up a different line of inquiry from his earlier concerns with a global ecumenical dialogue. It is not yet clear from his arguments what would constitute such a fixed place where community among people from different backgrounds and cultures are possible (Witvliet, 2017, p. 81). While this is a protest against both exclusivist and assimilationist approaches to migration in Europe, it does not make any proposals for how to respond to whiteness within such concrete communities. Furthermore, given Witvliet’s emphasis on ecumenism as place of encounter throughout his career, it is not clear whether the fixed place of community mentioned in Kwaliteit van Leven can by necessity be connected to the particular place of Jennings discussed in chapter 1. Witvliet’s examples of ecumenical encounter are after all seldom bound to a particular geographic location.

While Witvliet is explicitly aware of the fact that the problem of engaging the ‘other’ is situated within a European colonial history (and this statement emerges from explicit reflection on this history of colonialism), framing the problem as one of mutual misunderstanding risks diverting the gaze from what is at the heart of the problem – the way in which whiteness silences everything and everyone that is not white.

Whether it is ecumenism as place, a gathering around the empty circle, or the community with those of different cultures and backgrounds, while Witvliet’s theological hermeneutic of conscious listening is clear, what remains unclear is how a white European theologian participates in the dialogue, gathers around the empty middle, or becomes part of the “We”. This leads to the third and final part of my analysis: Witvliet’s relationship to the Enlightenment. This will illustrate that not merely by accident, but rather by the very design of his hermeneutic, the only possible participation that is possible for a white European theologian is a (more ethical) enactment of European epistemology and ethics.
2.5 Epistemology and the Enlightenment as resource

In chapter 1 I have explored more recent attempts at describing the problem of race in general and whiteness in particular as it developed theologically through modern colonialism and the Enlightenment. While the Enlightenment as intellectual space within which modern racism develops is well known, between Carter and Jennings we see both the extent to which this process within the Enlightenment is weaved into the development of modern Christian theology, but also how Christian theology in the earlier colonial period was deformed by racial conceptions. What I now trace in the work of Witvliet focuses on a tension where the Enlightenment acts as both source of a totalising and oppressive system, as well as the source of a possible critique on this system of oppression. In dialogue with Witvliet, I will describe this tension, but more specifically, I want to indicate a particular white theological response to this problem, which will in the broader argument become an example of a particular type of response to the problem of whiteness.

I turn in this third section to Witvliet’s engagement with African-American historian of religion Charles Long, and through that to how he grapples with the emancipatory potential of the Enlightenment. Witvliet introduced the work of Long to a German and Dutch speaking audience in a 1992 publication remembering the 1492 start of the colonisation of the Americas. It marks the beginning of a slight shift in his engagement with black theology, where first Long’s (Witvliet, 1992b, p. 58) and then Dolores Williams’ (Witvliet, 1999, p. 184) critique on the first phases of black theology of liberation would take a more prominent place in his writings than his engagement with Cone. More importantly for this section, it marks a particular engagement with Enlightenment values that will become important in his further work, and which raise key questions concerning his engagement with whiteness.

2.5.1 Long as hinge in reading the Enlightenment

Witvliet’s 1992 essay, Europa en de andere, expanded upon in Gebroken Traditie, briefly focuses on the work of Dutch anthropologist Ton Lemaire, but mainly on the book Significations by African-American historian of religion Charles Long. The explicit focus of the essay is on the question of how we know the ‘other’. More specifically, it is on how white Europeans can know people of Asian, African and American indigenous descent (Witvliet, 1992b, p. 50) – thus, while never put in this explicit terms, how those who are tied to the colonisation of the world can know the people who were colonised.

However, while this is the explicit focus of the essay, there is a deeper focus underlying the argument: what do we make with the Enlightenment in general and academic disciplines that emerge from the
Enlightenment in particular? Can these help us to know the ‘other’? The fundamental problem is that key to the construction of white supremacy is the idea that white people have a particular (superior) ability to understand the other. Knowing the other and controlling the other has been deeply intertwined in modern history, and the construction of disciplines which study the other are deeply implicated in this (Witvliet, 1999, pp. 77-85). The focus of Witvliet’s argument is therefore not the general and universal question of whether we can truly know the other, but rather on the one hand more specifically whether this Enlightenment tradition out of which disciplines such as anthropology, science of religion, and missiology emerge can assist us in truly knowing the other, and on the other hand whether it is possible to still affirm the ideals of the Enlightenment given its oppressive history. Both will be answered in the affirmative. I focus on the first question here, and on the second in the following subsection.

The central epistemological problem that Witvliet wants to illuminate in dialogue with the work of Long is the eurocentrism which developed with a centred consciousness and a reductionist vision. Long places this within the longer development of citied traditions, and the need for a sacred centre for the emergence of a city (Long, 1999, pp. 78-79), but it takes on a particular form in Enlightenment epistemology. The problem that Witvliet wants to focus on is that this Enlightenment orientation works from a single centre (midden, the same word he would elsewhere use with reference to the lege midden), and from this ‘centred consciousness’ various forms of reductionism work to relate the diversity of religious phenomena to various social or psychological factors (Witvliet, 1999, pp. 88-89). In Witvliet’s argument, it is however not the details of method in the history of religions that is of concern, but rather the way in which those who occupy this centre, specifically those in academic disciplines developing from this Enlightenment orientation, fail to take the otherness of the other seriously into account.

Naming this problem, however, for Witvliet requires turning to the same critical tradition to deliver the self-critique. In his epilogue to Gebroken Traditie, he writes: “The paradox is that it is exactly the scientific thoughts that are heir of the Enlightenment that are able to criticise the objectivity and

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116 In Witvliet’s text at this point referred to as ‘Western supremacy’ (Witvliet, 1999, p. 80), but a few pages later, when moving to Long and the United States context, he will again tie ‘Western’ to ‘white’ and ‘Western culture’ to racism (Witvliet, 1999, p. 86).
prejudice of the rationality of that same Enlightenment tradition” (Witvliet, 1999, p. 275). This seems to be a key argument for Witvliet’s work from the 1990s onwards: that the problems with the Enlightenment needs to be interrogated, but that the Enlightenment nonetheless provides the tools for its own critique, and rejecting this would lead to a more dangerous world (this last point will be the focus of the next section).

There is a nuance within Long’s justification for working with the history of religions which assists in illuminating Witvliet’s choices. Indeed, as Witvliet clearly paraphrases (Witvliet, 1999, p. 86), Long sees in the history of religion the only discipline which can do justice to the religious experience of the black community in the United States of America. Long states it in even stronger terms, it was “a mode of making sense of the experiences of my tradition that did not begin with a methodology of pathology, one of the primary American cultural and social scientific languages about blacks” (Long, 1999, p. 8). And as Long notes in the section Witvliet also quotes at length, this disciplinary approach is indeed built on “Enlightenment understandings of the human venture” (Long, 1999, p. 8). In Long we can indeed find an attempt at reworking this academic discipline that emerges in tandem with the European gaze towards the other in ways which would allow a better description of oppressed communities’ protests against the way in which colonialism disrupted their humanity, and also ways of noting how such protests are indeed found within and at times inevitably drawing from the language of this modern world which encompasses the horizon of existence. On the other hand Long is also clear that drawing from Enlightenment ideals is not the only way in which the colonial history is protested (Long, 1999, p. 6), and in the conclusions of some of his essays he notes the limitations of the “Western scientific apparatus” (Long, 1999, p. 135) and calls for a “new science... part and parcel of a new humanism” (Long, 1999, p. 87).

In Long we simultaneously find a description of the problems with a discipline such a history of religion, an illustration of how such a discipline can do justice to the experiences of oppressed communities, but also an exploration of the limits of what such a discipline can do and the need for a more fundamental revolution of methodology and epistemology. I point this out, however briefly, to note that Witvliet’s

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117 “Het paradoxale is, dat juist een wetenschappelijk denken dat erfgenaam is van die Verlichting in staat blijkt te zijn het objectiverende en bevooroordeelde van de rationaliteit van diezelfde verlichtingstraditie onder kritiek te stellen.”
118 The discussion of the work of Perkinson below will return to these alternatives Long reveals.
119 Elsewhere, he would describe the Enlightenment itself as a “new science” of a particular era in Western history (Long, 1999, p. 65). We should analogously see his own call for a “new science” as a call for a similar fundamental scientific revolution.
use of Long is specifically to seek for possible ways of drawing on disciplines which are formed within the modern world as mechanisms of knowing the other which contribute to the oppression of the other, and to draw on these in ways which can contribute to a protest against the very hierarchisation which often accompanied work within these disciplines and thus to contribute to a relation of equality. Key to this is the earlier described commitment to respectful listening to the other, while simultaneously being critical of attempts at European appropriation of the epistemologies of the other - even though the critical questions of those from very different backgrounds should be a key concern. The result is a critical interrogation of the European Enlightenment world to recognise its oppressive character while still drawing from its tools of knowing the other and critiquing the self, and, committing to its emancipatory values in the face of growing racism, nationalism and xenophobia in Europe.

Witvliet is no simplistic praise-singer for the Enlightenment. He is deeply aware of its dark side and does not hold back on his own critique of modernity. However, what Witvliet presents, illustrated best in his reading of Long, is an argument where critique on the Enlightenment inevitably happens from within and depends on the Enlightenment, whether this is from liberation theologies\textsuperscript{120} or disciplines such as anthropology or science of religion.

2.5.2 The last resort: freedom, equality, and solidarity as the gift of the Enlightenment

There is a constant line in Witvliet’s work throughout his career in which, while taking the critique on European colonialism with utmost seriousness, he seeks to illuminate the ways in which there are overlaps between liberation theologies and certain European political theologies, and in parallel with this how the values of the Enlightenment and of a certain Christian tradition can indeed continue to inform working against the very racism, nationalism and xenophobia which defined Europe throughout

\textsuperscript{120} See for example Witvliet’s use of Long’s critique on black theology’s use of liberation (Witvliet, 1992b, p. 58) and his own description of black theology building on a normative tradition in European political theology (Witvliet, 1985, p. 87). Witvliet should not necessarily be faulted for this analysis. Gustavo Gutiérrez (Gutiérrez, 1970), for example, when describing a theology of liberation connects the notion of what he described as ‘liberation’ quite explicitly with an Enlightened tradition following Hegel, Marx, & Bloch (among others). More recently Walter Mignolo continues to make the claim that Christian theology of liberation is fully founded within ‘Western civilisation’ (Mignolo, 2012, pp. 23, 25). On the other hand, a more nuanced discussion is needed, noting that liberating traditions in Christianity also drew from different epistemic traditions. Long pointed out that protest among people confronted with the West through colonialism took both the form of building on certain Western values as normative, as well as disavowals of such values (Long, 1999, p. 6). This will also be illustrated in part when returning to black theology of Liberation in South Africa in chapter 3, where such an easy reduction to the Enlightenment simply is not possible.
the period of colonialism, modernity, the wars of the 20th century, and which Witvliet see re-emerging in the late 20th and early 21st century Europe.

Witvliet’s commitment to these Enlightenment ideals is presented alongside two possible alternatives. The one, which he returned to repeatedly, is a “postmodern relativism”, which he connects to a re-emergence of racism, nationalism and xenophobia in Europe (Witvliet, 1992b, p. 61; Witvliet, 1999, p. 98; Witvliet, 2003, p. 134). His strong emphasis on this set of Enlightenment values must be seen as a response to this reading of his own context. On the other hand, but far less prominent in his work, he is sceptical of the alternative of Ton Lemaire, which suggest, in Witvliet’s words, a nostalgic return to animistic and archaic values – which he again suggests might, contrary to Lemaire’s intention, contribute to growing nationalism and xenophobia, rather than its opposite (Witvliet, 1992b, p. 62).

Witvliet’s discussion of Adorno illustrates this commitment to the Enlightenment. He explicitly opts for an interpretation which argues that Adorno is in fact still an Enlightenment philosopher committed to a historical project of freedom and justice (contrary to those who argue that Adorno has given up on the Enlightenment) (Witvliet, 1999, p. 211). However, the internal tension in Witvliet’s work also become visible when on the one hand he agrees with Adorno that modernity and narrative is in tension with each other and that we should not attempt to keep narrative alive artificially, while on the other hand arguing that narrative is really the only way for true intersubjectivity (Witvliet, 1999, pp. 224-228). These points are intertwined in a way which captures Witvliet’s attempt at grappling with his own whiteness (and with that his modern European identity): The Enlightenment ideals is something which should be committed to, and he himself, but in fact most of the world, is inevitably caught up inside this modern project, yet the possibility for what is being envisioned does indeed lie outside this modern worldview.

Here a key tension in Witvliet’s work emerge. It is worth quoting him at length to illustrate the point:

In my opinion, it is an illusion to think that the good Enlightenment can be disconnected from the perverted. As long as the 'colonization' of our world in the sense of Habermas continues, the perverting will win. In order to prevent cynicism and indifference from forming the political service, to avert ecological disasters and to promote respect for human rights, it is nevertheless vitally important, despite everything, to stick to the values of Enlightenment thinking with its humane, critical, impulse to focus on the whole - without, incidentally, playing out this thinking as superior over other cultures. To disregard this in a postmodernist-relativistic way is life-
threatening in a European context in which nationalism, xenophobia and racism are re-emerging. (Witvliet, 1999, p. 100)\textsuperscript{121}

A number of points need to be noted. While Witvliet refuses an easy separation between the good and the bad of the Enlightenment, these two sides do exist in his mind, and there is a recurring argument that the Enlightenment ideals both can and must be held onto.

We can indeed read Witvliet as arguing that it is particularly ‘Europe’\textsuperscript{122} that needs to hold to these Enlightenment values, and that he argues this due to a specific analysis of the context of Europe in which there is an increased rejection of the other inside of and the other outside of Europe. An Enlightenment humanism is presented as a critical alternative to this – but importantly, in his argument, it is presented as the only possible critical alternative available.

Here the limits to Witvliet’s listening to the ‘other’ becomes clear. For Europeans the listening to the ‘other’ implies a listening with deep interest, and other voices can be ‘places’ from which Europeans can critically engage their own traditions (Witvliet, 1999, p. 101), but as noted in reflection on the work of Minjung theologian Suh Nam Dong, the only thing that can be ‘done’ with other theologies, is to listen to its questions and then critically reflect on European culture and tradition (Witvliet, 1999, p. 192).

It is exactly Witvliet’s deep commitment to the absolute otherness of the other that seems to result in the Enlightenment as the only possible place to which white Europeans can turn. The epistemological work of others may not, out of respect, be made to serve a European project – today we might describe this as a refusal of appropriation of the intellectual work of oppressed communities. This is the commitment to which Witvliet leads us, the structure of which, in its ideal form, would require that those of European descent listen intently to others, hear their critical questions, and then turn back to

\textsuperscript{121}“Het is mijns inziens een illusie om te denken, dat de goede Verlichting van de geperverteerde los te koppelen valt. Zolang de ‘kolonisering’ van onze leefwereld in de zin van Habermas doorgaat, wint de pervertering. Om te voorkomen dat cynisme en onverschilligheid de politieke dienst uitmaken, om ecologische rampen af te wenden en te bevorderen dat de mensenrechten gerespecteerd worden, is het echter van primair levensbelang ondanks alles vast te houden aan de waarden van het Verlichtingsdenken met zijn humane, kritische, op het gehéél gerichte impuls - zonder overigens dit denken als ‘meerwaarde’ tegenover andere culturen uit te spelen. Dit denken postmodernistisch-relativistisch overboord zetten is levensgevaarlijk in een Europese context, waarin nationalisme, vreemdelingenhaat en racisme steeds weer de kop opsteken.”

\textsuperscript{122}I keep to Witvliet’s use of “European” here and in following paragraphs, but as noted earlier, his conflation of ‘European’, ‘Western’, and ‘white’ leaves a certain vagueness on who and what exactly is included in his ‘European’ at this point.
find ways in which the Western intellectual and ethical tradition can be transformed to contribute to justice and equality.

We should understand Witvliet not simply as ignoring the fact that any possibility for escaping the inherent tensions of the Enlightenment would have to come outside of the Enlightenment, but rather as accepting that it is impossible for himself, and for white Europeans, in general, to move outside of the Enlightenment, and that the best approach is then to commit to the best ideals of the Enlightenment.

While the Enlightenment might be an inevitability for Long – or more specifically, for Long as historian of religion it would be impossible to not move through the Enlightenment, given the way in which his discipline is fundamentally tied to the Enlightenment, the critique of the critique – the critique of the Enlightenment critique of religion - is not that easily drawn into an affirmation of Enlightenment ideals. Rather, something new needs to emerge, a new science, new humanity, and a new way of understanding.

In the end this newness seems like an impossibility in Witvliet’s work – at least, it is impossible for Witvliet as a white European theologian to envision a way in which white Europeans can take their place around an empty middle in a way which allows this fundamental newness that emerges from the underside of the Enlightenment to determine how we might understand one another and what it is that we jointly commit to. In Witvliet’s programme, white Europeans can at most attempt to listen to the critique of others, in particular, black theology for those who are white and Christian, and in light of this critique attempt to curb the unjust and oppressive excess of modernity while holding to its enlightened ideals.

2.6 Enlightenment at the edge of the empty middle

Witvliet is conscious of his own social location as white European theologian responding to black theology. He is insisting on the particularity of theological responses, and not blind to the fact that he himself is responding from a particular position. However, what remains unclear in Witvliet’s account is

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123 While at times one gets the sense that Witvliet sees this being caught up inside modernity as a universal phenomenon, I suspect it could be argued that Witvliet holds to this not as a necessarily universal principle, but as the particular position of white Europeans – although including the majority of the world as well. For example, while he rejects Lemaire’s appropriation of a pantheistic indigenous spirituality and approach to life, he does so by explicitly noting that it is dangerous in the European context (Witvliet, 1992b, pp. 51-52), and we need not necessarily assume that such a connection to the earth is also questioned where it exists as traces of a world not devastated by the process of colonialism and modernity.
to what extent the particularity of whiteness is fundamentally different from the mere difference of other particular theologies.

Responding to *The Kairos Document* in 1986, Witvliet rightly notes that the challenge of Kairos cannot be left to the South African church in general, or the Dutch Reformed churches in particular, but must be heard as a challenge to the Dutch church as well. Not least because of the historical connection – the Cape as a Dutch colony - but also the more general reality that apartheid is a continuation of colonialism, colonialism – beyond South Africa as well – which the Dutch church need to face and process (Witvliet, 1986, p. 79). What should the Dutch church hear, however? On the one hand, he notes that the “church theology” identified by Kairos is also working in the Dutch church – where certain Christian ideas, such as peace and reconciliation, are applied a-historically and a-contextually in ways which do not allow a clear naming of the powers of evil. However, what a prophetic theology in The Netherlands or Europe would then look like is not mentioned, only that it would involve a social analysis which draws from the whole congregation (Witvliet, 1986, pp. 91-93). But his social analysis at this point remains invisible: how is the context in which Witvliet writes weaved into this colonial system in his own time? How is this theology, practised in his own time, part of the racial and colonial world which he is protesting?

In Witvliet’s engagement of black theology from within white Europe, we finally find a return to the Enlightenment, albeit an attempt at separating out the wheat from the chaff, even while recognising that this is in principle not entirely possible. Witvliet should be read at this point as arguing that these Enlightenment values are what specifically European people should hold to, as the values which can remind of a different way of engaging with others, but the effect is that Witvliet’s approach to diversity and the “otherness of the other” results in the black Messiah really being a voice to black Christians (even if the questions this Messiah raise can be heard in Europe), while white Europeans need to turn to the values of the Enlightenment and a European Christian tradition.

Witvliet’s critique of modernity and the Enlightenment, in the end, cannot be described as an anti-colonial critique.\(^{124}\) It is not that Witvliet denies the important contribution of his interlocutors from the formerly colonised and enslaved world to make it clear that there is a fundamental problem with the Enlightenment and modernity. His work over decades illustrates a slow and committed attempt at

\(^{124}\text{In this sense Witvliet reproduces what Mignolo (Mignolo, 2012, p. 36) describes in the difference between Western and decolonial critiques of modernity.}\)
listening intently to how the problem is being articulated, and to the constructive alternative theologies being proposed. But in the end, the route he charts in Europe is one in which he then needs to turn away and name this problem anew in terms of the logic of the Enlightenment, and present his alternatives as what really is the valuable core of the Enlightenment.

Witvliet’s work brings us around a table. A neutral table, not constituted through relations of power – at least that is his hope. Around such a table he hopes to develop a hermeneutic of understanding – or more accurately, he hopes to find a way for white Europeans to understand those who the same white Europeans consider to be ‘other’.

The comparison with Jennings places this into perspective. Because while a first reading might hint towards the same implication: (for Jennings just framed in the negative) why these white Reformed missionaries didn’t know this black Christian family, this focus also illuminates what remains hidden – there is a “distorted relational imagination” (Jennings, 2010, p. 4) underlying this not knowing. The work that we are faced with is not in understanding a different cultural-religious experience (even if the difference in experience is quite real), but rather in undoing a ‘distorted relational imagination’ – an imagination which Jennings, as traced in chapter 1, found rooted in a colonial Christian imagination.

Witvliet provides us with an excellent example of what a sustained listening to black theology might look like. He interprets black theology in a way which calls his white colleagues and students to take this voice seriously as an important and equal interlocutor, and which calls the church to create spaces where those who are different can meet in search of a future of freedom, equality, and solidarity. Importantly, Witvliet warns against an easy appropriation of black theology to serve white European ideals. He consistently insists on taking the absolute otherness of the other seriously. But the result is that the only place to turn is the very epistemological and ethical traditions which were deeply implicated in the construction of a racial world. What this discussion of Witvliet highlights is an attempt to find a more ethical way for white people to exist in relation with others – more specifically, a way for white theologians to be in deep and respectful dialogue with others. But the very insistence on the absolute otherness of the other also allows whiteness as another other to retain its place around an empty circle as just another voice.

My purpose is not to reject Witvliet’s detailed analysis of black theology, nor the important work of translating and presenting black theology to an audience which would perhaps not have found it easy to hear its call. Also, I am not in opposition to Witvliet’s attempt at working out a form of engagement
around the metaphor of the empty circle. Rather, I hope to probe the possibility, but also the limits, of dialogue and understanding in disrupting white theology.

3 Perkinson

3.1 Introduction

Again, I focus on two pairs of books. Perkinson’s publications extend well beyond these four books, including numerous chapters and articles, but given the limited scope of this section, focusing on these key works provide an important lens on his work. Perkinson’s 2004 publication *White Theology* (Perkinson, 2004), which was a reworked version of his doctoral thesis, will here be of key importance. Having received much less attention so far, he published a second monograph in 2013 titled *Messianism against Christology*. Furthermore, each of these monographs was accompanied by a collection of papers presented in preceding years, *Shamanism, Racism, and Hip-Hop* published in 2005 and *Political Spirituality in an age of Eco-apocalypse* published in 2015. Perkinson explicitly states that these collections of chapters accompany the respective monographs (Perkinson, 2015, p. 6).

Coming from an early charismatic experience of spirit-filled conversion, his work as a theologian has been a conscious attempt at reading spirit generously – well beyond the doors of the church and with a particular ear for those remnants of indigenous worldviews still reminding of a world not colonised nor taken over by empire. Professor of ethics and systematic theology at Ecumenical Theological Seminary, he positions himself disciplinary in religious studies (Perkinson, 2004, p. 9; Perkinson, 2013, pp. 23-24), but insist that the problems that he seeks to describe, including whiteness in particular, are best described as theological, even when presented as secular (Perkinson, 2004, pp. 2-3; Perkinson, 2013, p. xxi; Perkinson, 2015, p. 91). The implications of such a hybrid theoretical claim are in part that theology is written without extensive interlocution with explicit theological writings, and the theology presented is more subtle, less explicitly engaged with the doctrinal logics themselves, while drawing from the logic of the doctrines – as will become visible below in the ongoing soteriological reflection.

Perkinson’s work brings together a number of threads: Hip-hop, anti-racism, eco-activism and anarcho-primitivism, all constantly related to Christology and soteriology – to name a few. He is best known for his earlier work attempting to develop a sustained white response to whiteness as a theological problem

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125 [http://www.etseminary.edu/james-perkinson.html](http://www.etseminary.edu/james-perkinson.html) [accessed 20 October 2017].

126 In his later work he would add communication studies (Perkinson, 2013, pp. 23-24) which he also teaches at University of Oakland ([https://www.scupe.org/jamesperkinson/](https://www.scupe.org/jamesperkinson/) [accessed 20 October 2017]), a focus which emerges quite clearly in his work on Hip-Hop especially.
– a white theological response to the challenge of black theology. In contrast his later work is trying to develop an anarcho-primitivist reading of the messianic movement around Jesus and its implications for a world on the brink of ecological catastrophe has received far less attention thus far, but more specifically, those interested in his earlier work have not thus far picked up the later pair of books to ask how Perkinson’s earlier reflections on whiteness is developed in the later works. So in a move analogous to the above structure on Witvliet, I start with the earlier more explicit work on race and whiteness but trace aspects of its development into the later work. This second pair of books is not focused on whiteness per se, although the critique of whiteness is, as I will touch upon below, never far from the surface either. Throughout this, my focus is however on how a white theologian critically engages whiteness theologically, while in comparison with Witvliet opening up some of the choices which have to be made.

The analysis below inevitably had to attempt to find a thread through Perkinson’s work without exploring every twist and turn in his argument. His sustained work on theology and white supremacy would allow for a far more extensive analysis than what is presented here. My search is however not in the first place for the detail of the critique but rather for the approach to the problem. Since I want to unearth possible ways in which white theologians can approach whiteness as a theological problem, I try to trace the road taken in Perkinson’s work. I do this under the headings Dislocation, Confrontation, and Relocation.

Placing this in relation to the first half of this chapter, I again start with questions of place – this is also, I will show, at the heart of Perkinson’s approach to a responsible white response to whiteness. Perkinson is based in Detroit and all of his work constantly draws from and responds to this context. Under dislocation, I start to trace the importance of bodily dislocation in Perkinson’s work and then turn to how this relates to epistemological dislocation – here I will already introduce a separation of ways between Witvliet and Perkinson by noting a different road taken in response to Charles Long and the Enlightenment.

In the middle section on confrontation, I again trace a route quite distinct from the empty middle presented above. Perkinson’s work from inner-city Detroit is in part a sustained attempt at listening to the furious voice of protest and the implication of black power and its later manifestations. It is a confrontation face-to-face which marks what Perkinson hears in black theology and what he tries to work out the implication of for those who are white.
Lastly, under relocation, I turn attention more explicitly to Perkinson’s soteriological reflection, most specifically to note the limits of thinking about white salvation. Here I introduce the heart of the conundrum which Perkinson presents us with – the impossibility of salvation for whites as white and the impossibility of solidarity in struggle as anything other than white – before briefly tracing his constructive proposal of becoming more than white as only viable route towards wholeness.

3.2   Dislocation: disrupting white bodies and theologies

Starting my analysis with a focus on places of encounter again, I first turn to the place from which Perkinson does his reflection: Detroit. Throughout his work, Detroit is the conscious place out of which he reflects. That place informs our theological work should come as no surprise after half a century of contextual theology, but in Perkinson’s case, this does not amount to a mere inevitable and broad formation, but rather implies conscious reflection on concrete practices, streets, and abandoned lots. To put this recurring reflection in his own words: “I speak, without apology, from postapocalyptic Detroit.” (Perkinson, 2017, p. 2)

However, my interest is specifically on how Perkinson thinks ethically and theologically through what Detroit has done to himself, and to what the kind of encounter that he describes might do to white people. In this section, I expand on this with a focus on epistemology – dislocation of the mind – illustrating an alternative choice in relation to Long from what was earlier traced in the work of Witvliet.

3.2.1   Detroit: dislocating white bodies

The symbolic meaning of Detroit is possibly lost on an outsider to the United States. But even a superficial reading makes it clear that Detroit is a place of vital importance in US racial imagination: the (in)famous home to the headquarters of General Motors turned blackest large metropole in the United States of America. Due to the expansion of the auto industry in the first half of the 20th century, it became one of the most important cities in the USA. However, infamously, the restructuring of this industry resulted in a considerable population decline in the second half of the 20th century.127

To this needs to be added that Detroit of 1950 was 83.6% white, while by the 2010 census the city was 82.7% black or African-American (compared to a 13% national black or African-American population from the same census). While Detroit is far more than its imploding automobile economy and changing

racial demographics, these are never far below the surface of the creative responses which Perkinson seeks to listen to and respond to.\textsuperscript{128}

A version of his own brief account, repeatedly found in different forms throughout his work (Perkinson, 2013, p. xxiv; Perkinson, 2004, pp. xv-xvii; Perkinson, 2005, pp. xv-xvi),\textsuperscript{129} of moving to and being formed through Detroit needs quoting at length:

Fresh from college graduation in 1974, I drove from birthplace Cincinnati, Ohio, to east side Motown, Michigan, with my entire life holdings packed up in my used Chevy Two, and plopped down in that decimated ‘hood’ – among the poorest and blackest in the country at the time – to join a renegade experiment in Christian community living. There some 70 Spirit-haunted seekers, stepping free from mainstream proprieties and values, were combining efforts in a common cause. We pooled income and assets on a poverty-level budget, black and white, married and single, residing as extended family units crammed into single-family houses within a six block radius of the neighbourhood Episcopal Church – itself, a barely functioning entity at the time the new community first formed, with less than 50 people on the membership rolls.

... What began for me as a venture of mission – white boy without contrition thinking he is heaven-sent to help black folk deal with an impossible situation – after 8 years, upended into a very different vision. It took that amount of time finally to reach the endpoint of my own supremacist assumptions, and finally be able to see the ribald vitality and raw creativity of ordinary folk, using culture and wit, to make desperation and poverty yield beauty in spite of the desolation. (Perkinson, 2017, pp. 2-3)

The racialisation of bodies and places are intimately intertwined. In the words of Shannon Sullivan, “In a raced world, the race of bodies helps effect the race of spaces, which effects the race of bodies who inhabits those spaces, and so on” (Sullivan, 2006, p. 146). White and black here refer not simply to the levels of melanin in the typical body accommodating such a space, although the way in which aesthetics

\textsuperscript{128} It should also be noted that Perkinson’s work is constantly explicitly conscious of its USA context. The whiteness he seeks to describe is not merely universal, but the particular form it takes within the US empire – language which he uses without hesitation (Perkinson, 2004, pp. 34-35).

\textsuperscript{129} As the page numbers reveal, versions of this narrative is often part of how he introduces his work. The quote below opts for the most recent version, but similar elements is found repeatedly in his work.
over centuries have been drawn into the construction of space inevitably implies that it is about this as well, but rather to how spaces are drawn into a racial construction of the world. As Sullivan indicates, this is about more than merely different neighbourhoods but plays out on the micro-level of spaces as well (Sullivan, 2006, pp. 144-150).130

The way in which the movement of white bodies into spaces which are demographically or symbolically black risks reproducing the very whiteness it claims to oppose has been a topic of ongoing scrutiny in recent years. Often discussed in analyses of economic gentrification, the more immediate focus for my own analysis here is on how such movements assume a particular white power over spaces.

Sullivan describes this as ontological expansiveness, the way white people, in particular white males, have been socialised to occupy an ever-expanding amount of space, while society is structured and others socialised to constantly be limited in how they move through and occupy space. White bodies moving into spaces marked as black are often perceived to be breaking with a certain racial contract, while such movements simultaneously reproduce whiteness in the very assumption of rights to occupy any place.

However, Sullivan places this argument within a longer argument indicating how attempts at consciously working against habits of whiteness fail, and arguing that one alternative is exactly a different positioning in terms of space. The refusal to reproduce racialised spatial constructions, which is not limited to but could include conscious white movements into neighbourhoods or (for example) schools typically considered black does indeed contain the potential for disrupting the reproduction of race, however, it also risks being the reproduction of the very thing it seeks to disrupt. One important aspect of Perkinson’s work, visible throughout my analysis here, is that it contains a lifetime of reflection on this tension.131

Perkinson is transparent about his earlier white gaze which informed a move to Detroit132, but simultaneously his life work against racism cannot be disconnected from this very move and the

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130 Sullivan focus on the differences between pavement and storefront, or the way in which particular stores work with subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) racial codes on who is allowed in and in what ways – for example the profiling at security gates which need to be opened for individual customers.

131 Rachel Schneider’s recent research contain detailed descriptions of some of the complexities found in contemporary South African instances of white evangelical Christians moving into predominantly black neighbourhoods temporarily or permanently (Schneider, 2017, pp. 168-313). Thinking through the complexities and ethics of such movements is of particular importance in the South African context as well.

132 This move is however already following on a longer history of growing up in a community which during his childhood became majority black (Perkinson, 2004, p. vii), attending a mixed school and learning about the
fundamental transformation that it caused in him. In one reading Perkinson’s work is an ongoing theological auto-ethnography of how Detroit has fundamentally reworked this one white male theologian. However, more than mere auto-ethnographic reflection is at stake in his writing. The process of reflection itself is a form of self-exorcism. This becomes a discernment on the depths of the required transformation required of those racialised as white.

But the importance of such dislocation within Perkinson’s proposal requires our attention and underlies every part of his work. I describe this here by looking at its two parts: the importance of the material body in a conceptual engagement with racism and the importance of (at least some) urban spaces in imperial America as place where the critique of whiteness is raised. Jointly this focuses attention on the particular move of a white male theologian into urban Detroit. The coming sections will explore different aspects of the transformation he then explores out of this dislocation.

Perkinson’s work constantly emphasises a bodily engagement that goes beyond (and comes before) the intellectual interrogation of texts. Quite specifically for our purposes, although with implications far beyond, black theology cannot be engaged as a textual tradition alone. Black theology in the United States follows on a long history of a particular political performance which calls out whiteness as also an embodied racial performance (Perkinson, 2004, pp. 42-47).

In part, his work calls out a white academic establishment entranced by Foucault on the logic of power, yet failing to grasp the opportunity to learn from those whose very survival depends on understanding this logic. But such learning requires a lifetime of bodily closeness and sharing of life. His work is a constant attempt at finding theoretical and methodological clarity on what is learned in such an embodied pedagogic experience (Perkinson, 2005, p. xvii; Perkinson, 2004, pp. 209-210).

Important as conceptual engagement with theologies of resistance would be, Perkinson’s entire argument builds on the point that whiteness cannot be critically interrogated in mere conceptual ways – “by remaining in one’s (white) room and ‘thinking thoughts’” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 215). It is reinforced complexities of how space is raced from an early age (Perkinson, 2004, pp. 10-11). The Detroit based confrontation quoted above and reflected upon below is thus already part of a longer history of being confronted with the implications of being white in black spaces in a white racist society.

While there isn’t space to engage his use of exorcism as description of the spiritual work bodies made white need to undergo in relation to whiteness, this is tied with the use of the shamanic that I do discuss below. This does not deny the importance of a theoretical engagement of race. He describes his own postgraduate work as adding theory to embodied experience (Perkinson, 2004, p. 14), and explicitly names the need for a theoretical exploration as well (Perkinson, 2005, p. 17). It is rather a protest against such a theoretical engagement by white academics which is not accompanied by an actual bodily dislocation.

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through the way bodies move in space, and its interrogation, not least its academic interrogation, requires the dislocation of the body of those seeking to both understand and resist the ways in which they are bound to modern whiteness.

The other part of this is that the place where a particularly black political performance finds its most explicit form in modern America is in urban upheaval. The 1992 Los Angeles riots responding to the acquittal of white police officers who beat Rodney King is the explicit moment of upheaval reflected upon in his earlier work (Perkinson, 2004, pp. 9-10; 87-88) but the 1967 Detroit riots, less than a decade before Perkinson’s above mentioned move to Detroit, is never far from his analysis. Detroit is the place in which his body gets transformed.

At least part of this movement of white body into urban black space concerns demographics. “Only a prolonged experience of “reverse minoritization,” in which whites experience occupying the place of the racial “other” without relief for an extended period, could accomplish a full initiation into the deep meaning of race.” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 46) However, as will become clear in every subsequent section, a mere counting of bodies in places, noting the presence of smaller numbers of lighter skinned bodies in spaces occupied by a majority of darker bodies, is but a small, if easily identifiable, part of what he is seeking to explore. Such a refusal to maintain segregated white space is indeed fundamental to dislocating white bodies, but what the rhythms, rituals, practices and commitments are that accompany such movements is as important, and will be unpacked below. What is however key to his proposal at this stage is the temporal dimension of this statement. Even if, again, this alone does not guard against the kind of ontological expansionism introduced earlier, he is clear that the process he describes involves an “extended period” of dislocation, and as will become clear later, this in fact ties with a life-long process.

Yet more than mere demographics are at play. There is a repeated reflection on the particularities of place, the classroom and the basketball court, the dance floor or spoken word stage, with racial codes broken at times resulting in (physical) violence, at times in ridicule. It is those spaces of black cultural production in opposition to whiteness that forms the background for Perkinson’s dislocation. And here again, we see the tension in his approach because there is the constant risk that what in fact happens when white people draw on black creativity is that again black production becomes the fuel for white salvation (Perkinson, 2004, p. 47). Every section below adds layers to an exploration of how Perkinson reflects on such a risky but necessary move, and how white bodies moving in black urban spaces may result in a slow transformation of whiteness without its reproduction.
3.2.2  Dislocating the mind

Important to Perkinson’s emphasis on dislocation is that dislocation, not only physical but always physical as well, is a pre-requisite for “learning to think differently” (Perkinson, 2005, p. xv).

The geographic location of Ecumenical Theological Seminary in downtown Detroit, where Perkinson teaches systematic theology and ethics, is of utmost importance in how students are shaped theologically – not least of this is the terror experienced by white students entering spaces they were socialised to fear (Perkinson, 2004, p. 177). On the other hand, the classroom itself, as space of white formation, should not be underestimated in its ongoing importance (Perkinson, 2004, p. 16), and pose a key challenge to those responsible for teaching (Perkinson, 2004, p. 224)

Perkinson’s more recent work in *Messianism Against Christology* contains extensive exegetical sections. What is important here is not the detailed results of his reading, but rather the way in which he insists on the importance of where we are reading from for what we read and how we read. An emphasis on location, whether social or geographic, as important in our hermeneutics is not strange in itself, but the way in which this is brought down to the ground is up to the present not common. It is quite literally the street-level that becomes important in Perkinson’s work, with quite particular streets and areas around Detroit becoming rich hermeneutical lenses in his work.

Here, and not for the last time, we need to note a particular reading of Charles Long and a positioning in terms of the struggle against colonialism. While Perkinson notes Witvliet with appreciation, yet indicates a lacuna in Witvliet’s work which he (in part) seeks to respond to (Perkinson, 2004, p. 41), I want to trace a later divergence in their work, based on the analysis of Witvliet and his use of Charles Long discussed earlier. This also opens up the deeper dislocation which Perkinson seeks to work through.

Charles Long, in the introduction to Significations, notes different forms of protest by those confronted with Western colonialism:

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135 Sullivan’s later work (Sullivan, 2014) explores how white experiences of fear of black people, even when manifesting in physical form (as Perkinson describes with white students entering the classroom physically shaking from driving through downtown Detroit for the first time), is the result of a process of white racialisation.

136 The reflection on the Heidelberg Project ([https://www.heidelberg.org/](https://www.heidelberg.org/) [accessed 8 October 2017]) is the one of the most extensive examples (Perkinson, 2013, pp. xiii-xviii), but such street-level reflections can be found throughout his work.

137 All of Witvliet’s work on Long was published in Dutch, and presumably Perkinson never read this, and doesn’t consciously respond to it. Yet, the divergence does become particularly clear at exactly this point.
On the one hand, some of these protests demand a continuity of the Western ideals in dealing with them. To some extent, some of these protest movements see a certain normativeness in Western values and are surprised that the Western investigators were not able to discover the primordial structures of these values in their own cultures. In other cases, the protest represents disavowals of all that is associated with the West and idealizes the authenticity of their cultures prior to the contact situation. In still other cases, the attempt is made to come to terms with the contact situation itself as a new form of human creativity. (Long, 1999, pp. 5-6)

One important distinction between Witvliet and Perkinson’s work, illuminating an important choice in the ongoing work of theological engagement with Long’s “theologies opaque”, or the plethora of diverse contextual theologies, and for our purposes the critical interrogation of whiteness and theology, is captured by how they focus on different protest options presented by Long. For Witvliet, it is indeed such a normativity in “Western values”, but specifically in how those at the underside of modernity reveal the contradictions of the Enlightenment and call for a reformation of the Enlightenment in order to become consistent with its own ideals, that opens up the possibility of an engagement. Perkinson, on the other hand, focuses his attention on the second and third possibility Long presents – those remaining signs of a world not taken over by the project of ‘civilisation’ as the last surviving example of the kind of sustainability needed for the future, or those gazing back at the civilising mission of modernity and insisting on confronting its monstrosity with an alternative creative imagination – even while in all these instances, again following Long, such responses are indeed situated within the context of colonialism in as much as they imply a response to this disruption.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o, in what has become a classic text, decades ago described the need for Decolonising the Mind (wa Thiong’o, 1986), and Perkinson’s work is to a large extent an attempt at illuminating the implications of such decolonisation of the mind for those racialised as white. In Wa Thiong’o’s work this started from the premise that literature studies in Africa should start with African literature, including literature in African languages, and study global literature in relation to this tradition of African literature, as opposed to studying African literature constantly in terms of the English canon. Said in the terms I use here, Wa Thiong’o’s work is an attempt at dealing with the dislocation caused by colonialism through an explicit emphasis on epistemologies “of the rest” (localised in various particular forms all throughout the colonised world). Yet for those who are racialised as white, which among other things implies a centuries-long formation in terms of the self, a different process is called for, one which requires a disruption of the white presumption of wholeness; dislocation of the mind.
This inevitably involves a shift in academic interlocution – with Du Bois, Fanon, Gilroy, or Long becoming not voices from a “different” context being studied, but rather the main theoretical impetus for understanding what it means to be white in this colonised world – to understand the context of whiteness. Key to Perkinson’s argument is that black theology is not theology from a different context, but exactly theology emerging from the context of white racism, speaking to the very context that those who are white inhabit, but inhabit in such a way that we remain unable to see it for what it is – whiteness is, after all, exactly that which allows some to live without the need to face the terror through which they sustain themselves (Perkinson, 2004, p. 41). Yet, this dislocation should not be reduced to a mere shift in academic interlocution, but in fact, points to the limits of academic intellectual work, and draws epistemic attention to readings of the world emerging outside the very centres of knowledge production.

It is this commitment that brings us to a connection between dislocated bodies and minds. The way race functions cannot be studied through mere engagement with academic texts. A key contribution that Perkinson’s work makes is in exploring the cultural aspects of working against whiteness. It is not that economic and material aspects of struggle are downplayed, but rather an insistence on exploring this broader cultural and social construction of whiteness and how it is being challenged by hip-hop and indigenous voices. From Detroit, it is hip-hop and local spoken word communities, which introduce not merely a transformation of concepts but of bodily rhythms and the working of words. On the other hand, in his later work, it is the very ground itself, the rhythms of ecological systems – with hunter-gatherer, pastoral nomad, and subsistence farming communities being the last remaining reminder of what such a life in rhythm would mean – that calls forth a different reading of the times.

There is a parallel to the earlier mentioned tension concerning white male ontological expansionism and white appropriation - here appropriating black creativity and commercialising this for (white) capital accumulation, or else taking up indigenous wisdom and knowledge to become its ultimate protagonist. Again, Perkinson is painfully aware of this tension, and within his critical reflection on whiteness, we find a lifetime of interrogation of this problem – underlying much of the discussion below.

These tensions in Perkinson’s work, both in relation to black space and black creativity, is exactly what his work calls us to hold. He proposes no easy route out of this, and even as we deepen the analysis of his work in the following sections, they do not go away. In his own words: “there is a razor’s edge that must be negotiated by white people for the foreseeable future in America – a difficult but rewarding
journey between the twin dangers of self-sufficient “self-ignorance” on the one hand, and “other-dependent” appropriation and exploitation, on the other.” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 47)

The tension is soteriological. Every attempt at seeking white salvation as another turn to the self and reproduces the very white Christian imagination traced in chapter 1. However, drawing on black creative and intellectual work for white salvation also risks a colonial process of reducing black bodies into material for white salvation. The route forward in Perkinson’s view requires a pedagogy which allows for the discomfort of black anger and laughter, yet refuses to hide its own white social existence but rather commits to doing the work of opening up to become more than white. It is to this confrontation that I turn next.

3.3 Confrontation: the power which illuminated the terror

As I argued earlier, a key aspect of Perkinson’s work is trying to reflect on the complexities of white bodies moving in black spaces, noting and disrupting the ways in which these practices reproduce whiteness and seeking to illuminate the possibilities of white transformation. Central to this is dealing with confrontation. Dislocation is seldom discomforting if not accompanied by moments, more specifically in this case a life-long process, of confrontation. Here Perkinson’s work diverges sharply from that of Witvliet’s empty circle. Thus as an alternative to the empty circle, I explore Perkinsons’s face-to-face confrontation in the first part, and then briefly sketch how his ongoing emphasis on terror relates to the undoing of whiteness.

3.3.1 Face-to-face

I want to unpack what happens in Detroit further by focusing on Perkinson’s use of ‘the gaze’; a confrontation face-to-face. A number of theoretical descriptions of how race functions reflect on what happens in white eyes: the look. Fanon and Du Bois are the classic examples of this, and it is a close reading of Du Bois in particular which forms a key theoretical foundation of Perkinson’s work (Perkinson, 2004, pp. 87-114). My interest here is however primarily on a reverted gaze, on what Perkinson described as “looking into black eyes and not deny the reflection” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 3). This will open

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138 While there is not space to engage this more thoroughly here, I suspect Perkinson touches a key nerve when repeatedly noting that the white fear of being laughed at or ridiculed by black people – should we ever not be able to draw on our whiteness in encounter with black people – might at times run deeper than the fear of black anger. As he puts it in the context of the USA, in the face of black anger, white people do still own the police (Perkinson, 2004, p. 199).

139 I do not here argue for an explicit rejection, since Witvliet’s empty circle forms part of his work only published in Dutch, and not reflected in Perkinson’s work, but rather, that at this point we see two distinct approaches to white engagement with black theology, approaches which are potentially typological.
up an engagement which is distinct from Witfliet’s empty middle and circled gathering: a meeting face-to-face (Perkinson, 2004, p. 115), with confrontation as a necessary medium for engagement of equals.

The intersection of race and soteriology has entered the argument throughout chapter 1, and while this connection could be traced through different histories than those already presented, Perkinson’s point that “the connection between salvation and racialisation has never been an “outside” imposition of a theological category on a nontheological subject” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 53) should at this point require little further justification. Whiteness, Perkinson will argue throughout his work, “has functioned in modernity as a surrogate form of “salvation”, a mythic presumption of wholeness” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 3, emphasis mine). Wholeness is the key description through which Perkinson will seek to reflect on soteriology in his work, and it is this presumed wholeness which exists by way of the utter destruction of the world – both of darker peoples and entire ecologies (Perkinson, 2015, pp. 93-96) – that needs confronting and outing.

In the soteriological focus found throughout Perkinson’s work most of “the emphasis … is on the formal logic rather than the particular symbolic contents of any given soteriology” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 66). Quite specifically, in particular as it concerns whiteness, Perkinson is picking up James Cone’s reading of black power and the soteriological implications of noting Christ as black and probing its meaning for white people:

It is not Cone’s purpose to try and work out the soteriological meaning of blackness as a Christological title for white people in their whiteness. Indeed, he would probably resist any suggestion that he do so as yet another attempt to appropriate black creativity for white benefit. (Cone has already been roundly criticized, within black religious scholarship, for implicitly reinforcing white theological norms too much as it is). But the question remains in the air. If Cone’s reconstruction of blackness as a Christological title is taken seriously in its claim to be theologically – and not just politically or psychologically – motivated, what is its soteriological meaning for white people? Can white people be saved by a black Christ? Must they? If so, how? (Perkinson, 2004, p. 29)

The key claim that I want to open up here is that such a soterio-logic implies confrontation. And the question facing white theologians is found in the relation of white salvation and such confrontation.

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140 While these words originally refer to a particular section of White Theology, they hold true for his work that follows as well.
Here I expand on the confrontation, briefly noting its soteriological implication for being black in a white racist world, but with the intent to focus attention on the position of whiteness in such a confrontation. In the subsequent sections, various soteriological lines will then be developed.

Two points early in his argument illuminate the logic. On the one hand he argues that “I am positing that a soteriologic is at work (whether consciously or less-than-consciously) any time concrete forms of identification are being produced with respect to particular political options that are willing to risk the suffering or causing of death for the sake of achieving some form of projected wholeness” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 66).

On the other hand, by tracing through Hegel to Fanon the question of consciousness, he picks up the insistence that any possibility for recognising the slave as equal requires confrontation. From Hegel, he learns that the question of recognition and self-consciousness “realizes its epochal moment in the choice either to risk death for the sake of freedom or to submit to bondage for the sake of security” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 66). This is the point that black power in mid-twentieth century United States of America insists on, and which Perkinson, through the eyes of Fanon, notes as hope. The distinction is between a (black) consciousness not wrought through confrontation, whose gaze continues to be met with indifference and paternalism, and the confrontation appearing on the scene in the second half of the twentieth century USA which Fanon described with “it is a monument of battle, but it is one topped by ‘white and black hand in hand’” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 77, quoting Fanon, emphasis is Perkinson’s).

While whiteness operated according to the mentioned soterio-logic in its dealing death for the mythic construction of its own wholeness, it is in a no-saying (to the point of risking death) confronting whiteness that Perkinson wants to raise the question to white people. Perkinson’s work is not blind to the ambivalence of militant blackness, and how it can be mobilised in ways which might be either for ill of for good (Perkinson, 2004, p. 84). What he is however insisting, is that in black power whiteness in

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141 That such a confrontation, born from centuries of colonial violence, at times also involve physical violence is not denied by Perkinson. The trauma of learning about the way spaces were raced as a middle-school learner is palpable in his description of at times physically abusive exchanges in black spaces; Perkinson recalls the violence of breaking the codes of both white and black spaces as a kid. However, these build on very different histories of how race and space intersect, and function quite differently in his argument. It is the latter which relates to my argument here (Perkinson, 2005, pp. xviii-xxii). How to make sense of this, and learn from this, without condoning such violence and while noting that this should also be engaged critically, becomes a lifelong engagement.

142 There is a gendered tension in Perkinson’s work that needs to be noted here. Perkinson is constantly aware that the no-saying he describes often take a particularly masculinist form (Perkinson, 2004, pp. 78-81), at times perpetuating an explicitly sexist discourse (Perkinson, 2004, p. 23). Yet, he also notes that it is particularly the black male that occupies the position of terror in white imagination, and for that reason needs to be taken seriously in
the USA is called out, and that particular confrontation is one which white theologians need to take up seriously if whiteness is to be thought through theologically. “White people were finally, briefly, made to look in the mirror of race and confront a gaze that looked back, but did not look alike” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 85). What the confrontation calls out is that whiteness roams the earth as terror upon all those deemed to be constituted of a darker complexion.

We should not read an easy opposite between confrontation and reconciliation into this analysis. Indeed, Perkinson, like many others, is hesitant about easy calls for reconciliation and sceptical about any attempt at claiming a post-racial world, at least in this lifetime. But whether in drawing on Fanon’s ultimate hope for harmony between black and white people (Perkinson, 2004, p. 75), or invoking Martin Luther King Jr.’s Beloved Community (Perkinson, 2013, p. 188), Perkinson does seek to probe the possibility of a life of intimacy (to use terminology from chapter 1) or reciprocity (Perkinson, 2005, p. 176). What he is however doing is following those who insist that any such possibility happens not by drawing away from confrontation, but rather by going through confrontation, and working out what this would imply (also theologically) for white people.

### 3.3.2 Facing terror

So what does such a confrontation mean for white people? More specifically, what is the soteriological implications for those being confronted by a look that looks right through us (Perkinson, 2004, p. 115), a clairvoyant sharpness of eye (Perkinson, 2004, p. 97) that sees whiteness for what it truly is? It is not merely the perceived anger that is at play here, although that surely is important, but rather the depth of knowledge that oppressed peoples bring into such a gaze – knowing what whiteness is, intimately knowing its terror in full.

What the confrontation reveals, and what Perkinson uses to name whiteness as a problem of spiritual proportions,¹⁴³ is the idea of ‘possession’: “Blond hair and blue eyes, it became apparent, could any possibility of dismantling whiteness (Perkinson, 2004, pp. 173-175), and therefore makes a particular choice to hear this confrontation in a sustained manner, and refuse a gendered critique which would allow a sidestepping of the confrontation. Perkinson’s choice should not be rejected too quickly. Such a gender separation can indeed too easily work provide white license to delegitimise the public confrontation of white supremacy, or silence the public confrontation which black women historically presented to white (patriarchal) supremacy. I therefore merely note the choice here, and follow it as indeed important, if not without theoretical and political complexity, as Perkinson would repeatedly recognise.

¹⁴³ I refrain from here referring to his language of exorcism as “just a metaphor”, or even as “metaphor”. If it is a metaphor, then it is not clear what the metaphor would be for. Rather, Perkinson use the language of spiritual powers as social description to probe the depths of the problem. Here is also draws explicitly on the Pauline language of principalities and powers to describe whiteness (Perkinson, 2004, pp. 103, 240).
reference more than just cultural privilege. They could also signal spiritual possession.” (Perkinson, 2004, pp. 52, see also p. 188). Those low on melanin were possessed during the process of colonialism and modernity with the spirit of whiteness.

The confrontation reveals a need for exorcism. But exorcism here refers to the possibility of change. Whiteness, as possessing spirit, could perhaps be “driven out”. Part of what he does is to revert the gaze by using the very descriptions which colonial mission Christianity invoked to name ritual and spiritual practices encountered to now name the white supremacy that Christian supremacy helped produce. But it is not just reversed repetition of the Christian language of the demonic, nor careless escalation of metaphors. Rather, what he is doing is to employ the work of African-American religious scholarship to focus critical attention on whiteness as a theological problem. The particular aspect which I turn attention to here is his use of shamanism, which brings the previous section on confrontation into focus. Constructively this also informs the work needed in the outing of supremacy.

It is often said that Perkinson’s work is a response to or appropriation of James Cone’s black theology (Carter, 2004, p. 530; Snyman, 2008, p. 12). This certainly seems to be in line with Perkinson’s own claim: “More formally, this book is a response to the gauntlet thrown down by Black Theologian James Cone” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 2). However, a closer reading of his work, in particular going beyond White Theology, see him aligning himself more closely with some of the critical responses to (not against, but rather beyond) Cone. For example, he briefly adds that his own work is an attempt to pick up a critique of Victor Anderson on Cone, but in relation to whiteness and white people (Perkinson, 2004, p. 37). More importantly for what follows below, it is again Charles Long that has the greater theoretical influence on Perkinson’s work. But as already noted, Long is here read in a different direction from what Witvliet does.

The importance of Long is explicitly recognised in Perkinson’s early work: “Long’s work contributes to and informs the question being investigated here in so many ways; the basic theme could almost be said to amount to an inquiry into race and shamanism under tutelage to Charles Long as himself shaman extraordinaire.” (Perkinson, 2005, p. 57)

A brief comparison in the indexes of his work will make it clear that it is Long, not Cone, who is of deeper significance to his work. Long is of key importance in how he positions his work theoretically, and looking at Long also reveal particular epistemological choices which I already opened up in the earlier discussion on Witvliet.

While published in 2005, this forms part of the collection of essays accompanying Perkinson’s 2004 monograph, and the chapter is from work presented in 1999 (Perkinson, 2005, p. 43)
Long provides the conceptual clarity to probe the depth of the impossibility of whiteness saving itself. Whiteness emerges in the colonial encounter as a “denial structure”, placing darker bodies between itself and the terrible, while simultaneously effecting absolute terror on the globe (Perkinson, 2004, pp. 127-128; 175-176). The ‘West and the rest’ indeed differs, in that, reworking Otto’s notion of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinosum*, the ‘West’ knows God only as *fascinans* (Perkinson, 2004, p. 129). Colonialism, for Long, is religious in as much as it leads not merely to the destruction of bodies, but of the very mythic structure of indigenous communities. Oppressed communities have over generations done the work of ritually and communally facing terror, acknowledging death and human contingency and struggling these into creative responses of life.

Here the key point is that in contrast whiteness is constituted as a denial of the very thing which needs to be faced if white people are to work through the question of race: general human contingency and the death produced by whiteness historically. Whiteness is the not knowing of terror by effecting terror onto mostly darker bodies. The epistemological commitment to oppressed communities is then not a mere ethical stance, arguing that the ‘West’ has had its moment in the sun and that the time has come for ‘others’ to speak, even if such would be an appropriate ethic. Rather, it is a conviction that the colonial and modern epistemological space that produced whiteness does not have the mythic resources of dealing with terror experienced or effected. In Perkinson’s words: “In this sense, white people are beholden to communities of color for mythic sustenance in the age of the individual” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 129); and his later work will in a similar way insist on being beholden to hunter gatherer, pastoral nomad, and subsistence farming communities for visions of sustainability in the face of global ecological catastrophe (Perkinson, 2013).

For Perkinson key to reading the response is the notion of the shamanic. It is used to phenomenologically describe black responses to whiteness, and most specifically to how this comes out in confrontation as in part having shamanic implication for white people. Noting this will allow us to revisit the question of salvation (wholeness) in the final sections. Perkinson repeatedly returns to shamanism as a kind of “trope” (Perkinson, 2005, p. xviii).146 Key to reading shamanism here is the reminder that W.E.B. Du Bois’ “veil” or “second sight” “is itself a veiled reference to being born with a “caul” (a gauzy film covering the eyes) in African-American culture – sign of peculiar shamanistic ability to see beyond the ordinary” (Perkinson, 2005, p. 45). Taking it further, he points to arguments that the

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146 Any such (Western) study of shamanism needs a keen awareness of the ethical demands of any study of particular shamanisms (Perkinson, 2005, p. 51).
taking up of “blackness” (a white category of initially derogatory meaning) and remaking it with new qualities\(^\text{147}\) reflects a particular kind of shamanistic activity – homeopathically “subduing the demon by wrestling it into a serviceable form “inside” one’s body” (Perkinson, 2005, p. 65). The point is not that every black individual is a shaman, but rather that under colonial and post-colonial oppression the black community forges blackness into a “communal identification that functions shamanically” (Perkinson, 2005, p. 75). The argument Perkinson tries to make is however not a simple extension that white people need to appropriate this shamanistic work of blackness in the outing of whiteness, or renounce whiteness in exchange for easy identification with such a blackness. The work proposed require a more nuanced relationship to blackness.

First, there is no responsible white response to white racism in the United States of America possible if this does not give primacy of voice to a blackness which “calls out” whiteness. The pedagogy Perkinson propose is however always twofold. On the one hand, it involves an openness to the rhythms of black creativity, allowing it to transform white bodies. On the other hand, and possibly more importantly, in taking up Long’s description of colonialism as \textit{tremendous}, Perkinson wants to argue that what is needed is that white people learn ourselves to face the terror, not least as it exists in ourselves (Perkinson, 2004, p. 117). Here our guide is those who have for generations worked out the epistemologies, rituals and aesthetics which makes such a confrontation possible (Perkinson, 2004, p. 129). The work required is not merely hearing the question blackness poses and turning back to the self in search of a moral response, nor is it to merely duplicate blackness in white bodies. Rather, it is a pedagogy which both requires giving primacy to black creativity and indigenous wisdom\(^\text{148}\) including adopting it in the formation of a different interaction with the world, but simultaneously noting that it requires a conscious response from white people which emerges from noting the particularity of being white in a world shaped by European colonial expansionism and its constituting racism.

In dialogue with Witvliet the important point here is however that Perkinson’s work is not an attempt at trying to hear a critique on the Enlightenment, and then to reform it towards its moral potential. Rather, it is a life-long process of learning to see whiteness and colonialism from the perspective of those who were made to suffer its effects, constantly arguing that any possibility to find a way beyond whiteness will emerge from the underside of modernity\(^\text{149}\). This is at the heart of Perkinson’s reading of Long; that

\(^{147}\) Here referring to United States equivalents to South African black consciousness work.
\(^{148}\) The first receiving more emphasis in his 2004 and 2005 books, the second in his 2013 and 2015 books.
\(^{149}\) This he elsewhere described as “reverse hermeneusis”, “[taking] in critique from those positioned subaltern to one’s own position and programming” (Perkinson, 2015, p. 16).
colonialism was not merely a violation of physical bodies, but the annihilation of “the mythic membranes of meaning”. A fundamental distinction here occurs between “the West and the rest”, in that ‘Western mythology’ did not experience such a rupturing (at least not immediately). However, this very distinction is what underpins the fact that only those on the receiving end of such a mythic annihilation fully know the reality of what occurred, of what the modern world truly is. Lastly, he picks up from Long that such a mythic rupture requires a ‘ritual reconstruction’, ‘transfiguring violence into vitality’ (Perkinson, 2005, pp. 89-91). What we see is therefore, giving epistemic primacy to those who know this modern world best (meaning, those made to undergo its terror) and focusing on the creative capacity (not in the least ritual capacity) to bring about life in the face of death.

3.4 Relocation: towards wholeness

This argument inevitably moves too quickly, a text such as this not allowing the appropriate time to note the depth of the crisis. Yet our attention inevitably must turn towards Perkinson’s core question already noted: what then of white salvation? What does blackness have to say towards the whiteness which is the constant object of reflection in this study? More specifically, is there any possibility of wholeness which might emerge from such dislocation and confrontation as briefly explored above? Tracing this under the notion of relocation does not imply some temporally later bodily movement. In fact, dislocation, confrontation, and relocation might actually refer to very similar moments, noting different aspects of what it does. What I do however trace is the extent to which Perkinson envisions the possibility of white bodies to be located differently in a world colonised, and doing this by further expanding the question of salvation, and briefly touching on how it relates to ethics and politics.

3.4.1 The limits of white salvation

A key critique against Perkinson’s work needs to be briefly described and his potential response explored in order to find our way towards the key description of the theological and ethical conundrum of whiteness that he names.

Carter summarises Perkinson’s approach by describing his baptismal commitment as a counterhegemonic initiation. What Perkinson is arguing for is that baptism calls for the expansion of my body to allow it to be occupied by another. In particular, baptism of white people should imply their being possessed with the other, in order to live counter-hegemonically in openness to the other. The

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150 Key to this is the use of Rudolf Otto’s *mysterium tremendum et fascinosum*, and the argument that whiteness functions as terror, and that white people need to learn what it means to face the tremendous.
problem Carter wants to illuminate is that this assumes and reproduces a hegemonic-counterhegemonic opposition and, drawing on the same arguments traced earlier in response to Witvliet’s reading of Buber, it, in fact, reinforces the “I” by subsuming the other into the I (Carter, 2004, pp. 536-538).

While focusing on different aspects of Perkinson’s work, the PhD thesis of Chris Driscoll makes a similar argument. Perkinson’s reversal of whiteness, from the position of god to the demonic, in fact, continues to reproduce whiteness as, in Driscoll’s words, “god-idol” – now as demonic (Driscoll, 2014, pp. 87-89). The problem is that whiteness inevitably gets reproduced in the attempts at disrupting its power of systemic oppression.

Important is that both Carter and Driscoll point out these problems while they are in general agreement with Perkinson’s broader political and theological project. Their critique forms part of attempts at articulating a more fundamental end to whiteness. That said, I believe a response can be drawn from Perkinson’s work which gets to the heart of his theological, political and ethical proposal for what it means to live and act and do theology responsibly as white Christians.

There is a fundamental tension which Perkinson repeatedly suggest we cannot get beyond for as long as this world is marked by the ongoing effects of colonialism and white racism. At its heart, it is a tension between soteriology and solidarity as these relate to the question of whiteness. Understanding this tension brings us to the heart of Perkinson’s response to the soteriological questions drawn from Cone’s black theology.

In what should be anticipated at this point, given the work described in chapter 1 as well as up to this point in chapter 2, Perkinson’s one key insistence is that whiteness “cannot be saved, only foresworn and fought against, in lifelong struggle” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 215). But the depth of the insistence becomes clear only when we note that there is nothing innocent in his use of ‘saved’ at this point. A few pages later Perkinson comes to the heart of the matter: “The conundrum of race is such that there is no salvation for whites as white and there is no solidarity with others except as white” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 223).

Theologically Perkinson takes up the work of James Cone to insist on a reversal of colonial soteriology: “the greatest uncertainty about salvation must now be predicated not of dark skin, but of light”
This does not imply any aesthetic shorthand for doing the difficult work of soteriological discernment – thus the reversal is not a reproduction of the theological process described in chapter 1 – but rather a commitment to discerning the work of Christ in contemporary society in that place that Christ took in Roman occupied Palestine.

The critique is nuanced: in as much as those of us identified as white remains white, there is indeed no salvation. Yet that is not due to the aesthetics involved in the identification, but rather due to the theological meaning of whiteness in modernity and the way lighter skinned bodies generally continue to draw benefit from past and present violence and terror bestowed on others as recourses were extracted. Simultaneously, and for these exact reasons, any participation in the work of dismantling whiteness requires, for those who are white, a recognition of how we are situated within the system of whiteness. The task is tricky: how to name and expose whiteness “while simultaneously deconstructing the very pretention to (ontological) reality that is the idolatrousness of the supremacy in the first place” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 37).

The goal is clear: whiteness must end. “There is no salvation for whites as white” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 223). But such an end does not come through renouncing race on an individual level. Yet as the previous sections made clear, layer upon layer, Perkinson’s entire argument unfolds as a deep conviction that white people cannot bring whiteness to an end, while that is exactly the responsibility that needs to be taken up (Perkinson, 2015, p. 197). The resources required to end whiteness is not those of white people, and white people cannot claim these from others – doing so would be just another repetition of a white right to that produced by others.

This logic briefly leads Perkinson to draw on language at the heart of a Christian soteriological vision: any redoing of white identity can only be “grace from without” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 215), as part of a process of being drawn into (initiated or baptised, in Perkinson’s language) communion with others. And while
not expanded upon, the brief mention of “grace” is key, because at the heart Perkinson’s argument on salvation should also be heard as a rejection of any “salvation by works”. There is no amount of anti-racist activity, no amount of struggle against racism, no amount of renouncement of whiteness that can be presented as “payment” for receiving salvation if the blackness of Christ does indeed have soteriological implication for those who are white.

3.4.2 Becoming more than white

If any claims of a personal move outside of whiteness for those who are racialised as white is to be met with suspicion (if not rejection), what possibilities of salvation remain, to use Perkinson’s frame, for those who are white?

As briefly hinted towards in the last paragraph of the previous section, while a clear moral and political stance against white racism is at heart to Perkinson’s work, he at no point allows this to do the work of salvation. In response to the possibility within Cone’s work that lighter skinned people might become “black [persons] in white skins” he writes: “I would never claim such for myself nor, in my hearing, allow other whites to make a similar claim (about themselves or about me) without challenge” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 19). In raising questions not dissimilar to classic theological debates on justification, he first seeks to show how high the price of such a moral commitment which might lead to a leaving behind of whiteness would be, and then argues that even if the struggle is raised to the point of becoming a physical target, that would not result in any magical change in how we are situated within this aesthetically determined regime. Important as “a lifetime of unrelenting struggle against the ideology of white supremacy” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 19) might be, the possibility of salvation for those on the lighter side of modernity is not found here, but always remain an act of grace, not an award earned.

For white people recognising that there can be no solidarity in the struggle against white supremacy in any way other than as white, while there can be no salvation as white, the possibility that remains requires a slower and more modest subversion of white identity. The theoretical key to Perkinson’s proposal is in part the reminder that after everything white people are not only white, and can become more than white. While whiteness cannot be shed like an outdated skin, who we are can be expanded in ongoing community. Joined with the ethical and political commitment to a lifetime of struggle, and in particular, to join in a black-led struggle against racism is a lifetime of being formed by others.

Here we need to return to Detroit. Because while Detroit functions as a place of dislocation of white bodies formed with a mythic – perhaps we should add heretical – presumption of wholeness, post-
apocalyptic Detroit is more than confrontation, it is also relocation in Perkinson’s imagination. Detroit is among other things today symbol of experimental urban farming. Vacant lots are turned to food. Whether the nutrients will add up to form an urban community living sustainably within its own borders is perhaps not the immediate concern, rather, what Perkinson discerns is that urban and wildland might just meet again (Perkinson, 2013, p. 179), and Detroit becomes an icon of sustainable cities (Perkinson, 2013, p. 20). The critical irony should not be missed here. Spoken in a context where “sustainability” is presented as a core objective of all major cities, Perkinson presents a vision which suspects that it is in listening in places away from the brokers of power that 7 billion humans, most of whom are living in cities, might find a way of living in rhythm with local ecologies. This too involves a slow disruption of white control over space and a formation in becoming more than white.

As has been repeatedly pointed out up to this point, there is a constant insistence that there is no right to such a drawing on others for undoing whiteness. Yet simultaneously there is an insistence that white people as white cannot save ourselves – any claim to the latter would indeed be a reproduction of the very soterio-logic outlined in chapter 1. What remains is a constant openness towards others, accepting the pedagogy as gift where it is presented. The challenge is particular to white people. While those made black by white supremacy go about the task of recreating identity against its capturing by a racial imagination, the task for white people is distinctly different. In Perkinson’s imagination, this involves a rejection of the white presumption of wholeness and a lifetime of being fractured, becoming more than one. The possibility of wholeness is in such a fracturing (Perkinson, 2004, p. 250) – a slow death to whiteness as the gift received through a pedagogy which baptises us into a life formed by others.

In the end, we are left with a tension not strange to Christian reflection: “The effort is the salvation. Even though it is given from without.” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 250) A lifetime of struggle against whiteness, or listening to the wisdom of those on the underside of modernity, of putting the body on the line protesting the oppression of others, of living and moving in spaces where whiteness is not the norm, does not bring about salvation for those who are white. What it does is to slowly disrupt the presumption of a right to salvation which constitutes whiteness, and opens us up to that which comes from without. Grace is not cheap, it has cost the lives of millions of colonised people and their subsequent slow work of reworking a life of oppression into a commitment to life. But yet, grace cannot be earned, only received, acknowledged, and allowed to do its work. In response, a struggle for racial justice is a debt of gratitude (Perkinson, 2004, p. 20).
3.5 The double-bind of anti-racism and salvation

Perkinson’s work intentionally leaves us with a multitude of seemingly impossible double-binds. In his own words, “the paradox is the pedagogue” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 223). There is an impossibility of any white attempt at overcoming whiteness which Perkinson attempts to bring home by both the weight of his theoretical argument as well as the rhythm of his presentation – indeed, the rhythmic prose of this “poet by desire” (Perkinson, 2015, p. 89) is no accident but rather a conscious attempt at recognising the black creative community informing his work and reading a performative ‘extra’ found in black presentation back into his theoretical work on black theology (Perkinson, 2004, p. 44). The intention is to leave the (white) reader feeling the weight of the situation and refuse any easy way out.

But weighty as his words are, his point is not merely adding better theory. The redoing of white identity “cannot be accomplished simply by remaining in one’s (white) room and ‘thinking thoughts’” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 215). The material dislocation of white bodies is also quite explicitly not that found in diverse “talk shops”. His critique on Witvliet is in part that Witvliet’s ecumenical focus is mostly reduced to reading black texts – although he immediately recognised that (at least at the time of writing The Way of the Black Messiah) this might have been the only option available to European theologians (Perkinson, 2004, p. 41).

Perkinson’s key contribution is perhaps not in the detailed analysis of black theology done by a white theologian, but rather in the conscious tracing of a white posture which does not withdraw from black anger, while also not rejecting that he does embody what this anger is directed at. It is not an easy claim to following a black Messiah or receiving salvation from a black Messiah, but it is an insistence that if salvation is possible for those who are white is can come from no other place.

The unresolved conundrums serve as a reminder that the problem of whiteness is not one which any white individual will resolve during a lifetime. Stepping into black space for a sustained period of time will remain a requirement while it simultaneously risks reproducing white ontological expansionism. Drawing on black creativity will remain the only source for challenging whiteness even while there is no right to make a claim to this wisdom. White ethical and political commitment to a struggle against supremacy will remain non-negotiable even while it does not promise salvation. And salvation will only be possible on the other side of death to whiteness, even while for those who are white any possibility of committing to solidarity in struggle will require a recognition of current embeddedness in whiteness.
4 Ways of white response: Witvliet and Perkinson

There does seem to be a deep connection between Witvliet’s insistence on the absolute otherness of the other, vision of an empty middle as place of encounter, and an inevitable result that white identity will be retained – *albeit* in a more ethical form and equal in relation to others. In contrast, it is exactly Perkinson’s insistence on an inevitable interweaving of identities, and acknowledgement of the need for confrontation, which allows an insistence on the end of whiteness. While both envision a communion inequality, Witvliet’s respectful insistence on difference inevitably allows for the difference coded as white to also take a place at the table, while Perkinson’s experiment in drawing the other into the self in fact see such communion not in equality between white and black, but in the end of race as an ontological marker.

But we shouldn’t step into the trap of setting up a simple opposition between the work of Witvliet and Perkinson. I read them together in this chapter because they provide us with key examples of white theologians taking black theology of liberation as key interlocutor. In neither case should we infer an easy evaluation of a patronising charity awarded to black theologies. In that sense, they are in the first instance both counter voices to the dominant streams of modern white theologies. It is exactly due to these similarities that we can here find examples of different possibilities in white theologians’ response to a history of white theology implicated in the thorough remaking of the world discussed in chapter 1.

From the analysis above we see them part ways epistemologically in how sources for imagining a more just society in dialogue with a global community are drawn upon. Witvliet takes the route of reforming his own European Enlightenment tradition, or rather of finding its emancipatory potential while rejecting the oppressive mirror thoroughly intertwined into this potential. The impossibility of such an attempt is neither ignored nor rejected, but rather the route is considered the only option in refusing growing racism and xenophobia in Europe. As a white European theologian, he brings this tradition into ecumenical dialogue, into a dialogue where it should become just one more possible trajectory – in equal relation to others.

Perkinson is far more hesitant to assume such a possibility, and his more fundamental interrogation of the entire project of ‘civilisation’ leads him to give epistemological priority to those voices from the underside of modernity and the outside of citied traditions, allowing for the possibility that these might not merely illuminate the dark side of his own white formation, but serve as guides in what might be the
alternative to these – an alternative which needs to over time form white people into something more than white, even while no right to claiming such epistemological resources can be made.

Yet if the limitation of Witvliet’s approach is that it cannot get out of the conundrum that the very tradition which produced modern racism is drawn upon for its critique, then the limitation with Perkinson seem to be that it risks severing the required overlap in language and epistemology needed to form those who supposedly are the audience of his work – white Americans.

Witvliet seeks to find a way to reform European political and moral discourse into one which would allow for greater freedom, equality, and solidarity, with implications for example where questions of migration are concerned. He seeks a theological and ethical discourse which has enough traction within a European context to be heard and to allow white Europeans to find an alternative to certain dangerous developments that he reads in the context.

There is no attempt by Perkinson to ‘reform’ white America.\(^{154}\) There is rather a pattern in his work of focusing attention on individual white males that have broken ranks or “gone wild”.\(^{155}\) While the political vision that Perkinson proposes throughout is deeply communal and constantly working from within solidarity with those at the edge of modern civilisation and the underside of colonialism, the ethical project as far as those who are white is concerned becomes deeply individual. It involves an individual white commitment to a lifetime of solidarity in black-led struggle.

Without implying some clear distinction, what it presents is a particular tension between a fundamental critique of whiteness on the one hand and finding sufficient ethical overlap to assist white people in the quest for true humanity. The challenge is not unique to race and might be framed as tensions between social critique and pastoral concern, between critical analysis and political effectiveness. The question is

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\(^{154}\) In one moment he does seem to propose that such a time might come – if not for “America” then at least for some broader tradition which currently might be described as “white”. In dialogue with Ruth Frankenberg he notes a prioritisation and states: “The task for now is not one of retrieving the “good” aspects of white heritage” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 163, my emphasis). The temporal statement seem to indicate a future moment in which such a good aspect of white heritage – whatever might be implied with good or with white heritage – might get priority. However, such an option is not part of his work, nor is this considered a possibility of his lifetime. Even if a theoretical possibility, it does not impact on his own theological and political work.

\(^{155}\) See the extensive reflections on Jim Corbett in learning to live of the land (Perkinson, 2013, pp. 33-36) or John Brown in abolitionist march (Perkinson, 2004, pp. 202-210). I have not here reflected on the potential implication of the gendered nature of these examples, but it should be noted.
however how to envision and facilitate the transformation of those who are drawn together as white without reproducing that very whiteness.

No doubt these are not clear lines. However, they open up key choices made in interrogating whiteness and finding a responsible white response to the history of white colonialism and white theology. The main point at this stage is to note that these choices are being made. Not that they imply a clear distinction, or that overlap is not inevitable, but rather that white theologians seeking to stand in solidarity with black anti-racist theology or in protest of whiteness in theology have done so taking different routes. In taking seriously the voice of black theology in South Africa we could assume that where consciously white responses to whiteness are found it will produce a range of white attempts at developing theologies that seek to oppose racism or question the normative whiteness in theology.

5 Conclusion
This chapter focused attention on two white theologians outside of South Africa, one from continental Europe and another from North America, recognised as giving particularly extensive attention to black theology and seeking its implication for white Christians. It sought to illuminate some of the choices made in doing such work, and some of the possibilities and limitations which these choices bring about. On the one hand, I now move from this analysis towards my own reading of black theology from my own context in chapter 3, and then turn towards similar responses from white theologians in the second half of the apartheid era in chapter 4. What was drawn from Witvliet and Perkinson informs my posture in my reading of Biko, Maimela and Mofokeng in chapter 3, but also becomes a lens through which to analyse Naudé, Nolan and Kritzinger in chapter 4.
Chapter 3 – Black theology in South Africa: Biko, Maimela, and Mofokeng

1 Introduction

Situated within the broader attempt of describing race in general and whiteness in particular as a theological problem, this chapter will move back in time and shift the geographical focus onto the contribution of black theology in South Africa towards a critical understanding of the theological problem of whiteness. I take this route because black theology of liberation in South Africa is that stream of South African liberation theologies which consciously take race as its central category of analysis (Maluleke, 2005, p. 117; West, 2014, p. 353).\(^{156}\) It has attempted to provide a sustained theological analysis of whiteness and a theological response which might be described as anti-racist. Following on what the previous chapter has argued, black theology is one critical theological discourse through which white theology needs to move if it is to discover “true humanity where power politics have no place” (Biko, 1972, p. 20).

In *Essays on Black Theology* Adam Small eloquently expressed that while the task of black consciousness (and black theology) is for black people to understand themselves, this will also allow white people to come to a deeper understanding of ourselves (Small, 1972, pp. 12-13). As will become clearer in chapter 4, this invitation to white people to listen in on black theology in order to come to a deeper understanding of whiteness and of ourselves, more particularly a liberating understanding of ourselves, has seldom been picked up within South African theology.

There is an inversion of a dominant white progressive logic\(^ {157}\) at work in Small’s argument which assists in positioning my approach to black theology. Similar to what was argued in chapter 1, Small argues that whiteness has always understood itself with blackness as its point of reference, a point of reference which is being disrupted as black people start to define their humanity in terms of nothing other than themselves.\(^ {158}\) However, for those of us who are white in a racialised world becoming human in terms not

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\(^{156}\) This does not imply that the focus on race as category of analysis is the only contribution of black theology in South Africa. Maluleke continues to argue that its reflection on “sociotheological hermeneutics and methodology” is of of similar importance (Maluleke 2005, p. 117).

\(^{157}\) In The Netherlands Gloria Wekker traces this in *White Innocence* (Wekker, 2016) and in South Africa Melissa Steyn identifies this with a particular liberal white response (Steyn, 2001, pp. 101-114).

\(^{158}\) A possible tension with the earlier arguments, in particular emanating from Carter, should be noted. Any defining of the self in terms of nothing other than the self risks a refusal of submitting the body to Christ in order to be received back (Carter, 2004, pp. 536-538). However, Small here represents one of the earliest steps in a longer conversation, and both the place of such a turn in a South African theological response, but also its more nuanced later developments, will be touched upon below.
of someone else but in terms of ourselves requires facing who we are, facing what race, racism, and colonialism has made us into. The logic being inverted is the idea that finding our humanity beyond a racist world can be done by merely rejecting references to how we have been racialised. As chapter 1 argued, the modern idea of the human is so deeply intertwined with the history of race that merely refusing to refer to race inevitably results in maintaining race. Furthermore, as argued in chapter 2, for white people to rediscover our common humanity would require facing our whiteness, and, Small argues, in this black consciousness and black theology can be a guide.

Yet a single chapter is not near sufficient to thoroughly examine South African black theology of liberation. This chapter will, therefore, limit itself to three primary voices: Steve Biko, Simon Maimela and Takatso Mofokeng.

The argument that the roots of South African black theology can be traced in black consciousness is not strange. Albert Nolan summarised it in brief when stating that “Black Theology has been a theological reflection upon the meaning of Black Consciousness” (Nolan, 1988, p. 4) and Malesela Lamola describe black consciousness as the ideological source of black theology (Lamola, 1989, p. 1).

The clear separation between black consciousness and black theology is however often too neatly maintained, and a too clear and linear development from philosophy (even if in the very broad sense of the word) to theology assumed. Mokgeti Mothlabi, in contrast, tried to conflate black consciousness and black theology, arguing that there really was not a difference between the black theologian and the students, and that a distinction between black theology and black consciousness was based on a divide between the religious and the secular which was part of a dualistic worldview that was to be opposed. Still, Mothlabi also had to recognise that there was some difference in approach between the theologian and the social scientist or philosopher (Mothlabi, 1972b, p. 53). Slightly more hesitant, Takatso Mofokeng

159 For example, Jennings state this explicitly: “This means that strategies that “renounce race” often are unwittingly socially and culturally counterproductive and may lead to economically imperialist practices regarding land and claims on land because the freedom they claim by resisting discursive practices, or cultural logics, or processes of structuration flows directly out of the spatial dislocation of bodies. Thus the freedom to renounce race is a direct descendent of the theological power to deny and undermine geographically sustained identities” (Jennings, 2010, p. 63).
describes the relationship as that of twin sisters, inseparable, even though black consciousness was the first of the twin (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 3).

More recently the historian Daniel Magaziner has argued that Christian theological concepts were really weaved into the intellectual development of early black consciousness. Obviously, we had the black theology projects that were connected to various institutions influenced by black consciousness, but Magaziner also indicates how early black consciousness leaders drew from their Christian faith, how theological conviction was turned into South African Students’ Organisation (SASO) resolutions, and how theological debates were weaved into the entire development of black consciousness. In one of the most interesting examples, Magaziner points out how the SASO/Black People’s Convention (BPC) trial became in part a theological debate when the judge asked witnesses to explain a SASO resolution describing Christ as a freedom fighter dying for the liberation of the oppressed, connecting Christ to the Zealots and an anti-colonial revolution against the Romans (Magaziner, 2010, p. 1).

I, therefore, start this chapter with a section on black consciousness, more specifically on its most important voice: Steve Biko. My reading of Biko and black consciousness is however not merely as background for a later study of a theology which reflects upon its meaning, although the black consciousness background should indeed be understood, but rather of black consciousness, with Biko as key intellectual proponent, as already working out a particular theological response to a “strong white racism”. Perhaps this reading of Biko can be described as an attempt to follow Jennings not only in content but also in method by doing “theological analysis of theology’s social performance” (Jennings, 2010, p. 10) – thus that I read certain aspects of Biko’s writing as a social performance of theology that requires a theological analysis.

Black theology of liberation (working consciously under that name) in South Africa is typically divided into three phases. The first starts with the University Christian Movement black theology project (Kee, 2006,

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160 Later he would remind that black consciousness was also birthed within the church (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 9), the implication seems to be that the “second twin” he refer to is therefore black theology as theology so named, brings distinct from Christians drawing on their faith (in whichever way) when forming a black consciousness. When Cone described the role of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X in the emergence of black theology in the USA, he emphasizes that for Malcolm Christianity had to be rejected (Cone, 2005, p. 60). In the South African history a much closer relation with Christianity and Black Consciousness is found, prior to the emergence of formal black theology. Furthermore, Maluleke’s critique on a history where ‘African’ and ‘Christian’ is seen as being in opposition, and arguing for the need for methods that can break with this dualism (Maluleke, 2005). However, the analysis below will clearly reveal how, in spite of a close relation with Christianity, Christian theology is often still considered as something ‘outside’ that needs to be reformed or rearticulated to respond to a particular context.
Tinyiko Maluleke identifies a second phase as starting with the ICT black theology conference and introducing class alongside race into the analysis of black theology, and a third phase post-liberation which introduces gender alongside race and class (West, 2014, pp. 349-353). Allister Kee’s overview takes a different route and identifies Allan Boesak as the key proponent of the second phase of black theology, and therefore sees a slightly earlier start to this phase (Kee, 2006, pp. 79-85) and a third phase being the turn to a Marxist reading. For Kee, the importance of the third phase of black theology is that it recognises that the problem is not about racism but about oppression, and therefore introducing a Marxist analysis and materialist emphasis (Kee, 2006, pp. 87-97). Where Mosala is considered the key proponent of the second phase by West when using Maluleke’s overview, Kee considers Mosala the key proponent of the third phase.  

This highlights the choice of interlocutors made in this chapter. Without denying the importance of class analysis in post-apartheid South Africa, the immense inequalities tearing society apart, or its intersection with race, my argument is indeed that the explicit focus on race and racism as such is of utmost importance in South Africa today. The focus of this study is then also on the theological construction of whiteness, and it is appropriate to turn to those who explicitly focus on the intersection of theology and race. As pointed out below, there has not been any phase of black consciousness nor black theology which did not concern itself with the immense poverty and inequality in South Africa, even if an explicit class analyses is not equally visible at all times.

The choice to focus on Maimela and Mofokeng is in the first place due to their explicit positioning in academic systematic theology. They represent the most important black South African academic systematic theologians before the end of apartheid. I then highlight their respective work in theological anthropology and Christology, key systematic loci in any attempt at giving a theological account of race or a theological response to racism. Theological discourse broadly connected to these two loci was key in the development of South African black consciousness and black theology, as will be shown below. Textually these were captured in the emphasis on creation (Genesis) and the gospels (Magaziner, 2010, p. 79; Kritzinger, 1988, pp. 58-60), an aspect which will be discussed below. 

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161 Kee’s broader argument is that black theology has failed, and that in South Africa the ongoing contribution of black theology is only in as much as it takes account of class. The emphasis on understanding race in South Africa today calls Kee’s 2006 analysis into question, but more fundamentally, in Kee’s analysis the 1972 essay by Mokgheti Motlhabi on *Black Theology and Authority* is “the only essay of significance” (Kee, 2006, p. 85) in *Essays on Black Theology*. However, Motlhabi seems to go against the grain of much of black consciousness in this essay by reading racism as prejudice, rather than as itself a system of power and oppression: “Racism as such is not the real poison in inter-personal relations. It is that for which racism exist, i.e. vast discrepancies in the distribution of power” (Motlhabi, 1972c, p. 93).
Mofokeng and Maimela were also the respective editor and co-editor of the *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* from 1987-1994, playing a key role in the development of this theological trajectory during this period. The work of Maimela and Mofokeng respectively will articulate the fundamental questions which white theology as white theology would have to respond to and grapple with the disrupting and transforming whiteness and white theology.

A brief note on the use of ‘black’ in black consciousness and black theology in South Africa is important at this point since this continues to result in misunderstanding. ‘Black’ in this context is a deliberate and explicit rejection of apartheid racial categorisation. In opposition to apartheid categorisation seeking to draw on various aesthetic and genealogical markers in demarcating people according to race black consciousness defines black as those oppressed by a system of white supremacy, taking control of pejorative words in racist discourse and inscribing it with meanings of value, and in the process including all who apartheid racialised as African, Indian and Coloured into those who are black. Here a tension in Biko’s use of black is important: black is both used in opposition to non-white, with non-white referring to those who aspire to be white and black to those defying white supremacy, but black is also used to refer to all oppressed by a system of white supremacy. So on the one hand, Shannon Hill’s important reminder of what Biko and black consciousness attempted and how this continues to be misinterpreted is important: “Their rejection of race and difference continues to be read as a promotion of these very things because too much emphasis is placed on the color that consciousness names” (Hill, 2015, p. xiii). On the other hand, we need to constantly remind that black refers to a particular position within a system of white supremacy, and in this, the visible markers used is never absolute yet always important. Both the consciousness and social location need to simultaneously be held to in understanding what is meant by

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162 The journal published two issues per year during this period, and is a key record in the development of black theology in the last years under apartheid.

163 See the side-by-side use of statements such as “we can see that the term black is not necessarily all-inclusive; i.e. the fact that we are all not white does not necessarily mean that all are black... If one’s aspiration is whiteness but his pigmentation makes attainment impossible, then that person is a non-white” (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 52) and “It is a manifestation of a new realization that by seeking to run away from themselves and to emulate the white man, blacks are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black. Black consciousness therefore, takes cognisance of the deliberateness of God’s plan in creating black people black. It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook” (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 53). While Mothlabi was highly critical of a myth of blackness where distinction between ‘black’ and ‘non-white’ are used manipulatively (Mothlabi, 1972c, p. 99), this rhetorical ploy need not by definition exclude a more descriptive understanding of black as those oppressed by a system of white supremacy.
‘black’ in the argument below for the possibilities for articulating a new humanism in opposition to the distorted view of the racialised human embedded in colonialism and modernity to be heard. This is the hope to which I now turn.

2 Steve Biko and a theology of hope

2.1 Introduction: black consciousness as an ideological/theological critique of white racism

Steve Biko was born in 1946 and grew up in the Ginsberg Township next to King William’s Town in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. Biko’s political involvement mostly emerged while studying medicine at the so-called “no-European” section of the University of Natal Medical School in Durban. While active in National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) politics, Biko played a key role in the black students’ breakaway from NUSAS to form the South African Students’ Organisation (SASO), an organisational shift that was closely tied to the emerging black consciousness movement in South Africa. The constant refrain that ‘Biko lives’,\(^{164}\) meaning that while the apartheid police may have killed his body, his ideas continue to live in the community, resounding into the present, perhaps best captures his ongoing significance. If South African black theology cannot be explored without understanding black consciousness, then black consciousness cannot be explored without engaging its more prominent South African voice.

“The study of the Black Consciousness Movement as a counter-ideology of resistance to white supremacy is essential to any understanding of contemporary South Africa” (Fatton, 1986, p. 55). While it might have been some time since these words of Robert Fatton rang true, at this moment in South African history it does indeed ring true again. By 1988 Albert Nolan could all but relegate black consciousness to the past (Nolan, 1988, p. 4), and in the 2007 collection of essays in remembrance of Biko the lack of recognition given to him is bemoaned by some (Mda, 2007, p. 3), while Jonathan Jansen, in the same collection, argues that while Biko’s work should be appreciated, we are now at a different place in society where black consciousness is no longer required.\(^{165}\)

Student protests starting with #Rhodesmustfall and developing through #Feesmustfall, connecting with a broader debate on the decolonisation of higher education and knowledge production (Maldonado-Torres,
2016) has however insisted on the ongoing relevance of Biko and black consciousness. Even though their contribution should not be limited to a mere repetition of the intellectual history of the 1970s, there is a clear connection between these two moments, providing a contemporary impetus for this theological reading of Biko (Headley & Kobe, 2017). Fanonian scholar Nigel Gibson makes the strong claim that “[a]fter Biko, nobody took up Fanon’s challenge to develop a new humanism, and a philosophic void appeared” (Gibson, 2011, p. 70). Allister Kee’s claim that “South Africa will not fulfil its destiny until it comes to terms with Steve Biko” (Kee, 2006, p. 72) rings true today and this chapter is at least in part an attempt at coming to terms with one aspect of Biko.

Historian Phil Bonner argues that both non-racialism and black consciousness are always present in the ANC even though the one or the other might be dominant at different times (Bonner, 2014). So without making any claims on the future, the current moment is drawing South African discourse back to resources which are more conscious of how race functions in society, and in this black consciousness and Biko are growing in importance as an analytical tool and moral voice.

The by now well-known narrative is that black consciousness emerged at a time of a political vacuum in black South Africa. The African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) were banned in 1960 and there was a general fear of engaging in activities which could be considered political (Magaziner, 2010, p. 21; Gibson, 2011, p. 49; Biko, 2008, p. 21).166 Black consciousness emerged in part as a protest to the student politics of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), which was a liberal student organisation with no restriction on membership, but where it became clear that white students still determined the agenda. Black consciousness emerged from within the social space of the University Christian Movement, which early on became a majority black organisation.167 Given the focus of this study, this University Christian Movement background will form the start of my analysis.

Robert Fatton’s earlier study on the ideology of black consciousness already hinted towards the need for studying black consciousness not only as the philosophical, ideological or social context out of which black theology would emerge but as itself theological. Fatton drew on Marxist analysis, and more particularly

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166 The interview that Gail Gerhart had with Biko in 1972 was published for the first time in 2008 in Biko Lives!
167 Biko himself presented this analysis. In the SASO/BPC trial he talks of the “political emasculation of the black people” (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 163) (see comments on the gendered language of black consciousness in the discussion of Essays on Black Theology below) and in a 1970 letter to Student Representative Councils, which Biko sent in his capacity of SASO president, the role of the University Christian Movement is pointed out (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 11).
on Antonio Gramsci, to analyse black consciousness. His main argument was to show that black consciousness is not a mere middle class black intellectual movement but that it had a truly revolutionary character and was also committed to the transformation of material structures (Fatton, 1986, p. 123). That said, Fatton’s argument is not the one easily contributed to Marxist analysis that the struggle against apartheid can be reduced to a class struggle (where class is understood in exclusively economic terms), an interpretation the rejection of which was fundamental to black consciousness. He notes that race can function independently from class (Fatton, 1986, p. 43) and therefore acknowledge the importance of the particular focus on ideology found in black consciousness.

Published in 1986, his research developed in the years after the banning of black consciousness and the exodus of black consciousness leaders into exile – often joining the ANC. Fatton not only recognises the broadly Christian religious background of the black consciousness movement but also notes that the ideology of black consciousness is in distinct ways formed by Christian thought – in short, theology forms black consciousness.

However, it can be argued that Fatton’s reading of how theology forms black consciousness is rather thin, and reduced to two visible questions (with the second only briefly hinted at). The first and main influence of Christian thought that Fatton observes is in the commitment to non-violence. This Fatton repeatedly ascribes to a Christian influence (Fatton, 1986, pp. 37, 117-119). The second aspect is that Fatton observes a particularly Christian influence on the humanism of black consciousness, and points out that the vague economic proposals of black consciousness should be read together with a Christian ethic (Fatton, 1986, p. 105).

Fatton’s fascinating study on how black consciousness is a particularly ideological struggle against apartheid is of utmost importance for my own argument. My own argument below is however that a theological analysis opens further possibilities for reading black consciousness within a Christian frame. To draw on Robin Gill’s distinctions (Gill, 2012a; Gill, 2012b; Gill, 2013), black consciousness does indeed act as the social context shaping a particular theology (society shaping theology, as has been repeatedly indicated), but there is also a theology which shapes black consciousness (theology shaping society). Black

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168 (Crehan, 2016) argues convincingly against such an understanding of class in Marx, and particularly in Gramsci.

169 But not only the ANC. As Mafuna recounts, others also attempted to join the PAC (Mafuna, 2007, pp. 85-86)
consciousness is itself also theological, even while this should not imply that black consciousness can be ‘claimed’ as an exclusively Christian movement.

Magaziner’s recent work makes a strong claim that black consciousness was not initially part of a mere struggle against apartheid, but that the hope of black consciousness was for a much deeper transformation of society. Magaziner’s case might be overstated if presented as if there was no concern with the political project of ending apartheid (Magaziner, 2010, pp. 12-14). In Kee’s words on Biko, “Of course he was against apartheid” (Kee, 2006, p. 76). However, it is important to note that the hope presented is quite explicitly not for a mere change from apartheid to democracy, but for a much deeper humanising of society in ways which transcend the political and economical, while never ignoring the need for political and economic transformation in the process.

My own reading below will focus on Biko in particular, reading Biko’s writing as theological performance. A formal reminder that this theological reading of Biko is appropriate is found in the 1972 publication *Essays on Black Theology* which will also be the main focus of my argument below. Biko’s essay *Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity* was reprinted in the collection of essays *We Write What We Like* (Van Wyk, 2007). In the introduction, Chris van Wyk points out that this is Biko’s “most often quoted essay” (Van Wyk, 2007, p. xiv). While most would know the essay from *I Write What I Like* (Biko, 2012 [1978]), the essay was originally published in *Essays on Black Theology*. It was also republished in the 1973 *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa* (Moore, 1974a), which is the source indicated in *I Write What I Like*. I will return to this essay in exploring a particular theological, indeed eschatological, argument being articulated through one of the most often quoted parts of this most often quoted essay, but for the moment I just point out that Biko’s writings were indeed at times formally embedded within a theological discourse, and it is within this that I will read his arguments. This essay has over the past half-century been central to the ideological and intellectual development of South African discourse on race, anti-racism, black consciousness, and I would propose that it is therefore also critical to any South African analysis of whiteness. A close reading of this essay provides an important entry into the topic of this chapter, but also into the argument that will be developed throughout the rest of the dissertation.

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170 The 1978 introduction to this essay in *I Write What I Like* already described this as Biko’s best written work (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 96).
171 Also published under the title *Black Theology: the South African voice*
While *Essays on Black Theology* (Mothlabi, 1972a) was republished as *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa* (Moore, 1974a), some differences are important. Sabelo Ntwasa was the initial editor of *Essays on Black Theology* but was replaced by Mokgethi Mothlabi when Ntwasa was served with a banning order. This also resulted in his essays being withdrawn (Moore, 1974a, p. vii). These were again included in the 1973 edition. But other changes were also made. Basil Moore’s lead essay on *What is Black Theology* was not part of the 1972 edition, rather, what became the fourth chapter in 1973 was the first chapter in 1972: Manas Buthelezi on *An African Theology or a Black Theology*. Three further changes occurred, one which is important for this study. Neither Lawrence Zulu’s 1972 essay on *19th Century Missionaries in South Africa* nor D.E.H. Nxumalo’s essay on *Black Education and the Quest for a True Humanity* was republished in 1973. The 1973 edition also included a poem by James Mattews titled *Christians*. No reason for these changes are provided in the introduction. I will return to Nxumalo’s essay below, which remain hidden if only the better-known edition under Moore’s editing is considered.

2.2 The University Christian Movement as an incubator for black consciousness

Black consciousness was born in the church. Given how intertwined politics and church have been in the 20th century of South Africa such a fact is not strange at all. We could make similar claims for the African National Congress or the Afrikaner Broederbond. That the church of the 20th century acted as a womb in which political developments were allowed and encouraged to develop is common to the South African history. The place of the University Christian Movement as an incubator for early black consciousness thoughts is widely recognised and often mentioned, and only requires a brief overview here. But how these political movements and different ideologies draw from, interprets, and transforms Christian theology and Christian ideas in the process of developing a particular political programme is the real question and focus of the broader argument.

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172 Mangcu convincingly places Biko in a broader Eastern Cape intellectual history which precedes the 20th century (Mangcu, 2014, pp. 33-78). I start my reflection at this more explicit moment in the development of black consciousness as a formal movement partly because I am interested in black theology as a theology so named (as opposed to a longer tradition of black critique of white Christianity). “Church” should however here be qualified, since while the University Christian Movement was called together by the so-called English mainline churches, tensions soon started to appear once the University Christian Movement adopted a more radical critique of apartheid and the church. By 1971 the churches already started to withdraw support for the University Christian Movement – the Christian Institute, another parachurch organisation that will be briefly discussed in chapter 4, was however explicit in its support for the University Christian Movement and related black movements (Thomas, 2002, pp. 206-207).
While black consciousness, with SASO and the BPC as its institutional vehicles, is read as emerging within the political vacuum left by the ANC and PAC on the one hand, on the other hand, it emerges as a response to a move to the political right within NUSAS. The role of the University Christian Movement as an incubator in which black consciousness could develop and grow is in part due to the fact that political parties were banned and student structures did not allow black students to take active control of the direction that was taken in response to apartheid. This history has been discussed in depth (Mangcu, 2014, pp. 113-149; Fatton, 1986, pp. 63-80; Magaziner, 2010, pp. 26-39; Magaziner, 2007), and my overview below therefore, provides a very limited amount of background, and seeks to focus attention on the space of Christian reflection that is the focus of the rest of the chapter.

As has been discussed repeatedly, Biko was an ardent supporter of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) after first arriving at the University of Natal Non-European Durban Medical School. Support for NUSAS was a point of contention, also revealing the rift between ANC and PAC aligned student bodies. Biko’s disillusionment with NUSAS and the rise of black consciousness is closely intertwined, in part providing a background to the particular emphasis on a rejection of white liberalism in Biko’s writings, an aspect important to the discussion below.

NUSAS was by the 1960s one of the few organisations where membership was still open regardless of race. However, due in part to inequalities in access to university education, white students dominated this space numerically and in turn, also maintained a grip on leadership positions and an ideological hegemony within NUSAS. NUSAS was opposed to apartheid but argued that the road to end apartheid was through convincing white South Africans of changes in policy. An exchange between Robert Schrire and Biko, after Biko questioned segregationist practices within NUSAS at the first NUSAS national conference Biko attended in 1967 reveals this:

Schrire remembers Steve asking him how he saw the struggle progressing, given the position taken by the white students. Schrire replied that the only road to liberation was through the persuasion of whites. The black students had to be careful not to alienate the white students,

\[173\] For Biko’s own accounts of this history see (Biko, 2008; Arnold, 1979, pp. 3-37; Biko, 2012 [1978], pp. 9-17)

\[174\] By 1968 NUSAS had 22000 white student members and 1776 black (“non-white” in the language of 1968) student members. Of ten members on the executive only one member was black (Mangcu, 2014, p. 130).
Accommodation, and often other social events, continued to be segregated within NUSAS structures. While the structure of white power within NUSAS went much deeper than this, the segregated accommodation at NUSAS national conferences became the rallying point.

While tensions grew within NUSAS, a collective of liberal Christian leaders associated with the so-called English speaking mainline churches\textsuperscript{175} worked to initiate a new inclusive university Christian organisation after the Students’ Christian Association (SCA) was segregated according to race. The University Christian Movement was formed in 1967. The 1968 University Christian Movement congress in Stutterheim was faced with the so-called 72-hour clause which stated that black people were not allowed to be in a white area for more than 72 hours. Within debates on whether there should be compliance or whether students, only black students or alternatively black and white students, should react in ways which would lead to their arrest, a tactical moment of a national black caucus emerged. Black students tactically complied with the law, walking over the municipal boundary at the end of the 72 hours, but through this process found space for a meeting of black students away from white eyes, and resolved to start a black student movement, which would later become the South African Students’ Organisation (SASO), one of a number of black consciousness organisation, and a key organisation in the ongoing struggle around liberal student politics.

While the University Christian Movement was in many ways similar to NUSAS, working on a multi-racial space as opposition to apartheid, it was also distinctively different from NUSAS in that it consisted of a majority black membership. While white ministers and priests played a key role in its development, they drew on a changing global political theology and carried political options into the University Christian Movement space which would have been impossible within NUSAS. Key to this was a secular political theology and black theology from the United States.

\textsuperscript{175} John de Gruchy points out the problem of the South African use of “mainline” churches and I follow him in referring to “so-called”. These are denominations related to European churches, and in South Africa include the Roman Catholic Church along with a range of protestant churches. The designation “English speaking” is also problematic, since the majority of the members of these churches are not English speaking, but it serves as a distinction for the Afrikaans Reformed churches, which is also part of this “so-called mainline” group of churches, yet with a distinct history, not least due to the history of apartheid politics (De Gruchy, 2014).
The University Christian Movement’s embrace of secular theology aligned it with a broader political shift in the North Atlantic and so-called “West”, but in the end this was considered irrelevant by black students.\textsuperscript{176} The University Christian Movement became another moment where European secular political theology and liberation theology came into conflict.

A University Christian Movement newsletter from 1969 already stated that “[i]t seems that the white students within the University Christian Movement are primarily in search of a theological identity, . . . [while] the non-whites in University Christian Movement, more particularly the African group, feel a greater need for political identity in the wider sense.” (Magaziner, 2007, p. 93).\textsuperscript{177} By 1971 the University Christian Movement was separated into three groups focusing on ‘white consciousness’, ‘black theology’, and ‘women’s liberation’ (Magaziner, 2007, p. 94). Yet ironically, white students seeking for a theological identity ended up rejecting the theological conversation in favour of a focus on the political economy, while black students committed to the plight of black South Africans continued with a thoroughly theological conversation intertwined with the social, political, and economic context of its day. This, as I point out below, became the first phase of black theology in South Africa.

It is not that black University Christian Movement students rejected the influence of secular theology in its entirety. They shared the emphasis on a theology focused on this earth, yet the intricate questions of whether various orthodox propositions can be retained in a modern world were simply not the focus of their concern.\textsuperscript{178} The question was rather whether the Christian faith can speak to the reality of being black in the context of white racism, to which a positive answer is provided.

As Magaziner (Magaziner, 2007) argues, a neat division between faith and politics does not adequately describe what happened within the University Christian Movement, black consciousness and black theology. Students were not merely seeking to apply Christian faith to their ongoing struggles, nor were they merely drawing rhetorically on Christian language to give a sense of legitimacy to a ‘secular’ political programme. Rather, faith and politics were wholly intertwined, so that Christian faith informed the

\textsuperscript{176} The distinction between “relevant” and “irrelevant” is of utmost importance in surveying this history. For black students this was used as a marker for whether it served the struggle against white racism.

\textsuperscript{177} The parallel with Gutierrez’ description of two theologies, a theology in response to the European Enlightenment as a response to the questions of the non-believer and a liberation theology taking the poor as its main dialogue partner (Gutiérrez, 2001, p. 21), should not escape our attention.

\textsuperscript{178} As I will point out below with reference to Biko, this does not mean that the questions typical to a more secular theology was not asked by black students as well, but this wasn’t the focus of their engagement with theology.
struggle against apartheid and white racism while Christian faith was simultaneously reimagined in ways relevant to the struggle. Politics and religion existed in one sphere.

The argument below will go to great lengths to illustrate how a central concept in Biko’s thought is part of a particularly Christian discourse. But this can only be done when the way in which politics and theology are intertwined is kept in mind. Biko (and others) were not in any way ‘translating’ (Bevans, 2002, pp. 37-44) Christian doctrine into more relevant and understandable words. In as much as talk about the relevance of Jesus to the struggle informed black consciousness and black theology, theology was transformed while being reborn from within the struggle against white racism.

Given the depth of the disruption to Christian theology brought about by colonialism and the fundamental distortion of theology as it was formed in step with a racial imagination (see chapter 1), such a deep transformation is to be expected at this moment where whiteness is confronted in dialogue with Christian theology.

### 2.3 Reading Biko as Christian theologian

In his seminal work on Fanon in South Africa, Nigel Gibson points out that Fanon was carried into SASO through the work of James Cone in *Black Theology and Black Power*. Biko himself read Cone (although by 1972 he admits to not having read the whole book (Biko, 2008, p. 24)) and Kritzinger indicates that Biko is at times quoting from James Cone (Kritzinger, 2008c, p. 11). The influence of friends in theology is often mentioned. In particular Barney Pityana, who shared a room with Biko for a year and recounts how *Frank Talk* articles were the result of intense debates (Accone, 2007, p. 49), but there were also others such as Sabelo Ntwasa. Biko was obviously familiar with the black theology emerging from within black consciousness projects, to which he also contributed. To think of Biko as consciously writing theology when writing for the black theology project should not be considered strange at all. Biko himself described his attraction to black theology (Biko in Stubbs, 2012 [1978], p. 239). So rather than trying to do a theological analysis of black consciousness (Kritzinger, 2008c, p. 2) as if black consciousness is something non-theological, I propose to read Biko as a Christian theologian, or rather, to follow Jennings, to analyse theology’s social performance as it takes shape in the words of Biko.

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179 Magaziner’s argument is that this is true not only for this moment of black consciousness, but also for the Dutch Reformed Church apartheid theology and the Kairos document. This he presents as in sharp contrast with the divisions of European post-Enlightenment divisions (Magaziner, 2007, p. 82).
Biko is by no stretch the most committed church person of early black consciousness leaders. As Bokwe Mafuna recalls in remembering Biko: “The SASO people drank a lot, argued a lot, womanised a lot and, apart from Barney Pityana, never went to church” (Mafuna, 2007, p. 80). Magaziner would point to numerous early voices beyond Pityana that also had a deep religious commitment, people like Kaborane Gilbert Sedibe\(^{180}\) or Onkgopotse Abraham Tiro.\(^{181}\) But Biko’s role as intellectual leader of the early black consciousness movement, his continued influence after, and at least in part due to, his murder, and the importance of his voice in contemporary South Africa, are important reasons for again visiting his thoughts - but in this instance in a search of how he enacts a particular theology in the process of naming a world no longer bound by whiteness. Within this study, I then also read him in order to discern the theological problem of whiteness and to begin to imagine what a theological disruption of whiteness might look like.

If black consciousness is birthed in part with the church as an incubator, then Biko’s thoughts, as circulated in its most popular form in the collection of essays titled *I write what I like*, are carried within a conscious Christian theological reflection. In the 2012 Picador Africa edition, a preface was included, written in 1996 by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Tutu’s evaluation of apartheid, here obviously presented as a preface to the most important black consciousness text, places black consciousness within a particular theological frame:

> Constantly, in the difficult days of our struggle against apartheid, I used to say that the Black Consciousness movement was surely of God. You see, the most awful aspect of oppression and injustice was not the untold suffering it visited on its victims and survivors, ghastly as that turned out to be, as the testimony we have been hearing attests. No, it was the fact that apartheid could, through its treatment of God’s children, actually make many of them doubt whether they were indeed God’s children. That I have described as almost the ultimate blasphemy. (Tutu, 2012, p. ix)

The analysis presented by black consciousness, and particularly presented by Biko, reveals the deep theological problem of what Tutu here describes as apartheid, but which we must within the broader

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\(^{180}\) Sedibe was one of the SASO/BPC 9 on trial in 1976-1977 and Student Representative Council President for the University of the North (Magaziner, 2010, p. 2).

\(^{181}\) Tiro was Student Representative Council President for the University of the North and assassinated in 1974 while in exile in Botswana. He was a Seventh Day Adventist lay preacher and introduced the 1973 SASO motion which read that Christ was the “first freedom fighter to die for the liberation of the oppressed” (Magaziner, 2010, p. 12).
argument of this study describe as whiteness: it is an anthropological heresy (to use the later words of Simon Maimela).

While the preface on the one side of *I write what I like* is a mere two pages, the collection is concluded with an extensive memoir by Aelred Stubbs, who Biko described as “my dear priest” (Stubbs, 2012 [1978], p. 193), written in 1978. Stubbs is conscious of the fact that the memoir is not about himself, but about Steve, the young man to whom Stubbs was a priest and friend, yet throughout the memoir Stubbs seems to be struggling with what to make with Biko’s faith, and perhaps what Stubbs himself should make of the church, which Biko questioned deeply. Stubbs, who also collected and edited the essays for *I write what I like*, writes the memoir in such a way that the reader should hear that in the end Biko does not reject the Christian faith, but that Biko can only hold to the Christian faith, despite the way that the churches in South Africa supported or were silent in the face of a system of white racism, because of a very particular interpretation of the Christian faith: black theology.

Quite explicitly, and in letters from Biko which Stubbs quotes extensively, Biko rejects orthodox interpretations of core Christological doctrines:

> From the above it becomes obvious that I am underplaying the role of Christ. My problem is that the most unbelievable aspects of organized religion are to do with the advent and subsequent role of Christ on earth. As a historical fact I find it easily acceptable that Christ did come to earth. What I find difficult to accept, however, are the many dogmatic pronouncements that accompany explanations about Christ’s advent and subsequent role on earth. The Catholic Church demands that I believe that Christ was true Man and true God at the same time. How can I? All true men have mortal fathers and mothers. But the Church does not accept that Joseph was Christ’s father. I remember saying to my tutors at a Catholic School – the choice is simple; it is either we are worshipping an illegitimate child as our God or we are elevating a normal human being into the status of God’s son. (Biko in Stubbs, 2012 [1978], pp. 238-239).

My task is not to evaluate Biko’s orthodoxy or faith, nor to make an exclusive Christian claim on black consciousness or to save Biko for orthodox Christianity. Stubbs respectful engagement with Biko’s critical relationship with Christianity should guard against any such attempt (not only in the case of Biko but for every other individual). What the preceding notes should, however, make quite clear is that Biko was
deeply familiar with Christian discourse, the church, and theology. Reading Biko’s thoughts as theology as well, even if not theology alone, should not be considered strange.

2.4 Biko: theology of hope

2.4.1 Eschatology as a lens on Biko

In this chapter, I focus my analyses of particular theologians on key systematic theological loci which most clearly present their argument. This is not an attempt at describing the full logic of black theology, but if the theological loci are the “‘places’ about which a variety of theological proposals can and have been made and around which theological disagreements cluster” (Kelsey, 2009, p. 28) then these also assist in more clearly describing the novel and critical proposals which black theology bring to the table. Rather than being less helpful in the case of Biko, whose writings is neither obviously theological in the academic sense nor systematic in any sense, I propose that reading these voices as contributing to places where theological proposals and disagreements cluster assist in making the performance of his theology clearer.

In the case of Biko, his thoughts are, I would argue, best captured by the category of hope, and I will argue that we best understand key aspects of his thought when we read them as a particular form of Christian eschatology. However, this eschatology is intertwined with an anthropological vision. Reading this intertwined eschatology-anthropology allows us to note a theological vision that goes deeper than a cultural or political project, and beyond the psychological liberation of black people (although all of this was up front in Biko’s work): Biko envisioned the breaking in of a new world.

While Fatton on the one hand convincingly argues that black consciousness was indeed also focused on class and economics (Fatton, 1986, pp. 32; 81-105) his Marxist analysis of black consciousness (and black theology) finally conclude by questioning whether black consciousness can sustain a revolution against capitalism, and this because of an optimism not disconnected from Christian hope:

182 This also links with Aeldred Stubbs’ memoir titled Martyr of Hope. For Stubbs hope was what Biko was witness to, a hope of freedom (Stubbs, 2012 [1978], p. 243)
The absence of theoretical thinking in the liberation movement may in fact be related to its conviction of ultimate victory which tended to make theory itself redundant: If the emancipation of black people was assured, and if the certainty of the triumph of the cause of liberation was unquestionable, then the search for a rigorous theory of the African revolution could be dismissed. This unshakeable faith in the ultimate victory distracted the Black Consciousness Movement from the realities of the capitalist economy and obscured the need for programmatic analyses, though it probably constituted an essential and necessary element for generating the human energy required for any revolutionary effort. (Fatton, 1986, p. 147)

The centrality of eschatology to black theology (and to the emerging theological reflection within black consciousness) has often been noted. In Kritzinger’s analysis of black eschatology, he notes that in black theology eschatology is not a separate locus but that eschatology, as pertaining to the Kingdom of God rather than the last things, pervades all of black theology (Kritzinger, 1987, p. 14). Kritzinger then seems to slip into the general ‘theology’ and it would be correct to read in this that he is, in fact, arguing that this is the place eschatology should take in all of theology: as pervading all theology through the focus on the Kingdom of God. Reading eschatology in this way is not unique to black theology. As will be pointed out below, this is eschatology after Moltmann.

2.4.2 The dialectics in I Write What I Like and a hopeful synthesis

As mentioned earlier, Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity was first published as part of Essays in Black Theology but is best known as part of I Write What I Like. My analysis below therefore consciously starts with this essay and reads it within these two collections in order to discern an emerging eschatology.

If Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity is the most often quoted essay by Biko, then the dialectics and conclusion, which will be key to my analysis below, is perhaps the most well-known sections from these essays. Although Biko describes his dialectic as Hegelian in What is Black Consciousness, Kritzinger warns against reading Biko’s dialectics in a technical Hegelian or Marxian sense, arguing instead that:

Biko most likely adopted his dialectical interpretation from J-P Sartre’s Black Orpheus, in which he introduces the work of the négritude poets of West Africa:
Négritude appears as the weak stage of a dialectical progression: the theoretical and practical affirmation of white supremacy is the thesis; the position of Négritude as antithetical value is the moment of negativity. But this negative moment is not sufficient in itself and the blacks who employ it well know it. They know that it serves to prepare the way for the synthesis or the realization of the human society without a breakdown. Thus Négritude is dedicated to its own destruction, it is passage and not objective, means and not the ultimate goal.

(Kritzinger, 2008c, pp. 3-4)

The parallel will become clear when we start with the most famous version of Biko’s dialectics, from Quest for a True Humanity: Contrasting black consciousness with white liberals, Biko argues:

For the liberals the thesis is apartheid, the antithesis is non-racialism, but the synthesis is very feebly defined. They want to tell the blacks that they see integration as the ideal solution. Black Consciousness defines the situation differently. The thesis is in fact a strong white racism and therefore the antithesis to this must, ipso facto, be a strong solidarity amongst the blacks on whom this white racism seeks to prey. Out of these two situations we can therefore hope to reach some kind of balance – a true humanity where power politics will have no place. (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 99)

A brief discussion of the rest of this essay is in order to describe the antithesis of the dialectics, before continuing to two other examples of the dialectics to start to grapple with the synthesis.

Following the dialectics in Quest for a New Humanity, Biko continues to work out the implication of his analysis. He first calls out different critics of apartheid, what he describes with the collective “liberal” when presenting the dialectics. The “white liberal” acts as a catchall, even though it might be argued that this description is not applicable to all, and includes a diverse set of white oppositions to apartheid.

Biko draws attention to three groups which work with this problematic analysis: the church opposition to apartheid (at this point embodied in the Christian Institute and the South African Council of Churches, and particularly in the Study Project on Christianity in an Apartheid Society (SPRO-CAS) report), the white

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183 Discussing this same move in Biko’s thought Magaziner points out that at this point Biko then also differs from Fanon, since Fanon rejected Sartre’s dialectical analysis of negritude (Magaziner, 2010, p. 42).
184 Given the multiple connotations attached to both “liberal” and “white liberal”, I use these terms exclusively where used in particular circumstances in sources under discussion in this chapter and the next. This does not necessarily imply any implication for all forms of liberalism over time and place.
liberals calling for integration (a description which fits well with other critiques of NUSAS), and those opposing apartheid for economic reasons (that apartheid should be transformed so that black South Africans can be better incorporated into the market). Against these Biko proposes black consciousness, “an attitude of mind and a way of life, the most positive call to emanate from the black world for a long time”, and in line with the antithesis, a commitment by black people to develop their own strategies for liberation (Biko, 2012 [1978], pp. 100-102).

As a transition to the next argument Biko writes: “In all aspects of the black-white relationship, now and in the past, we see a constant tendency by whites to depict blacks as of inferior status” (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 102). Within the context of his argument, it is not merely the places of explicit segregation, those places where white people work to keep black people as far away from themselves as possible, in brief, apartheid legislation, where this tendency exists, but also in many places in opposition to apartheid.

Biko then proceeds to work out the implications of the dialectic for three spheres of society: religion, education, and business. Again, it is important to note that in each case Biko reflects on the ways in which there is a form of a relationship between black and white, yet this relationship is distorted due to the white racism in which it is embedded, and this relationship contributes to the oppression of black people, leading him to argue for strong black solidarity and a black consciousness rejection of a relation which maintains white racism.

His critique of religion focuses on white missionaries. The missionaries are “[t]he first [white] people to come and relate to blacks in a human way in South Africa” (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 102). As Richard Elphick discusses in detail, this humane relation was what led to immense conflict among the early missionaries and white colonists in the Cape colony (Elphick, 2012, pp. 52-64), but embedded in this relation was a force working for the deep disruption of black humanity. On the one hand Biko here follows a critique that has become common by now: the missionaries not only brought the Christian message, which is an adaptable religion and can, therefore, be translated into particular situations, but they attached far more than the “heart of the Christian message”185 to their activities, and also taught converts to despise their

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185 Biko interrupts his argument to state that “I do not wish to question the basic truth at the heart of the Christ message” (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 103). What this “basic truth” would be is not clear, and it might be that this interjection also serves as assurance to those more committed to the church who participated in the black theology project and the writing of Essays on Black Theology. But as argued above, the best interpretation might be that Biko really means what he says when arguing for “a re-examination of Christianity” (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 103), so that there indeed is a basic truth which he discerns in Christianity.
culture and traditions. The totalising nature of the missionary endeavour is however placed much more sharply than a mere call for “indigenisation” might be in other places: “[T]he basic intention went much further than merely spreading the word. Their arrogance and their monopoly on truth, beauty and moral judgement taught them to despise native customs and traditions” (Biko, 2012 [1978], pp. 103-104). At this moment Biko draws attention to how epistemology, aesthetics, and morality through a colonial Christian paradigm construct a whiteness to which black people need to aspire in the process of becoming Christian. The depth of this is found not in the rejection of African religion by missionaries but in how Africans who converted to Christianity despaired where they themselves came from. This is where Biko sees the role of black theology: to bring black people and God together again, assisting black Christians to find their way within the confusion created by missionary Christianity. (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 104). Black theology then becomes a particular antithesis in the face of white racism as it disrupted black humanity through missionary Christianity.

Education has always been, and at least in part recent students protests is due to the way it continues to be, a place where white people, and also the missionary movement in both its historic and contemporary form, have worked for the “development of black people”. What Biko highlights is that the “know-all white tutors” contributed in teaching black children to despise their background and culture, to think of it as “barbarism”. If this education is part of the thesis of white racism, then Biko presents as antithesis attention to African history, the revival of African heroes, and appreciation of African culture, and concrete examples such as the development of black theatre and drama (Biko, 2012 [1978], pp. 104-106).  

In business and economics Biko’s focus is not primarily on the obvious of exploitation of black labour, although this is also mentioned, but on how society is set up so that poor black people need to spend excessive amounts on basic needs, and in particular, that what is spent flow back to white businesses.

Again, these exchanges implies a form of distorted relation, as was also made clear in the discussion of Jennings’ account of race in chapter 1. The solidarity Biko therefore, presents as an antithesis is the development of black business co-operatives and attempts at ‘buy black’ campaigns (Biko, 2012 [1978],  

[^186]: For an exploration of the role of art in black consciousness, continuing past the death of Biko, see Shannon Hill’s *The iconography of Black Consciousness* (Hill, 2015).
p. 107). In both these examples, he indicates what it would mean concretely to oppose white racism through strong black solidarity.

Important is that in all this Biko is describing the antithesis. These involve various tactical aspects. If Biko is correct in his analysis of the problem, that it is white racism and not segregation of races that is the problem, then these are the tactics which he argues would bring change. However, Biko is also clear that the problem of the liberal dialectics which he opposed is in particular that it resulted in “very feebly defined” synthesis. By making apartheid the problem, which is responded to by non-racialism as antithesis, it is not clear how the antithesis actually changes the situation of black people – the point made through examples of the ineffective opposition to apartheid from various white groups.

However, Biko presents similar arguments in other places, and a comparison between these assist in describing the synthesis and highlighting what I would describe as Biko’s theology of hope. The Definition of Black Consciousness was written for a SASO training course in 1971:

The overall analysis therefore, based on the Hegelian theory of dialectic materialism, is as follows. That since the thesis is a white racism there can only be one valid antithesis i.e. a solid black unity to counterbalance the scale. If South Africa is to be a land where black and white live together in harmony without fear of group exploitation, it is only when these two opposites have interplayed and produced a viable synthesis of ideas and a modus vivendi. (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 55)

A third example, this time from the SASO/BPC trial, but contained in I Write What I Like, can also be found. During cross-examination by Advocate Soggot, with some interjection by Judge Boshoff, Biko repeats the logic of the dialectics but in a different style.

Under discussion is a BPC resolution on the formation of a power bloc. Biko starts his explanation by noting his analysis of society: “First of all accept that in our analysis the cardinal point is the existence in our society of white racism which has been institutionalised.” (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 149) Biko then explicitly rejects the approach of the liberals (similar to the dialectics in The Quest for a True Humanity), arguing that the only way to get white people to change is by forming a ‘power bloc’ of black solidarity through which they can be forced into ‘bargaining’ (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 150). The outcome of such a bargaining process, an outcome which Biko argues is assured based on their reading of history, even if the timeframe is not assured, is “a total accommodation of our interests in the total country” (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 152).
As the exchange on the formation of a power bloc continued, Biko then explicitly connects this action with hope, in contradiction to Judge Boshoff’s accusation of creating antagonism. In Biko’s words:

“If I contest the first point, My Lord, I don’t think the means [that] are used for conscientisation have that effect at all – of making – of antagonising black people, or of creating antagonism within black people. On the contrary, what I would say is that our methods do in fact give hope. I think it must be taken in the context of a situation where black people don’t have any hope, don’t see any way ahead, they are just defeated persons, they live with their misery and they drink a hell of a lot because of the kind of misery... (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 155)

In three instances Biko starts from the premise that the problem in South Africa is white racism which calls for strong solidarity among black people. However, the synthesis takes on slightly different forms, differences which are important to note: black solidarity leading to total accommodation in the total country (SASO/BPC trial); solid black unity leading to “a land where black and white live together in harmony without fear of group exploitation” (*The Definition of Black Consciousness*); strong solidarity amongst blacks leading to “a true humanity where power politics will have no place” (*Quest for a True Humanity*).

While the antithesis is presented in similar ways, the three syntheses presented in the three examples of the dialectics is formulated differently, and I argue that it should not be considered to be wholly synonymous, although intertwined. The true humanity where power politics have no place cannot be reduced to accommodation and land without fear, even though the hope is never less than these concrete political effects. In order to reveal this, we need to trace how “power politics” is used by Biko.

After presenting the dialectics in *What is Black Consciousness* Biko continues to state that “[t]he fact that a synthesis may be attained only relates to adherence to power politics” (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 55). Synthesis here refers to harmony and living without fear, and Biko argues that this will only be the result of a process of power politics. No synthesis can be attained without such power politics. He again uses this notion in *White Racism and Black Consciousness* to argue that power politics is also quite simply the reality of how things work at this stage. This is the “game of power politics”, and “group power”, or to use the words of the dialectics, black solidarity, is the only way to be successful in the ‘game’ (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 74). In brief, then, Biko argues for a black consciousness which is a particular power politic that is a pre-requisite for “true humanity where power politics have no place”.

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While the point will be clarified further in the argument below, at this point already we can notice how Biko’s dialectics can be read to structurally function as a category of hope in close parallel to Christian discourse on eschatology which goes beyond mere progression but rather implies a disruption of this world and the introduction of a new world. The very thing that organises life together, the “game of power politics” is what should be disrupted through strong solidarity from those who are black.

What this reading then highlights is that the synthesis is not the end of one political project, after which true humanity then becomes the new thesis leading into another dialectic, a new power politic. In this Biko’s dialectic, therefore, differs from the idea of a permanent dialectic found for example in Adorno and the Frankfurt school (Cloud, 2009, p. 296), and the difference can be described as eschatological. The “true humanity where power politics have no place” does not imply a new thesis which will be followed by another antithesis but a total disruption of how humans relate to each other politically and as humans – a new creation. Or argued philosophically, “[i]n terms of the dialectic, the negation of white racism is black unity. But the end is not a ‘synthesis’ of white racism and black unity but a complete transcendence where race would not be a factor” (Gibson, 2008, p. 137).

Whether this was good political theory, or even attainable, is not the concern here. Furthermore, important as the questions on what causes liberation movements to become part of a new oppressive power structure after the end of formal colonialism might be, this should not distract us from the hope presented in this argument. The concern is with how the synthesis follows a particular Christian logic of hope.

Two further arguments serve to illuminate such a theological reading of the dialectics.

Kritzinger (Kritzinger, 2008c) assist us in taking this argument one step further towards understanding true humanity. Kritzinger reads the dialectics from the synthesis back in order to present an argument for liberating whiteness. Kritzinger reads the synthesis as envisioning a new society which will emerge from black opposition to white racism. He takes as hermeneutical key different notions of integration as used by liberals and Biko. A simplistic reading might be that this is merely a question of who sets the terms and therefore mirrors of each other: white liberals proposed immediate integration, which is integration on white terms, while black consciousness would propose an integration on black terms – black then used not in the sense of black consciousness, but as a racial category. But such an interpretation would be incorrect.
Kritzinger’s interpretation hinges on a shift in Biko’s language in *Black Souls in White Skins*?: the integration is on African terms. Biko shifts from black to African. It is on African terms that integration can happen. Kritzinger then connects this with Biko’s metaphoric language in *White Racism and Black Consciousness* to illustrate the point further:

> [When] I was at high school, Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda was still a militant … His often quoted statement was: “This is a black man’s country; any white who does not like it must pack up and go” … We knew he had no right to be there; we wanted to remove him from our table, strip the table of all trappings put on it by him, decorate it in true African style, settle down and then ask him to join us on our own terms if he liked. (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 75)

What Kritzinger argues is that African is joined to the dialectics through the fact that there was an African society flourishing before colonialism, and that this informs true humanity (Kritzinger, 2008c, pp. 5-8).

However, while this vision of African society is clearly part of Biko’s argument, just as the political vision of a more democratic society is part of his vision, reducing true humanity to Africanisation limits Biko’s vision. Here I move beyond Kritzinger’s reading. Biko had a universal vision of true humanity, and this universal vision reveals a theological imagination. Two quotes from two essays in *I Write What I Like* brings us to this point.

He concludes *Quest for a True Humanity* with the following words:

> We have set out on the quest for true humanity, and somewhere on the distant horizon we can see the glittering prize. Let us march forth with courage and determination, drawing strength from our common plight and our brotherhood. In time we shall be in a position to bestow upon South Africa the greatest gift possible – a more human face. (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 108)

Lastly, the conclusion of *Some African Cultural Concepts* reads:

> We reject the power-based society of the Westerner that seems to be ever concerned with perfecting their technological know-how while losing out on their spiritual dimension. We believe that in the long run the special contribution to the world by Africa will be in this field of human relationship. The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa – giving the world a more human face. (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 51)

This is not simply an argument for a particular ‘cultural’ understanding, which is relative to another understanding. What colonial imperialism, white racism, and ‘Western’ individualism have done to our
understanding of being human is rejected. Africa’s gift is therefore also normative. Here Biko follows Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda in presenting human relations as the gift of Africa to the world. As Magaziner points out, Kaunda argued that certain things were right for all people, and in the sphere of human relationships, “the African way could be the right way for all people” (Magaziner, 2010, p. 46). Failing to note this risks reading Biko as just another provincial majoritarian argument as if the mere fact of an African majority on the African continent should call for African humanity, which can exist side by side to every other expression of humanity where the majority determine how relations between people are structured in that context. From the above I argue that it is more apt to read Biko arguing that the understanding of being human associated with colonialism and white racism (and through this with the broader ‘Western’ world) is fundamentally distorted, and that the synthesis of true humanity arisen out of the dialectics is not merely a provincial response but rather a ‘gift to the world’. This is, as Gibson argues, Biko working out the new humanism which Fanon called for (Gibson, 2011, p. 70).

I will make a final turn in exploring the notion of ‘true humanity’ within the black theology frame of 1971/2 where it arose. I will present a more comprehensive black theological anthropology in an analysis of the work of Simon Maimela below (moving beyond this early phase), so the purpose of this exploration of Biko’s true humanity is a conscious service to my reading of what I describe as a theology of hope.

2.4.3 The quest for true humanity in Essays on Black Theology

It is this quest for true humanity that is at the heart of Biko’s work: “According to Biko, it was for the attainment of this sense of being human, that Black Consciousness was formulated and propagated. This is the core of Black Consciousness, all that followed was only polemics on the means and methods of achieving this, and a general defence of Black Consciousness.” (Lamola, 1989, pp. 5-6). Concepts like “human dignity”, “humanity” and “humanisation” are found throughout the essays of Essays in Black Theology and Black Theology: The South African Voice. Three essays are explicitly focused on “true humanity”, making it clear that Biko’s use should not be read in isolation, but as part of a broader conversation. The essay of D.E.H. Nxumalo, Black Education and the Quest for True Humanity, was only included in the 1972 publication and not in the more widely read 1974 republication.187 The title is an even more explicit overlap with Biko’s most famous essay. The other essay with this explicit focus is by

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187 No reason for this is provided, but this does not impact on the argument below. The important point is just that this connection will not be noted if only the more well-known collection edited by Moore is considered.
Manas Buthelezi, at this stage, the most respected black theologian (Lamola, 1989, p. 4), titled *The Theological Meaning of True Humanity*.\(^{188}\)

If black consciousness leaders freely copied and adapted from various sources, not caring for perfect referencing and at times presenting thoughts from others as their own (Magaziner, 2010, p. 48) then the same seems to apply to their drawing from each other. However, Biko’s writing has also been described as deeply embedded in conversation with other people in the movement. Who is drawing from whom is not important in the analysis below. It is perhaps best to read these clear intertextual connections as evidence of ideas emerging from within the same discursive space. What is important is to indicate that Biko’s words are closely intertwined with those of others who more explicitly develop the same concepts along more formal theological lines.

With Nxumalo, as with Biko, “the quest for true humanity” guides the essay through the title and conclusion. “The quest for true humanity” is used in a way which presupposed enough common ground with the audience that no definition is required, while also framing the essay in such a way that everything in between forms part of the true humanity. Nxumalo simply closes this essay which in the title was focused on the quest for true humanity with the words: “We must remember our emphasis is on the quest for true humanity” (Nxumalo, 1972, p. 120). Throughout the essay, education is defined in an inclusive way, including not only formal schooling - “[e]ducation is found everywhere” (Nxumalo, 1972, p. 114). It starts in the womb, encompass all of life, and black education should be reduced neither to “the Black man’s cultural structures, [n]or to the Blackman’s current social problems, but to the overall process of emancipating him from any chains of past slave mentalities” (Nxumalo, 1972, p. 113).\(^{189}\) True humanity is

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\(^{188}\) Note that “true humanity” is constantly used without a determiner. It is not a quest for “a true humanity” or “the true humanity” but for “true humanity”.

\(^{189}\) A brief note on the masculine language of black consciousness is inevitable at this point. Reading *Essays on Black Theology* reveals the constant grammatical reduction of “human” to “man”. Oshadi Mangena points out that not only should this be read against the background of language conventions of the time – a feminist critique on this exclusive language was only just starting to influence South African discourse – but we should also consider the fact that the gendered reference to humans is not part of the Sotho or Nguni languages. Mangena argues that while a conscious critique of gender was not part of early black consciousness, the activities of the black consciousness movement reveal a sensitivity concerning gender. Women were accepted fully as members, and by December 1973 Motlalepula Kgware was elected as president of the Black People’s Convention, making her the first women to lead a national political organisation in South Africa, and by implication the black consciousness movement the first South African political movement where a woman ascended to the highest level of leadership (Mangena, 2008, pp. 253-260). This does not detract from the highly masculine discourse in black consciousness, seen in particular through the sexualised discourse on “manhood”: “Possession of the male sexual member was political shorthand. If you were oppressed and did nothing, you never had it; if you were banned, you had lost it; if you collaborated, presumably you did not deserve it in the first place.” (Magaziner, 2010, p. 33)
that which should be the goal of black education, and this is focused not primarily on the past but on the future, and on the liberation (not least of the mind) that should be worked towards.

The essay by Buthelezi takes a different form. Born in 1935 Buthelezi is of an older generation than the students, and by the writing of *Essays in Black Theology* already completed his doctorate in theology. In the 1972 collection, Buthelezi contributes both the first and the last essay of the collection, as well as the third essay on true humanity. Buthelezi’s task in this collection is that of bringing conceptual and theological clarity. The titles of the three articles present their focus well: *An African Theology or a Black Theology?*, *The Theological Meaning of True Humanity*, and *Theological Ground for an Ethic of Hope*. Situated between the essays of Biko and Nxumalo which draw on the quest for true humanity within the context of the project of black theology, Buthelezi provides a formal theological outline for a notion with broader discursive appeal.

Buthelezi, also drawing on the notion of a ‘quest for true humanity’, defines it as an overcoming of that which “militates against the realisation of my destiny as a human being” (Buthelezi, 1972b, p. 70). To a large extent Buthelezi’s theological comments read as many other proposals in theological anthropology. He explores the ‘image of God’ from Genesis 1:27 and the ‘new creation’ from 1 Corinthians 5:17, theologically (not explicitly exegetically) expanding on these notions in dialogue with some key questions.

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The answer should not be found in glibly stating that “man” in *Essays on Black Theology* and elsewhere should just be read to refer to “men and women”. Considering how patriarchy continued to form black theology is important, as Deloris Williams would famously argue some years later (Williams, 1993). But the “strategic choice” women made to focus on racial oppression (Magaziner, 2010, p. 34) should not be read as mere compromise, but should rather be understood as part of a broader critique by poor and black women against a feminism which sought to include women into a dehumanizing white capitalist world (Mangena, 2008, pp. 260-265). If such an inclusion is as the equals of poor and black men, then this is as dehumanised poor or black humans. I therefore do not propose to resolve questions on the masculine language of black consciousness and *Essays on Black Theology*, but from the preceding argument I do assume that the quest for a true humanity was vital for poor and black women as well if any focus on gender in particular were to go beyond assimilating women into a dehumanizing system.

So even if gender (and sexuality) raise particular questions to a true humanity, these also function with the systems of racial and economic dehumanisation under discussion. While the questions of gender and sexuality deserve sustained consideration, the risk of using gender and sexuality to divert the gaze from the problem of white racism should also be noted.

190 *In An African Theology or a Black Theology?* Buthelezi sets out a question which has come to dominate South African black theology: to what extent and why it differs from African theology. For Buthelezi this was mainly about a distinction between a focus on the past and a focus on the present. The ethnographic approach which Buthelezi connects with African theology is accused of making a cultural object out of the past and ignoring present struggles. For black theology, the project for which Buthelezi is here writing the first lead essay, the emphasis should be on the current struggles facing black people (Buthelezi, 1972a). This emphasis will be clear in the whole project, and is shared by Biko (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 45).

191 Buthelezi use “authentic” as synonym for “true” throughout in the first paragraphs of the essay, but then remains with only “true humanity” in the rest.
in the tradition. True humanity is described both as “that state and form of existence which God intended when he created man” (Buthelezi, 1972b, p. 72) as well as with redeemed creation: “redemption puts man on the road towards the realisation of his true humanity” (Buthelezi, 1972b, p. 76). Choosing for Luther over against Aquinas, Buthelezi emphasises that the image of God related to the entire human, rather than being added to that which is essentially creaturely. The entire created human is created in the image of God (Buthelezi, 1972b, pp. 72-75).

This theological anthropology sketched in relation to creation and new creation and constantly used to expand on the notion of true humanity, is then brought into dialogue with the existential contradictions which Buthelezi addresses as part of his contribution to black theology. The first is that African thought works with a concept of the wholeness of life where sacred and secular and the living and the dead are closely tied together, something which missionary Christianity could not grasp. Similar to Biko’s universalism, Buthelezi argues that this is not merely important because it “reflects a traditional African insight, but more so because it serves to preserve the integrity of man” (Buthelezi, 1972b, p. 100). But the main existential crisis that Buthelezi is aiming at is that black people were alienated from this wholeness of life so that humanity was ‘colonised’, leading to self-hatred and a constant orientation in relation to the ‘Westerner’. True humanity is ‘post-colonial’ humanity which is also redeemed humanity, sharing with others in God-given dominion over creation.\(^1\)

Reflecting on Biko’s *Black Consciousness and a Quest for a True Humanity* Bokwe Mafuna writes that “I have come to understand the ‘self’ as the reflection of the Universal Spirit in human beings. It is the essence of the Spirit of God in us and it resides in our hearts. This is what makes us human beings. Whether Steve saw it in this light I can never be sure” (Mafuna, 2007, p. 88). What we can, however, see from the above discussion is that the synthesis of the dialectics was intertwined with Christian theological reflection of the early 1970s.

Let me conclude by pointing out that Biko’s concluding metaphor of a “prize” on the “distant horizon” to which we should “march” (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 108) is not strange in popular Christian eschatologies. It

\(^1\) Writing in 1971 we should not read a technical definition of postcolonial or post-colonial into Buthelezi’s use of the word ‘post-colonial’, nor see in this a conscious choice between postcolonial and decolonial. A redeemed humanity is for Buthelezi a true humanity which is not dominated by another.

\(^{193}\) I return to the use of ’dominion over creation’ as key notion of black theological anthropology in the more detailed discussion or Maimela below.
is perhaps with reason that this reminds of Paul’s rhetoric in Philippians 3:14 “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (RSV).

2.4.4 Biko’s eschatology as a critical lens on whiteness

Biko’s description of race explicitly argues along lines which today would be described as seeing race as a social construct. As Shannon Sullivan argues, seeing race as a social construct does not imply that it is merely a “sort of veneer laid over a nonraced human core” (Sullivan, 2006, p. 32). However, what Biko does in this early reflection is to reject any notion of race as being part of the orders of creation and therefore, to again quote Sullivan, to argue that “being historical means being capable of having a different future” (Sullivan, 2006, p. 3). The very idea of race, the very construction of humanity as raced, is capable of having a different future in Biko’s vision. But this future is tied to a rejection of white racism from the underside of modernity.

In reflecting on Biko’s ‘more human face’ Mandla Seleoane touches on how this goes back behind and below the political system of apartheid when writing: “The removal of the basis for white and black people believing that blackness spells inferiority is one of the things that, in Steve’s view, we would need to achieve in order to attain the humanity he sought” (Seleoane, 2007, p. 74). It is exactly at this point where Biko’s relevance is revealed in South Africa more than two decades after the end of apartheid. Because the very basis for what keeps race in place needs to be opposed. As the preceding chapters argued in dialogue with theology outside of South Africa, and this chapter and the next will argue in dialogue with theology from South Africa, this basis is also theological.

While another world, something that comes after history, after our biological death, has been of deep concern to much of Christian reflection under the description eschatology, this clearly is not what Biko is focused on. If there is an eschatology in Biko’s synthesis then it can only be in this world. If there is hope then it is only hope if it is hope for this world. Any attempt to make black suffering bearable by shifting attention to the ‘sweet by and by’ would have no place within Biko’s argument.

Biko writes about hope, writes what I described up to this point as Christian eschatology, “after Moltmann” (Bauckham, 2007, p. 671; Webb, 2007, p. 505). Biko himself was most probably not familiar with the work of Moltmann, but we know that he was familiar with the more explicitly liberatory work of
Cone and that the University Christian Movement was familiar with Harvey Cox’s *The Secular City*, even if we cannot tell whether Biko himself read Cox’s work. A Christian eschatology concerned with the future of *this* world was fully part of the milieu in which Biko’s thoughts developed. If we take as a working definition that “eschatology articulates the conviction that reality will eventually be transformed into what it ought to be” (Conradie, 2000, p. 8), then the potentially eschatological implication of the synthesis becomes clear.

Biko’s dialectics functions in a fashion similar to the imaginative hope which Bauckham describes:

> Hope is an imaginative enterprise. Especially is this the case when hope’s great gift is its power to negate the negatives of present experience. Only the capacity of the human imagination to transcend the given enables us to escape the constraints of the present and to suppose that things might be otherwise. This kind of imaginative or visionary hope is intimately related to transcendence. It takes us beyond the mere extrapolation of the future from the present and the calculation of the future on the basis of past and present. It envisages the genuinely new. (Bauckham, 2007, p. 681)

The dialectics have an obvious concern with the future. This is also clear from the more overtly political versions of the dialectic. But we should not read a too clearly linear timeframe into the dialectics. These are not three phases that can be placed next to each other: strong white racism, followed by strong black solidarity, after which true humanity will arrive. Rather, while strong white racism calls forth strong black solidarity as the only possible response, and make possible true humanity where power politics have no place, these can also exist simultaneously. Strong white racism and strong black solidarity by definition exist simultaneously. But true humanity is both here and not here. It is already and not yet. It is here because God’s claim of people as true humans makes the confrontation with the dehumanising force of white colonialism and racism a possibility, but it is also here in places where this strong white racism no longer retains its power of questioning the true humanity of others. It is a hope from which people live

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194 In 1968 the University Christian Movement ordered 100 copies of Cox’s book (Magaziner, 2007, p. 90). As Magaziner indicates, Cox’s work is a picture of the political theology of the liberal University Christian Movement within which black consciousness was born, even if black consciousness should not be reduced to this political theology.

195 In Biko’s own words he was not an avid reader. Books were considered helpful, but secondary to listening to the people (Biko, 2008, pp. 24-25).

196 I am aware that this exclusive focus on race silences the other powers that disrupts our true humanity. While black theology in the era under discussion had a clear focus on whiteness as that which opposes true humanity, this argument can only remain true when embedded within a broader opposition to that which oppose our true humanity through patriarchy, economic oppression, heteronormativity etc.
in the present, but it is a reality which is always in need of becoming as long as whiteness and other forces disrupt true humanity.

In the concluding *Essays on Black Theology* Buthelezi contributed an essay on hope, describing black eschatology as a realised eschatology:

> The Christian ethic is essentially an ethic of hope. Its context of realisation is the ‘now’ and the ‘not yet’. The struggle against oppression coexists with the consciousness of victory as realised eschatological event. That is why the delay in the manifestation of fruits does not detract from the intensity of a genuinely Christian ethical endeavour. The boundary between faith and hope melts away: while faith affirms the reality of the present, hope affirms the future reality as already present. (Buthelezi, 1972c, p. 124)

Biko’s true humanity is a protest against another Hegelian eschatology: the expectation of an ‘end of history’ found in free-market capitalism and liberal democracy (Bauckham, 2007, p. 677) which through the Washington Consensus became key to forming a vision of a ‘new South Africa’ (Gibson, 2011, p. 2).

But such a temporal interpretation risks merely reading Biko as a mirror of this other determination of where the project of history should end.

True humanity is however not merely a point at the end of time but also at the end of space. Drawing on the work of Enrique Dussel Vítor Westhelle points out how the projects of history, and the search for a temporal utopian future, privilege what is already here. But liberation theologies are concerned with those people who have been denied history, who have been considered human only in so far as they have been grafted into the history of another. “Those without a history are somewhere! And from this place, this spatial (dis)location, eschatology is being envisioned differently.” (Westhelle, 2007, p. 315).

It is at the periphery of how whiteness constructed the world that true humanity can become possible. In Dussel’s words, “I, on the other hand, deny that same Being and its utopia not in the name of future utopia but of a present utopia: the peripheral peoples, the oppressed classes, the women, the child” (Dussel, 1972).

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197 This history continues to be a matter of intense debate. However, part of the negotiation phase at the end of apartheid involved decisions on economic policies, and also the need for a loan from the World Bank. The influence of institutions like the World Bank and IMF, their proposals for economic reform in developing countries (the Washington Consensus) had a clear impact on these policies. What is however important for the argument here, is that this occurs shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, therefore related here to arguments about an ‘end of history’ where all are drawn into a single economic vision.

198 Vítor Westhelle points out that *eschaton* in the New Testament has both spatial and temporal use, and that the kingdom is found both temporally and spatially at the *eschata* (Westhelle, 2007, pp. 320-323).
1985, p. 48). Hope is not merely that which envisions a future beyond white racism, but a space beyond that formed by a colonial imagination. True humanity emerges from a particular place, beyond the ends of colonial space.199

Read in this way, Biko’s eschatology stands in stark contrast with the popular image of a reconciled eschatological community. Not because the aesthetic diversity of humanity should not be part of such an imagination, but because the racial scale which brings humans together through aesthetically marked difference which does not reject the power that marks this difference (whiteness) results in a community which is, in Biko’s words, ever bound to power politics – thus no true humanity.

This allows us to explore in dialogue with Biko the eschatological question repeatedly posed to liberation theologies: does Biko allow for the work of God, or can Biko’s synthesis be ‘reduced’ to a utopian political vision? Embedded as Biko’s language of hope and the true humanity was inside a Christian discourse, some might argue that Biko’s thought is just another secularisation of Christian hope, reduced to the “immanent possibilities of the historical process itself” (Bauckham, 2007, p. 674). Biko is quite clear that if we want something to change then we will have to do it ourselves. Perhaps slightly tongue in cheek he concludes The Church as Seen by a Young Layman, a talk given to a conference of black pastors, with the words: “Finally, I would like to remind the black ministry, and indeed all black people that God is not in the habit of coming down from heaven to solve people’s problems on earth” (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 65). But is his synthesis one more historical utopianism?

In Biko’s conscientisation, it is clear that true humanity is not something that we can give to others, even if it is a gift that can be bestowed on the world. True humanity assumes that we will recognise who we already are, it assumes humanity already gifted (created). It should also not be confused with an Enlightenment emphasis on ‘progress’ (see Bauckham, 2007, p. 675), on the contrary, the kind of utopian technological visions of Enlightenment progress is part of what is being protested in the quest for true humanity! Even Kritzinger’s description of black eschatology as a vision of a “non-racial South Africa” and “a democratic, socialist, African state” (Kritzinger, 1987, pp. 21-23) is already a shift from Biko’s hope for

199 Westhelle would argue that the process of humanisation does draw on a longitudinal eschatological imagination (Westhelle, 2012, p. 83). However, his spatial emphasis also illuminates the immediacy of true humanity, and the fact that its liberatory impulse, even if drawing all into such a new humanism, emerges from a particular place which has to be taken seriously.
true humanity towards the more political syntheses. A great hesitancy should therefore, accompany reducing Biko’s hope to any utopian political programme, even while he had very clear strategic goals.

This question can perhaps best be answered through a modern theological analogy. Jewish philosopher and theologian Peter Ochs describe the post-liberal theology of David Hardy and others as a theology of repair. What this theological work however does is not to bring repair itself, but to clear the space so that God can do the work of repair. Hardy’s focus is on repair within the divided church, placed within a broader argument on repair between Jewish and Christian communities (this is where Ochs’ interest comes in), and in the world at large. But repair is the work of the Spirit, and “Hardy’s reparative writing is to recommend ways of removing obstructions to the work of the Spirit, rather than ways of directly repairing loss” (Ochs, 2011, p. 182).

By analogy, Biko’s dialectics should be read as a theology of hope which works to clear away that which prohibits God’s work of repairing true humanity. That is the work of the antithesis, and it is work that requires the active participation of human agents building capacity, conscientising people, opposing that which disrupts the humanity of people. It is fully dependent on this active work. But true humanity itself cannot be given by one to another, people can only be led to discover who they are. Biko’s writing is best understood as a commitment to clearing the obstacles – both structural and psychological – which made it difficult for black people to recognise what was already true – that they were created by God (Biko, 2012 [1978], p. 53; Tutu, 2012, p. ix).

However, we finally need to return to Adam Small. Because the hoped-for true humanity at the end of space is also a call to those drawn in to construct the centre of whiteness.

The point however, is that we can no longer care whether or not Whites understand us. What we do care about is understanding ourselves and, in the course of this task, helping Whites to understand themselves – in the words of the Black author I have already quoted, helping them “to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality”.

We notice that this insistence upon ourselves, this new turning away from the White world towards ourselves, is not passing unnoticed by Whites; they have written about it in their newspapers where they say it is to be feared. We wish to say to them however, that they have something worse to fear: themselves. (Small, 1972, pp. 12-13)

In dialogue with black consciousness, a Christian eschatology cannot be the reproduction of hope for racial reconciliation as often understood – the hope that the races formed through colonialism and
white supremacy can live in harmony. It is rather about a new humanism, true humanity, which fundamentally disrupts race in its rejection of the white racism that constructs modern ideas of the human as raced. In as much as whiteness is fundamentally a category signifying power in modernity, true humanity is found on the other side of the disruption of whiteness. Biko’s hope was deeply universal, but for those endowed with power in places where whiteness reigns supreme it provides no easy way out, since the very basis of our being in modernity is named as an obstruction to receiving God’s gift. Yet the only possibility for those who are white to work for the removal of this obstruction involved recognising the extent to which we are bound into whiteness as a system and working for the disruption of this system that obstructs people’s humanity.

What Biko argues is captured in James Perkinson’s conundrum of whiteness discussed in chapter 2: “The conundrum of race is such that there is no salvation for whites as white and there is no solidarity with other except as white” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 223). We will only be able to embrace Biko’s dialectics if we understand this conundrum: for the liberal whites of the 1970s in South Africa, there could be no solidarity with black people for as long as they silenced their own whiteness, attempting to present themselves as somehow disconnected from its evil. But the gift of a more human face can only be embraced where whiteness no longer reigns. True humanity is not attainable “for whites as white”.

2.5 Conclusion

Biko was no academic systematic theologian. His work should not be evaluated as a project in academic eschatology. On the contrary, apart from not being trained in academic theology nor consciously writing within the genre of systematic theology, Biko’s deep commitment as intellectual thinking with the people (Biko, 2008) precluded any such systematisation in his short life (he was killed at the age of 31). So we should not search for a worked out systematisation with all loose ends tied. However, as argued above, Biko can rightly be read within the frame of Christian eschatology, and doing this both highlights the implication of his thought and, as will become clear in the argument below, provides a background for what it was that black theology worked for: not the mere end of apartheid, but a true humanity (Biko) or new humanism (Gibson).
3 Simon Maimela and the problem of white theology and anthropology

3.1 Introduction

Simon Maimela’s early academic career was in the USA. He completed his master’s studies at Luther Seminary in St. Paul in 1974 and his doctoral studies at Harvard in 1978. He taught in various institutions during the latter half of the 1970s, before being appointed as the first black theologian at the University of South Africa in 1980. In 1994 he became the first black Vice-Principal at this same institution. He was a founding member of the Institute for Contextual Theology and played a key role in the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) (Landman, 2010).

In the first of two steps at exploring how this quest for true humanity was picked up in more formal academic black theology I turn to Maimela’s work on theological anthropology. Elaine Robinson’s brief overview of North American theologies, both black and white, indicate a pattern which can be found repeatedly (even while Robinson’s overview is by her own admission not exhaustive). Black and Latino/a theologies give priority to reflecting on race in their theological anthropologies, while white theologians ignore race (Robinson, 2012, pp. 29-53). While Robinson’s analysis is mainly focused on textbooks, where anthropology constitutes a single chapter, and an argument could be made that spatial limitations are at play (even while gender and sexuality are indeed important in some of these same introductions), the observations hold beyond this example.

Perhaps no better example can be given than David Kelsey’s Eccentric Existence (Kelsey, 2009), not because of his greater silence but because of the mere scope of this work on theological anthropology. At beyond 1000 pages, exclusively focused on theological anthropology, and consciously working with the body, it could be expected that the way in which modern notions of race have distorted our theological anthropology (or beyond this, how modern theological anthropology is thoroughly embedded within a racialised context and an important force in forming this racialised context) should at the very least form an explicit part of his analysis. So even the turn to the body does not imply that the canons of North

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200 This section was previously published as, The theological anthropology of Simon Maimela: Democratisation of power and being human in relationship (Van Wyngaard, 2017).
202 Robinson uses the description “theologies of colour” in the US context which I translate as “black” theology into the South African context. Following the argument I made in the introduction to section 2 of this chapter, I use “black” to refer to all people oppressed by white supremacy and “black theology” to refer to those theologies which consciously work from the experience of racial oppression.
Atlantic theology (let us name this as white theology) will reflect on one of the key ways in which bodies were given theological meaning: race.\textsuperscript{203}

A further problem of white reception which Robinson identifies in relation to the work of Rubén Rosario Rodrigues’s \textit{Racism and God-Talk} might be relevant in numerous other situations as well: theological anthropology which addresses the particularity of race from a particular social location is (by the predominantly white North Atlantic theological canon) considered to have relevance to people from that particular social location alone (Robinson, 2012, p. 32). The thesis of this study is however, the exact opposite: that, as pointed out above with reference to Small in particular, black theology is of particular relevance for those who are white to understand themselves as white in a racialised society.

### 3.2 Simon Maimela’s black theological anthropology

As a systematic theologian Maimela reflects on two loci in particular. The one is notions of salvation and in particular how it relates to history and liberation, the other anthropology and in particular how it relates to race and racism. These are obviously related, and while the focus of this section is on the latter, the former is always right beneath the surface. Dwight Hopkins already pointed out that it is however the latter that is at the core of Maimela’s work (Hopkins, 1989, pp. 109, 197).

Throughout his career Maimela held that apartheid is at its heart an anthropological problem: the deepest problem with apartheid is that it negates the being of black people (Maimela, 1982, p. 59), that at its heart apartheid is the result of an impoverished anthropology (Maimela, 1994, p. 2) and after the end of apartheid he states that “when that pessimistic anthropology became embodied in the apartheid ideology and its social structures, it became the greatest single factor that was to result in the division of our racial groups from one another rather than their reconciliation” (Maimela, 1997, p. 6).

Without here embarking on a discussion on the extent to which black theology has a white audience, whether explicit or implicit, and to what extent black theology should or should not have a white audience, \textsuperscript{203} A thorough discussion of Kelsey’s silence on race in his anthropology requires a detailed study on its own. David Ford already mentioned Kelsey’s silence on matters of sex and gender (Ford, 2011, p. 51), and a question along the same lines (the fact that Kelsey himself claims that theology should reflect on the relation to current culture) can be made for race. Kelsey responded by noting that questions of gender, sex, and race (Kelsey adds race even though Ford did not raise questions about race) are indeed important, but he considers this to be outside our basic identity in Christ and therefore left these for a later project (Kelsey, 2011, p. 80). Even if this argument does make sense within Kelsey’s project, we have to note that through this Kelsey repeats the pattern which Robinson problematised.
it is still important to note that a number of Maimela’s essays were consciously written with a white audience in mind. As a black theologian, he was on a number of occasions asked to reflect on the implication of black theology for white South Africans in late apartheid South Africa. But even beyond this Maimela often seems to consciously write with a white audience in the back of his mind. However, black theology in South Africa, and Maimela in particular, also worked with the idea that while it addresses the oppressed black people it hopes that white people will also listen and be liberated (Maimela, 1984, p. 47). I therefore, read Maimela both in his conscious address to white South Africans, but even more as one listening to his black anthropology as a challenge to white racism.

Maimela’s constructive proposal for theological anthropology rests on two pillars that I will describe in my analysis as the democratisation of power and relational anthropology. In his final argument on theological anthropology, he consciously presents them as two sides to his proposal, but they appear repeatedly with different emphases in various publications from the early 1980s.

It can be argued that with these two pillars Maimela is also attempting to draw together black theology and African theology, a relation that was under sustained debate during the time when he reflected on anthropology, in particular in Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) where Maimela played an active role (Molobi, 2010, p. 21) and where he in a 1991 keynote address also consciously opened up this split and attempted to indicate ways in which these two streams could be weaved together (Maimela, 1991a, pp. 1-3). The argument on the democratisation of power is more

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204 See for example the introduction to Man in “White” Theology where he reflects on the difficulty of being asked to speak on white anthropology (Maimela, 1981) or the conclusion to Black Power and Black Theology where he explicitly calls on white Christians to listen to black Christians, and explain the need for black power in a way which is only relevant to a white audience (Maimela, 1984, p. 49). John de Gruchy’s response to this last mentioned paper also reveal that this is an explicit purpose of the paper (De Gruchy, 1984, p. 50).

205 See for example an argument published in the Journal of Black Theology in South Africa, in which he argues that “I believe it is the calling and challenge that face the Black Church to begin to call the Churches and Christians in this land to account for what they do in their relationships with their racially different neighbours in the light of what they teach and profess every Sunday.” (Maimela, 1988, p. 25). Whether Maimela intends to include the black church and black Christians in his calling to account for relations with neighbours of a different race is open for interpretation, but regardless, it should be clear that he intends that the black Church should call white Christians and churches to account.

206 The 1994 essay What is the human being? is both the most extensive explicit argument on theological anthropology and also the last he wrote academically on the topic. The later and shorter essay on the topic (Maimela, 1997) was mostly a duplication of a section of the 1994 essay. It is however important to note that he already presented in a brief outline in 1981 (Maimela, 1981, pp. 39-40) the main points of what he developed more fully in 1994.
explicitly related to the black theology struggle for liberation while his suggestion for relational
anthropology is more explicitly presented as an African contribution to theology.

Emphasising the anthropological aspects of Maimela’s critique should not be read as an attempt at shying
away from the material reality underpinning racism. In 1979 Maimela explicitly identified himself with
those who attempt to see class and race together (Hopkins, 1989, p. 111) and in a 1998 introduction on
In the repeated description of the context as involving dehumanisation and oppression, which calls for
the transformation of humanity and society, he describes the overarching goal as justice: “Therefore the
elimination of sin requires greater effort than the conversion of few pious individuals. Its elimination
demands a radical liberation and transformation of humanity itself as well as the transformation of
society. This happens when men and women together with God struggle to build up a just society”
(Maimela, 1990a, p. 54). That said, behind the injustice of apartheid, Maimela described an impoverished
and heretical theological anthropology.

I turn first to his constructive anthropological vision, which acts as a mirror for noting the anthropological
deficiencies of whiteness. In this vision we see Maimela enfleshing what he believed the task of theology
should be: “Even more important it [theology] must become involved in the creation of a humane picture
of the world, a world which shall be attractive enough to motivate human beings to invest their time,
energy and creative potentialities to realize it.” (Maimela, 1982, p. 64).

3.2.1 Democra	ising power

Maimela describes the creation imago Dei as a “momentous biblical conclusion” (Maimela, 1994, p. 6)
and describes his reflection in the imago Dei as a biblical reflection208. Exegetically Maimela does not even
attempt to keep to those texts which inform the notion of the imago Dei but draws freely on various other
scriptural sources, and I would argue from the agenda of black theology, to develop his anthropology
around the notion of the imago Dei. The imago Dei is found only in Genesis 1-11 (Middleton, 2005, p. 16)
and New Testament texts reflecting on Christ as the image of God is both limited in number and is not
simply a reflection on Old Testament instances where this notion is found (Kelsey, 2009, p. 936). Still, the

207 In this Maimela associates himself with Mosala, whom he places in the same category, and who is perhaps the
best known from this time for bringing together black theology with Marxist class analysis (Kee, 2006, p. 87).
208 The 1997 republication of the first part of the 1994 lecture on what is a human being is presented as a “biblical
reflection” on what is a human being. In a much shorter reflection in 1981 he also presents his anthropology as a
*imago Dei* has become a key notion in the history of theology, and the limited biblical references by no means disqualify Maimela from constructively developing this notion in a way of opposing racism. The key argument Maimela makes in relation to the *imago Dei* does however, have strong exegetical support in the Genesis 1 text, as I will indicate below.

On a more general note, Maimela connects the *imago Dei* to notions of human dignity, value, and human uniqueness on various levels (Maimela, 1994, pp. 7-9), including humans being religious and communal beings (Maimela, 1994, pp. 11-13). While such an emphasis has an obvious critical function in contexts of oppression, where the dignity of humans are being trampled upon (cf. Maimela, 1984, p. 42), and while this is indeed connected to a positive anthropology, Maimela’s positive anthropology should not be reduced to considering humans as valuable, to “his view on the goodness and beauty of being human” (Landman, 2010, p. 5)\(^{209}\), even though he does, perhaps we might say obviously, consider humanity, both in general and black humanity in particular, to be beautiful and good.

Rather, the point in which Maimela’s positive anthropology is most clearly expressed, and which ties together his arguments over a number of years, concerns the power given to human beings. In the *imago Dei*, Maimela notes that “human beings can representatively act on earth as the Godself would have acted” (Maimela, 1994, p. 7). Noting the difficulty of giving content to the *imago Dei*, and after mentioning two dominant interpretations of the *imago Dei* throughout history, and pointing out their limitations, Maimela finally states that “God’s image in humans has to be understood in terms both of human living relationships to their surroundings and of their calling to a dynamic task and vocation of becoming sharers of God’s creative nature” (Maimela, 1994, p. 16).

Maimela’s positive anthropology must be read as positive not only about the value of human beings but optimistic about the potential of human beings to transform their worlds, about the *power* of humanity. He argues that “the idea of divine image should be understood as referring to the divine empowerment of men and women, granting to them the ability to create and produce the world and to structure human interrelationships for the furtherance of history” (Maimela, 1994, p. 17) and he defines the divine

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\(^{209}\) Both Landman’s (Landman, 2010, pp. 4-5) as well as Fick’s (Fick, 2013, pp. 339-340) overview of Maimela’s anthropology reduces his positive anthropology to notions of beauty and goodness. However, neither of them make reference to Maimela’s most comprehensive essay on theological anthropology, *What is the human?* from 1994, where the argument on the *imago Dei* and empowerment is most explicitly unpacked. Still, the older overview of Hopkins, written before this 1994 essay, and not cited by either Landman or Fick either, already noted that Maimela’s anthropology is aimed at arguing that humans have the power to change their circumstances and the world (Hopkins, 1989, pp. 109-111).
image as humans’ “empowerment to become the co-creators with God, within the overall context of divine creativity” (Maimela, 1994, p. 20). Exegetically, Maimela draws this explicitly from a reading of human dominion in Genesis 1 (Maimela, 1994, pp. 20-21).

However, the explicit development of human empowerment as a notion in a black theology of liberation can only be understood when noting Maimela’s insistence on what I would call the democratisation of power. The problem with colonialism is the monopolising of the vocation of creative agency, excluding black people from God’s task of having dominion over the earth and being agents of history (Maimela, 1994, pp. 23-24). This is the heart of Maimela’s positive anthropology: that humanity is empowered to be God’s co-creators, but more specifically, that all humanity is empowered in this way, and that the anthropology allowing power to be monopolised so that some are denied participation in having agency over history is therefore heretical. Maimela also reads the Genesis text to say that this dominion by definition excludes dominion over other human beings (Maimela, 1994, p. 29).

While the argument above is drawn from the latest iteration of Maimela’s theological anthropology, in retrospect it is clear that this emphasis on empowerment was key to Maimela’s anthropology from the beginning. As an example, when arguing for a theology of humanisation in 1982 he writes “it is in their power to make the world into something in which every human being can enjoy freedom and social justice” (Maimela, 1982, p. 63). Elsewhere he acknowledges the importance of affirming black humanity and goodness (black is beautiful) but immediately states that this is connected to the affirmation that one “has the right to determine one’s destiny” (Maimela, 1984, p. 42). He pre-empts the argument that he will develop more fully a decade later by writing in summary that black theology seeks to show that concerning black people “God loves them and has created them in his image and has given them full authority to have dominion over their created selves and over their environment” (Maimela, 1984, p. 46). Dwight Hopkins also noted this emphasis in his 1989 study on black theology in South Africa and the USA, pointing out that it is through such democratisation of power that we can speak of a theology of reconciliation in Maimela’s work – taking joint responsibility (Hopkins, 1989, p. 112). In summary, the argument that Christian anthropology insists on not only human dignity but human power and agency is visible

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210 While Maimela’s theological point is clear, his exegetical argument jumps between Genesis 1 and 2 to argue his point from the place in the narrative where Eve is created, but leading into contradictory statements since Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 cannot be harmonised on such a narrative level. If we however assume that Genesis 1 is the primary text that Maimela works with, then his argument is that since Adam and Eve were both created before the mandate for subjugation, dominion over other humans is clearly excluded from this mandate.
throughout his career, although he develops this more systematically as an essay in theological anthropology towards the end of his academic writing.

Richard Middleton’s (Middleton, 2005) detailed study on the *Imago Dei* in Genesis 1 makes an argument for a reading of the *Imago Dei* as drawing on Mesopotamian royal metaphors, where the king is the image of the gods on earth, and therefore has a particular task of ruling. However, the Genesis 1 text functions as a critique of this royal ideology by connecting the image of God to *all* humanity, therefore implies democratisation of power (Middleton, 2005, p. 205). Maimela’s insistence in emphasising the empowerment connected with the *imago Dei* is not argued on such detailed exegetical grounds, but it can both be exegetically justified (following Middleton) and he also develops a theological rationale for a key aspect of black theology: the need for black power.

As part of an argument explaining to a white audience why black power (which Maimela equates with black consciousness211) and black theology is important, Maimela simply states that a new South Africa is only possible by moving through black power and black theology (Maimela, 1984, p. 49) which meant that one has the “right to determine one’s destiny” (Maimela, 1984, p. 42).212 Given the argument above, one can expect an anthropological vision where true humanity and true community is dependent on the democratisation of power, on everyone being allowed the agency to contribute to determining their own future.

This strong emphasis on dominion however, warrants at least a brief note on ecology. From a contemporary ecotheological perspective, Maimela could be described as anthropocentric in his optimistic anthropology. There is a strong line of argument in which humans are sketched as being outside of ‘nature’, and where the value of creation is reduced to its support for human life, rather than having

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211 Maimela himself at one point seems to consider black power and black consciousness to be closely related if not synonymous (Maimela, 1984, p. 45). While Maimela does not quote Steve Biko, Mogashoa notes that Maimela seems to be drawing on Biko’s 1971 essay *Fear – an Important Determinant in South African Politics* (Biko, 2012 [1978], pp. 80-87) for his notion of black power in writing black power and black theology. Mogashoa however seem to be unaware that *Black Power and Black Theology* was published in 1984, and therefore incorrectly reads the 1987 republication (Maimela, 1987, pp. 63-74) against the background of the Rubicon speech and resulting events (Mogashoa, 2010, p. 5). This 1985 speech by the then president PW Botha, where he emphasised his resolve to continue with the policy of apartheid, became a key moment in the final phases of apartheid.  

212 It is important to read this together with his emphasis on community and interpersonal relations, and the creative and life-giving possibilities when people from different backgrounds connect – in brief, Maimela is not in any way advocating for any form of “group self-determination”, this is explicitly about every individual having agency.
value for its own sake.\textsuperscript{213} I note this first merely for pointing out what would be obvious in a contemporary more ecologically sensitive reading, but also because I think that the liberating anthropology, even when anthropocentric, contains an interesting, if unintended, ecological upshot. In insisting on the democratisation of power, there is also a rejection of conquest and of colonial rulers or ethnic and tribal domination of the land of others and individualised fencing of the land to keep others from it (Maimela, 1994, pp. 23-24). In ecological perspective this calls for humanity as a whole having dominion over the earth by humans having dominion, that is, creative agency, over the local earth and land on which we live. This implies that humanity as a whole must share creative agency for all the earth, rather than only some monopolising this agency. Arguably, our contemporary ecological crisis is at least in part due to the extent to which those who control creative capacity are disconnected from the land which is being drawn upon for resources, allowing for the destruction of land on which others depend without needing to consider how it impacts on the self. Maimela’s own conclusion, not set in ecological perspective but with clear ecological implications, is that God’s command for co-creativity should result in a transformation of the world “into one which is supportive of life” (Maimela, 1994, p. 30).

3.2.2 Being human in relationship

Without enforcing a too strict division into Maimela’s work, a second and distinct development in his theological anthropology can be discerned. Maimela merges these two lines of argument in numerous places, perhaps most comprehensively in the last pages of \textit{What is a human?} (Maimela, 1994, pp. 25-30). However, noting the distinct arguments can assist in gaining clarity on his proposal. I distinguish between these two lines of argument not only due to the difference in emphasis, but also a difference in sources. As pointed out above, the emphasis on the empowerment of humans is presented as a biblical argument (even if arguably not a strictly exegetical argument). While it is obviously possible to make the point that human beings are inherently relational from biblical arguments, and Maimela at times does follow this line, he mostly develops an argument from African anthropology, therefore from culture and experience, for this part of his anthropology, even while this is also described as being in line with the Bible.\textsuperscript{214} Maimela

\textsuperscript{213} See for example his argument for the primary task of theology as humanisation, where a strong distinction is made between “jungle/Eden” and “city/Jerusalem”, with our task being to work for the latter where he argues that “our primary human responsibility to construct, nurture and change social structures so that they might serve human needs better and better” (Maimela, 1982, pp. 62-63). Maimela is also explicit that this constructive task involves manipulation of the environment for human needs, so that his argument can be read as stating that the environment exists for the sake of serving humans.

\textsuperscript{214} The primary exegetical argument Maimela repeatedly invokes is that Genesis 3 and 4 need to be kept together, but were separated from each other in White/Western theology so that Genesis 3 was read without noting its
argues for an African contribution in at least two ways. One can be described as a naïve reading of both the Bible and the notion of “Africa” by presenting examples of the contributions of those in what is now called North-Africa to the Jewish and Christian faith, such as the Egyptians sheltering Abraham and Jesus (Maimela, 1990b, pp. 70-71). The other is a more conscious form of inculturation (Maimela, 1991a, p. 1) in dialogue with African culture. I ignore the first and focus exclusively on the second.

One of the questions that Maimela addresses in a number of places is what the African contribution to the Christian faith would be (cf. Maimela, 1988; Maimela, 1990b; Maimela, 1991a). He sketches African culture as being built on an anthropology which sees the human as being human in community, “which is the hallmark of African anthropology” (Maimela, 1991a, p. 5). Every human is therefore tasked with maintaining this healthy network of relationships, both with the community and the ancestors, and elaborate practices and rituals exist to protect this network of interpersonal relationships (Maimela, 1988, p. 22).

The result of this relational anthropology is that sin is understood primarily, if not exclusively\(^{215}\), as that which disrupts interpersonal relations, that leads to the breakdown in community, rather than the breaking of divine laws. This is related to the well-known distinction between a vertical and horizontal dimension to faith, and Maimela argues that this horizontal dimension has been underemphasised in the history of theology. The relational is directly connected to this horizontal dimension and described as the contribution which the black church, drawing on African resources, must make to the church at large:

This African perspective on anthropology, which looks at life holistically in terms of the multiple relationships in which life is lived, the perspective that lays greater stress on the social wrongs

\(^{215}\) Maimela remain slightly vague on whether sin is exclusively what happens between humans, or whether some transgression against the divine that is not also a transgression against another is possible. See for example the contrast between the following two sentences appearing right after each other, where the first is slightly more hesitant, but the second makes a stronger claim: “Sin is understood more in terms of the evil that people do to or perpetuate against one another than in terms of the human transgression of the divine law against God. In other words, Africans do not think of sin and evil in terms of an abstract legalistic structure through which human beings relate to God either by obeying or disobeying the Supreme Being outside and beyond the social life in which individuals live as social selves.” (Maimela, 1990b, p. 74, my emphasis) In the broader argument it does however seem to become clear that Maimela is leaning towards the latter argument, where not God but humans suffer due to sin, although the Creator God is offended by these actions which cause suffering (Maimela, 1990b, p. 75). But if humans, individually and as a community, are the object of sin, that does not mean that humans only are the subjects of sin and evil. Within Maimela’s description of an African worldview various forces contribute to sin (Maimela, 1991b, pp. 6-7).
and evils which humans commit against their fellows, is one which *Black* theologians should lift up and offer an *African* contribution to theological reflection on the great questions of sin and salvation (Maimela, 1988, p. 22, my emphasis)\(^\text{216}\)

What is important is that he presents his theological anthropology consciously by drawing from experience and culture; in this case, what is considered a valuable contribution from African experience and culture. While he presents this as being in line with scripture (Maimela, 1988, pp. 23-24), it is not dependent on scripture for its truth and contribution. Lastly, while drawing on African experience and culture, he presents this not as a provincial idea but as a contribution made to the church and society as a whole.

Concerning the question of sources in theology, there is a moment in Maimela’s work which hints towards a more decisive break with the project of what he would describe as traditional theology. This possible break is found in him throwing down the gauntlet to *black theology*. In a 1993 publication, Maimela critiques *black theology* for its naïve use of scripture and its attempts at convincing others that its view of God is free from ideological distortion. Rather, Maimela argues that *black theology* should take full responsibility for its own claims, arguing that the truth of *black theology* is not necessarily found in superior interpretation of scripture, but rather in its moral or practical value: *black theology* speaks about God in a way which works for “liberating the black people from oppression, thus leading them to realise their fuller humanity”, and the truth of *black theology* should be determined by its effectiveness (Maimela, 1993, pp. 61-66). This stands in sharp contrast to the language of a more “Biblical” perspective found earlier, for example in contradicting “Biblical anthropology” with “white anthropology” (Maimela, 1981, p. 29) or in arguing that biblical arguments are more authoritative than arguments from culture and history and form the “true basis of the knowledge of what the human is” (Maimela, 1981, p. 38). But arguably Maimela did not work out the implication of such a decisive break concerning sources of theology in his work; it is rather a more creative tension between *black* and/or *African* experience and scripture and tradition that forms his theology.

\(^\text{216}\) While Maimela often uses this interplay of an *African* contribution which *black theologians* should pick up and contribute to the broader church, elsewhere he uses these exact same words but instead of *black theologians* here he refers to *African theologians* (Maimela, 1991b, p. 12). The difference can be explained by looking at the broader focus of each argument, with the 1988 version speaking to challenges of the black church and the 1991 version more specifically to the contribution of *African theology*.  

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3.3 The heresy of white theological anthropology

Against this background, Maimela’s theological critique of white anthropology, or anthropological question to white theology, becomes clear. I point to three theological critiques, giving a more expanded explanation of the first, which is not directly related to his positive proposals, and a more brief explanation on the last two, which is the mirror image of his positive proposals.

Maimela is quite explicit in stating that the problem of white racism is not found in the classic statements of Christian anthropology nor how they are appropriated in contemporary white churches (Maimela, 1981, pp. 27-28).217 If we want to understand the problem of theology we need to focus on how it is being enacted.

There is a problem that Maimela is attempting to describe and make sense of or perhaps an utterly strange anthropological phenomenon that Maimela attempts to frame in Christian perspective:

the concept of "man" in White theology is one of the most difficult for an outsider, that is, one who is not White, to analyse and to try to make sense of. This is because the portrait or construal of what is constitutive of the human that White theology offers its readers strikes a Black person as a creature with which he cannot identify himself. For human self ("man") as portrayed in White theology is an incurably dangerous monster. (Maimela, 1981, p. 27)

He continues to make the explicit claim that “biblical anthropology and White anthropology are mutually exclusive and contradictory, running on parallel paths that can never meet” (Maimela, 1981, p. 29). This claim needs to be read in light of the thread on what a “biblical” anthropology would be, as outlined above.

If Maimela’s theology can be described as building on a positive anthropology, then the negative to which this is a response is found in his description of white anthropology. The problem with white anthropology,

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217 It is however possible to also read this as a rhetorical device, bordering on a homiletic strategy, which highlights a shared Christian identity and then indicates how white actions reveal a break with the explicitly confessed Christian identity. Given that Maimela also poses questions to the orthodoxy of Christian (protestant) anthropology, in particular the way the total depravity of humans is used (Maimela, 1981, pp. 35-36), I suggest that Maimela’s sharp distinction between white theoretical and practical views of man, where he praises the theoretical and critiques the practical, makes more sense if read as such a rhetorical device. Read in this way Maimela follows a classic strategy of black theology in South Africa which acknowledges the professed Christianity of white South Africans and even the South African government (cf. Maimela, 1982, p. 58; Maimela, 1988, p. 25), and then calls out white Christians for not living up to this confession. This is also not unique to South Africa. James Cone identified this same strategy in the work of Martin Luther King (Cone 2005, p. 58). As such, I read the rhetorical device in the context of the introductory comments on Maimela’s white audience.
and given the description above it should be clear that this problem amounts to the heretical in Maimela’s view, in that it holds to a view of humans which says that humans are uncontrollably caught up in cycles of domination and force, having a “portrait of a world in which every human self is the enemy of every other human”, where “human interrelations can never be creative and positive because ultimately each human poses a danger to all the others” and finally, “White anthropology continues to teach us that humans have uncontrollable fratricidal drives which even the Gospel and conversion cannot tame” (Maimela, 1981, pp. 31-32).

The result is that history is read through this lens, so that it becomes a narrative of conflicts, ignoring the positive and creative interactions between diverse peoples and apartheid is then considered absolutely necessary in order to keep apart people who are “by design and nature bent on destroying each other” (Maimela, 1981, p. 33). Maimela is not blind to the very real violence and oppression found in history and acknowledges that this can indeed lead us into the temptation of a negative anthropology, and he does not advocate a naïve community where oppressed peoples ignore the potential violence that can result from certain relationships. What he does however vehemently oppose is the fatalism that he reads in a white anthropology.

Secondly, traditional Western theology became so obsessed with the salvation of the individual that it made sin out to be primarily about transgressions against the divine, making it possible for white theology to justify that one can remain racist even though you are a Christian. Writing on this split between the horizontal and vertical dimension of sin he states: “[W]hite theology seems to suggest that it is possible for Whites to be saved and yet remain racist oppressors while at the same time remaining in good standing in the Church” (Maimela, 1990b, p. 73). This distinction is impossible within the relational anthropology that Maimela presents, where salvation is concerned with the restoration of community.

Thirdly, following from the argument that not only is the implication of the creation imago Dei that humans have dominion over the earth, should not have dominion over other humans, and that all of

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218 For this Maimela explicitly emphasises that a true history of South Africa, while including much conflict, should also indicate “cooperative, friendly, and mutually creative efforts” between indigenous Africans and European settlers (Maimela, 1981, pp. 32, 34).

219 Shannon Sullivan (Sullivan, 2014) reflects in the US context on how the biological reactions white people have due to racial fears are used as an argument to “naturalise” such fears. The argument would then go that since I am physiologically fearful (heartbeat races when I walk through a neighbourhood racialised as black) this has to be natural. What her argument would reveal is that the negative anthropology which Maimela describes impacts on white physiological responses to black people.
humanity is created to have dominion, white theology has justified that dominion was made exclusive to a certain class of people and this class of people have dominion over other people (Maimela, 1994, p. 24).

It is against the background of this theological anthropology that we should read Maimela’s core critique on apartheid, which, exactly because of his focus on the anthropological nature of the heresy is a critique on whiteness rather than apartheid. Maimela’s critique is then not simply on the political system of apartheid, but on the anthropology that underpins this system, and because it goes beyond apartheid and continues to have a direct implication for our reading of whiteness in South Africa after apartheid.

3.4 Maimela’s critique in contemporary perspective

Maimela’s work is a particular description of the more general recognition that white racism also disrupts the humanity of white people. Working from a Christian vision infused by an African anthropology and a black liberation reading of the Bible, he cuts the wounds open to reveal aspects of what is broken in white humanity. Following his main constructive proposals, we can summarise this as an anthropology which does not see itself as fully in interrelation with all other people, and that disconnects being human together from an equitable distribution of power and creative agency.

If we are to follow through on Maimela’s anthropology then we need to constantly keep human dignity and human agency together. The temptation to separate these remains constantly visible when the quest for dignity is reduced to addressing the various material needs of people on their behalf without committing to a society where people have agency in the history that determines their own future and space to creatively contribute to society. This insistence on empowerment and human agency as inherent to a Christian anthropology seem to remain missing in much contemporary discourse, even while dignity is strongly emphasised.

While Kee sees the relevance of black theology after the demise of apartheid exclusively in its appropriation of a class analysis, which reveals how the apartheid political economy was perpetuated in a democratic South Africa, Maimela’s anthropological work opens up another route for a critical engagement of race both sides of 1994. By emphasising the anthropological, Maimela insists that the question of race cannot be reduced to a particular political system, nor to its incidental overlap with class

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220 See for example his claim that “If racism is the agenda then black theology becomes redundant with the end of apartheid” (Kee, 2006, p. 87) and the resulting argument that the relevance of black theology after apartheid is exclusively found in a class analysis.
oppression. The problem is also with dehumanising systems and anthropological assumptions which in a black theological perspective is heretical. Reinforced by a racist political and economic system, and therefore disrupted when these intersecting systems challenged, this anthropology can also survive independently of them. Maimela’s emphasis on the anthropological nature of the problem highlights that political transitions are by their very nature not a resolution to the problem of whiteness, important as the political changes in South Africa have been. Disrupting an anthropology implies disrupting the very idea that we hold of humanity.

Maimela is not blind to the ecclesiological problems resulting from this anthropological heresy. He notes that the response of the white church is to convince white people that they are Christians “in good standing” even though they are “sinning against Christian unity and the third article of the Creed”, that is, “I believe in One, Holy and Apostolic Church…” (Maimela, 1981, p. 34). However, where he differs from approaches which primarily note the ecclesiological problems resulting from racism, is by insisting that this ecclesiological problem is the result of a much deeper anthropological heresy that needs to be addressed.

3.5 Conclusion

At the heart of Simon Maimela’s theology is a liberating anthropology presented in opposition to a white racist theological anthropology. The core elements of this anthropology are a commitment to the democratisation of power and being human in relationship. The effects of a white anthropology are visible on both sides of a democratic dispensation in South Africa. Maimela’s work therefore, presents one aspect of the theological challenge to whiteness in South Africa that remains significant.

4 Takatso Mofokeng on Christology

4.1 Introduction

Takatso Mofokeng was a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa in Mamelodi, a township outside Pretoria, before doing his doctoral studies at the Theologische Hogeschool in Kampen, The Netherlands. He was a member of the Belydende Kring and later professor of systematic theology at the University of South Africa (Botha, 2015, p. 70).

Christology has been key to black theology both in the USA and South Africa, seen perhaps best in the Christological emphasis of the main proponents of the first phases of black theology in each of these contexts – James Cone and Allan Boesak. As chapter 1 illustrated through the work of Carter, the
construction of Christ as white has been fundamental to the construction of race in modernity, and through the work of Magaziner and others, the importance of the black Messiah in SASO and BPC became clear. This section will therefore, look into black Christology through the work of Mofokeng, again towards reading it for its particular challenge to white theology and white Christianity.

Mofokeng’s academic work in black Christology started with his doctoral thesis published under the title *The Crucified Among the Crossbearers*, and continues in the ensuing decade with a steady stream of articles – primarily in the *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*. As I will show in the sections below Mofokeng takes account of the positive anthropological thrust, in particular as emphasised by Maimela, but drawing it from earlier sources as well, but argues that the reality of dehumanisation needs to be taken with utmost seriousness – illuminated through a theology of the cross – and that beyond an emphasis of creation *imago Dei* Christologically the recreation of black humanity needs emphasis.

After an introduction to how he approached his black Christology, I will focus on its twin parts, crucifixion and cross-bearing, connected to dehumanisation and the quest for true humanity, before touching on one of the key concepts in his work, solidarity, to turn attention to the challenge to white Christianity.

4.2  Developing a South African black Christology

4.2.1  The ecclesial business of theology

Looking at a citation index of Mofokeng’s academic work it is striking that a particular article from 1988, *Black Christians, The Bible and liberation* (Mofokeng, 1988), has received a disproportionate amount of attention right into the present.\(^{221}\) This article is often drawn upon together with the work of Itumeleng Mosala in a South African biblical hermeneutics debate concerning the Bible as a site of struggle. In brief the argument that emerged during this time was that contrary to a widely held view in black theology of the Bible as a text of liberation, Mofokeng supported the view of Mosala that the Bible itself is the product of a class struggle and that certain texts were written in support of a ruling class and cannot contribute to a liberating praxis. In the words used within this line of argument, the Bible itself, not

\(^{221}\) Without assuming that these are exactly correct, it is striking that in Google Scholar index 109 citation of this article are picked up, while *A black Christology: A new beginning* (Mofokeng, 1987a) only shows 8 citations. Both these articles were published in the South African *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* one year apart. This becomes even more striking when we note that the latter was published as the first article in the first volume of the journal, of which Mofokeng was also editor, and clearly seeks to set the agenda of the way in which he himself seeks to rework theology in South Africa.
merely its interpretation, is a site of struggle. My point here is however not that of biblical hermeneutics and the details of this debate, but this does touch on a key aspect of how Mofokeng seeks to develop his black Christology.

Tightly interwoven with Mofokeng’s black consciousness starting point is a methodological commitment to the theology emerging from poor black Christians in the struggle. In his own words: “basically the creation of theology is an ecclesial business” (Mofokeng, 1987a, p. 2; Mofokeng, 1987b, p. 55). The task of the theologian is for Mofokeng to document the theology that emerges from within a community, and to participate in the community (Mofokeng, 1987b, p. 61). This becomes particularly clear in how he writes about the Bible. While Mofokeng is indeed of one mind with Mosala concerning the ideological nature of the biblical text, and of the Bible itself, and not just its interpretation, as being a problem in the struggle for liberation, the question of how black South Africans read the Bible ‘on the ground’ is always more important.

In one of his last publications in the *Journal of Black Theology* he clearly positions himself in relation to Mosala: “I personally agree with him [Mosala] and support him in this project because it brings in many ways the text closer to Black working class and peasantry” (Mofokeng, 1993b, p. 142). This reaction to the Old Testament scholar Mosala, who he clearly positions himself most closely to, is however, part of an ongoing reflection. Earlier he notes that it is not yet clear whether Mosala’s approach will “grip the black Christian masses” (even though he then proceeds to argue that he suspects that as far as the black working class is concerned, it is indeed Mosala’s approach that will be more appreciated (Mofokeng, 1987c, pp. 28-29)) and in later arguments makes the lived religion of poor communities, and in this case their witness of which texts to read and which to note as hurtful, a more important norm than ideology-critical theories (Mofokeng, 1992, p. 4).

The point here is that in Mofokeng’s work there is a constant move to allow the way in which the black community does its own theology weigh more heavily than the choice of ideological commitment. Whatever his own ideological preference, he, for example, notes that neither African Traditional...
Religion nor Marxism provides an “ideological storehouse” from which Christians in local communities can draw in their struggle. Where the Bible is then the key resource to which black Christians turn, the responsibility of the theologian becomes to help shape it into a formidable tool for liberation (Mofokeng, 1988, p. 40).

Such a commitment to the lived religion of black people is however not naïvely held to. The fact that the faith of many black people is indeed shaped by a colonial mission Christianity that cannot work for their liberation, and in fact works to maintain oppression, is also noted. Preference must therefore, be given to search for a relevant theology among those who opposed the colonial enterprise (Mofokeng, 1987b, p. 55). The way in which Mofokeng holds to a commitment to theology as an ecclesial business with preference to those who opposed the colonial enterprise is by starting his work within black consciousness.\footnote{In a later article noting important epistemic breaks in South African theology Mofokeng notes that much of the theology found among black Christian theology is found within the framework of colonial mission theologies. He notes the African Independent Churches as one voice of protest, but mostly it is in black theology, students’ movements around 1976, and the labour movement of the 1980s that he see opposition to the colonial enterprise (Mofokeng, 1989).} It is to this starting point that I first turn.

4.2.2 Starting from black consciousness

In a recent analysis of Mofokeng’s *The Crucified among the Crossbearers* Nico Botha first names Barth as Mofokeng’s main interlocutor, and then rectifies this to say that the true main interlocutor for Mofokeng’s work is those poor black South Africans that cause the Reverend Mofokeng to critically reconsider the theological answers he gives (Botha, 2015, pp. 73-74).\footnote{This second group refers in particular to the farmworker and children in Mamelodi which Mofokeng mentions in the foreword of his dissertation (Mofokeng, 1983, p. ix).} But neither of these satisfy a close reading of his dissertation, and definitely not of his later work towards the end of the 1980s and early 1990s. Barth is sometimes mentioned in his later articles, but never in ways which carry the weight of his theological arguments, and while it is poor, and in his later work specifically working class, black South Africans with whom he wants to stand in solidarity with through his theology, the voices that inform his constructive Christological proposal is more particular than such a broad description. Rather, it is as Dwight Hopkins noted black consciousness that is “the first source of his theology” (Hopkins, 1989, p. 135).

In the development of Mofokeng’s work, the choice for starting from black consciousness is first made, and then in later years given more elaborate justification by noting other possible options. He notes that
the African Independent Churches (AIC) do indeed form one example of black Christianity in opposition to the colonial enterprise (Mofokeng, 1989) but in response to arguments that black theology should, in fact, commit to working exclusively from within the AIC’s he notes their limitations in forming a modern liberating faith (Mofokeng, 1990).

He also notes the role of the so-called mainline churches, and in particular prominent leaders from within these churches, in forming a popular religiosity in response to the colonial enterprise. In spite of the presence of some of these leaders, he makes a distinction between the religion within the churches and the popular religion within the struggle. In his writings towards the final years of apartheid, it is the religion within the struggle itself, within labour movements, student movements, in the informal settlements and in the moments of protest that he wants to listen to (Mofokeng, 1990).

However, this consideration of various options, emphasis on labour movements, and positioning outside both AIC’s and so-called mainline churches is in fact done after the work of developing his black Christology in dialogue with black consciousness. His academic theological project starts out as an attempt to take black consciousness seriously as ‘where the spirit works’ (Mofokeng, 1983, pp. 6-42).

The importance of black consciousness remains visible in his later work. In spite of his own Marxist and materialist commitments, he describes as a “tragedy” the way in which some black South African theologians of the late 1980s have dumped black consciousness in favour of orthodox Marxism (Mofokeng, 1987c, p. 33). The point here is not trying to evaluate the choice, but rather to emphasise how Mofokeng goes about developing his Christology.

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226 Beyond the general limitations he notes in AIC’s, the particular way in which some AIC’s were in fact working in support of the apartheid state is of particular concern (Mofokeng, 1990, p. 21).

227 A decade later he again refers to the critique emerging in dialogue with black consciousness (among other voices) as the “the operational sphere of the Holy Spirit that enables us to talk in a trinitarian way about Christian being and existence” (Mofokeng, 1993a, p. 21).

228 Allister Kee is scathing in his critique of Mofokeng, and black activists in general, on this point. He mentions this argument of Mofokeng’s as an example of how black activists have misunderstood Marx, and in particular have silenced the fact that Marx himself had to suffer consequences of racism (anti-Semitism) (Kee, 2006, pp. 93-94). On the other hand, in Mofokeng’s later publications he does seem to prefer such a Marxist paradigm himself (Mofokeng, 1992).

229 Mofokeng’s writings in the early 1990s have far less emphasis on the more philosophical reflections of the student movements of black consciousness in the 1970s. His writing give the impression of trying to develop an approach to theology which is grounded ever more in working class and urban poor realities – even more than what student movements would typically be. However, most of his work on black Christology which was developed earlier is still mostly indebted to the black consciousness student movements.
4.2.3 Through Sobrino and Barth

The largest part of *The Crucified among the Crossbearers* is a discussion of Sobrino and Barth, and most of this consists of a close reading and analysis of their respective Christologies. Reading Mofokeng’s work therefore, requires a careful eye for where he is providing an analysis of the perspectives of Sobrino and Barth and where he is drawing their work into his own constructive proposal for a black Christology.

It is indeed true that Mofokeng sees in both an explicitly contextual theology – the importance of which continues to be noted in particular where it concerns Barth (Tshaka, 2005, p. 69; Botha, 2015, p. 73). But in Mofokeng’s own perspective such a contextuality would be true for every new theological development\(^{230}\) and should thus not be considered the “first motivation” (Botha, 2015, p. 73) for his focus on Barth.

Rather, both Sobrino and Barth are drawn upon because they assist in the primary task of Mofokeng’s black Christology: answering the Christological question which is also an anthropological question is Christological starting point Mofokeng identifies for a South African black Christology. The important point here is that when reading Mofokeng a general hesitancy is required in sections outlining Sobrino and Barth, listening for the specific ways in which he employs them in answering his own questions (which is the questions he hold to be the questions of black South Africans), rather than giving too much weight to what at times is mostly descriptive.

Mofokeng captures the way in which he tries to read Sobrino and Barth in critical tension in order to develop his own Christology when in two paragraphs following each other he names the limit of each. The strength of Sobrino is that he allows for the hermeneutical and Christological identification of the poor and their liberation efforts. The strength of Barth is that he Christologically describes “the moment of creation of the human acting subject” (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 206). Each of these points Mofokeng respectively misses in the other, and his own work should be read as an attempt to bring them together: how do we do theology by taking the poor (in particular for Mofokeng the black poor) seriously as place where God is revealed while Christologically developing the (re)creation of the black acting subject.

\(^{230}\) When mentioning examples of theologians and theologies which took their own situation seriously Barth is mentioned together with Calvin, Luther, the early church, as well as various more explicit developments in contextual theology in the latter half of the twentieth century (Mofokeng, 1987b, p. 56).
The next section will seek to illuminate Mofokeng’s critique but also how he then develops his Christology as a response to this. I do this by showing how the limitation that he finds in the work of Sobrino and the constructive contribution he draws from Barth are both flowing from the theological questions he picks up from black consciousness.

4.3 The crucified and cross-bearing

The image of God, that important theological notion in South African black theology already discussed above, is not at all absent from Mofokeng’s work. Most often it is however only found in historical overviews of the development of black theology in South Africa (e.g. (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 35; Mofokeng, 1989, p. 44; Mofokeng, 1993b, p. 139), or else in vague statements indicating Mofokeng’s general agreement with the importance of the insistence that black people were created in the image of God (e.g. (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 260; Mofokeng, 1987b, p. 60; Mofokeng, 1993b, pp. 144-145).

Mofokeng’s Christological project is rather carried within the related question he first quotes from Biko - “Who am I?” (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 17) – which in the spirit of the broader black consciousness and early black theology movements he expands as “Who am I?” and “How can I be liberated to become my authentic self?” (Mofokeng, 1983, pp. 35-36). This he wants to connect with the historical question of Christology - “Who do you say that I am?” (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 242) to get at the heart of his own project: “Who does Jesus Christ say that we are and how shall we become ourselves, our liberated selves?” (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 228).

However, Biko raises this question as a question of theodicy. The broader quote which Mofokeng recalls is:

> Essentially the black community is a very religious community, which often reflects on beings, in other words, what is my purpose in life, why am I here, who am I? But I mean in this particular context in which we as oppressed people find ourselves in this country, inevitably you come to a block in your thinking, when you think about God, a God who is all loving, all knowing, but a God who allows me at the same time to be at the receiving end of suffering ... what is God’s intention with us, what does he want? (Mofokeng, 1983, pp. 17-18)

The answer to the question “Who does Jesus Christ say that we are” must continue with its second half “and how shall we become ourselves, our liberated selves?” since it emerges within a context of oppression and a theological struggle asking about God within this suffering. True humanity then cannot
be theologically discussed when disconnected from dehumanisation just as resurrection cannot be discussed disconnected from crucifixion.

In his early work, Mofokeng’s particular perspective becomes most clear at the moments where he pushes back against Sobrino and Barth. In the first subsection below I indicate how he emphasises dehumanisation by seeking to deepen Sobrino’s discourse on the poor and in the second how he places the black consciousness “Who am I?” Christologically in dialogue with Barth. These however, need to be read together with a clarification he himself makes regarding his use of terminology a decade after the publication of *The Crucified among the Crossbearers*:

> In my book *The Crucified among the Crossbearers* ... I used the concept 'crossbearers' without saying whether I made a distinction between the black community in general and black Christians. That absence of a distinction led to confusion and some questions. Some theologians argued that not all oppressed people could be crossbearers, that is, people who consciously go beyond the objective situation of crucifixion by the oppressors and choose subjectively to take up the cross and turn it into an instrument of liberation. We acknowledge that confusion. ... we have now chosen to adopt the concept "crucified people" with reference to the oppression of black people in South Africa. For those who are bearing the cross and using it as an instrument of liberation, we shall use the concept 'crossbearers' in this article. (Mofokeng, 1993a, pp. 29-30)\(^{231}\)

So I first discuss how the crucified today should be discussed in terms of dehumanisation, and then how cross-bearing is related to the quest for true humanity in Mofokeng’s black Christology.

4.3.1 Dehumanisation and the crucified

Mofokeng notes two things about the Christology of black Christianity and its reading of the gospels and identification with Christ which he wants to develop more fully in his own theological project.

First, the starting point of a black Christology is at the birth in the manger. This he puts in a conscious tension with the work of Sobrino and Barth. Sobrino starts his reading of Jesus at the so-called Galilean

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\(^{231}\) This is indeed a later development in his work, or rather, a later clarification and sharpening of his earlier work, and not every instance of his use of these words in the earlier writings should be expected to conform to these definitions – as he himself admits. However, the general distinction, and simultaneous theological importance, of those oppressed (crucified) and those who take up the cross in working for liberation (crossbearers) is visible throughout his work, as I will briefly indicate below.
crisis and for Barth the baptism at the Jordan. The context of black South Africans however, draws them to the story of Jesus born on poverty, and Mofokeng follows black Christians in starting his Christology here (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 243; Mofokeng, 1987a, p. 13).\textsuperscript{232}

Secondly, he repeatedly notes the importance of Good Friday celebrations among black Christians living life in a long Good Friday. Both the actual liturgical expressions of Good Friday celebrations under late apartheid, but also the theological importance of living a crucified life without seeing a possible end to this suffering – life as a ‘long Good Friday’ – is important (Mofokeng, 1983, pp. 27-28, 41, 225-226; Mofokeng, 1989, p. 47).\textsuperscript{233} He emphasises the cross because he discerns that this is the emphasis found among black Christians. What Mofokeng wants to do is to work out the theological importance of such an identification with the cross of Christ, while working out a theology of the cross which can be wielded towards liberation – emphasising both the crucified and crossbearers.

He argues that those suffering under oppression today are in a particular way related to the cross of Christ. The “popular theological reflection” of black Christianity which identifies the cross as concentration point does so out of an experiential identification with Jesus’ crucifixion.\textsuperscript{234} He does make a distinction: their suffering is not due to their active struggle for liberation, as was the case for Jesus, but simply for being black (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 28). The distinction is important since the identification of contemporary suffering with the suffering of Christ risks a glorification of the cross (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 140). Rather, those crucified is a mirror on society. The denying of the humanity of some is a denying of the humanity of all (Mofokeng, 1993a, p. 25). The oppressed poor reveals the dehumanisation of all and the need for true humanity.

From Sobrino, he argues for this particular theological importance of the oppressed. Christology should start with the historical Jesus – here not referring to those debates in New Testament scholarship which has gone by this name, but to the human Jesus as portrayed in the gospels. The emphasis will constantly

\textsuperscript{232} This is not a denial of the validity of the starting points of Sobrino and Barth. He always explicitly recognise that given a different context black Christians might have opted for either hermeneutical lens. It is simply starting from where people are, and what they connect with: Jesus born in poverty.

\textsuperscript{233} Here he repeatedly invokes the earlier work of Manas Buthelezi.

\textsuperscript{234} While his early work briefly mentions first century Palestine as colonised land (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 110), initially he is silent on the importance of the analogy of the cross as capital punishment of an occupying (colonial) Roman empire. He rather explicitly reads the cross within intra-Jewish political and religious confrontation with the Romans. Initially he goes so far as to speak of Israel “using Pilate the political representative of Rome as an unwilling participant” in the crucifixion (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 166). A few years later he does however note the importance of Roman imperialism, and he more strongly emphasises Palestine as occupied territory (Mofokeng, 1987a, pp. 14-15), and reflects on the cross as Roman instrument of capital punishment (Mofokeng, 1989, p. 46).
be on his life and how he lived, and on the resurrection as an affirmation of that life (Mofokeng, 1983, pp. 68-73). Jesus' life is one of solidarity with the poor and confrontation of the powers of oppression, leading to his final crucifixion (Mofokeng, 1983, pp. 75-81), and as Jesus in his life lived in solidarity with the poor, so the Spirit of God is in a particular way working among the poor.

The Christian community that is being drawn into the history of God in the world by the Holy Spirit follows the Son and engages in a history of liberative immersion in the world of those who suffer. (There is a simultaneity in the actual effective working of the Son in his immersion in the world of the poor and the actual effective working of the Spirit of God among the poor).
(Mofokeng, 1983, p. 73)

This insistence on the particular theological significance of the poor and oppressed is taken from reading Barth. In brief, he reads Barth by way of Sobrino. It is Sobrino's Christology, which is discussed first, that provides the conceptual tools to take the experience of the poor and oppressed as of particular Christological importance, and Mofokeng's critique on Barth is due to the fact that Barth is unable to distinguish between the experience of “man” and “poor man” (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 195). It is the particular theological significance of the oppressed for a faithful Christology that Mofokeng is trying to illuminate.

On the other hand, in spite of a general agreement with Sobrino, Mofokeng concludes by suggesting that his work needs to be sharpened: “It is a question, whether Sobrino realizes the radical and deep effects of oppression and exploitation on the poor. They do not only paralyze and blind but dehumanize so intensely that it takes God’s act to create the poor’s humanity and subjectivity.” (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 109) The point here is not evaluating Mofokeng’s critique, but to illuminate the problem Mofokeng is consistently trying to put on the table: That the history of colonialism and white racism has an effect so utterly dehumanising that reminders of the creation in the image of God (even when acknowledged) is not sufficient: black humanity needs to be recreated. For that he turns to Barth.

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235 As he moves through the argument, the impression is also created that this question might overstate his own critique. The point Mofokeng is attempting to make is not primarily a question of what Sobrino realises or not, but rather of whether his Christology can adequately describe the question of the recreation of humanity. On this latter account Mofokeng is clear in his critique. The question I refer to here does however make clear what Mofokeng seeks to emphasise in his account of the crucified.
4.3.2 Cross-bearing and the quest for true humanity

I now return to where this chapter started: the quest for true humanity. Given what was said in the first section of the chapter, Mofokeng’s use of notions such as “true humanity” should immediately alert any reader of the black consciousness lens through which he is working. Where Maimela attempted to work out a positive black theological anthropology in relation to the question of creation and power, Mofokeng’s focus on the disruption which race brought about draws his attention to the required work of recreation. The creation of a black acting subject should be understood as an act of recreating through Christ that which was distorted by the sin of white racism and the colonial enterprise.

On the one side, this conscientisation is read inside such a Christologic, while on the other Barth’s Christocentric work provides a theological framework for this recreation. In one section on Barth, in particular, Mofokeng reads Barth into his black Christology through a repeated relating of Barth to the black Conscious emphasis on true humanity. The “purpose” of engaging Barth in his black Christology then becomes not an inevitability due to Barth’s stature, nor merely due to Barth’s socialist context, but because Barth provides the language with which to theologically describe what Mofokeng hears in South African black consciousness and black theology.  

While the emphasis on humanisation is not exclusively found in the particular language of “true humanity”, looking at Mofokeng’s use of this does highlight the way in which Barth is employed in a particular manner. Mofokeng first reintroduces this notion in his work when expanding on the earlier mentioned question from Biko (“Who am I”). Between the already mentioned questions, Mofokeng introduces another: “How long shall the black Christian wait before he realizes true humanity which the gospel has promised him?” (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 34, my emphasis).

Mofokeng returns to true humanity in the midst of discussing Cross and resurrection in Barth. Key to his reading of Barth is that the resurrection is a confirmation of the life of Jesus preceding the crucifixion, and that if Jesus Christ has risen “and he is continuing his work today in the world, then, he must be effective, visibly, audibly and tangibly effective, as he was before his death” (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 146).

Mofokeng’s most repetitive use of true humanity occurs within an overview of the work of the spirit in forming a Christian community and Christian praxis which participates in the continuing work of Christ towards forming true humanity. Important is that Christ is the one true human and the only medium

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236 See the reasons provided by Botha (Botha, 2015).
and knowledge of true humanity. “There is, however, evidence of his [Christ’s] effective operation in the world today. There are concrete situations, movements and people in the world today, as they have always been present right through history that give a glimpse of the presence of the being of Jesus Christ and of concrete true humanity in the world.” Here Mofokeng will not make this claim concrete, he will just remind that where these are found they “do not emit light that can give total perception... they are on the contrary, also dependent on Jesus Christ for light” (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 148).

Mofokeng returns to answer this in his last paragraphs on Barth, a chapter later. He finally needs to note the limits to Barth, and it is that Barth cannot adequately answer the question of how those “whose entire life is a long Good Friday” will notice the resurrection. Can the work of the spirit be visibly recognised by the poor and the oppressed? Mofokeng’s conclusion is that the resurrection becomes tangible for the poor and the oppressed in the commitments to liberation towards true humanity:

“It is ... the case with Sobukwe, Mandela, Biko, Shezi and many other Black South Africans of past and present, who are either dead, in prisons or in exile or still “free” in South Africa. The movements and communities which they personify and in which they stood and still stand are the visible, recognizable and identifiable trail of the Spirit of God in “the long Good Friday” existence of Black people in South Africa.” (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 226)

Mofokeng finds in Barth language which illuminates the theological significance of the black struggle against apartheid in general and the emergence of black consciousness in particular, even while pushing back against Barth in order to allow deeper Christological significance for the struggle of liberation of the poor and oppressed. If coming into existence of the New Testament community is a “visible first fruit of the effectiveness of the risen Jesus Christ”, a “verification” of those created anew in Christ (Mofokeng quotes 2 Corinthians 5:17) (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 138), then in his own time and context the emergence of a black community working creatively for the liberation towards a “new humanity of love” is “a verification of the resurrection in a sinful world” (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 43). The cross is a no to dehumanisation, the resurrection a yes to “the new and humanizing form of existence that corresponds to the life of Jesus Christ” (Mofokeng, 1983, pp. 138-139)

What Mofokeng picks up from Barth – the recreation of humanity through the cross of Christ – is a language which illuminated the heart of his black Christology.

The Spirit of God creates a new black community of faith to become a creative subject. More precisely, the Creator Spiritus creates a creator. This new community becomes a creative one by
and in following Jesus Christ in his work. This creation is, conversely, a liberation. The Spirit liberates this community to become liberative. She is made and moved to respond positively to Jesus Christ and his work. This life of creating and liberating which is both a gift and a task is its humanization. (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 43)

Discipleship then is the search for true humanity (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 228)

4.4 Solidarity and the call of Christ

We are finally left with the question of what Mofokeng’s black Christology would imply for white Christians. But Mofokeng’s work, in an even more explicit way than that of Maimela, shows very little concern for a white audience. The academic conversation that he participates in, primarily found in the pages of the *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*, explicitly speaks to fellow black theologians.

Few concepts play such an important role in Mofokeng’s writings as “solidarity”. While what is to be said emerges through the notion of solidarity, this notion is not exclusively, not even primarily, drawn upon to describe the call towards white Christians. Nonetheless, that solidarity has particular implications for white people is still clear. This tension should not be underestimated. In his critique Mofokeng is simultaneously refusing to reproduce race by elevating white people beyond what is true for humans in general – this includes the way in which those humans with power over others refrain from standing in solidarity with the most vulnerable in society – while simultaneously insisting on the historical and sociological particularity of the call to white people.

On one level Mofokeng uses solidarity to describe a general positive attribute of communal life, and a particular attribute of African communal life that needs retrieval (Mofokeng, 1993b, pp. 144-145). On the other hand, he uses the notion to describe the work of Christ and the Trinitarian life of God (Mofokeng, 1983, pp. 145-182). His use of the notion of concern here is however, Christologically connected to the more specific notion of “crossbearers” as he clarifies it a decade after *The Crucified among the Crossbearers*, and was historically connected to black consciousness. Solidarity is then the act of taking up the cross and wielding it towards liberation for the crucified in our own times, and historically the most important precedent for this in South African history is the black consciousness youth who worked for the humanisation of black oppressed people under apartheid and in opposition to white racism.
For everyone solidarity as cross-bearing is an act of discipleship and implies a concrete commitment in life. There is no assumption that all black people act in solidarity with the crucified, and even black theologians are questioned due to the shifting class positions of those in ecclesial leadership and academic appointments (Mofokeng, 1993b, p. 142). Even for those crucified, those sharing in suffering, Mofokeng use solidarity as standing with others in suffering and this implies cross-bearing. Solidarity is then not simply ‘also suffering’, but includes the active participation in a struggle for true humanity. Christologically it is both important that Jesus was born poor, and that he chooses the side of the poor (Mofokeng, 1983, pp. 243, 245).

As pointed out earlier, Mofokeng insists on the theological importance of those suffering today, the crucified. Their cry of suffering in itself already reveals the crucifixion in our day (Mofokeng, 1993a, p. 25), and for Mofokeng there is no consistent Christology possible which does not take this particularity into account. Jesus ‘born poor’ is not accidental, but of utmost importance for the meaning of the incarnation. Yet, the constant insistence on a distinction between crucified and cross-bearer, between suffering and the choice to act with those suffering (even when as one suffering) in the struggle towards a true humanity, also speaks to those not ‘born poor’.

In the middle of a number of densely written paragraphs in which Mofokeng for the last time brings together Barth and Sobrino before he will proceed with his own constructive proposal, he describes the poor converting the “Christian”. Here he starts noting those that go to the poor with the purpose of “converting” them within an encounter of “charity”. The conversion that Mofokeng’s theology of the cross seeks to reveal is however, the reverse: the poor converting the Christian, revealing God as the one who is the first to be in solidarity with the poor, and who bring about a crisis of faith which leads to a conversion to justice (Mofokeng, 1983, pp. 220-221).

Mofokeng’s theology of the cross is in no way naïvely optimistic about the struggle. He recognises that the response of the apartheid government at times caused serious setbacks in the struggle for liberation (Mofokeng, 1987c, p. 21), and in 1993 notes “long before the search for a just and peaceful solution to the problems of our country is completed, that the present generation of black people is doomed and
condemned to remain permanently in poverty, ignorance and squalor and that nothing can be done to save them from that condition.” (Mofokeng, 1993a, p. 24)

Tied up within the context of this confrontation of reality is a brief description of what it would require of white people to allow for change – and it is exactly because he has no expectation that this will happen that he notes the reality of another generation of black people who will remain permanently crucified.

They will remain nailed forever on the cross of poverty in the midst of glittering gold because bringing them from the cross will entail radical conversion to God and their black neighbour (accepting the humanity of black people) as well as cross-bearing (reduction in the standard of living) for white people, and an accompanying radical structural change. Theologically speaking, we can say that human and structural resistance to God’s righteousness and justice for the oppressed has condemned them to the state of a crucified people. Consequently, their hanging on the cross will continue to be a silent but visible indictment of humankind for lack of solidarity. (Mofokeng, 1993a, p. 24)

Here Mofokeng draws together the different aspects of his theological programme as it implicates white South Africans. The conversion required is both anthropological and material, and solidarity must be visible in such an anthropological and material conversion. Where such a conversion remains invisible, the implication in theological terms must be named as resistance to God’s righteousness and justice.

The point here is not one of strategy but of theology – meaning, it is not attempting to find a response to the ongoing strategic question of the particular role that white people should play in the struggle against white racism. Rather, Mofokeng is insisting that solidarity with the oppressed is at the heart

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238 In the subsequent issue of the journal in which he made this statement he connects this analysis of the future of South Africa to a transition which does not promise any radical changes in the material condition of the lives of black people (Mofokeng, 1993b).

239 It has to be noted that this “generation” are those who today (2018) make up the black South African population of working age which are faced with a broad unemployment rate of approximately 36% (https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/PBO/qbrief-2018-05.pdf [accessed 19 June 2019])

240 In one of the first studies on The Crucified among the Crossbearers, a dissertation examining Mofokeng in relation to Bonhoeffer, Martin Forrest touches on the implication of black theology for white people a number of times. His main point is however a response to the so-called “liberal whites” to hear the insistence that they too stand guilty, in spite of their opposition to the National Party (Forrest, 1987, p. 184). He uses the notion of solidarity to explain this, stating that “white Christians must confess their guilt in solidarity with their fellow-whites and bear it, vicariously, on their behalf” (Forrest, 1987, p. 144). While it is clear that Mofokeng does expect such a recognition that all white people are implicated in the system of white racism (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 10), which would imply recognising guilt, confession and repentance, when speaking of “solidarity”, its focus is not to

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of who God is, of the work of Jesus Christ, and that a resistance to the struggle for true humanity emerging from oppressed (and in his case specifically black) communities should be noted as nothing less than resistance to God. If God is submerged in the life of the poor and oppressed then God is not to be found everywhere, but related to through solidarity with the poor and oppressed (Mofokeng, 1983, p. 85). The resurrection is tangible where Christ raises a “community of solidarity... outraged by the innocent cry of the crucified” (Mofokeng, 1993a, p. 29).

4.5 Conclusion
Mofokeng’s Black Christology is then a constant reflection on the dehumanisation through white racism and capitalist exploitation, and Christological account of the black consciousness quest for true humanity. It is a sustained call for solidarity with the poor and oppressed, with a particular emphasis on those oppressed in the context of white racism. This call for solidarity is extended to all – black theologians, the black working class, or white Christians – and we can see both a theological and a more pragmatic rationale in his call.

Pragmatically he recognises that the material transformation of society requires a material transformation of the lives of the privileged. Theologically the only following of Christ today is in solidarity with the crucified of our own day: if there is any possibility for discipleship then it involves solidarity with the poor. A “mission to the poor” should result in the conversion of Christians by the poor before anything else.

The black Christ in Mofokeng is no tribal god, no provincial or cultural reading of Christ, but rather within the context of white racism a claim on the lives of all. If we then here repeat Perkinson’s question in relation to the work of James Cone – Can a black Christ save white Christians? – then Mofokeng’s black Christology would respond that the only possibility of salvation for those who are white in the context of white racism is in terms of a black Christ: meaning, Christ who is in solidarity with the crucified of our own time, calling all to such solidarity.

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_distinguish between white and black people, rich and poor: in Christ all are called to stand in solidarity with the oppressed, even while the implications of solidarity would not always be the same._

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5 Conclusion

At this point, we can focus our question for the last two chapters by drawing on aspects from the first three. James Perkinson provides the words, while the black theologians from chapter 1 and 3 inform the meaning in the lens I have constructed.

Sooner or later in the crucible of interracial encounter, whites are faced with facing the tragedy of race in the nakedness of a dark face. What threatens to appear, if such an epiphany is not immediately banished by easy explanation, is “death,” a mini-apocalypse of whiteness that alone can confer the blindness through which paradoxically, we begin to see. This is the abyss that opens under our feet and inside our stomachs when (if) we forego the supremacy of certainty that has until now served our modern “birthright” and prophylactic against the gnawing darkness of contingency. “White” skin is essentially a latent denial of death. But let go of whiteness in the encounter with people of color and we step off an inner cliff! Who are we then? (Perkinson, 2004, pp. 198-199)²⁴¹

Jennings focused our attention on this in a particular way that we can now bring down to southern African space: If race is what happens when identity is disconnected from space, “who are we?” if not white, yet while living on invaded space?²⁴² If whiteness is always constructed with blackness as its polar opposite, “who are we?” when blackness becomes a recreation of humanity? In the wake of modernity’s equation of whiteness with the ultimate form of humanity, “who are we?” when confronted with the heretical nature of that claim, the brutal oppression of its effect, and the growing refusal to accept its claim?

This might not have been the most urgent question reflected upon by white theologians who were contemporaries with the voices heard in this chapter. Confronted by the urgency of the situation, the debate of the 1970s and 1980s in South Africa is by necessity mostly focused on naming the problem of apartheid, and seeking ways to bring it to an end. But as this chapter sought to illuminate, the critique of black consciousness and black theology explicitly attempted to dig through apartheid and see a deeper question behind the social and economic devastation it caused. In chapter 5, I will argue that the questions emerging here continue to be those that haunt South Africa (and in fact a broader world disrupted by colonialism and white racism) in the present. Yet with these in mind, in chapter 4, I first turn to listen to

²⁴¹ I consciously cut Perkinson’s reflection short here. He continues the line of questioning with “How shall we speak and behave? What if we offend? Will we be raped, killed, consumed? Of – God forbid – laughed at?” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 199). It is the first question which however draw our attention here.
²⁴² Here I note the work of Chris Budden in working out the theological implications of ‘invaded space’ in the Australian context (Budden, 2009).
key white theologians responding in solidarity with black consciousness and black theology – mostly from the same years that received attention in this chapter, listening for resources in naming whiteness as a theological problem.
Chapter 4 – White participation in the struggle against apartheid: Naudé, Nolan, Kritzinger

1 Introduction

In 1987 the Institute for Contextual Theology AGM passed the following motion: “[that] the ICT takes up the matter of a positive ministry to the oppressor with particular attention paid to issues such as guilt, fear and material interests in the white community” (Institute for Contextual Theology, 1988).

Alex Bhiman was Acting General Secretary at the time and called the first meeting on 15 September 1987. It was attended by Willem Saayman, Denise Ackerman, Beyers Naudé, Nico Smith, Michael Worsnip, Nico Horn, Alex Bhiman and Klippies Kritzinger (Institute for Contextual Theology, 1987, p. 1).

Key points from this meeting, which emerged repeatedly during the project, are that work on a liberating ministry to the white community must be done next to and in dialogue with black theology and black theologians and that the project should focus on the grassroots (Institute for Contextual Theology, 1987, p. 2). At this meeting, Kritzinger was elected convener for the first one-day meeting planned for about 50 people at which the project was to be explored further.

After further meetings of a smaller group (Kritzinger, Naudé, Worsnip and Bhiman) Kritzinger produced a draft position paper. The position paper placed a strong emphasis on the relationship between white liberation and black theology:

There can be no sense in which the undertaking of such a ministry to whites can be divorced from the insights and directions of Black and liberation theology. In fact, the whole exercise is stimulated and called forth by Black Theology, and proceeds by constant interaction with black theologians. It is thus not an exclusively white enterprise, but a joint effort of black and white Christians to develop a liberating ministry to white people. Since we recognise that oppressors

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243 These introductory comments were also made in an earlier publication on a similar topic, although my exploration here goes in a very different direction than the earlier article (Van Wyngaard, 2016b).

244 Correspondence indicates that at least Michael Worsnip also contributed to the position paper. In a letter on 29 January 1988 Rev. JM Lamola, ICT projects co-ordinator, thanks Kritzinger for the position paper and then also writes that “I am impressed at the way Michael has been able to integrate the longerterm (revolutionary ... shh) objectives of this without exposing the project as such to being seen as another mere radical stunt” (Lamola, 1988). In this letter Lamola also recommends that the name of the project by changed from A Liberating Ministry to Whites to A Liberating Ministry to the White Community.
are incapable of bringing about liberation, we affirm that the oppressed need take the initiative and critically accompany this enterprise (Institute for Contextual Theology, 1988).

From 1988 until 1990 a yearly national conference was held. The intention was that the national conference would be repeated regionally and that regional conferences would result in local working groups along the lines developed in the national working group (Bulman, 1989). Papers would be commissioned on specific themes and then made available to be presented regionally. In a previous publication, I have discussed the developments in this project in detail (Van Wyngaard, 2016b), and I will not repeat that analysis here. Rather, what I do here is to pick up the work of three key voices from this project, and discuss their work in light of the argument from the preceding chapters.

The programme for the 1988 national meeting indicated two ‘senior’ theologians as key speakers: Beyers Naudé and Albert Nolan. There is no record that Naudé ever attended this meeting, nor any of the subsequent meetings, although Nolan did play a significant role in forming the theology of this project. In spite of this distinction, I start with both these theologians as they were identified as key to this project, and occupied key positions as white theologians working in solidarity with black theology in the 1970s and 1980s. The third voice I engage is that of Klippies Kritzinger, who at this time was a younger theologian at Unisa that just completed his PhD on the very topic of this Institute for Contextual Theology project, and as indicated in the preceding paragraphs played a key role in organising this project.

These are not the only important voices that were involved. Gerald West was another younger theologian involved in this project, and much of his work in the past decades was responding to the black biblical hermeneutic of Itumeleng Mosala. Steve de Gruchy was also a participant, and West himself indicates ways in which Steve, as a white theologian, was doing his work within a ‘black frame’ (West, 2012). The list could go on: Willem Saayman, who ended up standing in for Naudé at the first meeting, Chris Langeveldt, who played a crucial role in developing one of the key concepts within this meeting, and also earlier in the Kairos process, and numerous others. The idea that some kind of response in solidarity with black theology was required from white theologians was not altogether strange at this point in South African history – although, within a Kairos frame, clearly not what a ‘church theology’ would prioritise. So while different examples could also be used, the programme for the first conference clearly give weight to Naudé and Nolan, even though Naudé didn’t arrive, and Kritzinger played a larger role than most. I therefore, allow myself to be guided by this particular moment in the history of engaging the topic at hand in the South African context.
The work of this project came to an abrupt end in 1990, a few months after the famous 2 February announcement on the unbanning of the liberation movements.\textsuperscript{245} Beyond the work that emerged from within this project, I here attempt to expand upon this with a detailed analysis of these three theologians as they developed their respective ideas on what a liberating ministry to the white community would imply. That provides a particular entry point to relate white South African responses in solidarity with black theology to the preceding chapters of this dissertation.

On one level they represent different generations of white South Africans in solidarity with the struggle against apartheid and white racism, born respectively in 1915 (Beyers Naudé), 1934 (Albert Nolan), and 1950 (Klippies Kritzinger). But they are all examples of attempts at responding to a clear break in South African theology and politics that came about with the emergence of black consciousness and black theology discussed in the previous chapter. I will discuss them in chronological order, and in each case draw on the preceding three chapters to illuminate the particular attempt at critically responding to whiteness as a theological problem.

2 Beyers Naudé and white commitment to black leadership\textsuperscript{246}

2.1 Introduction

Beyers Naudé continues to be one of the most iconic figures of Afrikaner opposition to apartheid. Naudé was born in 1915. His father was a co-founder of the notorious Afrikaner Broederbond – a secret society closely related to the National Party and Dutch Reformed Church, the three of which was instrumental to the formation of apartheid. Naudé himself had the making of a staunch nationalist, from a young age playing a prominent role in Afrikaner ideological formation. That changed from the late 1950s. Naudé played a key role in the Cottesloe meetings of the World Council of Churches and famously remained resolute in his opposition to apartheid even after then Prime Minister Verwoerd influenced the Dutch Reformed Church to reject the Cottesloe resolutions. In 1963 he became a founding member of the Christian Institute and was famously forced to choose between the Dutch Reformed Church and the Christian Institute. As director of the Christian Institute, he played a key role in the church struggle against apartheid. The argument I trace below emerged from this Christian Institute phase of his work.

\textsuperscript{245} A clear answer on why the project came to an end is not presented in the minutes of the project meetings. However, while multiple factors might have influenced this, decreasing funding for the ICT after the 2 February 1990 announcement was possibly a key institutional reason.

\textsuperscript{246} Parts of this section was presented at the July 2019 conference of the Transatlantic Roundtable on Religion and Race in Nairobi, Kenya.
In 1985 Charles Villa-Vicencio already warned against the way in which Naudé was in ahistorical way being portrayed as a “larger than life” “all-wise mythical figure” (Villa-Vicencio, 1985, p. 3). And indeed, the complexity of Naudé’s life has been reflected upon endlessly. What grips the imagination in the repeated return to Naudé is never only the stance he took against apartheid, or even the fact that he was willing to remain resolute in spite of a banning order – and in spite of the full knowledge that some form of state repression was inevitable in the long run – but the fact that Naudé emerged from the Afrikaner elite! How could one named after a famous Afrikaner general, the son of one of the founders of the Broederbond, himself a prominent Broeder and moderator of the Transvaal Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, turn Afrikaner dissident? Like a refrain, reflections on the life of Beyers Naudé has returned to this question: what was it that made it possible for an Afrikaner – particularly one with such impeccable Afrikaner credentials – to oppose apartheid? Reading Naudé through a Pauline analogy of boasting in the flesh (Villa-Vicencio, 1985, p. 3) becomes almost inevitable. Here was one who could rightly claim to be at the heart of Afrikanerdom yet who opposed apartheid with all his might.

A second warning that Villa-Vicencio places next to the first is that we should refrain from reading a Damascus-like conversion into Naudé’s narrative – with a staunch apartheid supporter turned dissident overnight in response to Cottesloe. Rather, his opposition to apartheid also drew from his earlier Afrikaner nationalist formation in opposition to British imperialism (Villa-Vicencio, 1985, p. 4) and pious imagination (Durand, 1985).

These reminders are important. Naudé indeed reflects the complexity of slowly realising that his very identity was built on what was in fact deeply unjust. It is a white attempt at reforming a Christian faith in the face of being confronted with such a Christian faith’s capacity to justify oppression. It is a tension between finding moral and theological language which both resonates with his own faith and which might also call white Afrikaners out of their support for apartheid, while slowly recognising that the very foundations of this moral and theological language were being called into question. In the same essay already mentioned, Villa-Vicencio reminds that Naudé’s life and work was a challenge beyond

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247 For a recent study exploring this very question see Fourie (Fourie, 2018). However, this paradox always captures the imagination of those writing about Naudé (see e.g. Bryan, 1978 and Ryan, 1990).
248 In the volume to which Villa-Vicencio here wrote the introductory chapter, an entire section was dedicated to “Afrikaner and Reformed”, with Jaap Durand (Durand, 1985) and Willem Saayman (Saayman, 1985) trying to note the theological convictions that allowed some Afrikaner theologians, Beyers Naudé in particular, to become Afrikaner dissidents.
Afrikanerdom, and at the heart of “Western values” (Villa-Vicencio, 1985, p. 4). However, as I will argue below, it also inevitably produced that challenge from within the heart of “Western values”.

That the Christian Institute was at its inception both predominantly white in composition and focus, and that it was the relationship with black consciousness leaders towards the later 1960s and early 1970s which helped to transform it, has been noted repeatedly, and my focus is exactly on this shift. My one line of argument is however, to note how Naudé remained an Afrikaner dissident, at least in one particular moment, by committing to a more generous Western universalism. I start by noting that at least for a moment Naudé’s rejection of Afrikaner apartheid is achieved through a commitment to a broader whiteness. I do this because I’m interested in the ways in which the often noted shift in the Christian Institute and Beyers Naudé in response to black consciousness allowed a critique not on Afrikanerdom and apartheid alone, but on a whiteness which simultaneously informed Naudé’s critique on the eve of the eruption of black consciousness.

If Cottesloe was not a singular conversion experience, then the same must be said of Naudé’s response to black consciousness. That Naudé was deeply transformed during and after the processes that transpired in the University Christian Movement and the early black theology projects is often recognised. This is often tied with a narrative of Naudé’s radicalisation – whether such a radicalisation is considered positively as a break with liberalism (Ryan, 1990, p. 124) or an opening up towards broader black leadership and a growing economic critique (De Gruchy, 1985, pp. 21-26), or negatively as a perceived break in solidarity with Afrikaners and a contribution to growing polarisation (Heaney, 2004, pp. 263-269). While the vague use of ‘radicalisation’ in different sources should be noted, it does illustrate a broad recognition that something changed in Naudé (and those who remained involved in the Christian Institute during the 1970s) after the emergence of black consciousness. In his detailed discussion of the development of Naudé’s theology, Coetzee draws these together: the shift can be described as being from a ‘liberal’ to a ‘radical’ position, and resulted in a break with even close white friends of Naudé, such as Ben Engelbrecht, who was no longer comfortable with the direction Naudé was taking. However, Coetzee’s alternative description would be more accurate: the shift in Naudé’s analysis should best be described as being from ‘white’ to ‘black’ (Coetzee, 2010, p. 504).249

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249 This description on ‘white’ and ‘black’ should be read in terms of the black consciousness and black theology tradition discussed in Chapter 3. It was the process of learning to see apartheid from the perspective of those oppressed by it, rather than the perspective of those in moral or political disagreement with it. It should be noted that the ongoing description of Naudé’s “radicalism” resulting during the years under discussion in itself reflects a
Naudé’s reflection on his own response to black consciousness is worth quoting at length:

In the beginning, much about Black Consciousness was strange; it was totally new and I had to re-evaluate. I had to ask myself to what degree this could be seen to be in conflict with the basic truth and assumptions of the Christian faith and to what degree this was due to the fact that we as Western Christians had traditional concepts, both theological and political, which we took for granted as being the only valid ones. Here were people, coming from a different background and perspective, telling us that from their experience, as black Christians, they saw South Africa’s future to be totally different. This required an extensive re-evaluation of my understanding both of the reality of what was happening in the country and of the role which the church had to play. (Naudé quoted in Ryan, 1990, p. 143).

The first section below contains a detailed analysis of Naudé’s public critique of apartheid immediately preceding the emergence of black consciousness. I present this detailed overview since it is key in understanding the shift in Naudé’s work which is of primary concern for this chapter. It also reveals a particular way in which whiteness was reproduced in opposition to apartheid, a reproduction which was central to the critique of black consciousness.

As others have noted, Naudé never produced a fully developed theology. His involvement in the struggle against apartheid did not allow time for that kind of research (Coetzee, 2010, p. 532). In tracing this shift, I therefore, draw almost exclusively from public lectures presented from 1966 until Naudé’s banning just over a decade later. When reading these lectures and talks, we inevitably deal with words spoken under a deeply oppressive regime, on the one hand taking note of potential state repression should certain arguments be presented in public, and on the other hand, making arguments which might win his predominantly white audience over to his side. I do not wish to deny particular position from which the analysis is being made – that of white South Africans. Naudé himself would repeatedly indicate that what he was communicating is quite simply that which the majority of black South Africans are working for.

1966/67 is not only a moment just preceding the shifts discussed in the preceding chapter, but also followed on the 1966 Church and Society meeting in Geneva, which caused a decisive impact on Naudé and the Christian Institute’s development (De Gruchy, 1985, p. 20). It is 4 years after being forced to leave his position as minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, around the same time as the formation of the University Christian Movement, and a year before black students would walk out of NUSAS to form SASO.

250 1966/67 is not only a moment just preceding the shifts discussed in the preceding chapter, but also followed on the 1966 Church and Society meeting in Geneva, which caused a decisive impact on Naudé and the Christian Institute’s development (De Gruchy, 1985, p. 20). It is 4 years after being forced to leave his position as minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, around the same time as the formation of the University Christian Movement, and a year before black students would walk out of NUSAS to form SASO.

251 See comments on Naudé’s arguments on apartheid and communism below.

252 For example, in a 1967 talk at the University of Cape Town Naudé himself presents the arguments that his views are not due to his association and relationship with black South Africans or the study of the social sciences, but exclusively the insights of his Christian faith (Naudé, 1967a). In an interesting way Naudé here repeats the very myth that Cedric Mayson would later describe as “absolute nonsense” – that Naudé came to his conviction purely
such influences, but neither do I here attempt to get ‘inside Beyers’ head’ in order to present what he might have thought but not yet argued publicly.\textsuperscript{253} Rather, my concern is exactly with how he attempted to rework his Christian faith and theology publicly in ways which both allowed him to respond to a challenge heard in black consciousness and black theology while drawing other white South Africans into that challenge through his words.

2.2 Apartheid and Western ideals

None would question Naudé’s rejection of apartheid and commitment to the struggle against apartheid. Indeed, Naudé embodies much of what emerged in preceding chapters. There are striking parallels with Jennings’ account of Colenso’s ultimate commitment to African liberation (Jennings, 2010, pp. 161-168) (see chapter 1). Naudé’s life-long commitment to the struggle against apartheid, to the point of banning and effective house arrest from 1977-1984 resonates with Perkinson’s description of what the implication would be for a white theologian aware of the history of white racism (chapter 2), and Naudé is a prime example of a response to Mofokeng’s call for solidarity in the struggle (chapter 3). My question is however, the extent to which Naudé is able to imagine a Christianity not bound to whiteness – and more specifically, to serve as a guide for such faith among those formed as white.

That a certain development occurs in Naudé’s thought is generally recognised. For example, in Ryan’s biography of Naudé Danie van Zyl\textsuperscript{254} is quoted saying of Naudé “In the early days I don’t think he would have supported universal franchise” (Ryan, 1990, p. 141). In 1967 Naudé himself argued in detail for the limited franchise as the only moral future for South Africa. Here indeed limited franchise was presented as an alternative on apartheid since it would not be based explicitly on race, but “one person one vote” was not yet within Naudé imagination.

In a plural society and a complex situation like ours a longer time will elapse than in a homogeneous society for the orderly evolvement of a system of government which will do justice to all but for the Christian the basic conditions for the franchise are clear: minimum

\textsuperscript{253} The potential for such work, in particular in relation to his thoughts on black consciousness, but also other topics which would have drawn the repressive mechanisms of the state and reduced the potential effect amongst white audiences, might exist in the immense amount of private correspondence now available in the archives of the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology.

\textsuperscript{254} Danie van Zyl was the Christian Institute’s advisor to the African Independent Churches Association (AICA) in the late 1960s.
qualifications, equally applicable to all, and based on certain standards of education and merit. There is no other alternative morally justifiable. (Naudé, 1967a, p. 11)

My main focus in this section is on this particular lecture quoted above, *Freedom in Our Society*, with some reference to other lectures or essays from this same period, and some reference to the continuation of key themes from this lecture in the years leading up to 1977. The concern is not on arguments on universal franchise specifically, but rather on the way in which Naudé draws upon a normative understanding of a particular form of Western Christendom in order to reject apartheid and Afrikaner ethno-nationalism. Furthermore, it is not only with the Eurocentrism in Naudé’s argument but rather on how he perpetuates an attempt at binding African people into a Western imagination of civilisation.

Naudé’s *The Afrikaner and Race Relations* was presented in December 1967 in Johannesburg and published by the South African Institute of Race Relations. *Freedom in Our Society* was delivered at the University of Cape Town in June of the same year. Both contain not just a rejection of apartheid, but also a normative alternative and both the critique and moral proposal are presented within a theological frame.

In 1967 Naudé is able to produce an answer to the question of Jaap Durand discussed in chapter 1. Or rather, Naudé is able to identify a particular heretical theological conviction that allowed Afrikaner Christianity to become, in his mind, the most important factor in the formation of white Afrikaner racism. Here we return to chapter 1, because Naudé already intuited that a supersessionist theology underlies Afrikaner identity – but also Euro-American nationalisms more generally (Naudé, 1967b, p. 4)

Naudé identifies the well-known narrative of Afrikaners describing themselves as “a chosen people” on a “special God-given mission”, with a “special purpose of being the torchbearers of the Gospel to the millions of heathens in dark Africa”. He notes that this was not just “analogy”, but eventually became “a divinely ordained command”, and he rejects this theologically in no uncertain terms – not just due to the

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255 This statement forms part of a response to the critique of more conservative white South Africans that those opposing apartheid are in fact seeking “one man one vote” (Naudé, 1967a, p. 8). Naudé would continue to state that in fact that can be the only outcome, after which he expands with the above quoted qualification. The only coherent understanding is then that at this point he does indeed envision that limiting citizenship based on race is unjust, but cannot envision that those illiterate (to use an example of laws which still had to be repealed in numerous countries in the years following this speech) could be included in voting. Following on a changed relationship to black leadership discussed below, by 1975 he is however telling white audiences that any kind of limited franchise (such as proposed by the Progressive Party) is no longer acceptable to the black community, and to young black intellectuals in particular: ‘one man one vote’ is the only option (Naudé, 1975b, pp. 7-8).
effect it was having, but for in itself revealing a questionable theological conviction based on a “distorted exposition” of the Bible. It reveals “ignorance with regard to the true meaning of the Incarnation and the nature of the church” and is based on a “false identification of himself and his people with that of Israel”. The “main blame rests on the Church and the clergy for lack of sound theological insight and for their misleading Biblical interpretation” (Naudé, 1967b, pp. 4-5).256 On the one hand, in December 1967, Naudé rejects apartheid and Afrikaner Christian nationalism (as well as its similar British, German or American examples) as a distortion of the gospel due to the way in which it makes itself into a new ethnic chosen people, taking over the place of Israel. On the other hand, in the earlier Freedom in Our Society, Naudé will give a similar divine sanction to a particular form of Western Christendom – albeit quite specifically opposed to such crude ethno-nationalism as that of apartheid Afrikaners.

Naudé opens Freedom in Our Society by taking care to position his argument as one born not of relational formation or political evaluation, but of Christian conviction; meaning his views did not come about through interaction with fellow-South Africans or study in philosophy or social science, but “from my insight in the Christian faith” (Naudé, 1967a, p. 1).257 The claimed insight of his Christian faith is however what leads him to commit to “our Western concept of freedom as it has expressed itself through the ages and been embodied in Western civilization”.258 This notion of freedom builds on three sources: biblical concepts, Greek philosophy, and Roman legal principles. Speaking at the University of

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256 Fourie (Fourie, 2018, p. 122) notes how this shift in Naudé’s message started occurring somewhere between the 1958 and 1959 Day of the Vow services. In his 1958 sermon in Potchefstroom he was still comparing Afrikaners to Israel, while by 1959 he preached that we should be cautious of such a comparison. However, this caution does not in itself bring an end to all elements of his volksteologie (ethnic theology). The rejection of this Afrikaner identification with Israel was also a theological rejection of the particular theology of Naudé’s father Jozua (Fourie, 2018, p. 150).

257 It should be noted that while this argument might have had an important rhetorical function, Naudé’s arguments throughout his career was always formed exactly by listening to people. As Cedric Mayson famously noted, “There is a beautiful, apocryphal story that drifts around the hazy, sentimental, religious world of Europe, which says that Beyers studied his Bible and there he discovered that his inherited attitude to blacks was wrong. This is absolute nonsense ... A central theme in everybody who made that change, including Beyers, was that they got to know black people” (Ryan, 1990, p. 124).

258 The copy of the lecture only references direct quotations, but one of these is from Barbara Ward’s 1954 Faith and Freedom – a book which also contained multiple arguments that Naudé would use in this lecture, and sometimes beyond. Ward was an English Roman Catholic Economist and an important guest participant at the 1966 World Council of Churches Church and Society meeting in 1966 (Crawford, 1995, pp. 194-195) which Naudé also attended. De Gruchy notes that this particular meeting was “of particular importance for Naudé’s own development and that the Christian Institute” (De Gruchy, 1985, p. 20). At this meeting the decision denouncing racism and racial superiority was taken, leading into the later WCC Program to Combat Racism (PCR) (Coetzee, 2010, p. 491).
Cape Town, he in fact, in spite of his claim that his own insight was formed through his Christian faith, goes on to argue that Greek philosophy (which becomes “Stoic religious thought” a few sentences later) and Christian faith both provide the concepts of “the equal rights of man... and the equal dignity of man”, made concrete and growing in influence thanks to the Roman legal system. And South Africa, Naudé insists, must be “rightly claimed to be part of Western civilization” (Naudé, 1967a, p. 2).

But if such a Western freedom born of Christian-Greco-Roman contribution can be drawn from either Christian faith or Greek philosophy – after all, he argues, the two teaches the same thing – Naudé nonetheless insists that theologically it is God who gives such freedom. What in one breath Naudé assigns to the effect of Roman legal systems, in the next becomes the result of the sovereign work of God. For, in fact, Scripture is not about “the freedom of man but the rule of God over man”, and the freedom received must be understood as a gift of a “Sovereign God”. God inscribed certain primal rights into the orders of creation. The implication is that only God may take away this freedom: no “states can rob the Christian of this freedom” (Naudé, 1967a, pp. 2-4). The way in which this freedom finds a life of its own, preceding Western civilisation and “express[ing] itself” (Naudé, 1967a, p. 2) through this Western civilisation is fully in line with his commitment to the sovereignty of God. On the one hand, God retains God’s place as sovereign over Western civilisation, but on the other Western civilisation is drawn into the place where God is revealed in our times – or specific to this lecture, where God’s freedom which should be given to all is concretely revealing itself.

In contrast, there are two places which Naudé identifies as in opposition to this freedom. Communism (equated with totalitarianism) and apartheid.

Naudé in 1967 is unwavering in his opposition to communism. It is a philosophy with “evil and injustice inherent in its aims and practices” (Naudé, 1967a, p. 12), “its ideology is totally unacceptable, its methods rejectable and its successes illusionary” (Naudé, 1967a, p. 13). In a gesture of generous universalism he implores students to “choose a faith to live by”, and remain open that such a choice need not lead to Christianity, but he is quite clear that such a choice may not be communism (Naudé, 1967a, p. 14).259 In communism, Naudé sees a danger which should draw all “religions who share a

259 While Naudé here seem to indicate a certain openness towards “other religions”, this doesn’t happen consistently. In a different context – speaking to a teachers union – 10 years later Naudé would include “other religions” in the same category as “Marxist philosophy” and “materialist hedonism” – these three being that to which a choice for Christianity would be an alternative, a choice which he suggests black theology would in future get the credit for as far as the majority of South Africans are concerned (Naudé, 1977b, p. 14). One way of reading the 1967 lecture would be to note that what Naudé is mostly attempting to do is to allow an openness towards
common faith in a living, just and loving God” (Naudé, 1967a, p. 13) together in opposing it. While not unchanged, the general thrust of Naudé arguments on communism remains the same in the coming 10 years and deserve a brief comment.

In speeches during the 10 years before his banning, one of the key themes emerging is Naudé’s rejection of communism. It is clear that Naudé’s repeated rejection of communism cannot be disconnected from the context of the apartheid South Africa 1950 Suppression of Communism Act, often used in banning of apartheid critics. In this context Naudé employs a rhetorical ploy of turning the National Party anti-communist argument against the National Party and apartheid government itself, naming the National Party as embodying the worst traits of communist governments, and as itself being the most significant contributor to the growth of communism in Southern Africa.

However, reducing Naudé’s argument to some strategic political move does not adequately explain this theme in his speeches. His anti-communist arguments reflect that of one fully committed to the struggle against communism as much as the struggle against apartheid. In fact, these become two sides of the same coin.

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Judaism – but at least in part based on the idea that Judaism forms part of the formation of the Western notion of freedom. Where Naudé can make a strong theological claim of reading Greek Philosophy and Roman law fully inside the work of the sovereign God, he is quite clear (see further discussion below) that communism and Marxist philosophy would not only be outside but fundamentally opposed to Christianity and God’s work in this world, and places like the 1977 lecture to teachers also reveal an ongoing struggle to allow for such a generosity in relation to other religions – at least if not drawn inside a Christian identity.

The way Naudé recollects the symbolic importance of communism, and of the possibility that he himself might be a communist, among his mother and the broader Afrikaner public reminds of the important role the stigma of communism played in the Afrikaner imagination, and of Naudé’s sense that he needed to defend himself against such an accusation. For example, when recounting the case of libel he himself and Albert Geyser instituted against Adrian Pont in the 1960s, it is Pont’s accusation of their communist involvement in particular that he recalls (Naudé, 1995, pp. 75-78).

In perhaps the strongest argument illustrating this point Naudé reminds his audience that “As a student of the Marxist philosophy put it to me: ‘If I were a Communist in South Africa the easiest and perhaps quickest way to achieve my goals would be to give my full and enthusiastic support to the implementation of the policy of separate development.’” (Naudé, 1971, pp. 3-4). But the reminder that the route to opposing communism is through opposing apartheid is found throughout his lectures (ex. (Naudé, 1975a, pp. 5-6; Naudé, 1977a, p. 7). In one of his last lectures before his banning he places black theology and ‘communism’ (here using other words) over against each other: “I am convinced that when our history is evaluated, the emergence of black theology will be seen to have been one of the most crucial and powerful spiritual and political forces in preventing millions of people from turning from the Christian faith to seek their salvation in Marxist philosophy, materialist hedonism or other religions.” (Naudé, 1977b, p. 14).

To draw on an example of one of the later lectures, again at the University of Cape Town, but now in 1976, days before the Soweto uprisings and massacre, the first point he makes on the South Africa he ‘does not want’, is that it should not be based on authoritarian rule, and therefore that he “reject in the strongest possible terms any community rule for our country as totally unacceptable” (Naudé, 1976, p. 3).
But apartheid is the immediate focus of Naudé’s critique in *Freedom in Our Society*. Apartheid, with its racial laws, is the embodiment of a rejection of the Western and Christian notion of freedom that Naudé insists on. The particular examples are not of concern here, but what is important is that Naudé’s critique on apartheid is at this point fundamentally that it does not uphold the values of Western Christianity. Rather, what Naudé argues repeatedly here and through the entire decade before his banning, is that apartheid should, in fact, be placed on the same level with communism – that other force of ‘opposition to Western civilisation’.

When describing apartheid as anti-gospel in 1966 (Naudé, 1966), he invokes two arguments which will resurface repeatedly, in spite of deeper changes in his analysis and proposal. The one concerns Christian unity and the other that apartheid is totalitarian. On the first, he argues that the gospel calls for fellowship among diverse people, rather than segregation, but on this point, Naudé is still open to the possibility that some practical aspects of apartheid might be accepted based on our weaknesses, as long as it is recognised that these are not biblical principles. His strongest rejection is however based on the argument that apartheid is totalitarian – implying that it pretends to be a system of faith that requires religious obedience. He insists that beyond what apartheid says, the way it calls forth obedience would in itself make it an anti-gospel:

But – and it is on this point that Christians who might concede the relative right to existence of ‘apartness’ recoil from it with dismay – there is only one Gospel in which, for South Africa also, the salvation for time and eternity is revealed. Every other idea of salvation which wants to lay claim to this power of salvation is not the Gospel but an anti-Gospel. (Naudé, 1966, p. 5)

This early rejection of apartheid as a heresy, based on a particular soterio-logic it displays, will be reproduced in less explicitly theological forms repeatedly: apartheid is totalitarian just like communism

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263 He doesn’t use the exact phrase “the weakness of some”, but the argument is not dissimilar to the infamous compromise introduced by Andrew Murray at the 1857 synod of the Dutch Reformed Church. Apartheid is not the ideal, but if applied within limits and as a result of peoples sinful struggle to live together with those “different”, it isn’t necessarily “anti-gospel”, but definitely not the gospel ideal either and should be accompanied with the prayer "Tolerate and forgive it, o Lord, for the sake of our weakness" (Naudé, 1966, p. 5). The distinction Naudé here invokes, without expanding on it, is between sin which can be forgiven, and that which is against the gospel – an alternative faith or a heresy – which must be rejected wholly.

264 Here the early Naudé is also a clear example of what Durand (Durand, 1985) would later identify in the relation between Pietism and Afrikaner dissidents. Exactly because Naudé comes from the Pietistic rather than Kuyperian trajectories at work in the Dutch Reformed Church, he can reject the idea that all policies should be biblically founded, and can therefore make a distinction between gospel and political realism. As Durand would also argue, this did not provide a theological model which was strong enough to counter apartheid theology, but it did allow a certain level of dissidence.
is totalitarian. It wants to present itself as a route to salvation. But in this apartheid is in fact in opposition to a normative understanding of Western Christendom, which is equated with an idea of Europe, where it is God at work in drawing Greek philosophy, Roman law, and the Bible into a single force for the expansion of God’s freedom.

Naudé’s argument made both within South Africa as well as in Western Europe, is that the most important way to assist a fight against communism in South Africa is to end apartheid. Even more, Naudé presents his own vision of a united society as more anti-communist than the apartheid anti-communists. Apartheid is in fact what would make Southern Africa communist, while, at least before his contact with black consciousness and the transformation of the Christian Institute in the 1970s265, he propagates a vision of Western freedom that will draw African people and emerging African nations into the Western world.266

Naudé’s particular Afrikaner commitment is often commented upon, but what he does here is to place his critique of apartheid within the trajectory of an idea of a Christianised West, arguing that in apartheid Afrikaners are in fact breaking with that trajectory. It is the hope for the expansion of the universal values of the ‘civilised West’ that he urges these white students at the University of Cape Town to commit themselves to. A few months later he makes clear that (part of) the problem within the Afrikaner community was exactly its failure to keep up with the developments in the West (Naudé, 1967b, p. 7)

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265 One way in which Naudé in the last years before his banning seems to bring his anti-communist trajectory in line with the growing critique on capitalism from black South Africans, and within the Christian Institute, is to make a distinction between African socialism/communalism and communism, to argue that the former is really what the majority or black South Africans would vote for (Naudé, 1975a, p. 11; Naudé, 1975b, p. 4).

266 I do not propose to have the work of Barbara Ward, mentioned earlier, bear more of an influence on Naudé’s thought than can be rightly argued – indeed, the arguments made reflect ideas popular in the spirit of the times and could well draw well beyond her world. However, her own vision of how Western ideals of freedom relates to the struggle against communism and the development of Africa resonates so clearly with Naudé’s arguments after 1966 that it does warrant mention: “In this contest with the attractions of Communism the Western world cannot rely on the momentum of past achievements and relationships. It has to reassert its vision of a free and just society, of a humanity united as brothers under the Fatherhood of God. The reason for bringing the great vitalities of nationhood and of material possessions under rational control is not only that survival demands a reordering of Western institutions. It is, above all, because new experiments in international and social relations will show to the world at large – to the young, to the students, to the new voters in Asia and Africa, to the natural leaders of the world’s masses – that the traditional faith of the West is strong enough to remold society, strong enough to fulfill the promise of brotherhood which, whatever the blindness of nationalism or the selfishness of property, remains imbedded in our society as a judgement and a challenge” (Ward, 1954, p. 296)
This discourse will continue into the 1970s. In 1971 he would contrast South African with all “civilised communities” who have rejected racial concepts (Naudé, 1971, p. 8), with civilised here seemingly retaining its synonym with “Western” and “Christian”, thus referring to the movements away from certain forms of scientific and explicit racist laws and ideologies in Europe, and to a lesser extent the United States, after World War II. In another speech delivered in absentia at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, he will again point out what he considered the inconsistency in South Africa of a “civilized, Western” country with “Christian” leaders denying “basic human rights” (Naudé, 1975a, p. 4). What Naudé continues to employ is a discourse of a “civilised Christian West”, and contrasting apartheid to this Western ideal. While the strategic political place of such an argument presented to his majority or exclusively white audiences can be understood, it continues to reinforce whiteness (in the guise of “Western”, “Christian”, and “civilised”) as moral norm against which all actions, including apartheid South Africa, should be measured.

Naudé’s vocal opposition to apartheid was in part made possible by his participation in ecumenical gatherings from the organising committee for Cottesloe onwards. Without assuming a singular definition of the term, the WCC representative tasked with visiting South Africa after Sharpville, Robert Bilheimer’s, description of Naudé as a “genuine liberal” is telling (Fourie, 2018, p. 126). Naudé found his public voice against apartheid by more and more speaking the mind of a so-called “liberal” ecumenical tradition. Beyers Naudé, the former Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Church ministers, became the voice of an organisation which from 1966 onwards more and more represented the so-called “liberal” tradition in South African theology, associated mostly with the English speaking churches (Thomas, 2002, pp. 166-167; 177-187).

The message communicated is quite often one of hastening a process of gradual change. This implied insisting on the urgency of allowing a growing number of black South Africans (with a primary emphasis on those in urban areas of “white South Africa”) to be drawn into the political and economic life of what was demarcated as “white”. In 1967 he frames the debate among white South Africans as being between those who argue for “the moral responsibility of the white electorate to increasingly involve non-whites in the political, economic and social life of the country” and those who insist on a final solution of “separate but equal development”, with apartheid then being the required interim measure.

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267 As Fourie (Fourie, 2018, p. 142) indicates, the way the choice around his involvement in Pro Veritate was handled in 1963 already indicated that Naudé was now more deeply rooted in his ecumenical convictions that in the theology and ideology of the Dutch Reformed Church.
for the latter (Naudé, 1967a, pp. 7-8). In 1975, in a paper sent to the British Royal Society, he speaks of the need for giving black South Africans a “meaningful share” in political power and economic wealth – yet “meaningful” remains undefined (Naudé, 1975a, pp. 7-8). Yet in this same year, speaking locally, he notes the tension between Helen Suzman’s Progressive Party and black consciousness proponents, since the latter are insisting on a country with “one man one vote” (Naudé, 1975b, p. 7).

Against this background, it should come as no surprise that Naudé, in fact, has to re-evaluate everything (in his own words) after being confronted with black consciousness. It was some of the very arguments that Naudé presented in opposition to apartheid that were slowly being questioned and confronted. It was the generosity of white people who wanted Africa to be drawn into a narrative of Western universalism that was being named as a perpetuation of the very same white logic that was underlying apartheid. While Naudé’s broadening of the world from Afrikaner nationalism to an ecumenical and global commitment is often noted, it was not only Naudé, the recovering Afrikaner nationalist that heard the challenge of black consciousness, but it was a white Westerner committed to expanding the best in Western tradition – and rejecting apartheid as fundamentally opposed to Western Christendom – who had to re-evaluate his thoughts.

2.3 Black agency – white responsibility

Naudé first met Biko in 1971 (Walsch, 1983, p. 135). As he begins to describe the sea-change that he observed in black consciousness (in his view from 1969 onwards), he initially jumps between a variety of adjectives: black awareness, black power, black anger, or black bitterness (Naudé, 1971, p. 10). While convinced of its significance, a coherent description and response would take time to develop. But when in 1972 Naudé receives an honorary doctorate from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam,268 it is the challenge of black consciousness that he places at the centre of his acceptance speech argument on the responsibility of the church.

On the one hand, he uses his acceptance speech to emphasise that the award is a voice affirming the work of the Christian Institute and thus rejecting the ongoing opposition to the Christian Institute from both the mechanisms of the apartheid state, but most specifically from the three Afrikaans churches of

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268 Berkelaar recounts the history of how Naudé was finally chosen to receive an honorary Doctorate. Objections to this were presented from both more conservative as well as Marxist groups, and Berkouwer’s awarding speech focused exclusively on Naudé commitment to the gospel, without giving any hint that the award could be read as a support of the struggle against apartheid (Berkelaar, 2007, pp. 21, 86-90).
Dutch descent. The heart of what he wants to communicate to his Dutch audience is however what he is hearing from black consciousness.

He describes the change happening within South Africa with references to a movement through three points of hope for change within the black community. First, he says, this hope was on a change of heart from the white community in South Africa and when this failed on international support. Both these hopes were in vain (although he considers his honorary doctorate to be a sign of international support). The contemporary change is therefore towards a conviction that liberation will come from the black community itself (Naudé, 1972, pp. 76-77).

The implications for the (white) Church and Christians then becomes that of taking a supportive or secondary role: supporting the political aspirations of the black community and the positive work of black consciousness on the one side, and turning to the white community and assisting them to better understand the fundamental change which black consciousness brought about (Naudé, 1972, p. 77).

Here Naudé is explaining to his international audience what the main focus of SPRO-CAS 2 will be, even while not naming it.

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269 The problems with this simplistic line of argument should not be dismissed: the overview Naudé sketch skips over decades, even centuries, of social and political developments within African politics in which people in Africa, including what would later become South Africa, were building the movements and institutions working for liberation among themselves, not to mention the earlier kingdoms which were at war with colonial empires before being conquered. By way of example, in 1922 Davidson Don Tengo Jabavu made the very same argument – that black South Africans initially placed their hopes on the “essential goodness of Englishmen” but after 1910, in response to younger voices, have been taking a more “independent” stance (Thomas, 2002, p. 89). Again, the removal of Africans from the Cape voter roll in 1936 caused a break between some streams of black political opinion and white liberalism (Thomas, 2002, p. 128). So the idea that black liberation will be the result of black organisation is not altogether new in the 1970s. Such a reminder was also not impossible in the 1970s. Peter Walshe, for example, in 1977 already recognised that the Christian Institute, even while a prophetic voice in the church, in fact only at a late stage joined a “century of African political protest” (Walshe, 1977, p. 478). However, within Naudé’s argument his phases become a testimony of his own further conversion as well a call towards his international audience for a changed relationship to the struggle for liberation in South Africa.

270 Whether intended or not, within Naudé’s broader work undoubtedly unintended, Naudé here risks reproducing an assumption of the Church and Christians as white, and making a distinction between “Church and Christians” on the one hand and the “black community” on the other. What he describe as the task of the Church and Christians is clearly referring to the white Church and Christians, which he contrasts with the work of the black community, but this church is not named as white.

271 When tracing this history, Walsch (Walsch, 1983, pp. 138-139) indicates that during 1971 there were still reservations around black consciousness within the Christian Institute. For Peter Randall, who led the SPRO-CAS process, it was only during the second half of 1971 that a break was made from a “predominantly white initiative designed to help blacks” to a committed support for black consciousness and black community programs instead. This shift was announced in January 1972, and the majority of the funding for SPRO-CAS was coming from The Netherlands. Convincing Dutch supporters of this new vision would therefore have been important.
A tension however, remains within his response. Here, and elsewhere, he commits himself without reservation to the leadership of the black consciousness movement, and to the responsibility given to white people in response to it. But his interpretation of black consciousness remains one of an inevitable mirror of white racism and apartheid. “The claim for recognition of black identity follows from the over-emphasization of white identity, black awareness growing out of the disregard of black human dignity; black apartheid, black solidarity and black power, grow as a necessary psychological defense against white apartheid, white solidarity and white power.” (Naudé, 1972, p. 77). Elsewhere Naudé would describe black consciousness as the Frankenstein creation of apartheid (Naudé, 1971, p. 11).

He would also make such a comparison in the positive. In his autobiography, more than 20 years after his acceptance speech at the Vrije Universiteit, Naudé draws parallels between the early Afrikaner Broederbond (before it became a secret society) and black consciousness, since both were born out of the need to work against the sense of inferiority over against their English speaking counterparts. On these grounds, he argues that Afrikaners (the clear primary audience of the autobiography) should be able to have empathy with black consciousness (Naudé, 1995, pp. 76-77). This particular idea is already present in the 1960s, when Naudé draws on this argument as motivation for a general white, but particular Afrikaner, empathy with the struggle against apartheid – as well as a warning to his audience that others will have as much commitment to their own liberation as Afrikaners had after the experience of British supremacy (Naudé, 1967a, p. 8). We should not ignore the ambiguity inherent in Naudé’s evaluation, nor the fact that there is some overlap with a broader white liberal conviction reigning during this time that black consciousness was “apartheid in reverse” (Thomas, 2002, p. 203).

In Naudé’s drawing on an idea of Afrikaner empathy for black consciousness, there seems to be a conceptual divide that remains uncrossed. Naudé reads black consciousness into an imagination of ethnic nationalism, and if there is at times signs of hesitancy towards the developments within black consciousness, it is this image of similarity with early Afrikaner nationalism that is underlying it. It is however exactly the question of ethnicity under apartheid that would be the main point of difference between Naudé and Biko shortly before Biko’s death and Naudé’s banning, with Naudé supporting

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272 “Die eis om erkenning van swart identiteit volg op die oorbeklemtoning van wit identiteit, swart bewuswording groei uit die miskennning van swart menswaardigheid; swart apartheid, swart solidariteit en swart mag, groei as noodwendige psigologiese verweer teen wit apartheid, wit solidariteit en wit mag.”
Kwazulu Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi and Biko refusing to be identified with him as long as he supports and works within the homeland system.  

Naudé was not blind to the problem, and would argue that the homeland leaders were pushed between a choice of “enforced acceptance of the homeland concept on the one hand – or nothing at all”, and held that if black South Africans could make their own choice, he believed that it would be the Freedom Charter “South Africa belongs to all” that would be chosen (Naudé, 1975b, p. 3). It would be reasonable to argue that Naudé’s choice in this instance was an acceptance of the strategic choice made by homeland leaders within an impossible situation, not in any way a condonation of the homeland system. However, at times he also indicates an openness to the possibility that these could develop into ethnic nation-states even after apartheid.

The point here is that Naudé’s approach of reading black consciousness through the analogy of early Afrikaner ethno-nationalism might have presented itself as a possible way of attracting the empathy of his predominantly white audiences, and given Naudé’s life-long sensitivity to the struggle of Afrikaners in the late 19th and early 20th century, it seems to be a key lens through which he attempts to understand black consciousness for himself. However, this does risk reading black consciousness through an ethnic imagination which it was quite explicitly attempting to disrupt. Naudé was however quite possibly aware of this tension. In 1975 he emphasises the ongoing work that would be required by everyone to undo the ethnic image that apartheid and white racism created (Naudé, 1975b, p. 12). He would probably have included himself among those who would need to do this work. This ongoing struggle should however not distract our attention from the primary place black consciousness held in his ongoing transformation during the 1970s, but perhaps rather sharpened this focus.

Noting this illuminates two aspects of Naudé’s response to black consciousness during these years. On the one hand, Naudé’s response to black consciousness is quite specifically focused on the question of

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273 The difference of opinion is recounted by Naudé himself (Naudé, 1995, pp. 106-108), and also recalled by Aeldred Stubbs (Stubbs, 2012 [1978], p. 204).

274 The political argument that Naudé makes throughout these years continues to be one that insists on citizenship for all those in “South Africa”. Initially this included the possibility that the so-called “homeland” system might be part of the future, but then he would insist that the migrant labour system had to be rejected and insisting that those working and living in “South Africa” had to become full citizens of “South Africa”. (see Naudé, 1967a, pp. 10-11). Even later, while rejecting the existing homeland system, he still remains open for the possibility that the homelands might accept independence. (Naudé, 1976, pp. 3, 5). In one of his last public speeches before his banning, he however criticises his fellow Afrikaner theologians for qualifying their critique on apartheid with a general support of separate development. He makes clear without a shadow of doubt that the entire system, both in implementation and foundation, should be rejected (Naudé, 1977a, p. 6).
social and political leadership, and on white commitment to black leadership within the struggle against white racism. Naudé might be the most important white church leader of the 1970s embodying this particular shift in both reflection and organisation within that part of the white church opposing apartheid. Such a shift is however but one part of a response, with questions of social analysis and epistemological orientation partly outside of this. On the other hand, it is exactly by noting this that the shift which occurs within Naudé’s approach comes into focus: the conviction that white South Africans should accept black leadership in the struggle against apartheid and white racism does not follow on being convinced of all aspects of black consciousness social analysis and epistemological reorientation. This is the fundamental break with earlier ideas on “trusteeship” common among white liberals. In brief, Naudé steps away from the position of eternal pedagogue evaluating black agents and supporting that which he can integrate into his own theological and political framework.

By 1976 at the latest Naudé’s earlier hopes for a gradual expansion of black political and economic participation was over, and his conviction was clear that the only solution would be that the white government be urgently removed and black political leaders take over. In a media declaration following a court order indicating that he is not allowed to enter Soweto following the 16 June 1976 protests he wrote:

It should now be unequivocally clear that the government is no longer in a position to determine the course of political events, not only in Soweto, but also throughout South Africa; it is also unable to guide the content or direction or pace of change in any way. Minor political and social changes are simply insufficient to solve the crisis of this moment. Consequently, it is a matter of great urgency and of the highest priority that the black community be allowed to truly choose recognized black leaders from among them, including those released from prison who have returned from exile, to take part in a national convention with a view to abolishing the unfair political and social structures of our country in the shortest possible time, and to offer the

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275 The point here is not that it implies a rejection of black consciousness social analysis, but rather that the order is important when interpreting Naudé’s change of mind on this point. It is not a process of first coming into agreement, which is then followed by an acceptance of the guiding role of black consciousness leaders. Rather, he becomes convinced about where leadership should emerge from, and accepts this in spite of the fact that he is not yet convinced of the social analysis being put forth.
country a political leader of liberation, based on freedom and justice for all. (quoted in Naudé, 1995, p. 105)²⁷⁶

We should not make too much of Naudé’s commitment to black consciousness during the 1970s. This does not imply questioning that commitment, but rather noting that working out the theological implications for white Christians would take a far longer time, and as I would argue below, go beyond the years for which Naudé represented a key first response. Rather, Naudé was perhaps the key white church leader recognising and then communicating the need for a particular shift: that white South Africans need to recognise that their role in the struggle for a more just society rejecting white supremacy in principle requires a commitment to and support of the leadership and initiatives of black South Africans. More and more the speeches of the 1970s reveal a white theologian and religious leader attempting to work out his role within the struggle from within such a commitment.

2.4 Christian unity and raising white consciousness

The unity of the church is for Naudé a key aspect of his theological critique against apartheid. Not only is its insistence on the visible unity of the church as an ecclesiological commitment which apartheid, and the apartheid within the churches, is breaking with, this vision of unity also ties to Naudé’s rejection of apartheid as a false gospel. As briefly mentioned above, Naudé sees a particular soteriological logic at work in the way that apartheid functions as a totalitarian system. But more specifically, apartheid is a false gospel in that it promises salvation through segregation. It is a system where “the greatest form of separation is seen to be the only salvation of the Whites” (Naudé, 1976, p. 3).

On the other hand, Naudé and the Christian Institute responded to black consciousness in the immediate aftermath of the SASO breakaway from NUSAS, and in years where the young black leaders that Naudé was putting at the heart of his call for a changed relation to black leadership among both

²⁷⁶ “Dit behoort nou onomwonde duidelik te wees dat die Regering nie langer in ’n posisie is om die koers van politieke gebeure, nie net in Soweto nie, maar ook in die hele Suid Afrika te bepaal nie; hy is ook nie in staat om die inhoud of die rigting of pas van veranderinge in op enige wyse te lei nie. Geringe politieke en sosiale veranderinge is eenvoudig ontoereikend om die krisis van hierdie oomblik op te los. Gevolglik is dit ’n saak van groot dringendheid en van die hoogste prioriteit dat die swart gemeenskap toegelaat sal word om werkelik erkende swart leiers uit hul middes te kies, wat diegene insluit wat uit die tronk vrygelaat is en wat vanuit ballingskap teruggekeer het, om aan ’n nasionale konvensie deel te neem met die oog op die aftakeling van die onregverdige politieke en sosiale strukture van ons land in die kortste moontlike tyd, en aan ons land ’n politieke leier van bevryding, wat op vryheid en geregtigheid vir almal gebaseer is, aan te bied”
In contrast to this, as late as 1975 he still publicly expressed his belief in the sincerity of the then Prime Minister John Vorster’s and the National Party’s commitments to reform and normalization of relations in South Africa (Naudé, 1975b, pp. 4, 7)
white South Africans and the international community supporting the struggle against apartheid was insisting on the need for forms of separatism – spaces where black South Africans could organise their own responses without the oversight of white people. That Naudé and the Christian Institute could remain involved with black consciousness and organisations arising from within this movement is primarily because they accepted this call for separatism and supported it.²⁷⁷

The argument in chapter 3 made clear that black consciousness and black theology was not rejecting notions of unity in principle. The arguments analysed in fact reveal a deep committed to common humanity. It was however vocally rejecting superficial calls for unity which left the fundamental racial ideology and hierarchy in place while insisting on a Christian reconciliation and a societal multi-racialism. What needs to be discussed is Naudé’s ongoing discourse on Christian unity in the same period as his insistence on black political leadership and recognition of the requirement of separate black and white foci and work within SPRO-CAS 2.

Naudé insists both on visible ecclesial unity and on a political future based on a negotiating process representing all South Africans throughout the 1970s until his banning.

In a 1974 talk where Naudé refutes the main biblical arguments presented as a justification of apartheid and presents aspects of an alternative theological vision, he draws on the creation in the image of God and a commitment to visible and structural unity of the church as constructive pillars of his theological critique. Building on language that was becoming key in black theology at the time, he argues that the creation in the image of God should imply a rejection of any sense of racial superiority, and that the church may not be split along ethnic, linguistic, or social lines (Naudé, 1974, p. 23).²⁷⁸

His arguments on ecclesial unity find its political parallel in ongoing calls (made to white audiences) for a kind of national convention where white and black leaders – and importantly this should include the

²⁷⁷ A report on the Johannesburg chapter of the SPRO-CAS 2 White Consciousness parallel to the Black Community Programmes, presented by Horst Kleinschmidt in the second half of probably 1972 (no date is indicated in the archive, but SPRO-CAS 2 was launched in January 1972, the report reflects on July and August, and mentions the future publication of White Liberation (Christian Institute, 1972b), which still happened in 1972) makes this commitment clear, not merely through the proposals presented on what such “work within the white community” would look like, but also in the sensitivity revealed for not “interfering in the Black Programmes” (Christian Institute, 1972a, p. 6).

²⁷⁸ As is common for the time, he accepts the denominational division in the South African church. That these are embedded in European national, linguistic, and social divisions carried over into the colonial South Africa escapes conscious attention.
imprisoned and exiled leaders of the black community – can work out a future political organisation (Naudé, 1975a, p. 11).279

These calls however, run parallel to the SPRO-CAS 2 attempts at doing “white work” – white members taking responsibility for making white South Africans aware, and drawing them into the support of, the non-racial future envisioned by black consciousness leaders. But throughout the 1970s there was an increasing disillusionment within the Christian Institute regarding attempts at ‘raising white consciousness’. Their efforts of taking up the challenge black consciousness presented to white liberals amounted to very little (Walsch, 1983, pp. 128-145), and what Naudé told his audience in 1972 at the Vrije Universiteit was proven to themselves as well: liberation will not come due to a change in the white community. Walsch writes off the remaining white membership of the Christian Institute in the last months before its banning that they were “at best, a vital but remnant fellowship: vulnerable, imperfect and ineffective yet a small clear voice of Christian hope” (Walshe, 1977, p. 145).

In the final months before his banning order, again speaking at the University of Cape Town (and now just months after the Soweto uprisings), he concludes with a list of what Afrikaners are supposed to do:

It required us a new lifestyle from us, a new life pattern where small alternative communities of people of different diverse cultures and racial backgrounds are prepared to come together to reflect on the human relationships of future Azania. Even if it does not have a significant public impact, such efforts will serve as a sign, as a symbol of hope and expectation that it is possible to live in peace in the country of the future as white and brown and black. (Naudé, 1977a, p. 7)280

On the one hand, his choice of Azania signals a political acknowledgement of voices that advocated for this as an alternative name for South Africa, on the other hand, he is employing the ecclesiological and

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279 This is indeed quite similar to the negotiated settlement that did become a reality many years later than Naudé hoped for it to happen. CODESA was the most visible part of such a national convention, but the early government of national unity could be described as an ongoing political negotiation, leading into the acceptance of the 1996 constitution.

280 “Dit verg van ons 'n nuwe lewensstyl, 'n nuwe lewenspatroon waar klein alternatiewe gemeenskappe van mense van verskillende uiteenlopende kulture en rasse-agtegronde bereid is om saam te kom om iets te weerspieël van die menslike verhoudings van die toekomstige Azania. Selfs al sou dit geen noemenswaardige openbare uitwerking hê nie, dan sal sulke pogings dien as 'n teken, as 'n simbool van hoop en verwagting dat dit moontlik is om in die land van die toekoms as wit en bruin en swart in vrede saam te lewe.”
strategic proposal that David Bosch was developing during the same years\textsuperscript{281}. While Naudé took a distinctly different position from Bosch on most key issues during these years\textsuperscript{282} – which does not detract from the fundamental opposition to apartheid from both – Bosch’s emphasis on the church as an alternative community seemed to resonate with Naudé at this point. Within apartheid South Africa such a vision can also be described as a form of prefigurative politics – embarking on attempts at living in the present that which is envisioned for the future. It is a form of unity that Naudé continued to hope might act as a sign and symbol of a future to come.

In Naudé’s autobiography, he writes about a meeting with Steve Biko in June 1976, and a question he posed to Biko concerning both the relationship of black and white South Africans, and the possibility of white South Africans contributing to liberation. He recollects Biko’s answer from memory, and it reveals the vision of unity, intertwined with the already discussed acknowledgement of black agency and strategic separation, here at work:

Beyers, in the immediate future, there is no place for the whites in the strategy of the Black Consciousness Movement. We blacks must learn to gain our human dignity and human rights independently. But the day will come when these relationships will change. That is the day when we all, black and white, will stand on an equal footing, take each other’s hand, face each other with mutual respect, and proudly say: We are all citizens and children of this country (Naudé, 1995, p. 107).\textsuperscript{283}

\textsuperscript{281} I have traced this development of the notions “alternatiewe gemeenskap” or “alternative community” in the work of Bosch from 1974 (when, under the influence of Yoder, it suddenly appears) until 1982 (where it disappears and gets replaced with synonymous notions such as “distinct community”, most probably due to ongoing interpretations of the alternative community as implying a withdrawal from society) in detail elsewhere (Van Wyngaard, 2011; Van Wyngaard, 2013). The specific language of an “alternatiewe gemeenskap” (alternative community) was a distinctive and consistent contribution of Bosch in multiple lectures and publications in these years, and his proposal bears a close resemblance to what Naudé is suggesting here. Of particular interest is Bosch’s insistence that the church needs a response which would be relevant regardless of whether it is politically successful, which Naudé in this crucial period, as state repression against the Christian Institute is picking up, also repeats.

\textsuperscript{282} Perhaps the most important example is Naudé’s qualified support of the use of violence (Müller, 2015), compared to Bosch’s principled insistence on non-violence (Bosch, 1987), although it could be pointed out in different positions on sanctions or other questions as well. I mention these because Naudé here seems to be drawing on Bosch’s ecclesiological vision, both as a strategic option for remaining faithful when chances of success are slim, but also with the hope that the Church as such an alternative community could be an example which will allow society to transform, while the ethical and political direction this ecclesiological vision would take Bosch into was in important ways distinct from where Naudé would go.

\textsuperscript{283} “Beyers, in die onmiddelike toekoms is daar in die strategie van die Swart Bewussynsbeweging geen plek vir die blankes nie. Ons swartes moet leer om ons menswaardigheid en ons menseregte onafhanklik te verkry. Maar die
In early interpretations, Peter Walshe already indicated the assumption that the argument for Christian unity and the argument for black agency were not considered to be in opposition to each other, but that the latter was a pre-requisite to the former. Naudé accepts this logic and lives from the faith that the latter will indeed develop into the former. There is however an important distinction that should be noted: Naudé is not arguing for nor supporting any form of separatist organising by white people. He commits to the strategic call for white people to take responsibility for particular work but calls on his white audience to commit on a personal level to already live in the kind of relations that he was hoping for and to do this work in collaboration with and under the tutelage of black leadership.

Steve Biko was murdered shortly before Naudé’s banning order, and one of Naudé’s last recorded speeches before being banned was a brief tribute to Biko, again delivered to a predominantly white audience. He structured the speech around what Biko’s message would be to black South Africans (where he just says that it is not his place to comment), the English speaking white community, and Afrikaners. It is to the latter that most of his attention will turn.

While Naudé does not use the notion “humanism”, his reading of Biko can best be described as that of a humanist whose commitment to humanity transcended distinction of race, class, or ethnicity. Naudé, in the end, describes black solidarity not as a threat to Afrikaners, but rather as a movement that can also liberate Afrikaners from the ideology of apartheid, and draw them into a broader South African identity. While here presented in less explicitly theological language, he continues to draw on earlier arguments of apartheid as pseudo-soteriology, promising salvation through separation and an increasing level of security and military power. In contrast, he proposes that black consciousness is an invitation to Afrikaners to become part of a broader community – on condition that this can no longer be as a

dag sal kom dat hierdie verhoudings sal verander. Dit is die dag wanneer ons almal, swart en wit, op gelyke voet langs mekaar sal staan, mekaar se hand sal vat, mekaar met wedersydse respek in die oë kan kyk en trots kan sê: Ons is almal burgers en kinders van hierdie land”
Naudé is here, as elsewhere (see Naudé, 1995, p. 78), writing from memory, and furthermore translating his conversation into Afrikaans. The jump between “blanke” and “wit” in his Afrikaans translation here put into the mouth of Biko should already raise suspicion. The point is therefore not to make Biko into a supporter for Naudé’s vision, but rather to indicate how Naudé attempting to align his ongoing commitment to unity with his simultaneous commitment black leadership in general – including over himself – and to the leadership of black consciousness leaders in particular.

284 The logic Walshe traces is that white South Africans, both in church and society, are to be prepared for black leadership. The task of white church and civil society leaders would then in part be to work for this preparation. However, while recognising the particularity of black and white work, this was out of a vision of “the Body of Christ as transcending all human barriers, not least those of race” (Walshe, 1977, pp. 471-472).
privileged elite ruling over others (Naudé, 1977c). Naudé’s hoped-for unity runs through black consciousness, not as an alternative to it.

2.5 Black agency and Christian unity

Chapter 1 attempted to show the crisis of whiteness for theology. While the argument does not need to be repeated here, it builds up towards what Jennings revealed as a distorted relationship between pedagogy and discipleship. Naudé symbolises a moment in the rejection of that theological problem within South African history.

Jennings describes the crisis as follows: “In the previous chapter, we saw Christian theology bound up in an evaluative insularity, a pedagogical imperialism. Now I add to that portrait another layer: Christian theology producing through translation isolating and reductive forms of Christian agency” (Jennings, 2010, p. 155). The key shift in Naudé’s vision lies exactly on such a vision of Christian agency, and perhaps, more generally, of human agency. What Naudé represents is a white Christianity starting to reject its own position as eternal pedagogue, in the process opening the possibility for true Christian community.

Jennings description of the later Colenso captures the reality of Naudé’s response to black consciousness as well: “This was a place his theology could not take him, but precisely where the Africans drew him” (Jennings, 2010, p. 165). As was pointed out above, Naudé does not present us with a worked out theological response in solidarity with black theology. His public lectures are rather a record of the active work of trying to work out for himself and indicate to his predominantly white audiences where it is that black consciousness is drawing himself, and could draw them if they opened themselves to it. While it might be this openness to being drawn into a world envisioned by black consciousness that caused alarm and discomfort among many of Naudé’s white colleagues inside the Christian Institute, this is exactly what makes Naudé of significance in reflecting on the work that white South Africans have struggled to do.

Naudé did not reject the argument that there was a need for a black organisation, apart from the control or even involvement of white people, in the struggle for liberation. He accepted the argument that white people should take particular responsibility for work among white South Africans. However, this could not imply an argument for segregated white organising. This “white work” had to be imagined and practised within a commitment to black leadership. This distinction also clarifies how the twin emphasis between black agency and Christian unity could be held to simultaneously.
Simultaneously supporting the work of the Black Community Programmes as well as calling his white audiences to an alternative community consciously “multi-racial” yet through a commitment to black leadership implying a rejection of the paternalism that such “multi-racial” spaces came within the past did indeed follow a coherent rationale. Black consciousness and Christian unity were not in conflict, but the former was a pre-requisite for the latter to exist in any meaningful way, even while the latter was concretely sought in the present.

3 Albert Nolan and white salvation within the struggle against apartheid

3.1 Introduction

The banning of Beyers Naudé, the Christian Institute, and various black consciousness movements in the late 1970s created another momentary vacuum in the institutionalised opposition to apartheid. Simultaneously, the opposition against apartheid was growing ever stronger both internationally and inside South Africa. That an alternative was needed was noted, and the name of the Institute for Contextual Theology was among other reasons chosen with a conscious nod to the Christian Institute which preceded it (Cochrane, 2001, p. 68). Albert Nolan joined early on as a staff member (Cochrane, 2001, p. 70). The Institute for Contextual Theology, the project known as contextual theology, and Albert Nolan cannot be reduced to each other in any combination, but neither can they be separated either.

Nolan was a Dominican, and served as Vicar-General of the Dominican order from 1976-1984 and again from 2000-2004. He famously refused the position of Master General of the Dominicans in Rome.\(^{285}\) In 1994 he also refused a position as an ANC Member of Parliament (Denis, 2016, p. 9). It has often been said that Nolan was closely involved in the process of drafting the Kairos Document. Given its strong emphasis as a people’s document, the exact contribution of various participants was not recorded, but in the words of Philip Denis, “Asked whether his role was that of an editor in chief, he did not say no” (Denis, 2017, p. 14).

Nolan’s theological writings are contained in three books and multiple essays, the most prominent of which was recently collated as a book as well. However, he frequently reminds that his more formal theological writings emerged from grassroots engagement. The main focus below will be on the 1988

\(^{285}\) Nolan was the first to reject this position in the eight centuries of the existence of the order (Denis, 2016, p. 7), and he did so based on a conviction that he should remain part of the struggle in South Africa - https://web.archive.org/web/20150924083942/http://www.radharcfilms.com/archive/346.html [accessed 15 September 2018].
published *God in South Africa*, which was an explicit attempt at theologically thinking through the questions posed by the struggle against apartheid, or stated better, to develop a theological system in concrete conversation with the material realities of struggle against apartheid. God in South Africa was however bracketed by two books on Jesus, published in 1976 and 2006. *Jesus Before Christianity* was focused specifically on highlighting the political implications of the message of the historical Jesus, and *Jesus Today* on the spirituality of Jesus.

Within Nolan’s long career in working for theology grounded in lived reality and responding to concrete socio-political and economic challenges, the 1988 publication of *God in South Africa* occupies a key place. I will return to this publication throughout the section below, but by way of introduction to the topic at hand briefly focus attention on a note from the preface.

> My attempt to say something to all South African Christians, both black and white, has proved to be extraordinarily difficult. How do you speak simultaneously to people who, while they inhabit the same country, live in totally different worlds? Moreover, one may well doubt whether it is ever possible to say anything worthwhile to both the oppressor and the oppressed at the same time. In fact, in the course of writing this book I often wondered whether I would do better to write two books on the gospel in South Africa: one for those Christians who find themselves on the side of the oppressor and another for Christians involved in the struggle for liberation. In the end I decided to write one book, not only because Jesus himself preached to the oppressor and the oppressed at the same time and not only because the gospel of Jesus Christ is one and indivisible, but above all because the gospel is not, and can never be, neutral. (Nolan, 1988, p. xii)

A few points need to be noted.

Nolan’s struggle with whether to write one book or two is important for the analysis below since the question will be quite specifically how Nolan would articulate a theology in response to the problem of whiteness in South Africa. What is it that he thinks should be said to white Christians in particular in the context of racism?

However, in this we should already note a shift to which I’ll return below: in one instance Nolan speaks of South Africans as both black and white, but then shifts to oppressor and oppressed in the next sentence, and to those “on the side of the oppressor” and those “involved in the struggle for liberation”
in the sentence thereafter. These three word-pairs are not synonymous, and the movements between them will become important in Nolan’s work, as I will point out below.286

On the one hand, Nolan is conscious of the fact that the gospel needs to be made concrete for those who are white, oppressors, or ‘on the side of the oppressor’. On the other hand, this must be based on the indivisible gospel of Jesus, and in imitation of Jesus’ own preaching to all. This already introduces multiple key themes in Nolan’s work: the importance of Jesus, the choices we make in our social analysis, and the place of oppressed and oppressor in Nolan’s theology.

A final introductory note to assist in framing the argument below concerns Nolan’s explicitly soteriological emphasis. “The gospel is about salvation from sin. That is one of the few statements that all Christians would agree about.” (Nolan, 1988, p. 35) How exactly sin and salvation are to be understood, both in general and within the particular context of late apartheid South Africa, is however not something all Christians would agree upon, but forms to the focus of Nolan’s argument. The question of sin and salvation with respect to whiteness will assist in illuminating Nolan’s arguments as it related to the topic of this thesis.

The argument below will therefore, proceed as follows:

• In a first introductory section, I expand on the emphasis on Nolan as a contextual theologian and highlight a number of distinctions to assist in situating this notion.
• Thereafter I focus attention on Nolan’s theological system by first highlighting a particular aspect of his eschatology in brief, and then focusing attention more specifically on his soteriology developed in God in South Africa.
• In the last two sections, I turn my attention to the main focus of this study, first focusing on race, and then on whiteness in particular, in terms of Nolan’s contextual soteriology.

3.2 Contextual theology

At times Albert Nolan has been described as the “initiator of Contextual Theology in South Africa” (Briard, 2001, p. viii). But such a description can lead to immense confusion, given different ways in which the notion has been used. I therefore, highlight a number of distinctions which can assist in clarifying what is meant with such a claim, and which I draw on both here and in the next section to situate Nolan and Kritzinger.

286 From later sections we can add to this his distinction between sinner and sinned against (Nolan, 1988, p. 66), or between sinner and sufferer (Nolan, 1988, p. 68).
James Cochrane (Cochrane, 2001, pp. 67-70) shares the infamous anecdote on the choice of name for the Institute of Contextual Theology. It was 1978, and a discussion around a name for an organisation that could again assist in publicly organising resistance to apartheid following the banning of the Christian Institute was being held. Such an organisation had to present itself as having a different intention than already banned organisations. Words like “liberation” was best avoided as not to invite the attention of the apartheid state. Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) was an explicitly ironic play on the Christian Institute (CI) which could present itself publicly as focusing on theological reflection and research. This should already caution against reading too strict a definition into the notion “contextual theology” as applied to the Institute for Contextual Theology. But what do we even mean with contextual theology? What does it refer to in the arguments below? A few distinctions will assist in situating its meaning both here and in the section on Kritzinger.

The first distinction concerns the statement that all theology is contextual (Pears, 2009, p. 1). While this might be true in very broad and general terms it does not assist us in speaking about specific attempts at contextualisation (Botha, 2010, p. 182). In more general terms Albert Nolan recently wrote on this: “In a way all theology is contextual. The difference is between those who are aware of this and those who are not” (Ackermann, 2014, p. 11). This points toward the first distinction when reflecting on contextual theology: that between a general understanding of all theology as being contextual, and “theology which explicitly places the recognition of the contextual nature of theology at the forefront of the theological process” (Pears, 2009, p. 1), what Bosch would describe as contextual theology proper (Bosch, 2004, p. 421). However, this concerns not only conscious awareness of the contextuality of our theology but making that an explicit starting point for our theological process. It is this more explicit contextual starting point that is of concern in this chapter.

In one of the most prominent interpretations of Nolan’s work, the editors frame contextual theology “as an umbrella term embracing a variety of particular or situational theologies” (Speckman & Kaufmann, 2001, p. xi). This is indeed often the way in which contextual theology would be described. However, not all particularities are the same. In a classic argument, Gutiérrez makes a broad distinction between two interlocutors of theology: the poor and the nonbeliever, or rather, the non-person and those “under the sway of modernity”. While liberation theology has developed through the commitment to the poor as the dialogue partner of theology, another stream of modern theology has responded to the challenge posed by the European Enlightenment and taken the nonbeliever as its primary dialogue partner (Guttiérrez, 2001, p. 21).
A Third possible distinction which is at times made in reflections on types of contextual theology is between theologies focusing on the socio-economic context on the one hand and theologies focusing on the cultural context on the other hand. This can for example be seen in Ukpong’s distinction between indigenisation and socio-economic models followed by Bosch (Bosch, 2004, p. 420) and repeated in for example Kim (Kim, 2004, p. 48) or in Schreiter’s distinction between ethnographic and liberation approaches (Schreiter, 1985, p. 13).

These distinctions serve to create a hesitancy in a broad description of Nolan as a contextual theologian, or of Nolan’s theology as in a more particular way contextual than numerous other particular theological projects around South African during the same time (black theology, African theology, and the first developments of a feminist theology). To start with, contextual theology is also used as a particular attempt at situational theology. That is to say, what goes under the banner of “contextual theology” in South Africa, in particular as it related to Nolan, should be understood as one particular attempt at situational theology, not as an umbrella for this chorus of situational theologies.

So what did Nolan understand under contextual theology? Key for my argument below is that Nolan perceived black consciousness and black theology to be something that has ended and that the theology that he is discerning in the 1980s as being a development from these, but quite distinct from them. Nolan’s own understanding of the shift is best described as a broadening from a black theology emphasis on race to an emphasis on a system of power that includes race but aims to point at a capitalist structure that underpins its structural oppressiveness (I return to Nolan’s understanding of race below). He does not reject black theology but rather places it in the past. Nolan’s reading of the theo-political landscape is a shift from black theology to a people’s theology (see Nolan, 1988, p. 115). Denis describes Nolan’s contextual theology as “a South African version of Liberation Theology” (Denis, 2016, p. 8) – linked to Latin American liberation theology. In part, this is evident in a shift towards a more explicit class analysis.

Even when contextual theology is understood as the more explicit reflection on context, and focused on Gutiérrez non-person as interlocutor, it is the different forms that such projects took on (and continues to take on) that often assist in illuminating the details of a proposal. As will become clear in the sections below, Nolan’s proposal is constantly found in the tension between reflecting on the particularities of life under the apartheid regime, while reading from a position where race is not the primary concern of his analysis. That this created certain tensions from the early stages of the Institute for Contextual
Theology as well is often noted (Cochrane, 2001, pp. 70-73). As will become clear below, these are choices which have a fundamental impact on the theological proposals developed in terms of race in general and whiteness in particular.

What Nolan however explicitly attempts in his contextual theology is to develop a system of drawing on theological language to describe what is happening in our contexts. ‘Reading the signs of the times’, a key metaphor for Nolan and those in the Kairos tradition, is something which Nolan claimed to see more among political analysts than theologians, but the need which he expresses is that “God and the traditions about God” should be used to “throw light upon the meaning of public events” (Nolan, 1988, p. 21). This is what Nolan describes as contextualisation: “contextualization means naming our experience and our practice with religious words like sin, salvation, grace, temptation, the work of God, the powers of evil, the practice of Jesus, the power of the spirit and so forth” (Nolan, 1988, pp. 27-28).

He develops a system of thought, we might say a “systematic theology” but a systematic theology thoroughly contextual, and in dialogue with the reality of the day. In what follows I therefore, trace the use of these traditional theological notions, pointing out how they fit together, but also how they are given meaning in relation to Naudé’s reading of the concrete political and economic context of late apartheid. The choices made in the process will become clear as the argument progresses. Tracing this system of thought will allow us to then also see how white South Africans under apartheid fit into his theological reading of the context.

3.3 Eschatology: either catastrophe or kingdom

While my main emphasis below is on Nolan’s reading of sin and salvation in terms of the South African context, a brief reflection on his approach to eschatology and how it acts as a lens for his own social analysis will assist in illuminating aspects of the subsequent argument, since his reading of how white South Africans should respond in a context of oppression can be read within a broader pattern in his work of setting up clear dichotomies.

In Jesus before Christianity he describes Jesus’ language of the “kingdom” as a reading of the context so that there is a clear either-or:

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287 Cochrane continues to highlight that the way in which race impacted on dynamics within the institute cannot be ignored, as black consciousness leaders and white theologians worked together.
What was certain for Jesus was that either the catastrophe or the “kingdom” would come in the near future. For Jesus the eschaton, or imminent act of God, was an either-or event. This is what qualified and determined Jesus’ time as a time for decision and action, as a unique opportunity. (Nolan, 2006a [1970], p. 105)

Faith would however, imply a conviction that “in the end goodness and truth will triumph over evil and falsehood” (Nolan, 2006a [1970], p. 103), and it is through this faith, and life oriented around it, that the kingdom comes. “Faith is a radical reorientation of one’s life. It admits of no compromise and no half-measures. One cannot serve two masters. One either makes the “kingdom” and its values the basic orientation of one’s life or one does not.” (Nolan, 2006a [1970], p. 101).

This kingdom vs. catastrophe dichotomy will be found repeatedly. Its basic pattern involved a conviction that a time of crisis in the present presents a unique moment for a fundamental change in society. This is found in his construction of the historical Jesus – the unique opportunity mentioned above – but is similarly worked out in his later books in response to contemporary contexts. The emphasis is always on salvation and an eschaton that manifest in the particular circumstances of people in the present (Nolan, 1988, pp. 132-133).

In *God in South Africa* Nolan’s eschatological orientation leads to an analysis where the very extremity of violence in the system of apartheid is cause for its own imminent destruction, and where it is the conscientisation brought forth by this extremity that brings about its salvific opposite, bringing Nolan to the optimistic description of the future of South Africa: “...the one thing we need not fear for the future is the kind of take-over whereby another group of people simply replaces the present rulers and

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288 This should not be confused with what Nolan described under apocalyptic perspectives, which worked with the idea that “one day this world will come to an end in a great cosmic upheaval and that salvation will come in the next world” (Nolan, 1988, p. 119). While Nolan’s eschaton is imminent and involves a significant upheaval, it is very specifically set within history. Furthermore, the work of God and the work of people are fundamentally intertwined in his reflection on the breaking in of God’s reign, or God’s salvation (Nolan, 1988, p. 130). It is not that Nolan denies the apocalyptic elements in the words of Jesus or the New Testament, but his criticism is on an apocalypticism which denies the place of humans and postpones the eschaton to the last days – in this his criticism is also focused on modern eschatologies which universalises eschatology and focus it on an end of history in general (Nolan, 1988, p. 132).

289 This Nolan unpacks over the course of a number of pages in his chapter on the signs of hope, where a number of cyclical movements are used as examples of how inevitable extremities in the maintenance of the system of apartheid are bringing about resistance to this system (Nolan, 1988, pp. 139-154)
maintains the same type of system so that people (of whatever colour) are manipulated as objects.” (Nolan, 1988, p. 144)

Nolan’s own disillusionment is palpable when writing Jesus Today 20 years later. Recognising the failures in many struggles for justice, he ascribed this as a problem of spirituality: “If people who have been socially liberated are not also liberated from their own egos, their personal selfishness, they are in danger of repeating – in another form – the very oppression and cruelty against which they have fought” (Nolan, 2006b, p. 18). Yet, a few pages later Nolan again reveals the pattern of kingdom vs catastrophe when placing “the power of peace, compassion, and justice” over against the empire of the United States, and stating that “there is now a real chance that today’s empire might be the last of the empires and that it will go quickly” (Nolan, 2006b, p. 32).

Theologically Nolan describes exactly this process of good emerging from the deepening crisis of evil as the work of God. After a long repetition of examples of how the deepening political crisis is making political change inevitable and made the reason for presenting hope in almost utopian terms, Nolan states: “if it is by the finger of God that these things are happening, then know that the day of salvation must be near”. A few paragraphs later, he then states: “Is this not precisely what is happening in South Africa today? Are we not experiencing a classic example of good coming out of evil” (Nolan, 1988, pp. 154-155).

The point here is not an evaluation of Nolan’s social analysis. Rather, I want to argue that his social analysis is consistent with a particular eschatological reading that carries throughout his work: Jesus was seeing a moment of crisis and potential, and we are facing a similar moment; there is a grave catastrophe on the horizon, a struggle looming, and sides need to be chosen. Faith means making a clear

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290 Later Nolan continues with what today can be described as a form of South African exceptionalism when indicating that the “development of grassroots democracy” distinguishes South African from other African countries, and that therefore “South Africa is different and will be different when liberation comes” (Nolan, 1988, p. 150). His concluding page to God in South Africa builds such exceptionalist discourse to a climax, writing South African political history into a contemporary global salvation narrative, and making the liberation of Africa dependent on South African developments (Nolan, 1988, p. 220). Before the 1994 transition David Bosch already questioned this description (Bosch, 2004, pp. 429-430), not based on a particular social analysis, but rather on a different eschatological (as well as ecclesiological (see Van Wyngaard, 2011; Van Wyngaard, 2013)) presupposition.

291 This is not an argument of inevitability, of “predestination” (Nolan, 1988, p. 156) about social processes. He always insists on human choice. But it is built on a particular theory of social change, where crisis is possibility for fundamental transformation.
choice for which side of this division between oppressed and oppressor we stand. This also informs Nolan’s argument on the salvation of white people.

3.4 Nolan’s soteriology

3.4.1 System of purity and holiness

Within Nolan’s explicit contextual theology in *God in South Africa* he remains ever the Jesus scholar of *Jesus before Christianity*. While reading present reality in terms of the language of faith, priority is given to a biblical theology in general, but a theology building on the life of Jesus in particular. While not of particular significance in *Jesus before Christianity*, the key lens Nolan uses in *God in South Africa* is to read the contemporary crisis analogous to Jesus response to the first-century Jewish purity and holiness system.

In order to clarify Nolan’s proposals on the salvation of white people I therefore, start with a brief overview of how he reads Jesus’ response to the system of purity and holiness, and how this informs his more general reading of sin and salvation in the present.

Nolan would use the language of ‘the system’ repeatedly to refer to the apartheid state mechanism and accompanying forces – it is ‘the system’ against ‘the people’ (Nolan, 1988, p. 165) or ‘the struggle’ (Nolan, 1988, p. 157). However, the same language is employed to describe Jesus’ struggle. Comparing Jesus to the various Jewish factions of his day, Nolan writes: “But they never questioned the system itself. Jesus did... The system we are talking about is what scholars now call a purity or holiness system.” (Nolan, 1988, pp. 34-35) This analogy carries throughout *God in South Africa*: as Jesus responded to the system of purity and holiness we need to respond to the apartheid system (Nolan, 1988, p. 67).

Through this analogy, Nolan highlights various aspects of apartheid and the struggle against apartheid. As the system of purity and holiness (as well as the Roman imperial system) was both a religious and political system, with no distinction between these different sides possible, so the same is true of apartheid (Nolan, 1988, p. 60). Both are totalitarian (Nolan, 1988, p. 69), based on the separation of people through imposed identities (Nolan, 1988, p. 74), bring about evil (Nolan, 1988, p. 87) and deflects the attention from “real sins onto activities that are themselves trivial or innocent or even virtuous”

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292 *God in South Africa* is structured around two chapters on sin and salvation in the Bible, each followed by a number of chapters which lead Nolan to reading sin and salvation in South Africa.

293 While it could easily be said that all theology draws from the biblical text, this is not always equally explicit. Of particular interest here is however Nolan’s emphasis on the *historical Jesus*, and his working from his earlier work on the historical Jesus to a systematic contextual theology.
(Nolan, 1988, p. 100). As God was at work outside the system of purity and holiness, so God is at work outside the system of apartheid (Nolan, 1988, p. 139), and true faith is to be found outside of these systems (Nolan, 1988, p. 156)

But mostly what Nolan is doing it to relate the language of sin and salvation, questions of soteriology, to the concrete struggles of South Africa. It is to the particularities of this language that we must turn next.

### 3.4.2 Forming the language of salvation under apartheid South Africa

Central to Nolan’s approach is a process of taking traditional theological concepts and defining them through relating them to the concrete challenge of the context. Understanding what Nolan means with words like, sin, guilt, suffering, evil and conversion is key to seeing the implications of his argument. Below I therefore briefly touch on how each of these concepts is being used, also indicating how they are placed in relation to each other to contribute to a systematisation of theological reflection in explicitly particular terms – in terms of the struggle against apartheid.

While Nolan starts his summary of the chapter on Sin in the Bible with a classic definition that “Sin is a religious word that speaks of God as the one who is sinned against” (Nolan, 1988, p. 48), the argument throughout the chapter is that God is the one who is sinned against exactly because people are harmed. In Nolan’s reading, there is no conception of sin which is disconnected from harm to other people: “Sin is an offence against God precisely because it is an offence against people… There is no such thing as a sin that does not do any harm to anyone.” (Nolan, 1988, p. 38) Within Nolan’s contextual theology this also implies ‘seeing’ and ‘judging’ to illuminate sin and consider an appropriate response. If sin is directly related to harm to people (whether self or others) then seeing the effects of actions (whether direct or indirect) has theological significance: it says something about how this action relates to God. In Nolan’s words, “Sin is about suffering, about making people suffer, allowing them to suffer or ignoring their suffering.” (Nolan, 1988, p. 38)

Key for the argument of this chapter and thesis is however how Nolan relates sin to guilt. In this approach, guilt cannot be used to refer to what is involuntary. “[I]nvoluntary guilt is a contradiction in terms” (Nolan, 1988, p. 43), and Nolan is explicit that we cannot speak of guilt due to being born into a particular group. It is our participation in sin that confers guilt; “only individuals can commit sin, only individuals can be guilty” (Nolan, 1988, p. 43).
This emphasis on the sin of individuals should however not miss the insistence on sin being ‘structural’ or ‘social’. Two lines of thought could be discerned. One is that, as noted earlier, sin always affects people, and in that sense, sin is always social. But individual sin also becomes “institutionalised and systematised in the structures, laws and customs of society” (Nolan, 1988, p. 43). Here, however, Nolan notes that in biblical language this refers to ‘evil’. He uses the language of “evil” to refer to the systematic nature of sin: “What we are up against are not human beings of flesh and blood, what we are up against is a monster. The system has a spirit of its own – an evil spirit” (Nolan, 1988, pp. 84-85). This builds up to an affirmation of a Catholic Bishops statement: “Those who say that apartheid is a heresy or that apartheid is a sin are indulging in understatements. The Catholic bishops came closer to the mark some years ago when they declared apartheid to be ‘intrinsically evil’” (Nolan, 1988, p. 87).

Nolan draws on the language of evil as part of his work of making use of religious language and symbols to shed light on the present (Nolan, 1988, p. 84). When he thus places the language of evil in contrast to the use of “sin” and “heresy” to describe the apartheid system, we have to hear in this a particular understanding of each of these notions, and an interpretation of the present which he attempts to present. As pointed out, Nolan regards sin as something which only individuals can be guilty of, and even while he considers much of contemporary Western theology to be drawn to heresy given its reduction of the gospel to the salvation of souls, the fact that this really is not deliberate seems to lessen the implication of the claim (Nolan, 1988, pp. 108-109).

It is however, the language of evil that captures the problem of “the system”. But the evil of systems is built on the sin of individuals, and sin implies the possibility of conversion. Conversion is the key intervention affecting individuals living within a system of oppression.

Fundamental to Nolan’s argument is that recognising sin is a rejection of fatalism and determinism. The concept develops as a rejection of a worldview which sees human beings as helplessly in the hands of gods or fate. “The concept of sin emphasises human responsibility, human guilt and the role of human

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294 Nolan is concerned with the social rather than personal understanding of sin (Egan, 1997, p. 182), however personal and individual should not be confused. For Nolan it is quite explicitly the individual that is responsible for sin, but sin is something that happens between people, not a question of personal and private morality.

295 He will add to this metaphors of the demonic, referring to a later reference by the South African Catholic Bishop’s Conference on the work of the apartheid government as ‘Satanic’, the Kairos Document describing it as ‘the devil’ or his own statement that it is ‘diabolical’ (Nolan, 1988, p. 87).

296 Here Nolan distinguished between a material and a formal heresy. This does not imply that Nolan is any less concerned with the problem, just that he acknowledge that it is possible that some might honestly have been ignorant of the problems inherent in the dominant theological convictions they were adopting.
decisions in determining the course of history. To see what is wrong as sinful is to see that it can be changed, that conversion and repentance are possible." (Nolan, 1988, p. 33) Choices can be made, different choices can be made, and those who are guilty, those whose actions can be described as sin, can live life differently. Denying that something can change is, in fact, denying the reality of sin. This is at the heart of how Nolan will think through sin and salvation for white people under late apartheid.

Throughout his work, it is however, a very stark and clear choice. It is the system against the people297, and the concrete expression of the people’s opposition to the system is the struggle:

The struggle is the opposite of the system. In the townships what people are concerned about is not your ancestry or the colour of your skin but whether you are on the side of the system or on the side of the struggle. There is no grey area in-between. You are either with us or against us (Mt 12:12 par). You cannot serve two masters (Mr 6:24 par). (Nolan, 1988, p. 157)

Conversion, not exclusively for white people,298 but for white people in a particular way, implies a shift from the side of the system to the side of the struggle. Nolan’s entire soteriology depends on the possibility of such a shift, a switching of sides, just as his understanding of sin assumes that it is something about which a choice is at least in theory possible, not something inevitable.

While not explicitly stated, yet consistent with the eschatology and social analysis earlier described, this clear choice between system and struggle also implies a rejection of “compromise” and scepticism towards the language of “nuance”. Even if in principle he would acknowledge that indeed some are “oppressors in one respect and oppressed in another respect”, he remains sceptical of the role such analyses might play in a concrete struggle against a particular injustice. There is a “clear-cut distinction between the oppressor and the oppressed or between the system and the struggle” (Nolan, 1988, pp. 198-199).

297 Brian Gaybba indicates that when Nolan speaks of “the people”, with the definite article, this refers to a symbolic group which represents those oppressed. The danger in Nolan’s use is however that he risks confusing this symbolic group with the concrete group of those struggling, to the point where critique against ‘the people’ (in the concrete sense) becomes theologically impossible (Gaybba, 1990).

298 Consistent with his entire argument, he speaks on the next page about “whites and others who are outside the struggle” (Nolan, 1988, p. 164). Later he would again explicitly state that the challenge which the gospel presents must not be seen as confronting exclusively white people, although it has particular implications for those who support the system (Nolan, 1988, p. 196).
3.4.3  Salvation

With these distinctions in place, we can turn towards Nolan’s understanding of salvation within his system of thought. Nolan is aware of the problem stated in terms of the relationships between liberation and salvation. He explicitly insists, probably over against potential critics, that he does hold that salvation is not simply to be equated with liberation, or made to mean total liberation: “as far as I can see, [there] must be another dimension, another angle or perspective on the same concrete reality” (Nolan, 1988, p. 185).

The difference between salvation and liberation is described in terms of transcendence: salvation requires looking at concrete reality in terms of transcendence (Nolan, 1988, p. 187). For Nolan, it is the struggle that is the concrete emergence of the transcendent and the reality of grace. Salvation is not simply what would result out of the struggle, but the struggle itself is salvific. The struggle is described in terms of grace, and becoming part of the struggle is to join a place of grace (Nolan, 1988, pp. 187-190).

The best way to capture the dynamic in Nolan’s argument is perhaps to say that while he would not describe every claim to or movement towards liberation in terms of salvation, the struggle against the system of apartheid is indeed discerned as being salvific in the explicitly theological, transcendent, terms of the word. Salvation is to be found inside and through the struggle against the system of apartheid. That is the heart of Nolan’s theological claim.

If evil is the structural embodiment of sin, then its salvific equivalent structures that embody the right use of power – whether churches or political organisations (Nolan, 1988, pp. 115-116). The struggle is already a sign of such an alternative structuring, and as indicated above, Nolan’s eschatology is related to a social analysis in which this particular eschaton cannot be other than a concrete opposite to the structures of evil.

Salvation is then both found in joining the struggle but also in the way the struggle brings about a total change of the system of apartheid. This distinction is important: the conscientisation and humanisation of people inside the struggle are itself salvific, a microcosm of God’s reign, even while the salvation of society remains outstanding.

299 This does not imply a naïveté about problems within the struggle. He states later that “It would be quite wrong and counterproductive to expect everyone in the struggle to have perfect motives” (Nolan, 1988, p. 206).
300 He explicitly draws these notions together in writing that “our eschaton, our salvation is the liberation of South Africa from this particular system of slavery and sin” (Nolan, 1988, p. 189)
Whether focused inside the struggle or focused on what the struggle will bring about, representative democracy is read into a soteriological vision to the point of equating the two. People’s power is simultaneously equated with God’s power (Nolan, 1988, pp. 112, 166) and with grassroots democracy (Nolan, 1988, p. 164), but grassroots democracy, seemingly too obvious to require explanation, implies a process of people electing leaders. Following the Freedom Charter Nolan writes:

> When the Freedom Charter says, ‘The people shall govern’, it means quite obviously through elected or delegated representatives as the next sentence makes clear: ‘Every man and women shall have the right to vote and stand as a candidate for all bodies which make laws.’ That is people’s power. (Nolan, 1988, p. 165)

This vision raises at least two immediate questions. In spite of Nolan’s emphasis on transcendence, the straight line between God’s power and people’s power, which results in a direct equation of salvation and representative democracy, does raise questions concerning the way in which a theological sanction is given to this particular political model. That any such particular claim would inevitably result in questions in hindsight is inevitable.

A second question that however needs to be raised towards Nolan’s model is whether the model of social change where immense suffering creates the context from which dignified living can emerge does indeed hold true. Or stated theologically, whether it is from within the midst of oppression that the concrete reign of God will engulf society. As indicated earlier, Nolan repeatedly moves from the immensity of suffering to the conviction that struggle emerging from such a context cannot and will not repeat what it struggled against.

Nolan looks back upon the history of Jesus and admits that the people failed Jesus – or in the language of faith, they did not have enough faith (Nolan, 2006a [1970], p. 108). Yet boldly he claims that the faith of those who suffer under apartheid is even stronger than what Jesus discovered among the poor of his time (Nolan, 1988, p. 158). Here failure is not possible.

The question is not merely one of social analysis, although it does impact on this as well. Rather, it relates to the way in which the crucible of suffering is itself being made into an instrument of salvation. Nolan would at no point even hint in the direction that suffering is somehow purposed by God to bring

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301 In line with the broader liberation theology tradition that he is part of, he states explicitly: “In South Africa today we call it people’s power: power that is shared by all, for the benefit of all and as a service to all. The Bible calls it God’s power.” (Nolan, 1988, p. 112)
about salvation, however, the salvific is made dependent upon concrete suffering. One of the most explicit examples of this is the way in which the duration of oppression is made into an argument for why liberation in South Africa will be different than in other African countries (Nolan, 1988, p. 150).302

With this we need to turn to the specific questions of this study: how does Nolan’s soteriological vision relate to race in general and whiteness in particular?

3.5 Race in the context of sin and salvation

Nolan reads a direct line between the system of purity and holiness and whiteness and racism in contemporary times. Following Joachim Jeremias, he reads a racial system into the Jewish system of purity and holiness (Nolan, 1988, p. 36). Such an understanding can best be described as a universal system of heritable identity, disconnected from the particular history of colonialism and modernity that would today typically be associated with the formation of race as an idea. While not using the now well-known language of prejudice plus power (Rattansi, 2007, pp. 130-131),303 his description of racism in South Africa can be described as systematised prejudice – this implies that the general phenomenon of prejudice is formalised through the structures of society (Nolan, 1988, p. 51). This is connected to suffering when he writes “[t]he most characteristic form of suffering in South Africa, though by no means the worst form, is the suffering of humiliation” (Nolan, 1988, p. 51), focusing attention on a general context of undignified and inhumane living, but in particular on being treated as inhumane by white people. This context of humiliation can then be read as analogous to what Jesus was responding to when responding to the system of purity and holiness (Nolan, 1988, p. 52).

However, Nolan’s work emerges within a 1980s struggle to disentangle the intersection of race and class, and he proposes a social analysis where racism is an interpersonal prejudice employed in a project of capitalist oppression:

302 Here it is the emergence of grassroots democracy within the long period of struggle, that which elsewhere he directly associates with God’s power, that provides the capacity for South African exceptionalism. However, Nolan’s entire premise is built on the conviction that the memory of the suffering imposed will insure that it will never be repeated in South Africa. As Miroslav Volf however argues in detail, there is no such guarantee that memory of injustice suffered will function as the basis of justice, and not become justification for further injustice (Volf, 2006, pp. 89-92)
303 As will become clear below, and in parallel to Rattansi’s argument, similar limitations will also apply to Nolan’s approach, in that it overstates the role of prejudice as far as race is concerned, while, as the entire study up to now would have highlighted in various ways, racism is not a function of mere prejudice, and such a use of ‘power’ does not allow language to deal with the racism of, for example, the white working class.
The system did not originate from the racism of the Boers or Afrikaner nationalism. It was developed by the white mine-owners and successive white governments for the purpose of profit-making. Racial differences were very conveniently exploited and when the National Party came to power in 1948 it simply perfected, streamlined and institutionalised the system and gave it the name ‘apartheid’. (Nolan, 1988, p. 72)

Shortly after the publication of *God in South Africa*, in an Institute for Contextual Theology paper, Nolan distinguished between a social and structural analysis. A social analysis reveals that tension exists between social groups, while a structural analysis reveals that the deeper problem is that of structural domination. For Nolan, the structural domination is class-based, yet these classes largely corresponded with social groups under apartheid.

Secondly, in response to this analysis, Nolan indicates how different solutions are proposed depending on the lens through which an analysis is being made: a social analysis results in highlighting the reconciliation of black and white South Africans while a structural analysis results in highlighting the restructuring of society. Nolan maintains that reconciliation as a response to the problem in South Africa is based on an incorrect social analysis; it is an answer that assumes that the problem is the competition for power between two social groups (Nolan, 1989, pp. 5-7).

Much of the behaviour of whites in our society has nothing to do with their whiteness as such but everything to do with their positions of power and wealth in the South African pyramid. Whites often say and do things simply because they are on top and in power. In other words if whites were in a different position in the hierarchy of power and privilege they would act and speak quite differently. (Nolan, 1989, p. 7)

Key to this analysis is noting that in Nolan’s work on race is understood as just one more form of general human prejudice. While obviously linked to colonialism in the South African context, in principle it is a construct and idea that precedes and could have functioned outside this history. Using his own theological language, such prejudice would clearly be “sin”, but this prejudice is not the sin that leads to the excess of suffering, or which is institutionalised to become the evil of apartheid.

It should be clear from preceding chapters why such a reduction of race to prejudice which is only in a second phase exploited for material oppression does not do justice to the fundamentally distorted theological vision which gives rise to and is maintained by an anthropological hierarchy existing beyond.
questions around access to material resources. The system that Nolan described is one where race is employed by a particular white capitalist class for the maintenance of specifically white power.\(^\text{304}\)

Following on chapter 3, Nolan’s reading of black consciousness and black theology would indeed give salvific importance to these developments. He positively describes the work of black consciousness and black theology of instilling a sense of pride among the black oppressed, but describe this as an accomplished mission: “Black Consciousness and Black Theology have successfully eliminated this form of misplaced guilt among black Christians” (Nolan, 1988, p. 102).

Here Nolan would be in agreement with a general thrust in black theology that the way in which a dignified view of the self was disrupted among African people by white racism is sin, and one aspect of salvation would for Nolan then imply forming persons which can see themselves as contributing to grassroots democracy. This would however, be a pre-requisite for the structural changes that constitute Nolan’s soteriological vision. As race is employed in the construction of the capitalist system in South Africa, so disrupting race is a pre-requisite or first step towards the struggle.

### 3.6 Salvation and white people

We have to recall the ambiguity of how Nolan talks of white people, oppressors, or those on the side of the oppressor. These clearly overlap in Nolan’s analysis, but he refuses to make them synonymous. It is exactly in this place of overlap yet not synonym that we can place Nolan’s reflections on conversion and salvation for white people.

A point however, needs to be made about Nolan’s use of such clear distinctions. It is not that Nolan is blind to the complexity of knowing where the line is drawn – indeed, that is in part why the reading of the signs of the times and the analysis of the context is so important since it might not initially be clear who ‘fits’ where. However, while Nolan is not blind to the ambiguity of such distinctions\(^\text{305}\), his rhetoric

\(^{304}\) Mogobe Ramose in an early response to Nolan already highlighted a limitation that has become particularly acute in the present: that Nolan’s social analysis does not take account of the fundamental question of land in terms of colonial apartheid (Ramose, 1990). Nolan does note that the separation of people from land is part of the alienation caused by apartheid (Nolan, 1988, p. 80), but his analysis would not lead to questions of indigenous land ownership in any way separate from contemporary capitalist ownership of land as tied to inequality within a modern economic system.

\(^{305}\) One key example in Nolan’s reflection would be the place of so-called black vigilantes or death squads, who are unemployed and without a clear understanding of the broader system in which they are operating, and then gets co-opted into ‘dealing’ with black resistance to apartheid (Nolan, 1988, pp. 56-57, 93).
constantly assumes a very clear distinction between these two sides. You are either here or there, and a choice must be made.

The way in which Nolan gives meaning to the notions of sin, guilt, and evil then becomes important. While the system is evil, having institutionalised and legalised sin, the system or a group can never be sinners, only individuals can be guilty of sin, and then only based on their own action or inaction. For Nolan then it is not whiteness in itself that calls for conversion, but the choices made in how white people respond or fail to respond to the context of white racism. The implications of the way sin, guilt, suffering and evil are related in his system of thought and the context of apartheid is made explicit:

One is not guilty because one is white but because one supports the system and succumbs to its temptations. Thus, once one stops supporting the system, actively or passively, one’s guilt ceases, it has been forgiven and forgotten. (Nolan, 1988, p. 97)

This is the heart of Nolan’s reading of sin and salvation as it related to white people under apartheid: you are either on the side of the oppressed or on the side of the oppressor. There is no middle ground. If you are guilty of active support for oppression or guilty of omission in active support for the struggle against oppression, then convert.

In a subsequent section of the book, he briefly mentioned “white guilt” as something which cannot be ignored. His concern is here with pointing out that theologies which seek to resolve “guilt” without changing structures of sin, and how people are embedded into this, end up changing neither sin, nor guilt (Nolan, 1988, pp. 109-111). The call is that white people break their support with “the system” and act in ways which build salvific structures, structures which give effect to the power of the people.

Writing about reconciliation a decade after the onset of democracy, Nolan again introduces this tension:

The conflict was understood to be between a policy of racialism and a policy of non-racialism. Whites who were really serious about non-racialism struggled side by side with blacks, and

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The 1988 ICT project on ministry to white people would see a much greater emphasis on a so-called “middle”, a group of people that are not in active support of oppression, nor participating in active resistance, and who should be strategically drawn into a resistance against apartheid (Van Wyngaard, 2016b). While such a threefold linear separation arguably still does not do justice to the intersecting complexity of participation, apathy and resistance to apartheid (or other systems of oppression), even such a distinction is seldom visible in Nolan’s analysis.
blacks who decided, for whatever reasons, to go along with a racial divide cooperated with the white racist regime. (Nolan, 2004, p. 93)

What remains unclear, and has immense consequence for a theological reflection on whiteness, is knowing our relation to the past impacts on the converted person. In dealing with conversion and time Katherine Tanner illustrates how a Christian imagination of conversion both imply a fundamental disruption with the past and an openness to a new and different future, while never implying that the past person is no longer of relevance.

Indeed, one is even now and, short of the eschaton, ever will be that sinner one was then, despite having been united again with God in Christ.

Because the sin from which one is converted remains even as one is propelled out of bondage to it by way of a new relationship with God in Christ...

Conversion does not mean, then, being set on a new path oneself, absent one’s former sins destroyed in Christ, being left with a now clean, blank slate to make the most of oneself through one’s own renewed efforts to conform one’s will with God. (Tanner, 2019, pp. 60-61)

This relationship between past and future is important in critically interrogating Nolan’s soteriology in terms of the theological problem of whiteness.

In terms of Nolan’s approach to conversion, his rejection of compromise ultimately risks silencing the fundamental way in which race continues to function on both personal and structural levels in spite of a personal commitment to the oppressed and against the oppressor. Nolan’s emphasis on kairos risks silencing the life-long commitment to working on both the self and the structures of society outlined in chapter 2. The need to impress the urgency of a choice in terms of the particular eschaton of liberation from the system of apartheid oppression takes us in a different direction from the need of a life-long and inter-generational process of disrupting an internalised and structurally maintained anthropological hierarchy.307

307 Here again, Nolan’s reading of black consciousness as having accomplished it’s task, when compared to both Nolan’s contemporaries which argued for its ongoing relevance (see chapter 3), and also our own contemporaries arguing for its ongoing relevance (Massingale, 2019), further illustrates how Nolan’s sense of time informs an understanding of conversion which cannot do the work of disruption of whiteness through a multi-generational reimagining of the human. This obviously must be read against the backdrop of Nolan’s conviction that it is in fact...
Put in different language: while Nolan would constantly remind that the message of the gospel can be heard more clearly by those who experience the oppression of the system and that the first steps towards joining the struggle would look different for the white middle class, the vision he proposes does not provide language to think through the pervasiveness of whiteness within struggles against racist systems. With everything collapsed into a political and ethical choice in the face of oppressive systems, much remains unsaid, and what is unsaid might be what is of particular concern in the present.

That said, Nolan’s approach is important since it provides a key example of an attempt at responding to the problem of whiteness that will continue into the present. Here individual white salvation is found in a political realignment with the struggle against oppression – or said more generally, the conversion of those who are on the side of the oppressor requires a concrete commitment to the struggle of the oppressed.

Nolan does not make the breaking in of God’s reign in this particular situation dependent on those who side with the oppressor changing sides, rather, the oppressive system creates its own downfall, and oppressors and those who support them will in his vision be swept along in a movement in history towards justice and humaneness. He goes to great lengths to convince his (white) readers that the struggle is against a system and not against people and that the vision of the people is to draw everyone, including white people, into a just society (ex. Nolan, 1988, p. 165).

There is however another dark side to the liberating system of theological thought that Nolan develops. The salvation described is closely tied to, and dependent upon, black suffering – also for the salvation of white people in the struggle. The problem is one which was explored extensively in dialogue with the work of James Perkinson in chapter 2.

Built into Nolan’s system of thought which hinges between the immensity of suffering and salvation is a final moment of extreme violence from the system. This is a violence that must be faced. “The ultimate challenge is the challenge to martyrdom for the sake of the struggle” (Nolan, 1988, p. 200). And indeed, it is specifically the youth and workers that face this willingness to die. This emphasis on death as the not whiteness per se that is the cause of oppression, but that race is one prejudice among many which has however become a tool in a capitalist ordering of the world.
most profound face of God. While giving salvific meaning to such deaths, it still leaves the work of
death mostly to those already considered expendable.

The inability to note that race functions in a particular way to prevent such martyrdom from leading to
bodily death heightens the risk of this reading. In the end, Nolan’s approach to conversion implies a full
identification with the struggle, the oppressed, by those who are white if they are willing to make such a
commitment with the ensuing sacrifices. However, while the apartheid years caused some deaths of
white people opposing the system of apartheid, whiteness, and often the public image of white people
joining the struggle against apartheid, provided security against such death not offered to black leaders
in the struggle, and definitely not the black youth and workers.

What Nolan does not touch on, and probably cannot touch on, is the immense amount of death which
made no contribution to a concrete dismantling of the system of apartheid. He writes about funerals,
“Funerals are celebrations of new life. Those who have died in the struggle must be honoured. They are
heroes and martyrs.” (Nolan, 1988, p. 201). Takatso Mofokeng, reflecting on this thread in Nolan’s work,
responds that “We can immediately think of Steve Biko” (Mofokeng, 1989, p. 49), but while such a
salvific function could be associated with the martyrdom of Steve Biko, it might be more difficult when
we look at death under apartheid in general. Which deaths are considered as being “in the struggle”?
What about a martyred death sought for the sake of honour? What about the senseless killings of those
participating in the struggle but whose death does not contribute to structural changes at all? For Nolan,
it is the willingness to die for others, not its effect, which makes this an act reflecting the face of God, an
act to be honoured, but an immense amount of death, even when done for the sake of others, remains
“senseless” in terms of bringing about concrete change. Responding to such concrete killings through
Nolan’s soteriological model does not reveal the transcendent in terms of that which brings about
salvation in history.

3.7 Conclusion

Nolan’s system of thought collapses faith into a particular moment of making a choice between good
and evil, between struggle and the system being struggled against. It is the poor, those oppressed by the

308 Nolan explicitly states that “Here, more than anywhere else in society today, we come face to face with God”
(Nolan, 1988, p. 201).
309 There are exceptions. Nolan is aware of the risk facing political activists (Nolan, 1988, p. 201), but as a rule it is
the nameless, ‘the people’, who face the risk of death, not the theologians, political elite, and specifically not white
people – in spite of changing sides.
system of the day, who determines the struggle against evil, but the choice of struggle faces all equally. Sin and salvation are questions of which side of the struggle a person positions themselves, with little distinction in meaning between those who are black and those who are white, apart from the question of whether there would be a natural inclination to struggle against the system, based on whether it is more or less clear that the system oppresses someone. The urgency here silences an emphasis on a lifetime of struggle, and immediate political choice hides the multi-generational work of dismantling a colonial racial anthropology. This tension between the urgency of political commitment and the slow processes of transforming deeply held conceptual and theological systems is something that needs to be kept in tension much more in the ongoing struggle on theology and whiteness.

Yet what Nolan does reveal is a sustained attempt at bringing the growing awareness of the economic base of apartheid legislation into dialogue with the question of how white people participate in the struggle and respond to their own sin of contributing to racial oppression. Here Nolan and Naudé reveal not only different eras but vastly different social analyses – in particular in terms of how they relate the struggle against apartheid to the broader ‘Western world’, or North Atlantic political bloc.

Yet this economic focus is at least in part what limits the depth of Nolan’s engagement with how whiteness is theologically constructed, and what the theological work might look like for dismantling this racialised theology.

4 Klippies Kritzinger and the disruption of white mission

4.1 Introduction

Klippies Kritzinger was born and raised in Johannesburg and recalls how as a kid at times he attended the Dutch Reformed congregation where Beyers Naudé was still preaching. By his own account, his formation in terms of both ministry and theology ran through the then Indian Reformed Church (later the Reformed Church in Africa), where he was involved in ‘outreach’ as a student, and where he later ministered.

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310 This section was previously published as White theology in dialogue with Black Theology: Exploring the contribution of Klippies Kritzinger (Van Wyngaard, 2016a).

311 While this is not of direct concern here, I explore the complex relationship, also in terms of Kritzinger’s account, of such experiences of ‘outreach’ and the critical interrogation of white racial identity in an earlier publication (Van Wyngaard, 2014b).
Theologically it was the Belydende Kring that had a particular influence on his early work. He describes the Belydende Kring as emerging from a black consciousness environment, yet inviting white ministers to join by the late 1970s. He credits the Belydende Kring both for a formation in terms of focusing theological attention on praxis, but also as a space in which he could learn to be a white theologian in solidarity with black theologians leading the struggle (Kritzinger, 2001, pp. 243-245). Institutionally it was the University of South Africa that formed the space within which Kritzinger’s academic theology was developed. He started as a junior lecturer in missiology in the 1980s and remained in this institution until his retirement. This section explores the contribution of Kritzinger to a white critical and anti-racist theology. As will be pointed out below, an emphasis on an anti-racist theology conscious of whiteness has been central to Kritzinger’s academic work since his doctoral studies (completed in 1988). Kritzinger’s work on black theology is often recognised, but his particular attempt at working on theology for the white community has received scant attention thus far.

Continuing the line of inquiry in this chapter I will therefore, examine Kritzinger’s understanding of the challenge of black theology and how he responded with a theology conscious of whiteness. This first section mainly focuses on an overview of his work since his doctoral thesis and into the early years of the 21st century by looking at his use of three theological metaphors. The second section will then situate Kritzinger’s white theology as a particular contextual theology by drawing primarily on Bevans’ Models of Contextual Theology.

4.2 The challenge of black theology and Kritzinger’s white theology

It’s perhaps most appropriate to find the origin of Kritzinger’s work in a personal encounter, a friendship which challenged him, before positioning it within an academic debate.

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312 Initially called the NG Predikante Broederkring (Dutch Reformed Church Ministers Brother’s Circle) this was changed in 1983 to the Belydende Kring (Confessing Circle).
313 This has however has not been examined in detail in spite of a festschrift published in 2010 examining various aspects of his work. In this festschrift, the only explicit references to Kritzinger’s work on whiteness was by (Banda, 2009, p. 122; Nel, 2009, p. 140).
314 See for example (Saayman, 2009, p. 12; Vellem, 2007, p. 115) or the extensive use of Kritzinger’s analysis of black theology in (Tenai, 2010).
315 The most visible reflection on this aspect of his work is where David Bosch points to Kritzinger’s work as an example of the challenge of liberation to the non-poor in Transforming Mission. This is however a mere passing reference, and as a general example of the challenge to the non-poor Kritzinger’s specific work on the challenge to white Christians is not mentioned (Bosch, 2004, p. 429).
Kritzinger describes an incident in 1986 as the most significant moment of his studies in The Netherlands:

[Dr] Mpho [Ntoane] enquired about my research and then asked whether I was giving the same attention to my own white history and identity as I was giving to the struggle of black Christians with their black history and identity. I had to admit that I was not, and realised that I had to add a chapter on white responses to Black Theology and to situate my whole study as a particular type of white response to it. (Kritzinger, 2001, p. 247)

The shift towards situating his study, and later work, as a particular white response is of the utmost significance. Out of this conversation he became convinced that the only credible way to pursue my theological vision was to come to terms with my whiteness, religiously as a Reformed Christian, culturally as an Afrikaner, economically as a member of the privileged middle class, and politically as a person who was legally allowed to vote under apartheid. (Kritzinger, 2001, p. 247)

This is not simply emphasising the liberation of black South Africans, although it cannot be understood if disconnected from black theology of liberation. Kritzinger writes that “[a] self-effacing concern of white people to achieve only black liberation cannot escape the trap of paternalism since it contains the tacit assumption that white people do not need to be liberated” (Kritzinger, 1988, p. 296, emphasis in original).

A point made in the earlier analysis of the work of Perkinson is of particular interest here. Of key concern for Perkinson is that white theologians need to work out the implications of black theology, noting that black theology is, in fact, speaking of the very same context of white racism that white theologians inhabit, albeit from a different position. This is very similar to Kritzinger’s description of his own work: “My whole study ... is an attempt at mediating this black challenge to white Christianity, and to ‘catch the boomerang’ by working out a theology for a liberating ministry in the white community” (Kritzinger, 1988, p. 272).

Kritzinger situates his entire study, and large sections of his later work, as a particular white response to black theology, or to put it in another way, the challenge that Kritzinger picks up from black theologians is to consciously give attention to his own history and identity as white in the midst of a racialised society. Key to this is that Kritzinger allows black theologians to become his primary interlocutors in an
attempt at analysing whiteness. Writing at the same time, Kritzinger and Nolan read the ongoing relevance of black consciousness and black theology in different ways – while Nolan recognises it as an important contribution from the past, Kritzinger seeks to understand its ongoing relevance for his present and the future. Kritzinger’s work in a sense picks up where Naudé concluded by the late 1970s, starting from working out the implication of black leadership in the struggle, and then developing his particular role from that point onwards.

I will start with a brief overview of Kritzinger’s description of whiteness since this provides the background for his conscious white theology. Thereafter I focus attention on his use of the notions liberation, conversion, and evangelism in relation to whiteness.

### 4.2.1 Analysing whiteness

Whiteness, while globally connected, is constructed locally, in each national regime (Garner, 2007, p. 1). At the same time, it intersects with various other dominant and subordinate identities. So while international descriptions of whiteness can be helpful it is important to describe whiteness in South Africa with reference to its particularity as well. Kritzinger’s work is deeply conscious of this. This is seen in his conscious choice to not only choose black theologians as his primary interlocutors for critically describing whiteness but by explicitly choosing South African black theologians. What we find in his description of whiteness therefore does reveal aspects of how whiteness is constructed globally (such as the relation to economic power), but also reveals the particularities of South African whiteness (such as the particular way in which whiteness is tied to land or language) and also that whiteness in South Africa changes over time (primarily in how whiteness is constructed in relation to the state).

His social description is rarely a uniquely Christian or theological description, but as an attempt to describe whiteness theologically draws on language of idolatry, which is described as “a worship of the false gods of the system of oppression” (Richard in Kritzinger, 1988, p. 281). To analyse whiteness in South Africa is then to analyse the idols through which whiteness is constructed. Through this he emphasises that theology is concerned with “the whole of human reality” and “attempts to ascertain the things that actually control the lives of people, in other words, the real ‘gods’ to which people are devoted and bound” (Kritzinger, 1988, p. 284) emphasis in original).

Examples of the idols which he describes include the emphasis on ‘state security’, the “widespread, often unquestioning, support of white people for this security ideology” (Kritzinger, 1988, p. 291) and the belief that South Africa is a white country belonging to white people and that white people should
have a religious willingness to even sacrifice their lives for this land (Kritzinger, 1988, pp. 287-290). Similarly, money and racial ideology are described as idols through which whiteness is constructed.

The description of whiteness as idolatry calls forth his theological and missiological response to whiteness, a call for change in the white community and transformation of whiteness.

As indicated above, Kritzinger perceives of his own work as an attempt at a theology which is constructed when catching the boomerang of black theology and working out a liberating ministry to the white community. The title of Kritzinger’s inaugural lecture was *Studying Religious communities as agents of change: An agenda for missiology* (Kritzinger, 1995). The lecture developed his understanding of the role of missiology as a discipline and the challenges of theological education in South Africa. As an inaugural lecture, it serves as a beacon of his thought and I find this an appropriate overarching notion to bring together the various theological concepts which he relates to the problem of whiteness.

To understand his work we need to bear in mind that his doctoral studies were in missiology, and were an attempt to listen to black theology as a challenge to *mission*. He defines mission as “that dimension of [a religious community’s] existence which is aimed at making a difference to the world, at influencing or changing society in accordance with its religious ideals” (Kritzinger, 1995, p. 368). While the one key aspect of Kritzinger’s work is that it should be read as a response in solidarity with and to black theology, the other is that all of his work on whiteness should be read through the lens of seeking change.

The three theological categories that he employs in responding to whiteness are liberation, conversion and re-evangelisation. While these are intertwined I will discuss his use of each in separately.

### 4.2.2 Liberating whiteness

Liberation is the key theological lens running throughout Kritzinger’s work, receiving more attention than either conversion or re-evangelisation.

Central to Kritzinger’s reading of black theology is that apartheid has harmed white people (Kritzinger, 1988, p. 294). He writes that “[it] is one of the fundamental tenets of black theology that oppression dehumanises not only the oppressed but also the oppressors. By keeping black people in bondage, white people have imprisoned themselves and distorted their own humanity.” (Kritzinger, 1988, p. 202). A liberating white theology should therefore, emphasise that humanisation includes working for the humanity of white people, and such a theology might then also be described as a deeply pastoral theology. It is important to notice this pastoral dimension since the assumption might too easily be
made that a theology focusing on the responsibility of the oppressors is merely guilt-inducing and focused on identifying and persecuting perpetrators. As has been pointed out in the analysis above Kritzinger’s work does not shy away from acknowledging and working with black theology’s critique on whiteness, but focusing on liberation means that we also notice that those who are white have been “sinned against” (Kritzinger, 1988, p. 295), and are therefore in need of liberation. This then leaves us with the dual questions of what white people are being liberated from, and what they are being liberated for?

The description of how racism is harming white people does not get a full analysis in Kritzinger’s work. We are left with only brief comments arguing that racism and apartheid harm white people by keeping them imprisoned in their intolerance and fear (Kritzinger, 1988, p. 295). This imprisonment does however become clearer in the extensive and repetitive description of what white people are liberated for.

Kritzinger’s hope for white people is that they will become white Africans (Kritzinger, 1988, pp. 203, 319-321; Kritzinger, 1990a, pp. 63-65; Kritzinger, 1994, pp. 10-12; Kritzinger, 2008a, pp. 17-21), or perhaps a better description of this would be Euro-Africans.316 This statement should immediately make us aware of two possibilities which are being rejected: on the one hand that white people are Africans merely by the fact of being born in Africa, and on the other hand that it is impossible for those who are white to ever be called African. Becoming African will be hard work but it is not impossible.

Becoming African would require a change in white people. This change is described as the conversion from the idols mentioned above and as restitution and acceptance of the guidance and leadership of the African majority. The one aspect which Kritzinger emphasises more than anything else is the learning of languages. The lack of speaking an African language not only continues to cause separation and a lack of white South Africans truly understanding black South Africa but Kritzinger also uses this as a marker for how much still needs to be done: if white South Africans do not learn an African language (apart from Afrikaans), then their commitment to becoming Africans is called into question (Kritzinger, 1991, p. 110; Kritzinger, 1994, p. 11; Kritzinger, 2001, p. 263; Kritzinger, 2008a, p. 22).

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316 Kritzinger’s seem to prefer using “white Africans”, but sometimes present “European Africans” or “euro-Africans” as an alternative (Kritzinger, 1987, p. 110) (Kritzinger, 2008a, p. 17).
Kritzinger also uses Hillbrow as an image of what we may become. Hillbrow is the notorious part of the inner-city of Johannesburg where already in the 1970s segregation became more difficult to enforce. Drawing on Johannes Kerkorrel’s well known Afrikaans song on Hillbrow, where he lists the various people found on the streets of Hillbrow (something which might be considered an idealised portrayal of Hillbrow), Kritzinger uses this as a paradigm of a possible future. It is an unpredictable future, but one where our life together contributes to a renewed sense of humanity (Kritzinger, 1994, pp. 13-14; Kritzinger, 1991, pp. 113-114).

It would not be saying too much to argue that becoming African functions eschatologically in Kritzinger’s thinking. He argues that liberation is the key category in black eschatology, and this emphasis on becoming African and Hillbrow as a possible future serves as markers for the liberation of white South Africans, presenting it in eschatological terms in his thinking.

A liberating white theology would therefore, work to assist white South Africans to truly become part of the Africa in which they live, or perhaps more accurately, to make Africa part of who we are. He writes “Indeed, the question is not how long we have been in Africa but whether Africa is in us, whether we identify with the people of Africa in a significant way” (Kritzinger, 2008, p. 20). Only this will liberate white South Africans from the fear and disconnection which racism created. The questions which we are left with is whether this is a liberation which white South Africans truly long for (or even recognise as something liberating) and then to what extent such a longing for white liberation can draw white South Africans into the difficult work of conversion and being re-evangelised?

### 4.2.3 Conversion

Kritzinger describes conversion as consisting of two movements, a turning away from what is wrong and a turning towards a new possibility (Kritzinger, 1988, p. 180; Kritzinger, 1990a, p. 56). If whiteness is constructed around the idolatries of race, money, land and self-interest, then those whose identity is constituted by these idols are called to conversion.

While whiteness is closely connected with Christianity and historically in Africa particularly the white missionary calling African “heathens” into a conversion away from idolatry, whiteness itself is here

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318 This need among white South Africans of becoming more deeply connected to Africa and black South Africans is expressed for example by Antjie Krog’s *Begging to be Black* (Krog, 2009) and Melissa Steyn’s description of why she was motivated to work on whiteness: because she “had never known to inhabit [her] land other than as some sort of psychological squatter” (Steyn, 2001, p. xvi).
revealed as in need of conversion, even, or perhaps even in particular, when it presents itself as “Christian”. A liberating white theology therefore, turns the gaze of Christian mission onto the white centre which presents itself as the historic bastion of Christianity.

While Kritzinger’s initial development of a call to conversion precedes the publication of Peggy McIntosh’s important essay on white privilege (McIntosh, 1989), his approach shares the general thrust of critical whiteness studies to focus the gaze onto those racialised as white. Roger Haight (Haight, 2007) has more recently argued against the rhetoric of white privilege as an attempt to enact change in white Americans. While Haight agrees with such a description of whiteness he argues that the call to dismantle white privilege ultimately fails because there is no positive alternative to the negative of racism. He therefore, suggests an emphasis on racial solidarity as the call to white people in response to racism.

Haight’s essay is illuminating for this argument since what he criticises is repeated in Kritzinger’s call to conversion as well. The limit of Haight’s approach, and where Kritzinger would differ, is best understood against the background of Biko’s critique of white liberals which had such a deep influence on Kritzinger’s work. As discussed in chapter 3, Biko argues that when non-racialism is placed in dialectical tension with apartheid then there is no clear synthesis, no vision of what society should become. He therefore, argues for black consciousness as the dialectical opposite to white racism in order to work towards true humanity (Biko, 1973, p. 39). Similarly, we might argue that if racial solidarity is presented as the dialectical (in following Biko’s use of the term) positive to racism then the synthesis remains unclear.

Kritzinger takes Biko’s call for true humanity as the synthesis, as a vision of a world in which racism is dismantled (Kritzinger, 2008c, pp. 5-8). But while Haight is doubtful of the language of white privilege, since it immediately puts white people on the defensive and therefore fails to initiate change, Kritzinger would argue that a failure to engage this critique, a failure to go through the razor of black consciousness, would mean that white people are not able to contribute to an anti-racist journey towards a true humanity.

The difference might perhaps be found in Haight’s leading image of racism: the extreme and blatant racist police brutality in 1963 civil rights protests. This allows the possibility that racism is something “out there” which white people can join in opposing. But Kritzinger’s argument would be that no white South African, himself included, is left untainted. While a critique of whiteness might therefore, lead to
disengagement by white people, a withdrawal into white enclaves, a movement towards a new humanity is not possible without thoroughly acknowledging and engaging this critique.

While Kritzinger’s conversion shares Nolan’s emphasis on joining in the struggle against apartheid (during the 1980s), there is a far greater emphasis on the life-long process of turning away from a formation as white, and turning towards a more humane existence. Conversion here is then not exclusively focused on a changed positioning in terms of a system of oppression, but also an ongoing process of transformation of the self, acknowledging that the racism that is being struggled against is in many ways embodied and sustained by those who are white, in spite of particular political commitments.

This leaves us with a question which is deeply ministerial and pastoral: how do we assist white Christians to go through this difficult process of engaging critical perspectives on whiteness, a critical perspective on themselves? I’ll use the third notion to attempt to answer this question.

4.2.4 Re-evangelising

A third way in which Kritzinger develops his theological response to whiteness is around the notion re-evangelisation. Black theology called for a re-evangelisation of black people, calling black people into self-acceptance, accepting themselves as created in the image of God (humanisation) and committing themselves to struggle for justice (Kritzinger, 1988, pp. 172-197). Here we notice black theology as having a deeply pastoral concern (Kritzinger, 1988, pp. 173, 197). Similarly, the white church needs to be re-evangelised, implying “that something went seriously wrong in the evangelisation of the white community until now” (Kritzinger, 1991, p. 107) and that there should be a drive towards “awakening the white church to become an agent of liberating and constructive change” (Kritzinger, 1991, p. 116). Among other things Kritzinger suggest that this will concretely call for changes in white suburban life, particularly white relations to domestic workers (Kritzinger, 1991, p. 109) and that white theologians and preachers should start to hold up the contributions of black people as “permanent living symbols of faith” to the white church (Kritzinger, 1991, p. 111).

It is important to notice that Kritzinger uses evangelisation as an activity focused on those who already profess to be Christian. In the late 1980s he is explicit about the fact that our priority is not to evangelise the “unreached”, but to “re-reach the reached”, including ourselves (Kritzinger, 1987, p. 23). “[R]e-evangelisation involves helping Christians to break with the unjust established order and to commit themselves to the creation of a new society” (Kritzinger, 1991, p. 107, emphasis in original). In a later
argument he repeats that the church is good at pointing out the sins of society, but needs to learn to reflect critically on itself (Kritzinger, 2001, p. 262).

While the content of what Kritzinger believes white people need to do is not always particularly Christian, Christian faith does provide the motivation for working for change and his emphasis throughout his writings is on working for change in the church. The tension in his work is that the change of society is what he is concerned with as a liberation theologian, but the way in which he works for this as a liberation theologian is by working for change within the church in particular. One reason for this is his conviction that the church cannot call for change in society if it does not embody that change in its own life (Kritzinger, 1991, p. 107; Kritzinger, 2001, p. 262).

When Kritzinger does his work as a white theologian responding to black theology, then the responsibility he discerns for the white theologian becoming conscious of racism in the church and conscious of her or his own whiteness and white racism is to work on calling white Christians towards a changed identity. This is important for the current argument since it reveals a distinct aspect of Kritzinger’s contextual theology and connected to this a particular strategic decision for how to work for change in a racist society. This leads us into our next section: positioning Kritzinger as a contextual theologian.

4.3 Situating Kritzinger as a contextual theologian

I will here situate Kritzinger’s white theology as a particular contextual theology, drawing from the distinctions introduced in the introduction to the section on Nolan, but adding a further layer by drawing on Steven Bevans’ Models of Contextual Theology.

From the argument thus far it should be clear that Kritzinger’s work is consciously contextual. When speaking of white theology such a distinction is of the utmost importance. It has become common to point out that what presents itself as “theology proper”, as theology without any marked contextuality or as a universalised theology, is often theology which is white, male and European (or North American). What is being criticised by black theology is then a contextual theology, in the sense that what presents itself as ‘just theology’ is indeed contextual. But it differs from black theology because it remains unconscious and therefore uncritical of exactly how it is a particularly white, male and European theology. What Kritzinger develops is a theology which is conscious about whiteness, which is white in a critical sense, taking the description of black theology as a primary source for its own self-reflection.
The danger of engaging in such a project should not be overlooked. The danger is not primarily found in the common fear that naming race would serve to reinscribe race in a so-called post-racial society. Rather, the danger repeatedly pointed out in whiteness studies, and also in a critical response to whiteness studies, is that shifting the gaze, *albeit* critical, onto whiteness may serve to recentre whiteness. Relating to contextual theology, the danger is that we might be led into the temptation of considering the perspective and experience of white people to be the starting point for our theology. Any attempt at developing a “white theology” which simply takes its own experience of being white as a starting point would inevitably repeat such a mistake. Here we should return to Perkinson’s position discussed in chapter 2 that “any self-consciously white theology [which] takes itself seriously as white” (Perkinson, 2004, p. 41) has to speak from the self-same context as black theology. The context of white racism which gives rise to black theology is the context which should form the starting point of any white anti-racist theology. This leads us to the second distinction.

Kritzinger’s approach can furthermore be described as a mission to the perceived centre, those places of power and privilege which also happen to be the historic centre of Christian mission: the white church of European descent and its Christians. Where shifts in the focus of mission towards the historic centres are involved, it usually fits more easily into Gutiérrez’ second group, focusing on the loss of power of the churches in secularised societies, and the challenge of a perceived increasing secularisation, decreasing church attendance and decreasing influence of the gospel in society poses. Taking black theology and black Christians as his primary interlocutors Kritzinger’s mission towards the white church has little if any concern with the challenge to Christian faith posed by growing secularisation. Rather, the problem is the way in which white Christians are embedded in oppressive relationships.

What is however of particular importance is that Kritzinger’s proposal breaks down the clear divisions between ethnographic and liberation approaches to contextual theology mentioned earlier. While Kritzinger’s work is consciously developed from the tradition of and in dialogue with liberation theology, his analysis of whiteness makes it clear that socio-economic and racial oppression is structured through so-called cultural aspects which need to be challenged, critiqued, and also ultimately theologically reimagined. This calls for a cultural analysis of white suburban lifestyle and the white suburban church (Kritzinger, 1991, p. 108) and of white identity (Kritzinger, 1994). This implies that his approach which is indeed mainly focused on socio-economic questions also points out that the required transformation includes the transformation, rather than either mere rejection or silence in terms of white cultural
identities - in his case in particular that of an Afrikaner identity (which he keeps in tension with a Christian, South African and African identity) (Kritzinger, 1994, p. 15).

With these distinctions made, I will proceed to discuss Kritzinger’s white theology in dialogue with Bevans’ Models of Contextual Theology. Already published in 1992, and revised and expanded in 2002, it remains one of the classic texts for providing an overview of types of contextual theology (Pears, 2009, p. 2). Bevans is however clear that the models should coexist, that our choice for how we develop a contextual theology should also be determined by the context and that there is no reason why we should be committed to only one of these models (Bevans, 2002, pp. 139-140). Thus, rather than attempt to box Kritzinger into one of these models, I use the models to illuminate and analyse different aspects of his work. The three models which I find particularly appropriate for analysing Kritzinger’s work are the praxis, counter-cultural and translation models.

It almost goes without saying that Kritzinger is a clear example of what Bevans describes as the praxis model. This model gives primacy to social analysis and acting in a concrete political and economic context, and to work for God’s justice. In the most explicit example Kritzinger has focused much of his own work on the further development of the praxis cycle of Holland & Henriot (Kritzinger, 2002), but even preceding this work his inaugural lecture clearly emphasises this approach (Kritzinger, 1995), and of particular concern for this argument, his work on whiteness is consciously embedded in what Bevans describes as one of the most visible examples of a praxis approach, liberation theology (in the form of black theology of liberation).

As is clear at this point, Kritzinger’s liberating white theology starts from a deep commitment to black South Africans and anti-racist action, analysing this context and developing a theological response out of this commitment and analysis (see Bevans, 2002, p. 76). This praxis approach to theology remains an important development, in particular since, as Migliore argues, the ecumenical church has really only begun to learn from these methods (Migliore, 2014, p. 18). But even more true is that the implications of a theology developed out of a commitment to racial justice has received fairly little attention from those who embody privileged positions, and in particular from those who are white. The important

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319 One of Kritzinger’s key contributions to his own discipline was to develop the initial praxis cycle into a 7 point praxis cycle emphasising the different dimension intersecting in faith practices. See how this 7 point praxis cycle is applied in response to a book edited by Piet Meiring (Kritzinger, 2008b) and to the work of David Bosch (Kritzinger & Saayman, 2011).

320 Bevans actually felt the need to warn that his praxis approach should not be limited to liberation theology (Bevans, 2002, p. 73)
question that Kritzinger attempts to answer over the course of his work is then: What does it mean for those who are white to commit to a liberating praxis for racial justice?

Kritzinger asks this question as a theologian, and as indicated above, as a theologian committed to the church. A number of reasons might be considered for Kritzinger’s choice of focusing on the church and Christians for re-evangelisation. Apart from the already mentioned point that the church cannot call for change in society if it does not embody that change in her own life Kritzinger also believes that not only Christians but all people from all religions (and those non-religious) should work for the reconstruction of South Africa (Kritzinger, 1991, p. 112). His suggestion for the task of missiology is also a focus on religious communities in general (not only Christian churches) as agents of change in society (Kritzinger, 1995, p. 368). As a theologian listening to black theology he then takes this task as a particular responsibility: he needs to work for changing the white church in contrast to a racist culture, assuming that others will do the same in their spheres of influence where applicable.

But this white church is found in a white community and a racist society, and what he proposes for the white church is to become a contrast with the white community in which it is found. I point this out because I think that this inevitably leads to his contextual theology taking on signs of a counter-cultural approach. The question is whether Christian symbols can work for the transformation of white Christians against the logic of white culture. Many assumptions typical of a counter-cultural approach are not shared by Kritzinger. The most important is that what he presents is emphatically not distinctly Christian, but part of a humanising agenda drawing from the well of Christian tradition to contribute to this agenda. But in a world of inhumanity and with an approach which focuses on the church as an agent of change, it is inevitable that the church has to become a counter-cultural community when following Christ. And those white Christians who start to disrupt whiteness in their actions inevitably become (or hope to become) a contrast to white domination.

The translation model is often described as the most conservative approach to contextual theology (Pears, 2009, p. 24), or even of not truly being an example of contextual theology (Pears, 2009, p. 25), since it continues to hold to the possibility of supracultural and eternal doctrinal truths (Bevans, 2002, p. 40). A critical description of this approach would be that what it considers to be core gospel truths which

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321 See for example his discussion of the Lord’s Table as the Christian symbol most subversive of apartheid (Kritzinger, 1991, pp. 114-116) and his own focus on how Christian symbols can contribute to the humanisation of white people (Kritzinger, 1990b, p. 1)
must be translated is already a theology bound to a Western form of Christianity, already contextually determined.

In order to introduce what I see as Kritzinger’s relation to a translation model, some background is required. The struggle against apartheid caused a number of white Dutch Reformed Church theologians who opposed apartheid to join the black church, Kritzinger was one of them, and he has remained an active member of a black congregation and denomination ever since. While this was key to enabling his critical engagement of whiteness, it led to an experience of alienation from the white community (Kritzinger, 2008c, p. 10). When in 1991 he wrote about a ministry to the white church he therefore, acknowledged that his argument is not based on day-to-day experience in the white church and he therefore, cannot develop it into a practical programme (Kritzinger, 1991, p. 107). A decade later he also points out that his own work on a liberating white theology has not made an impact on the white church. He partly attributes this to his own disconnection with the white church which created too little common ground for effective communication. But he considers an effective programme of communication in the white church, we might say effective re-evangelisation, a pre-requisite for effective anti-racist programmes in the church (Kritzinger, 2001, p. 248).

I point this out for two reasons: first, because there is an important tension which we need to consider. The ability to critically reflect on whiteness requires some distance from the white community and being embedded in a different conversation. But this might inevitably lead to a disconnect with the language of the community of origin, requiring an active process of reanalysis in order to effectively minister to the white community.

Secondly, this disconnected language and attempts at finding effective ways of communicating to the white church draws our attention to aspects of Bevans’ translation model. However, Kritzinger’s white theology turns the translation model in on itself by adopting patterns closely resembling a translation approach to contextual theology but in a way which is distinctly outside-in. With this I mean that in the mission back to the white centre, the perspective of the oppressed, in his case found in black theology, that which would be considered a consciously contextual theology, is presented as the gospel which needs

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322 The Reformed family of churches in South Africa remains largely segregated by race to this date. The Uniting Reformed Church, or which Kritzinger is a member, was a unification of the historic black and coloured Reformed churches, and today contains a small number of white members.
323 See his reflection on the influence of the Belydende Kring as source of his commitment to a critical engagement of whiteness (Kritzinger, 2001, pp. 243-248)
to be translated for a white church that is not able to understand this language. The presence of God is found among the oppressed, this is where God is revealed and Kritzinger therefore, read the call to conversion and the invitation to become Africans that black theology presents to white South Africans as a call from Christ self (Kritzinger, 1990b, pp. 8-9).

The task of the white missionary is then transformed into one of listening to the margins and re-formulating this theology in a way which those who are white in a racialised society can understand and respond to. Again this does not correspond to all of the technical definitions of a translation approach, but we can recognise a reversal at work which reveals in Kritzinger’s contextual white theology a form of translation which goes against the grain.

4.4 Conclusion

As indicated in the first chapter, and emphasised throughout the study, Jennings argues that Western theology has not yet begun to explore the depths of the influence of the colonialist moment on Western theology, and continues “to misunderstand the theological power of white and black identities” (Jennings, 2010, p. 64). For Jennings the concern is with the deep theological mistake which changed the way we imagine land and space, and he argues that “the way forward, if there is a way forward, will involve several more conceptual steps before a future of communion might be envisioned” (Jennings, 2010, p. 64). Jeorg Rieger has commented that while the colonialist mistakes of mission have been generally acknowledged (even while its deeper reasons might not have been addressed) “considerably less awareness of the colonial mistakes of the theology of the same period” (Rieger, 2004, p. 207) can be seen. If this observation is correct it is perhaps not accidental that black theology gets its most consistent academic response from a white theologian in South Africa as a challenge to mission rather than to theology.

Kritzinger’s challenge to the broader field of theology in South Africa would then be whether other white theologians would be willing to take up the challenge of black theology for different theological questions. Kritzinger’s contribution towards a white theological response to black theology was focused primarily on turning a missiological gaze onto white South Africans. Liberation, conversion and

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324 To draw on Bevans’ description of revelation in the praxis model, where he contrasts the view of the translation model on revelation as consisting of a supracontextual message with a praxis model which understands revelation “as the presence of God in history ... in the experience of the poor and the marginalized” (Bevans, 2002, p. 75).
evangelism provided the theological language for such an attempt at finding a theology which could effect change among white South African Christians.

While the urgency of apartheid inevitably drew all involved to the immediate work of building political capacity for the struggle in opposition to apartheid, Kritzinger’s work started to also explore the deeper ideological and theological formation of whiteness, and the ongoing pastoral and liturgical work that would be required to transform white people and undermine whiteness.

5 Conclusion
As the debate on whiteness continues to be developed into a more nuanced discourse, both in South Africa and elsewhere, interdisciplinary and also within theology, it is important to remember the early voices attempting to do this difficult work. In concluding her argument on “What should white people do?” North American philosopher Linda Alcoff argues that we need a commitment to the simultaneous work of

acknowledgement of the historical legacy of white identity constructions in the persistent structures of inequality and exploitation, as well as a newly awakened memory of the many white traitors to white privilege who have struggled to contribute to the building of an inclusive human community ... retrieving from obscurity the history of white antiracism even while providing a detailed account of colonialism and its many cultural effects. (Alcoff, 1998, p. 25)

This chapter in part attempted to do such work, but more importantly sought to highlight the theological resources that might be picked up from how white theologians sought to think through their own involvement in the struggle against apartheid, but also highlight theological matters which remain unresolved within this context.

A simplistic comparison does not do justice to the three voices here discussed. The debate on racism and the developments within black theology in South Africa implied that they inevitably responded in different ways. On the other hand, arguing that they simply represent a progression from one decade to the next too easily ignores the various theological convictions they brought to bear in their responses to racism and apartheid and the social and political position from which they developed these.

These voices often lumped together for their joint struggle against apartheid, should not be reduced to a single vision. Naudé and Nolan worked from different political and economic visions, Nolan and Kritzinger from different understandings of race, whiteness, and the role of black theology. What this
analysis however, attempts to illustrate is how Christian faith and theology was drawn upon and reworked in attempts to grapple with what it means to be white given the history of white racism, colonialism, and in South African apartheid.

Without attempting to exhaust the debate, the final chapter will attempt to pick up from these voices and raise questions for the future by taking up the contributions highlighted in earlier chapters.
Chapter 5 – Making space for the repair of humanity

1 Introduction

In chapter 1 whiteness was named as a problem of theology not only because of the theological ideas underlying the construction of whiteness but because theology itself becomes distorted through a racial imagination. Throughout the study, I have illustrated a hesitancy to quick ‘solutions’ to the whiteness of theology or the theology that produces whiteness by reminding of the depth of the problem. In keeping with the trajectory thus far, this is thus no conclusion by way of solution. If anything, the preceding chapters is a reminder that we will not ‘solve’ whiteness neither in a single text nor, for that matter, in a text. James Perkinson’s reminder should ring true for white South Africans as well: “there is only the way you live” (chapter 2, 3.4.2).

But we would not have come this far without a deep conviction that our lives are indeed formed by ideas, more specifically, by beliefs. How we think about Christ, how we worship and pray to God, how we imagine the community gathered by the spirit, has over the centuries mattered. It mattered when Europe was read into the place of Israel in our imagining God’s covenantal work. It mattered when the church was imagined as a segregated community in service of effective missionary activity in South Africa. It also mattered when black students and theologians insisted on humans as imago Dei or the crucified Christ recreating humanity in the context of the utter dehumanisation of people.

It is from this conviction – that theology matters, and that it matters for the sake of matter, that is – our bodies on this earth – that the study finds meaning. But simultaneously opening ourselves up to exploring the complexities of whiteness in relation to theology has to be accompanied by facing the danger of what this might do to doctrine. The provisional nature of what I propose(d) here implies that the question of where the production of doctrine\(^{325}\) might take us remains unknown. That indeed is perhaps part of the crisis of race and theology, since even the briefest overview of the depth of the problem leaves us with the intuition that nothing will remain untouched once we start to pull at this thread. What will remain of or happen to our deeply held beliefs and practices formed in the last 500 years (at least), which include the Reformation, and for many thus everything that they might consider under the notion ‘tradition’, cannot be determined in advance. There is therefore, an ongoing task for

\(^{325}\) While I intentionally use the word “doctrine” here, I have in mind not stale convictions reproduced one century after another, but rather, following Christine Helmer, doctrine as faith convictions socially constructed (Helmer, 2014, pp. 149-169)
systematic theology to allow the critique on whiteness and colonial Christianity to be heard to its full effect. Yet that might be the only faithful way of being Christian today. We must allow ourselves to face the full horror of where colonial and white Christianity took us during modernity.

What should be clear from the preceding chapters is that Christians’ and the church’s questions concerning race and whiteness cannot be addressed by a neat division of doctrine and ethics, and specifically, that racism is not an ethical problem (only). Furthermore, racism cannot be reduced to an ecclesiological challenge of disunity and division in the churches, important as this might be.

On the one hand, it should no longer come as a surprise. Theology has always been thoroughly intertwined with social, political, economic, and cultural processes, and its production interwoven with the negotiation or enforcement of power throughout history. What is however important is that the depth of the crisis of race in Christian theology has most often been missed by theologians in general, and white theologians in particular. If the task of an engaged systematic theology is to “investigate and own the complexities of theology’s discursive power” (Ward, 2016, p. 34), then in part the preceding chapters were an attempt to reveal that discursive power both in its work of constructing and also of disrupting, race. However, underlying these analyses was the immense silence among white theologians concerning matters racial.

The effect is to note that a problem at the heart of modern theology has indeed received attention, but often at the borders of modern theological production. It is not by chance that the five white theologians engaged above each in their own way functioned at the boundaries of their respective white ecclesiological and theological contexts. The centres of theological production – those places where a vast amount of resources are poured into and where a vast amount of academic literature has been appearing from – has been able to do the work of theology without the need to investigate the complexities of its discursive power in relation to the whiteness that determined its entire thrust throughout the colonial and modern period.

What is found in the twist and turns of the pages so far is then not even an attempt at a fully worked out thesis on whiteness and theology (even though it traces a number of attempts at hinting towards such an interrogation), but rather an attempt at hinting towards where we are, at least as far as work by white theologians on interrogating whiteness theologically has come. It is at best an attempt at adding my voice to a vast chorus of mostly black theologians who have insisted that this task has only just begun. James Perkinson might have argued for a lifetime of struggle against racism in the context of
ethics, activism, and individual white identity, but “lifetime” might not be an appropriate temporal category in the production of doctrine. Doctrine and its effects in principle work over lifetimes, over generations. It responds to the particularities of the present, yet inevitably (and often unintentionally) inform the lives of those to come.

It is exactly in this that Willie Jennings’ warning becomes clear: “The way forward, if there is a way forward, will involve several more conceptual steps before a future of communion might be envisioned” (Jennings, 2010, p. 64). In part, the approach that shaped this study worked with an imagination of systematic loci as those places where certain questions have been grouped together (Kelsey, 2009, p. 28). While not the design of the project, the effect from the analysis of various voices was that I repeatedly turned to these classic questions to ask how they have been distorted by whiteness or how they reveal the distortion of whiteness. Creation, salvation, anthropology, Christology – concepts each with a technical academic history and ecclesial Christian thrust, focused our attention on the depth of the distortion.

Embedded in this study is a rejection of the ways in which race was made into that which concerns only South Africa and the southern United States. While my experience was that this became less frequent over the years 2014-2019, early attempts to explain what my research was about to Dutch contacts were often met with a sentiment that such a topic was certainly important for South Africa, given its history of apartheid, but that The Netherlands (and broader Europe) is luckily “beyond race”. I made no explicit attempt to refute this claim here, apart from tracing the important work of Theo Witvliet. But the insistence on the depth of the problem was an insistence on the breadth of the problem as well – indeed, it spans the horizon (Jennings, 2010, p. 452), both epistemologically and geographically.

However, the commitment to context and to responsibility for particular places in which we are embedded remains. In the same way, the insistence that theology is not only inevitably intertwined with particular political processes but needs to consciously think through its intertwined existence and seek to provide a more faithful response also remains. Perhaps mostly, the conviction that theology should always speak from the door of the church – looking outwards to society on the one hand, and inwards to

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326 A number of factors might have contributed to this, such as: a shifting global discourse around race and racism, an ever louder outcry about the Dutch history of slavery, seen in changes in Dutch museums during this period, the way the so-called ‘migrant crisis’ in Europe has forced questions of race to the fore, and the increasing pressure and public debate in response to Zwarte Piet celebrations, all of which were visible during these years.
the congregation on the other, is ever-present. On the one hand, I want to disrupt the way in which the problem of race can be shifted onto apartheid since this fails to capture the depth of the problem. But on the other hand, there is no way of rejecting the fact that the southern part of Africa, and what today is South Africa in a very particular way, has been thoroughly distorted by the working of whiteness, in particular through the history of apartheid. Furthermore, that theology was not only always wholly intertwined in this, but that theology has been foundational to this crisis.

What I proceed to do in this extended conclusion is to pick up three themes that emerged repeatedly and in different ways in the above. I will do this to highlight how these assist in naming the problem of whiteness, to name how it is a particular problem in South Africa today, and to take first steps in illuminating what the theological work of dislodging whiteness from a Christian imagination and forming white Christians into a faith less bound to white racism might look like. The three themes I will draw together by way of conclusion concern salvation, space, and the human.

2 Salvation: making way for repair

Questions of salvation have been a recurring theme in the preceding chapters. In as much as these have been underlying modern notions of race our inability to name the ways in which such distorted visions continue to inform our attempts at reconciling is at the heart of the salience of race in the present. Questions of who is saved, who teaches about salvation, who mediates salvation, and who discern God’s work of salvation have constantly been read through ways that draw from and reinforce whiteness.

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327 This image was presented by Graham Ward in a seminar on 13 March 2018 where Ward and I responded to the research of Al Barrett and captures my own sentiments and commitments.

328 A slight hesitancy on my part to demarcate my location in terms of a national identity as “South African” should here be noted. In spite of the very particular way in which apartheid formed what today is called South Africa, it is impossible to draw a clear line to the north at the border of Namibia and Zimbabwe, two countries where very similar policies were in place and where a similar settler colonialism informed its post-colonial identity. On the other hand the economic power of South Africa in southern Africa has caused its racial dynamics to inevitably continue to overflow its borders, so that the question of whiteness became intertwined with different national regimes. Lastly, South Africa internally is such a diverse context that we cannot reduce its racial dynamics to a single thread. I attempt to think through such a slightly broader geographic context in part in order to insist that national borders are not an adequate demarcation for the working of whiteness in southern Africa, but also to insist that a singular “South African” response will also be impossible.

329 Given the work presented in chapter 1 in particular, but also the broader argument of chapter 3 and 4 that a response to apartheid as a theological problem is not the same as a response to whiteness as a theological problem, I suspect that much of the historical work concerning the theological justification of apartheid (ex. Elphick, 2012) will need to be revisited in the coming years to take account of a longer theological problem which precedes 1948, 1857 and 1652. My own proposals assumes such a longer theological history, but does not attempt to trace that.
Perkinson probed the depths of this problem in his work when asking about the implication of a black Christ for those who are white. But the analysis of Carter and Jennings' work on the intersection of race and Christian supersessionism provided the backdrop for the repeated reflections in preceding chapters on what salvation would mean given its racial history. Carter illuminated the problem with the way in which Europe and a particular form of Christianity in a supersessionist way takes the place of Israel to become the mediating space for God’s work of salvation. Jennings’ argument highlighted how a proto-racial aesthetic is drawn upon in answering soteriological questions in the early colonial period. More importantly, he highlights how a racial vision of salvation is used to do the work of Christian discernment – whiteness becomes a marker of salvation. Furthermore, his work revealed how Christian soteriology is employed in justifying colonial conquest, finally making colonial dislocation a pre-requisite for indigenous salvation. In brief: whiteness functions both as a marker of insured salvation, but also a marker of that which mediates salvation. Any soteriological reflection today must then take stock of how salvation has been distorted through a racial imagination.

It is therefore not accidental that attempts at focusing theological attention on the reality and effect of race and racism call forth question on what salvation would then mean for those who relied (and continue to rely) on such a whiteness for salvation. More specifically, in the context of white racism, the implications of claims that God’s work of salvation is in a particular way effected in relation to those who are suffering the effect of the very faith which was deemed to guarantee salvation for some and mediate salvation for all is of primary concern. What does it mean if whiteness is not only of no effect in God’s work of salvation\(^ {330} \) but in fact on the one hand in a heretical way claiming to effect that which it has no right of effecting, and on the other hand working in fundamental opposition to the salvation being offered to a world suffering the disastrous effects of colonial conquest and racist oppression?

While voiced in different ways, the response from those white theologians engaged in this study has consistently been that the place from which salvation is to be reflected upon in the context of colonialism and white racism is next to those who seek to work out the implication of the saving work of Christ from the particular position of blackness – that which was made into a sign of damnation in white

\(^{330}\) The Belhar Confession, focusing mostly on ecclesiological questions, reminds us of the recent use of a racial lens in determining proper church affiliation in the white Reformed Churches in South Africa. Article 2 states “true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church”. The argument made throughout the dissertation is however that whiteness was drawn upon not only in determining the membership of church, but also in the discernment of salvation. Identifying this ongoing mediation is however more difficult than identifying racially legislated membership criteria.
theology. The risks involved in such work was explored extensively in chapter 2, both in Witvliet’s hesitancy towards appropriation and Perkinson’s insistence that such hesitancy is not sufficient reason to refrain from giving primacy of place to the work of black theology and black creativity in disrupting whiteness both conceptually and personally.

In the South African context of late apartheid, primary emphasis was given to questions of solidarity in the struggle. This was of particular importance in Mofokeng’s Christology. It is a discipleship of cross-bearing wielded towards liberation, “active participation in a struggle for true humanity” (chapter 3, 4.4). The implication of Mofokeng’s Christology is that “God is not to be found everywhere, but related to through solidarity with the poor and oppressed” (chapter 3, 4.4). In the language of the Belhar Confession, this called for emphasis to “stand where God stands”.331

Solidarity is a key aspect of the range of responses to apartheid and white racism examined in chapter 4. Where this group of white theologians developed a specific focus on problems in the white community, it was derived from solidarity with black South Africans. Of particular importance here, is that such solidarity has salvific importance. Naudé described the pseudo-soteriological character of apartheid and contrasted this to a call towards deeper community he discerned in black consciousness. For Nolan conversion implied a changed commitment in terms of the system, standing with those oppressed which had salvific implications, and for Kritzinger, such a changed commitment informs a life-long process of re-evangelisation of white people (himself included).332

But, as I argued thus far, the soteriological assumptions and implications of whiteness go beyond apartheid. It has formed the heart of modern Christianity and underpins a colonial imagination which fundamentally transformed the very spaces in which we move. This soteriological lens can assist in naming the problem of race as it continues to impact on South Africa after apartheid.333

The problem that needs to be highlighted here is twofold. On the one hand, since whiteness is that which functions as a soteriological shorthand (disregarding the difficult discernment of God’s work of

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331 Kritzinger highlights that this particular phrase most probably draws from the 1979 Belydende Kring Theological Declaration (Kritzinger, 2010), signalling a more explicit drawing from black and liberation theologies than Belhar itself might reveal.

332 Similarly, Perkinson’s life project is built around the conviction that a lifetime of struggle against racism is the very least required from those who are white.

333 In a publication preceding this dissertation I indicate who such a white soteriological vision continues to inform Afrikaner discourse around issues such as violent crime (Van Wyngaard, 2015a), but in terms of the argument below the same could be said of visions of residential space, in particular as associated with racialised forms of gated communities.
salvation by drawing on aesthetic markers or their derivatives found in notions of culture, nation, or
neighbourhood) or a mythic presumption of wholeness, whiteness itself militates against a salvation
which is received through grace. In Perkinson’s language, “there is no salvation for whites as white”
(Perkinson, 2004, p. 223). On the other hand, as touched on through the work of Tanner in dialogue with
Nolan’s arguments on conversion in chapter 4 (3.6), conversion in Christian imagination does not imply
that the past is erased. Whom I was continues to inform who I have become beyond conversion or –
drawing from the earlier emphasis on life-long commitments and processes of being re-formed – within
ongoing conversions.

“The way forward, if there is a way forward” (Jennings, 2010, p. 64) cannot be reduced to a
momentary renouncement of whiteness, nor finalised through a switching of sides (important as it is for
white Christians to join the work of dismantling ongoing racist structures). While I here emphasise the
problem of white people drawing from a particular white imagination when taking on the role of being
the ones who can bring about their own salvation, Shannon Sullivan repeatedly illustrates the same
problem in psychological terms when noting that active work against whiteness always risks reproducing
that very whiteness (Sullivan, 2006). The way forward I propose from the preceding is a route more
indirect and requiring a slower process of transformation.

Let me return to Peter Ochs’ image of repair outlined in chapter 3 (2.4.4). Important as the work of
dismantling structures which reproduce racial hierarchies might be, and as important as the
transformation of the self might be, constant vigilance against a white imagination of bringing about
salvation (not only for the world but also for ourselves) should guide the process of disrupting whiteness
and white racism. Yet work is required, a lifetime of work! This work should however, be seen as that of
clearing the way, removing that which prevents white people from receiving grace from without, from
finding who we are outside the mediating spaces whiteness created, and from living as humans equal to
and together with other humans. Seen in this light whiteness is the refusal of a grace not mediated by a
white Christian imagination, and the work of Christian formation requires the dismantling of such a
refusal.

In the language developed above, a process of re-evangelisation is a pre-requisite for openness to
receiving a gift of true humanity, but receiving it exactly as a gift. Given the spatial and bodily distortions

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334 I deliberately remind of the words of Jennings, even though I’m not here repeating the exact arguments he
attempts to make following this reminder of the depth of the problem of race for Christian theology.
of salvation marked by race, it is however vital that the following two key themes be drawn into this concluding reflection on whiteness and salvation.

3 Recreating particular space

While apartheid was an attempt at all-encompassing social engineering in racial terms, in many ways its spatial dimensions made apartheid into a global symbol – this originally Afrikaans word continues to be used internationally to refer to practices of extreme segregation. More specifically the intersection of racial oppression and spatial segregation in the present continues to make apartheid into a metaphor and analogy for present injustices – most visible in analyses of the occupation of Palestine.\textsuperscript{335} This spatial history continues to haunt South Africa in some of the most disturbing ways, and continues to be at the heart of South African debates on race: whether it involves the realities of ongoing urban segregation, the need for land reform in agricultural areas, or the crisis of segregation and inequality in education.

Chapter 1 focused attention on the ways in which colonisation and a racial imagination were fundamentally tied to a distortion of the relationship between people and place. This included the way in which Europe as both place and idea can in supersessionist ways became the mediating conditionality for the emergence of a white Christ, but most importantly how race required disruption of identities formed in terms of a particular place, and how colonial space was fundamentally reimagined through a racial lens. Even more, colonisation and its accompanying dislocation changed the very meaning of space by drawing on racial logics. Jennings set the scene in emphasising that critically reflecting on the alteration of space in colonial theological imagination will have to be at the heart of the work of imagining common humanity. Chapter 2 returned to questions of space first in Witvliet’s idealised Christological space for ecumenical encounter, and then far more concretely in Perkinson’s reflections from urban Detroit. Kritzinger most explicitly introduced the theological problem of white relations to conquered space in South Africa by emphasising the idolatrous place of land in white imagination.

I briefly return to Shannon Sullivan’s argument on the ways of transforming whiteness. Sullivan’s arguments on ontological expansiveness highlighted the risks of white people, white males, in particular, socialised to take over an increasing amount of space. This highlighted the risks involved in white people moving into black spaces, but as indicated in chapter 2, was situated inside a broader argument on the

\textsuperscript{335} Without here engaging the ensuing debate, the 2017 UN report using the language of apartheid to describe Israeli practices towards the Palestinian People is one of the most prominent examples. Here too the geographic fragmentation is emphasised (https://www.unescwa.org/news/escwa-launches-report-israeli-practices-towards-palestinian-people-and-question-apartheid [accessed 5 June 2019]).
need to change the very space in which formation of white people happens if whiteness is to be disrupted. In post-apartheid South Africa the need to reimagine and recreate the spatial reality of this geographical area, in particular, due to its ongoing effects in maintaining a racial and racist formation, is of key importance.

The point here is not a detailed engagement with questions of land ownership in terms of racialised economic inequality, even though it should be clear that such questions should be at the heart of a quest for justice both in South Africa and around the globe in the aftermath of colonialism. Rather, our attention should be focused on the way in which whiteness has been constructed and continues to be constructed in terms of a particular relation to space, and that any disruption of whiteness cannot happen within the white mind alone, but must inevitably imply a shifting of bodies in terms of space, and a transformation of the space in which white bodies move.

Building on the earlier point on work of repair, this change in the relation between white bodies and space, and transformation of space itself, should be noted as a key aspect of ‘clearing of way’ of that which assists in refusing the reception of the gift. What I hint toward is that the true humanity imagined in chapter 3 and returned to below requires a changed relation to space.

Witvliet’s work returned to this repeatedly, first by Christologically imagining encounters not mediated through relations of power but later in attempts at going beyond Buber through an emphasis on community. For Witvliet it was quite specifically the fixed place of community (as opposed to a postmodern focus on networks) that required emphasis in forming a “we”. Perkinson was even more explicit in working out the complex process of bodily dislocations as it ties with epistemic dislocation and white conversion. Perkinson’s emphasis throughout is that the fragmentation which allows the gift to be received requires the disruption of white control over space. Kritzinger briefly explored such possibilities by turning to the most unlikely of places – Hillbrow – as an image of what might be.

One thread emerging repeatedly from those engaged in the previous chapters is that it is the struggle against injustice which itself opens up such spaces, but these always need to be noted as fleeting

336 While I follow Sullivan in emphasising that a change in environment can, under certain conditions, inform a change in habits of whiteness (Sullivan, 2006, pp. 143-145), I’m not here concerned with her own exploration of the distinctions between settled and nomadic existence. This distinction is primarily read through her study of the Roma, which informs a particular construction of a racial “other” through spatial imaginations, which does not relate to the particularities of space at the southern tip of the African continent.

337 As I indicated in my critique in dialogue with Mbatha’s Stations of the Cross for Africa, this powerless image should rather be developed into a more explicit restructuring of power to give effect to justice.
moments, a sign of what may be to come, but always at risk of collapsing against the weight of a world colonially reimagined and remade. Whether it is the images of Hillbrow, Detroit, a hoped-for empty middle, or Eucharist at a party of activists, repeatedly the possibility of spaces which might carry the work of humanising surfaced from within struggle.

In chapter 3 the critical contribution of Mofokeng, which also highlighted a divergence from Maimela, was the way in which he read Sobrino and Barth together to emphasise the particularity of the oppressed on the one hand and the depth of dehumanisation on the other hand. Mofokeng’s argument was for a need for “recreation”, which he read Christologically. He argues that an emphasis on a return to a created ideal does not take the depth of the distortion of humanity through colonialism and white racism into account. A recreation through the cross was called for.

Here I propose reverting to Mofokeng’s insistence on recreation, rather than return to an original creation forever lost, but now related to space rather than humanity. Yes, it cannot be disconnected from who owns the land, but even deeper it concerns questions of what space means, and how space is defined by race. Even if the last vestiges of a world where space still forms identity (referring both to Jennings and Perkinson’s work drawing from communities still reflecting such a life) may still exist, a nostalgic emphasis on a world created, similar to an emphasis on humans created, underplays the fundamental disruption of space that modernity brought about. There is a recreation required which will allow particular space to over time find meaning no longer born from a colonial imagination.

It is not accidental that ecological metaphors may be of particular significance at this point. Jennings reminder is that what race did was in part to effect a fundamental distortion of the very space in which we find ourselves, in terms of the environment, the economy, but also the social and theological imagination through which we think about identity. The task facing us is then not merely undoing such a theological imagination, but rather participating in the ongoing struggle for allowing a space which can inform and sustain a different theological imagination to emerge.

What I am proposing is an insistence on the particular space in which we “live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28) as being of particular importance in clearing out what prevents the work of repair required. If the particular space on which our living and moving and having our being requires the reproduction of race for its existence, if the space itself is dependent on whiteness for presenting a

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The work of Adrienne Maree Brown (Brown, 2017) reminds of how soil science in particular can become a lens for making sense of the work required in anti-racist activism.

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sense of wholeness, then it is the spaces in which we move that should become the object of critical theological reflection.\[339\]

Concretely, I am proposing that our rejection of the ongoing segregation and re-segregation in South Africa is not a mere goal of post-apartheid South Africa, but a pre-requisite for the work of forming a different theological imagination. However, this must be qualified by noting that segregation itself was but the final concrete form which a racial imagining of all space took on. The entire process of conquest, extraction of resources for the sake of the North Atlantic (or in the case of South Africa internally toward those places marked as white), and dislocation of people in order to give racial meaning to particular space becomes the object of such scrutiny. What is required is a theology of space, tied to the work being done by, for example, urban- and ecotheologians, but conscious of the way in which space is racially imagined and working from within particular space. The space in which people live and move and have their being should indeed continue to be a particularly theological question.

Key to what emerges from the above points is that the clearing of way to allow grace from without to bring about a transformation of the self requires a rejection and active subversion of the ways in which whiteness is spatially maintained. The way in which space and its interaction with bodies constantly insist that we cannot be human without being human in terms of race is what needs to be reimagined. Key to the struggle is then the transformation of space to make space for forging a new humanism. The emphasis on recreation rather than return concretely reminds that this work cannot merely rely on an imagined past where a permanent relation to a particular created environment sustained identity. It will need to do the work of thinking through how a built environment\[340\] currently fully caught up in notions of private property can again become space which carries identity.

4 Receiving true humanity in particular community

Chapter 3 centred around the early black consciousness emphasis on true humanity as picked up by black theology in subsequent years. Specifically, I provided a detailed theological analysis of Biko’s

\[339\] The examples would be endless, but the earlier South African work on “semi-gration”, both in a racial development of gated communities and a move to particular areas or parts of the country highlights the key role of place of living in maintaining whiteness, here also as a sense of wholeness, in post-apartheid South Africa(Ballard, 2004a). Similar arguments could be made concerning the racialised anxiety around spaces of education, both in terms of who enters as students and who acts as teachers, and how this relates to what is perceived as “good education”.

\[340\] The city is here of particular importance, not least due to the fact that cities are where people will be staying in decades, possibly centuries, to come, but also due to the racial imagination which underlie the very structure if South African cities in particular.
arguments on true humanity, followed by the distinct arguments from creation and Christ in the work of Maimela and Mofokeng respectively. Here at the most basic level, I highlighted that what is called for beyond whiteness is humanity. The reminder from Jennings highlighted in the concluding section on Kritzinger (4.4) however remains of utmost importance: that “a future of communion” will require a longer conceptual journey than a mere announcement. Furthermore, also following Jennings’ arguments from the same section, that a mere renouncement of race often draws from the same theological logic of denying “geographically sustained identities” discussed in chapter 1 (Jennings, 2010, p. 63). Yet tied to the previous points on salvation and space I must return to the question of the human.

In the current climate where a white commitment to a South African national project is drawn on as anti-racist strategy, it is perhaps important to highlight that this is not what I am proposing in thinking about becoming human within particular space. I am not proposing an ethnic and nationalistic reprioritisation, as is often heard, where whiteness is relativised by its drawing into an emerging South African nationalism which is then drawn into a vague African political identity. See for example the conclusion of a recent PhD in practical theology focused on working against racism: “I am a proud white male Afrikaner and more than that I am a proud South African and more than that I am a proud African, but more than all of this I am a proud follower of Jesus Christ, called to be His hands and feet across all boundaries and obstacles.” (Van Dyk, 2018, p. 292) Such a reorganisation is, after all, the reproduction of the very structure of society that we have, a reproduction of the very racial scale highlighted in the work of Jennings at the start of this study, where race functions as a tool for thinking people together. In such a route, my becoming human in global relation is mediated through the layers of political and economic power manifesting as states, political regions, or global companies.

Biko, in dialogue with his early black theology contemporaries, named this as true humanity. Long and Ndlovu-Gatsheni, drawn into the analysis of chapter 2, spoke about a new humanism or a humanist revolution. Maimela turned to the imago Dei in response to white racism, and Mofokeng pointed towards a Christologically inspired recreation of black humanity. Yet in spite of differences, these all remind of the same reality: that contemporary notions of the human have been thoroughly distorted by

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341 The emphasis on a new humanity is also the line followed by Zimitri Erasmus’s recent Race Otherwise (Erasmus, 2017). Kwame Appiah concludes his recent work on identity by emphasising the necessity of a “cosmopolitan impulse that draws on our common humanity” (Appiah, 2018, p. 219), and Jennings too places his work within “the growing conversation regarding the possibilities of a truly cosmopolitan citizenship” (Jennings, 2010, p. 10). The point is not to present these as being in complete alignment, but it does illustrate the general space within which this reflection develops.
a racial imagination and racist history, and that it is such a reimagining of the human no longer imagined from within the (theological) logic of whiteness that must draw forth our sustained attention.

The trajectory traced in chapter 3 highlighted a key attempt at imagining the human in conscious response to modern racism. On one level, that very possibility drew from a salvific imagination: to name the dehumanisation in all its horror, yet insists on the possibility of becoming human, to the point of drawing all into a humanising trajectory, was a feat of profound theological imagination.342

While the voices traced in chapter 4 are not an exhaustive account of white responses, it is important to note that such a fundamental reimagining of being human was either out of reach, outside the agenda, or merely taking its first steps. What was noted was a general understanding of freedom emerging from solidarity in struggle. Yet “struggle” was often by legal necessity bound by an apartheid spatial imagination. Moments of protest would inevitably be broken by forcing bodies to be conformed back to segregated spaces. The end of apartheid merely announced the possibility to undo this spatial history, but in itself did not bring any such changes about

The argument up to this point can then be drawn together in the following proposal: the clearing way to allow receiving the grace of new humanity assumes a recreation of space. But what is hoped-for is indeed a new understanding of the human. By emphasising the space in which this emerges I am however picking up on an insistence found in theologies of struggle against apartheid, but also in the broader argument presented in earlier chapters, that such recreation is not something which happens in the head (only).343

The implications of such a line of proposals is that we continue to resist a ‘solution’ to race found in a mere renouncement of race. Rather, the gift of humanity not tied to race is what emerges from a lifetime commitment to a life together. It is from humans living with humans. If such global cosmopolitan citizenship is to be imagined, then it must be imagined from the particularities of spaces where such a humanism is created in local communities.

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342 My point here is not that such a theological imagination is the only route towards a humanising vision, but only that the voices traced in chapter 3 do indeed illustrate such an imagination at work.

343 Perkinson’s point that transforming white identity is not done by merely “thinking thoughts” was discussed above (3.2.1) and Jennings arguments on the intersection of race and space also reminds that “Racial identities have taken on landscape and geographic characteristics and cannot simply be overcome by thought”. (Jennings, 2010, p. 63)
In reading Biko’s true humanity through the work of Vitor Westhelle I outlined an eschatological imagination not merely focused on time but also, perhaps even primarily, on space. The question of reimagined human is then not merely one called from the future, but from a space that formed outside the space of colonial imagination: “Hope is not merely that which envisions a future beyond white racism, but a space beyond that formed by a colonial imagination. True humanity emerges from a particular place, beyond the ends of colonial space.” (Chapter 3, 2.4.4).

I am therefore not proposing a theological theory of the human. Such conceptual work which reminds us of common humanity in principle, whether grounded in creation in the image of God or God’s creative work in our being born, is after all in place. But Mofokeng’s reminder on the recreation of humanity should be noted here as well – a mere announcement of common humanity in terms of creation cannot carry the weight of undoing the distortion of humanity. Here I return to Witvliet’s analysis. First, from a Christian imagination, we need to be reminded that any claim of speaking to the universal, of cosmopolitan citizenship or common humanity, in this case, emerges from a particular place, experience, and community. But Witvliet’s important call in the critique of Buber for the move of the ‘I’ to the ‘we’ – a ‘we’ bound to a particular community – should also be recalled. It is in the ‘we’ of community that we are transformed – most specifically, community where the complexity of difference in ‘norms and values’, the ‘contradictions’ of identity, are allowed to meet (Witvliet, 2017, p. 81).

However, Witvliet’s experiments in community need extension through Perkinson’s reminder of a lifetime of being embedded in community. Drawing from Perkinson, but also developments traced in chapter 4, such community cannot be imagined as a neutral space but must remain conscious of who shapes this space. For white people, in particular, a lifetime of community not organised around whiteness will be required to start the work of being formed into humanity not constituted in terms of whiteness.

This does not imply any easy renouncement, as if the weight of colonial history can be shifted aside with mere change in words. Rather, such concrete community not organised around whiteness may provide the space for whiteness to take on different forms, as we allow the work of its normative power being

344 I merely note Kelsey’s critique of the emphasis on the creation imago Dei and his emphasis on birth and being human (Kelsey, 2009, pp. 242-280).
dismantled to take place.\textsuperscript{345} Even more, it is within concrete community that the possibilities of
discovering who we are if we are not only white or if we are “more than white” (chapter 2, 3.4.2).

There is indeed a tension that would have to be held to, at least for the immediate future in South
Africa. On the one hand, we have to take seriously the argument that a future of communion will remain
out of reach, given the immense work of undoing race required. On the other hand, the slow work of
dismantling the refusal of receiving humanity as grace not mediated by whiteness can only be achieved
in life-long community not organised around whiteness.

What I propose is therefore that the work of clearing way will require lifetimes\textsuperscript{346} of commitment to
community not organised around whiteness. Rather than announcing theories of humanity not bound to
race, we need theologies that will inform a space in which common humanity can be rediscovered and
received. Following the various arguments in preceding chapters, such a space is however, the soil in
which theological anthropologies not bound to whiteness may emerge. Important as the body should be
to future theological anthropology, the body always exists in particular space, and it is this interaction
between bodies and space that will require our ongoing attention as we clear the way for a recreated
humanity to gracefully emerge.

5 Conclusion

I hoped to hold to a commitment and vision born of the struggle against apartheid that race indeed
must end, while simultaneously refusing a renouncement of race which risks its reproduction in a
different guise. Simultaneously, I wished to insist on the particular commitment required from white
people in working for the disruption of race, while remaining vigilant of deeply held convictions that
salvation will again be mediated by white people. Lastly, noting the complex interaction between race
and space highlighted throughout the study I focused attention on the formation in communities in
recreated spaces.

\textsuperscript{345} Here I indeed see similar possibilities to what Melissa Steyn described as “hybrid whitenesses” (Steyn, 2001, pp.
168-170), but suggest that the forms it may take must be worked out in concrete community.

\textsuperscript{346} The use of the plural is not accidental. If a future beyond race is possible, and there is no guarantee that we can
ever un-know race given the depth at which it has formed the contemporary world, this will require a multi-
genenerational commitment.
This emphasis is consciously born from the particular reality of South Africa’s ongoing racial organisation of space. It also carries particular meaning in a geographic area where white people determine the meaning of vast amounts of space while being a small minority of the population.

But perhaps it may speak to a global world where space was deformed in service of colonialism as well. Looking on from a different space, but in part a space that became a temporary home while this study was in progress, this problem was seen repeatedly in anxieties around migrants – quite specifically migrants racially placed in opposition to whiteness. What such community would look like in contemporary European space is a question for others, but there too, the interaction of bodies and space remains key.

But at heart the argument above also hints to the fact that this conclusion is only an introduction to something that requires a lifetime of exploration. It is “a problem so massive that it extends itself over the horizon” (Jennings, 2014, p. 452). The questions on the intersection of race and theology opened up here will require that the history of race and theology in the southern part of Africa be revisited with an eye for places of intersection previously hidden. Here I have in mind the way race intersects with theology both conceptually and historically beyond the confines of apartheid. More urgently the intersection of race and gender in white theology in southern Africa is of the utmost importance. The pervasiveness of both race and Christianity in South African history and present reality remind that no stone can be left unturned as we critically interrogate the disruption of the very ground under our feet.

Attempting to name the complexity and horrors of whiteness in South Africa and beyond calls for a commitment in the way we live – while we write words to produce arguments, the crisis must find a response in concrete commitments to life. Most specifically, by repeatedly attempting to name the problem in terms of fundamental theological distortions, I hoped to highlight the duration of commitments that is called for.
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Summary

The main research questions that shape this study is why whiteness is a particularly theological problem and what an appropriate theological response from white theologians would look like? These questions are asked repeatedly in dialogue with different theologians, trying to develop a deeper understanding of race in general and whiteness in particular as specifically theological problems.

The thesis develops through five chapters, with each of the first four chapters asking what theological problems are with race in general and whiteness in particular, discerned by the interlocutors engaged. In response, each chapter discerns aspects of what a theology that disrupts the whiteness of theology, would look like.

Chapters 1 and 3 form a unit by looking at two particular instances where African-American/black theologians worked to describe the theological problem of race in general and whiteness in particular, in the context of the USA and South Africa. Chapters 2 and 4 form a unit by looking at white attempts at a theological disruption of whiteness or a construction of a theology that disrupts the problem of whiteness, using examples from continental Europe and the USA in the one chapter and focusing on South Africa in the other.

Chapter 1 analyses the so-called Duke school of race and theology, referring to the books of Kameron Carter and William Jennings published in 2008 and 2010 respectively. The chapter reads them together and does this consciously from a South African context. The focus of the chapter is specifically on their respective and joined attempts at describing whiteness as a theological problem in colonialism and modernity. This is particularly related to their thesis on the relationship between whiteness and Christian supersessionism, and the way in which space and bodies were being recreated in racial imagination.

Chapter 2 analyses the work of two white theologians who at different points were singled out by James Cone for their particular work at interpreting and working out the implications of black theology for those who are white: The Dutch theologian Theo Witvliet and the US theologian Jim Perkinson. The development of their respective attempts to consciously respond to black theology is focuses on, among other things, tracing a divergence in their work in response to Charles Long. This assists in highlighting key questions that white theologians consciously respond to the problem of whiteness need to consider.
Chapter 3 turns the focus to South Africa, and in particular to the black theology of liberation’s attempt to theologically engage the problem of whiteness and white racism in the 1970s and 1980s. The chapter start out with a theological analysis of the writings of the black consciousness leader Steve Biko, specifically in terms of the notion ‘true humanity’, and then proceed to focus on how this was worked out in more formal systematic theology through the black theology of Simon Maimela and Takatso Mofokeng. In their respective projects, I highlight how different theological proposals on how to speak of ‘true humanity’ in the context of white racism were arrived at.

Chapter 4 then turns to three white theologians from the same period, analysing the way in which they heard the challenge of black consciousness and black theology. Beyers Naudé, Albert Nolan, and Klippies Kritzinger. These represent key white theologians working in close proximity or direct response to the emerging black theology under apartheid, and to some extent beyond apartheid. While Naudé and Nolan respectively played prominent roles in the Christian Institute and Institute of Contextual Theology, Kritzinger became the first white theologian to attempt to consciously work out the implications of black theology for those who are white in a sustained manner.

Out of the analysis of these critical voices, the study concludes by proposing three lines of inquiry that could inform future theological reflection on whiteness. Firstly, the question of salvation in relation to whiteness is outlined. The way in which whiteness was intertwined with Christian soteriological visions call for vigilance in any hasty claims on white salvation and a rejection of a white mediation of salvation. Rather, whiteness itself is described as a refusal of grace, and the transformative work required described as a dismantling of such a refusal to allow space for the work of repair.

Secondly, the importance of how bodies relate to space in the formation of race in general and whiteness in particular is noted as key in the work of dismantling whiteness. The study focus attention on how a Christian theology informed a distorted relation to space, and highlights a changed relationship to particular place as critical to the work of clearing away a refusal of grace. A nostalgic emphasis on a world created is, however, described as underplaying the fundamental disruption of space that modernity brought. Therefore, the work required is described as a recreation of space. For those who are white, this call for a lifetime of life in a particular community that is not organised around whiteness.

Thirdly, the way in which contemporary notions of the human have been thoroughly distorted by a racial imagination and racist history is placed at the heart of the study. Attempts at reimagining
humanity in ways not bound to whiteness, particularly as this took form in South African black theology, receive particular attention. Rather than a theory of the human, what is called for is the slow work of reimaging humanity in concrete community not organised around whiteness. This is described as the soil in which theological anthropologies not bound to whiteness may emerge.

**Opsomming**

Die navorsingsvraag in hierdie studie is waarom witheid ’n besondere teologiese vraagstuk is, en wat wit teoloë se teologiese antwoord hierop is. In gesprekke is hierdie vrae herhaaldelik aan verskeie wit teoloë gestel om insig te kry in die teologiese vraagstukke van ras in die algemeen en witheid in die besonder.

Hierdie tesis val in vyf hoofstukke uiteen. In elk van die eerste vier hoofstukke dui gespreksgenote aan watter teologiese vraagstukke ras in die algemeen en witheid in die besonder vir hulle inhou. In antwoord hierop word aspekte van ’n teologie wat die witheid van teologie aftakel, in elke hoofstuk aangetoon.

Hoofstuk 1 en 3 vorm ’n eenheid en ondersoek die beskouings van twee Afro-Amerikaanse of swart teoloë van ras in die algemeen en witheid in die besonder as ’n teologiese vraagstuk in die VSA en Suid-Afrika. Hoofstuk 2 en 4 vorm eweneens ’n eenheid en verken die pogings van wittes om witheid teologies af te takel of ’n teologie te konstrueer wat die vraagstuk van witheid aanpak. In die een hoofstuk word voorbeelde op die Europese vasteland bespreek en in die ander word voorbeelde in Suid-Afrika gebruik.

In hoofstuk 1 word die sogenaamde Duke-skool van ras en teologie ontleed. Melding word gemaak van Kameron Carter en William Jennings se boeke wat onderskeidelik in 2008 en 2010 verskyn het. Hulle word hier gesamentlik en doelbewus teen ’n Suid-Afrikaanse agtergrond gelees. Die auteurs se afsonderlike en gesamentlike poging om witheid as ’n teologiese vraagstuk in die lig van kolonialisme en moderniteit te beskryf is die brandpunt van hierdie hoofstuk. Dit hou verband met hulle hipotese oor die verband tussen witheid en Christelike supersessionisme, en die wyse waarop ruimte en liggame in die rasgegronde verbeelding herskep is.

In hoofstuk 2 word die werk van twee wit teoloë ondersoek: die Nederlander Theo Witvliet en die Amerikaner Jim Perkinson. James Cone het hulle vertolking van die implikasies van swartteologie vir diegene wat wit is by verskeie geleenthede uitgesonder. Elke teoloog se reaksie op swartteologie, onder
meer die antwoorde wat elkeen aan Charles Long rig, word van naderby bekyk. Dit vestig die aandag op
die sleutelvrae wat wit teoloë in ag moet neem wanneer hulle op die witheidvraagstuk reageer.

In hoofstuk 3 val die soeklig op Suid-Afrika; in die besonder die wyse waarop swartbevrydingsteoloë die
vraagstuk van witheid en wit rassisme in die 1970’s en 1980’s benader het. Die hoofstuk begin met ‘n
teologiese ontleding van die swartbewustheidsleier Steve Biko se werk oor die gedagte van ‘ware
menslikheid’. Vervolgens word nagegaan hoe dit deur die swartteologie van Simon Maimela en Takatso
Mofokeng in ‘n meer formele sistematiese teologie beslag gekry het. Ek vestig die aandag op hoe daar in
hulle onderskeie projekte verskillende teologiese voorstelle gemaak word om teen die agtergrond van
wit rassisme oor ‘ware menslikheid’ te praat.

In hoofstuk 4 word drie wit tydgenootlike teoloë onder die loep geneem: Beyers Naudé, Albert Nolan,
en Klippies Kritzinger. Die wyse waarop hulle aan die uitdaging van swartbewustheid en swartteologie
die hoof gebied het, word ontleed. Hierdie wit teoloë het tydens apartheid en in sekere mate daarna
oue bande met die opkomende swartteologie gehad en kon daarop reageer. Waar Naudé en Nolan ‘n
belangrike rol in onderskeidelik die Christelike Instituut en die Instituut vir Kontekstuele Teologie
gespeel het, was Kritzinger die eerste wit teoloog wat op volgehoue wyse en doelbewus die implikasies
van swartteologie vir diegene wat wit is, beskryf het.

Uit die ontleding van hierdie kritiese stemme word tot die slotsom gekom dat drie ondersoeklyne
teologiese besinning oor witheid in die toekoms kan beïnvloed. Ten eerste word die verband tussen
verlossing en witheid in hooftrekke aangedui. Die vervlegting van witheid en Christelike
verlossingsleer view omsigtheid wanneer bewerings oor wit verlossing en die verwerping van
wit bemiddeling in verlossing oorhaastig gemaak word. Witheid op sigself word eerder beskryf as ‘n
weiering van genade en die nodige transformatiewe werk word beskryf as die aftakeling van sodanige
weiering om ruimte vir herstel te laat.

Ten tweede, is die wyse waarop liggies met ruimte verband hou in die ontstaan van ras in die
algemeen en witheid in die besonder ‘n belangrike aspek in die aftakeling van witheid. Hierdie studie
toon aan hoe ‘n Christelike teologie die ruimtelike verhouding ontwirg het, en dat ‘n nuwe ruimtelike
verhouding noodsaaklik is om die weiering van genade uit die weg te ruim. ‘n Nostalgiese nadruk op ‘n
geskepte wêreld onderskat die ontwrigting van ‘n ruimte wat deur moderniteit meegebring is. Daarom

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moet werk gemaak word van die herskepping van ruimte. Van diegene wat wit is, verg dit 'n gemeenskapslewe wat nie om witheid draai nie.

Ten derde vorm verdraaide opvattings van die mens weens 'n rasgegronde verbeelding en 'n rassistiese geskiedenis die hoofsaak van hierdie studie. Besondere aandag word bestee aan pogings om menslikheid te herbedink sonder om witheid daarby te betrek, byvoorbeeld dié van Suid-Afrikaanse swarte teoloë. In plaas van 'n menslikheidsteorie op te stel, moet met die moeisame taak begin word om menslikheid in 'n konkrete samelewing sonder inagneming van witheid te herbedink. Dit sal 'n vrugbare teelaarde wees waaruit teologiese antropologieë wat nie aan witheid gebonde is nie, kan voortspruit.

Isifinqo

Imibuzo yocwaningo ehamba phambili eyakha lolu cwaningko ukuthi kungani ubuhlanga buyinkinga ethile kwezenkolo nokuthi impendulo efanele yezenkolo eyovelza kuzazi zezenkolo zambahlehlohe iyobukeka kanjani noma iyothini? Lemibuzo ibuzwa kaningana ekukoxisaneni nezazi zemfundiso yezenkolo ezhulkahlukena, izama ukuthuthukisa ukuqonda okujulile kobuzwe ngokubanzi kanye nobumhlophe ikakhukuzi njengezinkinga zenkolo ngqo.


yobukholoniyalizimu kanye nesimanje manje. Lokhu kuhlobene kakhulu kuyithesisi yabo ngombono wabo ngobudlelwano phakathi kobumhlophe kanye nokuqina kobuKristu, nendlela isikhala nemizimba eyayiphinde yenzwi ngayo ekucabangeni ngezobuhlanga.


Isahluko sesi-4 sibe sesiphendukela kwizazi zemfundiso yenkolo ezimhlophe ezintathu ezisuza enkathini efanayo, sihlaziya indlela lapho bahlanguzeka nenselelo yokungazi kwabantu abamnyama kanye nemfundiso yenkolo yabamnyama. UBeyers Naudé, Albert Nolan, noKlippies Kritzinger. Lokhu kumele izazi zemfundiso yenkolo ezimhlophe ezisebe ndawonke noma ziphendula okuqondile enkolweni yemfundiso yabantu abamnyama engaphansi kobandlululo, futhi ngakolunye uhlangothi kwedlulele nakulo ubandlululo. Ngenkathi uNaudé noNolan ngokukandela bedlala indima ebalulekile Esikhungweni sama Krestu nakuleso Semfundiso yeThiyoloji (Christian Institute and Institute of Contextual Theology), uKritzinger waba yisazi semfundiso yenkolo sabamhlophe sokuqala ukuzama ukuthola imiphumela yenkolo yabamnya kulabo abamhlophe ngendlela eqhubekayo

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