

Cracking the Eurocentric Code

A Battle on the Banks of the 'New Blood Rivers'

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Abstract

Belief in divine privilege or God's creation of a *volk* is fundamental a motif in the propulsion of the superiority of one race against another in the world, *ipso facto*, the continuous management of systems of knowledge, authority, economics, and a 'world civilization' now quintessentially fundamentalist and racially fascist are effects of this deeply hidden and coded belief. Apartheid simply, is a zenith of this supersessionist (replacement of Israel from the Bible with European white) world enunciated since the justification of the commodification and dispensability of black lives. To elucidate this thesis, this article first offers a presentation of Cone's theological grammar. Second, we punctuate the value of self-criticality as an indispensable criterion by demonstrating that Cone was engaged critically in Black Theology of Liberation's (BTL) internal discourses not only to clarify the relationship between *Sunday* and *Saturday* religiosities, but to distinguish and distance BTL from idolatrous imaginations of knowledge and history. Black faith oozes from the volcanic, rapturous explosion that dismantles the divide between *Sunday* and *Saturday* religions. Third, we make the point about the ghettoization of Cone's theology at its gestation and by this we seek to demonstrate this continuous relegation of the school to residential alienation and nihilism in the battle of ideas. For this reason, the article argues, cracking the "Western code," to break the coalition of black experience with the white power structure, is the space where BTL might have to dwell in the battle of 'New Blood Rivers.'

Keywords: *umkhondo* of white superiority, Non-racist, 'volk', "Western Code"

A brief Note in memory of James Hal Cone,² is made up of my encounter with Cone as a student and my interaction with other black theologians.

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² What would James Hal Cone have not said about the significance of A Black Theology of Liberation (BTL) for the liberation of black people in a racist, neofascist and fundamentalist world by the time he finished his book, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2013)? 'I have said it all,' he might have said. The passing of James Cone on the 28th April 2018 deeply touched most of us who are students, exponents and scholars of BTL. On the 10th May 2018, some black theologians gathered at the University of South Africa (Unisa) to mourn and celebrate his memory. Our personal encounter with Cone and his influence on us could be described in two ways: formal and oral texts. The name James Cone reverberated in the classrooms, dining rooms, corridors and even in the bathrooms in our student days at the Federal Theological Seminary (Fedsem). James Cone was a full house name. Some of the works that were already discussed in our classes which usually brought on Cone's theology included Cecil Ngcokovane's *Demons of Apartheid* (1989) Takatso Mofokeng's *The Crucified and Permanent*

1. Introduction

1.1 The 'New Blood River' and the Grammar of White Superiority

Do we need to rearticulate and continue to explain Cone's theology or continue with the struggle to restore our authority as black people which up to this day has not been restored? We desire no regurgitation of Cone's contribution in this article, but to carry on with Cone's spirit: "I write because writing is the way I fight. Teaching is the way I resist, doing what I can to subvert white supremacy" (in Ellsberg 2018). It is the mode of doing theology than the method and grammar of Cone's contribution we desire in the 21st century than its repetition. We endeavour to tackle or trace *umkhondo*³ (*a la* Zakes Mda), the footprints of whiteness, and the "Western code," exemplified in assumptions that include the thinking that as a *volk*, Afrikaners were responsible for the Christianization of all cultures. This article does not isolate Afrikanerdom but essentially engages the white man's burden, our curiosity about the assumption that the former quintessentially forms part of a Eurocentric civilization that marked human bodies and for the first time in history, commodified and rendered black lives dispensable. What Cecil Ngcokovane posited some years ago about demons of apartheid might be found in this statement by one of the architects of apartheid and the first apartheid era prime minister, D.F. Malan:

Cross Bearers (1983), Itumeleng Mosala's *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (1989) and Allan Boesak's *Farewell to Innocence* (1977). These authors in various ways had their own experiences with Cone.

Our encounter with Tinyiko Maluleke is another dimension of our oral text on Cone. We met Tinyiko Maluleke ironically in our oral traditions at Fedsem, given his prominence during his days as a student there. Some of the things we heard about him while at Fedsem, turned out to be true, verily confirmed later by his erudite scholarship and a reputable, flourishing profile in public life to date.

Incidentally, with Dwight Hopkins, Cone's own student, in Tinyiko Maluleke's office at Unisa, in the early 2000s, we had that blissful conversation embellished with Cone and around other black theologians which abides in our memory. Undoubtedly, this incident made a deep imprint in my mind, during those inquisitive days of a journey and hunger for black theological knowledge. Similarly, Gideon Khabela, another South African supervised by James Cone while at Union, would never complete our conversations on BTL without touching on Cone — especially his experiences with Cone as a supervisor and thus giving a window through which to peep into the personality of this giant. A renowned perfectionist, with anger against white supremacy, incisive thoughts about blackness, all filled the content of these oral texts about this giant. So, my class and oral encounters with James Cone, including a somewhat distant electronic conversation with him when he graciously agreed to contribute a chapter in our work, *Prophet from the South: Essays in Honour of Allan Aubrey Boesak* in 2014, shape the stance we take in this article. May his soul rest in peace.

³ This word which means a trace of something, *mohlala* in Sesotho is a powerful motif used by Mda in his novel *Little Suns* (2015). For its use see also Vellem, V 2018. "Between Two Trees: On Rediscovering Reconciliation in Post 1994 South Africa."

The difference in colour is merely the physical manifestation of the two irreconcilable ways of life; between barbarism and civilization, between heathenism, and Christianity... Apartheid is based on what the Afrikaner believes to be his divine privilege and calling to convert the heathen to Christianity without obliterating his national identity (1989:18).

One might say that this statement by D.F. Malan simply needs to be relegated to the archives because apartheid is a thing of the past. D.F. Malan nonetheless, we argue, believed that “Afrikanerdom (*the white power structure*)⁴ is not the work of men but, the creation of God” (Ngcokovane, 1989:12). Afrikanerdom hinges on a belief in an irreconcilable way of life between black and white people and that whites have as their calling, the conversion of blacks without obliterating their own identity.⁵ Our thesis therefore, derived from this lived historical truth under the yoke of Afrikaner racists in South Africa is that belief in divine privilege or God’s creation of a *volk* is fundamental a motif in the propulsion of the superiority of one race against others in the world, *ipso facto*, the continuous management of systems of knowledge, authority, economics, and a world civilization now quintessentially fundamentalist and racially fascist are effects to sustain this deep belief about whiteness as the work not of men, but the creation of God. This is the code of whiteness hidden in all antics and innovations that masquerade recognition of black pain. Whiteness is thus a spiritual matter, a white man’s burden, powerfully suggested in these poetic lyrical lines by Rudyard Kipling:

Take up the White Man’s burden —
 Send forth the best ye breed —
 Go bind your sons to exile
 To serve your captives’ need;
 To wait in heavy harness,
 On fluttered folk and wild —
 Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
 Half-devil and half-child.⁶

⁴ Italics in brackets ours.

⁵ There numerous examples in our history which speak to this belief. The creation of Bantustans in South Africa was not only about the irreconcilable ways of life between whites and blacks, but it was also about the creation of blacks, yes blacks converted to the idea that it was God’s wish and creation to have Afrikaners civilize them. This problem is still out there in our public life today. In the past, within our democratic dispensation in South Africa, the term ‘fronting’ was used to imply this phenomenon. The current term used today is “rented blacks.” All these about the same logic: the creation of blacks to serve in this grand Afrikaner mission, the conversion of blacks as participants in their civilization by whites. Incidentally, this means blacks with whom whites are comfortable in numerous ways, including leadership in various spheres of life such as politics, universities, churches and many others.

⁶ We have selected only one stanza of the poem for reasons of length, it is nonetheless a well-known

Whiteness as not the work of men but God's creation continues as a 'New Blood River' in the 21st century for newly caught, sullen peoples, half-devil and half child, they will never grow, they can only be civilized and Christianized, they will always be doubted not as angles but devils? I slowly began to doubt if blacks in South Africa and the exponents of Afrikanerdom in particular, and the exponents of the white power structure in general, ever believed in one God. A visit⁷ to the El Mina Castle in Ghana completely sealed this silent, painful inward struggle of my doubtful conviction about racists ever believing in the same God as black oppressed people. Seeing a Dutch Reformed Church on top of the dungeons that kept black people captured to be sailed across the Atlantic, sold as slaves in the Americas, helped one to make the connection that apartheid simply, is a zenith of a world enunciated since the justification of the commodification and dispensability of black lives—a zenith of a white man's burden in the world to be 'taken up' all the time.

On the other hand, our God is a *God of the Oppressed* (Cone), we argue, and our struggle against evil that is both metaphysical and spiritual, the worship of the history of a particular race in the world. Black faith we contend, is a deep conviction about "Yahweh . . . forever having to remind his pathological cultic people that salvation is a political affair, not *just* a religious one" (Eagleton, 2003:175).⁸ The battle for black authority is thus a political matter for our salvation. It is a battle not of religious piety, but politics of conversion according to Cornel West (1993:18). This politics of conversion, James Cones explains, implies that:

Any advice from whites to blacks on how to deal with oppression is automatically under suspicion as a clever device to further enslavement. Furthermore, it is white intellectual arrogance which assumes that it has a monopoly on intellectual and moral judgement (1969: 20).

It is out of this background and conviction that a case for cracking the Eurocentric "Western code" is made. The religious view and belief system of the white power structure which entails that God's creation is equal to white and Christianity is equal to the worship of Afrikaner in particular, or white history in general and thus the monopoly of white intellectual and moral judgement in the salvation of all human beings and we must add, all creation too. D.F. Malan rightly accused those who opposed apartheid by asserting that the previous (colonial) governments in South Af-

poem.

⁷ I have been privileged to visit the El Mina Castle twice. Our first visit to this place took place during the General Assembly of the then World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Accra which adopted the Accra Confession. At the beginning of this year 2018, exploring the legacies of slavery within the auspices of the Council for World Mission, we also visited this Castle.

⁸ Our italics

rica also knew apartheid very well. P.W. Botha made a similar remark in the 1980s, namely; that racism is not only unique to the Afrikaner people but rather, it is part of a Eurocentric world system lock, stock and barrel. There is still more to the pitch of our thesis we need to foreground, exemplified by the speech we regard as *umkhondo* of whiteness, *umkhondo* of the white man's burden, made by D.F. Malan:

The battle with weapons is over. That was the Voortrekkers'. But one, even more violent, more deadly than theirs is being decided now. The battlefield has shifted. Your Blood River⁹ is not here. Your Blood River lies in town at the New Blood River of our people. White and non-white meet each other in much closer contact and in much tighter wrestling-hold than one hundred years ago when the circle of white-tended wagons protected the laagers and the shot-gun and assegai clashed against each other. . . Where he must stand in the break for his people, the Afrikaner of the New Great Trek meets the non-white at his Blood River, half-armed or even completely unarmed, without barricade, without a river between, defenseless in the open plains of economic competition (Ngcokovane, 1989:32).

The battle with weapons is over and the 'New Blood River' is economic competition, a blatant truth about South Africa more than two decades after political liberation. This war imagery is more than rhetoric in a borderless world with its constant shifts of the battlefields, the 'New Blood Rivers' of the maintenance of white supremacy. To date, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) has grappled with the Belhar Confession for a number of years. Its current Moderator of the General Synod, Nelis Janse van Rensburg, wrote a letter on behalf of the Executive of the DRC to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URC) and said:

Unfortunately, there are thousands of members in the DRC who do wholeheartedly share and practice the beliefs expressed in this (the Belhar) confession, but who have not endorsed the confession as such (2016:2).

The Belhar Confession is, *inter alia*, at the centre of the unity talks between the DRC and the URC. Yet it is more than that if one thinks about many other churches

⁹ In the many battles and wars of dispossession in South Africa, the Afrikaner people had to encounter amaZulu at the banks of what has now been known as the Blood River, the Ncome River in isiZulu. When visiting the site of the battle which today is a monument, it is possible to enter the memorial site from to different entrances, one is called Blood River (Bloedrivier), this side serves to tell the Voortrekker side of the story. The other side, when you enter is called Ncome. The amaZulu warriors after suffering near total defeat, were pursued by the Voortrekkers, and trapped in the muddy banks of the Ncome River. There, trapped, they were slaughtered—it is believed that the water of the Ncome turned red, hence the name in Afrikaans Bloedrivier (Erika Raas 2018 Master's dissertation).

abroad that have adopted it (Belhar) already. It is at least more of a theological statement directly resulting from the question of blackness and Christianity in South Africa — the question of the reconcilability of humanity and the indivisibility of justice against a deeply held conviction by whites that black and white ways of life are irreconcilable. Van Rensburg continues:

The reality is however, that members also have reservations about the importance of confessions, are not informed about the formation of confessions, misunderstand the meaning of the confession (Belhar), “want to close the books on the past” and therefore do not want to think about the sad time of apartheid any more, believe that the confession is temporal, think that the confession only addresses whites, etc. The Moderamen of the General Synod undertook many special efforts in recent years to introduce the Belhar Confession within the DRC and to put it in perspective and will continue doing so. We are currently creating church orderly space for the acceptance of the confession by synods and hope that the meaning of the confession will increasingly receive greater recognition.

The idea of wanting to close the books of the past and that the Belhar Confession addresses whites only cannot be glossed over. How is ‘closing the books of the past’ unrelated to the worship of the history of Afrikaner people? Yet they qualify this, they believe that a confession is temporal. If the Belhar Confession is addressed to white people only, are all white people temporally racist? As we have suggested, ‘closing the books of the past’ should not be viewed as an Afrikaner problem because of apartheid, we have alluded, is a zenith of the white power structure in the world. ‘Closing the books of the past’ suggests authority bordering on idolatry about history, space and temporality in the white power structure. It means the worship of the history of one race in the world that can close and open books of the past, present and future of the world.

It is for this reason that we should interrogate democracy as a ‘New Blood River,’ neo-fascism a ‘New Blood River,’ Brexit a ‘New Blood River,’ shifting battlefields of a continuing belief that one race is created to close and open books of history for the salvation of all races and the whole of creation. What has become a huge challenge in the ‘New Blood River’ of democracy, the era of the deification of liberal democracy is that black proximity with white power is tighter and virtually lies on the same horizon without any river between. What a white man did at least five hundred years ago from the El Mina Castle, a Dutch Reformed Church on top, his laagers with barricades to keep blacks in the dungeons is executed well by a black person today.¹⁰

¹⁰ See Allan Boesak’s 2017. *Pharaohs on Both Sides of the Blood-Red Waters*. In this book Allan Boesak among other things, connects the struggles of young people across the world and deeply laments

In listening to and hearing Cone empathetically, nothing further could be said about what racism and its theological justification does to black people. More than enough work has been done in this regard. Instead, we need to contend with the fact that the more the logic of BTL is explained, rearticulated and restated, against the fallacy of the superiority of one race, the harder the husk of racist logic becomes. The more BTL explains, the more the shifts of the 'Blood River.' To honour James Cone is thus to win the war against racism, not to repeat what this evil is all about and how Cone explained it. It is to write because writing is the way we must fight. Teaching is the way we must resist, doing what we can to subvert white supremacy. This war is political, it is about black authority in intellectual and moral judgements, and it is quintessentially spiritual.

We first offer Cone's grammar of the battle in the intellectual 'Blood River.' Second, we punctuate the value of self-criticality as an indispensable criterion by demonstrating that Cone was engaged critically. Third we make the point about the ghettoization of Cone's theology at its gestation and by this we seek demonstrate the continuous relegation of the school to residential alienation and nihilism in the battle of ideas. It is for this reason that we make a brief case for cracking the "Western code," what Cones' whole theology stands for and symbolizes, our last point in this article.¹¹

2. On James Cone's Grammar of Doing Theology

Any attempt to aggregate Cone's theological proposition and to encode it into a grammar of some sorts might not be possible without Cone himself speaking a little bit:

Like the people of Macedonia, Jesus became a significant presence in my life too. I do not remember the exact date or time I 'turned to Jesus', as the conversion experience was called. At home, church and school, at play and at work, Jesus was

the culpability of struggle icons as Pharaohs among their own people in the context of Empire. In our South African context, he addresses the question of a deifying spirit of the democratic order among other things.

¹¹ The rudiments of the umkhondo of whiteness are already alluded to throughout this article in D'F. Malan's speech and the poem by Rudyard Kipling and space for. Our focus is on Cone's legacy that has always been bypassed and ghettoized, especially his spirit of fighting. It should be noted that Cone's whole theological project in his whole life is centred of debunking white theology and this is assumed as a starting point. A vivid stance to rather move away from repeating the strong thought of Eurocentric epistemologies driven by white superiority is taken in some works though, cf. Vellem V. C Vellem, V.S., 2017, 'Un-thinking the West: The spirit of doing Black Theology of Liberation in decolonial times', HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 73(3), a4737 and Vellem, V. S. 2018. "Cracking the Skull of Racism in South Africa Post-1994," in Hewitt, R. & Chammah, J.K Who is an African": Race, Identity, and Destiny in Post-apartheid South Africa. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 31-48.

always there, as the anchor of life, giving it meaning and purpose and bestowing hope and faith in the ultimate justice of things. Jesus was that reality who empowered black people to know that they were not the worthless human beings that white people said they were (2002:1-2).

Jesus as the anchor of life was a *Sunday* affair according to Cone. The reason for this according to Cone is that “Sunday was the most segregated day of the week, and 11:00 am the most segregated hour” (2002:2). Cone uses “Saturday” and “Sunday” to describe distinctions in the religiosity of blacks in the United States of America, the influence of Christianity and the Blues, the *Saturday* culture of black people. Some years ago, Tinyiko Maluleke (1994c) painted a powerful picture about the ambivalence of the church in South Africa black urban townships. What Cone describes as *Saturday* and *Sunday* religions could easily be described in our South African experience as *ekasie* religiosity, i.e. *Saturday* and *Sunday* religiosities. *Saturday* and *Sunday* liturgies are indivisible in the black experience.

Following on Maluleke, *Saturday* religiosity breathes the vestiges of colonialism, the throttling compound system linked to cheap labour turning township life to temporary ‘bedrooms’ for blacks, not home yet home, a quintessential order of alienation. What bothers Cone therefore is the relationship between the Jesus of *Sunday* and that of *Saturday*. Cone remembers how this ‘Sunday Jesus’ was pervasively present in his home and upbringing, but cannot really remember his ‘date’ of conversion to this Jesus, the day he ever turned to this *Sunday* religiosity. White and black people who read the same Bible, worship the same God and adhere to the same confessions¹² could not do these together, and still do not even today. This was the most troubling of the questions to Cone for the tension that existed between *Saturday* and *Sunday* religions or religiosities for blacks was easy to grasp but not the division between black and white on *Sunday*. The indivisibility of *Saturday* and *Sunday* among blacks provides an antidote against white superiority but Sunday, a glaring chasm between black and white.

Cone remembers the day of his explosive turning point. “But the Civil rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s awakened me from my theological slumber” (2002:5). Cone continues:

While reading Martin Luther King Jr and Malcom X, the blackness in my theological consciousness exploded like a volcano after many dormant years. I found my

¹² Note what the letter by the Moderator of the DRC says about confessions today. If ordinary people in the DRC do not know what confessions are all about, what then is the struggle of confessions as they feature uppermost in theological debates about Belhar, Accra and so many others? What do these confessions encode?

theological voice. Using the cultural and political insights of Malcom and Martin, I discovered a way of articulating what I wanted to say about theology and race that not only rejected the need for my professors' approval, but challenged them to exorcize the racism in their theologies (2002:5).

Cone made this point earlier in his journey:

As Black Power represented the end of black-white consensus and coalition in the politics of black liberation, so black theology represented the end of black-white consensus and coalition in the churches and theology. As Black Power represented the assertion of a black value system in social, cultural, political, and economic institutions, so black theology meant the incorporation of a similar value system in the churches and religious life of black people (1985:32).

The pervasiveness of *Sunday* religiosity that alienates blacks from their experience converges with the *Saturday* one through an explosion of black power, the end of black – white consensus through an assertion of a black value system. Without this explosion the pervasive *Sunday* religiosity of Eurocentric Christianity continues uninterrupted keeping blacks in slumber. Theology and ideology thus need to combine to become a dynamic explosive that disrupts the slumber and dormancy of black people from their pain perpetually consigned irrelevant in their *Sunday* liturgies alienated from black experience. BTL in combination with Black Power is thus a dynamic explosive that disrupts slumber and dormancy among blacks to exorcize racism in social, cultural, political and theological discourses.

Black Consciousness and its relationship with BTL in South Africa became such an explosion racist theology in South Africa never came to terms with and continuously failed to redeem itself up to this day. Cone had already visited South Africa in the late 1960s, his influence on Steve Biko and many other South African black theologians, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and BTL in South Africa explicit in the first publication of essays on BTL in 1973, edited by Basil Moore. Cone's theology characteristically brings three dimensions together: Black Power, The Blues and Martin King Luther Jr.'s theology and the Civil Rights Movement. This is how Cone described his theology in a number of interviews and public speeches he made, but his writings too.¹³ Cone reminisces:

Malcolm X teaches us that African- Americans cannot be free without accepting their blackness, without loving Africa as a place of their origin and meaning. Martin King teaches us that no people can be free except in the beloved community of

¹³ We rely here on numerous videos in which Cone presents his views in his lectures and interviews.

humankind – not just blacks with blacks or whites with whites but all of us together (including Native Americans, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals) in a truly multicultural community. Malcolm alone makes it too easy for blacks to go it alone and for whites to say ‘begone!’ Martin alone makes it too easy for whites to ask for reconciliation without justice and for middle –class blacks to grant it, as long as they are treated special (2002:11).

It is not the separation of Martin and Malcolm methodologically that BTL espouses but the combination of both and this concept, ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’ is an inevitable ‘alphabet’ in the grammar of doing BTL.¹⁴ For as long as racism remains prevalent and its recrimination against Black Power ultimately undermines black existence, theology has to be subjected to a hermeneutic of suspicion. A hermeneutic of suspicion serves to respond to the dilemma of merging the contradictions of a double-self syndrome¹⁵ resulting from black self and Christianity because Africa is the object of ridicule in the modern world and importantly, Christianity is difficult to differentiate from European culture. Cornel West, Cone’s closest colleague and friend, describes himself eloquently as “a blues man in the life of the mind, as jazz man in the world of ideas” (Mednieta *et al.*, 2011:29 of 43 Kindle). Without the blues what then is the life of his mind and if not a jazz man what then is his participation in the world of ideas? Let us stretch this question to Cone. Without the blues, without Black Power and the Civil Rights movement, what is Cone’s grammar of theology? Cone explains:

The life of a black slave and white slaveholder were radically different. It follows that their thoughts about things divine would also be different, even though they might sometimes use the same words about God. The life of the slaveholder and others of that culture was that of extending white inhumanity to excruciating limits, involving the enslavement of Africans and the annihilation of Indians. The life of the slave was the slave ship, the auction block, and the plantation regime. It involved the attempt to define himself without ordinary historical possibilities of

¹⁴ It should be stated that in South Africa, BTL’s sources such as its relationship with Black Consciousness (BC) have for a long time included tools that are outside the mainstream orthodox approaches of doing theology. By its very nature, BTL is a theological grammar that extends the contours of doing theology to include black history, culture, aesthetics, and black religion, in a nutshell black experience that has never been part of Western theology in the same way as Cone mediates Malcolm X, the Blues and Martin Luther King Jr to develop his grammar with tools outside the mainstream white theology in the United States of America.

¹⁵ The question of “double consciousness” has been a subject of discussion in BTL. For example, Tinyiko Maluleke (2004: 187-188) problematizes the “Du Boisian twoness,” seeing it as a problematic analytical category for the understanding of African Christianity but accepts this notion in so far as it “the problem of self-perception and the foreign lenses used in the actual perceiving.” Emmanuel Eze in one example in his chapter titled: “Double Consciousness and the Democratic Ideal,” in Levy, J.T (ed.), *Colonialism and its Legacies*. New York: Lexington, 1-75 Kindle.

self-affirmation. Therefore when the master and the slave spoke of God, they could not possibly be referring to the same reality. When the slave spoke of Jesus Christ, he spoke out of the depths of suffering and despair and the pain “rolling through an unfriendly world,” (1975:10).

Cone makes an important indictment against Eurocentric Christianity and proposes a hermeneutic of suspicion to address the problem of double self-syndrome in relation to Christianity. It is often apparent that blackness in Cone’s theology disturbs whites who appreciate Martin than Malcolm. For this reason, some whites make a distinction between blackness and liberation, yes, blackness or liberation, they ask. Each time this question is asked, a black person is thrown back to a double self-syndrome. Liberation without the liberation of blackness is a ‘holy’ *Sunday* liturgy detached from a *Saturday* black religiosity. Nothing in our view ever preoccupied Cone’s theology than this failure by white, Eurocentric Christianity to deal with this defective conscience of their *Sunday* religion.

That Cone in his *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, thoroughly examined Reinhold Niebuhr’s theology, whom he regarded as the most progressive of the theologians of the Cross (2013:32), to argue for the cultivation of a theology by blacks with their own imagination. At the heart of the defective consciousness of whiteness is the incapacity to undergo a “transvaluation of values” which for black people is unlikely too without an explosion of consciousness (Cone, 2013: 35). *Sunday* is a liturgy without a transvaluation of values that keeps blacks in slumber, but also fails to challenge the defect in the conscience of white Christians where liturgy should “transvalue our values and enter the human at the point where man is lowly rather than proud and where he is weak rather than strong” (Cone, 2013:34). BTL is thus a religion implausible without the rupture of a defective conscience, a dynamic explosion of the conscience, and the politics of conversion. Such a rupture is plausible if the interpellation of the oppressed, the “*punto de partida* (point of departure)” (Dussel, 1996:ix), ruptures this defective conscience to produce a new theological imagination. To conclude this section, Cone’s horizon pursued by all major studies in BTL is captured by Leonardo Boff as politics of conversion to:

1. The experience of *political, economic, and cultural oppression* of one group by another group.
2. The experience of *liberation movements*, which seek to shake off all yokes and go in search of new manner of life in common, seek to gestate a new type of human being, one who will be more of a comrade, more open to communion.
3. The experience of *resistance* on the part of dominated but undefeated groups working in a regime of captivity and refusing to let the spark of hope flicker and die (1993:1-2).

To honour and emulate James Cone is to come to terms with this explosion, a conversion that ruptures a defective conscience to end a coalition of *Sunday* and *Saturday* that keeps blacks in slumber. The rupture of conscience is spiritual. Cone's life, persistence, depth and consistency in developing and defending a grammar of theology that cracks the Western code's sustenance of black double self-syndrome, the dualism of *Sunday* and *Saturday* religions, the denigration of black authority and participation in history ultimately, is a heritage and spirit bequeathed us in a raging battle and war on the banks of the 'New Blood Waters.'

3. Internal Critical Engagements of Cone's Theology

Cone, did not escape critical engagement from within. In South Africa, let us focus a little bit on Allan Boesak's and Itumeleng Mosala's critiques of Cone's work, at least as examples of the dynamics of critical internal discourse of doing BTL. Allan Boesak takes issue with Cone's understanding of theology as a "rational study." Boesak prefers the formulation of what theology is by opting for Gutierrez's view of theology as a reflection on actions that transform the world (1977:16). Such a reflection on actions that transform the world is about faith being active in the world. Boesak explains that faith should not be viewed merely as a confession, "but as an act of trust in and commitment to God and to humanity" (1977:16). Theology therefore is not a philosophical exercise according to Boesak, an "automatic mental or spiritual process," it is not detached nor is it neutral. So Boesak shows that he is not comfortable with Cone's departure of a rational theology in describing black theological imagination. Is this about Cone's experience of a volcanic explosion through Black Power and Malcolm X that Boesak is worried about? Indeed Boesak questions Cone's view that theology is a reflection "in the light of the black situation" (1977:16). Boesak calls for caution here because according to him it is the Word of God not the black situation that illuminates and guides action in the struggles for liberation. He says:

We fear that Cone attaches too much theological import to the black experience and the black situation as if these realities *within themselves* have revelational value on a par with Scripture. God it seems to us, reveals Himself *in* the situation, the Word is being heard in the situation, thereby giving meaning to the situation (Boesak, 1977:16).

Our primary purpose is to demonstrate that Cone's theological vision was engaged critically from within, barring Boesak's language about God and the very uncritical use of the category "Word of God" in his engagement of Cone's views then.¹⁶ Inter-

¹⁶ It is important to state that Cone has responded to some of these critiques much as Boesak has continued to develop what his understanding of the Word of God is, especially in his up-coming work

estingly, Itumeleng Mosala critiques both Cone and Boesak in his argument about the exegetical starting point of BTL. He engages Cone because “All major black theological studies in South Africa draw in some way on the work of James Cone” (1989:14). While Cone recognizes that black experience constitutes one pole of black hermeneutics together with the Word of God, the epistemological prism offered by this experience, blackness, does not translate into “Cone’s perception of the nature and function of the Bible as the Word of God” (1989:15). Mosala avers:

Paradoxically, black theology’s notion of the Bible as the Word of God carries the implication that there is such a thing as a nonideological appropriation of Scripture. Black theologians condemn white people’s view of God and Jesus Christ as apolitical, that is, above ideologies, on the one hand; but they maintain a view of Scripture as the absolute, nonideological Word of God that can be made ideological only by being applied to the situation of oppression, on the other hand (1989:15-16).

Mosala directs the same critique to Allan Boesak, Cornel West and Sigiibo Dwane, nuancing his critique according to each one of their versions of what he sees as an “enslavement to the wider theological problematic that regards the notion of the Word of God as a hermeneutical starting point” (1989:17). Mosala’s argument basically suggests that the notion of the Word of God “presupposes a hermeneutical epistemology for which truth is not historical, cultural, or economic” (1989:19). We need not go any further¹⁷ than this because our main argument for now is that BTL has its own richness of internal engagements all of which speak to one strong thought or proposition, namely; the culpability of Western Christianity in the pauperization and anthropological impoverishment of black people or better, the experience of Christianity, the Bible, the Word of God as genocide, epistemicide and spiritualicide by black people. More importantly though to return to Cone, is that the Word of God and the black situation, explicit in his *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* both speak to each other, the tree and the cross, the Word of God and the black situation a point that Mosala poignantly makes, cannot be freed from ideological

in which he even engages the patriarchal elements in the Exodus, ipso facto, the very foundational texts of the liberation paradigm. Boesak nonetheless as we see in his engagement with Cone seems to struggle with decentering theological categories associated with his Reformed Tradition and our conversation in this regard continues elsewhere not in this particular article. Our intension here is to make the point that BTL is internally, a vigorous dialogical discourse as shown by these early, critical engagements within the school.

¹⁷ The continuation of the debate in South Africa finds expression in Tinyiko Maluleke’s engagement with Gerald West, cf. Vuyani Vellem’s 2018 “Hermeneutical Embers in the Zone of Non-being” upcoming. Now it continues as Boesak takes on Vellem and Maluleke in his up-coming work as already alluded above.

taints. A hermeneutic of suspicion assumes that truth is in history among other things. BTL does not idolize its cultivations of knowledge. One of the serious problems we must contend with in our *umkondo* of whiteness and the enraging 'New Blood Rivers' is alertness to idolatry—idolatrous epistemology as central to the worship of white history and knowledge of God. This heritage of internal critique within the gestation of BTL is an antithesis to a conquering idolatrous spirit that is incapable of dialogue even its metaphysics.

4. On Ghettoizing Cone's Theological Proposition

BTL has also been a subject of attack in the shifting battlefields and 'Blood Rivers' of the white theological world. Exponents of this school are lynched. Oscar Romero in Latin America, Steve Biko and Sabelo Ntwasa in South Africa and many other examples we can think of are victims of lynching by the white power structure. The lynching of the exponents of BTL is continuous and assumes on other means, ways and forms of sustaining the white power structure. Cone explicitly stated that professional theologians have as their task as winning "the theological war," (1985:48).

Non-racist intellectuals critique Cone often by downplaying the strong thought of his theological proposition. A few of these early examples will suffice as our main point is on the pattern of this critique that has continued to morph while maintaining the very same core discernible from some of these examples. David Bosch, in responding to Cone begins by making a general statement about liberation theology having made "a lot of the so-called "Exodus motif" *its central pivot*, but *fears* that much of what is being said in this connection misses the real point of the Exodus" (1975:6).¹⁸ He argues that this paradigm is almost similar to zealotism which was not accepted by Jesus Christ due to its proneness to violence. "All through Scripture" he says, "we do not find there much talk of a violent attack on the existing order" (1975:6).

But first we need to briefly understand where Bosch comes from in this article quickly. He offers an ecclesiological reflection based on scriptural views to identify three models of the church. He sees the church as both theological and sociological. The first model which he describes as realist he attributes to the Herodians in the Bible. The second model he describes as Zealotism, the one he describes as basically adopting violent means and rejected by Jesus even though there were some leanings between Jesus' teachings and convictions with Zealots. The third model, attributed to the Essenes was that of withdrawal from society and public life. Bosch suggests that the model Jesus espoused was different; it was revolutionary, not violent, subversive not violent, and prophetic not violent. Bosch argues that the

¹⁸ Our italics.

church as both a theological and sociological an entity demands constant alertness from downplaying the tension between the theological or sociological aspects of the nature of the church. If the church conforms more to the world, it becomes redundant, yet the church becomes more irrelevant if she forgets that she is in the world. Following this, we could argue, violence is a sign of redundancy—a redundant church—to Bosch against those who struggle for their liberation especially by resorting to violent means in defense of their dignity.

Bosch validates his thesis by employing Paul's proposition of "a new order" and thus the building of a new community as cardinal to ecclesiology. He says that Jesus straddled between two models, the "exile" and the "prophetic," distinguishable by how Jesus responded to the Roman Empire and the "power structure centralised in the Sandhedrin," (1975:6). Jesus did not violently attack the Roman Empire but followed the non-violent prophetic model when he dealt with the Jewish leaders. According to his thesis it was because "The Christian is liberated from the way things are. He is a post-revolutionary" (1975:8). Bosch thus takes on Cone's work, *A Black Theology of Liberation* by comparing him with a "South African Black theologian." He says:

The South African black man writes as follows: "'This is the difficult demand. . . . *to love the white man*'. We cannot hate our fellow man. God created us in love because He loved us, He so loved us that He chose the way of love that goes through bitterness, sweat and blood. He chose death. It is difficult to love whites. It is costly to love whites, yet the black man must. The life that the whites seek to destroy through hatred must be rebuilt in love. . . . (1975:10).

Engaging Bosch is a matter for another article, but there is *umkbondo* here about some battle going on. Takatso Mofokeng in our celebration of Cone's memory punctuated the difficulty any black theologian must contend with in order to love black people: "It is difficult to love a black person," he said. Apart from the appeal to love whites as Bosch seems to suggest, there are numerous problems with Bosch's thesis that include among others, a subliminal text of dichotomies, a troublesome association (coalition) with blacks, suspicious hermeneutics and others. Bosch's statement: "The life that the whites seek to destroy through hatred must be rebuilt in love," says it all. What is love according to him?

According to Mosala, it is important to understand that there are non-racists who are different from outright racists whose features include the "commitment to values of reconciliation, integration and love" (1987:20). This non-racist approach to these values tends to "exclude black history, black culture and the black struggle"

in its theology (Mosala, 1987: 20). Non-racist love for blacks is love without their history and culture. To love white people requires a deep grasp of black alienation from their primary resources of livelihood, their land, cattle, labour and culture. Itumeleng Mosala says “Paul’s theological metaphor of reconciliation between God and humans, and God and the world,” should be understood as a reconciliation of God’s “alienated property, human/the world” (1987:25).

Mosala actually premises his views on reconciliation on Cone’s work: *Black Theology and Black Power*. White people, Mosala explains; “See reconciliation as a substitute for revolution and liberation” (1987:19). Bosch does not explicitly engage this work by Cone, namely *Black Theology and Black Power*; Cone’s first work. In this very article, to respond to Cone, he cites only four pages, 131,132, 136 and 137. “A South African Black theologian” he compares with Cone cannot even be identified in this article. Bosch does not present the core thesis of Cone’s work: *A Black Theology of Liberation*. This is the key problem for us more than Bosch’s content really, apart from what he sees as love as a substitute for revolution and liberation in cahoots with his own chosen ‘South African Black theologian.’¹⁹ Bosch says “ the Christ of Cone is ...so very muscular.. if one group’s Christ becomes too muscular, the others get frightened and go back into their shells (1975:10).²⁰

If BTL is redundant by collapsing the tension between theological and sociological aspects of ecclesiology, how relevant is a theology with abundant violence that erases black history, black culture and the black struggle by a non-racist theologian in engaging BTL?²¹

Tinyiko Maluleke (1994b; 1994b, 1999), is one theologian who fiercely cautioned against the propensity by white scholars in South Africa to bypass black scholars or better, not to engage the proposition of BTL and this has continued throughout post-1994 South Africa with hasty innovations such as Public Theology.²² David Bosch did not sign

¹⁹ As Bosch was making this statement of love and the importance of a non-violent approach toward building an alternative community, the World Council of Churches (WCC) had already adopted the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) which supported if you like, the use of violence in defense of violence.

²⁰ We need to punctuate this point. That BTL is seen even today as a frightening paradigm, an expression of hatred for whites, an angry school that requires no response, but thick silence and labelling of black scholars is a problem up to this day. Is this a non-racist response to the fundamental problems that BTL responds to? This argument partly attempts to demonstrate the genesis of such a response from a colossal figure in South African theological circles, the ghettoization of black thought.

²¹ Our space will not allow us to engage other scholars, Bosch’s South African blacks and non-racist whites. We only list those we could engage in the same manner to illustrate our point: Klaus Nuerberger (1990; 1999), Anthony Bradley (2010). This pattern is found in a number of works in South Africa, the dismissal of Cone or BTL without engaging the core proposition of the school.

²² Once again Tinyiko Maluleke fiercely challenged Public Theology in South Africa in particular the use of David Bosch, this same matter is also engaged in Dibeela et al, 2014.

the well-known Kairos Document (KD) because he felt it was encouraging violence. Mosala (1987) nonetheless draws from the KD to develop his approach on reconciliation. The KD proposes three models of ecclesiology and the Prophetic Model in the KD, does not make David Bosch who argues that Jesus' model was prophetic to endorse the KD. When there is such a huge difference in theological thought how can the propulsion of one theological proposition continue without violating the other? Western Eurocentric theology seems to choose the ghettoization of opposing theological propulsion and since Bosch, this 'Blood River' has continued, shifting and morphing to continue the war by other means. The ghettoization of Cone's theology quite early in the development of his theology is tantamount to its erasure at its gestation, in the very beginnings. It seems this is the original sin of Eurocentric Christianity. Jennings says:

[T]he analyses of this condition often don't get to the heart of the constellation of generative forces that have rendered people's social performances of the Christian life collectively anaemic.

Jennings continues:

Those short-sighted analyses suffer on the one side from unfamiliarity with the deep theological architecture that patterned early modern visions of peoples, places, and societies and therefore lack the sense of what turned horribly wrong theologically (2010:6).

The architectural structure of Eurocentric Christianity, experienced by blacks is inseparable from violence. It is faulted by what Jennings calls "supersessionism"—the gradual replacements of Israel in the mind and heart of God and sadly, "positioning Christian identity fully within European (white) identity and fully outside the identities of Jews and Muslims" (2010:32). South African experience as exemplified in the *umkhondo* of apartheid is the zenith of a theological architecture that patterned a diseased anthropology, space, temporality and social life since Eurocentric modernity. As Maluleke argued some years ago that the urban township is "residential racism," similar to Cornel West's concept of nihilism or meaninglessness, "the numbing detachment" of black people from space, time and history has a bearing on a theological architecture that is supersessionist. Ghettoization is the war to keep the residential place for BTL in a numbing detachment from the knowledge of God, despite the fact that "Cone does theology in a way that differs radically from the traditional Western paradigms," Engelbrecht (1987:9). This is the question:

How is it possible that the canon of thought in all the disciplines of the Social Sciences and Humanities in the Westernized university . . . is based on the knowledge produced by a few men from five countries in Western Europe (Italy, France, Eng-

land, Germany and the USA)? How is it possible that men from these five countries achieved such an epistemic privilege to the point that their knowledge today is considered superior over the knowledge of the rest of the world? How did they come to monopolize the authority of knowledge in the world? Grosfoguel (2013:74).

Grosfoguel says: “To answer these questions, we need to go back several centuries and discuss the formation of racism/sexism in the modern world and its relation to the *long durée* of modern structures of knowledge (2013:75). The genocides of the people were accompanied by the killing of knowledge and destruction of libraries. To bypass Cone, to ghettoize Cone’s theology, to erase black history, black culture and the black struggle is to miss Cone’s conversion and awaking in bringing the cross to the lynching tree and the lynching tree to the cross of Jesus in response to the architecture of a diseased Christian imagination fraught with ignorance, erasure and supersessionism. This is at the centre of the war that assumes ‘New Blood Rivers.’ One of the options we therefore propose is to crack the “Western code” and due to space we shall be very brief.

5. On Cracking the “Western code”

Terry Eagleton argues that the preaching of the gospel that is not a scandal and an affront to the status quo is worthless (2009). Black faith is thus a disassociation from the coalition with the “Western code.” BTL as part of a decolonial turn, “confronts all of Western civilization from the perspective of the colonized (Mignolo, 2011:xviii), a supersessionist civilization. Walter Mignolo continues:

“[t]he belief in one sustainable system of knowledge, cast first in theological terms and later on in secular philosophy and sciences (human and natural sciences, nomothetic and ideographic sciences, as Wilhem Dilthey distinguishes the “science of the spirit” from hard sciences), is pernicious to the wellbeing of the human species and to the life of the planet. Such a system of knowledge referred to here as the “Western code,” serves not all humanity, but only a small portion of it that benefits from the belief that in terms of epistemology there is only one game in town. The “code” has been preserved in the security box since the Renaissance. Diverse knowledge has been generated from that secret code in six European modern or imperial languages: Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, German and English (2011:xii).

This belief is a secret, it is hidden in a security box. Linda Alcoff is correct to suggest that “colonial ideologies remain strongly influential of new discourses and new theories even in the contemporary moment” (2013:58). The cunning antic of Eurocentric knowledge is the coding of one sustainable system of knowledge to maintain the superiority of one race, a hidden code in a security

box. The battle for BTL is to crack the code, to descend into, and beyond its security box.

We must address ‘apostasy,’ a challenge to black religiosity to achieve this, in the 21st century manifest in black proximity to whiteness and the white power structure. In our recent visit to Khayelitsha, holding a conversation in *ekasie* on Cone’s memory, one participant described life in the township as hell. The struggle against nihilism according to Cornel West comprised networks of communal and family support against “institutions that create a seductive way of life” (2011:26). This must be understood as the struggle of the soul because “nihilism is a disease of the soul” (p.29). Township life, residential alienation exposes blacks to institutions that create a seductive way of life and destroys networks and communal support in the face of this onslaught.

Clodovis Boff is correct when he argues that “liberation that does not have a transcendent perspective ends up becoming enslavement” (1987:100). Following on Boff’s assertion, black faith should be the power to prevent political alienation and pietistic slumber from arresting comprehensive liberation of black people in trust with a transcendent perspective, *God of the Oppressed*. Following Terry Eagleton, BTL changes the paraphernalia of religion and as black religion, it is a religion of “the murdered, transfigured body of Jesus” (2009:20). Black faith or religion or better, religiosity is solidarity with the *anawim*, the destitute and the dispossessed. Eagleton explains:

The *anawim*, in Pauline phrase, are the shit of the earth — the scum and refuse of society who constitute the cornerstone of the new forms of human life known as the kingdom of God. Jesus himself is consistently presented as their representative. His death and descent into hell is a voyage into madness, terror, absurdity, and self-dispossession, since only a revolution that cuts that deep can answer to our dismal condition (2009:23).

New Blood Rivers are set on the banks of seduction what is now crustal clear in our democracy in South Africa, in our universities, in churches: apostasy against the faith of the anawin. To crack the Western code is thus inevitably to relate consciousness with faith, faith and ideology and to embrace the spirit breathed by the rupture between the boundaries of *Saturday* and *Sunday* religions.

6. Un-Concluding Remarks

Cone wrote: “I write because writing is the way I fight. Teaching is the way I resist, doing what I can to subvert white supremacy.” We began by employing an imagery of war, the ‘Blood River’ serving as a heuristic device, yes, because this war is not merely rhetorical, but glaringly real too. There is a deep *umkondo* of whiteness about the

shifting of the banks of the 'Blood River.' D.F. Malan's speech tacitly gives us flashlights of the capacity of the white power structure to plan. The current contestation, the battle for economic liberation in South Africa was ostensibly predicted if not projected and planned for seventy years ago. What we see today might be the effects of the 'New Blood River' enunciated a long time ago. To struggle against such a structure of oppression is no simple battle, nor is it a battle that simply could be waged without spiritual capital. To win this war repeating what Cone's legacy is might be tantamount to hanging Cone on the lynching tree of supersessionism, a *Sunday* religiosity that will keep Cone and blacks in slumber. There are at least three cardinal arsenals we might overlook at our own peril along the banks of the 'New Blood Rivers.' First, the explosive, volcanic turning to political conversion to exorcise racism from the open plains of our battle for authority and dignity no longer requires *residence* in the Western world and its history but a *dwelling* in all spheres of black life, the innermost coals of living out black faith. This is how the coalition and consensus with the white world might come to an end. Second, BTL has to fiercely address the challenge of defective consciousness is the plains of the 'New Blood River.' Black 'apostasy' is a harrowing sign of a deep need for politics of conversion and the dismantlement of pietistic politics of slumber among the oppressed. Third, the ghettoization of black knowledge and thus black epistemologies is violence BTL will continue to respect at its own peril. Last, to crack the "Western code," is inevitable a battle we cannot wage without persistence, consistent obstinacy with intellectual depth in our writing, teaching and preaching to sustain our faith in James Cone's *mkhondo*.

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