

James H. Cone and Political Theology in IR: A Conversation

Abstract:

This thesis seeks to mobilise the work of theologian James H. Cone as an intervention into discussions of political theology and ontology in International Relations. Christian theology is increasingly drawn upon to inform and enliven multiple meta-theoretical discussions in International Relations, such as ethics and metaphysics. Engaging primarily with white European and American traditions of theology risks an impoverished understanding of the wide array of Christian traditions. The thesis broadens the scope of the 'theological turn' in IR by substantively engaging with a key figure of the Black Liberation Theology movement in the United States, James Cone. Cone is offered as a political thinker whose theological corpus offers multiple productive encounters with influential works of political ontology and political theology, particularly regarding questions of the political impact of theology, and theological grounding of questions of ethical or ontological universality. Closely following Cone's theological reasoning opens significant questions about the importance of debates about Christianity's central figure and their competing mobilisation as the grounding of theological, and subsequently, secular, universality. It is thus argued that central to Christian political theology are questions about the impact of Christ's conceptual *abstraction* from a historically situated Jesus. This process of abstraction authorises a two-part reflex that is familiar in Christianity: the supersession of the Jews as God's chosen people, and the supersession of any bounded particularity *at all*, through which Christianity becomes a universal offer of salvation. This thesis thus draws out Christian Supersessionism and identifies its manifestation in influential sites of theological and philosophical thought, revealing the depth of the theological problem to which Cone's theology responds. Directing attention towards the persistent problem of supersessionism, and its intricate involvement with the production of both much anti-Semitism, as well as a theologically rooted white supremacy, reveals the radical potential of Cone's theological work.

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	5
Introduction	6
Thesis Argument and Road Map.....	17
Chapter 1: Three themes in political metaphysics: Philosophy/Theology, Universality/Particularity, Concreteness/Abstraction.....	28
The Continuity Between Theology and Philosophy	33
From Intellectual History to Political Theology.....	37
Postmodern Theology: John Milbank	41
The Problem of Abstraction in Political Ontology.....	52
Rehabilitating Universality: The Void.....	56
Rehabilitating Universality: St Paul the Apostle	59
Fidelity to an Infinite Demand: Pauline Weakness	63
Depoliticised Metaphysics: Re-politicising ontology	68
Conclusion.....	73
Chapter 2: James Cone: A Theological Introduction.....	77
Part 1: Black Theology and Black Power (1969), and A Black Theology of Liberation (1970)	80
<i>Black Power</i>	82
<i>The Gospel and Revelation</i>	82
<i>God and the Human Being</i>	86
<i>Jesus and the World</i>	90
<i>The End: Eschatology</i>	92
<i>In sum</i>	94
Part 2. The Spirituals and the Blues (1972), and God of the Oppressed (1975)	95
<i>The Spirituals and the Blues (1972)</i>	97
<i>God and Jesus in the Black Spirituals</i>	100
<i>Transcendence and Eschatology</i>	101
<i>The Blues</i>	103
<i>God of the Oppressed (1975)</i>	104
<i>The Black Experience as a Theological Source</i>	104
<i>The Meaning of Liberation</i>	110
<i>Suffering (or: Theodicy, again)</i>	111
<i>Violence</i>	113
<i>In sum</i>	114
Conclusion.....	117
Chapter 3: Reading Between the Lines: White Theology.....	119

The Origins of Black Liberation Theology	120
The Two Meanings of White Theology	123
White Theology as a sociological critique.....	128
White Theology as a theological critique.....	131
John Milbank’s Ontology of Harmony	134
Love and Harmony in Political Theology.....	139
Conclusion.....	143
Chapter 4: Concrete Divinity: Ontology, Ethics, Politics	146
Social Weightlessness Revisited.....	154
On Badiou and Cone	156
Cone and Paipais.....	160
Concrete Universality.....	163
Theological Concreteness	168
Ontological Blackness	171
Conclusion.....	174
Chapter 5: Supersessionism in Christian theology	177
Christian Supersessionism at a Glance	184
Superseding Judaism to become God’s New Israel	185
Early Christianity ‘against the Jews’: <i>Adversus Judaeos</i>	189
Supersession-Universality.....	193
Origen of Alexandria	195
St Augustine of Hippo	197
Martin Luther.....	200
Karl Barth	204
Conclusion.....	208
Chapter 6: Christian Supersessionism in Modern Philosophy.....	211
Immanuel Kant.....	215
<i>J. Kameron Carter’s account of supersessionism in Kant</i>	218
Martin Heidegger, <i>Being and Time</i> —a summary.....	226
<i>Care</i>	228
<i>Being-fallen</i>	229
<i>Being Authentically, or Being-towards-death</i>	230
Heidegger and Christian Supersessionism	233
<i>Heidegger and the ‘Christian problem’</i>	237
In Conclusion.....	243
Conclusion	245

Bibliography 269

Acknowledgements

This PhD thesis could not have been conceived or completed without the advice, assistance, friendship and encouragement of many people, some of whom are acknowledged here. Firstly, Mustapha Kamal Pasha has been a caring and challenging supervisor and mentor, closely advising and encouraging me as I navigated the troublesome intersection of theology and politics. Milja Kurki, too, has provided crucial advice, encouragement, and questioning that kept me tethered to the realities of this task. Without their help who knows where I would have drifted off to. Their attentive listening to my thoughts, and reading of my writing, has sharpened and pushed my work far beyond what I thought possible, and I am enriched and rewarded by their care.

Writing this thesis has sometimes been a lonely experience, and many friends have made it both possible and enjoyable. I hope the friendships made in and through Aberystwyth's International Politics Department will remain when this thesis is long forgotten: Emma Kast, Duncan Fuller, Tom Vaughan, Suzanne Klein Schaarsberg, Tim van Veen, Karijn van den Berg, Marcello de Souza, Krishna Monthathip, Toni Čerkez, Philip Conway, Nick Morgan, and Joe Thurgate, I thank you all, amongst all the others who know who they are. The steady wisdom and knowing smiles of Florian Edelmann, Katharina Höne, Sam Saville and Bongo always came as welcome and calming reassurance. My family, too, have encouraged and congratulated me at every step. Finally, my partner Katarina Kušić has supported me throughout the whole process, playing a multitude of roles. To her I am deeply grateful.

Introduction

The metaphysical is of deep concern for International Relations (IR), a field constitutively organised around competing metaphysical conceptions of what ‘the international’ is, upon what authority sovereignty is established, or from whence order is derived.¹ Beyond the search for the roots of IRs core concepts, the metaphysical is also a realm of creative and generative discussion in which new frameworks are explored. Under the vocabulary of cosmology, ontology or pluriversality, the metaphysical has in recent years been increasingly and variously engaged, contributing rich frameworks to our understanding of the political.² Alongside increased interest in these fields, we have also seen growing attention paid to another realm of metaphysics: the theological. However, in a field that broadly operates with an assumption of secularity, the route (back) to the theological is slightly more circuitous than the route to, for example, ontology.

After growing study on the ‘return of religion’ in IR³ gave way to the introduction of direct questions about secularity,⁴ the frame of the post-secular has become a core feature of IR thinking.⁵ Discussions of post-secularity in IR have drawn upon wider literature in the humanities, and it is thus a field with important and cross disciplinary connections, exceeding the strict paradigmatic and disciplinary frames of IR thinking.⁶ More recently, interest in the

¹ Rengger, N. J., *International Relations, Political Theory and the Problem of Order: Beyond International Relations Theory?* (London: Routledge, 1999); Schmitt, C., *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty, 1922* (University of Chicago Press, 2010); Wight, C., *Agents, Structures and International Relations: Politics as Ontology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Bain, W., *Political Theology of International Order* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

² Kurki, M., *International Relations in a Relational Universe* (Oxford University Press, 2020); Prozorov, S., *Ontology and World Politics: Void Universalism I* (Routledge, 2013); Prozorov, S., *Theory of the Political Subject: Void Universalism II* (Routledge, 2013); Blaney, D. and Tickner, A., ‘Worlding, Ontological Politics and the Possibility of a Decolonial IR’, *Millennium* 45, no. 3 (2017): 1–19; Querejazu, A., ‘Encountering the Pluriverse: Looking for Alternatives in Other Worlds’, *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 59, no. 2 (2016).

³ In both international relations as a worldly phenomenon, and International Relations as an academic field of study. Petito, F. and Hatzopoulos, P., eds., *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Fox, J. and Sandler, S., *Bringing Religion Into International Relations* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2006); Snyder, J., ed., *Religion and International Relations Theory* (Columbia University Press, 2011).

⁴ Hurd, E. S., *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁵ Mavelli, L., ed., *Towards a Postsecular International Politics: New Forms of Community, Identity, and Power* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015); Wilson, E. K., *After Secularism: Rethinking Religion in Global Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Pabst, A., ‘The Secularism of Post-Secularity: Religion, Realism, and the Revival of Grand Theory in IR’, *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 5 (2012): 995–1017; Pasha, M. K., *Islam and International Relations: Fractured Worlds* (Routledge, 2017).

⁶ Connolly, W. E., *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Blond, P., *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (Routledge, 2002); Asad, T., *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 2003); Taylor, C., *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007).

post-secular has given rise to direct (re)engagement with theology within IR.⁷ The growing field which I shall call political theology in IR is initiated by two distinct rationales. The first, following wider works in the humanities engaged in deep intellectual history,⁸ seeks to identify the inheritance of theological ideas and questions in the figures and traditions who are casually assumed to be operating, after the European Enlightenment, in a new realm of secularity. This intellectual-historical project has most recently been driven in IR by the works of Seán Molloy and William Bain, on the theological in Kant's thought most relevant for IR, and the theological roots of the idea of international order.⁹ Whilst Molloy and Bain focus on Kant and Hobbes respectively, two pillars of the European tradition of political philosophy, there has also been study of the theological underpinnings of thinkers more distinctly located in IR, particularly early Realists who often understood themselves as Christian Realists. Nicolas Guilhot, for example, argues that early realists of IR such as Morgenthau and Niebuhr were beholden to a the deeply conservative thought of the infamous German Jurist, political theologian, and Nazi Carl Schmitt.¹⁰ The Augustinian Protestant neo-orthodoxy that they professed may be, Guilhot writes, "the tree that hides the Teutonic forest."¹¹ This interpretation is partially refuted by Vassilios Paipais, who reminds us that the theological tradition of Protestant neo-orthodoxy which was so important to Niebuhr and Morgenthau is a genuine inheritor of Augustine's refutations of both Gnosticism and Pelagianism, and so cannot be reduced to repeating Schmitt's political theology.¹² Indeed, Nicholas Rengger offers an account of modern anti-Pelagianism in a whole swathe of IR and political theorists.¹³ IR thinkers are deeply indebted to, and indeed located within, theological concepts, paradigms,

⁷ Rengger, N. J., 'On Theology and International Relations: World Politics beyond the Empty Sky', *International Relations* 27, no. 2 (1 June 2013): 141–57.

⁸ Gillespie, M. A., *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (University of Chicago Press, 2008); Gregory, B. S., *The Unintended Reformation* (Harvard University Press, 2012); Harrison, P., *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); Bain, W., ed., *Medieval Foundations of International Relations* (Routledge, 2016); Kantorowicz, E. H., *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁹ Molloy, S., *Kant's International Relations: The Political Theology of Perpetual Peace* (University of Michigan Press, 2017); Bain, W., *Political Theology of International Order*.

¹⁰ Guilhot, N., 'American Katechon: When Political Theology Became International Relations Theory', *Constellations* 17, no. 2 (2010): 224–53.

¹¹ Guilhot, N., 226.

¹² Paipais, V., 'Overcoming "Gnosticism"? Realism as Political Theology', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 29, no. 4 (2016): 1603–23.

¹³ Rengger, N. J., *The Anti-Pelagian Imagination in Political Theory and International Relations: Dealing in Darkness* (Routledge, 2017).

and problematics. The intellectual-historical project of political theology in IR is engaged in sustained study of these very underpinnings.

These accounts build a picture of the role of theology in multiple paradigms of IR thought. Political theology in IR is not, however, only an intellectual-historical discussion, and it has a second, more generative strand. Perhaps the clearest text which articulates the ground upon which the second project of political theology in IR stands is *Theology and Social Theory* by John Milbank. Milbank argues that secular reason, from liberalism to postmodern nihilism, fail to escape the theological: at the metaphysical level, they all engage in making deeply theological claims.¹⁴ Milbank's persuasive argument brings theology and secular thought closer together, and on the question of metaphysics it places them on a level playing field. Put more simply, John Caputo writes that philosophy and theology "make claim to much the same turf".¹⁵ Recognition of the overlap between 'secular' metaphysics and theology prepares the ground for a re-engagement with theology from within fields beholden to a secular frame.

Whilst not necessarily finding authorisation in Milbank's argument alone, a corresponding movement has taken place in political theology in IR. Questions of deep import for IR as a whole, over ethical universality or particularity, or theoretical abstraction and concreteness, are being approached in this field through the deep resources of theological thought. Resisting entrapment in the secular allows us to approach these themes in a way which challenges certain aporias and assumptions of modernity.¹⁶ Projects which attempt to re-imagine the political by re-engaging with the theological are widespread in continental philosophy.¹⁷ Either through the philosophical re-engagement with theology, or with theologians themselves, political theology in IR represents the rehabilitation of the theological as a resource for questions of the ethical, the political, and the metaphysical.

¹⁴ Milbank, J., *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (John Wiley & Sons, 1990).

¹⁵ Caputo, J. D., *Philosophy and Theology* (Abingdon Press, 2006), 16.

¹⁶ Paipais, V., 'Introduction: Religion or Theology? (Re)Introducing Political Theology into the Study of World Politics', in *Theology and World Politics: Metaphysics, Genealogies, Political Theologies*, ed. Paipais, V. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 7.

¹⁷ Badiou, A., *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford University Press, 1997); Žižek, S., *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (MIT Press, 2003); Critchley, S., *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (Verso Books, 2012); Agamben, G., *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* (Stanford University Press, 2011).

Recent years have seen a proliferation of contributions to the second, generative strand of political theology in IR. For example, a recent special issue on Reinhold Niebuhr (a huge figure for realism in IR) has explored the import of his Christian Realism for ethical questions of pacifism and interventionism, and his changing perspective on these throughout his career.¹⁸ Previously, in a 2016 special issue that represented the first consolidated collection of works on an explicitly characterised political theology in IR, Caron Gentry discusses the tensions between the Christian Realism of Niebuhr and Feminist Christian Realism to affirm love as a theological virtue with deep relevance for international politics.¹⁹ A more recent work, *Wrestling with God*, examines the 'ethical precarity' of multiple religious actors in international politics, arguing against conceiving of theology as a source of dogma but as a framework that must be negotiated with in praxis.²⁰ In a chapter in the first edited volume on political theology in IR, Lianne Hartnett discusses the political theology of love that can be found in multiple ground-breaking sites of revolutionary political action.²¹

Questions that overlay political theology also overlay many works of political ontology. Both fields are deeply interested in the political ramifications of metaphysical structures, and of the potential of the metaphysical for re-energising conceptions of politics and the political. To this extent, the term ontotheology may depict well the overlap between these fields. For example, Sergei Prozorov's recent *Void Universalism* project makes claim to the highest metaphysical realm, asserting its emptiness to derive political axioms from it. Whilst Prozorov stays well away from any explicitly theological vocabulary, his concern with rehabilitating universally applicable axioms is shared by many theologians who see in appeals to God the only referent that exceeds bounded human cultures. Prozorov's project in particular shows how works of (explicitly secular, that is, philosophical) ontology overlap with concerns for the derivation of political axioms from newly re-engaged theological sources. Vassilios Paipais'

¹⁸ Clinton, D., 'Reinhold Niebuhr: The Law of Love and the Omnipresence of Power', *Journal of International Political Theory* 17, no. 2 (1 June 2021): 139–50; Moses, J., 'A Niebuhrian Pacifism for an Imperfect World', *Journal of International Political Theory* 17, no. 2 (1 June 2021): 169–84; Paipais, V., 'Reinhold Niebuhr and the Christian Realist Pendulum', *Journal of International Political Theory* 17, no. 2 (10 December 2020): 185–202.

¹⁹ Gentry, C. E., 'Anxiety Politics: Creativity and Feminist Christian Realism', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22, no. 2 (20 September 2016): 389–412, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-017-0097-x>.

²⁰ Lynch, C., *Wrestling with God: Ethical Precarity in Christianity and International Relations*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

²¹ Hartnett, L., 'Love as a Practice of Peace: The Political Theologies of Tolstoy, Gandhi and King', in *Theology and World Politics: Metaphysics, Genealogies, Political Theologies*, ed. Paipais, V. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 265–88.

monograph, *Political Ontology and International Political Thought*, while concerned with political ontologies rather than philosophies, closes by pointing to the theological as a potential site of deep inspiration for overcoming the depoliticisation that is endemic in political ontologies. Both of these works will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 1, as part of a wider discussion of the themes that are of core concern for political theology in IR.

Political theology as a field of thought distinct from political theology in IR has its foundational myth in the work of German jurist and conservative Catholic theologian Carl Schmitt. Schmitt's text entitled *Political Theology* claims the theological origins of modern secular concepts of the state and sovereignty.²² Whilst Schmitt has been a crucial interlocutor for many in political theology and post-secular philosophy, the contemporary turn to political theology in IR resists falling singularly into his orbit. Benno Teschke has called recent proliferations of discussions *Schmittiana*, and whilst Schmitt is a central figure for political theology writ-large, it is to the benefit of political theology in IR to retain its pluralistic and multi-varied terrain of discussion. As we shall discuss in Chapter 1, the conservatism latent in Schmitt's political theology is itself contestable on theological grounds, and the association between the concepts of Christianity and the structures of a political sovereign is far from straightforward, either theologically or historically. This is contested notably by Eric Peterson, who insists that the doctrine of the Trinity makes of Christianity a religion that cannot authorise a divine monarch that rules in the image of a monotheistic God. Beyond Peterson's critique of Schmitt and divine monarchy in general, political theology is being engaged in IR to enliven discussions far beyond the authorisation of sovereignty.

Political theology in IR (following the field of IR as a whole) has, however, mostly remained bounded in a Christian and Euro-American canon of thought. As a field it is beginning to challenge the dominance of these traditions. For example, Mustapha Kamal Pasha has deeply engaged with the thought of Twentieth Century Islamic thinker Sayyid Qutb to challenge both Western and secularist conceptions of sovereignty.²³ In the same edited volume on political theology, we find a discussion of the relevance of Mādhyamaka Buddhism to relational

²² Schmitt, C., *Political Theology*.

²³ Pasha, M. K., 'Political Theology and Sovereignty: Sayyid Qutb in Our Times', in *Theology and World Politics: Metaphysics, Genealogies, Political Theologies*, ed. Paipais, V. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 157–79; Pasha, M. K., 'Political Theology and Sovereignty: Sayyid Qutb in Our Times', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22, no. 2 (20 September 2016): 346–63.

cosmologies that can go beyond a secular/post-secular binary.²⁴ These works build on a growing number of works not explicitly located within political theology in IR, but which combine post-secular and post-western imperatives to explore widely for sites upon which to build political projects which exceed the European and Christian biases of IR. The work of Giorgio Shani is a crucial example of this, engaging with the Islamic conception of the Umma and the Sikh Khalsa Panth to explore the possibilities of non-Western cosmopolitanisms.²⁵ More recently, Shani has argued that ‘post-Western IR’ should be understood as primarily concerning inter-*cosmological* relations.²⁶ The theological and the cosmological are thus growing apace even outside an explicitly articulated field of political theology in IR.

Mustapha Kamal Pasha, in a recent article, argued that race and religion are intricately linked, and it is to the detriment of scholars of religion or race to fail to thoroughly engage with one another.²⁷ One work in IR which brings together the themes of divinity with anti-racist politics is *The Black Pacific* by Robbie Shilliam.²⁸ Shilliam identifies cosmological connections between the African diaspora (particularly black power politics and the Rastafari tradition) and anti-colonial activism in Aotearoa. A primary success of Shilliam’s work is the identification of deep cosmological connections between movements, connections that are not mediated by or routed through the European or North American core of international relations. Race and religion are thus deeply connected by their mutual production in the forging of the modern world, but also in the potential of the theological to authorise and inspire worldly and spiritual *redemption* from the dehumanisations and colonisations of colonial modernity.

Calls to move beyond the Euro-American bias of IR have become a familiar feature of critical discussions in the field of IR.²⁹ For many, who hope that some thought system will permit a radical transcendence of all that we find discomfiting about the North Atlantic canon of

²⁴ Brincat, S., ‘The Cosmology of Mādhyamaka Buddhism and Its World of Deep Relationalism’, in *Theology and World Politics: Metaphysics, Genealogies, Political Theologies*, ed. Paipais, V. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 105–28.

²⁵ Shani, G., ‘Toward a Post-Western IR: The Umma, Khalsa Panth, and Critical International Relations Theory’, *International Studies Review* 10, no. 4 (1 December 2008): 722–34.

²⁶ Shani, G., ‘IR as Inter-Cosmological Relations?’, *International Politics Reviews*, 19 July 2021.

²⁷ Pasha, M. K., ‘Religion and the Fabrication of Race’, *Millennium* 45, no. 3 (2017): 312–34.

²⁸ Shilliam, R., *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

²⁹ Shilliam, R., *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010); Tickner, A. and Blaney, D., eds., *Thinking International Relations Differently* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013).

imperial Christianity (or imperial secularised Christianity), this conjures up hopes for a highly exoticized and dichotomised 'total other' thought-system that departs from the Western, the imperial, or the patriarchal. In other words, what is hoped for is a site of innocence, untainted by a quest for dominance, and in particular that of the period of formal European colonialism, the afterglow (or informalisation) of which still fundamentally shapes very global and very local political and social relations.³⁰

The search for innocent sites upon which to rebuild political concepts betrays at least the following two myths: Firstly, it betrays an ongoing attachment to a European, or Euro-American, exceptionalism in which all (or much) that is Euro-American is corrupted, and so its perfect opposite must be *at least potentially* innocent. The idealised total-other to the West is not considered valuable in and for itself, but is considered valuable insofar as it can be instrumentalized to stage a critique, or construct an alternative, which remains fundamentally of and for the West. As bell hooks articulates: "Certainly from the standpoint of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, the hope is that desires for the "primitive" or fantasies about the Other can be continually exploited, and that such exploitation will occur in a manner that reinscribes and maintains the *status quo*."³¹ A corollary danger of this narrative of difference only existing *between* the 'west' and the 'non-west' is the adoption of a notion of Western homogeneity which is implicitly predicated on a pre-existing myth of a racially culturally 'pure Europe.' This myth has been, and continues to be, attempted to be realised by the most visible and the most hidden homogenisations, expulsions, and exterminations.

Secondly, the search for innocence betrays a Eurocentric appropriation of 'the international', in that 'the international', or the 'internationally inter-connected' world, is considered to be primarily the North Atlantic world *outside of which* exist 'undiscovered' concepts which enjoy an unbroken connection with a pre-colonial or non-imperial past. Since the energetic capital and missionary expansions of the period of European colonialism, the global transfer of ideas and worldviews has accelerated, but this phenomenon is not new. Recent historical work

³⁰ This is particularly visible in contemporary patterns of migration and governmental responses to them. Isakjee, A. et al., 'Liberal Violence and the Racial Borders of the European Union', *Antipode* 52, no. 6 (2020): 1751–73; Mayblin, L. and Turner, J., *Migration Studies and Colonialism* (Wiley, 2021). See also Vieira, M., 'The Decolonial Subject and the Problem of Non-Western Authenticity', *Postcolonial Studies* 22, no. 2 (2019): 150–67; Fonseca, M., 'Global IR and Western Dominance: Moving Forward or Eurocentric Entrapment?', *Millennium* 48, no. 1 (2019): 45–59.

³¹ hooks, b., *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (South End Press, 1992), 22.

does much to remind us of global interconnections and flows of capital, products, and ideas for millennia, during which Western Europe was deemed by the civilised world an uninteresting backwater.³²

This thesis begins from a basic assumption that radical challenges to the received canon of political thought are not only found in an imagined ‘outside’ of the North Atlantic world and its various cultural, social and religious signifiers. When the ‘bad, corrupted West’, ‘pure, innocent non-West’ dichotomy is problematised (but not forgotten, for it reminds us of the recent history that has fundamentally shaped, and continues to shape global dynamics of hard, soft, and financial power), we can find radical challenges to political conceptions that are articulated partially from ‘within’ the thought-world which the West *has come to claim as its own*, but which historically has not exclusively been, and again is becoming, conceived and practiced firmly outside the Euro-American world: Christianity.

Religion in general, and Christianity in particular, enjoys a highly ambiguous role in the academic field of IR. As discussed above, it is gradually being shown to undergird huge swathes of the Euro-American canons of IR and political thought. This is not to mention the presence, in IR, of a variety of unspoken faith commitments and dogmas. As Mika Luoma-Aho reflects, the ‘political dogma’ of IR helps us to deal with the unsettling realisation that the world is a ‘complex, frightening, and uncertain’ place, giving the ability to replace “complexity with simplicity, uncertainty with conviction.” To this extent, academic explanatory narratives often respond to a deep sense of bewilderment, settling our worries that the world is unfathomable, and life unpredictable.³³ Despite the ostensible secularity of the field of IR, and despite the apparent success within it of either enlightenment liberalism, some variety of Nietzschean nihilism, or a pragmatic political realism, there too we find a dazzling array of Gods. The myth of secularity is being revealed as masking an ever-present ‘God-function’ that seems almost ubiquitous at the metaphysical level in political thought. Despite our secular age, Gods abound.

³² Frankopan, P., *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2016); Hobson, J. M., *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³³ Luoma-Aho, M., *God and International Relations: Christian Theology and World Politics*, 1st edition (New York ; London: Continuum, 2012), 91–92.

Regarding Christianity and Christian thought as a dogma that only manifests as legitimation for European supremacy³⁴ risks missing the multiple and varied sites and moments at which it has been mobilised as a framework of radical political empowerment. Whilst it has often been the religion of empires, Christianity has often provided a liberatory political framework for populations and communities disempowered and dehumanised by the violence, exploitation and abuse of the colonial-modern world which has often crafted Christianity into a tool of domination. Such religious and theological movements can be of keen interest to scholars of political theology in IR for two reasons: Firstly, they represent deeply political engagements and creative re-imaginings (or rearticulations) of Christian theology, and so must be a central site of engagement for any area of study which seeks to draw out and investigate the political potential of Christian theology. Secondly they invite us to challenge the historical-civilisational myths that cast Christianity in general and Christian theology in particular as the cultural property and governmental tool of the internal and external colonial projects of Europe and the West. These myths are entertained at the expense of a fuller (and more historically accurate) understanding of Christianity as a phenomenon that exceeds our contemporary vocabulary of the West and the Rest.

It is into this fray that this thesis introduces the black liberation theology of James H. Cone. Cone's early life and theological education took place in the late Jim Crow era and during the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States. He is widely accredited with having instigated the academic field of black theology in the United States. His theological project and reflections are inseparable from this political movement and the deep fissures in Atlantic colonial-modernity that are revealed and indicated by the fraught and aggressive relations of a white majority population towards people of African heritage.

Cone was born in Arkansas in 1938 and, along with his family, was a member of the African Methodist Episcopal [AME] Church in the United States, which was founded in 1787. In an

³⁴ Such a view is built on unnecessary simplification and generalisation, allowing one author to claim that "Christianity was well suited to serve as a religious justification for colonialism... because at its core Christian theology is a colonialist theology. Colonialism stands at the heart of Christianity's origins within Judaism." Whilst there is much truth to this argument, to cast Christianity as an essentially colonial phenomenon requires ignoring a great deal of nuance and contestation that recent scholarship identifies in Christianity's earliest days and relegating Christian movements that stand explicitly against colonial impulses. Heschel, S., 'Theology as a Vision for Colonialism: From Supersessionism to Dejudaization in German Protestantism', in *Germany's Colonial Pasts*, ed. Ames, E. et al. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 148.

event of symbolic significance, the AME Church was founded when the black contingent of the St George's Methodist Church, Philadelphia, were 'ordered' to occupy seats at the *back* of a 'newly constructed gallery.' Upon protest, the white trustees attempted to eject the the AME's soon-to-be founder, Richard Allen, along with others, resulting in a mass walk-out of the entire black contingent. This manifest example of a Christian upholding of white supremacist views resulted in the raising of sufficient donations for the building of a new church 'of their own': "Allen, as "the first proposer of the African church," was selected to turn the first spade. "Here," he concluded, "was the beginning and rise of the first African Church in America.""³⁵

The African Methodist Episcopal Church, like many others in the United States, became an institution of resistance to the dehumanisations of a manifestly white supremacist society. Key in this resistance was the self-humanisation of those enslaved in the system of chattel slavery that treated slaves as mere objects to be owned. As Dwight N. Hopkins writes, it is on this religious tradition that black theology drew. Just as Cone draws upon the songs and sermons of the African American religious tradition in the United States to ground his theology of liberation in that tradition, as we shall see in Chapter 2, Hopkins accounts that the 'major model' of what would later become an explicitly articulated 'black theology' was drawn from the period of slavery. In particular, figures like Nat Turner, a Baptist preacher, "...heard voices from the spirit of liberation that led him to use Christianity for insurrection against the slave system in Virginia in the year 1831."³⁶ Harriet Tubman, too, returned from her escape to freedom from a Maryland plantation, 'compelled by the spirit of liberation' to help free other slaves: "Because of these successful secret acts, she is hailed as the Moses of the Underground Railroad (that is, the clandestine paths from the slave South to the North and Canada)."³⁷ As we shall see, in a precursor to a key element of Cone's black theology of liberation, a bishop of the AME church, Henry McNeil Turner, declared that God was a

³⁵ Campbell, J. T., *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 10; Allen, R., *The Life, Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen: To Which Is Annexed the Rise and Progress of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America. Containing a Narrative of the Yellow Fever in the Year of Our Lord, 1793, with an Address to the People of Color in the United States* (Lee & Yeocum, 1888); Dickerson, D. C., *The African Methodist Episcopal Church: A History* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

³⁶ Hopkins, D. N., *Heart and Head: Black Theology—Past, Present, and Future* (Springer, 2002), 30.

³⁷ Hopkins, D. N., 30.

Negro.³⁸ These figures show the tradition of liberative Christianity, centred around black life and survival, in which Cone was brought up.

The imperatives to action spoken of here (the liberative spirit and the identification of the Christian God as a Negro) are metaphysical claims that produce, and are intended to produce, deep political commitments. African American Christianity, and the academic field of black theology, are systems of praxis and theological reflection that are deeply connected to, and interwoven with, the demands for dignity, humanisation, and radical legal, social, and political change that is often associated with a secularised story of the civil rights movement or a white-saviour myth of the abolition of slavery. It entails claiming divine authorisation for self-liberation, a liberation realised in worldly, material terms.

Purely academic reflections of politics and metaphysics (whether secular or theological) are often restricted by a separation between theory and praxis, where an excellently articulated theory is hoped to spring forth a concordant praxis, or a principle of praxis is transcendentalised posthumously into a metaphysical theory.³⁹ As we shall see, in Cone's work we find a close negotiation of the tensions between worldly commitments and divine promise. It therefore represents a political theology that is deeply entrenched in a particular political struggle, but which at the same time exceeds this struggle in particular in laying claim to the nature of the meaning of Christianity. The image of Christ which Cone presents as a core symbol of the contemporary meaning of a liberative Christianity invites us into the discussion of the roots of Cone's deepest target: theological abstraction. This theological abstraction will be connected with what will be termed Christian Supersessionism, and will be presented as a key stake for modern political thought.

This thesis seeks to tackle the disconnection between political theology in IR and particular theological movements which are rooted in concrete political struggles. Cone's work is presented as a political theology grounded in a particular struggle, which at the same time exceeds and speaks beyond that struggle. It is from a grounded, concrete location that the deepest theological questions can be approached in a way that bears political meaning for real struggles. Just as Cone took theological abstraction to task, this thesis identifies the

³⁸ Hopkins, D. N., 30.

³⁹ Paipais, V., *Political Ontology and International Political Thought: Voiding a Pluralist World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); McNay, L., *The Misguided Search for the Political* (John Wiley & Sons, 2014).

political *and* theological relevance of concrete frames of reference, *through which* we can speak of things beyond the physical world.

Thesis Argument and Road Map

The central argument of this thesis is that the theological project of James Cone raises serious questions and offers piercing insights for the current move towards political theology in IR. Firstly, the critique Cone sustains against what he calls ‘white theology’ offers oblique insight into the political implications of certain abstract theological virtues. White theology, as Cone mobilises it, has two dimensions, with a sociological and a theological thrust respectively, and Cone’s identification and critique of both can fruitfully call political theology to closer reflection of its own sociological biases and political implications. The second way in which Cone mobilises ‘white theology’ is of greater interest, drawing our attention to the questions of whether abstractly articulated virtues like love and harmony, foregrounded at the expense of others like liberation and justice, adequately pay witness to a Christian message that is identified as pivoting upon a promise of liberation. White theology thus identifies a latent conservatism in abstract theological virtues, inviting us to inspect the political implications of certain virtuous theological abstractions.

Secondly, the dialectic Cone constructs between spirituality and materiality establishes in his work a political theological project that sees constant negotiation between spiritual imperatives and material realities as central to calling upon metaphysical authorisation whilst remaining grounded in a particular, worldly, political struggle. This aspect of his work can be directly mobilised into discussions about what it means for a theology (or indeed an ontology) to remain or be *political*. What this conversation reveals is that Cone *does* what many thinkers of political theology *advocate*, in presenting a fully-fledged theology that is deeply grounded, indeed utterly inseparable from, a particular political movement. This highlights the need for political theology to engage deeply with already-existent theologies that may have already responded to the limits of modernity, and depoliticised metaphysics, in deeply creative and political ways.

Thirdly, Cone’s insistence on ‘theological concreteness’ bears witness to a theme in Christianity that has deep import for any attempt to draw upon theology as a potential source for enlivening contemporary political discussions. At the root of the theological abstraction that Cone rejects is the theme of Christian Supersessionism. This is identifiable as a key

problem for both political theology, and for secular fields of political thought that are increasingly found to lie upon theological bedrock. Moving beyond Cone's explicit discussions, the thesis will offer a discussion of Christian Supersessionism with specific reference to key thinkers of both Christian theology (Paul, Origen, Augustine, Luther, Barth) and two titans of contemporary philosophy (Kant and Heidegger). This short discussion of Christian Supersessionism will bring to light a core tension at the heart of Christian universalism: its claim to universality is built upon its claim to particularity, to its distinction vis-à-vis Judaism. This means that Christian theology must aspire to access the universal *via* the particular. Concrete, worldly struggles must be the starting point of any Christian theological questions about the connection and inseparability between theology and politics. Abstract engagements limit the potential of theological reflection because they fail to make deep and meaningful connections between the ultimate and lived realities. This is a core limitation of academic political theology, in both IR and beyond: a hesitation to plant a firm flag in real, worldly situations, preferring instead the general, the abstract, and the theoretical.

To make this argument this thesis has six chapters. In Chapter 1, it will introduce and discuss a thematic collection of nine works which give voice to the intersecting themes through which Cone's work can be introduced into the growing field of political theology in international relations. Those texts discussed are not restricted to strict works of IR because the themes that lie at the core of the questions of political theology overlay, and are sometimes best discussed through, works outside IR.

This chapter opens with two intellectual-historical works which detail the indebtedness of contemporary political thought to theology, those being Michael Gillespie's *The Theological Origins of Modernity*,⁴⁰ and Seán Molloy's *Kant's International Relations: The Political Theology of Perpetual Peace*.⁴¹ From here we move to an account of a key tension in political theology: the extent to which theological notions are merely identified with the exercise of sovereign power, and the extent to which they are more appropriately mobilised 'from below' the corridors of power. Here we discuss György Geréby's discussion of the tensions between Carl Schmitt and Erik Peterson.⁴² Following Geréby's discussion we move to a work of

⁴⁰ Gillespie, M. A., *The Theological Origins of Modernity*.

⁴¹ Molloy, S., *Kant's International Relations*.

⁴² Geréby, G., 'Political Theology versus Theological Politics: Erik Peterson and Carl Schmitt', *New German Critique* 35, no. 3 (105) (1 November 2008): 7–33.

contemporary political theology, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* by John Milbank,⁴³ which offers both a diagnosis of the ills of secular reason as an aberrant theology of the worship of pure power, followed by a prognosis suggested in the form of a more peaceable counter-kingdom marked by an ontology of harmony. From Milbank's heavily abstract work we move to a critique of such abstraction in the form of Lois McNay's *The Misguided Search for the Political*,⁴⁴ in which the author criticises the over-abstraction of political ontologies which become severed from any account of sociological experience. From here we look at Sergei Prozorov's *Void Universalism* project which explicitly invests in abstraction in the hopes of reaching what can be verified from any particular world as universal axioms.⁴⁵ Following a foray into the void we turn back to the explicitly theological (at least in source material), to another work which tries to rehabilitate universality, this time with an explicitly anti-capitalist aim, that being Alain Badiou's *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*.⁴⁶ After Badiou we will discuss the *Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* by Simon Critchley, who calls for an infinite demand of faith even for those who do not subscribe to religion, using a Heideggerian reading of Paul to elaborate what he finds infinitely demanding.⁴⁷ Finally, we look at the work of Vassilios Paipais, *Political Ontology and International Political Thought: Voiding a Pluralist World*,⁴⁸ in which the problem of depoliticisation is identified in multiple (foundationalist, anti-foundationalist, and post-foundationalist) approaches to political ontology. For Paipais, one particular example of religious iconography can tentatively offer inspiration for a political subjectivity that weaves power and powerlessness, eternity and contingency.

What holds these thinkers together is a stickly constellation of questions and problems around the foundation of the political that can be identified in relation to three axes: philosophy-theology, universality-particularity, abstraction-concreteness. In Chapter 1 this thesis shows how the question of a fundamental foundation of politics, or political thought, is variously located in relation to these three dimensions. Political theology in IR is a pluralistic field and as such its concerns overlap with fields outside IR, necessitating engagement with

⁴³ Milbank, J., *Theology and Social Theory*.

⁴⁴ McNay, L., *The Misguided Search for the Political*.

⁴⁵ Prozorov, S., *Ontology and World Politics*; Prozorov, S., *Theory of the Political Subject*.

⁴⁶ Badiou, A., *Saint Paul*.

⁴⁷ Critchley, S., *The Faith of the Faithless*.

⁴⁸ Paipais, V., *Political Ontology and International Political Thought*.

this wide spectrum of thinkers that speak to themes that overlap and overlay between political theology, political ontology and political theory.

Philosophy and theology (or, the secular and the sacral) are considered here not as great opposites where one represents reason and the other dogma. Rather, many hold philosophy and theology to be intrinsically linked, as Gillespie, Molloy, and Milbank all argue. For Badiou, Critchley, and Paipais, the theological is seen as a tradition that can be fruitfully tapped to aid in overcoming entrenched impasses of political theory. The nihilism of postmodernity lamented by Milbank reigns supreme, but it delivers us not to a liberated condition of an unmediated experience of reality, but simply leaves us groping for new myths that deliver us from the emptiness and violence of a nihilist world.

Universality is actively pursued, here by Prozorov and Badiou. Badiou hopes that Paul's universality can help to establish a framework that can slow the expansion of global capital. For Prozorov, a non-hegemonic universality is pursued in order to settle the disputes over political axioms that arise in a world made up of many worlds. As Paipais warns, however, a commitment to an unmovable, final, or universal foundation risks a depoliticisation at the most fundamental level, because it purports to finally settle the continual tension between the ontic and the ontological. For Paipais, a *political* ontology is one that claims an unmovable ontological foundation with a knowing smile, with recognition of its own fundamental moveability. The extent to which Badiou and Prozorov fall foul of Paipais' critique is somewhat ambiguous, as both are post-foundational thinkers for whom a conception of the void at the heart of metaphysics is crucial. In a desire to move away from deep abstractions that result in the disconnect between the ontological and the ontic, Lois McNay criticises the commitment to ontological abstraction in discussions of political ontology. She argues that this abstraction produces a 'social weightlessness' in which the thinker forgets both their own social and cultural location, and detaches ontology from the political worlds purported to be of the utmost concern. As we shall see, these themes are engaged in a variety of ways by the texts that we shall discuss.

These three dimensions, philosophy-theology, universality-particularity, and concreteness-abstraction, are in no way parallel or exclusive. However, they name three tensions into which this thesis inserts itself. Cone's theology insists on the necessity of concrete theological speech, deeply entrenched in a particular political struggle but also speaking beyond that

struggle. It is thus a concrete theology which problematises a clean universality/particularity dichotomy because it separates universality from abstraction and particularity from concreteness, making universal claims from a particular location through deep engagement with a concrete political movement. Despite speaking *of* things held to be eternal, for Cone Christian theology is fundamentally situated in the human lives out of which it is articulated. Cone does not approach theoretical problems in abstract discussions, but rather responds to them in the fray of a particular political movement. In paying close attention to Cone's negotiation of these dimensions of political thought, we see the potential for addressing these impasses whilst retaining fidelity to particular political struggles: Cone addresses himself to the 'eternal' without abandoning the every-day, and casts Christianity as a story of concrete liberation of particular oppressed peoples, in contrast to the dominant Pauline-universalist vision in which Christ becomes the *abstracted* basis of universal salvation. Crucially, Cone's project is not an *advocacy* of this constellation of concrete political commitment and theological reflection, but a prophetic performance of the deep import that theology has for political problems.

Chapter 2 will substantively introduce the work of James Cone. The bulk of Cone's unique theology was published in his first four books: *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969), *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970), *The Spirituals and the Blues* (1972), and *God of the Oppressed* (1975). The first is his most polemical, and the first two draw most substantively on the sources and vocabulary of his formal seminary education. As a student of mainstream Protestant thought in the US in middle of the twentieth century, Cone is steeped in the German Protestant tradition of thinkers like Karl Barth who he is significantly influenced by, and Paul Tillich, along with Rudolf Bultmann and Jürgen Moltmann, and the French existentialist tradition, with thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ From Barth Cone understands the centrality of a concrete understanding of Jesus Christ for Christian theology, and with Tillich and Bultmann he articulated his understanding of the existential import of this concrete understanding of Christ. Moltmann, famously associated with Hope Theology, allowed Cone to deeply express his rejection of a hope that focused on redemption from suffering in the next life. Through the French Existentialists Cone articulated an understanding of the existence of black people in the United States as absurd, and as demanding rebellion. Barth, K, *Church Dogmatics* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1994); Tillich, P., *Systematic Theology, Volume 1*. (University of Chicago Press, 2012); Bultmann, R., *Theology of the New Testament* (Baylor University Press, 2007); Moltmann, J., *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (Fortress Press, 1993); Sartre, J-P., *Theology of the Absurd* (Newman Press, 1965); Camus, A., *The Rebel* (Penguin Books Limited, 2013).

Cone is subsequently criticised by his peers in the emerging field of black theology for an overreliance on European and White American sources of thought. In his third and fourth books, he tries to establish and deepen the theological program of his first two books, but focusing on two sources: Biblical exegesis, and the songs, sermons, stories and traditions of the black religious experience in the United States. By this he hoped to establish that his black theology was not simply derived from Euro-American political theology and philosophy. These four books represent the substantive sources of Cone's theological project. The division between references to the work of Euro-American philosophers and protestant theologians and Biblical exegesis and expressions of the black religious experience in the United States already well depict the worlds which Cone straddles. This chapter will take the form of introductory overview of Cone's main works, a necessary step in establishing an archive of the relevance of his thought to wider discussions of political theology in IR. Chapters 3 and 4 will then draw out key themes in Cone's work that can be put into meaningful dialogue with works and issues of political theology engaged with in the contemporary field of IR.

Chapter 3 will focus on a term in Cone's work which at times signified two different things. This is what Cone calls 'white theology'. White theology is used by Cone in a multitude of ways, often as a polemical tool of grouping 'mainstream theology' under a rubric by which it can be already understood as complicit in the establishment and maintenance of a white supremacist society.

In the first sense, white theology is a device used to name the fact that mainstream theology, and particularly so in the years of Cone's seminary studies in the early 1960s, was (as it remains) overwhelmingly dominated by white American men of European descent. This sociological fact is in no small part responsible for the habit of mainstream American theology to respond only to the cultural, social, and political questions of its dominant and majority white populace. This leads to the neglect of explicit theological engagements with questions concerning racism, segregation, lynching, racial dehumanisation, or white supremacy (or any other experience not of the dominant class who occupy the academy). Cone levelled this criticism in the late 1960s at his fellow academic theologians, and it is now one that is levelled widely across the academy, not least in the field of IR which is overwhelmingly produced in and responds to the questions of the knowledge centres of the North Atlantic world. White theology, however, also signifies a second critique. In its second sense, white theology

signifies interpretations of Christianity in which it is understood as essentially identified with dominant classes of society or the state (this was Schmitt's form of political theology which Peterson criticised, as Geréby argues), or as a private faith that does not radically call into question power imbalances in society, inviting the faithful to quietly suffer social injustices in order to demonstrate their piety and identification with Jesus' suffering on the cross, for which they can expect reward in the afterlife. In this sense, white theology is a theologically expressed conservatism which can be used to shore up status-quo imbalances of power, both by pacifying the dominated and by identifying social structures with theological virtues.

This chapter will argue that both senses of the term 'white theology' can be brought to discussions of political theology in IR. The application of the first, though not in theological terms, is growing apace in the field already. The second sense in which 'white theology' is used also requires deep attention. Here it will discuss two contributors to political theology to warn against a latent theological conservatism and pacification which does not challenge, but can even shore up the interests of, dominant groups. Here it will discuss John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory*,⁵⁰ and more briefly, Lianne Hartnett's recent essay on Reinhold Niebuhr and the political potential of love.⁵¹ Hartnett's paper represents part of the political theology interest in Reinhold Niebuhr taking place in IR, whilst Milbank is a core proponent of the widely influential Radical Orthodoxy movement. This chapter thus shows the relevance of Cone's rejection of white theology outside his immediate context, in that it draws our attention to the political implications of more abstractly articulated theological arguments. White theology in Cone's work thus provides a concept that can be used as a platform of political critique for political theology in IR. From here we move from reading Cone as providing the basis of critique that can be 'applied' elsewhere, to the deeper workings of his own political theology.

In Chapter 4 I will continue to draw out and conceptualise key features of Cone's theology. Here the focus will be the dialectic in his work between the material and the spiritual. This dimension of Cone's work speaks to the theme of universality/particularity identified in Chapter 1 as of core interest for works of political theology, but also for many works of

⁵⁰ Milbank, J., *Theology and Social Theory*.

⁵¹ Hartnett, L., "'The Impossible Possibility of Love': Reinhold Niebuhr's Thought on Racial Justice", *Journal of International Political Theory* 17, no. 2 (13 December 2020): 151–68.

political ontology. As Paipais laments of depoliticised ontologies, Cone does not subordinate either the ontic or the ontological to the other in the hopes of establishing a final and firm grounding for theology. As a Christian he holds that the Bible is central, but he recognises (particularly in his early work) the need for it to be interpreted *for* particular social and political struggles and situations. The social reality of racism and the struggle for dignity in a white supremacist society is *as important* to Cone as the imperatives of Christianity's founding text and traditions. Here Cone's work is put into conversation with that of Paipais, as well as Badiou and McNay, and the concrete universality of Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek. This aspect of Cone's work soon draws us beyond his own explicit vocabulary and into the indispensable recent work of J. Kameron Carter. Here we move from the tension between universality and particularity to that between abstraction and concreteness. For theologian J. Kameron Carter, Cone's 'underdeveloped apex' is the theme of 'theological concreteness' in which the central insistences of Christianity can be drawn from a concrete understanding of its central figure: Jesus. Cone persistently writes that Christ's contemporary meaning in society must be understood in relation to the oppression of black people to the point that Christ, and the experience of the Cross, must be identified in the lynching of black people. Inseparable from the political-theological declaration of the meaning of Christianity in the claim that 'Christ is black', then, is a concrete understanding of 'Jesus' Jewishness'. For Cone, Christ can only be identified with particular peoples and their struggles, when Jesus is concretely understood as a particular person of his time, as a committed member of an ethno-religious particularity that laboured under Imperial Rome and called itself to a higher purpose and meaning than that prescribed for it by worldly powers.

Here we begin to scratch away at the aspects of Cone's theology that have serious import for political theology. Alongside the manifest complicity of mainstream Christianity in the west with the modern discourse of racism, Cone also reacts to the implications of a problem of theological abstraction, most fundamentally the abstraction of a disembodied 'Christ-principle' by which Christianity becomes a potentially universal message of salvation offered by a commitment of faith alone. This will be discussed under the term Christian Supersessionism. Here we will detail two dimensions of Christian Supersessionism. The first involves the de-Judaizing of Christianity, and the second the detachment of Christianity from

any worldly community at all, to become a universal promise of salvation realized through faith alone.

Christian Supersessionism points to a paradox surrounding Christian universality, which is that its universality is at the same time its claim to particularity vis-à-vis Judaism. This paradox, and the continued existence of Judaism as 'preventing' Christianity from becoming truly universal, undergirds the aggressivity of universal claims when met with that which is deemed unable to transcend its particularity. For many Christian theologians and philosophers those that will remain 'merely particular' are the Jews, whilst Christianity offers a frame of universality. This relation between Christianity and Judaism would provide the basis for a racialised hierarchy between the universal and rational white races, and those considered trapped in their ethnic or racial particularity. For Cone implicitly, and for Carter explicitly, supersessionist abstraction leads both to the privatisation of religion through which the injunctions of 'white theology' become possible, but also the entrenchment of a Christian anti-Semitism which in time would become the basis of the establishment of the modern idea of race. Cone already performs the subversion of an abstracted-universal Christianity in his restoration of the meaning of divine liberation to particular groups and particular struggles at particular moments, and his subversion of Christian Supersessionism is one route among countless others.

Chapter 5 will directly address Christian Supersessionism and demonstrate its persistence in key sites of Christian theology. The purpose of this chapter will be naming and explicating this dimension of Christian theology, covering its key features and depicting its consistent, even central, location as a key tenet of Christianity. Here it will look at relevant interpretations of the Apostle Paul, the early Christian *Adversus Judaeos* literature, and the work of Origen of Alexandria, Augustine, Martin Luther, and Karl Barth, who himself had such an influence on Cone. This list is of course in no way exhaustive, and is a list which has deeper import for the Protestant world than for other Christianities. Nevertheless, these thinkers have wide impact in Christianity, and the point here is to indicate the persistent presence of a supersessionist strain in influential Christian thought.

Any sustained discussion of supersessionism, even one as brief as this, opens huge questions which this thesis tries to tease out. The primary question that a sustained account of supersessionism raises is: is Christian theology already, or inherently, implicated in a politics

of supremacy from its very beginning? Cone's thought raises this question but also already responds to it, re-casting Christianity against its supersessionist tendencies. Naming and identifying supersessionism (and its logics) is a deeply necessary process for the academic fields of political theology and beyond, in both the secular and the sacral thought-worlds.

In order to demonstrate that the problem of supersessionism is not just located in the abstract depths of Christian theology and unlikely to have implication for the ostensibly secular fields of political philosophy and theory, Chapter 6 will discuss Christian Supersessionism with regard to two titans of philosophy: Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger. Discussion of Kant will springboard from the work of Carter, for whom the anti-Judaic impulses of supersessionism (discussed in Chapter 5) will become intricately written into key aspects of Kant's thought. With a little help from the recent work of Seán Molloy we will see how closely the problem of supersessionism rubs up against the field of IR. More ambiguously, as is characteristic of such an ambiguous thinker (despite his claims to establish concrete foundations), the theme of supersessionism will be discussed in relation to he who looms over much political theology and ontology, as discussed in Chapter 1: Martin Heidegger.

Whilst evidence of Heidegger's anti-Semitism can no longer be overlooked,⁵² this chapter will demonstrate the ambiguity of Heidegger with regards to Christian Supersessionism. Despite everything which evidences his extant and manifest contempt of Judaism, his fundamental ontology in its endless cycle of ontic and ontological engagement can actually be read *against* supersessionist logics. That is, Heidegger insists on recognising that we cannot transcend our particular existences, our particular contexts. Heidegger's legacy remains stained but ambiguous, as so many take his philosophy away from its author and context (against Heidegger's own advice). Despite this, it is undoubtable that Heidegger is deeply implicated in questions of anti-Semitism more explicitly, and supersessionism more abstractly. This chapter argues that he thus provides questionable ground upon which to discuss theologies which go beyond Christian Supersessionism and its more anti-Semitic impulses.

⁵² Björk, M and Svenungsson, J., eds., *Heidegger's Black Notebooks and the Future of Theology* (Springer, 2017); Di Cesare, D. E., *Heidegger and the Jews: The Black Notebooks* (John Wiley & Sons, 2018).

The aim of this thesis is thus to approach the field of political theology in IR from the thought of James Cone. Cone is a theologian who lies outside the dominant canon of Western theological and philosophical thought. Part of the intention behind the unusual pattern of this thesis is to resist a reification of Cone's thought as constitutively 'different' to mainstream theology, a reification which solidifies his outsider status and implicitly casts his thought as an unusual particularity, the end of a street, rather than as defining the crossroads at which theological questions intersect with political problematics. Thinkers who engage, or who are taken to engage, in abstract discussions are usually accorded the privilege of defining such crossroads, with examples of 'contextual theology' as speaking only to their particular time and place. Here Cone is taken to be speaking to the heart of the very question of politics and Christian theology, identifying theological abstraction as a problem which lies at the heart of numerous influential theological and philosophical figures. Whilst this thesis specifically speaks to the field of political theology in IR, the identification of supersessionism as a core problematic of multiple influential thinkers in both theology and philosophy opens out its implications for a much wider set of fields, including political theory, political ontology, and IR theory writ large, especially the area of cosmopolitanism that draws upon Kant. It is my hope that the engagement of this thesis will lead to a much wider assessment of supersessionism in these fields, with Cone's project ever present as a concretely political guide in attempting to 'do' theology alongside a critical awareness of the features and fractures of supersessionism.

The original contribution of this thesis is in bringing the black liberation theology of James H. Cone to bear upon political theology in IR. Cone is a Christian thinker located outside the Euro-American canon of thought which provides the core of political theology's points of reference. Beyond this, the thesis offers through Cone a critique of abstraction in political metaphysics, and an account of the roots of Christianity's core abstraction, disturbing the assumed identity between abstraction and claims to universality. Finally, it stages this discussion from the work of a thinker deeply rooted in a particular struggle against racialised dehumanisation, thus maintaining a deep connection with the ontical world of political domination. As so many thinkers advocate, and so few perform, in Cone the ultimate is approached through commitment to a particular political movement, the insights of which launch us into a deeper understanding of the interconnections between, and inseparability of, theology and politics.

**Chapter 1: Three themes in political metaphysics: Philosophy/Theology,
Universality/Particularity, Concreteness/Abstraction**

This chapter will identify three themes of crucial importance for the growing field of political theology in IR. These three themes identify the conceptual terrain upon which a conversation between political theology in IR and the theological project of James Cone can meaningfully take place. These themes will be introduced via nine texts. Each of these texts approaches and addresses some form of tension or continuity between philosophy and theology, universality and particularity, concreteness and abstraction. These themes indicate the sorts of questions and problems which will be approached through Cone's work in this thesis.

My argument in this chapter is that the field of political theology in IR is deeply concerned with various tensions, distinctions, and associations between philosophy and theology, between universality and particularity, and between concreteness and abstraction. These three themes clarify subtly different, but interrelated questions approached in political theology in IR upon which Cone's thought can be brought to bear. The field of political theology spans intellectual historical as well as more theological and philosophical questions, and these three themes can help us to identify core problems to which it speaks.

We will begin with two texts which are part of the growing number of works which dispel doubt about the deep theological inheritances of philosophical thought, and which cast a critical eye upon the strict distinction between theology and philosophy. This intellectual historical project addresses the distinction between theology and philosophy and draws our attention to the myriad ways in which the relationship is one of continuity. The first is a thoroughgoing intellectual-historical account of *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, by Michael Gillespie.¹ Gillespie's account is invaluable for its depiction of modernity as fundamentally responding to a Fourteenth Century theological debate between scholasticism and nominalism, opened up by Franciscan theologians such as William of Ockham. The second, more directly located in IR, is Seán Molloy's account of the theological nature of the political thought of Immanuel Kant.² As Molloy shows us, Kant's works held most dear to International Relations are intrinsically linked to theological notions of providence and anthropology, and so cannot be understood outside the canon of Christian thought. Works

¹ Gillespie, M. A., *The Theological Origins of Modernity*.

² Molloy, S., *Kant's International Relations*.

such as Gillespie's in the humanities more widely, and Molloy's in IR specifically, work to narrow the chasm that sometimes seems to exist between theology and ostensibly secular fields that look towards philosophy rather than towards theology. The narrowing of this gap between theology and philosophy makes sensible intervening into the field of IR from a theological standpoint. Just as political theory draws deeply upon philosophy, identifying the theological inheritances of philosophy enables reading the work of contemporary theologians as just as meaningful for a field, such as IR, which operates upon an assumed secularity. Gillespie's and Molloy's work, then, is offered here as preparing the ground for theological engagements with IR, in modifying how we understand the possibility of a secular realm of thought distinguishable from theological concepts and questions.

Whilst discussions of political theology often open with the work of German jurist Carl Schmitt, I prefer György Geréby's account of Schmitt in relation to his critic Erik Peterson. This critical discussion of Schmitt, and his introduction alongside the work of Peterson, provides a more detailed landscape for current interest in political theology, than a direct discussion of Schmitt's political theology.³ Indeed, Peterson's criticism of Schmitt's association of the theological with state politics as inauthentic seems more appropriate to the array of activities and 'levels' of activity that are cast as 'political' in current scholarship: 'the political' is no longer simply what happens at a state level, and importantly for Peterson, what happens at a state level cannot be cast as theological in an authentically 'Christian' sense. Despite Schmitt's obvious advocacy of 'concrete political action' understood as sovereign decisionism that gives the sovereign its political character, Geréby's account of the tension between Schmitt and Peterson as revolving around an identification of divinity with sovereign power shows the implication of Schmitt and Peterson in the question of political entities laying claim to, or understanding themselves in the image of, a universal power. Whilst Schmitt advocates the sovereign replication of divine decisionism, Peterson argues that the authentic Christian community can make no pretence to power and must patiently labour from below without any attempt at transcendence. This question of the extent to which Christian thought can be associated with the 'powers that be' is a crucial one for understanding its various mobilisations as the ground of political action, from positions of both power and weakness.

³ Geréby, G., 'Political Theology versus Theological Politics'.

Following the Schmitt-Peterson debate, I will look in slightly more depth at a work of political theology that transitions between the intellectual-historical (diagnostic) frame, into a generative frame of prognosis. In *Theology and Social Theory*,⁴ John Milbank provides a thorough take down of ostensibly secular social theory, making a similar argument to both Gillespie and Molloy: that secular social theory can only be properly understood as responding to, and thus as located within, theology. Milbank presents enlightenment liberalism, Marxism, positivism and nihilism as operating fundamentally at a theological level of non-provable *mythos*, which opens the door for the consideration of a counter-mythos, which he offers in the form of an Augustinian ontology of love. Milbank's text thus addresses the separation between philosophy and theology, employing an immanent mode of critique (rather than an intellectual-historical frame) to depict secular reason as dependent upon a core theological claim. Milbank's prognostic discussion of a counter-mythos, as shall be discussed at length in Chapter 3, also engages the territory of concreteness/abstraction, invoking abstract theological virtues in a manner that Cone is sharply critical of.

From here we will move away from the explicitly theological. The themes of concreteness/abstraction and universality/particularity are also of concern for many scholars of political ontology, and the following two works raise and address these themes in a fashion that has considerable overlap and import for the field of political theology.

Firstly, Lois McNay's *Misguided Search for the Political* argues that much democratic theory has retreated so far into 'theory', into a search for fundamental grounds, that it runs the risk of losing any political potency at all.⁵ McNay uses Bourdieu's vocabulary of social weightlessness to highlight the problem of theorists imagining themselves as able to eschew the worldly and locate or establish some ultimate ground, therein falling into a disconnected and depoliticised discussion of deeply abstracted ultimate grounds. McNay's work therefore casts in stark relief the problem of abstraction in political metaphysics, stating the need for metaphysics to be built not on *abstract*, but on *concrete* grounds.

Following McNay's concern with concreteness/abstraction, we will move to another work of political ontology that pushes at the boundaries surrounding the question of universality and

⁴ Milbank, J., *Theology and Social Theory*.

⁵ McNay, L., *The Misguided Search for the Political*.

particularity. Sergei Prozorov's *Void Universalism* project⁶ explicitly attempts to access the ultimate ground that McNay is cautious of, though he does not depict it as an Archimedean point upon which one can stand, but as an *emptiness* that exists beyond and between all the particular worlds that we inhabit. Prozorov deduces political, universal axioms directly from his explication of the void. These axioms are therefore taken to be universal but *not* hegemonic because they are not strictly drawn from a particular world, but from the void as such. Prozorov's project shows that the frame of universality is alive and well, and a great deal more sophisticated than might be imagined. Prozorov is keenly concerned with undermining the *hegemonic* universalisation of particular worlds, but as is perhaps unavoidable his discussion is steeped in a European philosophical particularity. This project, however, shows that universality is still an explicit aim of many concerned with imagining metaphysics for politics.

From here we return to a more theologically oriented response to the question of universality and particularity. Alain Badiou, in *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*⁷ looks not to a Heideggerian void to re-establish universalism but instead directly to the core of Christian universality, Saint Paul. For Badiou, Paul is a 'philosopher of the event' who holds much potential for the undoing of the expansion of global capitalism into the never-ending niche markets created by particular identities. Badiou's Paul teaches us that fidelity to a politically revolutionary event that brings about true equality involves turning away from all communitarian particularisms. Again, we see here that universality is a key concern of political theology. Badiou sees in Pauline Universalism the revolutionary potential to overcome all identarian distinctions, which in his account provide new spaces for capital to expand into. Badiou's engagement with St Paul as a thinker of universality pre-empts our discussion of the problem of Christian Supersessionism which will take place in Chapters 5 and 6, and indicates the contemporary relevance of drawing out Christian Supersessionism and putting it in conversation with contemporary rehabilitations of Paul. Suffice it to say, in Badiou the theological frame of universality is alive and well.

After Badiou's re-energisation of Pauline universalism I will discuss one work which also springs from the closing gap between philosophy and theology. Simon Critchley's *Faith of the*

⁶ Prozorov, S., *Ontology and World Politics*; Prozorov, S., *Theory of the Political Subject*.

⁷ Badiou, A., *Saint Paul*.

*Faithless*⁸ invokes a re-reading of Heidegger's Paul to advocate a theology of the 'wretched of the earth', in which a Pauline *weakness* can show the way to an authentic freedom. Whilst weakness appears to be a particular, worldly condition, its mobilisation as an abstraction betrays its universalising effect: in the abstract we can all be understood as weak. This levelling of humanity under theological virtues is a crucial problem for Cone, because in making weakness, or suffering, an ontological condition it obscures differentiation between sufferers. The invocation of theological abstractions, therefore, has effects in the world of political struggle because it opens the door to the absorption of vastly different experiences of suffering or weakness under a shared, universal condition defined by abstracted experiences.

Finally, we will look at a work which addresses the depoliticisation endemic to political ontologies in IR, an argument which pivots upon the identification of the subordination of either the ontological (which is often both universal and abstract) to the ontic (which is often predicated upon the particular or the concrete), or vice versa, in an attempt to establish 'final grounds' upon which to construct political thought. In *Political Ontology and International Political Thought*,⁹ Vassilios Paipais argues that foundational, anti-foundational, and post-foundational approaches to political ontology result in depoliticisation because they close the question of fundamental grounds with either a positive depiction of the ultimate ground *as* something fixedly particular, or its reflection in a totalising claim of the impossibility of ultimate grounds. Paipais depicts a political subjectivity that does not dispel *the political* from *politics*, by negotiating between the universal/abstract and the particular/concrete in a way that does not close or fix this very negotiation. For Paipais such an open negotiation between the ontological and the ontic is crucial for an ontology (and this thesis holds that the same argument goes for theology) to be *political*.

The tensions, and variously articulated relationships, between philosophy and theology, universality and particularity, and concreteness and abstraction thus point to crucial problematics for the field of political theology in IR. They represent the challenges around thinking theology alongside politics. The field of political theology holds that there is an important continuity between theological thought and our 'secular' age, to the extent that

⁸ Critchley, S., *The Faith of the Faithless*.

⁹ Paipais, V., *Political Ontology and International Political Thought*.

the divide between theology and philosophy can be productively traversed. This traverse spans both diagnostic and prognostic projects, seeking to both point to and remedy certain problems and tensions through engagement with theology and its influences and corollaries in the secular fields of thought.

The Continuity Between Theology and Philosophy

Political theology as a wider field beyond IR has, most often, its origin narrative in the work of Carl Schmitt, a Catholic theologian and German jurist who, it is told, coined the very term.¹⁰ I prefer, however, to begin with a broader and more recent narrative which connects modernity with theology through a more thorough intellectual history than did Schmitt. Schmitt is undoubtedly an indispensable figure, but in the wake of multiple accounts of the connection between contemporary political thought and the theological, other points of entry into political theology are available. Whilst Schmitt has been the central figure of political theology, including for early realists in International Relations, Vassilios Paipais argues that the narrative of Schmitt's centrality for the pragmatism of the neo-orthodox Protestant early IR realists, such as Reinhold Niebuhr, may be an over-stated connection.¹¹ Schmitt is therefore slowly being dethroned as the de facto starting point of any discussion of political theology in IR.

A significant work which draws out the theological background of the 'secular' European thought-world is Michael Allen Gillespie's *The Theological Origins of Modernity*. Gillespie argues that the nominalist revolution against medieval scholasticism, influenced heavily by Aristotle, begins the intellectual process through which such a thing as modernity slowly becomes conceivable: the twinkle in the eye of secular modernity's theological parentage. Nominalism forwarded two assertions, against scholasticism. Firstly, it asserted the omnipotence of God over and above any rules or limitations that humanity might imagine God to be bound to (such as goodness or predestination). Secondly, it asserted that such things as universals could not exist under an omnipotent God, because they would "constrain his omnipotence."¹² From this follows a conception of the radical individuality of all things, both human and natural.

¹⁰ Schmitt, C., *Political Theology*.

¹¹ Paipais, V., 'Overcoming "Gnosticism"?'

¹² Gillespie, M. A., *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, 22.

For Gillespie, theological humanism and the Reformation, which followed the nominalist revolution, were both attempts to overcome the ontological 'abyss' opened up by nominalism. The ontological triad of God, man, and nature, are organised differently by each in order to find a solid ground upon which to build an ostensibly stable foundation. To use Heideggerian vocabulary, as Gillespie does, both humanism and the Reformation "accepted the ontological individualism that nominalism proclaimed, but they differed fundamentally about whether man or God was ontically primary."¹³ Still operating ostensibly within the nominalist ontology of an omnipotent God and its ensuing individuality, modernity

"...was the consequence of the attempt to resolve this conflict by asserting the ontic priority not of man or God but of nature. As we will see, while this new naturalistic beginning helped to ameliorate the conflict, it could not eliminate the antagonism at its heart without eliminating either God or man. However, one cannot abandon God without turning man into a beast, and one cannot abandon man without falling into theological fanaticism."¹⁴

Gillespie's depiction of modernity as a response to the thirteenth century theological revolution of nominalism is a central work in understanding the political dimensions of theology as well as the theological inheritance of the modern, secular world. He traces the effects of the nominalist revolution through humanism and Luther's reformation to enlightenment thinkers who established the ontical primacy of "the mechanical motion of matter."¹⁵ Gillespie's argument draws to a close with the recognition that the antinomies of Immanuel Kant reveal the contradictions in modernity that suggest that the problem thrown up by nominalism has not yet been sufficiently solved.

"In other words, modern natural science, which analyzes all motion in terms of efficient causes, is unintelligible without a freely acting first cause such as God or man, but such causality through freedom, which is essential to morality, is incompatible with natural necessity. Freedom is thus both necessary to causality and incompatible with it. Kant recognized that if this conclusion were correct, the modern project was self-contradictory and that modern reason could give man neither the mastery of

¹³ Gillespie, M. A., 16.

¹⁴ Gillespie, M. A., 17.

¹⁵ Gillespie, M. A., 262.

nature nor the freedom that he so desired.”¹⁶ Therefore: “If the antinomy cannot be resolved, then it is difficult to see how the modern scientific and technological project that seeks to make man the master and possessor of nature can be compatible with a moral and political project that aims to realize and secure human freedom.”¹⁷

As Gillespie notes in his introduction, the horrors of the first half of the twentieth century exposed this contradiction beyond any doubt and was responded to by variously advocating a return to pre-modern virtues (Strauss, Arendt, Voegelin), an “exploration of post-modern seas”¹⁸ (Adorno, Derrida, Deleuze), or reinforcing the modern project with the argument that the horrors of totalitarianism were not at all modern.¹⁹ Gillespie writes that 9/11, in turn, has exposed the limits of this modern liberal consensus that declared ‘the end of history’ with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and so depicts a new age of crisis that is not at all unconnected from those metaphysical crises that have gone before it, since the origins of modernity are to be found deep in the nominalist revolution. Gillespie’s linking of the inheritances of modernity to older theological problematics is indispensable in drawing ‘secular modernity’ back into conversation with, and framing it in terms of, its theological backgrounds. These links between, and therein the re-linking of, the secular and the sacral explored by works such as Gillespie’s and others²⁰ make possible the conversation between Cone’s theology and fields of political thought in which the frame of secularity dominates. Gillespie’s account of the theological origins of modernity thus provides the background against which a re-engagement with theology becomes an essential task for contemporary scholarship.

Another work which follows a similar pattern, of revealing the dependence of contemporary thought upon theological concepts and questions, is Seán Molloy’s *Kant’s International Relations: The Political Theology of Perpetual Peace*. Molloy addresses the dependence of Kant’s thought on theological notions, such as divine providence, and relates the implications

¹⁶ Gillespie, M. A., 259.

¹⁷ Gillespie, M. A., 261.

¹⁸ Gillespie, M. A., 9.

¹⁹ Strauss, L., *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought* (SUNY Press, 2012); Arendt, H., *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1958); Voegelin, E., *Science, Politics and Gnosticism: Two Essays* (Simon and Schuster, 2012); Adorno, T. W., *Negative Dialectics*, 2nd edition (New York: Continuum, 1981); Derrida, J., *Writing and Difference*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2001); Deleuze, D., *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Patton, P., Revised ed. edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

²⁰ Similar recent works include: Gregory, B. S., *The Unintended Reformation*; Harrison, P., *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*.

of this for contemporary Kantianisms in IR. Molloy provides a robust account of the theological underpinnings of Kant's thought, particularly pertaining to those works most influential in the field of International Relations, such as *Toward Perpetual Peace*, and *Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent*. Molloy is clear to state the impact of his argument for contemporary thinkers in IR who operate within a Kantian frame. In his analysis, even those who 'remotely' cleave to Kant's project become implicated in the deeply theological dimensions of Kant's thought, and their refusal to address the theological underpinnings of Kant result in their inability to conceive, let alone escape, the theological, anthropological, and metaphysical strictures of his thought. As Molloy writes, "God is in the very grammar of DPT [Democratic Peace Theory] and cosmopolitan theories of IR... The cosmopolitan order is an attempted secularization of the idea of the New Jerusalem, and cosmopolitanism its faith."²¹ As we shall see when we discuss John Milbank's work, unwitting theological commitments which contain and entrap 'secular' thought within theological problematics that they remain unable to see, are a recurrent topic of works which seek to identify the theological genealogies of modernity.

Molloy points out that central to Kant's political thought is faith in an ordering being under whose imperatives the gap between imperfect human beings, and potentially perfect humanity, can be narrowed: "...without faith human beings are restricted to the status of political animals that cannot be expected to transcend or escape their environments. The problem is revealed to be anthropological, and the putative solution to be theological in nature."²² Molloy writes that the notion of divine providence, too, runs deeply and consistently throughout Kant's political writings. The result of this presence of theology in Kant, and absence of an account of the centrality of theology *to Kant* in Kantianism is, for Molloy, utterly fatal to the latter. Contemporary political Kantianisms such as the cosmopolitanism of figures like Charles Beitz and Thomas Pogge are, due to this theological aporia, conceptually 'at sea' without the ability (or will) to account for the theological ground upon which their thought is built.²³

²¹ Molloy, S., *Kant's International Relations*, 26.

²² Molloy, S., 20.

²³ See: Beitz, C. R., *The Idea of Human Rights* (Oxford University Press, 2011); Pogge, T., *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Polity, 2008).

Gillespie's and Molloy's are critical works for scholars of secular political thought to begin to understand the deep entanglements, and often utter reliance, of secular concepts and problems upon theological ideas and questions. Leaving Gillespie and Molloy's intellectual history projects, we move away from the strictly genealogical or intellectual-historical, towards a different, and more generative sort of engagement with theological work in the recent turn to theology. György Geréby discusses the tensions and differences between Carl Schmitt's 'Political Theology', in which theological concept-making follows the needs of the state, and Eric Peterson's 'Theological Politics', in which politics is only theological when it falls in line with higher demands for ethical existence. Investigating the political-ethical lessons that can be drawn from theology, rather than demonstrating how secular thought is dependent upon theological inheritances, is the way in which thinkers such as Milbank, Badiou, Critchley, and Paipais seek to contribute to Political Theology. It is important to distinguish these two types of work, intellectual history and generative political theology, because it is the latter to which this thesis primarily speaks.

From Intellectual History to Political Theology

The famous quote from Carl Schmitt's *Political Theology*, second only to its opening line on the sovereign nature of he who decides upon the exception,²⁴ states that:

“All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development- in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver- but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts. The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology. Only by being aware of this analogy can we appreciate the manner in which the philosophical ideas of the state developed in the last centuries.”²⁵

György Geréby articulates some important differences between Schmitt's political theology and the work of his brief friend, and thereafter critic, Erik Peterson.²⁶ For Schmitt the theology in political theology is, as he writes, a concern for sociological studies of the key concepts of

²⁴ Schmitt, C., *Political Theology*, 5.

²⁵ Schmitt, C., 36.

²⁶ Geréby, G., 'Political Theology versus Theological Politics'.

politics and the state, a kind of intellectual history that shows the dependence of secular concepts of the state upon theological concepts, therein revealing their 'true form'.²⁷ Peterson, on the other hand, as Geréby shows, argues that an analogy between theological and political sovereignty is not possible on multiple counts. Firstly, the theology of the Trinity reveals that the analogy between the sovereign God and the secular, singular sovereign (such as Hobbes' Leviathan and Schmitt's sovereign) is problematic because it interprets the Trinitarian divinity of Christianity as a straightforward monotheism and uses that misrepresentation as its image of divinity. Peterson objects to the suggestion that a 'monotheistic sovereignty' such as in Schmitt's depiction, is, or can be, derived from Christian theology.

Furthermore, the Christian community, as an eschatologically oriented group, must live in hope of the Kingdom of Heaven and not live comfortably in a state as though it has already come: "The fulfilment of the world is the final event that happens in the city of God, in the heavenly Jerusalem. Therefore the church must resist every other political power that would consider itself the final stage of development, an end of history."²⁸ Living in, or building, a secular state that operates as an analogy of the rule of God is deemed to be un-Christian. Peterson's objection to Schmitt's political theology is an objection to the reduction of the Trinity to a simple sovereign 'one-God' on the one hand, and an argument that even if constructing such a political theology were possible, it would be to constitute a state in which no honest Christian, who awaits the end times, could live.²⁹

In *Monotheism as a Political Problem*, Peterson argues that as Christianity expanded in the Roman Empire it adopted a Hellenised Jewish notion of divine monarchy which became bolstered as the Church encountered the pluralistic pagan political theology of the Roman Empire. This would become the Arianism that subordinates the Son to the Father and therein insists on the divine Monarchy (of the Father) and supports the 'sole sovereignty' of the Romans. Arianism is revealed for Peterson to be a *political* imperative, "a piece of

²⁷ In his *Political Theology*, he writes, for example: "What is relevant here is only the extent to which this connection [an analogical connection between theology and political thought] is appropriate for a sociology of juristic concepts." Schmitt, C., *Political Theology*, 37.

²⁸ Geréby, G., 'Political Theology versus Theological Politics', 27.

²⁹ Peterson, E., 'Monotheism as a Political Problem : A Contribution to the History of Political Theology in the Roman Empire (1935)', in *Theological Tractates* (Stanford University Press, 2011).

Reichspolitik”,³⁰ that would (despite being declared heretical at the Council of Nicea in 325CE) drive “the emperors to the side of the Arians... [and the Arians] to become the theologians of the Byzantine court.”³¹ The prioritisation of the Father as providing theological justification of Roman Imperialism is deeply challenged, for Peterson, by an ‘Orthodox Trinitarian doctrine’ which cannot produce or support a monotheistic monarchy. The doctrine of the Trinity is thus incompatible with divine Monarchy as a political theology, which for Peterson can only be rooted in ‘Judaism or paganism’.³² Monotheism as the political theological justification of divine monarchy is, for Peterson, extraneous to Christianity which has not a single God but a Triune God. Peterson invokes Celsus’ (a Second Century critic of Christianity) depiction of Christianity as a religion of revolt which is incompatible with the necessary paganism of the Roman Empire, but which also exceeds the political failures of Jewish monotheism.³³ Peterson’s account of Christian factionalism, and therefore its revolt against Roman Imperial paganism (which has space for many Gods) reads as a critique of metaphysical pluralism that eludes a totalising monarchical rule only at the last moment, in insisting on the Triune nature of the Christian God and so its theological incompatibility with a single ruler. Christianity therefore, for Peterson, cannot be the religion of empire in which national cults are permitted to govern or in which they are overcome by a single ruler who stands in for a single God head. Christianity stands ‘beyond Judaism and paganism’, offering a peace that cannot be won by an emperor but which “is solely a gift of him who “is higher than all understanding.””³⁴

Geréby’s account of Peterson’s objections to Schmitt’s political theology give greater texture to our understanding of just what contributions to ‘political theology’ (or, as Peterson would have it, theological politics) variously propose. Schmitt’s political theology is a conceptual history of sovereignty and related political notions, one which points to theology as the root system of these concepts. Secondly, it is a theological legitimation, or grounding, of political structures, that might better be articulated as a ‘state theology.’ Peterson objected to this co-optation of Christianity into a groundwork for contemporary statism, invoking the Orthodox

³⁰ Peterson, E., 102.

³¹ Peterson, E., 103.

³² Peterson, E., 104–5.

³³ Peterson, E., 88.

³⁴ Peterson, E., 105.

Doctrine of the Trinity as well as Augustine. The following quotation from Augustine's *Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus* is provided by Geréby:

“They do not inhabit cities of their own... They live in cities, be they Hellenic or Barbaric, as it is their lot... They live in their own cities, but as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under all the disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but every homeland is a foreign country...They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. Obedient to the laws, they yet live on a level that transcends the law.”³⁵

For Peterson, theology cannot be entrusted to the state or a worldly power, as the Christian must labour under hostile conditions rather than exert a monotheistic dominance, an empire which in its exertion of total power claims rule over eternity. The Church however, is not to go underground, or turn within and deny any and all worldly involvement: “For Peterson, the public representation of the eschatological kingdom of God requires rejecting any and every attempt to identify this kingdom with a secular empire.”³⁶ Geréby notes the ‘deep affinity’ between this transitory conception of the Church and Benjamin’s messianism, which has in recent years become a central theme in political theology.³⁷

Geréby’s distinction between Schmitt’s political theology and Peterson’s theological politics gives an important texture to the field of political theology, as many works show much more affinity with Peterson’s displeasure with the co-optation of theology by the state or its instrumentalization in the project of simply studying the state and secular political thought. In such projects there is often the implication that theological underpinnings are to be revealed in order to be purged so that secular thought can finally become properly ‘modern.’ This freezes theology in a distant past and overlooks the ways in which the theological world continues to be lived and produced, and the multiple sites and political moments in which political thought and theological thought inseparably overlap and cross germinate.

³⁵ Geréby, G., ‘Political Theology versus Theological Politics’, 28; Augustine, ‘The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus’, trans. Roberts, A. and Donaldson, J., accessed 26 November 2020, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/diognetus-roberts.html>.

³⁶ Geréby, G., ‘Political Theology versus Theological Politics’, 24.

³⁷ Geréby, G., 28–29.

Postmodern Theology: John Milbank

Milbank argues that there is not a significant departure between theology and secular reason (for example, enlightenment liberalism and postmodern nihilism), as secular reason both emerged from, and was only made thinkable due to, specific *theological* developments. Not only is secular reason a child of a particular theological aberration (the nominalist revolution), it also continues to fail to foreclose the theological as the fundamental negotiation of the various non-verifiable myths that authorise and undergird secular reason in its different guises.

Milbank demonstrates that currently influential nihilist ontology, represented most substantively in his treatment of the work of Martin Heidegger, makes little more than a faith-based claim to the 'ontology of violence' it advocates, an argument which authorises the reinstatement of the 'superiority' (encapsulated in the phrase – 'Queen of the Sciences') of theology as the site at which these self-consciously non-verifiable, quasi-religious and mythological ontological foundations are negotiated.

Having made this diagnosis, and having thereby demonstrated that the theological is a latent and fundamental element in all secular reason, he makes his prognosis to the problem. This is best summarised by what he originally intended to name what became the Radical Orthodoxy project³⁸ ('Postmodern Critical Augustinianism')³⁹ – and hinges upon the assertion that having demonstrated the religious or faith-based nature of a nihilist ontology of violence, we can choose, instead, to assert an ontology of peace. Having dispatched these pillars of the secular world, Milbank forwards his *alteras civitas* as a return from a nominalist, *Franciscan* world, to an *Augustinian* mythos of social harmony.⁴⁰

Liberalism and Theology

In explaining the link between theology and liberalism, Milbank's narrative is one of inheritance: various theological developments made the conception of a secular social space

³⁸ Milbank, J., Pickstock, C., and Ward, G., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (Psychology Press, 1999).

³⁹ Milbank, J., 'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism': A Short Summa in Forty Two Responses to Unasked Questions', *Modern Theology* 7, no. 3 (1991): 225–37.

⁴⁰ Elsewhere, Adrian Pabst has made a similar suggestion: "Against secular hegemony, whose origins, paradoxically, can be traced to late medieval Franciscan theology, I contend that the Dominican tradition offers conceptual resources to chart an alternative modernity." Pabst, A., 'International Relations and the "Modern" Middle Ages: Rival Theological Theorisations of International Order', in *Medieval Foundations of International Relations*, ed. Bain, W. (Routledge, 2016), 166.

possible, and were inherited directly into what we now think of as exclusively secular ideas: “This is the space in which there *can be* a ‘secular’, or secular knowledge of the secular – and it is just as fictional as all other human topographies.”⁴¹ For Milbank, in many aspects of secular modernity, the church did it first: “That it was first of all the church, the *sacerdotium*, rather than the *regnum*, which assumed traits of modern secularity – legal formalization, rational instrumentalization, sovereign rule, economic contractualism – ought to give us pause for thought.”⁴²

Milbank begins by stressing the invented nature of the notion of secular social space, and how that invention feeds into a politics of *dominium*: “For the *factum* (the made) to become identified with the secular, it was necessary that Adam’s *dominium* be redefined as power, property, active right, and absolute sovereignty, and that Adam’s personhood be collapsed into this redefined mastery that is uniquely ‘his own’.”⁴³ Along with the classical definition of *dominium* as the management of property, there persists in this “a more brutal and original *dominium*, the unrestricted lordship over what lies within one’s power – oneself, one’s children, land or slaves – in Roman private law.”⁴⁴ This latter, ‘brutal’ *dominium*, begins to take precedence in the middle ages and in the seventeenth century, and emerges in full force in what are often taken to be early secular works: “The political state, for the nominalist Hobbes, is only conceivable as an ‘Artificial Man’ (Leviathan) whose identity and reality are secured by an unrestricted right to preserve and control his own artificial body.”⁴⁵ For Milbank this (nominalist, as he names it) picture of the political state rests on an individualistic (contractual) account which has no space for *telos*, ‘collective making’, or a “genuinely social process”,⁴⁶ and that this exposes the problem with this more ‘brutal’ *dominium* which finds its way into political thought through these early, supposedly secular, texts such as Hobbes’ Leviathan: “It is in this inescapable imperative... that one discovers the kinship at root of modern absolutism with modern liberalism... a liberal peace requires a single undisputed power, but not necessarily a continued majority consensus, which may not be forthcoming.”⁴⁷

⁴¹ Milbank, J., *Theology and Social Theory*, 15.

⁴² Milbank, J., 16.

⁴³ Milbank, J., 12.

⁴⁴ Milbank, J., 12.

⁴⁵ Milbank, J., 13.

⁴⁶ Milbank, J., 13.

⁴⁷ Milbank, J., 13.

Milbank is thorough in the identification of arbitrary notions of transcendence and enchantment in Hobbes' work, as well as that of other early 'secular' political greats: "Hobbes's 'Leviathan' remains truly haunted by the 'Kingdom of the Fairies' who 'inhabite Darknesse Solidutes and Graves', because the latter's nominality echoes the nominality of Leviathan itself, and both 'engines of meaning' are equally arbitrary, although Hobbes' alone claims natural, subjective and even Biblical foundations."⁴⁸ In his text, both Machiavelli and early liberal political economists receive a similar treatment, and are depicted as in the end failing to escape the Christian theological frameworks outside of which we are so used to reading such works.

In Milbank's analysis, enlightenment liberalism is a heady mix of latent theological mistakes (the creation of a secular space of pure power, the emergence in this space of a liberal, and always possibly absolutist, state, the shoe-horning of virtue into a tragic politics of princely calculation) and the reformation individualism and theodicy of market driven liberal political economy. Milbank's refusal of these not-so secular political philosophies is certainly on theological grounds: he rejects the *dominium* and hard Protestant individualism from which they flower, favouring instead a more traditional, benevolent, communal, forgiving God from whom the nominalist revolution inspired by William of Ockham began to divert.⁴⁹

Postmodern Nihilism, or: the ontology of violence

The second target of Milbank's diagnosis which I will focus on is postmodern nihilism, which he takes to be the inevitable child of the enlightenment, birthed by a Nietzschean identification of exactly what is above: the latent theological underpinnings of liberalism, and the subsequent wholesale rejection of it. The representative of this large and varied corpus is Heidegger, and Milbank commits considerable space to dissecting and identifying the mythological underpinnings of Heidegger's 'ontology of violence.'

Central to Heidegger's ontology is the 'ontological difference', or: the separation between ontic (contingent, worldly) beings and ontological (transcendental, universal, primordial) Being.⁵⁰ In Heidegger's ontology, Being as a purely ontological entity is always 'thrown' into a contingent, worldly, particular state of being, and these two conditions, for Heidegger, should

⁴⁸ Milbank, J., 20.

⁴⁹ Gillespie, M. A., *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, 22.

⁵⁰ Milbank, J., *Theology and Social Theory*, 298.

never be attempted to be reconciled, to “reduce the mystery of the ontological difference”.⁵¹ The reason for the rejection of reconciliation between the ontic and the ontological is that Heidegger is seeking to ‘expunge’ metaphysics and onto-theology by demonstrating that attempts to deal with metaphysics that obscure the ontological difference, the fundamental fact that ontical beings *are never* simply ontological Being free of any particularity, are complicit in the forgetfulness, and thus the inauthenticity, of “the average ‘ontical’ attitude.”⁵² This acceptance of radical contingency, an acceptance of “the *infinite* possibility of things being other than they are”,⁵³ is what leads to authentic existence in which knowledge can only be grounded upon “the irreducible questionableness of the relation of beings to Being.”⁵⁴ What this does is remove the grounds of traditional metaphysics: at the same time you cannot know Being, because the ontological difference shows that it is irreconcilable and should remain, finally, a mystery. Further, it is the ongoing error of metaphysics to attempt to ‘know’ Being by simply projecting contingent being onto it, again due to the ontological difference: Being is not being and beings cannot fully know Being because they cannot relinquish themselves from their particularity and contingency as beings—and metaphysics should accept this fundamental contingency and stop trying to make this leap.

Milbank’s contention is that since beings are *always* committed to some historical tradition, some particularity, this surely suggests that:

“we must always see our preferred finite stance... as a particularly privileged key to Being itself. A ‘metacritical’ perspective... makes a constitutive and not merely regulative metaphysics an inescapable aspect of our historical destiny. We *have* to say ‘how things are in general’, to be able to say anything at all.”⁵⁵

This seems to suggest that Milbank takes the ontological difference even more seriously than Heidegger, as he grounds even his own perspective on Being as fundamentally inscribed by the particular tradition in which his being is located. This leads Milbank to suggest that Heidegger does not simply give an overview of the formal relationship between Being and

⁵¹ Milbank, J., 298.

⁵² Milbank, J., 297.

⁵³ Milbank, J., 298.

⁵⁴ Milbank, J., 298.

⁵⁵ Milbank, J., 298.

being, but rather “gives an *answer* to the question of Being which is as arbitrary, and as metaphysical, as any other cultural or philosophical reply.”⁵⁶

Milbank accounts that Heidegger seems aware of this problem, as by his later work he has shifted away from the ontological difference and from an absent and unknown Being, to “the constant ‘fall’ of Being into an ontic condition. The question is no longer about Being, nor even about the ontological difference, but about what lets Being be *in* this difference, about the *sache*⁵⁷ that always is different.”⁵⁸

Here Milbank begins to bring in his account of Heidegger’s ontological violence, commenting that both Derrida and Deleuze have since said that “‘difference’ has now become the sole ‘transcendental’ in both a ‘Kantian’ sense that one assumes *a priori* that a radical heterogeneity, incompatibility, non-hierarchy and arbitrariness pertain amongst every knowable thing, and in a ‘scholastic’ sense that every thing really is constituted by such a radical heterogeneity.”⁵⁹ Ontical presence, too, is constituted by its concealment of Being, and this for Milbank indicates an account of primordial violence whereby beings are radically heterogenous and irreconcilable, and they are forever ‘falling’ into ontical existence, and necessarily violently suppressing and concealing ontological Being. Milbank identifies an Augustinian spectre in Heidegger’s reproduction of “Augustine’s teaching about original sin, and the ineradicable sense of human guilt”,⁶⁰ and concludes that “Heidegger seems only to have succeeded in inventing his own religion.”⁶¹ What Heidegger inherited from theology will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 6.

Milbank follows his critique of ontological violence to its inheritors in post-structuralism, arguing that they fail to convincingly distinguish the ontology of difference from fascism, “or a politics of the mythical celebration of power.”⁶² Milbank objects to the politics-as-power

⁵⁶ Milbank, J., 299.

⁵⁷ “*Sache*, like the Latin *res*, originally denoted a legal case or a matter of concern, while *Ding* was the ‘court’ or ‘assembly’ before which a case was discussed... *Sache* occurs in Husserl’s slogan ‘To the things [Sachen] themselves!’, prescribing an unblinkered view of things, free of traditional prejudices and assumptions... *Sache* is non-committal about the nature of the ‘thing’ in question.” Inwood, M., *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Wiley, 1999), 214.

⁵⁸ Milbank, J., *Theology and Social Theory*, 299–300.

⁵⁹ Milbank, J., 300.

⁶⁰ Milbank, J., 301.

⁶¹ Milbank, J., 302.

⁶² Milbank, J., 318–19.

equation, arguing instead that “all politics invents power by proclaiming a religion which channels the mythical power of a fictive God or Gods (‘fictive’ does not necessarily here mean ‘untrue’).”⁶³ Here Milbank really starts to clear the ground for his Augustinian prognosis, speaking through the arguments of French anarchist *nouveaux philosophes* as a springboard. These thinkers, sceptical of the dogmatism of French post-structural philosophy in the 1960s, take nihilist reason to task from much the same perspective as Milbank. Firstly, they argue that despite the ‘perfect’ form of politics (and religion) being monotheism, as it posits a single, absolute source of power, it is only religion which can check this political power, “because it posits a source of power over and above political sovereignty, and invents ‘the soul’ as a place of direct contact with this power.”⁶⁴ Secondly, as Milbank writes, “the *nouveaux philosophes* realize that one can only oppose Nietzsche and his followers by invoking a counter-mythology and a counter-ontology, not by trying to reinstate humanism founded upon ‘universal reason’, not by seeking a level of narrated ‘reality’ beneath the play of *simulacra*.”⁶⁵ Milbank’s ‘deconstruction’ of secular reason, and assertion that what these ontological frames *really* do is posit non-provable counter-myths to that of an ‘arbitrary, Scotist God’,⁶⁶ makes an incredibly radical opening of ‘the theological’ to be directly thought as a space of competing myths. This is a very postmodern theological project, and many theologians would argue either that these myths are not ‘non-provable’ (citing either scripture or something like Anselm’s Ontological Argument),⁶⁷ or instead would insist that a myth’s provability or non-provability is quite beside the point. The core theological question remains, for many, not one of provability but of faith.

⁶³ Milbank, J., 319.

⁶⁴ Milbank, J., 319.

⁶⁵ Milbank, J., 320. The political dimension of the *nouveaux philosophes* cannot be ignored, as their critique was catapulted into mainstream populist media attention in a surge of anti-left-wing sentiment in France, and undoubtedly therein became caught up with popular anti-intellectual and right-wing politics. For example, one thinker associated with the *nouveaux philosophes*, Bernard-Henry Lévy, writes polemically against the ‘new barbarism’ of ‘the left’: Lévy, B., *Left in Dark Times: A Stand Against the New Barbarism* (Random House Publishing Group, 2008); Mondon, A. and Winter, A., *Reactionary Democracy: How Racism and the Populist Far Right Became Mainstream* (Verso Books, 2020), 91.

⁶⁶ Milbank, J., *Theology and Social Theory*, 321. As Paul Tillich writes: “Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, the nominalist, asserted that reason is inadequate to the authority, the living tradition; reason is not able to express it. This was stated very sharply in later nominalism. However, if reason is not able to interpret the tradition, the tradition becomes authority in a quite different way; it becomes the commanding authority to which we have to subject ourselves even though we do not understand it.” Tillich, P., *A History of Christian Thought, from Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism* (Simon and Schuster, 1972), 139.

⁶⁷ Plantinga, A., *The Ontological Argument from St. Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers* (Macmillan, 1968).

Milbank's diagnosis of the ills of secular reason prepares a theological platform upon which engagement between Cone's thought and a field like IR can be staged. It is in identifying that both secular reason and theology have at their core a non-provable, mythological claim, that they can be understood as operating upon terms that permit comparison, conversation, or intervention. Milbank's argument is that secular reason is at heart theological, an account which opens the floodgates for direct conversations between systematic theologies and fields, like IR, which function according to an assumed secularity. To this extent Milbank's account of secular reason prepares much ground upon which this thesis stands.

Milbank's Prognosis

Milbank's prognosis to the ills of secular reason, and particularly the ascendancy of postmodern nihilism, is also of great interest for this thesis. In Chapter 3 we shall discuss in depth the critique of 'white theology' that Cone mobilises in his thought, a critique which can be directed at the prognostic dimension of Milbank's thought. Below we shall summarise the prognosis he offers.

In order to flesh out his *alteras civitas*, Milbank states that Christian theology must do four things. Firstly, it must sketch a counter-history of ecclesial origination. Secondly, it must describe the counter-ethics and the practice that emerges from it. Thirdly, it must articulate a counter-ontology, and fourthly, it must take up the counter-history again under the aspect of ecclesial self-critique. It is the third of these that is most significant to our discussion of Cone, because it is in a frame of offering competing counter-myths, or counter-ontologies, that both Milbank and Cone can be seen to be speaking in the same conversation and pursuing similar (theological) ends. Indeed, as Milbank writes, "it is only at the ontological level, where theology articulates (always provisionally) the framework of reference implicit in Christian story and action, that this 'total' difference is fully clarified, along with its ineradicable ties to non-provable belief."⁶⁸ These facets of Milbank's prognosis must be absolutely clear: they are grounded in non-provable belief, as a reaction to the non-provable belief that undergirds the ontology of violence of nihilist philosophy. It is thus a provisional and arbitrary articulation, which is favoured not because it is more true, more grounded in an unwavering objectivity, but because as the ontological is, for Milbank, a matter of contingent

⁶⁸ Milbank, J., *Theology and Social Theory*, 381.

belief, to construct and advocate an ontology of *peace* is the proper and virtuous path for a Christian theology: “The task of such a theology is not apologetic, nor even argument. Rather it is to tell again the Christian *mythos*, pronounce again the Christian *logos*, and call again for Christian *praxis* in a manner that restores their freshness and originality.”⁶⁹

Milbank seeks to establish an ontology of harmonious peace and virtue, over difference, which in nihilism creates a *mythos* of ontological violence. This can very much be read as a contrasting interpretation to Heidegger’s account of ‘thrown-ness’, in which the mystery of the ontological difference is narrated not as a spontaneous and perpetual being-thrown into contingent existence, but a continuous process of being-*given* to existence by God. The self-generation of seeds is not to assist God, it is to participate in God.⁷⁰ This given-ness of being thus establishes the importance of charity: “The task of human creative differentiation is to be charitable, and to give in ‘art’ (all human action) endlessly new allegorical depictions of charity. Through this charity, ‘God’ is both imaginatively projected by us and known, though with a negative reserve which allows that our initiative, precisely *as* an initiative, is a response, and a radical dependency.”⁷¹ So, charity is an allegorical depiction of the given-ness of being, and retrospectively allows God to be known because, despite it being an initiative, it is nevertheless a response to the given-ness of being which articulates a radical dependency to the giving-ness of creation.

Difference and harmony

The second component of the counter-ontology speaks to Milbank’s treatment of difference, and his avoidance of his account of difference resulting in an account of primordial violence. This is very succinctly articulated by Milbank in an earlier article. He writes here that the universality that Christianity sought from the very beginning was not one in which difference was abolished, but one in which it was *subsumed*. Christians retain their languages and cultures, but belong to an ‘eternal city ruled by Christ’. For Milbank, the ‘liberty, equality, and fraternity’ that is implicit in Christianity exceeds those of liberalism because they are not limited to ‘mere mutual tolerance’ or regulated conflict. Rather, Christianity is both open to difference and striving for harmony. Here Milbank invokes musical harmony, in which

⁶⁹ Milbank, J., 381.

⁷⁰ Milbank, J., 425.

⁷¹ Milbank, J., 425–26.

‘endings and displacements’ do not constitute violence, because despite differentiation all the notes fit together and harmonise as a whole. Christianity, uniquely for Milbank, is therefore capable of subsuming difference under a harmonising whole that does not inevitably lead to conflict or violence.⁷²

Unity and difference, and the fact that they are mutually implicated (“unity *is* through its power of generating difference, and difference *is* through its comprehension by unity”)⁷³ invoke a virtuous harmony: “The God who is, who includes difference, and yet is unified, is... a God who speaks in the harmonious happening of Being.”⁷⁴ Harmony can only happen with difference, but it inscribes harmonious and virtuous, rather than conflictual, relations between differences.

Peace

So comes the jewel in the crown of Milbank’s anti-nihilist ontology. Having thoroughly prepared the ground for his counter-ontology by depicting the nihilistic ontology of difference as violence, and having argued that this is, in the end, just another contingent and quasi-religious *mythos*, which cannot claim foundational status other than as *mythos*, Milbank has only to assert the ontological *mythos* that better reflects a peaceable Christian ontology.

Despite his assertions about contingent *mythos*, Milbank is keen to ground his ontology of peace in the already-existing Christian canon, rather than just assert it as a purely ethical choice. His grounding for this is in the work of Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, a Christian theologian writing in the late 5th and early 6th centuries. As Milbank writes, “...for (both Augustine and Dionysius) ...peace is essential for existence (so that peace become a transcendental attribute of Being), violence is an unnecessary intrusion. Thus Christianity, uniquely, does not allow violence any real ontological purchase...”⁷⁵ Instead of reproducing Augustine’s doctrine of original sin, Milbank accords violence to “a free subject who asserts a will that is truly independent of God and of others, and thereby a will to the inhibition and distortion of reality (so that, in a sense, the Cartesian subject only exists as the sinful subject).”⁷⁶ Evil, then, is only the failure to ‘be’ in relation to God, asserted by a free will

⁷² Milbank, J., ‘Postmodern Critical Augustinianism ’, 227–28.

⁷³ Milbank, J., *Theology and Social Theory*, 423–24.

⁷⁴ Milbank, J., 430.

⁷⁵ Milbank, J., 432.

⁷⁶ Milbank, J., 432.

that is independent of God or any theological predetermination. This account of evil requires a parallel definition of the Good: "...what makes something to be good, what makes it to be, is not any essence which it possesses... but its existing... entirely in particular patterns of desire, which remain open to, and whose beauty constitutes a path to, the unknown infinite."⁷⁷

The Counter-Kingdom

In the closing paragraphs, Milbank explicates the fate of the *alteras civitas* in imminent terms. He reminds us of two things: firstly, that Christianity unleashed a 'naked' and unfettered violence in the form of the theologically authorised confluence of absolutism and enlightenment liberalism, which has evolved into the entrenchment of a nihilist religion of ontological violence. Secondly, that the state itself, under this same authorisation, assumed the form of a 'perverted Church', which itself gradually authorised a deferral of consideration on 'the good':

"Gradually *ordo* got separated off from both true *usus* and ultimate *frui*, and pastoral rule became, within the secular state, a rule through the classification of populations in terms of medical, psychological, economic and educational canons of 'normality'. Such a rule is a kind of mimicry of ecclesial peace, because it can be based upon a consensus, yet the basis of this consensus is not agreement about either 'the goal' or 'the way', buy merely a deferral to 'expert' opinion. And expertise is only expertise about power."⁷⁸

With this ecclesial self-critique, Milbank closes by stating that 'the judgement of God has already happened', and as such that the time is nigh for the Church to enact "the vision of paradisaal community which this judgement opens out", or else it continues to promote a "hellish society beyond any terrors known to antiquity: *corruption optimi pessima*."⁷⁹ Milbank writes that no 'return to law', as a mechanism for the mere inhibition of violence (as nihilism has so competently exposed), remains possible: only the enactment of a vision of ontological peace can offer an alternative to the final nihilism of secular reason. This is contrary to

⁷⁷ Milbank, J., 432.

⁷⁸ Milbank, J., 433.

⁷⁹ Milbank, J., 433.

Peterson's vision of the authentically theological politics as always existing in expectation of the Kingdom, and not performing its fulfilment.

Secular reason, thus, as the ugly brainchild of theology, is always built upon some mythological element, and so only hides/denies its ultimately theological nature. Milbank is advocating that metaphysics, that is, ontology, be dealt with only at the theological level, where these various myths about the sublime are posited. Since these myths, dealt with by the theological, are after all just myths, this realm is governed by two things: tradition, whereby one can only posit myths, and position the self, as part of an already existing tradition, and ethics, whereby there is some impulse to evaluate myths according to their virtue. These two things lead Milbank to advocate his 'radical orthodoxy' – radical because it takes the postmodern stance of accepting, and building from, a fundamental conception of contingency (and non-provability) at the level of mythos, and orthodox because it looks to the work of St Augustine and the complete usurpation of both enlightenment values of liberalism and nihilism (as the forever reification *and* mitigation and suppression of a primordial violent condition) and towards the reinstatement of Christian values like Good and Evil over secular ones like Truth and Falsity. Milbank's 'reconciliation' of difference, a social political cultural fact he does not deny, comes from his assertion of Christian virtue as able to 'reconcile' difference through communal membership in a 'church' of diverse believers, a flock of many coats.

Milbank's text is undoubtedly a milestone in political theology. It weaves a stunningly thorough critique of different aspects of secular reason with a counter-mythos of harmonious order. Milbank's work, and the Radical Orthodoxy movement of which he, along with Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, has been an integral part, has led to a wide array of publications and encounters, such as between Radical Orthodoxy and Eastern Orthodoxy, and with contemporary philosophers such as Slavoj Žižek,⁸⁰ alongside its wide influence in

⁸⁰ Milbank, J., Pickstock, C., and Ward, G., *Radical Orthodoxy*; Pabst, A. and Schneider, C., eds., *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2013); Milbank, J., Žižek, S., and Davis, C., *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Brazos Press, 2010); Davis, C., Milbank, J., and Žižek, S., *Theology and the Political: The New Debate* (Duke University Press, 2005); Pickstock, C., *Aspects of Truth: A New Religious Metaphysics* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); Žižek, S. and Milbank, J., *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* (MIT Press, 2011); Milbank, J., *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009); Milbank, J., *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (Wiley, 2014).

academic theology itself. Milbank's argument about the latent theology in secular reason, and the potential role of theology for providing counter-myths strengthens the position of this thesis, that deep engagement with theologies like Cone's offers many fruits for those outside his field. Milbank essentially demonstrates that the 'non-provable' lies at the heart of all metaphysics, and so opens the door to direct engagements with theology. The influence of Milbank's work in post-secular philosophy, which in turn has much influence in political theology in IR, prepares fertile ground for a conversation with a more explicitly and stylistically theological thinker as Cone. As we shall see in Chapter 3, Cone's theology itself offers considerable material for criticising, in turn, Milbank's Augustinian counter-Kingdom. Whilst Cone's project will cast start relief on Milbank's prognosis, his returning of secular reason to a theological frame is indispensable for engagements with theology, such as this one, which are located outside it as a strictly defined field.

Here we will take a short sojourn from extant works of political theology to discuss two works more secularly located. The purpose for this is to show the overlap of discussions about metaphysics, mythos, and foundations between political theology and political ontology. Firstly we will look at a work which criticises the pursuit of stable foundations located in radical democratic theory, which speaks directly to the theme of concreteness/abstraction. Here ontological abstraction is criticised in favour of articulations that are more closely resonant with concrete political conditions and experiences. Secondly we will look at a work which speaks directly to the theme of universalism/particularism from an explicitly abstract conceptualisation, attempting to create a non-hegemonic universalism from the very assumption of an absence of concrete ontological foundations.

The Problem of Abstraction in Political Ontology

One thinker whose work in the realm of democratic theory has many parallels with (as we shall see in Chapters 2, 3, and 4) key aspects of Cone's theological project, is political theorist Lois McNay. McNay explicitly criticises the over-reliance on abstraction of metaphysical discussions in radical democratic theory, advocating a 'return' to a more concretely committed frame of discussion, demonstrating the importance of deep engagements with concretely committed theologians such as Cone. McNay's hesitance about ontologising from an abstract position of 'social weightlessness' is resonant with Cone's project of theologising from the struggle against white supremacy, showing the import of Cone's thought outside

‘just’ theology: the problem of abstraction is one that is manifest in political ontology, identifiable through McNay’s critique which is immanent to secularity. As we shall discuss in Chapter 4, Cone already exceeds McNay in articulating this critique in the production and articulation of a counter-theology itself.

In her 2014 book, *The Misguided Search for the Political*, McNay charts various points at which radical democratic theory moves away from any anchor to social reality and towards abstract accounts of the essence of the political. This she criticises with Bourdieu’s vocabulary of ‘social weightlessness’, arguing, with multiple examples, that “what was originally intended as a strategic and temporary retreat from the social becomes a more lasting withdrawal into a reified and self-referential model of the political.” The effect of this retreat into self-referentiality gives rise to an increasing absence of relevance for social or political lives which, despite the sophistication and penetration of abstracted academic arguments, continue to grind on. McNay holds that if theory and thought is to be ‘politically effective’, it must be “conducted in the same direction as the tendencies of the world, not at a great remove from them...”⁸¹ Explorations of political ontology that take place in democratic theory, for McNay, are ‘so enmeshed in a style of abstract and closed reasoning’ as to render the relevance to the ‘phenomenal social world’ and to the ‘logic of embodied action’ highly doubtful. This is, in the final analysis, fatal for their ‘purportedly progressive political implications’, as they are found to be at such a remove from the needs of worldly experience as to have no effect upon them.⁸²

Before moving on to point to social weightlessness in radical democratic theorists like Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière, McNay points to the problem of democratic theory that draws upon idealist notions of democracy in the abstract. McNay identifies the problems of approaching democratic theory from an abstracted, ideal model. McNay accounts that the problem with ideal theory is not necessarily abstraction itself, but the idealised abstractions of a ‘hypothetical norm’ that render ‘inequality, domination, and so forth’ as deviations. Ideal theory therefore, for McNay, takes as the source of this hypothetical norm the experiences of highly insulated and privileged groups and projects them into universality, whilst

⁸¹ McNay, L., *The Misguided Search for the Political*, 4.

⁸² McNay, L., 4–5.

marginalising “...the perspective of other groups which, *interalia*, might reveal different aspects of reality.”⁸³

Ideal democratic theory thus self-consciously tries to develop abstract models of democratic politics which unwittingly universalise particular world views and so render themselves unable to attain the goal of a truly universal or universalizable model. Radical democratic theory, instead, produces social weightlessness by an over-reliance on ontological discussions. This results, for McNay, in a ‘disregard of the actual’ that eclipses what is purported to be their core aim: a critique of power. This “...failure to attend sufficiently to certain crucial features of social reality, particularly the lived experience of inequality, has troubling implications for the emancipatory import of their theories.”⁸⁴ Abstraction thus, for McNay, hamstring the projects of theorists who claim to be concerned with critiquing power, drawing them further and further from its real manifestations.

Whilst for McNay some level of ontological discussion is a necessary part of political theorising, the separation of the ontological and the ontic, and the former’s discussion as some higher or prior level of political thought all too often leaves the ontic forgotten, and so the ‘real-world’ potential of these discussions is unfulfilled. The ‘jump’ from abstractions distilled in a theoretical vacuum to their application, or identification, is a recurrent problem of the academy. This results in theories which are ‘conceptually lopsided’, focusing on ‘essential political dynamics’ that are almost impossible to identify in particular social relations, which ends up with silence on matters of “...oppression and disempowerment that supposedly lie at the heart of the radical democratic agenda.”⁸⁵

It seems that the recurrent problem is not the unwillingness to make the ‘next theoretical move’, from an ontology to a political practice, but the impossibility of such a move when the ontological as a realm is completely parsed off from the ontic. The separation and enshrinement of the ontological as a separate and pure realm of politics might already be rendered impotent, because it is impossible to come back from it. For those who profess, or hope for, an emancipatory purpose, as McNay writes of radical democratic theorists, this is quite a problem.

⁸³ McNay, L., 10.

⁸⁴ McNay, L., 11.

⁸⁵ McNay, L., 12.

In the end, McNay advocates something slightly reminiscent of what she criticises the ontological discussions of radical democratic theories for becoming, “what Sheldon Wolin (2000) has termed a ‘theoretic theory’ rather than a genuinely political one.”⁸⁶ McNay’s corrective to the ontological floating of radical democratic theory ultimately entails a theorisation of a “...critical phenomenology of negative experience, exemplified in the idea of social suffering.”⁸⁷ Without taking seriously such a critical phenomenology that grounds analysis in human experiences of suffering and domination, radical democratic theory is condemned to rely “...on abstruse accounts of radical action that are governed by an abstract, self-perpetuating logic and that fail to connect to the embodied existence of oppressed groups.”⁸⁸

McNay plants her flag in the soil of critique as the route to overcoming this depoliticising otherworldliness. Political theorists must engage first in a critique of domination, and afterwards a politics might become possible: “It is by revealing these mechanisms of subjection that pathways to emancipation can begin, in part, to be thought about.”⁸⁹ It seems that this represents a persistent problem of political theory – the declaration that *first* x must be done, so that later on, at some undetermined point, y (which is what is agreed upon to be the most important bit), can happen, or become possible, or begin to become possible. As we shall discuss in Chapter 4, this is an approach which contrasts starkly with Cone’s who articulates his critique of abstraction as a corollary to, and indeed as secondary to, his productive construction of a liberative theology.

McNay’s argument might indeed spur works which fulfil her suggestions, but hers remains itself a work of theoretical critique, which raises questions, according to her own standards, about whether formal critique is at all able of instituting the ‘emancipatory politics’ to which it often alludes. There seems to be a level of entrapment within critique and suggestion, out of which it is immensely difficult to voluntarily break, even when this entrapment is so explicitly identified and criticised. This thesis holds that Cone’s project is one example of a theology which does break out and perform a prophetic gesture, a fully articulated counter

⁸⁶ McNay, L., 4; Wolin, S., ‘Political Theory: From Vocation to Invocation’, in *Vocations of Political Theory*, ed. Frank, J. A. and Tambornino, J. (University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

⁸⁷ McNay, L., *The Misguided Search for the Political*, 207.

⁸⁸ McNay, L., 207.

⁸⁹ McNay, L., 209–10.

myth, of the sort McNay advocates. As we shall see, Cone fulfils many of McNay's demands, eschewing abstraction and delivering ontology directly to, as well as building it out of, a worldly political struggles.

Whilst McNay argues that a return from abstraction is necessary for metaphysics to remain political and wedded to a goal of emancipation, our next interlocuter, Sergei Prozorov, pushes in exactly the opposite direction, seeking to resuscitate universalism without recourse to hegemony, via an ontology, ethics, and politics built upon the emptiness of the void.

Rehabilitating Universality: The Void

This discussion of certain metaphysical themes central to the field of political theology in IR cannot omit the momentous *Void Universalism* project of Sergei Prozorov. Prozorov's two-volume publication opens up serious new possibilities for thinking political axioms upon the groundless ground of the postmodern predicament.

Prozorov's project is explicitly located in the world of nihilist metaphysics, in which there is nothing 'above' the many particular orders that we inhabit. Prozorov responds to the polarised problems of hegemonic universalism, whereby any claim to universality simply entails the hegemonic *universalisation* of a particular world and its attendant transcendentals. Prozorov begins with the increasingly common position that there is no such thing as the World (and so this signifier signifies only an emptiness), but instead many worlds which are inhabited by different cosmological orders.⁹⁰ 'Above' these worlds is the space in which we imagine World Politics to take place. But what is that space? Is the space between

⁹⁰ This notion, popular in both decolonial and postcolonial, particularly Latin American, literature as the pluriverse, as well as in post-humanist literature (the distinction is often challenged), has spread widely to many areas of IR and political study: Blaney, D. and Tickner, A., 'Worlding, Ontological Politics and the Possibility of a Decolonial IR'; Querejazu, A., 'Encountering the Pluriverse'; Rojas, C., 'Contesting the Colonial Logics of the International: Toward a Relational Politics for the Pluriverse', *International Political Sociology* 10, no. 4 (2016): 369–82; Hutchings, K., 'Decolonizing Global Ethics: Thinking with the Pluriverse', *Ethics & International Affairs* 33, no. 2 (2019): 115–25; Demaria, F. and Kothari, A., 'The Post-Development Dictionary Agenda: Paths to the Pluriverse', *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 12 (2017): 2588–99; Blaney, D. and Tickner, A., 'International Relations in the Prison of Colonial Modernity', *International Relations* 31, no. 1 (2017): 71–75; Efstathopoulos, C., Kurki, M., and Shepherd, A., 'Facing Human Interconnections: Thinking International Relations into the Future', *International Relations* 34, no. 3 (2020): 267–89; Delgado, A. C. T., 'Suma Qamaña as a Strategy of Power: Politicizing the Pluriverse', *Carta Internacional* 13, no. 3 (2018); Nordin, A. and Smith, G. H., 'Reintroducing Friendship to International Relations: Relational Ontologies from China to the West', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 18, no. 3 (2018): 369–96; Escobar, A., 'Sustaining the Pluriverse: The Political Ontology of Territorial Struggles in Latin America', in *The Anthropology of Sustainability: Beyond Development and Progress*, ed. Brightman, M. and Lewis, J., Palgrave Studies in Anthropology of Sustainability (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2017), 237–56; Kurki, M., *International Relations in a Relational Universe*; Escobar, A., *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Duke University Press, 2018).

the many worlds simply an emptiness that can yield no positive values? This is a question that is left untouched by many who are more interested in ‘worlding’, or elevating a particular transcendental order to the status of a ‘world’.

Whilst resisting subordinating the many worlds into some positive reality from which problems of ethical relativity can be solved, Prozorov argues exactly that some political axioms can be deduced from the ontological reality of the empty throne of a void universality. That Prozorov resists filling that throne, even with something like a horizon of time-bound being-towards-death, and from this *nihil* brings forth axioms, points to the political potential of an ontological void that has as yet not taken up much momentum.

Prozorov ultimately advocates three axioms that can be deduced from the void: equality, freedom, and community. All beings find themselves thrown into the void without any worldly hierarchies (equality), without any worldly fetters or limitations (freedom), and together (community). The pursuit of positive axioms from the ontological void of nihilism is a bold project and Prozorov’s execution is concise. What it hopefully opens up is a space in which the paralyzing effects of nihilism can begin to be overcome. Vassilios Paipais has commented that, after establishing these axioms, it is rather unfortunate that Prozorov begins with fundamental ontology and ends with a politics of limitations: “Having opened the door to the direct ‘ontologisation’ of phenomenal politics... is quick to close it behind him by concluding with a call for a politics of restraint and limitations... ending up with what practically amounts to an appeal for realist prudence.”⁹¹

Nevertheless, Prozorov’s void universalism is an ambitious and important metaphysical project. Without imposing upon the many worlds in which humans live, accepting that there is nothing that operates above and beyond these particular worlds, Prozorov pursues the establishment of positive political values that can give shape and meaning to the void in which all beings find themselves when they see the particularity of their existences. Void universalism goes a long way in avoiding abstract universality, in arguing that the axioms of freedom, equality, and community are not imposed from ‘outside’ but found ‘within’ all possible worlds.

⁹¹ Paipais, V., ‘The Promise of Ontology: Nihilism for a Pluralist World’, *Millennium* 45, no. 1 (2016): 71.

Prozorov hopes to establish or recover a universality which tries to *impose* as little as possible, and which leaves space for the array of different ‘transcendental orders’ located in the many worlds that we inhabit. Once one thinks ‘inside’ this network of many worlds, and an empty World, it is difficult to think outside of it. Indeed it has the potential to subsume all other ‘transcendental visions’ as just one of many particular worlds, ‘above’ which an essential emptiness can always be claimed, at least within an ostensibly secular frame. In this way it is more of a totalising project than would first appear, as it makes each transcendental vision unable to lay claim to any kind of metaphysical or ontological bottom line, and subordinates all merely ‘particular worlds’ under an overarching logic of nihilist, secular emptiness.

In Milbank’s schema, Prozorov’s void universalism as a metaphysics springing from secular reason is at heart beholden to a non-provable claim. This is indicated in the common-sense appeal to anxiety as the source of a direct experience of the void: “surely, every one of us must have been bored or anxious more than a few times.”⁹² This appeal to what is ‘surely’ revealed to ‘every one of us’ in anxiety does not take seriously the diversity of human experiences. As a metaphysics that attempts to subsume rather than to eliminate difference (the same thing for which Milbank praises Christianity), but one which claims a higher frame using a set-theoretical method that is not recognised as authoritative by other transcendental orders, it merely posits the void *besides* and not *above* other theological or universal claims. As we shall argue in particular in Chapter 5, the ‘standard narrative’ of Christianity’s universality is established in the self-same move in which it establishes its particularity vis-à-vis Judaism. It seems that the same is true of Prozorov’s void universalism: its claim to universality is methodically conducted in a particular thought-world, and this conduction itself testifies to, and solidifies, its particularity, its particular origins.

Prozorov’s project is a deeply important and insightful project that far exceeds this discussion of it. It reminds us that attempts to establish universality are not always undergirded by a hegemonic drive, and that universality itself is not a forgotten frame. Universality and particularity are thus core themes in contemporary political ontology, a field which has considerable overlap with political theology. Following Heidegger amongst others, Prozorov approaches metaphysics without God, though the God-function of the void is evident, seeking

⁹² Prozorov, S., ‘Ex Nihilo in Mundum: A Reply to Paipais’, *Millennium* 45, no. 1 (1 September 2016): 73.

to expunge the reliance of the ultimate upon concrete, worldly, projections. As a generative rather than a critical project Prozorov's stands out as a bold articulation of non-hegemonic universality that shows the centrality of that frame to ongoing discussions of political metaphysics. Here we return from the self-consciously secular to the ambiguously theological, though remaining within the drive to rehabilitate a frame of universality.

Rehabilitating Universality: St Paul the Apostle

French philosopher Alain Badiou's small but provocative book *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* charts the universal potential of Paul, not as Christian theologian, but as a thinker of 'the event', as a world-changing rupture, represented in Paul's case by the resurrection and ascension of Christ. For Badiou there is potential in a militant Paulinism to overcome a critical problem of contemporary social and political life. This problem is the multiplication of markets and the opening up of market spaces for the continued expansion of capitalism by groups who insist on 'manufacturing' particular interests and identities so that they can have a slice of the niche-products, and niche-markets, pie. Badiou laments the opening up of particularistic identities 'demanding recognition' and providing 'inexhaustible potential for mercantile investments'...

"...of women, homosexuals, the disabled, Arabs! And these infinite combinations of predicative traits, what a Godsend! Black homosexuals, disabled Serbs, Catholic paedophiles, moderate Muslims, married priests, ecologist yuppies, the submissive unemployed, prematurely aged youth! Each time, a social image authorizes new products, specialized magazines, improved shopping malls, "free" radio stations, targeted advertising networks, and finally, heady "public debates" at peak viewing times."⁹³

Badiou looks to Paul not as a Christian theologian, but as a radical thinker of an abstracted 'universalising rupture' that was the beginning of Christianity. Badiou's take on the universal and event-al significance of Paul is worth quoting at length:

⁹³ It seems unlikely that a call for 'recognition' by 'disabled Serbs' or, even more unlikely, catholic paedophiles, is the engine of capitalist expansion in modern times. Badiou (perhaps tellingly) doesn't mention the marketisation of the particular interests of already well established and financially hyper-consuming groups, such as Western-European, university educated, middle classes and their media, international travel, and material consumption. Badiou, A., *Saint Paul*, 10.

“One must, in Paul’s logic, go so far as to say that *the Christ-event testifies that God is not the God of Being, is not Being*. Paul prescribes an anticipatory critique of what Heidegger calls onto-theology, wherein God is thought as supreme being, and hence as the measure for what being as such is capable of.

The most radical statement in the text we are commenting on is in effect the following: “God has chosen the things that are not [*ta me onta*] in order to bring to nought those that are [*ta onta*].”⁹⁴ That the Christ-event causes nonbeings rather than beings to arise as attesting to God; that it consists in the abolition of what all previous discourses held as existing, or being, gives a measure of the ontological subversion to which Paul’s antiphilosophy invites the declarant or militant.

It is through the invention of a language wherein folly, scandal, and weakness supplant knowing reason, order, and power, and wherein non-being is the only legitimizable affirmation of being, that Christian discourse is articulated. In Paul’s eyes, this articulation is incompatible with any prospect (and there has been no shortage of them, almost from the time of his death onward) of a “Christian philosophy.”⁹⁵

For Badiou, as for many who see the radical potential of Christianity, God is the God of non-being. However, for Badiou this non-being, curiously, is not expressed sociologically as in those cast out from society. That is, the metaphysical affirmation of non-being that takes place in the Christ event does not pertain to those cast as less than fully human, humans deemed as non-existent, the scandalous, weak, but rather to ontological non-being as such. This remains un-elaborated vis-à-vis his earlier argument about those who insist certain identities and experiences warrant recognition as part of their being. The fuller passage from Corinthians I is worth quoting at length, as it suggests that Paul did not envisage a tension between being and non-being as such, but as between the strong and the weak *in the world*:

“Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish *in the world* to shame the wise; God chose what is weak *in the world* to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised *in the world*, things that are

⁹⁴ In the Oxford Annotated Bible translation: “God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are,” I COR 1:28 Coogan, M. D. et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 1640.

⁹⁵ Badiou, A., *Saint Paul*, 47.

not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.”⁹⁶

The Christ-event reveals for Badiou a nonbeing that is not a mediation of something else, but which is itself a revolutionary rupture which must arrive and, as a revolutionary moment, in turn, pass. The rupture of Christ here is thus not the constitution of a lasting, legal regime, but an unmediated messianic event which overthrows the old regime. This is the extent to which Badiou, a professed atheist, is interested in the thought of Paul. Badiou asks what the function of the event is, arguing that it is ‘what must arrive so that there can be something else’, not the institution of a lasting order. Paul’s Christ-event, then, is a model of revolutionary politics, of throwing out the old so that there can be a new.⁹⁷

Paul’s Christianity is thus steeped in revolutionary potential, the potential to overthrow regimes and deliver us to universality. But what exactly is this universality? Simply the rejection of all particularities, as implied in Badiou’s opening frustrations about the apparent sudden proliferation of identities? It seems there is a disjuncture in Badiou’s account of the potential of Paul. At once he is an antiphilosopher of revolutionary rupture which explodes onto a stagnant scene of legalised existence (institutionalised, sacrificial, temple-based Judaism), a poet of the pure Christ-event. At the same time, he promotes a universality that is evidently advocated because it assuages concerns about the proliferation of identities and the attendant (apparent) proliferation of specialised markets. For Badiou, Paul’s universalism pivots upon the de-essentialisation of ethnic or cultural difference (such as between Jew and Greek). In the new reality, these differentiations ‘collapse’ into mere rhetoric, without reference in the real.⁹⁸

The distinction between evental and post-evental is critical. The resurrection is a pure event, a rupture in the fabric of society, that decimates the previous order, that ‘relieves us from the law’. However, inscribing the Christ event as that which ‘relieves us from the law’ produces an uneasy tension with those who exactly do not see Jesus as the Messiah and who do not see him as relieving them from the Law. Here we see a first glimpse of the ‘logic’ of Christian Supersessionism that gets inscribed into political thought, especially where Paul is imagined

⁹⁶ My emphasis I COR 1:26-29 Coogan, M. D. et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1640–41.

⁹⁷ Badiou, A., *Saint Paul*, 48–49.

⁹⁸ Badiou, A., 57.

as a thinker who casts out Judaism and establishes Christianity as superseding Judaism. This will be discussed at length in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Paul's subsequent extension of the meaning of this event to 'Jew and Greek alike', institutes the universality that Badiou hopes might lend a hand in current predicaments. But here we see the limit of approaching these theological works from a secular mindset. Without the messianic rupture Paul's universality cannot happen, and made into philosopher or anti-philosopher makes Paul's universality into just another legal code. Badiou is right that universality is (in the Pauline Christian story) post-evental, and the messianic moment takes place *before* this. The messianic moment does not take place in a Pauline-universal society. Even outside a messianic frame, Paul responds to a rupture that throws up the possibility of *either* a radical entrenchment of difference, *or* its overcoming, and it is this second path which Paul takes. To re-energise Paul as a radical thinker of revolution must entail seeing the rupture-ing potential of differentiation that must take place *before* the Pauline interpretation. Without the Christ-event, which in the Pauline story *takes place in* a divided world in order to reveal the (potential) universality of salvation, Paul is but another universalist advocating for something in theory which, the record seems to suggest, will be unlikely to spontaneously become a lived reality. Badiou therefore needs what Paul already has: a Messiah.

Badiou's account of the radical potential of Paul is a welcome and important return to Christian theology for the ostensibly secular fields of a political theory and political philosophy, and an important contribution from a political radical perspective, as it draws clear associations between Paul and modern themes of political revolution. Badiou's abstraction of Paul's move away from the Law as representing 'struggle as such' is reminiscent of Heidegger, as shall be discussed in Chapter 6, in whose early writings we find a "fantasy of Paul-versus-the-Jews [as] a vision of 'struggle as such'..."⁹⁹ The problem with this process is not just its inaccuracy vis-à-vis the figure of Paul (to which much modern scholarship attests),¹⁰⁰ but its authorisation of a story of Christian origins that posits *its* universality as achieved at the expense of Judaism, and in so doing it has played a part in authorising not just

⁹⁹ Blanton, W., 'Anarchist Singularities or Proprietorial Resentments? On the Christian Problem in Heidegger's Notebooks of the 1930s', in *Heidegger's Black Notebooks and the Future of Theology*, ed. Björk, M and Svenungsson, J. (Springer, 2017), 108.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example: Pitre, B., Barber, M. P., and Kincaid, J. A., *Paul, a New Covenant Jew: Rethinking Pauline Theology* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2019).

centuries of anti-Semitism but also a conceptual model of 'the new aggressively superseding the old,' that has with time become intricately woven into the fabric of the secular world. Here the (Pauline) theological is mobilised as a vehicle of universality that can deliver us from the obsession with concrete identities that give fuel to the fire of ever-expanding capital. But the universal is constituted in relation to Judaism as that which is overcome.¹⁰¹

Both Prozorov and Badiou seek to rehabilitate universality, one through postmodern nihilist ontology of the void, and the other through Paul as a thinker who provides us with an image of humanity that can overcome all distinctions. Both of these universalities are rooted in abstractions which seek to move away from concrete and particular experiences or positionalities. In contrast to these attempts to eschew the concrete, exist works which explicitly try to build from, and indeed to theologise, from a position of concretion, whilst remaining attached to two of the same thinkers that undergird much of Prozorov's and Badiou's texts, those being Heidegger and Paul.

Fidelity to an Infinite Demand: Pauline Weakness

As is already apparent, a figure that consistently looms very close to the surface in much of these works and discussions is that of Martin Heidegger. Whilst for Prozorov Heidegger's thought concerning ontological moods gives ground for claiming the general verifiability of a nihilist metaphysics that points us towards the void, Critchley finds in a more theological understanding of Heidegger (and particularly Heidegger's reading of Paul) grounds for an ontological vision that is explicitly tied to the weakness and impotence that define the human condition. Both of these deal in very different abstractions, but the aim is similar: to discern a generalisable understanding of the human condition from abstract theological or philosophical concepts.

In *Faith of the Faithless*, Simon Critchley proposes a reading of Heidegger that is fundamentally shaped by Heidegger's reading of Paul (which, again, will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 6). Critchley advocates a reading of Heidegger which pays respect to the duality of the ultimate and the particular and to their mutual dependence. Drawing our

¹⁰¹ As Vassilios Paipais comments, "Badiou's stance, seeking to revive a type of universalism that would overcome its contamination by neoliberal ideology or its relativisation in the proliferation of postmodern identities, is promising, yet it still labours under the familiar trope of the 'Jew' as the constitutive exception to European universalism." Paipais, V., *Political Ontology and International Political Thought*, 179.

attention to the 'call of conscience' in Heidegger, Critchley writes that its 'double function' is analogous to Paul. This call of conscience has a double function because it calls us out of our contextual, worldly everyday and towards things more essential, whilst calling us to our finitude and intractable entrenchment *in* the everyday. It therefore calls us to understand *both* our 'thrownness' in the everyday, and that ontological frame towards which we project ourselves. For Critchley this 'double nullity' of thrownness and projection constitutes 'nothing less than the experience of freedom', a freedom which takes full responsibility for its concrete limitations whilst nevertheless appealing to, and being guided by, the pursuit of the ontological.¹⁰²

This double nullity of thrownness and projection leads Critchley to return to Paul in order to offer a reading which affirms the duality of faith and law, rather than their (traditionally Pauline, as we will discuss in chapters 4 and 5) separation and subsequent subordination of the latter to the former. Critchley focuses on Romans 7 and 8 and attempts to offer a 'more plausible' reading of the relation between faith and law: "...if law and sin were not within me, then faith would mean nothing. Our wretchedness is our greatness."¹⁰³ Following this, Critchley advocates the cultivation of 'the faith of the faithless', where faith is 'fidelity to the infinite demand'.¹⁰⁴ For Critchley, the question is not how to speak of the ultimate, or God, without an established religious framework, but how to speak of religion, "as that force which can bind human beings together in association—without God."¹⁰⁵ The lessons of Paul's emphasis on wretchedness is thus extended beyond its Jewish and Gentile audience to the faithless, an infinite demand that calls us to understand the ontological import of an essential weakness.

Critchley offers a reading of Paul which contrasts with that of Badiou, and is even reminiscent of Cone and the various liberation theology traditions, as we shall see in the following chapters. Whilst he doesn't mention any liberation or postcolonial theologians, he does invoke Fanon:

¹⁰² Critchley, S., *The Faith of the Faithless*, 14.

¹⁰³ Critchley, S., 15.

¹⁰⁴ Critchley, S., 18.

¹⁰⁵ Critchley, S., 19–20.

“What is being imagined here is a political theology of the wretched of the earth, as Frantz Fanon would say, or the scum of the earth, which is the New International Version translation of *perikatharmata tou kosmou*... What is at stake is a politics of the remnant, where the off-cuttings of humanity are the basis for a new political articulation.”¹⁰⁶

Critchley depicts Paul not as ‘the founder of Christianity’¹⁰⁷ or as some original and grand intellectual of a universalist metaphysics:

“When Paul is called, he becomes trash, literally a piece of shit or dung as some of the earlier translations render *to skubalon*. As opposed to the nobility of Saul, a free Roman citizen, Paul becomes small. ... Crucially, Paul is a slave name and like all slave names it is a nickname—violently imposed—that superimposes itself in the place of the erased proper name.”¹⁰⁸

For Critchley, the weakness of Paul, his slavery to Christ, is central to the political message of his letters. In this regard Critchley’s vision is close to Peterson’s imagination of the politically active theological community as labouring in a strange city, under a worldly ruler whose dominion cannot share the Christian vision of weakness and eschatological patience.

Critchley wants to experiment with a notion of faith as something resembling bearing witness to an ‘infinite demand’, having faith in a principle one holds above oneself. This infinite demand, in its unverifiability, reveals to the ‘faithless faithful’ a powerful powerlessness, a strength in weakness: “...the infinite demand confronts the strength of the subject with an essential weakness or state of wanting (*asthenia*)... Faith—especially a faith of the faithless, since it lacks a transcendent, metaphysical guarantee¹⁰⁹—is a powerless power, a strength in weakness.”¹¹⁰ Critchley is thus engaging theology for an audience explicitly beyond a community of believers, exploring its insights for questions about, and visions for, the human

¹⁰⁶ Critchley, S., 158–59.

¹⁰⁷ “the most widespread and egregious distortion” Critchley, S., 157.

¹⁰⁸ Critchley, S., 160.

¹⁰⁹ The assumption that those ‘with faith’ live with the confidence of a transcendent, metaphysical guarantee (and that the faithless live without) is of course an unnecessary oversimplification, and it is fortunate that it is not a pivotal assumption for Critchley’s political theological experiment. Two excellent texts on the interface between ‘faith’ (meaning, organised religion) and doubt are: Erdozain, D., *The Soul of Doubt: The Religious Roots of Unbelief from Luther to Marx* (Oxford University Press, 2016); Schellenberg, J. L., *The Wisdom to Doubt: A Justification of Religious Skepticism* (Cornell University Press, 2012).

¹¹⁰ Critchley, S., *The Faith of the Faithless*, 162–63.

condition. His emphasis on Paul's weakness, his slavery, points to an abstracted understanding of wretchedness providing an image of the human condition that delivers us to ontological freedom in our understanding of our weakness. This contrasts with his earlier invocation of Fanon, for whom the wretched *of the earth*, not the essentially wretched abstract human, provides grounds for an anti-colonial politics rooted in a particular historical moment.

Critchley's faith in, or adherence to, this infinite demand, as constituting (for the faithless) or revealing (for the faithful) the power of weakness is, as we shall see, reminiscent of Paipais' closing advocacy of a broken but regnant Christ-figure, powerful in its very weakness. Critchley argues that this can be drawn from a reading of Heidegger's interpretation of Paul, in which the human being is defined not by 'potency and strength', but "in which authenticity is rooted in an affirmation of weakness and impotence."¹¹¹

Critically for Critchley, and in line with Milbank's claim that postmodern nihilism is a competing claim made on an essentially theological level, faith is not a claim of external truth, but rather "an act of fidelity or "being true to," rather than a propositional or empirical idea of truth. Truth is conceived as what, in a rather nicely antiquated English, can be called "troth-plight", the faithful act of pledging or proclaiming."¹¹² This articulates well the second way in which scholars of IR are becoming increasingly interested in theology, not simply as a source of intellectual history but as a deep resource for creatively thinking the political relationships between humans, the world, and the ultimate.

Critchley draws from Heidegger's reading of Paul (and in particular, Pauline grace) an account of human impotency, or inability to 'reach' the horizon of authenticity, as revealing what freedom really is:

"Heidegger embraces a logic of grace which entails that the project of how to become oneself is out of one's reach... The decision about who I am is not in my power, but only becomes intelligible through a certain affirmation of weakness... Freedom is not something I can confer on myself in a virile assertion of autarchy. It is something that

¹¹¹ Critchley, S., 14.

¹¹² Critchley, S., 165.

can only be received through the acknowledgement of an essential powerlessness, a constitutive impotence.”¹¹³

Paul is thus crucial for Heidegger’s ‘double nullity’, for the duality of thrownness and projection. Pauline weakness is thus that towards which we *must* project ourselves if we are to understand ourselves as impotent and weak, which will deliver us to ontological freedom. Here Critchley draws us deeper into the abstracted understanding of nothingness as the ontological ground:

“The situation is thus acutely Pauline: once I have heard the call, I look at everything as if it were not¹¹⁴ and I look at everything that is from the standpoint of that which is not—such is Paul’s double meontology. Strictly speaking... the self is divided between two nothings: on the one hand, the nothing of the world; and on the other, the nothingness of pure possibility revealed in being-towards-death.”¹¹⁵

Paul’s meontology, that is, his account that the messianic means bringing to be those that are not, and making nothing those that are, thus points to the radically political potential of Paul as grasped upon by so many contemporary writers. Critchley’s experiment in political theology draws from Heidegger a politics of authenticity drawn from weakness, a political stake he claims as rooted in Paul. As for many other writers discussed above, theology is not a matter of revelation but a matter of bearing witness to an infinite demand, a fidelity that is open even to the faithless.

As we shall see in the following chapters, Cone’s thought raises political questions for theologies which organise themselves around abstracted notions such as suffering, questions which can be extended to Critchley’s Heideggerian/Pauline notion of weakness or wretchedness. Whilst Critchley invokes Fanon, his abstract understanding and articulation of wretchedness as an essential dimension of the human condition is not equitable with the call that the wretched *of the earth* be liberated from European political and psychological

¹¹³ Critchley, S., 182.

¹¹⁴ Here Critchley is referencing a passage that is critical for accounts of Pauline Messianism, from Corinthians I, 7:29-31, which reads: “I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.” Coogan, M. D. et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1647.

¹¹⁵ Critchley, S., *The Faith of the Faithless*, 187.

colonialism. The abstract way in which Critchley articulates the essential wretchedness of the human condition is resonant with the abstract articulations of much theologies that hope to speak beyond their context, and to that extent it sits well in the growing pantheon of post-secular philosophy/political theology discussions. As we shall see, Cone approaches theology with an explicitly political suspicion of such abstractions.

Critchley offers a weighty account of Heidegger's indebtedness to St Paul and the possibility of a 'radical' re-reading of Heidegger that depicts us as paradoxically being 'thrown' into the world (being intrinsically embedded in the world) and as projecting ourselves out of it (making and attempting to meet the claims of an 'infinite demand'), towards an essential weakness. This duality will be a recurrent theme throughout this thesis, and in particular reference to Cone's thought in Chapter 4. The way in which Cone constructs the connection between the divine and worldly struggle, the point of connection itself, is an understanding of the particularity of the Jewish Jesus. This depiction of Jesus the Jew as the grounds of the duality of our existence vis-à-vis what is 'not of this world' draws us into the discussion which will take place in Chapter 5 and 6, over the systematic abstraction that lies at the heart of much Christian thought. In Chapter 6 we will make our way back to Heidegger, and will discuss the ambiguous and uneasy theme of Christian Supersessionism in his thought.

Depoliticised Metaphysics: Re-politicising ontology

Here we address our final text in this illustrative discussion of the core themes of political theology, those being an assumed differentiation between (secular) philosophy and (dogmatic) theology, hopes to rehabilitate universality or establish the horizon of particularity, and the tensions between abstract articulations and claims to worldly concreteness.

In his recent *Political Ontology and International Political Thought*, Vassilios Paipais laments the deadlock of Western metaphysics inaugurated by an oscillation between foundationalism, anti-foundationalism, and post-foundationalism in thought about political ontology.¹¹⁶ Paipais reacts to what he calls depoliticization as the effect of both above tendencies. Instead, he advocates an approach to political ontology that would both 'avoid a relapse into ideological forms of universalism' as well as "deflect the latest incarnations of historicism—as the

¹¹⁶ Paipais, V., *Political Ontology and International Political Thought*, xii.

discourse that pronounces on what totality is (usually a flattened-out, undifferentiated, univocal ensemble) from an internal, contextual, yet necessarily metalinguistic, and, therefore, ultimately self-contradictory point of enunciation....”¹¹⁷ A political ontology is thus, for Paipais, one which avoids both disembedded universality but also the closure of any meta-contextual referent. It is the constant negotiation between the ontic and the ontological, the worldly and the otherworldly, without subordinating either to the other, nor hiding the unresolvable tension that lies between them.

In the case of foundationalism, depoliticization is for Paipais the effect of reifying the universal over the particular, which in the words of Sergei Prozorov, is always “a result of a hegemonic operation of *universalization* that conceals the particular origin or character of what it presents as universal.”¹¹⁸ Paipais identifies the effect of depoliticization in the liberal and post-liberal ontologies of thinkers such as John Rawls, Michael Walzer, Richard Rorty, Martha Nussbaum and Alisdair Macintyre. In a similar fashion, Paipais identifies depoliticisation in the anti-foundationalist critical dialogic ontologies of Jürgen Habermas, Andrew Linklater, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Richard Shapcott. The faults of these thinkers, for Paipais, is the ultimate reliance on some *foundational*, rather than *political*, ontology, which neglects to engage in the political as the always-insufficient *negotiation* of the ontological and the ontic, as opposed to forcing the latter to assimilate to some universal conception of the former. Foundationalists reify grounds, whilst anti-foundationalists attempt to do away with grounds, leaving only language and the ensuing need for something like discourse ethics, which leaves them rooted in an ontic (Eurocentric) understanding of universal community that attempts to overcome difference via dialogue.¹¹⁹

Post-foundationalism is also found to have acute problems. Often floored as the antidote to the errant universalism of ontological foundationalism, anti-foundationalism is represented by the agonistic ethics of David Campbell, the complexity/multiplicity of William Connolly, and the radical democracy of Chantal Mouffe. The problem with these approaches is the ‘elevation’ (or transcendental-isation) of some ontic principle (difference, complexity, contingency) to the status of ontological value, and then its use as a foundation-function to

¹¹⁷ Paipais, V., xi–xii.

¹¹⁸ Prozorov, S., *Ontology and World Politics*, xv.

¹¹⁹ Paipais, V., *Political Ontology and International Political Thought*, 97–98.

be mapped directly onto politics. The problem is the absence of ‘the political’ as the insufficient, and tragic, *negotiation* between the ontological and the ontic, as opposed the enactment of the belief that folding the former into the latter will produce a politics of ontological harmony (because that politics will be ‘true to the world’).

Central to Paipais’s prognostic discussion of imagining ontologies that remain *political* is the Pauline notion of messianic time. Here Paipais draws upon Agamben’s reading of messianic time, in which:

“...the prophet is essentially defined through his relation to the future. In Psalm 74:9 we read, "We see no signs, no prophet any more, and there is no one among us who knows how long." "How long": each time the prophets announce the coming of the Messiah, the message is always about a time to come, a time not yet present. This is what marks the difference between the prophet and the apostle. The apostle speaks forth from the arrival of the Messiah. At this point prophecy must keep silent, for now prophecy is truly fulfilled. (This is how one should read its innermost tension toward closure.) The word passes on to the apostle, to the emissary of the Messiah, whose time is no longer the future, but the present. This is why Paul's technical term for the messianic event is *ho nyn Kairos*, "the time of the now"; this is why Paul is an apostle and not a prophet.”¹²⁰

Agamben seeks to disentangle messianic and eschatological time, the conflation of which he argues is a misreading of the Apostle Paul. Critically, eschatological time is apocalyptic, it warns of the coming apocalypse and concerns itself with both this eventual rupture and “the atemporal eternity that comes after the end of the world.”¹²¹ This temporality can be roughly understood as the Christianisation of an ancient Greek temporality¹²² which is variously reproduced as chronological or linear time, with the addition of an apocalyptic future rupture that interrupts linear time with the time of salvation as “the Christian conception of a time oriented toward eschatological salvation and, hence, toward a final end...”¹²³

¹²⁰ Agamben, G., *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford University Press, 2005), 61.

¹²¹ Agamben, G., 62.

¹²² Also invoked by William Connolly as Chrono-time or clock time, in: Connolly, W. E., *A World of Becoming* (Duke University Press, 2011).

¹²³ Agamben, G., *The Time That Remains*, 63.

Agamben's reading of Paul, however, ushers in a conception of messianic time which can be roughly summarised (to use Agamben's words) as "the time of the now" – "What interests the apostle is not the last day, it is not the instant in which time ends, but the time that contracts itself and begins to end... or if you prefer, the time that remains between time and its end."¹²⁴ This puts Paipais' thought in line with Peterson's, discussed above, in which the authentically theological community awaits, and does not enact, the 'fulfilment' of time.

Paipais seeks to operate within this immanent temporality of now-time which at once grants the messianic moment to the immanent present *and* frees political ontology from the fetters of the worldly element of eschatological time—the ongoing chronological subsistence of worldly conditions. This allows the construction of ontological systems in a roughly temporally-suspended spatiality which calls for a-temporal moulding of the whole. Whilst for Prozorov this manifests as a formal structure of void universalism dividing the World and many worlds, and inscribing universal axioms, for Paipais it is a Lacanian, tragicomic subjectivity which *aspires* to the messianic, but which will always fall short of it. For Paipais, then, a formal ontology of political difference refuses to solve or overcome the tension between 'politics and the political', neither solidifying its vision into some 'proper order', nor dispatching with the frame of order itself as that which is desired but which can never be attained.¹²⁵

Political ontology can thus remain political because it retains, and flourishes within, a dialectic between the ontic and the ontological. It can, too, give rise to a form of critique that does not side with the 'oppressive and unjust structures of power' or with abstracted forms of critique such as 'fluidity, contingency, and mobility' whilst maintaining a recognition of its own complicity in such structures of power.¹²⁶ Paipais thus advocates a formal ontology as the empty space in which a 'naked emperor' enacts a tragicomic political subjectivity.¹²⁷ Paipais' closes with a clear image of the tragicomic subjectivity which enacts this formal ontology of always-insufficient and always-incomplete negotiation of the ontological and the ontic:

¹²⁴ Agamben, G., 62.

¹²⁵ Paipais, V., *Political Ontology and International Political Thought*, 223.

¹²⁶ Paipais, V., 23–24.

¹²⁷ Paipais, V., 226.

“In Greek-Orthodox temples – in a beautiful short-circuit of the events of crucifixion and resurrection – the icon of the crucified Jesus is accompanied by a crowning inscription that implies the only existence, as Paul would say, messianic subjects can be boastful of. Above the hanging, mutilated, humiliated and wretched body of a condemned Christ – an outlaw for the Roman state, a scandal for His own community and a fool for Greek philosophers – the sign paradoxically declares: *Ὁ Βασιλεύς τῆς Δόξης* (‘The King of Glory’).”¹²⁸

Paipais’ account of the de-politicisation of approaches to political ontology which dispatch either the ontic or the ontological in favour of the other, and his insistence on the open and continual negotiation between them as constituting a political ontology, sets the stage for a deep conversation between political theology in IR and the thought of theologian James Cone. Paipais’ understanding of a *political* metaphysics resonates with Cone’s early theological works, wherein human talk of God is both politically necessary and always fallible, and must be re-evaluated in light of the Gospel by those in struggle and as new generations confront new political problems. Crucially, Paipais calls for ontological reflections to be *both* reflexive and formal, but where that formality is not constituted by a reliance on abstractions. Cone’s thought exceeds Paipais’ in that it is a productive and creative project of theological production into which critique is weaved, but for which critique is not the main purpose. To that extent Cone explores the space that Paipais indicates only in the closing chapter: the production of new creative visions for ultimate frames in the midst of political struggles. Critically, such reflexive visions must not themselves fall into a hegemonic universalisation, to the entrenchment of a particular interpretive order, and within the horizon of Christianity Cone’s thought constitutes a nuanced negotiation of this, even going so far as to threaten the abandonment of Christianity itself if it cannot provide a divine imperative for political liberation. Paipais’ work takes a nuanced route between the themes of universality and particularity, and concreteness and abstraction. What is lacking in his articulation, as with all the works that we have discussed here, is explicit and concrete reference to a particular political world, a particular experiential register, as that ground from which the ultimate is claimed, negotiated with, or appealed to. To engage these problematics through and from

¹²⁸ Paipais, V., 228.

concrete worldly entrenchment that for many is a central feature of overcoming dogmatic universalism or a-political abstraction is, it seems, the next step for political theology.

Conclusion

Political theology in IR is deeply concerned with a varying terrain of themes. This chapter has not reviewed this literature as a fixed and bounded field, but has rather tried to give voice to the themes and tensions that are at issue for it. Many of the works in this chapter are located either outside IR or outside political theology, and this attests to the considerable overlap between political theology in IR and political theology outside IR, political ontology within and beyond IR, to the extent that distinguishing between them is not necessarily a strictly analytical or helpful endeavour.

In any case, scholars of IR who are becoming interested in political theology approach it from roughly two distinct angles. Firstly, the theological is something to be identified in projects of intellectual history which point to concealed theological concepts in thought that is casually assumed to be operating in a strictly secular frame. This broad project of course overlaps IR and the humanities in general, with a standout work being Michael Gillespie's *The Theological Origins of Modernity*. This work draws our attention to the ways in which the nominalist revolution against scholasticism undertaken by such Franciscan thinkers as William of Ockham resonates deeply in the metaphysical problematics of modernity. Texts such as this do indispensable work for closing the gap between 'secular modernity' and the thought-worlds of theology, providing a rigorous account of the intertwinement of theological and secular thought.

In IR more specifically, Seán Molloy demonstrates the inheritance of theological ideas like divine providence in the thought of Immanuel Kant, a figure of particular importance for cosmopolitan thinkers of IR. In Chapter 6 we will return to Molloy's work to help us connect the discussion of Christian Supersessionism in Kant with his critique of reading Kant without taking stock of the role of theology in his thought. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 will contribute to this project through a discussion of the problem of Christian Supersessionism. Whilst Cone does not engage in an analytical discussion of supersessionism, the central role of a concrete depiction of Jesus in his thought draws our attention to his widespread resistance of theological abstraction, and in turn to question the theological roots of the abstraction that

he rejects. Whilst the discussion of Christian Supersessionism remains a preliminary one, it points to a crucially important idea that has become concealed in modern philosophy.

The second broad project towards which political theology in IR is oriented springboards largely from this closing of the gap between philosophy and theology. These works point towards a generative re-engagement with theology as a deep resource for addressing multiple questions that overlap between political theology and political ontology. Going beyond the intellectual-historical, Milbank's work argues persuasively that secular thought is not just an inheritor of theological concepts, but that at the metaphysical level it *makes* its own theological claims. Milbank distils multiple forms of secular reason, not least postmodern nihilism, to making at core a non-provable and mythological claim, and as such as never having stepped beyond theology itself. In Milbank's frame, metaphysics *are* theologies.

The themes of universality/particularity and abstraction/concreteness are of key importance for political metaphysics. Can universality be rehabilitated, as Prozorov wishes, and drawn from Pauline thought, as Badiou suggests? Milbank, too, seeks to establish an ontology of first principles

With sharp criticism of political ontologies or theologies which appear to forget the world and plunge away from it in ontological exploration of first principles, some seek to retain a worldly ethical referent, such as suffering (McNay) or weakness (Critchley). These attempts to return metaphysics to the world via an insistence on the essential importance of certain experiential registers do so through an abstract understanding or depiction of these registers. As we shall see in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, Cone takes particular issue with theological abstraction as shoring up a thinly veiled conservatism that fails to challenge the white supremacy and racism that create the political struggle from which he explodes.

To that extent, this thesis follows a pattern opposite to the logic with which this chapter has been constructed. Here the intellectual-historical inseparability of theology and philosophy was first stated, then we discussed multiple political metaphysical articulations which revolve around some relation between universality/particularity, abstraction/concreteness. The final articulation of thinkers like McNay, Critchley, and Paipais is to advocate starting with some understanding of human struggle, but in each this struggle remains abstract: struggle as such. Cone begins where these thinkers finish, he performs what is here advocated. But he goes

one step further in entrenching his theology of liberation not in abstract struggle as such, but in a particular worldly struggle. Cone's thought can therefore be read as fulfilling the puzzling difficulty of theorists to go beyond critique and advocacy. He speaks from deep entrenchment in a particular political struggle, a struggle that is deeply indicative of the violence of the modern world created by the period of Western imperial globalisation. He speaks from this struggle but speaks to a truth that lies beyond it.

Deep engagement with political theologies that lie outside the mainstream canon of European and Christian thought will push discussions around political theology into new and challenging territory. There do exist multiple such works engaging with traditions outside Christianity, but this thesis has necessarily had to restrain its scope to Christian theologies and corollary modern philosophies.¹²⁹ Cone's stands as a theological project that can invite theorists in IR interested in the insights of theology into a deeply situated world that combines political praxis with theological reflection.

This chapter has introduced the themes and questions which revolve around the point of entry into a conversation between Cone's theology and political theology in IR. The following chapter will give a sustained summary of his theological project. Following this summary we will turn back towards works of political theology upon which Cone's thought offers insights, in Chapters 3 and 4. In Chapters 5 and 6, directed by Cone's Christological commitments, we will turn towards a core tension in Christianity's origin story itself. This tension, Christian Supersessionism, carries into modern theology and philosophy an uneasy and partially concealed aggressivity towards Judaism. Cone's thought guides us towards a deeper conversation about the role and implications of the confluence of abstraction and universality that often lies at the heart of Christian thought. This problematic revolves around the extent to which claims to universality articulated in the milieu of Christian thought are paradoxically, at the same time, claims to particularity vis-à-vis Judaism, a particularity that becomes concealed behind universalising abstractions. The political struggle in which Cone is engaged is, as we shall discuss in Chapters 4 and 6, deeply linked to the secularisation of Christian

¹²⁹ See: Brincat, S., 'The Cosmology of Mādhyamaka Buddhism and Its World of Deep Relationalism'; Shilliam, R., *The Black Pacific*; Pasha, M. K., 'Ibn Khaldun and the Wealth of Civilizations', in *Routledge Handbook of Ethics and International Relations*, ed. Steele, B. J. and Heinze, E. (Routledge, 2018), 554–64; Pasha, M. K., 'Political Theology and Sovereignty: Sayyid Qutb in Our Times'; Pasha, M. K., *Islam and International Relations*; Ling, L. H. M., *The Dao of World Politics: Towards a Post-Westphalian, Worldist International Relations* (Routledge, 2013); Shani, G., 'Toward a Post-Western IR'.

Supersessionism in modernity, responding to one of its manifestations in modern racial discourse.

Chapter 2: James Cone: A Theological Introduction

This chapter will substantively introduce the work of James Cone. It will take the form of introductory overview of Cone's main works, which is a vital step in establishing familiarity with his thought, as well as establishing the archive upon which conceptual extrapolation of his work to wider discussions of political theology in IR can be established.

The bulk of Cone's theology was published in his first four books: *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969), *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970), *The Spirituals and the Blues* (1972), and *God of the Oppressed* (1975). The first of these texts is his most polemical, and the first two draw most substantively on the sources and vocabulary of his formal seminary education. Here he engages significant figures of the early Twentieth Century German protestant tradition, with thinkers like Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann and Jürgen Moltmann, alongside French existentialist thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Following his engagement with these writers, Cone is criticised by his peers in the emerging field of black theology for what is deemed an overreliance on European and White American sources of thought. In his third and fourth books, he tries to establish and deepen the theological program of his first two books, focusing instead upon a Euro-American canon of academic thought, primarily upon on two sources: Biblical exegesis, and the songs, sermons, stories and traditions of the black religious experience in the United States. By this he hoped to establish that his black theology was not simply derived from Euro-American political theology and philosophy. These four books represent the substantive sources of Cone's theological project. The division between references to the work of Euro-American philosophers and protestant theologians and Biblical exegesis and expressions of the black religious experience in the United States already well depict the worlds which Cone straddles.

James H. Cone (1936-2018) was a black American theologian. Born in Arkansas, he spent most of his professional life, from 1970, at Union Theological Seminary, New York. Cone is hailed as one of the founders of Black Liberation Theology, a theological movement which began in the late 1960s. Cone experienced rural, deep-south racism, including threats of lynching, in his childhood life, and upon pursuing a formal theological education, became more and more frustrated that the open and institutionalised racism of life in early and mid-twentieth century America was a topic ignored by his, mostly white, seminary professors. After completing his

PhD in 1965, on the anthropology of the thought of Karl Barth,¹³⁰ an influential German theologian, Cone became more and more dissatisfied with the inability and unwillingness of American theology to address head on, by then centre-stage in public life due to the civil rights movement, issues of racism and white supremacy. Inspired by black power, and doubtless despondent about its commonly-held incompatibility with Christianity, as famously argued by Malcolm X and others in the Black Power movement,¹³¹ Cone set out to demonstrate that Christian theology *can* give birth to a radical and revolutionary politics.

Cone's texts can be arranged thematically in pairs. His first two books, *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969),¹³² and *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970)¹³³ are widely acknowledged as founding texts of Black Liberation Theology, and contain within them a sophisticated and sharp tongued attack on 'white theology',¹³⁴ and the establishment of a political theology of liberation, articulated in large part in tradition and style of Cone's formal seminary education in systematic theology.

These initial texts sparked a number of critical responses, not least from Cone's brother Cecil Cone, variously revolving around the over-reliance on the structures and sources of European, primarily German, protestant thought, to give shape to his (supposedly) black theology. Whilst Cecil Cone's book, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology* was not published until 1975,

¹³⁰ Cone, J. H., *The Doctrine of Man in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., 1965).

¹³¹ As Elonda Clay argues: "[Stokely] Carmichael, like many leaders within the Black Power movement, including Malcolm X, H. Rap Brown, Huey Newton, James Foreman, and Eldridge Cleaver, aggressively expressed a hermeneutic of suspicion towards U.S. Christianity as a culturally legitimized religious system that was a demonic force against Black flourishing and self-determination. As a White man's religion, Christianity was seen as just another form of cultural imperialism and as justification for "civilizing" missions of economic and political imperialism to be rejected." Clay, E., 'A Black Theology of Liberation or Legitimation? A Postcolonial Response to Cone's Black Theology and Black Power at Forty', *Black Theology* 8, no. 3 (2010): 315.

¹³² Cone, J. H., *Black Theology and Black Power* (Orbis Books, 1969).

¹³³ Cone, J. H., *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Orbis Books, 1970).

¹³⁴ In an article published in 1985, Cone points concisely to what he means by white theology, providing a good way to introduce the idea: "As white theology is largely defined by its response to modern and post-modern societies of Europe and America, usually ignoring the contradictions of slavery and oppression in black life, black religious thought is the thinking of slaves and of marginalized blacks whose understanding of God was shaped by the contradictions that white theologians ignored and regarded as unworthy of theological reflection." Cone, J. H., 'Black Theology in American Religion', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53, no. 4 (1985): 756. White theology, and counterposing it simplistically with Cone's Black Theology, has of course been a contested construction, most notably by Jacquelyn Grant: "It is my contention that if Black theology speaks of the Black community as if the special problems of Black women do not exist, it is no different from the white theology it claims to reject precisely because of its inability to take account of the existence of Black people in its theological formulations." Grant's critique pushes a conceptualisation of white theology into new territory. Grant, J., 'Black Theology and the Black Woman', in *The Black Studies Reader*, ed. Bobo, J., Hudley, C., and Michel, C. (Routledge, 2004), 429.

James Cone heard the message loud and clear, and by 1972 had already made a shift to calling upon the sources of the black religious tradition in the US to structure and guide his theological work, publishing in that year *The Spirituals and the Blues*.¹³⁵ In 1975 Cone followed up with *God of the Oppressed*, another text which moves away from the European theological mainstream and towards the liberating message found in two sources: the Bible, and the songs, sermons, stories and speeches of the American black religious tradition.¹³⁶

After this publishing whirlwind, and having kickstarted and already made a reflexive shift in the source material of Black Liberation Theology, in the early 1980s Cone published two, much more accessible, texts which both had similar aims: to provide an account of the debates that shaped the first 10 years of Black Liberation Theology, and to point toward future directions. These were *My Soul Looks Back* (1982) and *For My People* (1984).¹³⁷

From here the timeline gets a little more confused. In 1986 and 1999 Cone published two books containing a variety of essays and papers which make a number of useful clarifications and re-iterations. The first, *Speaking The Truth* (1986) contains a number of works published or presented in 1975-1985, and the second, *Risks of Faith* (1999), contains essays dating from Cones very first iteration of a Black Theology, in 1968, up to a consideration of Black Theology and the environment, in 1998.¹³⁸

The remaining texts were published in 1992 and 2011, and 2018, a final memoir finished shortly before his death on April the 28th, 2018. These were *Martin & Malcolm & America* (1992), and *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2011), and *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*.¹³⁹ These texts are central for understanding Cone's political and theological vision. The first argues that the thought of *both* Martin Luther King, Jr. *and* Malcolm X are central to a black liberation movement that can be sustainable and productive beyond the (necessary) outburst of rage and righteous condemnation. The second, now hugely popular in seminary education

¹³⁵ Cone, C. W., *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology* (Nashville, TN: AMEC, 1975); Cone, J. H., *The Spirituals and the Blues* (Orbis Books, 1972).

¹³⁶ Cone, J. H., *God of the Oppressed* (Orbis Books, 1975).

¹³⁷ Cone, J. H., *My Soul Looks Back* (Orbis Books, 1986); Cone, J. H., *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Orbis Books, 1984).

¹³⁸ Cone, J. H., *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Orbis Books, 1999); Cone, J. H., *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968-1998* (Beacon Press, 2000).

¹³⁹ Cone, J. H., *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream Or a Nightmare* (Orbis Books, 1992); Cone, J. H., *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Orbis Books, 2011); Cone, J. H., *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian* (Orbis Books, 2018).

in the US, presents the argument that the cross and the lynching tree are the twin symbols of America. With sustained engagements with greats of the 'progressive' protestant tradition, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Reinhold Niebuhr, this text is widely cited as offering a prophetic message to Christianity in the United States.

For the purposes of this thesis, it is the first four texts which are most interesting, along with the two essay collections which provide a number of clarifications and concise arguments. It is in these texts that Cone presents his systematic theology, addressing core theological questions regarding the nature of God, the meaning of Jesus Christ, the sources of revelation, and the meaning of suffering. As this thesis seeks to present Cone as a political theologian, it is essential to delve into the core of his theological work itself, as therein we see how deeply his politics is theologically grounded, and his theology is politically grounded. From these four texts, then, the meaning of Cone's thought for conversations around political theology can be most directly ascertained.

Part 1: Black Theology and Black Power (1969), and A Black Theology of Liberation (1970)

Cone's first two books represent a comprehensive critique of what he calls 'white theology'. As well as wanting to reject the work of white theologians, Cone also identifies the function of the 'white-washing' of Christianity: a simultaneous denial of racial particularity or prejudice within the European traditions of Christianity, along with the persistent representation of Jesus as a white Caucasian man, and the undercurrents of a racialised imagery of 'white America' as the 'chosen people' in various theo-political myths.¹⁴⁰ These myths have been well documented, not least by Sylvester A. Johnson, who writes that "...chosenness and whiteness worked symbiotically to define race and nation in opposition to Negroes as the "radical other.""¹⁴¹ These myths maintained, and still maintain, the implication that only the people and cultures descended from Europe carry an authentic Christianity—identified by Cone, and many others, as the perpetuation of racism and white supremacy from within theology.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Niebuhr, R., 'Anglo-Saxon Destiny and Responsibility', in *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, ed. Conrad Cherry (UNC Press Books, 2014).

¹⁴¹ Johnson, S., *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity: Race, Heathens, and the People of God* (Springer, 2004), 2; Glaude, E. S., *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (University of Chicago Press, 2000).

¹⁴² Cherry, C., ed., *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (UNC Press Books, 2014).

Just as Cone rejects white theology, so he rejects the limitless forgiveness and appeal to brotherhood represented by the mainstream civil rights movement, and its most influential leader, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. Cone sees this as the apologetic appeal to the better humanity of a society of oppressors who in his account will happily and cynically exploit this kindness to maintain the position of power. Cone instead seeks to demonstrate that something more akin to the politics of black power can be affirmed from within Christianity, which eschews the vocabulary of universal equality in favour of an insistence on dignity:

“...whatever the consequences, there is a growing—a rapidly growing—body of black people determined to “T.C.B” —take care of business. They will not be stopped in their drive to achieve dignity, to achieve their share of power, indeed, to become their own men and women—in this time and in this land—by whatever means necessary.”¹⁴³

Cone begins by making an ontological affirmation: he is black first, and Christian second. Thus his first book can be understood as a Christian affirmation of Black Power. In Cone’s theology, prior to a commitment of faith, is an understanding of the material conditions of human life. As we shall see, this is not an arbitrary commitment, just as another theologian could claim to be white before they are a Christian, but blackness is central to his understanding of Christianity. As he writes in the preface to *A Black Theology of Liberation*, “In a society where persons are oppressed because they are black, Christian theology must become black theology, a theology that is unreservedly identified with the goals of the oppressed...”¹⁴⁴ Indeed, in the preface to the 1986 edition of *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Cone writes that “Theology, as Latin American liberation theologians have stressed, is the second step, a reflective action taken in response to the first act of a practical commitment on behalf of the poor.”¹⁴⁵ Theology, then, *follows*, and does not *precede*, a social and political commitment.

It is important here to recognise that Cone’s reproduction, in his first two texts, of a fairly traditional structure of a work of systematic theology is conducted in the hope of challenging white theology in the theological areas that it holds as central to the discipline. Whilst he begins with a statement of fidelity with the Black Power movement, he focuses, at least at

¹⁴³ Hamilton, C. V. and Ture, K., *Black Power: Politics of Liberation in America* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011), 184-185.

¹⁴⁴ Cone, J. H., *A Black Theology of Liberation*, vii.

¹⁴⁵ Cone, J. H., xxiii.

first, on the main questions of academic systematic theology. In his later texts, he moves away from this structure, as he gains the confidence to move away from the structures and sources of his formal seminary education.

Black Power

In defining Black Power, Cone begins with an account of the condition of absurdity which he argues that black people in the United States inhabit – of grappling with a system (“the white world and its values”) that defines and treats them as inhuman.¹⁴⁶ In language characteristic of the Black Power movement of the time, Cone writes that the response of Black Power to this condition of absurdity is analogous to the rebel in the work of Albert Camus: “One who embraces Black Power does not despair and take suicide as an out, nor does he appeal to another world in order to relieve the pains of this one. Rather, *he fights back with the whole of his being.*”¹⁴⁷ Here a first step of making ‘whites’ recognise their humanity, black people must recognize the ‘unsavoury behavior’ of whites for ‘what it is.’

In this absurd condition of inhumanity, Cone sees freedom and humanity as things which must be taken, not waited for to be given by a racist white society. Indeed, it is *only* black people who can lead this charge, and the self-love and self-respect necessary for this is one of the cornerstones of Black Power. This means resisting co-optation into ‘white society’ and adopting or internalising a rejection of blackness, but instead celebrating and living in full witness of the ‘beauty of blackness’: “Instead, it must affirm the beauty of blackness and by so doing free the black man for a self-affirmation of his own being as a black man.”¹⁴⁸ Black Power is thus a forceful and self-confident response to conditions of dehumanisation. But rather than finding its sources in a kind of pragmatic-political or existential rationality, how may it be affirmed for those of Christian faith?

The Gospel and Revelation

In the preface to the 1986 edition of *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Cone reveals the conditions under which he wrote this work of systematic theology: “Alone in Adrian, Michigan, searching for a constructive way in theology that would empower oppressed blacks, the motif of liberation came to me as I was rereading the scripture in light of African-

¹⁴⁶ Cone, J. H., *Black Theology and Black Power*, 11.

¹⁴⁷ Cone, J. H., 12.

¹⁴⁸ Cone, J. H., 19–20.

American history and culture... Liberation emerged as the organizing principle and has remained the central motif in my perspective on the gospel."¹⁴⁹ In this text Cone follows a fairly traditional theological layout, beginning with revelation as an implicit claim to objectivity, and following it with doctrines of God, humanity, Christ, church, world, and eschatology.¹⁵⁰

Later, Cone wrote that if he were to re-write this book he would not begin with revelation, as it implies an objectivity often claimed by the Western theological tradition, and from which he wants to distance himself. Nevertheless, in *A Black Theology of Liberation* it is clear that Cone does not want to claim objectivity of scriptural interpretation, as he is acutely aware of the potential damage of claims to divine authorisation. Cone explicitly associates those who claim 'verbal infallibility' with a politics of domination that finds in scriptural authority a bottom line, beyond all doubt, for justifying the most inhumane political and social policies and processes. This is a theme that emerges time and again in Cone's thought, as politically polemical as it is, which foregrounds the reality of human fallibility on matters eternal. Whilst literalism is theologically problematic as it claims the possibility of knowing what must, for Cone, remain essentially mysterious, he highlights too its political shortcomings, in its association with the confident imposition of theologico-political order.¹⁵¹

Cone's identification of *liberation* as a central theme in biblical tradition is threefold. Firstly, he emphasises that the election of Israel is inseparable from the Exodus event: "By delivering this people from Egyptian bondage and inaugurating the covenant on the basis of that historical event, God is revealed as the God of the oppressed, involved in their history, liberating them from human bondage."¹⁵² Secondly, he emphasises the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament: "The consistent theme in Israelite prophecy is Yahweh's concern for the lack of social, economic, and political justice for those who are poor and unwanted in society."¹⁵³ Thirdly, Cone turns to the Gospel message of the New Testament: "...the career of Jesus show[s] that his work was directed to the oppressed for the purpose of their liberation. To suggest that he was speaking of a "spiritual" liberation fails to take seriously Jesus'

¹⁴⁹ Cone, J. H., *A Black Theology of Liberation*, xxiv.

¹⁵⁰ Cone, J. H., xxiii.

¹⁵¹ Cone, J. H., 33.

¹⁵² Cone, J. H., 2.

¹⁵³ Cone, J. H., 2.

thoroughly Hebrew view of human nature. Entering into the kingdom of God means that Jesus himself becomes the ultimate loyalty for humankind, for *he is the kingdom*.¹⁵⁴ Cone thus argues that the core meaning of Christianity is the liberation of oppressed peoples, and that this is revealed both in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry, as well as the Old Testament narratives of Exodus and Yahweh's concern for justice. As will be discussed at length in Chapters 3 and 4, Cone responds to the dominant understanding of Christianity as offering a universal message of salvation with the strong assertion that Christianity *does not* contain a universal message for all people at all times, but that its 'Good News' is a message of liberation to and for the oppressed of society. He puts this assertion in the strongest of terms:

"Yahweh takes sides... Jesus is not for *all*, but for the oppressed, the poor and the unwanted of society, and against oppressors. The God of the biblical tradition is not uninvolved or neutral regarding human affairs; God is decidedly involved... If God is not involved in human history, then all theology is useless, and Christianity itself is a mockery, a hollow, meaningless diversion."¹⁵⁵

Cone thus begins by grounding his theology of liberation in the Gospel. His argument is that the theme of concrete, worldly liberation is the central motif of the Old Testament, as well as the life and ministry of Jesus in the canonical Gospels. God is depicted not as a passive observer or an inactive creator, but as deeply involved in human history to realise the liberation of the oppressed.

*"Revelation, then, is the epistemological justification of the claims of a community about ontological reality."*¹⁵⁶

The question of revelation is of central importance to theology writ-large, and it is where the 'objectivity' of any given knowledge of God is claimed. Cone's treatment of revelation is reflexive and delicate. He must tread the line between fallacious and ideological claims to objectivity (and the literalism that he rejects) whilst retaining the legitimising function of an appeal to the divinity of liberation.

¹⁵⁴ Cone, J. H., 3.

¹⁵⁵ Cone, J. H., 6–7.

¹⁵⁶ Cone, J. H., 44.

Cone moves away from objectivity by claiming that his account of revelation can be understood through what he calls the risk of faith. This is underlined by, and experienced within, the situation of existential desperation of being oppressed in an oppressive society. Cone writes that revelation cannot be claimed by a theologian, and ultimately must be interpreted without a 'guaranteed ethical guide'.¹⁵⁷ The revelation of liberation as the meaning of Christianity is thus one that must be discerned individually as a wager, a wager that comes without guarantees. Theologians attempt to 'discern' the meaning of God, and, drawing upon Tillich, Cone writes that black theologians must wager that understanding God as offering a divine message of liberation is a necessary symbolic representation of what cannot be understood literally.¹⁵⁸ The fundamental inability of human knowledge to truly ascertain the meaning of the ultimate is what restricts revelation, and which calls upon the faithful to take a risk in interpreting the meaning of Christianity. This falls in line with Cone's assertion that theology proceeds *after* one has made a political commitment to the community of the oppressed. Thus, "Black theology takes the risk of faith and thus makes an unqualified identification of God's revelation with black liberation."¹⁵⁹

So, for Cone, revelation *is* the event of liberation—the liberating presence of God—and the evidence that God is for the oppressed is found when conditions of oppression develop into a situation of liberation. Acts of liberation are thus understood as 'the work of God', and acts of emancipation 'by any means necessary' are authorised by God as divine liberator. This is an unforgiving association of God with oppressed people fighting uncompromisingly for liberation, and leaves no clause insisting upon peaceable compromise with worldly powers.¹⁶⁰

Cone argues that revelation is irreducibly historical, that is, revelation of the divine message of liberation of black people from a society that deems them inhuman is a contemporary iteration of that divine message, but is itself not eternal, for societies and oppressions change. This historicity is in line with Cone's assertion that theologians do not decipher the meaning of God for all eternity, but only in relation to a particular community. Revelation, too, is only available to the faithful, as those able to perceive that liberation is the word of God: "Faith, then, is the existential recognition of a situation of oppression and a participation in God's

¹⁵⁷ Cone, J. H., 7.

¹⁵⁸ Cone, J. H., 8.

¹⁵⁹ Cone, J. H., 32.

¹⁶⁰ Cone, J. H., 48.

liberation... Faith is the existential element in revelation—that is, the community’s perception of its being and the willingness to fight against nonbeing.”¹⁶¹ Acts of liberation thus reveal the ontological reality of God for the faithful, and this revelation creates a feedback loop whereby God-as-liberator calls upon the faithful to perform and enact worldly liberation.

God and the Human Being

*“The first reply is to deny that there is a “universal God” in the normal understanding of the term... God is black.”*¹⁶²

Cone is understanding of those who advocate the destruction of the ‘white Christian God’. He has sympathy with adherents of black power who see Christianity as the religion of the oppressor, and who want nothing to do with it: “...many black militants have no time for God and the deadly prattle about loving your enemies and turning the other cheek. Christianity, they argue, participates in the enslavement of black Americans. Therefore an emancipation from white oppression means also liberation from the unGodly influence of white religion.”¹⁶³ His inability to go along with these arguments stems from both his Christian faith as central to his life and his community, as well as his understanding that the central message of Christianity is one of liberation.

Cone is highly dismissive of the death of God ‘controversy’, showing that he only accepts the rejection of the Christian God on ethical and political, not philosophical, grounds. He writes that the ‘death-of-God’ is a symptom of an ‘affluent society’ for whom a message of liberation is not existentially meaningful. Rather, the question of God’s absence from the world is not a concern for black people in the United States, who have their purpose, resisting dehumanisation, forced upon them. The question for black people in the United states is not how to find meaning without God, but how to “...survive in a world permeated with white racism.”¹⁶⁴

Cone here points to Paul Tillich’s argument of the symbolic nature of all theologies, arguing that the English word ‘God’ is only “a symbol that opens up depths of reality in the world. If the symbol loses its power to point to the meaning of black liberation, then we must destroy

¹⁶¹ Cone, J. H., 50.

¹⁶² Cone, J. H., 90.

¹⁶³ Cone, J. H., 60.

¹⁶⁴ Cone, J. H., 66.

it.”¹⁶⁵ He recognises that perpetuating the assumed universality of the God preached by white American churches (‘a complacent white God’) is fatal for the revolutionary spirit in black communities. He knows that the theological bases of white supremacy and racial oppression are powerfully underpinned by theologies that create pacification: “The white God will point to heavenly bliss as a means of detouring blacks away from earthly rage.”¹⁶⁶

Cone’s task then becomes not one of loving and trying to work within the conception of God inherited from white churches (what Cone would call the “timid, Uncle Tom approach of black churches”)¹⁶⁷ but instead to articulate a black God of revolution whose Kingdom is realised only in acts of liberation: “The white God is an idol created by racists, and we blacks must perform the iconoclastic task of smashing false images.”¹⁶⁸ Thus, the God of black theology is the God of the liberation of oppressed people. The contemporary articulation of this God is revealed in the phrase *God is Black*. Cone refuses to depict and understand God in abstract terms unrelated to current suffering in society and wants in the clearest terms to articulate the association of divinity with liberation.¹⁶⁹

Thus, being Christian means being unreservedly on the side of the oppressed: “Knowing God means being on the side of the oppressed, becoming *one* with them, and participating in the goal of liberation. *We must become black with God!*”¹⁷⁰ The imperative to ‘become black with God’ is thus connected with salvation and involves the reorientation of one’s existence on the basis of the knowledge that the liberation of the oppressed is the revelation of God and the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.¹⁷¹

Contrary to a privative and pacifying Christianity in which a forgiving and understanding God offers love universally, for Cone God’s love is fundamentally connected to His wrath. Cone sees the potential fatality of a conception of universally forgiving love for such a political theology as his, and must depict clearly how the divinity of liberation precedes a universal offer of love, which threatens to squash any political imperative with a paralyzingly warm fuzzy glow in which...“All we have to do is behave nicely, and everything will work out all

¹⁶⁵ Cone, J. H., 60–61.

¹⁶⁶ Cone, J. H., 60.

¹⁶⁷ Cone, J. H., 60.

¹⁶⁸ Cone, J. H., 62.

¹⁶⁹ Cone, J. H., 67.

¹⁷⁰ Cone, J. H., 69.

¹⁷¹ Cone, J. H., 70.

right.”¹⁷² God’s love does thus not exist unconnected to, and prior to, God’s wrath against oppressors. This is closely connected to Cone’s refusal to separate peace and justice, wherein appeals to Christian peacefulness risk overriding demands for justice. Cone must thus see off these threats which risk drawing Christianity back into the private realm, to ensure that his black theology remains decisively political and with direct meaning for worldly struggles. Whilst Cone is clearly interested in the function of theology as a powerful tool in the liberation struggle, he couches its ultimate purpose in existential, rather than material terms: “Ultimately... black humanity is not dependent on our power to win. Despite the empirical odds, our involvement in our liberation is not pointless; it is not absurd. It refers to the depth and meaning of our being-in-the-world.”¹⁷³ The symbolic function of Cone’s theology is not only about the material liberation struggle, it is also about freeing black people to be humans in connection with a divine purpose.

Along with rejecting the universality of an abstract loving God, Cone also rejects theology that speaks about a universal human subject. The universal human subject is seen as a transparent tool of white supremacy: “the human person in American theology is George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln rolled into one and polished up a bit. It is a colorless person, capable of “accepting” blacks as sisters and brothers, which means that it does not mind the blacks living next door *if* they behave themselves.”¹⁷⁴ Recognising the implicit manifestation of white supremacy in notions of the universal human,¹⁷⁵ Cone moves resolutely to the human being in black theology as thoroughly particular. Firstly, Jesus himself was not “a universal human being but an oppressed Jew...”,¹⁷⁶ and it is thus to, and about, oppressed black people in the United States that black theology makes its assertions about humanity. Cone thus speaks of the human being via its ‘being-in-the-world-of-human-oppression’, a starting point that centralises the suffering subject in the ontological question of the human being.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Cone, J. H., 73.

¹⁷³ Cone, J. H., 81–82.

¹⁷⁴ Cone, J. H., 92.

¹⁷⁵ This shall be discussed at length in chapters 4, 5, and 6, with particular reference to: Carter, J. K., *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁷⁶ Cone, J. H., *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 90.

¹⁷⁷ Cone, J. H., 92.

In the image of the gospel of liberation, human existence is explained as ‘being in freedom’, “which means rebellion against every form of slavery, [and] the suppression of everything creative.”¹⁷⁸ Thus, to be ‘fully human’ means to be “identified with those who are enslaved as they fight against human evil... Quite literally, it means becoming oppressed with the oppressed, making their cause one’s own cause by involving oneself in the liberation struggle.”¹⁷⁹ This means that to be free, human persons must risk everything when they find out that what is at stake in the struggle for liberation is nonbeing. Freedom is thus a confrontation, a risky human encounter, not an abstract question to be dealt with in academic discussions. Humanity, and human freedom, is thus put into practice in risky encounters against oppression.¹⁸⁰ This conception of human existence extends beyond the oppressed community itself, defining human freedom as unattainable when the oppressed are humiliated. The being of the human is undermined by degradation ‘of their brothers and sisters’. Those who realise their freedom by acting in solidarity with the oppressed do not do so out of ‘pity or sympathy’, “...but because their own existence is being limited by another’s slavery.”¹⁸¹

Contrary to a doctrine of sin wherein sin is universally manifest in individual humans who are fallen, Cone writes that sin is a community concept, and thus to be in sin “is to deny the values that make the community what it is. It is living according to one’s private interests and not according to the goals of the community.”¹⁸² Failing to work toward lifting the yoke of oppression from a given community, is thus to be in sin, and there can be no knowledge of sin outside the community of the oppressed: “...oppressors do not wish to know what is wrong with the world. Only the oppressed know what is wrong, because they are both the victims of evil and the recipients of God’s liberating activity.”¹⁸³ Cone thus defines sin in non-universal and non-abstract terms. The sin of white people is different to the sin of black people: for the former, it is their continued existence on the terms of, and in benefit of, white supremacy, and for the latter sin is the loss of identity and becoming co-opted into a world that dehumanises black people: “It is saying yes to the white absurdity—accepting the world

¹⁷⁸ Cone, J. H., 92.

¹⁷⁹ Cone, J. H., 93.

¹⁸⁰ Cone, J. H., 95.

¹⁸¹ Cone, J. H., 101.

¹⁸² Cone, J. H., 110.

¹⁸³ Cone, J. H., 114.

as it is by letting whites define black existence.”¹⁸⁴ To live in sin is thus for Cone quite literally to refuse to engage in acts of liberation.

Jesus and the World

In line with his identification of the dangers of a white God pacifying black people, Cone vehemently rejects the depiction of Jesus as a blond haired, blue-eyed Caucasian who stands behind a conservative and racist society and state: “Their Jesus is a mild, easy-going white American who can afford to mouth the luxuries of “love,” “mercy,” “long-suffering,” and other white irrelevancies, because he has a multibillion-dollar military force to protect him from the encroachments of the ghetto and the “communist conspiracy.””¹⁸⁵ This socially conservative Jesus, Cone recognises, is useless for the liberation struggle, in much the same way that a God that prioritises love over wrath, and peace over justice, is.

Cone takes the historical Jesus seriously, arguing that his sole reason for existence was “to bind the wounds of the afflicted and to liberate those who are in prison. To understand the historical Jesus without seeing his identification with the poor as decisive is to misunderstand him and thus distort his historical person.”¹⁸⁶ Just as Cone’s God is black, so is his Jesus. However, Cone does not make this argument along the lines of contemporary ethnic or racial vocabularies, but rather argues that the fact that Jesus was a particular Jew means that in contemporary times, his particularity vis-à-vis the powers that be must be understood in relation to the particularity of blackness: “The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus reveal that he is a man for others, disclosing to them what is necessary for their liberation from oppression. If this is true, then Jesus Christ must be black so that blacks can know that their liberation is his liberation.”¹⁸⁷ Cone argues that because Jesus was certainly not literally or figuratively white, because he was a persecuted Jew, the divinity revealed by his persecution and the messages of his ministry must be contemporaneously understood in relation to the struggles of black people in America: “Black theology contends that blackness is the only symbol that cannot be overlooked if we are going to take seriously the Christological significance of Jesus Christ.”¹⁸⁸ The symbolic importance of the particularity of Jesus is huge

¹⁸⁴ Cone, J. H., 115.

¹⁸⁵ Cone, J. H., 117.

¹⁸⁶ Cone, J. H., 119.

¹⁸⁷ Cone, J. H., 127.

¹⁸⁸ Cone, J. H., 129–30.

for Cone's refusal of theological abstraction and universality. As we will discuss in chapters 4, 5, and 6, the insistence on the Jewishness of Jesus, and the refusal of an abstract and universal Christ-figure points to deep fissures in the politicisation of Christian theology.

Implicit in Cone's theology is a dialectic between the concrete, worldly conditions of oppression, and the sublime message of liberation. Experiencing the former without the latter means living in despair, and understanding the latter without trying to change the former is the highest hypocrisy of white Christianity, which Cone explicitly articulates by starkly juxtaposing academic questions with the reality of struggling to exist in the face of dehumanisation, oppression, and extermination:

"The world is not a metaphysical entity or an ontological problem, as some philosophers and theologians would have us believe. It is very concrete. It is punching clocks, taking orders, fighting rats, and being kicked around by police officers. It is where the oppressed live. Jews encountered it in concentration camps, Amerindians on reservations, and blacks on slave ships, in cotton fields, and in "dark" ghettos. The world is white persons, the degrading rules they make for the "underprivileged," and their guilt-dispelling recourse to political and theological slogans about the welfare of society "as a whole." In short, the world is where the brutal reality of inhumanity makes its unGodly appearance, turning persons into animals."¹⁸⁹

The World, for Cone, is what is encountered by oppressed people struggling to exist. The question of the meaning of being is thus for Cone divine liberation, though it is not ascertained in moments of quiet anxiety or ontological reflection, as for Martin Heidegger or Sergei Prozorov, but is revealed to the oppressed in their political struggles.

The church, as that community that recognises and responds to the message of liberation, therefore can neither abandon the world nor fully embrace it: it cannot retreat into pious self-reflection, nor associate worldly conditions, like nationalism or capitalism, with the kingdom of God.¹⁹⁰ This is highly resonant with Eric Peterson's vision of political theology, as discussed in Chapter 1. Indeed, as Cone writes, "...it does not matter in the least whether the community of liberators designate their work as Christ's own work... The truly Christian response to

¹⁸⁹ Cone, J. H., 140.

¹⁹⁰ Cone, J. H., 141.

earthly problems is doing what one must do because it is the *human* thing to do. The brother's suffering should not be used as a stepping-stone in Christian piety."¹⁹¹ In Cone's theology, *the world* is the site of redemption, not the *soul*. Christianity is a religion of salvation, but in black theology this salvation takes place in a concrete world, and it is the oppressed who are saved: quiet piety is inadequate. Working against oppression is seen as a fundamentally human activity insofar as humans and the world operate on the terms of a liberating God. Thus liberation is regarded as an ontological characteristic of the world, rather than as a merely religious ethic enacted within that world. Cone is especially concerned with inauthentic solidarity offered by 'pious frauds', who see goodness as a pious activity deserving of praise, and not as an essential dimension of their humanity. These pious frauds "...are rejected because they failed to see that being good is not a societal trait or an extra activity, but a human activity. They are excluded because they used their neighbour as an enhancement of their own religious piety. Had they known that blacks were Jesus, they would have been prepared to relieve their suffering. But that is just the point: there is no way to know in the abstract who is Jesus and who is not. It is not an intellectual question at all. Knowledge of Jesus Christ comes as one participates in human liberation."¹⁹² It is thus through concrete action against oppression that the reality of God, Jesus, humanity, are revealed to the oppressed, and is shared in only by those who engage in and enact authentic solidarity.

The End: Eschatology

No proper theology would be complete without an eschatology. In Cone's theology, the kingdom 'to come' must not be displaced into an eternally future realm, life after death, but must be forcefully realised in this world: "What good are golden crowns, slippers, white robes, or even eternal life, if it means that we have to turn our backs on the pain and suffering of our own children?"¹⁹³ Cone writes extensively on the pacifying function of this

¹⁹¹ Cone, J. H., 143.

¹⁹² Cone, J. H., 143–44. A recent article interrogates the signifier 'liberation' in Cone's theology. Elonda Clay argues that "the discourse now participates in a politics of nostalgia reflecting on a historical moment that has passed (Black Power); thus rendering the signifier "liberation" stagnate and worn..." She argues here that the spirit of liberation of early Black Liberation Theology has been lost in its second and third generation iterations, and as such Black Liberation Theology has become an activity undertaken by the university educated middle-class, "which gives rise to overdeveloped theological formulations juxtaposed with underdeveloped liberation praxis." Clay, E., 'A Black Theology of Liberation or Legitimation?', 320. Since this project is explicitly concerned with these theological formulations rather than their respective liberation praxes, Clay's critique remains powerful. She rightly calls contemporary black theologians to identify and work with modern resistance movements that will no longer reflect their nostalgic depiction of historic, heroic movements and figures.

¹⁹³ Cone, J. H., *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 146.

otherworldliness in many black churches, arguing that the congregations were encouraged to graciously accept their earthly troubles, for a better life awaits them after death. We will discuss this at much greater length in Chapter 3.

Cone draws upon Rudolf Bultmann's Heideggerian eschatology which understands authentic human selfhood as the inseparability of the human future from being-in-the-present.¹⁹⁴ This led to the rejection of "any eschatological viewpoint that centred on cosmological ingredients, or apocalyptic speculations on non-earthly reality... Eschatology, said Bultmann, must focus on human beings as they exist in their existential situation, in which the meaning of history is located in the present moment of decision."¹⁹⁵ Thus, liberation emerges again as central to Cone's theology: liberation *is* the realisation of the Kingdom, and there is no 'end times' that must be awaited in quiet anticipation. As he clarifies:

"Heaven cannot mean accepting injustice in the present because we know we have a home over yonder. Home is where we have been placed *now*, and to believe in heaven is to refuse to accept hell on earth. This is one dimension of the future that cannot be sacrificed."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ As Bultmann writes: "The true solution of the problem lies in the thought of Paul and John, namely in the idea that Christ is the ever present or ever becoming present eschatological event. That is to say, that the Now gets eschatological character by the encounter with Christ or with the Word which proclaims him, because in the encounter with Him the world and its history comes to its end and the believer becomes free from the world by becoming a new creature." Bultmann, R., 'History and Eschatology in the New Testament', *New Testament Studies* 1, no. 1 (1954): 15. Whilst Bultmann and Heidegger converge upon this immanent, anti-teleological (or anti-historicist) view, it is important to note where they diverge. Both fundamentally acknowledge the necessity of God for metaphysics, but for Heidegger it is a practical, rather than faith-based, commitment: "On Heidegger's view, if the God of infinite perfection did not exist, he would have to be invented – not because humans have a psychological need for God, but because philosophers who work with theories of being have a metaphysical need." For Bultmann, Being remains a mystery, which is at core the hook for a metaphysical appeal to God, whilst for Heidegger it is a problem to be solved by an objective, phenomenological science. Heidegger, M., *Being and Time (1927)* (Blackwell, 1967), 31. Vanhoozer, K., *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 99. Cone's eschatology must be understood as following in the tradition of Bultmann, and not Heidegger, despite the obvious signs for potential conflation.

¹⁹⁵ Cone, J. H., *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 146. There are similarities between Bultmann's eschatology and the currently popular notion of Pauline messianism. Bultmann writes: "Therefore the time between the resurrection of Christ and his expected Parousia, has not only chronological but also essential meaning. It is this meaning which gives to the Christian life its character as Christian. After Paul, however, a change took place, the more the end of the world became delayed indefinitely. The generations after Paul had not the strength to preserve the Pauline view of Christian life, and therefore the 'time-between' came to have merely chronological meaning." Bultmann, R., 'History and Eschatology in the New Testament', 14. As Agamben writes, "For Paul, the contraction of time, the "remaining" time (I Cor. 7:29: "time contracted itself: the rest is") represents the messianic situation par excellence, the only real time." Agamben, G., *The Time That Remains*, 5–6.

¹⁹⁶ Cone, J. H., *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 149.

This, again, resonates with the pacifying effects of Christianity that Cone rejects, which we will discuss at length in Chapter 3. Cone's eschatology is one that directs attention to the now, and which calls for revolutionary action as a means for realising the kingdom. Far from the pacifying function of an otherworldliness, it injects the present with a divinely authored injunction to act against oppression, and so to realise worldly liberation as the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In sum

Cone's first two books contain in their pages a Christian theology which provides metaphysical ground upon which a revolutionary black power politics can be built. Drawing upon a number of influential European theologians and philosophers, he reconstructs a Christian theology that can provide a metaphysical bases for the struggle for black liberation.

Cone's first texts begin with a prior affirmation of blackness and black power. Cone argues that both in his being, and in the way he is treated in society, he is black *before* he is Christian. His Christianity thus must follow his blackness, and must not attempt to override or mask this particular experience. From here Cone presents liberation as the central message of the Bible, both in the Old Testament stories of the Exodus and the Hebrew prophets, as well as in the life and ministry of Jesus in the New Testament.

This leads to Cone's argument: given that God is undeniably identified with, and in favour of, the oppressed, and given that Jesus's life is characterised by his intentional marginalisation from worldly powers, and eventual execution by the 'principalities and powers', in contemporary political vocabulary it follows to state the God and Jesus *are* black. This challenges the commonly held belief that Christianity is a fundamentally universalist frame carrying a universal message of salvation for all. Cone here argues that the universalisation of an abstract human subject, usually conducted in seminary offices under a depiction of Jesus as a blond haired, blue eyed Caucasian, is a mechanism of supremacy whereby the self-image of 'white' society is projected to the level of abstraction.

Woven into Cone's theology is his resistance to theological abstractions: God, Jesus, humanity, and eschatology are all concretely expressed in terms of the core message of divine liberation and articulated 'for our times' in terms of the struggle of black people in the United States against racial oppression and white supremacy. Theological abstraction is thus

established early as a core problem for Cone, and concretely articulating his theology in terms of real-world political struggles is established as a key dimension of Cone's thought. The projection, from particularity and to universality, makes 'white theology' not only an irrelevance for black people struggling against systems of dehumanisation and degradation, but also mask the liberating message of Christ and the Bible. These arguments issue a considerable challenge to 'White Christianity' and the Christian theological mainstream. A number of early responses to these first two texts led Cone to sharpen his arguments in later publications. However, it is the specific responses of his black colleagues that most directly shape his subsequent works, as we shall see below.

Part 2. The Spirituals and the Blues (1972), and God of the Oppressed (1975)

In *For my People* (1984), Cone recounts the origins of black theology. His narrative tells that many 'older, more established black scholars were highly resistant to the negation of the universality of the Christian message, essentially accusing black theology of racism for its racially particularistic outlook. Indeed, they were more concerned with demonstrating the potential harm of black theology to an 'already divided' society, than in orienting their theologies around and against the divisions that already existed.¹⁹⁷

After the publication of his first two books (*Black Theology and Black Power* and *A Black Theology of Liberation*) Cone came up against a different kind of critique from his contemporaries within the emergent field of black theology. Reservations revolved around his over-reliance on white, European theologians and philosophers, and the structures of their thought, to give shape and voice to his theological contentions. In *A Black Theology of Liberation* this is especially noticeable, with the most referenced thinkers including Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Jürgen Moltmann, Martin Heidegger, Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus. Whilst there are indeed a number of references to thinkers like Frantz Fanon, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X (both of whom are central to Cone's politics),¹⁹⁸ Elijah Muhammed, Albert Cleage, and Stokely Carmichael, as a work of systematic theology it is the combination of German protestant thought and French existentialism that structure Cone's initial works, where he first explicates his theology of liberation. This is recognised and articulated by thinkers such as Charles H. Long, Charleton Lee, Gayraud S.

¹⁹⁷ Cone, J. H., *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*, 22.

¹⁹⁸ Cone, J. H., *Martin & Malcolm & America*.

Wilmore, and his own brother, Cecil Cone. Cone writes that their engagement showed “that I had not been liberated from the rational structure of Western thought forms. If theology is black, they asked, must not the sources for its articulation also be black? Where are the black sources in James Cone?”¹⁹⁹

Cone’s brother, Cecil Cone, voiced serious criticism along these lines in his 1975 book *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology*. Cecil writes of his brother: “Cone has committed himself to an alien theological methodology. And that is why he asks questions his people are not asking.... By following white theologians, he leaves himself vulnerable in the final analysis to the “supreme white crisis,” the question of the existence of God himself.”²⁰⁰ Cecil Cone argues that following white theologians, his brother asks questions (particularly about the historicity of Jesus) that ‘his people are not asking.’ The basic tension is that James Cone rejects white theology on the one hand, whilst harvesting what is useful to him from it, and in many ways building his theology of liberation upon it, on the other. For Cecil, both the mainstream theological tradition which lives on through James’ early work, *and* the nationalist imperative of a total rejection of white theology are inadequate starting points for a black theology that holds at its centre the black religious experience:

“[Cone] believed that he could “beat” the whites at their own theological game... But even if he should win, what gain is there for the black religious experience that he claims to represent? In the process, that experience is reduced to the secularity of the liberation movements or to the terms of a Western historical apologetic. Either way, the substance of black religion is ignored in favour of a secular modernity.”²⁰¹

Cone took this critique very seriously, and it shaped his next two publications, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (1972), and *God of the Oppressed* (1975). As Cone writes in the preface to the 1997 edition of *God of the Oppressed*, in these books he sought to draw upon, alongside the Bible, “...sacred documents of the African-American experience—such as the speeches of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., the writings of Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison, the music of the blues, jazz, and rap... [and] Liberating stories, myths, and legends...”²⁰² In the

¹⁹⁹ Cone, J. H., *My Soul Looks Back*, 60.

²⁰⁰ Cone, C. W., *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology*, 110–11.

²⁰¹ Cone, C. W., 113–14.

²⁰² Cone, J. H., *God of the Oppressed*, xi.

first of these two texts, as the name suggests, Cone focused on the religious songs known as the spirituals, and the secular expressions of black experience known as the blues.

The Spirituals and the Blues (1972)

The Spirituals and the Blues is the first text in which Cone explicitly grounds his theology of liberation in authentically 'black' sources – songs and sermons of the black Christian religious tradition, and their secular counterpart in the blues. Much of this text reiterates the theology found in his previous books, grounding its authorisation from a very different cultural heritage, but in a continuation and extension of the thrust and arguments of his previous works. The structure of these books does not follow that of his previous works, but instead follow a different logic: with faith as a presupposition, the questions which arise in the black experience are dealt with in turn. For example, as we shall see below, Cone's treatment of God and Jesus does not contain lengthy theo-political arguments about metaphorical blackness, but instead quickly turn to the questions pitched at them by the spirituals, such as the challenge of ongoing suffering and servitude, despite faith. The problematics of Christology, pneumatology (which remains conspicuously absent throughout Cone's works), and eschatology, are not addressed in 'normal' academic fashion, but instead the theological problems raised by the experience of enslavement are raised as theological problems of the utmost importance:

“The situation of being an American slave created certain kinds of theological problems, but they were not the same theological problems of white slave masters or others who did not live out their lives as slaves. Therefore, to use European or Western theological and philosophical methodologies as a means of evaluating the significance of black reflections on the slave condition is not only theoretically inappropriate but very naïve. To evaluate correctly the slaves' theological reflection on their servitude in relation to divine justice, it is necessary to suspend the methodology of the enslavers and to enter the cultural and religious milieu of the victims. What were the theological questions of the *slave* community?”²⁰³

To begin, Cone writes that there is a constitutive tension encapsulated in the spirituals and the blues, between despair and hope. Recounting W.E.B. DuBois' interpretation of the

²⁰³ Cone, J. H., *The Spirituals and the Blues*, 65.

spirituals in *The Souls of Black Folks*, Cone writes that “DuBois was fascinated by the tension in the spirituals between hope and despair, joy and sorrow, death and life, and by the ability of black slaves to embrace such polarities in their music.”²⁰⁴ Writing of another interpretation of the black spirituals, that of Howard Thurman, Cone writes: “the black spiritual is an expression of the slaves’ determination to *be* in a society that seeks to destroy their personhood. It is an affirmation of the dignity of the black slaves, the essential humanity of their spirits... The essence of ante-bellum black religion was the emphasis on the *somebodiness* of black slaves.”²⁰⁵ The experience of enslavement is thus directly linked with existential, theological, and ontological questions of existence, questions that for Cone cannot be meaningfully addressed in an abstract vacuum and without reference to real political struggle.

This affirmation of being was made in a politico-religious framework that worked independently of the white Christian church. Indeed, Christianity was instrumental in creating obedience amongst enslaved people: “We should be reminded here of the role played by white Christianity in producing mental servitude among blacks... Black slaves were condemned to live in a society where not only the government but “God” condoned their slavery. The spirituals were created out of that environment.”²⁰⁶ Despite this, enslaved black people, Cone argues, developed a distinct form and practice of Christian faith, drawing upon both African religions as well as Christianity, that was organised around affirming freedom in a life of bondage. Cone writes that the Christianity taught to enslaved people “taught blacks to look for their reward in heaven through obedience to white masters on earth”, whilst the enslaved were practicing and developing a distinct faith that focused on dignity and promised earthly freedom.²⁰⁷ This ‘slave religion’ was permeated with liberation as a core theme, which “explains why slaveholders did not allow black slaves to worship openly and sing their songs unless authorized white people were present to proctor the meeting”,²⁰⁸ a sure sign of the recognition of religion as a potentially highly subversive platform.

²⁰⁴ Cone, J. H., 13.

²⁰⁵ Cone, J. H., 16.

²⁰⁶ Cone, J. H., 22–23.

²⁰⁷ Cone, J. H., 28.

²⁰⁸ Cone, J. H., 28–29.

Cone advocates interpreting the spirituals theologically, as a source of a distinct and manifest theology of liberation, because as well as containing lucid accounts of the experience of enslavement and resistance, they also contain “the spirit of the people struggling to be free; it is their religion, their source of strength in a time of trouble.”²⁰⁹ In these texts Cone is highly concerned with grounding his theology of liberation in these sources, which amount to a distinct religious tradition of enslaved and oppressed people in the United States.

It is important to note, too, Cone’s emphasis on the essentially *African* nature of the spirituals. He argues that the music traditions brought from Africa with enslaved peoples are not simply artistic, as an aesthetic activity, but performed a functional role in expressing the wider cosmology of the community. These songs were part of the continuous practice and inheritance of African traditions of oral history, religious expression, and core social processes such as the coming of age of young members of the community. Characteristic of the explosion of interest of black people in the United States in their African roots which was taking place in that period, Cone grounds the spirituals in an African culture brought over to the Americas by enslaved people, combining it with the Christian gospels to create a liberatory faith, practice, and theology.²¹⁰ Cone does not deny that white Christianity and its traditions were influential on enslaved black people—indeed, it was often successful in preaching obedience and the acceptance of suffering, precisely what Cone reacts to—but he argues that African influences were utterly decisive in producing the songs known as the spirituals.

The spirituals are thus forwarded as a viable and indispensable theological source, that can give structure and form to a black theology that looks not to the canons of philosophy and Christian thought emerging from white Euro-American theology, but instead from the experiences of enslaved black people as inheritors of African religious and musical traditions. Cone is careful to emphasise that these sources can be seen more significantly as an African inheritance than a European, Christian one, though over time the vocabulary and structures of Christianity become more and more important in them.

²⁰⁹ Cone, J. H., 30.

²¹⁰ Cone, J. H., 30.

God and Jesus in the Black Spirituals

Cone identifies liberation as the core theological message of the spirituals:²¹¹ “According to the spirituals, the meaning of Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection is found in his identity with the poor, the blind, and the sick. He has come to set them free, to restore their wholeness.”²¹² In Cone’s account the spirituals depicted black people as God’s children, whose servitude was unrelated to divine revelation.²¹³

Cone recognises that there is an acute problem of theodicy where faith is challenged by human bondage. He is careful to show that the way in which enslaved black people dealt with the ‘problem of evil’ was not philosophical, but involved a question of faith. Cone counterposes the ‘concrete’ investigation of the ‘absurdities of human existence’ undertaken in the specific context of community survival and the community of faith, with the rational or philosophical reflections, ‘in the classical Greek sense’, which utilises ‘abstract and universal distinctions’ to assume “a universal stance common to “all” people.”²¹⁴ Concrete, situated engagements with the problem of evil which manifest in the spirituals as a theological source have the utmost legitimacy for Cone’s theology of liberation, and the rational, abstracted reflections of a philosophical or academic theological engagement are cast as a disconnected enterprise which can mean nothing for enslaved people. Thus, the spirituals entail a very different kind of approach to social and political problems than do the sources upon which Cone draws for his first two texts. As his brother pointed out, transcending the faith of the community and asking questions that they do not ask is to become seduced by, and stuck in, a frame which encourages the theologian to adopt a top-down approach that ignores, even denies, particular experiences and seeks to gain the lofty heights of universal proclamations.

The question of how enslaved black people knew that God was liberating them—a test of the existence and activity of the divine—is thus presented as simply external to the concerns of the community. Here the spirituals, and the wider religious traditions of enslaved black people are explicitly articulated as a faith tradition and not a philosophical argument about the reality or existence of God:

²¹¹ Cone, J. H., 32.

²¹² Cone, J. H., 44.

²¹³ Cone, J. H., 33.

²¹⁴ Cone, J. H., 54.

“As with all faith assumptions, the *truth* of a theological assertion is found in the givenness of existence itself and not in theory. Black slaves did not devise philosophical and theological methodologies in order to test the truth of God’s revelation as liberation. From their viewpoint it did not need testing... Instead of testing God, they *ritualized* God in song and sermon... [the spirituals] are not documents for philosophy; they are materials for worship and praise to the One who had continued to be present with black humanity despite European insanity.”²¹⁵

Enslaved black people thus knew of divine liberation through faith, a faith that promised liberation in this world, and so held back the tide of despair whilst providing an injunction to commit to acts of liberation, where possible, and within the confines of the recognition that mere survival was in many instances itself considered to be the only attainable horizon of liberation.

Transcendence and Eschatology

Cone argues that the spirituals are not just worldly iterations of faith in anguish, but encapsulate a transcendence in themselves. Indeed, this transcendence was not exclusively future, as with most eschatology, but could exist in the present. This transcendence entails a recognition of the presence of a liberatory promise, and that an understanding of the liberated Kingdom provides an injunction to discontentment with ‘the present political order’. To believe in the future Kingdom meant to get on board with its present realisation:

“They accepted the consequences of the eschatological Kingdom, and opened their minds and hearts to the movement of the future. They were bound for the Kingdom that was breaking into the already new present, and they affirmed their willingness to “git on board” that “gospel train.”²¹⁶

This presents the spirituals and the faith that they represent as challenging the pacifying effect of an eschatological ‘otherworldliness’, whereby hope for a better life is displaced to the afterlife. Indeed, “Heaven then did not mean passivity but revolution against the present order.”²¹⁷ That reaching Heaven does not demand worldly obedience in exchange for otherworldly election, but instead the worldly liberation (which, as already mentioned,

²¹⁵ Cone, J. H., 65–66.

²¹⁶ Cone, J. H., 84–85.

²¹⁷ Cone, J. H., 86.

included survival) of the community of the oppressed, puts Cone's theology amongst those political theologies which demand current action to accelerate the Kingdom 'breaking into the present.' Cone grounds this worldly transcendence encapsulated in theological hope in the religious songs of enslaved black people in America, arguing that it freed black people to carve out their humanity and horizons of existence independently from the social and political system that depended on their dehumanisation. It was through music that this humanity and 'dimension of promise' was ritualized, a promise that 'became a real force' in the lives of enslaved people. Heaven was thus not a peaceful reward in the afterlife but a transformative promise of delivering the enslaved from the 'nothingness' of enslaved existence to a 'being-for-the-future', "a vision of a new Black Humanity."²¹⁸

Cone argues that black eschatology is comprised of 4 elements. Firstly, it was based on the historical possibility of escape, to the northern states of the United States, or to Canada. Secondly, given the limited chance of the above, it entailed an affirmation which protected the humanity of enslaved black people, even when they couldn't physically escape bondage. Thirdly, it entailed an affirmation of life after death where the wicked will be punished and the victims vindicated. Fourthly, and most crucially, it entailed a historicity encapsulated in the associated of "God's future righteousness... [with] their present existence on earth. Eschatology then was primarily a religious perspective on the present which enabled oppressed blacks to realize that their existence transcended historical limitations."²¹⁹ Eschatology, as represented in the spirituals, was thus an affirmation of the present, and of the present humanity of people defined and treated as less than human. In Cone's work, then, transcendence and eschatology entail a dialectic, between the encouragement of worldly liberation, and confidence in otherworldly righteous justice. Thus transcendence and eschatology enlist both the present and the future. The idea of a future kingdom with no enslavement provides confidence in divine justice, but it must not be waited for passively—it must be realised actively in the present, so that the faithful might *do* the work of a liberating God.

²¹⁸ Cone, J. H., 90.

²¹⁹ Cone, J. H., 95.

The Blues

In the final chapter of this book Cone addresses the music tradition of the blues. He wants to argue that whilst it is often understood as such, the blues are not fully secular in the philosophical sense of a strict secular/sacred divide. He argues that rather than outwardly rejecting God, the blues rather ignore God in their affirmation of black humanity, and thus can be seen as existing alongside the spirituals, rather than as somehow metaphysically against them: "Like the spirituals, the blues affirm the somebodiness of black people, and they preserve the worth of black humanity through ritual and drama."²²⁰

Indeed, in their avoidance, rather than rejection, of the Christian God, the blues affirm the same transcendent present as the spirituals: "This is not atheism; rather, it is believing that *transcendence* will only be meaningful when it is made real in and through the limits of historical experience. The achievement of being is an entirely historical reality, grounded and defined within the context of the community's experience. The blues people believe that it is only through the acceptance of the real as disclosed in concrete human affairs that a community can attain authentic existence."²²¹ This amounts to the rejection of 'objective transcendence' (a peaceful Heaven patiently waited upon), but not 'historical transcendence' (liberation from oppression), as it is exactly through the blues (and the spirituals) that black people can transcend the absurdity of inhumanity.

For Cone, the delicate interplay of earthly and otherworldly transcendence is as clear in the Blues as it is in the Spirituals, and they too take as their cue the conditions of absurdity and inhumanity in which enslaved and oppressed black people found themselves. Both draw the listener to look for a home that is 'earthly *and* eschatological', a real place filled with the human connections of joy and love, but also stretching beyond it to offer an 'affirmation of self' and the self-respect necessary for building a life free from physical and mental enslavement.²²²

The theology of liberation grounded in the spirituals and the blues is thus deeply political and theological. Both this world and an otherworldly reality are invoked together, two inseparable horizons of human existence and creativity that enliven and empower each other. Cone

²²⁰ Cone, J. H., 105.

²²¹ Cone, J. H., 113.

²²² Cone, J. H., 126.

refuses to succumb to a flat immanent reality of secular existence, nor to disconnect the transcendent from any worldly referent. In a fashion often advocated by those who lament the secularisation of political metaphysics, he theologises both this world and the next together, as mutually dependent frames of reality and hope. From this foray into the spirituals and the blues as often ignored sources of theological reflection, Cone moves, in his next text, to a wider source material for a theology of liberation built upon the distinct religious experiences of black Christians in the United States.

God of the Oppressed (1975)

In *The Spirituals and the Blues*, Cone made a shift from basing his theology in the sources of European and American academic theology and philosophy, to the musical traditions which speak of the religious traditions of enslaved black people in the United States. In *God of the Oppressed* he continues this task, widening his source material to include sermons and speeches by political and religious figures such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as some reflection on his own childhood in Bearden, Arkansas. It is clear that his theological perspective has shifted since he wrote *A Black Theology of Liberation*, when he asks: “What could Karl Barth possibly mean for black students who had come from the cotton fields of Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi, seeking to change the structure of their lives in a society that had defined *black* as nonbeing?”²²³

The Black Experience as a Theological Source

As well as expanding his theological perspective to explicitly take as its sources the experience of enslavement and segregation in the United States, Cone also reflects on some more traditionally academic concerns. Here he explicitly mentions “the problem of the particular and the universal in theological discourse...”²²⁴ Here Cone recounts a criticism of the ‘particularistic’ thrust of black theology:

“There is the need to respond to a certain kind of critical dismissal of Black Theology, typified by the statement of one distinguished theologian that blacks “are not free to violate the canon of exact reflection, careful weighing of evidence, and apt argument, if they want to make a case for other intellectually responsible listeners.” Because

²²³ Cone, J. H., *God of the Oppressed*, 5.

²²⁴ Cone, J. H., 7.

theological discourse is *universal*, I am constrained to reply to this comment, serious despite its patronizing mood, by a fellow theologian. But because theology is also *particular*, my reply is (in brief) that he is wrong, and that he is wrong because his theological perspective is determined by his whiteness. He is saying nothing other than “Unless you black people learn to think like us white folks, using our rules, then we will not listen to you.”²²⁵

Here Cone rejects the pervasive presumption that “only the white experience provides the appropriate context for questions and answers concerning the divine.”²²⁶ The problem of those who make this presumption is the inability to self-reflect and see their own narrowness and particularity, instead preferring to imagine that they can embody a universal personhood and thus their reflections and questions about transcendence can represent, or speak to, those of all people. This resonates with both McNay’s critique of social weightlessness, Milbank’s reminder that theology always speaks for a particular community, and Paipais’ insistence that to remain *political*, a metaphysics must engage in constant negotiation between worldly and otherworldly commitments. Indeed, Cone writes that the central thesis of the book concerns this: “My point is that one’s social and historical context decides not only the questions we address to God but also the mode or form of the answers given to the questions.”²²⁷ Social and historical context, however, do not constitute the ultimate horizon of reality in a message of liberation that is decidedly *theological*.

Cone suggests a nuanced relationship between the experience of black people and ‘the truth’ of God. As we have seen in Cone’s earlier texts, he presents the revelation of God as manifest in events of liberation, sometimes referred to as the liberating activity of Jesus. Since this revelation happens *to* the community of the oppressed, it does not make sense to say that a theologian can bypass the experiences of oppressed peoples if they seek access to knowledge about the divine. True to his reformed heritage in general, and his Barthian training in particular, Cone places Jesus Christ front and centre, writing that Jesus Christ ‘is’ “...an event of liberation, a happening in the lives of oppressed people struggling for political freedom. Therefore, to know him is to encounter him in the history of the weak and the helpless. That

²²⁵ Cone, J. H., 7.

²²⁶ Cone, J. H., 14.

²²⁷ Cone, J. H., 14.

is why it can be rightly said that there can be no knowledge of Jesus independent of the history and culture of the oppressed."²²⁸ Thus, for Cone, it is impossible to know about the liberating activity of God if one bypasses the experiences of enslaved black people. This is a direct attack on the presumption of white theology and philosophy to be able to speak for all peoples without starting from the experiences of the 'unwanted of society'.

From here Cone argues that theology is fundamentally unable to transcend history and culture, arguing that theological language is *about* the eternal, but *is not itself* eternal. Here we see an important split between the human, social world and the world of the divine, a split which cannot be dissolved but which must be carefully negotiated in different times and places by different cultures and generations.²²⁹ Indeed, theology as God-talk tells us more, Cone suggests, about the 'God-talkers' than about God himself.²³⁰ Further, to break out of these limitations, and to gain more authentic glimpses at universality, Cone argues that theologians must "break out of their cultural and political boxes and encounter another reality. They must be challenged to take seriously another value system."²³¹

This suggests that theology entails a kind of experiential floating directed only by personal reflections. This risks the charge of making theology into a direct and unmitigated tool of ideology, a charge that seems ever present in Cone's mind. However, Cone argues that there is indeed a hermeneutical principle that guides exegesis, which is "the revelation of God in Christ as the Liberator of the oppressed from social oppression and to political struggle, wherein the poor recognize that their fight against poverty and injustice is not only consistent with the gospel but is the gospel of Jesus Christ."²³² That God's revelation is social and political in character has ongoing implications for the doing of theology, creating a number of dictums about the state and nature of Christian theological reflection:

1. "There can be no Christian theology that is not social and political."²³³
2. "...theology cannot merely repeat what the Bible says or what is found in a particular theological tradition. Theology must be prophetic... we must take the risk to be

²²⁸ Cone, J. H., 32.

²²⁹ Cone, J. H., 36.

²³⁰ Cone, J. H., 38.

²³¹ Cone, J. H., 49.

²³² Cone, J. H., 74–75.

²³³ Cone, J. H., 75.

prophetic by doing theology in the light of those who are helpless and voiceless in society.”²³⁴

3. “Theology cannot ignore the tradition... By studying the tradition, we not only gain insight into a particular past time but also into our own time as the past and present meet dialectically. For only through this dialectical encounter with the tradition are we given the freedom to move beyond it.”²³⁵
4. “Theology is always a word about the liberation of the oppressed and the humiliated. It is a word of judgement for the oppressors and the rulers.”²³⁶

This casting of the proper nature of theological speech sees theology as inherently political, as prophetically reflecting the nature of God as a God of promise, as a necessary conversation with tradition and the corpus of theological reflection that are inherited by Christian thinkers, and as necessarily engaged in advocating for liberation and casting judgement upon oppressors.

Cone deflects the criticism that Black Theology is nothing more than a socially determined ideology by arguing, as we have seen above, that human-talk *about* the eternal *is not* eternal itself. Thus there is a distance between human experience and God, with humans having to face up to their fundamental inability to step outside their place and time: “As long as we live and have our being in time and space, absolute truth is impossible.”²³⁷ However, this admission is not an advocacy of ‘unrestricted relativity.’ Despite particularity, theologians and others “can and must say something about the world that is not reducible to our own subjectivity. That trans-subjective “something” is expressed in story, indeed is embodied in story.”²³⁸ Cone argues here that the biblical story has its own ‘integrity and truth’ independent of ‘our subjective states’. Thus, we must move through history and ask what the relation of the redemptive character of Christ is to the human stories that we both witness and create.

What Cone calls upon to give body to his theology is that of the biblical Jesus, the necessity of which is firmly stated as the guide for any Christological appeal in modern times. Here Cone grounds his reading of the historical Jesus as affirming his theology of liberation. This

²³⁴ Cone, J. H., 75.

²³⁵ Cone, J. H., 75–76.

²³⁶ Cone, J. H., 76.

²³⁷ Cone, J. H., 93.

²³⁸ Cone, J. H., 93.

dimension of Cone's thought is absolutely central to understanding the import of his work beyond his project of writing a Christian theology of black power for the mid twentieth century United States.

"Jesus was a Jew! The particularity of Jesus' person as disclosed in his Jewishness is indispensable for Christological analysis. On the one hand, Jesus' Jewishness pinpoints the importance of his humanity for faith, and on the other, it connects God's salvation drama in Jesus with the Exodus-Sinai event... Jesus' Jewishness therefore was essential to his person. He was not a "universal" man but a particular Jew who came to fulfil God's will to liberate the oppressed. His Jewishness establishes the concreteness of his existence in history, without which Christology inevitably moves in the direction of Docetism."²³⁹

This Christological insistence on Jesus' Jewishness would become to be understood as a reaction to Christian Supersessionism, already an attempt to work against this 'Christian problem'.²⁴⁰ This aspect of Cone's thought, the de-abstraction of Christ, reveals deep fractures in Christian theology around which orbit fundamental questions about its political potential, or the politics that can be based upon competing and contested Christologies. This will be discussed at length in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Here again Cone affirms the blackness of Jesus: "It is on the basis of the soteriological meaning of the particularity of his Jewishness that theology must affirm the Christological significance of Jesus' present blackness. He *is* black because he *was* a Jew."²⁴¹ This is affirmed as being the appropriate Christology for a theology which places the black religious experience and biblical interpretation as the two sources which affirm liberation as the central message of Christianity: "the validity of any Christological title in any period of history is not decided by its universality but by this: whether in the particularity of its time it points to God's universal will to liberate particular oppressed people from inhumanity."²⁴² Liberation thus remains the

²³⁹ Cone, J. H., 109.

²⁴⁰ Blanton, W., 'Anarchist Singularities or Proprietorial Resentments? On the Christian Problem in Heidegger's Notebooks of the 1930s'.

²⁴¹ Cone, J. H., *God of the Oppressed*, 123.

²⁴² Cone, J. H., 125.

hermeneutic principle that pierces the tension between universality and particularity in Christian theology.

This elevation of particularity is central for understanding Cone's theology, and he mobilises it against the claims to abstracted universality of white theology:

"I contend that there is no universalism that is not particular... As long as [white theologians] can be sure that the gospel is *for everybody*, ignoring that God liberated a *particular* people from Egypt, came in a particular man called Jesus, and for the particular purpose of liberating the oppressed, then they can continue to talk in theological abstractions, failing to recognize that such talk is not the gospel unless it is related to the concrete freedom of the little ones."²⁴³

Appeals to universality are thus seen as masking the fundamentally committed and embedded nature of any particular human-talk about God, as well as acting as counter to the liberating message of the Bible. In chapters 4 and 6 we will draw heavily upon the work of J. Kameron Carter, who writes that the account of the concreteness of Being revealed in Jesus is the 'underdeveloped apex' of Cone's thought. Being is, in Cone, conceived concretely in relation to worldly oppression and the divine promise of liberation, and abstract conceptualisations of Being are thus cast as concealing a politics of racial hierarchy. This is articulated through the commitment to Jesus' Jewishness, through which Cone builds an account of the political import of Christian theology for the political struggle against white supremacy and racial oppression in the United States.²⁴⁴ It is around this that much of my argument about the import of Cone for political theology in IR, and particularly the turn to theology within it, will be built. Along with later scholarship such as Carter's, it reveals that shady legacy of the abstraction of Christ and its function as a basis firstly of Christian superiority vis-à-vis Judaism, as well as a cornerstone of European claims to supremacy (racial, as well as religious and cultural). Cone's works do not approach this topic in the form of genealogy or critique (this is the form that Carter takes), but in the articulation of a prophetic theology of liberation. It therefore already performs the kind of creative production that academic works advocate but rarely succeed in constituting.

²⁴³ Cone, J. H., 126.

²⁴⁴ Carter, J. K., *Race*, 158. Also see Taubes, J., *The Political Theology of Paul* (Stanford University Press, 2004).

The Meaning of Liberation

In line with the claim that black religious thought was oriented towards the realisation of an eschatological future, Cone argues that liberation is not exactly a spatial end-condition characterised by a particular set of organisational relations. Rather, it is *in liberation* that the Kingdom of Heaven is manifested, because liberation has a double meaning: freedom from physical poverty, *and* freedom from spiritual poverty. It is in the experience of physical liberation that the good work of God is found and enacted, and the understanding of this good work will, and must, likewise uplift the oppressed to fight against their physical oppression.²⁴⁵ This relation is not totally symbiotic, however: spiritual, or existential, oppression is firmly subordinated to physical oppressions, and liberation from the former without work to bring about liberation of those who suffer the latter amounts to a false reading of the Christian message. Even once one operates under an understanding of liberation as the core thrust of Christianity, a keen understanding of ‘material reality’ must precede attempts to approach ‘spiritual reality’, to avoid the lumping together of vastly different experiences under abstracted categories like ‘suffering’. Cone here is wary of the risk of a theology of liberation having a focus on physical oppression being eclipsed by more abstracted and existential sufferings (he uses the phrase ‘suburban loneliness’) to make liberation theology palatable to the white Christian majority of the United States.²⁴⁶ An understanding of the gospel of liberation must explicate the material difference between physical oppression and spiritual suffering, and organise itself around, for Cone, the former.

Cone never quite breaks into a socio-political doctrine of material liberation. He never lays out what the condition of ‘being liberated’ would look like, but instead he points strongly towards revolutionary action rather than post-revolutionary existence. In that sense he is more interested in becoming-liberated than being-liberated: “There is no liberation without transformation, that is, without the struggle for freedom in this world. There is no liberation without the commitment of revolutionary action against injustice, slavery, and oppression. Liberation then is not merely a thought in my head; it is the sociohistorical movement of a people from oppression to freedom—Israelites from Egypt, black people from American slavery.”²⁴⁷ Cone’s advocacy of liberation is more of a call-to-revolution than a soberly distilled

²⁴⁵ Cone, J. H., *God of the Oppressed*, 134.

²⁴⁶ Cone, J. H., 137.

²⁴⁷ Cone, J. H., 139–40.

doctrine, or blueprint, of a new political form of organisation, because this is what the community of the oppressed, in his estimation, needs: the empowerment to fight and to throw off the chains of slavery and white supremacy, rather than an exclusive academic doctrine that hands down to them from on high a blueprint of what they should fight for. This shows Cone's understanding of his own fallibility, and his hesitation to prescribe a better reality for others.

Suffering (or: Theodicy, again)

Cone argues that the doctrines of suffering in the western Christian tradition have been over-abstracted, from being an experience of the oppressed to being an intellectual problem to be solved in the confines of the offices of seminary professors. This contributes "to a political conservatism that locates the resolution of the problem of suffering either in the logical structure of the rational mind or in the interior depths of the human heart, and thereby negates the praxis of freedom against the structures of injustice and oppression."²⁴⁸ Cone's contention is that the problem of evil as understood in western Christianity is taken as a philosophical problem and is shaped by the thought of early church thinkers like Irenaeus and St Augustine. Cone depicts Greek philosophy, and its influence, through Neo-Platonism in thinkers like Augustine, as focusing too much on the theoretical formulation of the problem of evil, offering solutions that are thereby alienated from praxis.²⁴⁹ This in turn leads to an approach to evil which is devoid of meaning for sufferers themselves: "By focusing on metaphysics, theologians make the problem of evil a matter of intellectual theory and more often than not end up suggesting solutions that have nothing to do with the liberation of the poor from bondage."²⁵⁰

A common theme in western Christianity is the endurance of suffering as a virtue.²⁵¹ Cone argues that placid acceptance of servitude for religious piety is antithetical to the liberating message of the Bible. Speaking specifically of the work of Emil Bruner, where suffering becomes a 'positive principle' wherein the sufferer might be understood to reach eternal life, Cone writes that "without struggle, this vision of a new heaven becomes a sedative that

²⁴⁸ Cone, J. H., 163–64.

²⁴⁹ Cone, J. H., 165–66.

²⁵⁰ Cone, J. H., 165.

²⁵¹ See, for example: Southgate, C., *Theology in a Suffering World: Glory and Longing*, Hardcover (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

makes the victims of injustice content with servitude. Without struggle, the negative suffering inflicted by oppressors becomes positive and thus leads to passivity and submission.”²⁵² This is obviously, for Cone, a wholly inadequate account of the ‘problem’ of suffering. Cone argues that, in contrast to the ‘spectator approach of the western theological approach’, the black religious tradition on suffering was created not in abstraction, but in the experiences of slavery and dehumanisation:

“Whether we speak of the spirituals or the blues, the prayers and sermons of black preachers or the folkloric tales of Br’er Rabbit and High John the Conqueror, black reflections about suffering have not been removed from life but *involved* in life, that is, the struggle to affirm humanity despite the dehumanizing conditions of slavery and segregation.”²⁵³

Despite this, Cone recognizes that black Christian faith entails an unavoidable paradox: faith in a God who allows black suffering to continue.²⁵⁴ He acknowledges that this paradox has driven many black people away from Christianity and towards Islam, communism, liberal constitutionalism, and other religious or secular frameworks that are variously deemed to

²⁵² Cone, J. H., *God of the Oppressed*, 168.

²⁵³ Cone, J. H., 169.

²⁵⁴ After the publication of Cone’s first two texts, William Jones published an article in the *Harvard Theological Review*, criticising the theodicy of three early proponents of Black Theology: Joseph Washington, James Cone, and Albert Cleage. Jones argues that any Black Theology must firstly be oriented around the question: “Is God a White Racist?” a question which two years later was published as the title of a book often cited as a serious early challenge to Black Theology. Jones summarises his argument thus: “We submit that Cone has not substantiated the one fact which his own position asserts must be shown if God is not a murderer, namely, that black liberation is a part of his innermost nature. If this is the case, the remainder of the system is without a sturdy foundation. Obviously, the equation between black theology and the Gospel he advocates becomes suspect. Further, the black factor of his theology would lose its support. It is on the basis of God’s identification with the oppressed, i.e. blacks, and his assumption of their condition that he is able to speak of a black Christ.” Cone forecloses this criticism by returning, mostly in *God of the Oppressed*, to a biblical exegesis which prioritises the liberating works of God of the Old Testament (particularly the Exodus story), and the solidarity with the poor and the weak demonstrated by Jesus in the New Testament. Cone thus ‘grounds’ the assertion that God is identified with the oppressed, through a Biblical exegesis: “In the Exodus event, God is revealed by means of acts on behalf of a weak and defenceless people. This is the God of power and of strength, able to destroy the enslaving power of the mighty Pharaoh.” ... “Because most biblical scholars are the descendants of the advantaged class, it is to be expected that they would minimize Jesus’ gospel of liberation for the poor by interpreting poverty as a spiritual condition unrelated to social and political phenomena. But a careful reading of the New Testament shows that the poor of whom Jesus spoke were not primarily (if at all) those who are spiritually poor as suggested in Matthew 5:3... The poor are the oppressed and the afflicted, those who cannot defend themselves against the powerful. They are the least and the last, the hungry and the thirsty, the unclothed and the strangers, the sick and the captives. It is for these little ones that the gospel is preached and for whom liberation has come in the words and deeds of Jesus.” Jones, W., ‘Theodicy and Methodology in Black Theology: A Critique of Washington, Cone and Cleage’, *Harvard Theological Review* 64, no. 4 (October 1971): 552; Jones, W., *Is God a White Racist?: A Preamble to Black Theology* (Anchor Press, 1973); Cone, J. H., *God of the Oppressed*, 57–66, 72.

provide a more hopeful metaphysic or praxis for liberation (or merely survival).²⁵⁵ Cone's faith in Christianity as a framework which can help to bring about liberation is, in the end, just that: faith. He argues that the logic inherent in this decision is different from 'other forms of rational discourse': "for many blacks during slavery and its aftermath, Jesus was not a clever theological device to escape the difficulties inherent in suffering. He was the One who lived with them *in* suffering and thereby gave them the courage and strength to "hold out to the end."²⁵⁶ Cone fundamentally accepts the seriousness of the challenge of suffering to black faith, and respects the motives and rationales of those who turn away from Christianity because of it. However, his reading of the liberation motif as central to the Bible, and his wedding it to a particular expression of radical black politics, is instrumental in the retention of his faith.

Violence

Canonical Christian thinkers like Augustine and Aquinas are implicated by Cone in the upholding hegemonic political and social institutions such as slavery: "According to Augustine, slavery was due to the sinfulness of the slaves... For Thomas, slavery was a part of the natural order of creation."²⁵⁷ Protestant Reformation thinkers are similarly depicted: "Martin Luther... equated the killing of a rebel with the killing of a mad dog."²⁵⁸ Cone's reading of liberation as central to the Bible means that he is not accusing past thinkers by the standards of the twentieth century: "They were wrong ethically because they were wrong *theologically*. They were wrong theologically because they failed to listen to the Bible... If Luther's error was due to the *time* in which he lived, then one would not expect to find similar ethical errors today. But that is just what one does find."²⁵⁹ Cone must work against the pacifying effects of much Christian thought to theologically ground his theology which demands worldly upheaval. He argues that the problem with Christian ethics is that it does not take the God of liberation as its starting point, but instead the abstracted God of 'white theology,' meaning structural oppressions are subordinated under a larger concern of the problem of evil. For him, rather, "a black Christian ethic must start with Scripture and the black experience."²⁶⁰ Indeed, Cone

²⁵⁵ Cone, J. H., *God of the Oppressed*, 169–73.

²⁵⁶ Cone, J. H., 177.

²⁵⁷ Cone, J. H., 182.

²⁵⁸ Cone, J. H., 182.

²⁵⁹ Cone, J. H., 183–84.

²⁶⁰ Cone, J. H., 188.

strongly states that it is inappropriate for black people to simply adopt the ethics of white theology, as they are ignorant of the divinity of worldly liberation, and the lived experiences of the oppressed themselves.

Cone's Christian ethic has two characteristic features: Firstly, it is defined by a situation of survival, whereby necessity permits oppressed people to do what they must in the face of dehumanisation and death. Secondly, it entails a risk of faith through which one must decide for oneself what is demanded in a given situation. In this way, he does not present a prescriptive, but a very pragmatic, ethic for political action:

“But since God's will does not come in the form of absolute principles applicable for all situations, our obedience to the divine will involves the risk of faith. The risk of faith means that the oppressed are not infallible. They often do not do the will of God which they know, and do not know the will of God which they proclaim... Christians are granted the risk of faith to hammer out the meaning of ethical obedience in the social context of human existence.”²⁶¹

Thus the risk of faith allows for a forgiving approach to ethics whereby the oppressed are dignified to interpret and act according to their material and structural situation of oppression first, before obedience to an abstract rule. Cone's ethic is therefore constructed in an ongoing dialogue between scripture, the black religious experience, and the ongoing and changing experiences of victims of oppression. The oppressed are thus not ‘commanded to follow philosophical principles’, but “to discover the will of God in a troubled and dehumanized world.”²⁶² ‘Concretely’, the oppressed must decide to participate in the realisation of God's promise of liberation, taking the risk of faith to carve out ‘decisions about life and death without an infallible guide’, ultimately grounded by the contention “...that God is found among the poor, the wretched, and the sick.”²⁶³

In sum

In *The Spirituals and the Blues*, and *God of the Oppressed*, James Cone shifts his theological perspective to better fit with the problems encountered by, and the religious tradition of, the community to which he wishes to speak. Unlike his first two texts, here he avoids presenting

²⁶¹ Cone, J. H., 190–91.

²⁶² Cone, J. H., 206.

²⁶³ Cone, J. H., 206.

arguments based on the expectations of white, European theologians and philosophers, and stops asking the questions that are central to these traditions. Instead, he focuses on two sources (the Bible, and the songs, sermons, stories and speeches of the black Christian tradition) and directs his attention not towards questions such as revelation, but much more towards the contradictions of experiencing suffering whilst trying to maintain faith.

Central to each of Cone's first four books is the reading of liberation as a central biblical message. Cone argues throughout that any theology which does not put liberation at the centre of its understanding of the meaning of the Bible and the life of Jesus, is not a properly Christian theology. God and Jesus' identity with the oppressed mean that they are 'black', a contextual designation antithetical to the 'whiteness' at the core of theologically authorised and manifest white supremacy. This is perhaps the most distinctive and important aspect of Cone's theology, especially for its intended wide audience beyond just academic theology, and it goes hand in hand with the assertion that Christianity, and the Christian message, is *not* a universal, or universalizable faith that can offer salvation to all people at all times. Such universalism, Cone argues, is in fact a mechanism of supremacy because it explicitly universalises theological questions (such as a highly abstracted 'problem of evil') that Cone argues could only be asked by theologians in a society that does not have more concrete societal oppressions thrust upon it – and so is not the appropriate recipient of the liberating message of Christianity.

This wresting of Christianity away from universality and towards being grounded in a particular community of oppressed peoples also has the effect of opening up for Cone, in light of his early critics, the possibility of drawing upon source material outside the mainstream canon of Christian thought to give authority and depth to his theology. Cone identifies oppressed people as the proper recipients of a Christian message, and so depicts much 'white theology' as itself an aberration, a peculiar diversion of Christianity away from its core ethic. This would place Cone firmly in agreement with Peterson's depiction of a 'theological politics' that remains true to the unempowered nature of a 'true' Christian community, and against Schmitt's political theology in which theological concepts become identified with sovereign power.

Jesus' particularity means that oppressed black people can have faith that their struggle has divine authorisation. This dimension of black theology counters the despair so evident in a

condition of overwhelming absurdity, and of the overwhelming asymmetry of material power between dehumanised black people living in white majority societies. This faith can help people endure suffering, but does not amount to a pacifying account of suffering as necessary for eternal peace in the 'next life'. Indeed, black theology presents an eschatology that enlivens the present, and acts of liberation in the present, to be understood as the manifestation of the Kingdom of Heaven. Black theology's eschatology brings the assurance of the possibility of another world to bear on the conditions of *this* world, with the injunction to do the work of God by realising liberation in *this* world, itself the attainment of the Kingdom.

The explicit primacy of material liberation over some more existential salvation makes black theology a very worldly doctrine. Suffering is redressed not in the afterlife, but in having the courage to act in a way that manifests divine justice *as* the liberation of the oppressed. The nonviolent Christian ethic of theologians such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and widely encouraged and preached by both religious and secular societies, is presented as creating impotency, and pacifying oppressed people into accepting subservience. Thus, Cone's theology supports a radical and revolutionary politics that first of all seeks to challenge power structures before it makes any pretence to any final state where these power structures are non-existent. Cone's ethic is more pragmatic than prescriptive: he provides the oppressed the freedom to act according to the necessity of their situation, whether or not an academic theologian has previously deemed their action in line with an Christian ethic. This they do at the risk of acting outside any previously prescribed ethic, which, in the pursuit of liberation, would by no means invite admonishment. Indeed, it corresponds roughly to Malcolm X's famous call for liberation 'by any means [that the oppressed deem] necessary.'

Most fundamentally, Cone's theology which, through a clear prioritisation of socio-political conditions of human life, creates a divinely authored injunction to *act* against oppression and in support of liberation. This injunction is rationalised on the community level not by professors of ethics in universities or seminaries, but with the freedom of a risk of faith that empowers fallible humans to take seriously the Christian message of liberation, and to act according to their situation and needs. Thus, the love of God, usually used to justify pacifism and human universality, is inseparable from righteous justice which condemns oppressors and explicitly sides with the oppressed.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented an account of the theology found in the first four works of James Cone. This has been a chronological, and thus a fairly meandering narrative. In the following chapters I will draw out and conceptualise what Cone most fundamentally rejects: white theology, as a particular approach to, and function of, theological discourse. Further, I will draw out and make clear the dialectic between material conditions and divine authority that he employs in his theology. Both of these dimensions of Cone's thought will be put into conversation with key themes of political theology in IR. In Chapter 3 we shall read between the lines of Cone's thought to identify the two main ways in which he mobilises 'white theology' as a critique of the mainstream theology of his day, and to draw out its implications for political theology in IR. In Chapter 4 we will discuss the relationship between extant political struggle and divine message that Cone constructs in and through his political theology. As we shall see, this has deep import for political theology in IR. It also provides the springboard for our discussion, in Chapters 5 and 6, of Christian Supersessionism as a necessary site of engagement for political theology.

Cone's first four books represent a momentous theological project. Their variety in scope and approach contribute to the breadth of his impact: his first two books speak directly to and in the terms of academic systematic theology, whilst his third and fourth books bring his theology round (or back) into the vocabulary and concerns of the non-academic tradition of African American religion and its tradition of song, prayer and worship. Whilst Cone opens fundamental problems for academic theology (upon which we will mostly focus in the following chapter), he has succeeded in styling a form of theological expression that has had direct impact in black Christianity in the United States and beyond. However, Cone's third and fourth books reveal that his theology is one *already* in practice in the African American religious traditions, and so his is one of articulation and explication for a more academic audience. Indeed, it is clear that Cone's neglect of one aspect of the Christian trinity (the Spirit) that remains central to one of the most globally successful Christian movements of recent years, Pentecostalism, reveals that black Christianity is in no way contained by the limits of his thought.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ "But James Cone gave only sparing attention to who the Spirit was. Scarcely anything noteworthy was said concerning the Spirit's person or the Spirit's relation to the other Trinitarian persons. What was important for

What Cone presents is a fundamentally *political* theology that labours in the foreign-ness of a white supremacist society, but not in patient expectation of an eschatological end or a messianic return, rather in with the explicit aim of realising liberation in this world. As merely human talk of that which exceeds the human, Cone articulates the divinity of liberation for his society and his time as the liberation of African Americans from the oppressions of white supremacy. To support a divine politics of liberation from racialised experience in the face of a colonial-modern world that has come to project white European-ness into the realms of universality and a-particularity, emphasising the ethno-cultural particularity of Jesus, and the social particularity of those to whom he ministered, was utterly central for Cone. Cone's insistence on the concreteness of Jesus' existence and ministry as revealing the concreteness of being itself, a revolutionary vision in which one cannot abstract oneself from the world in which one exists and is inevitably in hierarchical relations with others, points firmly to a deeper project of the very political potential of Christianity. Abstracting Christ from Jesus, argues Cone, has had disastrous effects in authorising and, perhaps, inspiring the European self-abstraction and projection into a hegemonic position of universal personhood.

To follow the ethos of Cone's project is to push this question and core tension in Christianity out into the open, as this thesis shall begin to do in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Next however, we must look to the more immediately relevant critique of white theology that is found throughout Cone's work, to see how this points to specific problems in the field of political theology.

Cone was that the Spirit was the divine presence without which there could be no worship. But this divine presence, the author of all the worshipping acts, was none other than the one who also authored, empowered, and sustained the struggle for liberation in its manifold expressions. Indeed, it was the Spirit who drew black people together so that the worship event could take place." Yong, A. and Alexander, E., *Afro-Pentecostalism: Black Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in History and Culture* (NYU Press, 2012), 174–75.

Chapter 3: Reading Between the Lines: White Theology

Now that we have given an overview of the key aspects of Cone's theology, this chapter will focus on what Cone calls 'white theology'. This dimension of Cone's thought allows us to begin to understand the ramifications not just of socio-cultural biases, but also of the advocacy of theological virtues which conceal political conservatism. White theology is used by Cone in two main ways. In the first sense, white theology is a device used to name the fact that mainstream theology in the United States, and particularly so in the years of Cone's seminary studies in the early 1960s, was (as it remains) overwhelmingly dominated by white men of European descent. This sociological fact is in no small part responsible for the habit of mainstream American theology, according to Cone, to respond overwhelmingly to the cultural, social, and political questions of its dominant and majority white populace. This leads to the neglect of explicit theological engagements with questions concerning racism, segregation, lynching, racial dehumanisation, or white supremacy (or any other experience not of the dominant class who occupy the academy).

This criticism was levelled by Cone in the late 1960s at his fellow academic theologians, and it is now one that is levelled widely across the academy, not least in the field of IR, which whilst inherently implying a pretence to 'internationality' is overwhelmingly produced in, and responds to the pressing questions of, the knowledge centres of the north Atlantic world. White theology, however, also signifies a second critique. In its second sense, white theology signifies interpretations of Christianity in which it is understood as essentially identified with dominant classes of society or the state, or as a private faith that does not radically call into question power imbalances in society, inviting the faithful to quietly suffer social injustices in order to demonstrate their piety and identification with Jesus' suffering on the Cross, for which they can hope for reward in the afterlife. In this sense, white theology is a theologically expressed conservatism which can be used to shore up status-quo imbalances of power, both by pacifying the dominated and by identifying 'stable' social structures with theological virtues.

This chapter will argue that both senses of the term 'white theology' can be applied to discussions of political theology in IR. The application of the first sense, as a form of critique, is growing apace in the wider field already. This chapter will argue that the second sense in

which 'white theology' is used also requires deep attention. Here it will discuss two contributors to political theology to argue that a theological pacifism, or pacification, leads to a latent conservatism which risks precluding destabilising processes of social and political change wherein justice is demanded and sought. Here I will focus the argument on discussion and analysis of John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory*,¹ and more briefly, Lianne Hartnett's recent essay on Reinhold Niebuhr and the political potential of love.² Milbank's theology has a wide-ranging impact in and beyond the theological movement of radical orthodoxy, whilst Hartnett's discussion of Niebuhr is indicative of a renewed focus in political theology in IR upon Niebuhr's theological thought.

The Origins of Black Liberation Theology

In his sixth book, *For My People*, Cone gives a mostly sociological account of the origins of Black Liberation Theology as an overt and self-conscious theological movement. He writes that there were three contexts from which Black Theology can be understood as having emerged:

“(1) the civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s, largely associated with Martin Luther King, Jr.; (2) the publication of Joseph Washington's book, *Black Religion* (1964);³ and (3) the rise of the black power movement, strongly influenced by Malcolm X's philosophy of black nationalism.”⁴

In Cone's work there is a powerful rejection of the inability of theology to have meaning for the lives of black people, stated in the unforgiving vocabulary of black power: “Unfortunately, Christianity came to the black man through white oppressors who demanded that he reject his concern for this world as well as his blackness and affirm the next world and whiteness.”⁵ Throughout his work as a theologian, Cone rejects and reverses this imperative, refusing to 'do theology' from a 'higher, more universal reality', and refusing to affirm the pacifying function of an eschatological otherworldliness:

¹ Milbank, J., *Theology and Social Theory*.

² Hartnett, L., “The Impossible Possibility of Love”.

³ Washington, J. R., *Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States* (Beacon Press, 1964).

⁴ Cone, J. H., *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*, 6.

⁵ Cone, J. H., *Black Theology and Black Power*, 33.

“A black theologian wants to know what the gospel has to say to a man who is jobless and cannot get work to support his family because the society is unjust. He wants to know what is God’s Word to the countless black boys and girls who are fatherless and motherless because white society decreed that blacks have no rights. Unless there is a word from Christ to the helpless, then why should they respond to him? How do we relate the gospel of Christ to people whose daily existence is one of hunger or even worse, despair? Or do we simply refer them to the next world?”⁶

Cone grew up in a racist and segregated Arkansas, and experienced from a young age the reality of living under an ethos of white supremacy that permeated the social fabric, including threats of the lynching of his father for filing “a lawsuit against the Bearden School Board in the early 1950s in the grounds that the white and black schools were not equal... We were all afraid for my father’s life and urged him to leave for his own safety. My father responded: “No white person is going to make me leave my own house. Let the sons of bitches come. They may lynch me; but with this double-barrel shotgun and my pistol, some of them will die with me.” Fortunately the lynch mob never came, as had been announced.”⁷ These experiences doubtless forged in Cone an unwavering sense of the inhumanity of white supremacy, and the importance of tackling its social manifestations not just its theological ones.

As a committed Christian, and going through a seminary education which culminated in a PhD dissertation on the anthropology of Karl Barth, Cone was faced with the monumental contradictions between the liberating ethic essential to the Christian message as he encountered it sociologically, in the black religious tradition, and theologically, and the actions and thought of both white and many black Christians and theologians, whose work promoted a conservative vision of Christian faith. But contrary to what this, and Cone’s own sociological account, would suggest, he was not *only* a concerned and politically aware Christian who responded to the changing circumstances of his times. He was a trained systematic theologian who brought his identification of the shortcomings of mainstream Christianity to bear on a radical re-reading of—or return to—the Christian message. Cone develops a sophisticated political theology that cuts through many of the presumed truisms

⁶ Cone, J. H., 43–44.

⁷ Cone, J. H., *My Soul Looks Back*, 21–22.

of Christianity as peaceable and pacifying doctrine of universal love and fellowship. Cone demanded that Christianity be made useful for black people suffering at the hands of white supremacy, and in a number of nuanced works, made it so.

Paolo Freire's foreword to the 1986 edition of *A Black Theology of Liberation* is worth quoting at length:

"A white theology can be just as political as a black theology or a theology of liberation in Latin America. Although it is easily seen through, political concern seeks to hide the orientation of a white theology toward defending dominant class interests. This is why, though simulating neutrality, white theology is preoccupied with the conciliation of things that cannot be conciliated, why it denies so insistently the differences among social classes and their struggles, and why in its efforts for social good it does not go beyond the kind of modernizing reformisms that only shore up the status quo."⁸

Cone's struggle with white theology is a struggle for existence: "...the central question for blacks is "How are we going to survive in a world which deems black humanity an illegitimate form of human existence?" ...By white definitions, whiteness is "being" and blackness is "nonbeing." ...To breathe in white society is dependent on saying yes to whiteness, and blacks know it... "To be or not to be" is thus a dilemma for the black community: to assert one's humanity and be killed, or to cling to life and sink into nonhumanity."⁹

In this early text, Cone's commitment to make theology useful to the oppressed is not strictly limited to black people, and as we will see later on, throughout his career the theme of liberation becomes extended beyond the socio-political remit of the Black Power movement. However, he rejects the criticism that Black Theology is a 'new kind of racism', by implying racial exclusivity, as well as the suggestion that God is colour-blind. As he writes:

"The focus on blackness does not mean that *only* blacks suffer as victims in a racist society, but that blackness is an ontological symbol and a visible reality which best describes what oppression means in America. The extermination of Amerindians, the persecution of Jews, the oppression of Mexican-Americans, and every other conceivable inhumanity done in the name of God and country—these brutalities can

⁸ Cone, J. H., *A Black Theology of Liberation*, xii.

⁹ Cone, J. H., 11–12.

be analysed in terms of the white American inability to recognize humanity in persons of color.”¹⁰

Close attention to the two meanings of white theology allows us to see exactly how it might be conceptually brought into conversation with the field of political theology in IR.

The Two Meanings of White Theology

In Cone’s work, ‘white theology’ is used to mobilise one of two criticisms of those theologians and theological trends that he wants to depart from. It is in many places a sociological critique of the cultural location, and thus social problematics focussed upon, of the theological mainstream of both North America and Europe. The problem here is twofold: in the first case, the theological mainstream did not often see racism as a particularly pressing problem, and even those that did approached it in the abstract academic discussions that exclude African American struggles for self-liberation.¹¹ In *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Cone uses Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s brief educational period in the US, and his ensuing engagement with black liberation struggles, to highlight his dissatisfaction with the engagement with race of one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century: Reinhold Niebuhr. Cone argues that whilst Niebuhr acknowledged racism and the effects of white supremacy, he failed to address it as a core *theological* concern. This leads Cone to comment on the difficulty, from the outside, of fully empathising with the experiences of black people. As Niebuhr did not engage race in as theologically a direct manner as Cone would have liked, “the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, during his year of study at Union (1930-1931), showed an existential interest in blacks... attending and teaching Bible study and Sunday School, and even preaching at Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. Bonhoeffer also read widely in African American history and literature... Some of Bonhoeffer’s white friends wondered whether he was becoming too involved in the Negro community.”¹² Cone is sharply critical of what he perceives as a ‘white paternalism’ in Niebuhr’s writing on race, where he writes about ‘our Negro minority’, whilst referring to Jews as ‘our brothers’. Cone points out Niebuhr’s failure to engage in direct dialogue with black theologians, and his failure to cite black intellectuals

¹⁰ Cone, J. H., 8.

¹¹ A similar dynamic is discussed in: Shilliam, R., ‘Black Redemption, Not (White) Abolition’, in *Claiming the International*, ed. Tickner, A. and Blaney, D. (Routledge, 2013), 141–58.

¹² Cone, J. H., *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 41.

in his writing, despite writing on race.¹³ Cone's critique of Niebuhr points to the failure of even progressive theologians of the era to take racism and white supremacy seriously as core *theological* issues, and to consider the black experience indispensable for talking about the meaning of Christ in America. His frustrations with Niebuhr's engagement with race points to his anger with the theological mainstream, which guides his systematic theology in his first two books. The limits of the thought of white theology that it identifies, explains why he became motivated to abandon, or at least minimise, reference to white and European theological traditions in his third and fourth books, *The Spirituals and the Blues*, and *God of the Oppressed*.

To abstract these criticisms and to mobilise them in the same manner that Cone did fifty years ago would be to remain wilfully ignorant of both the ways in which Cone's work, and black theology more broadly, has grown in influence amongst 'white' theologians, and to disclose the possibility of adjudicating between the very varied political perspectives which have arisen in subsequent generations of black theology. A devaluation of theology undertaken by members of the white majority in the US is a necessary polemical and political outburst, and not a sustainable model for scholarship. As Elonda Clay argues, black theology after Cone has become in part a search for an authentically and completely non-white Black religious experience, a search which produces myriad problems for a movement which claims to foreground liberation. Clay laments that black theologians have become 'historiographers and biographers' who are engaged in a re-writing of historical events and figures to create a nostalgic narrative of black political superheroes. These projects come, for Clay, at the expense of sustained outrage about 'conditions of poverty and economic exploitation.' Without persistent re-articulation and re-contextualisation (as Cone himself advocates), black theology risks becoming crystallised in 'retrospective reflection and nostalgic return', in the hopes of finding or posthumously creating a purely black intellectual space that transcends whiteness but is therein defined only by its rejection. Clay argues that "...these strategies fail to re-contextualize Black radical religious imagination and socio-political praxis for the present historical moment within transnational informational capitalism and neo-liberal imperialism."¹⁴ To understand Cone's rejection of white theology, then, as simply the

¹³ Cone, J. H., 41–42.

¹⁴ Clay, E., 'A Black Theology of Liberation or Legitimation?', 321–22.

rejection of theology done by white people, is a limited endeavour, and bears witness neither to the more nuanced mobilisation of the term in Cone's work, nor to the deeper liberative spirit that Clay argues must be central, which goes far beyond, but which must nevertheless be articulated through, the strictures of white and black.

The second way in which Cone uses the term 'white theology' is to mobilise a much more political-theological critique. Roughly, white theology is here theological concepts, traditions, and doctrines which produce a conservative, pacifying, love-thy neighbour, turn-the-other-cheek politics of social cohesion, such as that which was used to great effect in pacifying black Christians in both slavery and, more importantly, once they were 'free' but were living under a less rigidly legal framework of dehumanisation. White supremacy adapted and employed an array of tools, from the seemingly banal to the grotesquely cruel, from segregation of water fountains, to lynchings. The Christianity widely preached during this period promised eternal peace in the afterlife, and even emphasised the virtue shown to God through the ability to endure suffering. For Cone, these theological arguments had the effect of providing a religious sanction on any motivation to rise up against oppression, from the practical injunction to love thy neighbour and to turn the other cheek, to deeply abstract civilisation/biblical ideas like the myth of Ham,¹⁵ produced a pacified black population. As we have seen, Cone counters this theological trend, which has taken hold of mainstream Christianity in North America and Europe, with his reading of Christianity as placing worldly liberation as its central imperative. It is this second, theological critique of a latent conservatism and pacification, in which this thesis is interested, as it highlights the ease with which a political conservatism can be woven into an advocacy of such Christian virtues as peace and love.

Conceptualising the use of 'white theology' in Cone's works involves reading between the lines – the term is used at different times to denote different targets, and the same targets are often also called 'white Christianity' or 'the white church'. Mostly it refers to North American iterations of Christian faith and theology that are complicit in white supremacy. Cone seems not to classify 'European theologies' under 'white theology', though both broadly

¹⁵ Wherein the curse placed upon Ham by Noah was used, via a biblical-historical mapping of civilisations, as a justification for the slavery of black peoples. Goldenberg, D. M., *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton University Press, 2009); Johnson, S., *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity*.

receive the same criticism, and it is his overreliance on a number of white, primarily European, theologians in his first two books for which he is heavily criticised, and which motivates his subsequent shift in the explicitly stated sources of his Black Theology.

I want to draw these various aspects of the theological mainstream that Cone is rejecting together, and to argue that there is a common thread underlying what it is about 'white theology', the practices of white Christians and churches, and the work of a number of European theologians, that he seeks to challenge and subvert. It is my sense that there are basically two different ways in which these various ideas and practices go wrong for Cone.

The first is more or less sociological, and occurs when theologians respond to what they believe to be the pertinent problems of society, and because of their 'whiteness', or their in some way being on the receiving end of the benefits of a white supremacist society, they are frustratingly (and for Cone—suspiciously) blind to issues of racism. The second regards what Cone constructs as a misreading of the core message of the Bible, which according to him reveals that a Christian life is that which is unequivocally identified with those most unwanted and rejected by society at large. The stories of the Israelites, and the life and teachings of Jesus in the New Testament, show Cone that God is not for all people, and certainly not for the 'dominant class' of society, but is on the side of the weak and the excluded. Theology which does not attempt to explicitly locate itself in solidarity with the poorest and most oppressed parts of society, and which does not explicitly speak to their problems, is white theology, and is fundamentally, for Cone, unChristian.

Cone is not the only thinker to employ the term white theology, though instances of its use appear to be very few. In an article published in 1971, Congolese thinker Dibinga Wa Said equates 'white theology' with 'bourgeois theology'. Said doesn't hold back in his polemical indictment of bourgeois/white theology:

"Briefly, Bourgeois Theology can be defined as an atheistic, anti-Christ, inhuman, racist, colonial scientific ideology whose main purposes are (i) to save the white races by all means necessary, (2) to exploit non-whites, and (3) to dominate nonwhites economically, politically, socially, and spiritually. As an ideology of dehumanization and depersonalization, Bourgeois Theology is the embodiment of all forces of evil

which contributed to the misery of the world in general, and to the eternal pains and sufferings of the people of African blood."¹⁶

In his essay, Said captures the spirit of Cone's consideration of the rejection of Christianity if it cannot be wrestled from the hands of a white supremacist society and theology. Said explicitly writes that not just the collaboration between white theology and white colonialism, but the building of the latter upon the architecture of the former, dispels all doubt that "white theology is the negation of Blackness,"¹⁷ and offers absolutely nothing for liberation. This realisation leads Said to advocate a total rejection of 'white Christianity': "...to hell with irreligious whitanity! To hell with white God! To hell with white Jesus! And to hell with those theological Black uncle toms who are still hung on the myth that the Black salvation will come from white institutions."¹⁸ Said and Cone both see the identification of Christianity with the racial supremacy and imperial domination of North America and Europe as totally fatal, authorising either a wholesale rejection of Christianity, or its complete re-interpretation.

More recently, theologian James W. Perkinson published a book with the title: *White Theology: Outing supremacy in modernity*.¹⁹ Perkinson's broad project is the redemption of 'white theology' (by which he means, theology by white people) in light of the lessons taught by several generations of black theology. Perkinson advocates a white theology that is conscious and confessional of the position and privileges of its author. Further, it must strive to deconstruct its cultural function as the establishment and consolidation of 'theology by white people' as dis-located and universalizable theological reflection: it must self-provincialise. Finally, it must seek to establish practices of solidarity with other groups of people. Perkinson hopes to redeem 'white theology', and his work remains a rare example of such an explicit attempt. He advocates not the overdetermination of the use of theology based on the racial identification of its authors, instead invoking Cone and Womanist theologian Delores Williams to propose that white theology "move back and forth between a more metaphorical understanding of privileged categories (of "blackness" and "sisterhood"

¹⁶ Said, D. W., 'An African Theology of Decolonization', *Harvard Theological Review* 64, no. 4 (October 1971): 504.

¹⁷ Said, D. W., 514.

¹⁸ Said, D. W., 515.

¹⁹ Perkinson, J. W., *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

respectively) and a more literal commitment to practices that counter white privilege and patriarchal power.”²⁰

Now that we have given a brief introduction of the basic thrust of the two ways in which Cone mobilises the term white theology, we will explore each in greater detail before seeing how they, and particularly the second sense of white theology as a theological-political critique of pacification, can be put into conversation with certain works in the field of political theology in IR.

White Theology as a sociological critique

Cone argues that theology is merely human speech about the divine. As he writes in the 1989 preface to *Black Theology and Black Power*: “Since theology is *human* speech and *not* God speaking, I recognize today, as I did then, that *all* attempts to speak about ultimate reality are limited by the social history of the speaker.”²¹ In *God of the Oppressed*, Cone developed this idea, with reference to Feuerbach, Marx, and the sociology of knowledge. Drawing firstly from Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity*,²² Cone affirms that theology is *interested* in the eternal, but is not itself eternal, being bracketed by the social time and place in which it is produced: “It is a finite image, limited by the temporality and particularity of our existence. Theology is not universal language; it is *interested* language and thus is always a reflection of the goals and aspirations of a particular people in a definite social setting.”²³

Cone moves from Feuerbach to Marx, who asserted that truth was not all that was at stake, but that there was a politics involved in these interested depictions of divinity: “The ruling class promotes religion because it justifies the present material relations and also because it serves as a sedative for the oppressed, making them remain content with humiliation and suffering. As long as the oppressed believe that their future is found in a heavenly world, they will not focus on the needed revolutionary praxis to change this world.”²⁴ This points to a dimension of Christianity that haunts Cone, as a sheer mechanism of oppression, unredeemable. Nevertheless, he never denies that theologians must reckon with their

²⁰ Perkinson, J. W., ‘Rage with a Purpose, Weep without Regret: A White Theology of Solidarity’, *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 82, no. 3/4 (1999): 437–38.

²¹ Cone, J. H., *Black Theology and Black Power*, ix.

²² Feuerbach, L., *The Essence of Christianity* (C. Blanchard, 1855).

²³ Cone, J. H., *God of the Oppressed*, 36.

²⁴ Cone, J. H., 39.

relativity and the relativity of their theologies, since human talk about God is always conditioned by social conditioning: "...their dreams and visions are derived from this world. For those who are accustomed to speak *ex cathedra* on matters of faith, this will be a difficult pill to swallow."²⁵ Cone writes that, given the insights of sociologists of knowledge, "the assumption that theological thinking is objective or universal is ridiculous."²⁶ Much of Cone's theology can be seen as attempting to redeem Christianity from these claims, that it is sheer ideology, and that it is the sheer ideology of the ruling classes, used to shore up unequal distributions of social and material capital. He takes this critique of religion upon himself as seriously as he turns it upon status-quo affirming works of white theology. Cone's response to this sociological critique, which would surely call the rational reader to abandon religion, is often theological (hinging not upon a philosophical argument for the existence of God, but upon faith), but he also offers a political rebuttal that leads well to the second dimension of white theology. He accepts that 'white theology and black theology' both emerge out of different social and mental grids, and this in part explains their diversion. However, Cone writes that he believes "...that the social a priori of Black Theology is closer to the axiological perspective of biblical revelation, for the moment the point is simply the inescapable interplay between theology and society—whether white or Black Theology. This means that theology is political language."²⁷ Whilst the axiological perspective of biblical revelation provides the theologian with a framework for adjudicating between different 'social and mental grids', Cone writes that there is fundamentally a politics at play in the production of any theology which speaks of things divine from the perspective of a particular social reality. This politics is legitimised or condemned, for Cone, by his exegesis of the meaning of Christianity as a story of, and call to, liberation.

So, the perspective of white theologians is bracketed by their social experience, and the problem is *not necessarily* the age-old philosophical dilemma of particular knowledge projected to the status of universality, but the fact that this social experience is that of *dominance*, resulting in an inability, or unwillingness, of white theologians to challenge the white supremacy upon which so much of North American and European society is built:

²⁵ Cone, J. H., 41.

²⁶ Cone, J. H., 41.

²⁷ Cone, J. H., 41.

“Although the historical events of the twentieth century have virtually destroyed the nineteenth-century confidence in the goodness of humanity and the inevitable progress of history, twentieth-century white theologians are still secure in their assumption that important theological issues emerge, primarily if not exclusively, out of the white experience.”²⁸

Indeed, during slavery, the majority of Christian theologians either ignored or justified it, and only a small number spoke out against it.²⁹ Cone is not dismissive of the fact that some white theologians actively fought against slavery, though he remarks that by the 1975 publication of *God of the Oppressed*, to his knowledge only one white theologian, Frederick Herzog, had “attempted to reorder theological priorities in the light of the oppression of black people.”³⁰

In an essay entitled ‘White Theology Revisited’, written in 1998 and published in *Risks of Faith*, Cone reaffirms the sociological aporia of white theologians. He writes that Christianity was unashamedly used to prop up and justify ‘slavery, colonialism, and segregation’ for five hundred years. Despite the implication of Christianity in these historical and ongoing processes, the problem of white supremacy persists in being ignored by the theological mainstream who pay close attention to, and spend a great deal of time writing about, the questions thrown up by ‘critical reason’ in the secular world. Cone’s continued disbelief that the theological mainstream do not consider white supremacy a problem worthy of sustained attention is clear when he writes that: “Their silence on race is so conspicuous that I sometimes wonder why they are not greatly embarrassed by it.”³¹

²⁸ Cone, J. H., 42–43.

²⁹ This claim is represented in a large body of literature which has excavated the many ways in which Christian faith and theology was complicit in slavery: “As a result of this group criticism and evaluation, there emerged what could be considered a proslavery mainstream. The Bible served as the core of this defense. In the face of abolitionist claims that slavery violated principles of Christianity, southerners demonstrated with ever more elaborate detail that both Old and New Testaments sanctioned human bondage. God’s Chosen People had been slaveholders; Christ had made no attack on the institution; his disciple Paul had demonstrated a commitment to maintaining it.” Faust, D. G., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830–1860* (LSU Press, 1981), 10–11. See also Gerbner, K., *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); Irons, C. F., *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2009); Dumas, P. E., *Proslavery Britain: Fighting for Slavery in an Era of Abolition* (Springer, 2016).

³⁰ Cone, J. H., *God of the Oppressed*, 46; Herzog, F., *Liberation Theology: Liberation in the Light of the Fourth Gospel* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013). The extent of the complicity of the various denominations which made up the earliest settlements on the Eastern seaboard of North America, is well told in Cañizares-Esguerra, J., *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700* (Stanford University Press, 2006).

³¹ Cone, J. H., *Risks of Faith*, 131.

This first way in which white theology is mobilised, as a rejection of theology *done by white people*, and associated with white-majority institutions and academes, brings a critique that has much polemical value in moments of political outburst, but is of limited use for mobilising sustained problematisations and critiques of the power dynamics and politics behind theological concepts. The second way in which Cone uses the term white theology, however, holds much greater promise.

White Theology as a theological critique

“The white church has not merely failed to render services to the poor, but has failed miserably in being a visible manifestation to the world of God’s intention for humanity and in proclaiming the gospel to the world. It seems that the white church is not God’s redemptive agent but, rather, an agent of the old society.”³²

The following section will address the second dimension of white theology that we find in Cone’s pages. That is, the argument that Christianity has become, and has been promoted as, an ultimately pacifying edifice that promises the sufferer the fruits of their hardships in the afterlife, so long as they unflinchingly observe the doctrines of love and forgiveness *especially* unto those who harm them most.

A fruitful place to begin an account of Cone’s criticism of the status-quo-affirming function of Christianity in the western tradition is his arguments about suffering. Cone states that the Euro-American theological tradition takes its cue from either Greek philosophy, or from the claim, in Paul’s letter to the Romans, that: “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”³³ Cone’s argument is that this faith in the essential goodness of things produces a political conservatism “that locates the resolution of the problem of suffering either in the logical structure of the rational mind or in the interior depths of the human heart, and thereby negates the praxis of freedom against the structure of injustice and oppression.”³⁴ Theology has thus posited suffering as an abstraction that pertains to the philosophical ‘problem of evil’, subsuming it into so many scholarly discussions. The problem is that these discussions divert themselves to academic philosophy and theology, and away from political action against suffering. They often result

³² Cone, J. H., *Black Theology and Black Power*, 71.

³³ Romans 8:28 Coogan, M. D. et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1626.

³⁴ Cone, J. H., *God of the Oppressed*, 163–64.

in 'theologies of the Cross' which emphasise the passion narratives and the suffering of crucifixion, eclipsing Jesus' ministry or any political interpretation of Jesus' radicalism in the face of both the Jewish authorities and the Roman Empire. Cone argues that this goes against the New Testament story of the resurrection of a poor and hated Jewish prophet: not a philosophical treatise on the origin or problem of evil, but an affirmation of God's action against it. Cone writes that the over-emphasis of theology on providing an analysis of the problem of suffering is due to it having been 'influenced too much' by philosophy, and 'too little by the Bible'. The occupation of theologians with 'metaphysical speculations about the origin of evil' has resulted in theology being concerned only with intellectual theory, and suggest solutions to problems such as evil and suffering "that have nothing to do with the liberation of the poor from bondage."³⁵ Downplaying liberation from worldly suffering, and displacing dealing with the 'problem of evil' to the purely philosophical, speculative and intellectual realm, and the widely held position that to suffering brings the believer closer to Christ, produces, for Cone, a pacifying Christianity that was sharply criticised by Malcolm X: "Don't stop suffering—just suffer peacefully. As Rev. Cleage pointed out, they say you should let your blood flow in the streets. This is a shame. You know he's a Christian preacher. If it's a shame to him, you know what it is to me."³⁶

At the most fundamental level, Cone's depiction of Christianity is the confirmation of the divinity of liberation. Political and social liberation is, for him, the core message of much of the Old Testament, particularly the Exodus story and the stories of the Israelites, and is the core message and action of Jesus in the New Testament.³⁷ He is dissatisfied with theologians from the US or Europe who, despite writing at the peak of Jim Crow legislation and with the emergence of the civil rights movement, can speak of liberation, if at all, only in abstract terms, without identifying the liberation of black people from social and political oppression as explicitly in line with the Christian message of liberation, as Martin Luther King did.³⁸ Here Cone makes a crucial move in pulling Christianity away from identification with worldly

³⁵ Cone, J. H., 164–65.

³⁶ Malcolm X, *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements* (Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 12.

³⁷ Cone, J. H., *God of the Oppressed*, 60–66; Cone, J. H., *Speaking the Truth*, 40–44.

³⁸ In 1967 King expressed his "disappointment with the Christian church that appears to be more white than Christian, and with many white clergymen who prefer to remain silent behind the security of stained-glass windows... [and] disappointment with some Negro clergymen who are more concerned about the size of the wheel base on their automobiles than about the quality of their service to the Negro community." King (Jr.), M. L., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos Or Community?* (Beacon Press, 2010), 36–37.

powers and dominant groups in society. Remarking that “If Jesus had been born in the king’s court and had been an advisor to the emperor of Rome, then what I am saying would have no validity”,³⁹ he points to the constant distinction made by Jesus and the Gospels between ‘the rich and the poor, the weak and the strong.’ That Jesus was crucified as a criminal by the empire and ‘condemned as a blasphemer’ by the Jewish religious elites, solidifies for Cone that the Christian Gospel is a message about liberation for the oppressed.⁴⁰

The second dimension of white theology is thus the production of an anti-revolutionary injunction to love-thy-neighbour no matter what. Whether getting innocently carried away with the doctrine of universal love, or whether intentionally trying to pacify the masses which threaten to overthrow the stability of an oppressive social regime, is given little different treatment: they both do their bit to maintain white supremacy. In 1967, Martin Luther King praised Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish religious bodies for having over the preceding five years, been ‘the vanguard in the civil rights struggle’, fighting to bring the ‘ethical insights’ of Judeo-Christian tradition and faith to bear on the problems of institutional racism and white supremacy. In the same spirit as Cone, however, he cautions that “the church as a whole has been all too negligent on the question of civil rights. It has too often blessed a status quo that needed to be blasted, and reassured a social order that needed to be reformed.”⁴¹

White theology, then has two dimensions. The first points to the social complicity of the theological mainstream with the dominant class of society, and the inability therein to ‘do’ theology from the perspective of those most in need of liberation. The second dimension points to a particular theological tradition, which has been enormously influential, which projects Christianity as an inner faith which does not challenge external, social or political conditions, but which invites the faithful to suffer, to love unconditionally, safe in the knowledge that they will receive their reward for this piety in the afterlife.

From this overview of ‘white theology’ in Cone’s work, we move back to works of political theology to discuss the capacity in which ‘white theology’ can be identified and mobilised as a vehicle of critique. Here we will unpack the counter-myth offered by John Milbank in his landmark text, *Theology and Social Theory*, arguing that the second way in which Cone

³⁹ Cone, J. H., *Speaking the Truth*, 9.

⁴⁰ Cone, J. H., 9.

⁴¹ King (Jr.), M. L., *Where Do We Go from Here*, 102.

mobilises white theology can cast light on the conservatism implicit in Milbank's *Civitas Dei*. Identifying the status-quo-affirming dimensions of Milbank's work points to how political ramifications can be concealed deep in theological and metaphysical articulations guided by deep commitments to abstract virtues.

John Milbank's Ontology of Harmony

A work of significant import for contemporary political theology, as well as post-secular philosophy, that can be meaningfully put into conversation with Cone's theological notion of 'white theology' is John Milbank's 1991 *Theology and Social Theory*, which was introduced in Chapter 1. To remind ourselves, Milbank skilfully demonstrates the essentially theological nature of a postmodern ontology of incommensurable violence and conflict as a dominant framework in contemporary continental philosophy and political thinking. Having identified that it, at core, remains a non-provable mythological claim to an essential violence between ontologically incommensurable entities, Milbank argues that the door is open to the production of counter-myths. Such counter myths might provide more harmonious grounds upon which to imagine politics beyond secular reason. Milbank posits that the *Civitas Dei* as conceived by theology is a fruitful site for resisting the totalising nihilism of postmodernity: "...one can only oppose Nietzsche and his followers by invoking a counter-mythology and a counter-ontology, not by trying to reinstate a humanism founded upon 'universal reason', nor by seeking a level of narrated 'reality' beneath the play of simulacra."⁴² Chief in resisting nihilism is the task of positing a theologically inspired 'good' over a postmodern ontology that forecloses moving beyond politics expressed as power. For this task, Milbank holds theology as uniquely positioned, as it alone checks worldly expressions of sovereign power, in holding such expressions accountable to a power 'over and above' the sovereign.

Milbank's prognosis to this diagnosis of the problem of the mythological foundation of postmodern ontology, which he argues ontologically grounds a politics of pure power, is a counter-mythos of harmony rooted in Plato and Augustine:

"Divine goodness, for Plato, is clearly cut off from mere heroic excellence, for it is not an achievement, but an abiding state. It cannot, therefore, be primarily linked with 'the goods of effectiveness' (to use MacIntyre's term) or of mere pragmatic success.

⁴² Milbank, J., *Theology and Social Theory*, 324.

Instead, its connection must be rather with some assessment of the up shot... of the circle rather than the arrow. *Only the philosopher, and not the man of action, really encounters this divine good*, which remains in a fashion ineffable, but when mediated to human being takes the form of justice... meaning the proper distribution of roles and rewards within the bounds of the city. The justice secured in the city constitutes a more reliable sort of peace: not a mere suspension of hostilities, but *a peace founded upon agreement and organic harmony, when each person sticks to his allotted task.*"⁴³

Milbank's eagerness to produce a myth that does not seem to ontologically entrench perpetual conflict reveals the conservatism latent in his project. Each person sticking to their allotted task appears highly analogous with Christian injunctions to turn the other cheek and suffer in silence. Indeed, Milbank charges that to an extent, enduring the suffering inflicted by the formal goals of state *dominium* is a necessary part of moving beyond theodicy. Here Milbank writes that the Church must extend 'socially aesthetic harmony' into the realm of the state, though in the case of a state committed only to *dominium* this will remain a limited endeavour. This *dominium* however must not be overthrown, but 'a measure' of its necessity resigned to, in a tragic acceptance of 'unmerited suffering'. This acceptance constitutes, for Milbank, a 'purely positive act', from which benefit can flow. Whilst just what Milbank means by 'benefit' means remains unclear (although it is likely to correspond with harmony), in the hopes of its attainment he advocates "the active enduring of unmerited suffering – a series that knows of its *own* impulses only conviviality, and seeks to escape, forever, the mesmerizing lures of tragic *aporia*."⁴⁴ Milbank's proposal of a *Civitas Dei* in which the 'active enduring of unmerited suffering' is a necessary part of harmony, and in which each must person sticking to his allotted task so that the whole can achieve a harmonious 'good', thus runs fundamentally counter to Cone's image of the liberative message of Christianity. Whilst for Milbank conflict is shunned as a disharmonious problem, for Cone it must necessarily remain an option to be engaged by the risk of faith, in the hopes of attaining liberation.

Milbank develops his notion of harmony through reference to Augustine's musical ontology. He invokes an internal harmony of the *psyche* which is linked to and manifests, collectively, an external harmony of the *polis*. The 'internal' soul, household, or city can only be

⁴³ My emphasis Milbank, J., 335.

⁴⁴ Milbank, J., 428–29.

authentically 'free' when contributing to, and located within, a harmonious 'external', the cosmos. In Augustine's *De Musica*, as Milbank writes, the soul is 'defined as a number that must be correctly positioned in a series'. The soul is only 'free' when its internality corresponds to its position in the series which must be harmonious. In abstract terms resonant with Cone's complaints about the pitfalls of white theology, Milbank writes that "Such freedom, however, is only fully and properly exercised when it opts for harmony, for the beautiful form of the series, however infinitely various; otherwise, freedom will be inhibited by disharmony, the resistance of other freedoms, and will not be perfect freedom."⁴⁵ 'Perfect freedom', it seems, does not for Milbank entail such upheavals as Cone's liberation, but rather be the acceptance of a degree of 'unmerited suffering'.

This harmony thus ushers in what seems to be a theological model of order in which the main task of a politically concerned ontology or theology is to dissuade the parts from 'disharmony'. Milbank does not at all leave space for any kind of righteous disharmony or politically necessary disruption: it is a pacifying politics that seeks to establish a theologically articulated formal peace that doesn't take seriously enough the one thing that it seeks to overcome: power, and its own implication in it. Milbank's obsession with harmony means that any liberative politics, which must inevitably engage in some sort of disharmony, is cast as a mere worship of power. A key problem here, in light of Cone's argument about the limits of 'white theology' for political struggles, is an ontological break between the world sought to be overcome (permeated with postmodern ontology of conflictual incommensurability) and that sought to be established (a harmonious ontology of peace). This break allows the 'new world', the *alteras civitas*, to be creatively imagined, but the moment of its 'establishment' would itself be a moment of great disharmony, a disharmony already made impossible by its ontological entrenchment of harmony.

This reveals in stark relief the nuance of Paipais' account of a *political* ontology, that acknowledges its own insufficiency and impossibility, but nevertheless engages in the imagination of alternative possibilities. The adoption of a harmonious *ordo* in a world already permeated with injustice and division risks foreclosing a frame of political action in which

⁴⁵ Milbank, J., 409.

injustices might be addressed. In an essay entitled *Violence and Vengeance*, Cone comments on this topic:

“We cannot, however, create a world without violence if we do not analyze carefully its causes, fight untiringly for justice and peace, and identify the persons and socio-political structures most responsible for human misery. Pious generalities, so typical of church rhetoric, do more harm than good, because they keep us from locating the root causes of violence and from identifying the real enemies of freedom.”⁴⁶

For Cone, theology must respond to real sufferings in the world in which it is located, not to abstract principles of violence or conflict. His insistence on the embedded, committed relation of the theologian to the world is modelled on his depiction of the committed, involved nature of a liberative God who is not ‘for all’ but ‘for the oppressed’. In an essay entitled ‘Christian Faith and Political Praxis’, Cone writes that the view of Christianity as concerning ‘spiritual reality’ rather than the ‘material conditions of people’ plays a crucial role in producing the conservative undercurrents of the influence of Christianity upon politics. He here concedes that, if this is the case, and Christianity is really just a tool for the entrenchment of the interests of the ruling classes, then Marx’s depiction of religion as the opium of the people in an oppressive society is right. However, Cone’s understanding of the liberative core of Christianity leads him to a different assessment of its political potential, containing ‘latent revolutionary and humanizing’ dimensions:

But if religion generally and the Christian faith in particular is an imaginative and apocalyptic vision about the creation of a new humanity that is derived from the historical and political struggles of oppressed peoples, then to describe it as a sedative is to misunderstand religion’s essential nature and its latent revolutionary and humanizing thrust in society.”⁴⁷

Milbank does not mention Black Theology, but he does discuss Latin American Liberation Theology, which in its insistence on the importance of material conditions to theology, and of the committed nature of a liberative God, has similarities with Cone’s thought. Milbank is highly critical of liberation theology and what he calls political theology, meaning theology

⁴⁶ Cone, J. H., *Speaking the Truth*, 62.

⁴⁷ Cone, J. H., 35.

that draws from the work of German theologian Karl Rahner. Milbank's primary critique of these Catholic movements is the subordination of theology to a 'pre-theological' sociology of capitalism and class divisions, *after* which theology develops its critique. Milbank is not politically averse to the Christian socialist hopes of liberation theology but laments that these theologians have not sought to demonstrate that socialism is a *logical goal* of Christianity itself, rather than an inevitable teleological goal of any rational human. Instead of developing a project of socialism grounded in Christian theology, theirs "has been simply another effort to reinterpret Christianity in terms of a dominant secular discourse of our day."⁴⁸

Cone and Milbank respond to radically different problematics, though they would both claim that *their* problematic is a primary one of 'modernity'. Cone responds to white theology as the systematic de-radicalisation and de-politicisation of Christian theology to shore up theologically authorised and socially and politically manifest white supremacy. His notion of white theology is clearly manifest in Milbank's advocacy of a *Civitas Dei* built on an ontology of harmony. In a similar vein, Milbank would likely identify an ontology of perpetual conflict in Cone's thought, arguing that it resonates with the postmodern rut of secular reason. Whilst the possibility of conflict must remain open in Cone's theology, the fact that it is drawn not from a Nietzschean-Heideggerian lineage, as is the target of Milbank's criticism, but from biblical exegesis and the liberative tradition of African American Christianity in the United States, makes it something of a problem for Milbank's dismissal. As a theology of liberation drawn from deep political struggle, it is located outside the field of his criticism, whilst Milbank's argument is located firmly within Cone's.

From Cone's perspective, Milbank is plainly reproducing white theology as a pacifying story of Christian spirituality that seeks to preclude severe social disruptions. That Cone's critique of such theology is levelled from outside the canon (wide as it is) of works that Milbank discusses, casts light on his depiction of an 'ontology of conflict' to be narrowly represented by Nietzschean-Heideggerian postmodernism, and using this as a platform to argue for ontological harmony. In the final assessment, Milbank's prognosis would be found by Cone to be most un-Christian due to its silence on the topic of worldly liberation, and its injunctions to endure unmerited suffering for the attainment of a harmonious order.

⁴⁸ Milbank, J., *Theology and Social Theory*, 208.

From here we move to another discussion of Cone's notion of white theology with direct reference to political theology in IR. To give voice to this discussion we will engage a recent paper on the work of the Christian Realist Reinhold Niebuhr, which directly addresses his work in relation to race.

Love and Harmony in Political Theology

The theological movement known as Christian Realism, represented here by Reinhold Niebuhr, offers nuanced ground for discussing the implications of Cone's critique of 'white theology'. Of particular interest here is Niebuhr's ambiguous position regarding race as a political and theological problem, having openly discussed and addressed questions of race, but not to the satisfaction of all, including Cone. A recent special issue in the *Journal of International Political Theory* on Reinhold Niebuhr offers excellent material for this discussion with specific reference to the rehabilitation of political theology in IR.

Niebuhr is a hugely influential American theologian whose time at Union Theological Seminary in New York preceded Cone's by a decade. Cone laments that their tenures did not overlap, writing that he would have liked to have engaged with Niebuhr on race and theology as he did his other colleagues.⁴⁹ Vassilios Paipais, in his paper, recognises the paradoxical nature of the very term 'Christian Realism', since the former

“...emerged as a transformative revolutionary movement bent on radically changing the relationship between the self and the world by calling for a transition from a self-centred preoccupation with the pursuit of individual interest and power accumulation to a new *way of life* embodying and instantiating the ethics of love and self-sacrifice. Realism, on the other hand, is traditionally understood as the doctrine of compromise and pragmatic accommodation with the realities of power, the acceptance of the world as it is, that is, a realm of competition for survival and dominance between rapacious or, in the Hobbesian version, between equally vulnerable and insecure human beings.”⁵⁰

Despite this apparent paradox, Christian realism would have a great influence on the field of International Relations, influencing such mainstream IR greats as Wight, Morgenthau, Waltz,

⁴⁹ Cone, J. H., *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 61.

⁵⁰ Paipais, V., 'Reinhold Niebuhr and the Christian Realist Pendulum', 2.

Carr, but also Martin Luther King, Jr. and ethicist Jean Elshtain. In place of a direct engagement with Niebuhr's work here we will discuss primarily Lianne Hartnett's contribution to this special issue, as it already does much work in bringing Niebuhr's work to bear upon discussion in International Political Theory, and bears witness to the current and ongoing 'return' to political theology taking place in the field of IR.

In her essay, "The Impossible Possibility of Love': Reinhold Niebuhr's thought on Racial justice',⁵¹ Hartnett writes of the centrality of love for Niebuhr's ethics. Hartnett clarifies, however, Niebuhr's account of the *inappropriateness* of 'mere love' at a communal level, intimating his advocacy of *justice*, as an 'approximation' of love at the communal level. Here it is easy to feel Cone's critique: Justice for whom? Indeed it is the *realist* reflex in Niebuhr's thought with which Cone would take issue, it's prudent and compromising centralisation of an abstracted notion of justice as a Christian ethic, an argument that is unlikely to seriously upset many.

Through reference to Cone, Hartnett presents the ambivalent nature of Niebuhr's discussion of race. At different times he both addressed it directly and seemed to completely neglect it. With clarity about this ambivalence, Hartnett opens her discussion about the potential of Niebuhr's theology of love as a response to racism, arguing that it can offer "a basis of critique, a call to compassion and a motivation for the political practice of coercion."⁵² As Hartnett writes, Niebuhr sought to subsume "racism as a sin of pride... [allowing] the claim that no one was immune."⁵³ This abstraction of racism into a facet of original sin is strongly criticised by Cone, who argues that the abstraction of human experiences into intellectual problematics contributes "to a political conservatism that locates the resolution of the problem of suffering either in the logical structure of the rational mind or in the interior depths of the human heart, and thereby negates the praxis of freedom against the structures of injustice and oppression."⁵⁴ This abstraction thus relocates the site of the problem to one of theory: "By focusing on metaphysics, theologians make the problem of evil a matter of intellectual theory and more often than not end up suggesting solutions that have nothing to do with the

⁵¹ Hartnett, L., "The Impossible Possibility of Love".

⁵² Hartnett, L., 7.

⁵³ Hartnett, L., 8.

⁵⁴ Cone, J. H., *God of the Oppressed*, 163–64.

liberation of the poor from bondage.”⁵⁵ As Hartnett acknowledges, Niebuhr’s “privileging of pragmatism, then, is bound to frustrate proponents of more radical, liberationist theologies.”⁵⁶ Cone’s critique of the abstraction of worldly experiences of racism from historically situated circumstances into intellectual and metaphysical categories and discussions as foreclosing political praxis, is anticipated by Hartnett, who argues with Ida Danewid that “an embrace of political emotions such as empathy or grief – and by extension, love – as a response to injustice enables a turn to universalism or an abstract humanism in order to evade historical responsibility.”⁵⁷

Despite their shortcomings, as a central figure of political realism Hartnett’s argument that the unwillingness to discuss race is entrenched and re-entrenched when figures such as Niebuhr, who *did* write, often strongly, on the topic, are discussed only with regard to their political realism. The fact that he is a figure of political realism perhaps makes it even more imperative that his thought on racism is brought to the fore, despite its sometimes-ambivalent nature. In his own work, Cone praises Niebuhr and his Christian Realism for thinking a theological position from which it is *necessary* to address the realities of the world as we find it. He did not shy away from the problem of race in America, though it cannot be said that it organised his theological thinking as it does Cone’s. Despite the fact that Niebuhr did not ignore race, as did the theological mainstream of the time, Cone draws our attention to Niebuhr’s concerning view of Anglo-Saxon America as fulfilling a limited, but still elevated, role of Chosen-ness. The passage that Cone invokes is worth quoting at length:⁵⁸

“It would serve no good purpose to try to compare the special destiny of the Anglo-Saxon peoples with that of Israel in olden times. Certainly no one would be so rash today as to claim the kind of destiny for our nations that the prophet’s word “only” implies. Nevertheless only those who have no sense of the profundities of history would deny that various nations and classes, various social groups and races are at various times placed in such a position that a special measure of the divine mission in

⁵⁵ Cone, J. H., 165.

⁵⁶ Hartnett, L., “The Impossible Possibility of Love”, 9.

⁵⁷ Hartnett, L., 15; Danewid, I., ‘White Innocence in the Black Mediterranean: Hospitality and the Erasure of History’, *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 7 (3 July 2017): 1674–89.

⁵⁸ Cone, J. H., *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 52.

history falls upon them. In that sense God has chosen us in this fateful period of world history.”⁵⁹

As a figure of political theology, the obvious shortcomings of Niebuhr’s thought must be brought to the fore and discussed with regard to a broad tradition of ‘white theology’ which produces an implicit conservatism and engages in a methodology of abstraction which remains unaccountable to those sufferers of whom it often speaks. Niebuhr’s is thus certainly a narrative of white paternalism, and one in which abstract notions of love are given precedence over worldly demands for justice. In this regard it can be understood in light of Robbie Shilliam’s dichotomy between narratives of abolition, handed down to the oppressed by a formerly colonial society or group who claim access to and state their discussions in a space of historical and conceptual abstraction, and redemption, seized ‘from below’ by the enslaved and their descendants:

“Would it not be eminently reasonable, then, to work with the hermeneutics of liberation, justice and accountability developed by those who have survived unfreedom against all the odds so as to redeem themselves, with a little help from friends? Why is this re-orientation— this grounding— so often unconceivable to a great many people?”⁶⁰

The problem with Niebuhr’s engagement with race is not one of total silence, as Cone laments of his theological colleagues, nor even one of total pacification (though Niebuhr often erred on the side of prudent diplomacy between calls for black liberation and the anxiety of the white American majority populace).⁶¹ What this short discussion of Niebuhr in light of Cone’s notion of white theology allows us to argue is that simply addressing race as a political problem, as Niebuhr does, might not be satisfactory in addressing the problem of race as a more deeply theological problem. Whilst invocations of shared humanity and a Christian ethic of love seem widespread responses to current outbursts of righteous anger, they may be wholly inappropriate for situations that demand liberation and solidarity rather than the hasty establishment of limited order. Cone’s notion of white theology, then, can be mobilised also in relation to figures like Niebuhr who explicitly discuss race and racism, but who do so

⁵⁹ Niebuhr, R., ‘Anglo-Saxon Destiny and Responsibility’, 297.

⁶⁰ Shilliam, R., ‘Black Redemption, Not (White) Abolition’, 321.

⁶¹ Cone, J. H., *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 42.

in a way that does not foreground a liberative core of Christianity, and who seek to appease both the oppressed and the oppressors in what amounts not to any sort of liberation, but only a ceasefire that leaves the status quo intact.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed a dimension of Cone's thought that can be extrapolated into illuminating discussions of political thought beyond his immediate context. The notion of white theology points to the socio-cultural particularity and horizons of the theological mainstream, as well as to the conservatism that comes so easily to a faith which advocates practice based on universal love and pious forgiveness. This chapter discussed white theology with regard to John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory*, as well as to Lianne Hartnett's recent work on the notion of love in Reinhold Niebuhr. Cone's vision of the gospel is as an injunction to liberation, and so the status-quo affirming dimensions of Christianity come under close scrutiny. The political conservatism latent in much Christianity that Cone points to is of great use for current discussions of the rehabilitation of theology in political thought. Primarily, it draws our attention to the political nature of notions that might easily be considered 'pre-political' theological virtues, like love, harmony, and peace. Cone insists that love means nothing without justice, and that overemphasising peace and harmony can have a status-quo affirming effect that precludes the possibility of the realisation of political liberation. A core problem that white theology highlights is both the pretence to universality, and the investment in theological virtues as *abstractions*. The first sense of white theology points to the cultural embeddedness of theology that speaks only from a particular experience but which denies its own parochiality, aspiring to make generalisable theological claims whilst masking and ignoring its own very real horizons. Further, abstract theological virtues which aspire to a general idea of 'the good' are articulated as destinations without regard for what that articulation itself entails for those who most need a world imbued with love or peace. Their articulation as abstractions precludes the possibility of their attainment for Cone, because they become co-opted as tools of pacification by the dominant classes of society.

As a component of critique, the notion of white theology can draw our attention to both socio-cultural biases, as well as to political commitments that lie latent in seemingly pre-political theological virtues such as love and harmony. As Cone writes, God's love means

nothing if it is not understood in conjunction with God's wrath, and peace means nothing if it is not understood in conjunction with justice. Interest in theology that springs from the ostensibly secular fields of political theory and IR runs a risk in treating theological notions as somehow essential and 'pure', or as raw materials, to be applied to politics, rather than themselves as already engaged in an acute politics of power. White theology reveals and names a tension in the nuanced ways in which theology is drawn upon for political thought. For Milbank, for example, it is a resource for thinking a blue-print of another world. The practical way *to* that world is hardly, in his text, mentioned, outside his argument that ontological myths can be replaced with counter-myths. Cone, however, is hardly interested in the institution of a clearly defined blue-print (in fact, what a 'liberated state' would look like is not elaborated upon), but rather in the capacity of Christianity to produce a revolutionary and liberative mindset. He is wholeheartedly focused on the *act* of liberation, and not on the *condition* of liberation. This tension opens up a slew of intricate questions which would inevitably revolve around whether the Kingdom of Heaven is something to be actively *made* on earth, or something to be waited for, questions that point beyond the scope of this thesis. This tension, between worlds lived and worlds hoped for, is also identified by Molloy in Kantian IR, who in their eschewing of Kant's theological underpinnings have no way to account for the establishment of a new cosmopolitan order: in Kant, the mover is divine providence. The historical agent of providence seems absent in Cone's theology, which must reckon with so much suffering and struggle. From Cone's perspective, becoming enthralled in depictions of another world is either a tool or a mechanism of forgetting this world, and turning ones back upon those to whom the Christian gospel most calls our attention. White theology either draws our attention away from this world, or it tries to convince us that what we have is either sufficient or even desirable, a position that Cone simply cannot entertain. As this chapter shows, Cone's thought penetrates discussions of political theology with the pressing questions and needs of particular political struggle, providing an oblique view on the political implications, and potential effects, of certain theological standpoints that are often engaged to resolve highly abstracted and intellectual problematics.

Having discussed the critical notion of white theology, and discussed the possibility of its application to certain instances of political theology, in the following chapters this thesis will move into the deeper territory at which it believes the most fruitful questions and

problematics can be drawn out from Cone's theological project for political theology in IR. The following chapter will draw out the dialectic which we find between the spiritual and the material in Cone's thought. The interplay of these, and their symbolisation in Cone's concrete claim of a Jewish Jesus evidencing his contemporary blackness, draws our attention again to the deep problem of abstraction in theological thought.

Chapter 4: Concrete Divinity: Ontology, Ethics, Politics

“Thus the idea of God is humanity itself projected to infinity. Divinity is humanity transcending itself while remaining enclosed within itself.”⁶²

In this chapter I will draw out a subtle theme in Cone’s works. This is the interplay between materiality and spirituality in his theology, or what can be called the spiritual/material dialectic.⁶³ This dimension of Cone’s work will here be mobilised into conversation with three works that overlap between political ontology, ethics, and political theology. What we will see in this chapter is that Cone both pre-empts and exceeds (by *doing*, rather than suggesting, endorsing, or advocating) what these thinkers each propose: ontology grounded in worldly struggle (McNay), concretely universal ethics (Badiou), and a re-politicised (onto)theology articulated through a humbly limited yet ostentatiously bold depiction of an already-graced present (Paipais). This discussion will both bring Cone’s voice into the field of political theology in IR as having import to its theological, ontological, and ethical problematics, but will also draw sustained attention to Cone’s insistence on theological concreteness, which in turn points us towards the specific roots of theological abstraction. In the second half of this chapter, we will thus begin to articulate the deeper stakes of Cone’s project for political theology more broadly, and set the stage for the discussions on Christian Supersessionism that will take place in Chapters 5 and 6.

In *Political Ontology and International Political Thought*, Vassilios Paipais depicts three approaches to political ontology. The first, a foundationalist approach, explicitly invests itself in some or other transcendental principle *as* transcendental, and works out political problems from it, in top-down orientation. The second, anti-foundationalist approach, claims to do the opposite (to overcome transcendence altogether), but in nevertheless seeking to articulate some essential (ontical) principle upon which an ethical politics can be built, drawn only from the ontic conditions of life, such thinkers inevitably engage in some kind of *transcendentalisation*, only from the opposite end of a vertically ordered transcendence/immanence spectrum, and so mirror a foundationalist approach. Paipais

⁶² Cone, J. H., *God of the Oppressed*, 37.

⁶³ Cone does not name this dimension of his thought, and any naming feels in some way problematic and insufficient. Whilst the parallels are obvious, I try to resist using the vocabulary of the ontic and the ontological, to (perhaps, in the end, only symbolically) resist the significant gravitational pull of Heidegger’s concepts and vocabulary.

advocates that to remain *political*, to avoid folding the world either underneath or on top of some unmovable depiction, an ontology must accept its own insufficiency *whilst* laying claim to divinity: to recognise the unassailable difference between the ontic and the ontological, and yet to recognise and take seriously their mutual dependence. The dialectic through which Cone puts the spiritual and the material, or the transcendental and the immanent, into conversation with each other is indicative of an approach to metaphysics which is neither foundationalist nor anti-foundationalist, but which rather accepts its fallibility and nevertheless propounds a divinity that is necessary for a politics of liberation.

In reading Cone's works it becomes clear that his metaphysics does not have a simple linear form in which either a conception of the divine informs the correct political path to be applied to material conditions (i.e. a top down, or foundational ontology), or in which the necessities of material conditions can be used to inspire the most efficacious depiction of divine authority (i.e. a bottom up, or post-foundational ontology). Instead, spirituality and materiality are in a dialectic with each other that weaves Christian faith with political commitment, and makes neither subordinate to the other (though at different times they each take priority).

Cone does not subordinate either the ontic or the ontological to the other in the hopes of establishing a final and firm grounding for theology. As a Christian he holds the Bible to be authoritative, but he recognises, particularly in his early work, the need for it to be interpreted *for* particular social and political struggles and situations. The social reality of racism and the struggle for dignity in a white supremacist society is *as important* to Cone as the imperatives of Christianity's founding text and traditions. Here Cone's work is put into conversation with that of Paipais, as well as Badiou and McNay. This aspect of Cone's work draws us beyond his own explicit vocabulary and into the indispensable recent work of J. Kameron Carter. For Carter, Cone's 'underdeveloped apex' is the theme of 'theological concreteness' in which the central insistences of Christianity can be drawn from a concrete understanding of its central figure: Jesus. Cone persistently writes that Christ's contemporary meaning in society must be understood in relation to the oppression of black people to the point that Christ, and the experience of the Cross, must be identified in the lynching of black people. Inseparable from the political-theological declaration of the meaning of Christianity in the claim that 'Christ is black', then, is a concrete understanding of 'Jesus' Jewishness'. For Cone, Christ can only be identified with particular peoples and their struggles, when Jesus is concretely understood as

a particular person of his time, as a committed member of an ethno-religious particularity that laboured under Imperial Rome and called itself to a higher purpose and meaning than that prescribed for it by worldly powers.

Here we begin to scratch away at the aspects of Cone's theology that have serious import for political theology. Alongside the manifest complicity of mainstream Christianity in the West with white supremacy and systematic racism, Cone is also reacting to the implications of a problem of theological abstraction, most fundamentally the abstraction of a disembodied 'Christ-principle' by which Christianity becomes a potentially universal message of salvation offered by a commitment of faith alone. For Cone implicitly, and for Carter explicitly, this abstraction leads both to the privatisation of religion through which the injunctions of 'white theology' become possible, but also the entrenchment of a Christian anti-Semitism which in time would become the basis of the establishment of the modern idea of race. This is named as Christian Supersessionism. Cone already *performs*, rather than just advocating, the subversion of this abstracted universal Christianity in his restoration of the meaning of divine liberation to particular groups and particular struggles at particular moments.

Whilst an explicit account of this dialectic never surfaces in Cone's work, this thesis argues that it is central to draw it out to gain a more detailed and nuanced understanding of his work, and the implications of his work, as a metaphysician. The way in which Cone weaves his account of the political imperatives of life with his *almost* unwavering faith in Christ and the Christian God, tell a delicate story of his understanding of the importance of divinity for politics.

Here we must remind ourselves of Cone's sociological view, that theology is fundamentally human talk about the divine, and that it emerges from and is relevant to a particular time and place. In the 1989 preface to his first book, published in 1969, he writes: "Since theology is *human* speech and *not* God speaking, I recognize today, as I did then, that *all* attempts to speak about ultimate reality are limited by the social history of the speaker."⁶⁴ Here Cone acknowledges that the association of divinity with the politics of black power was relevant at the time of writing, but the intervening twenty years, and the cogent critiques levelled by

⁶⁴ Cone, J. H., *Black Theology and Black Power*, ix.

womanist theologians in particular, have shown that he can be accused of the same sociological blindness to the suffering of others of which he accuses white theologians.⁶⁵

Cone is explicit about addressing the problem of the particular and the universal. In the introduction to *God of the Oppressed*, he writes that theology is both universal *and* particular, because it speaks *of* the absolute, *from* a specific time, place and perspective.⁶⁶ Thus, for Cone, social and historical context influence “not only the questions we address to God but also the mode or form of the answers given to the questions.”⁶⁷ The *subject* of theology is eternal, but those who make theological statements are limited by history and society.

Despite this sociological grounding, which may imply a flattening of theology to the social and political context of the theologian, the eternal remains of central importance. Having acknowledged that the ‘dreams and visions’ of theologians are derived from ‘this world’, Cone writes that universalism is a ‘social product’, and especially remains so “when it is legitimated in pious or scholarly language.”⁶⁸ Only when one deeply engages with and takes seriously ‘another reality’, or ‘another value system’, can any vision of the universal begin to be enhanced beyond the strictures of particular experiences and situations.⁶⁹

However, this breaking out of particular cultural and political boxes should not lead to a conception of universal experiences of oppression, amalgamating or subsuming particular conditions under a more holistic analysis. Appeals to universal experiences of oppression mask ‘*material* distinctions’ that must be recognised in the social world: “For it is material reality (social, economic, and political existence with the poor) that makes for the proper understanding of spiritual reality (“all oppressed”).”⁷⁰ By contrast, for Cone, when it is from ‘spiritual reality’ that an analysis of liberation departs, important material differences of the social world are ‘lost in clouds of theological rhetoric’ that do not only mask that social reality upon which a theology of liberation must be based, but, for Cone, actually perpetuate oppression itself in diverting attention away from those necessary, worldly, material

⁶⁵ “When I read my book today, I am embarrassed by its sexist language and patriarchal perspective. There is not even one reference to a woman in the whole book! With black women playing such a dominant role in the African-American liberation struggle, past and present, how could I have been so blind?” Cone, J. H., x.

⁶⁶ Cone, J. H., *God of the Oppressed*, 7.

⁶⁷ Cone, J. H., 14.

⁶⁸ Cone, J. H., 49.

⁶⁹ Cone, J. H., 49.

⁷⁰ Cone, J. H., 137.

distinctions: “By putting physical oppression derived from unjust social structures in the same category with suburban loneliness, the white questioner implies that either one may be the point of departure for an understanding of the gospel of liberation. But that is not true.”⁷¹

Critical to this centrality of materiality is the ever present current of ‘the gospel’, a byword for Cone’s critique of the second dimension of white theology discussed above, and his reading of liberation as the central message of Christianity. This provides Cone with his backstop, his bottom line which, having exegetically argued for the divinity of liberation as the core of the Christian message, allows him to stay centred and avoid swaying here and there amongst interpretations whose validity is considered relative to one another. Invoking the Israelite exodus from Egyptian slavery, Cone writes that liberation is “...the mind and body in motion, responding to the passion and the rhythm of divine revelation, and affirming that no chain shall hold my humanity down.”⁷²

Amongst this foregrounding of material reality, and the experience of it, we are reminded of a passage offered by Cecil Cone, in his critique of his brother’s early over-commitment to the black power movement, wherein Cone prioritised the immanent political movement of black power and heavily drew upon it to give shape to his theology, subordinating the black religious tradition to it. Cecil Cone refuses to subordinate a ‘black experience’ to a flat plane of secularity, and as a liberation movement understood within the limits of secularism. Seeking to bring his brother’s attention back to the *religious* experiences of their community, Cecil criticises the dispensation of ‘black religion’ and the ‘black religious experience’, ignored in favour of secular modernity, and its intellectual sources.⁷³ Cecil’s point is that the ‘black experience’ is not just a secular experience of oppression, but also a religious experience of divine liberation.

Cone heard this critique loud and clear, and in his later works he re-emphasised the spiritual dimension in his work. In a reflective essay, Cone writes that the intention of the early black theologians was to ‘theologize *from within* the black experience’, and to resist reproducing ‘the theology of Europe or white North America’.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Cone, J. H., 137.

⁷² Cone, J. H., 139–40.

⁷³ Cone, C. W., *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology*, 113–14.

⁷⁴ Cone, J. H., *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*, 5.

However, Cone does not advocate theologizing *purely* from within the black experience. He persistently advocates the centrality of scripture as grounding theology beyond its own particularity. For Cone, centralising scripture permits theology to ‘take seriously’ the social and political context within which it is articulated, *without* becoming over-determined by it. “Thus the question is not whether we take seriously our social existence but *how* and in *what* way we take it seriously... [Scripture] can break the theologians out of their social ideologies and enable them to hear a word that is other than their own consciousness.”⁷⁵ Here we begin to see the nuance and interplay between the commitment to the immanent problem of racism and white supremacy, and the calling upon and being led by, a reading of Christianity as confirmation of the divinity of liberation.

Cone further speaks of the inability of a secular frame to reassure him of a remedy to black suffering:

“When I turn to Western philosophy’s analysis of metaphysics and ontology, I do not know whether [Martin Luther] King was right, if rightness is defined by white rationality. But in the faith context of black religion, King was right, because people were led to act out the faith they talked about. If black theology is to be a theology of and for this black faith, it will not bother too much about the logical contradictions of its assertions when they are compared with white Western philosophy.”⁷⁶

The faith context of the black religious tradition thus becomes the testing ground of the dialectic between spiritual authority and material necessity in Cone’s work, *not* the western tradition of secular philosophy, as warned against by Cone’s brother, Cecil.

In a paper entitled ‘Christian Faith and Political Praxis’, first presented in Mexico at a conference in 1977 entitled ‘Encounter of Theologies’ and republished a number of times,⁷⁷ Cone is clear about the effects of intertwining the power of divinity with social and political

⁷⁵ Cone, J. H., *Speaking the Truth*, 7–8.

⁷⁶ This lack of concern for logical contradictions is, I feel, a little overstated here, though an excellent discussion on the themes of paradox and tradition in Cone’s early theology is had by Vincent William Lloyd, in: Lloyd, V. W., ‘Paradox and Tradition in Black Theology’, *Black Theology* 9 (22 June 2011): 265–86; Cone, J. H., *Speaking the Truth*, 15.

⁷⁷ Cone, J. H., ‘Christian Faith and Political Praxis’, in *Praxis Cristiana y Producción Teológica*, ed. Pixley, J. V. and Bastian, J-P. (Salamaca: Ediciones Sigueme, 1979), 75–88; Cone, J. H., ‘Christian Faith and Political Praxis’, *Bulletin de Théologie Africaine= Bulletin of African Theology= Boletín de Teología Africana Kinshasa* 2, no. 4 (1980): 205–18; Cone, J. H., ‘Christian Faith and Political Praxis’, *Encounter*, no. 43 (1982): 129–41.

analyses, in light of the understanding of Christianity as an emancipatory story. Cone writes that when the 'meaning of Christianity' is drawn from people who are fighting for justice and struggling against those in whose interest the status quo operates, "...something radical and revolutionary happens to the function of the "holy" in the context of the "secular". Viewed from the perspective of oppressed peoples' struggle of freedom, the holy becomes a radical challenge to the legitimacy of the secular structures of power by creating eschatological images about a realm of experience that is not confined to the values of this world. This is the strange and revolutionary character of Christianity that is so often misunderstood by church and nonchurch people alike."⁷⁸ The divine, for Cone, then draws attention to the radical possibilities of a vision 'not confined' to this world, but which comes to bear upon it. Christianity thus has for Cone a 'revolutionary character' that invites the faithful to revolutionary action. This points to the function of the spiritual in Cone's political theology as carrying an explicitly political potential, as demanding political action. Yet the revolutionary potential of Christianity is not just drawn out by a re-ordering of theological priorities or changing abstract theological conceptions. The 'revolutionary character' of Christianity is, for Cone, borne not of 'introspection nor mystical mediation', but of the historical struggles of Israelites and, later, the black community, for whom faith in God was "...an *historical* faith, that is, a trust in the faithfulness and loyalty of God in the midst of historical troubles. It was not from introspection, nor from mystical meditation, but from the faithful reading of history that Israel and later the black community came to liberate broken humanity to wholeness."⁷⁹ Here Cone is de-emphasising an inner spiritual liberation in favour of worldly, social and political liberation that takes place in the midst of historical struggles.

Cone mobilises this appeal to historical struggle to counter the charge that black theology is remaking Christianity to serve an ideological purpose, *and* the argument that he derives his theology of liberation from white theologians, namely Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.⁸⁰ Here the historical perspective of struggle in the Biblical account of the Israelites

⁷⁸ Cone, J. H., *Speaking the Truth*, 36.

⁷⁹ Cone, J. H., *God of the Oppressed*, 91.

⁸⁰ A word here on the implied rendering of such thinkers as these as simply 'white academics' is necessary. Karl Barth resisted the Nazi and German nationalist attempts to interpret the German nation biblically, and Hitler messianically. His response was a theological one, in which the church was interpreted as properly retreating from the world and the domain of the state, a 'render unto Caesar what is Caesar's' in which the power of the Christian message becomes unattainable by the state, as it, and God, are 'not of this world'. Whilst this was undoubtedly an attempt to wrestle Christianity from crude worldly abuse at the hands of totalising state powers,

shows that liberation of the oppressed is central to scripture, and the fact that this was known by Black Christians, and related to their own experience, shows for Cone that his theology of liberation is based in Black religious traditions, rather than in the arguments of white academics.

Not only does the divinity of scripture offer a way to negotiate the trap of being utterly defined by, and enclosed within, a particular social existence, but it is also able to challenge the particular social order that elevates pure power and has become a worship of realpolitik, ie. a capitalist and white supremacist modernity. This cannot, nevertheless, be separated from a context of faith as faith in the divine *truth* of liberation, rather than just faith that liberation is good.⁸¹

This ultimate commitment does not, however, entail dispatching the worldly and retreating to an inner spiritual relationship with God. As Cone writes, “God’s Spirit is liberating because he gives people the courage and power to resist dehumanization and slavery.”⁸² By faith, believers ‘receive the gift of a new humanity’ that manifests in worldly processes of liberation: it is in sharing in liberation from material conditions that the Christian promise of a new humanity is realised. In conjunction with this faith, faith in the realisation of the Christian promise of liberation which does not give a concrete guide for action, theology must articulate

it has been continuously criticised for being too weak and too abstract a response to the inhumanities of the period. Nevertheless, it needs to be highlighted that Barth did ostensibly resist Nazism in this way. Dietrich Bonhoeffer on the other hand certainly cannot be accused of being simply a white academic who thereby (as the criticism implies) enjoyed a comfortable and un-committed existence, as Cone himself details in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. On the 9th of April 1945, Bonhoeffer was hung at Flossenbürg concentration camp, after two years of internment, for his participation in an Abwehr plot to assassinate Hitler. Of course, that these thinkers did not have a keen and personal understanding of the particular plight of black Americans is of course true, though Bonhoeffer, as Cone accounts, does engage deeply with black struggle in the United States. The attempt to reduce dependency on German academic theology is not in and of itself problematic at all. However, this thesis holds that rendering such thinkers simplistically as ‘white academics’ is an unnecessary reduction that does not pay due respect to how they took great risks to resist Nazism in their own times and places. See: Rasmusson, A, “‘Deprive Them of Their Pathos’: Karl Barth and the Nazi Revolution Revisited”, *Modern Theology* 23, no. 3 (2007): 369–91; Barth, K., *The Only Way: How Can the Germans Be Cured?* (Philosophical Library, 1947); Bonhoeffer, D., *Letters and Papers from Prison* (Fortress Press, 2010); Marsh, C., *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology* (Oxford University Press, 1996); Cone, J. H., *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*.

⁸¹ “Faith...is not belief in propositional truths designated as important by organized churches; rather, it is an ultimate commitment to a particular God who revealed the fullness of divinity in the presence of Jesus Christ.” Cone, J. H., *Speaking the Truth*, 40.

⁸² Cone, J. H., 44.

itself in relation to a theory of social conditions, “...in order to actualize in society what it confesses in worship.”⁸³

Thus, we see the intricacy of this dialectic between the spiritual, or transcendental (Scripture, faith), and the material, social and political conditions of life. Despite a strong sociological approach, Cone avoids jettisoning the necessity of divinity and faith as a truly spiritual relation. He further avoids utterly transcendentalising his theology of liberation in an attempt to reach abstracted universalism, keeping well-grounded in the political struggle against racism and white supremacy. Materiality and spirituality are thus bound up together in a combined process of invocation and inspiration. This makes us recall the famous Barthian rejoinder, that the theologian must have the Bible in one hand, and the newspaper in the other. This dimension of Cone’s thought can cast illumination on thinkers of political theology, and political ontology, in IR, who are keenly concerned with the relationship between what Heidegger calls the ontic and the ontological. My argument here is that Cone’s project constitutes a fully formed example of what each of these thinkers advocate: An ontology that is steeped in ontic reality. Cone’s work provides a creative vision of a theology concretely grounded in a particular human struggle, that makes serious claims about divine truth whilst retaining humility about the human incapacity to speak fully of the divine. In the following, thus, we will discuss the spiritual/material dialectic in Cone in relation to works of Lois McNay, Alain Badiou, and Vassilios Paipais, followed by the concrete universality of Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek.

Social Weightlessness Revisited

Here it is useful to return to what Lois McNay laments in *Misguided Search for the Political*. For McNay, the problem with much of the ‘ontological turn’ in radical democratic theory lies in the suspension or relegation of worldly commitments or sources of ontological reflection, which “deprive social existence of autonomous significance, reducing it to a weak ontic reflection of prior ontological dynamics.”⁸⁴ The subordination of ontic phenomena to ‘prior’ ontological dynamics is precisely what Cone responds to when he laments the discussion of issues of socially sanctioned racial segregation and dehumanisation under highly ambiguous abstractions such as a general ‘problem of suffering’, or a ‘problem of evil’. The abstraction

⁸³ Cone, J. H., 44.

⁸⁴ McNay, L., *The Misguided Search for the Political*, 168.

of such questions into a problem of evil 'as such' attempts to distil the question in the hope of generalisability, but fails to (and in Cone's account, sometimes willingly) bear witness to the realities of its manifestation and those who labour under it. For Cone, it is not just a theoretical-ethical imperative to prioritise 'the idea of social suffering', but a theological one. In *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Cone argues that a failure to understand the lynching tree as a visible symbol of the Crucifixion of Christ in contemporary times, is a failure to bear witness to the meaning of the Cross itself: "...in the United States, the clearest image of the crucified Christ was the figure of an innocent black victim, dangling from a lynching tree."⁸⁵ Cone emphasises that the victims of lynching were not 'abstract or anonymous symbols', but particular people: "...they had names; their passion was recorded (by their very murderers) in souvenir photos like those of Rubin Stacy, hanged on a lynching tree in Fort Lauderdale, or Laura Nelson and her son swinging from a bridge in Oklahoma, or Cleo Wright burned to a crisp in a street in Sikeston, Missouri."⁸⁶ *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* is where Cone makes explicit and concrete the link between the passion of Christ and the experience of lynching in the US. Whilst in his early texts his direct connection between Jesus and blackness is made in more symbolic and allegorical terms, here he forcefully points to the image of the suffering Christ reflected in lynching. But this is not just a 'weak ontic reflection' of a prior ontological dynamic, an acute problem of socially weightless ontologies for McNay.⁸⁷ This weak reflection, for McNay, renders such abstracted ontologies unable to speak decisively about any worldly manifestations of exactly what they purport to be most concerned about, domination and disempowerment. Cone, rather, builds his theology with explicit and sustained entrenchment in a particular struggle.

The problem of the ontological subordination or suspension of concrete worldly commitments is highly relevant to both political theology as well as political ontology: it is to lives lived and troubles experienced that political thinking must pertain. McNay ultimately advocates a "critical phenomenology of negative experience, exemplified in the idea of social suffering."⁸⁸ However, it is difficult not to conclude that such a critical phenomenology of negative experience leaves a wide-open door to a return to abstraction, and an abstracted

⁸⁵ Cone, J. H., *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 93.

⁸⁶ Cone, J. H., 93–94.

⁸⁷ McNay, L., *The Misguided Search for the Political*, 168.

⁸⁸ McNay, L., 207.

idea of social suffering. Cone's thought, by contrast, already guides us through theological reflections that weave theological dynamics together with ontical commitments and explications, engaged as it is in a particular worldly political struggle. Reading McNay's critique from the perspective of Cone, then, we find ourselves in total agreement with the thrust of her argument, but wondering why she doesn't articulate in a more concrete manner. Thinking with Cone, necessary critiques of over-abstraction, such as McNay's, speak more authentically when they explicate the worldly commitments that they demand of their interlocutors.

From here we move from McNay's reflections on the limits of socially weightless political ontology, to the more political theological and post-secular philosophical reflections of Alain Badiou. In stark contrast to his text on the thought of Saint Paul, we find elsewhere in Badiou's thought a robust advocacy of 'concrete universalism' to which Cone's project deeply speaks.

On Badiou and Cone

In *Saint Paul*, Badiou is explicitly critical of demands for 'particularist' recognition, and seeks a Pauline abstraction of the pure Event in Christ: "The father, always particular, withdraws behind his son's universal evidence. It is quite true that all postevental universality equalizes sons through the dissipation of the particularity of the fathers."⁸⁹ This universal event is, in Badiou's mind, a great equaliser of all human differentiations. Despite Badiou's ultimate removal of a universalising 'Christ event' from its situation, elsewhere Badiou advocates the necessity of situatedness in approaching questions of ethics. Simon Critchley, in *Infinitely Demanding*, writes that Badiou takes issue with universal abstractions like God, Man or the Other upon which to build abstractions, advocating instead not 'concrete relativism' but what Critchley terms 'situated universals'. Here we react to concrete situations that demand an ethical response, but whilst the particular situation is the source of the demand, the demand itself is "addressed, in principle, to everyone and hence universal."⁹⁰ The concrete particularity of an ethical demand, then, does not overwrite a frame of universality, but renders it answerable to, and found in, such particular situations.

In *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Badiou is critical of an abstract and universalised ethical framework, indeed any abstracted question of 'Ethics' as such. He insists

⁸⁹ Badiou, A., *Saint Paul*, 59.

⁹⁰ Critchley, S., *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (Verso Books, 2014), 42.

here that there are only ethics *of* particular situations, which respond not to 'Evil as such', but to irreducible singularities which are defined as Evil in particular evental moments. Badiou pitches his 'situated ethics' against a universal Kantian ethics in which a 'general human subject' both suffers from and can point to an objectively identifiable 'evil'. This delivers ethics from any concrete particularities but also operates upon a consensual or *a priori* 'evil' which is in Badiou's account, now thinking with Levinas, a secularised discourse of religious piety.⁹¹

As an avowedly atheistic thinker, Badiou seeks to deliver the question of ethics from both its religious and secularised-religious frameworks, in a theological, and Kantian, human rights discourse respectively. Like Cone, Badiou wants to couch these questions which we receive in the guise of utter abstraction in terms of the specific situations in which people live. Badiou, too, wishes to resist the 'ideological framework' of universal ethics in which 'man' is negatively defined by his status as a victim of suffering and evil. He argues that man must be defined by his 'affirmative thought', "...by the singular truths of which he is capable, by the Immortal which makes of him the most resilient... and most paradoxical of animals"⁹²

This affirmative basis of situated ethics resonates with Cone's thought, his deeply situated 'Risk of Faith', his insistence on the divinity of black humanity, his refusal to allow blackness to be defined as the inhumanity by which it was, as a marker of identity, created. For Badiou, 'Man's' immortality is affirmed when "he affirms himself as someone who runs counter to the temptation of wanting-to-be-an-animal to which circumstances may expose him."⁹³ Every human, for Badiou, is capable of affirming this immortality, and we must resist drawing ethics from the '*simple* reality' of human life that presents a split subject, split between the fully human, Western, ethical subject, and the 'subhuman' victim:

"Who can fail to see that in our humanitarian expeditions, interventions, embarkations of charitable *legionnaires*, the Subject presumed to be Universal is split? On the side of the victims, the haggard animal exposed on television screens. On the side of the benefactors, conscience and the imperative to intervene. And why does this splitting always assign the same roles to the same sides? Who cannot see that this

⁹¹ Badiou, A., *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (Verso Books, 2012), 23.

⁹² Badiou, A., 16.

⁹³ Badiou, A., 12–13.

ethics which rests on the misery of the world hides, behind its victim-Man, the good-Man, the white-Man?... And this is why the reign of 'ethics' coincides... with today's sordid self-satisfaction in the 'West', with the insistent argument according to which the misery of the Third World is the result of its own incompetence, its own inanity – in short, of its own *subhumanity*.”⁹⁴

Ethics must be based, then, on a critique of dehumanising political projects, on a hierarchy between those subjects of ethics who are granted full humanity and subjecthood, and those upon whom ethical frameworks act, and who they purport to save. The unequal distribution of *humanity* in a universalised and abstracted discourse of ethics which masks a fundamentally split ethical subjecthood is of utmost importance, too for Cone. In both thinkers, an abstracted ethics masks a sheer power politics in which only dominant classes are cast as fully human. One of Cone's organising questions, “How are we going to survive in a world which deems black humanity an illegitimate form of human existence?”⁹⁵ speaks directly to the question of being that is latent in black theology, the question of rejecting the being offered by co-optation into the 'white world', and thinking being anew in light of the black struggle against dehumanisation: “By white definitions, whiteness is “being” and blackness is “nonbeing.” ...To breathe in white society is dependent on saying yes to whiteness, and blacks know it... “To be or not to be” is thus a dilemma for the black community: to assert one's humanity and be killed, or to cling to life and sink into nonhumanity.”⁹⁶ For both Badiou and Cone, then, the dehumanisation that is latent in a universal ethics based on such abstractions as 'all humanity' is remedied not by a more successful pursuit of a universal abstraction upon which to build a universal ethics, but upon the human immortality that is realised in the self-humanising claims of a particular political struggle against dehumanisation.

As with Cone's criticism of the inherently conservative nature of a politically 'uncommitted' Christianity,⁹⁷ pointing out that it masks and enables political processes of racial domination,

⁹⁴ Badiou, A., 12–13.

⁹⁵ Cone, J. H., *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 11.

⁹⁶ Cone, J. H., 11–12.

⁹⁷ Alongside the argument presented in the previous chapter, Cone quotes Niebuhr to support the argument that the attempt to remain impartial actually supports dominant classes: “There is no way one can be impartial in the struggle between the rich and the poor. As Reinhold Niebuhr noted, “Neutrality in a social struggle between entrenched and advancing social classes means alliance with the entrenched position. In the social

Badiou is clear about the power politics masked by a universal ethics. He argues that the price paid by a universalist ethics is ‘a stodgy conservatism’ built upon the split subject of biologically defined victim and (white) Western saviour. The hidden purpose of such an ethics, Badiou writes, is the preservation of the privileged status of the West as the true agent of history, and the non-West as merely its victim (to whom, in a gesture of self-centred piety, the West extends a corrupted hand).⁹⁸

Having firmly criticised an ideology of universalised ethics, Badiou turns to his event-al ethics. Whilst Cone’s theology is composed of a dialectic between material necessity and revealed divinity, Badiou’s ethics is equally dialectical, between situatedness and immortality which is the ‘potentially more than ‘mere’ animal’ with which he defines humanity: “The event is both *situated* – it is the event of this or that situation – and *supplementary*; thus absolutely detached from, or unrelated to, all the rules of the situation.”⁹⁹

Cone’s theology names the theologically authorised white supremacy which used Christianity as a mechanism of racial repression. The parallels between Cone’s work and Badiou’s here, though they are stated in very different worlds, with very different assumptions and vocabularies, is remarkable. What Cone’s thought already presents, preceding, as it does, Badiou’s by some decades, is the potential of *Christianity* to produce such a radical politics. It is curious to note that in his earlier *Saint Paul*, Badiou sees in the Apostle a figure who invokes an eventual overcoming of all human distinctions, presented with such vigour as to appear to relish the thought of the possibility of a totally universalised plane of humanity. In *Ethics*, however, Badiou is much more wary of abstract-universal frames, here in the figure of Ethics, noting its complicity in the shoring up of a western-centric and white-washed global Ethical

struggle we are either on the side of privilege or need Cone, J. H., *Speaking the Truth*, 73–74. The passage in full is worth quoting: “The ascetic may possibly have a vantage point from which to criticize the ethical purity of Christian socialism or Christian radicalism. Those who stay in society have not. If our critics were less confused about the moral and social realities of modern society, they would know that neutrality in a social struggle between entrenched and advancing social classes really means alliance with the entrenched position. In the social struggle we are either on the side of privilege or need. No ethical perfectionism can save us from that choice.” Niebuhr, R., *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*, ed. Robertson, D. B. (Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 40.

⁹⁸ “The ethical conception of man, besides the fact that its foundation is either biological (images of victims) or ‘Western’ (the self-satisfaction of the armed benefactor), prohibits every broad positive vision of possibilities. What is vaunted here, what ethics legitimates, is in fact the conservation by the so-called ‘West’ of what it possesses.” Badiou, A., *Ethics*, 14.

⁹⁹ Badiou, A., *Ethics*.

Enforcer, which “determines Evil to be, in a certain sense, simply that which it does not own and enjoy.”¹⁰⁰

Explicating Badiou’s critique of abstract ethical universalism alongside Cone’s demonstrates the reach of Cone’s thought, along with the depth of its ethical reflection that speaks from a concrete situation to a wider audience. As with McNay, Cone *does* what Badiou advocates that ethicists ought to be doing: drawing ethics from concrete struggles, without subordinating itself to a limited frame of relativism and particularity, by making a grounded claim to universality, thus affirming human immortality and overcoming the latent conservatism and Western self-elevation written into abstractly articulated ethical frameworks.

Cone and Paipais

The resonance between Cone’s approach to theology and Paipais’ approach to ontology is deeply located and not immediately accessible. To return to the closing motif of Paipais’ ontological contribution: through an assessment of the issue of depoliticization in the various manifestations of the relation between the ontic and the ontological in approaches to pluralism, Paipais advocates a tragicomic messianic subjectivity which confesses the *necessity* of a *flawed* and ‘incomplete’ political subjectivity, both recognising the need for some claim to divinity, but also the inevitable insufficiency and incompleteness of any such claim. This is imbued with temporal immanence: it happens in the ‘now-time’ of ‘messianic’ presence rather than displaced in a future eternity, for which we will always be waiting. Importantly, Paipais praises certain projects for “their daring to think of the ‘now’ as already ‘graced’ or pregnant with repoliticising possibilities.”¹⁰¹ Here Paipais invokes works which do not surrender to the realities of the liberal humanist or neo-liberal economic order, nor postpone their transcendence to another world, but regard the current world as ripe for political reimagination. Yet, as he writes, such ‘confident enterprises’ are not redeemed from their involvement in a world which might tragically demand, and always threatens, the sometimes suspension or transgression of lofty ideals, or political, ethical, commitments.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Badiou, A., 14.

¹⁰¹ Paipais, V., *Political Ontology and International Political Thought*, 227.

¹⁰² Paipais, V., 227–28.

Paipais' depiction of the battered, humiliated 'King of Glory' as a metaphor for the tragicomic subjectivity of a truly political ontology, can be meaningfully compared to Cone's theological advocacy of a Christology grounded in a concretely understood Jewish Jesus, bringing a message of divine liberation, crucified by worldly powers and therein reflected, for Cone's struggle, in the black victims of white supremacy. Cone makes this confident assertion about the present blackness of Jesus, but recognises the fallibility of all human talk of the divine. He therefore understands the symbolic representation of Christ not as a vessel for overcoming particular times and places, but as the way in which those times and places can speak of, and be heard by, the divine. Cone writes that *Jesus is black* whilst recognising that this depiction 'may not be appropriate' in the future, or indeed in other present struggles. However, he writes, "...the validity of any Christological title in any period of history is not decided by its universality but by this: whether in the particularity of its time it points to God's universal will to liberate particular oppressed people from inhumanity."¹⁰³ Cone, therefore, dissolves the straightforward distinction between universality and particularity in which, in similar fashion to Badiou's assessment of a universal Ethics, universality becomes a tool of dominant classes, or in which, according to Paipais, the political is foreclosed in the production of a linear relationship between them. Universalism must therefore be particular, as it is in a particular place, at a particular time, and in a particular man, that the liberating promise of God has been revealed to humans:

"I contend that there is no universalism that is not particular.... Indeed... [white theologians'] insistence upon the universal note of the gospel arises out of their own particular political and social interests. As long as they can be sure that the gospel is *for everybody*, ignoring that God liberated a *particular* people from Egypt, came in a particular man called Jesus, and for the particular purpose of liberating the oppressed, then they can continue to talk in theological abstractions".¹⁰⁴

Central to Cone's theology is a relation between the divine and the worldly that exceeds the direct mapping of one onto the other, as well as ordering them vertically so that one precedes, and dictates the form of, the other. Instead, the world (a concrete situation of white supremacy) informs *and* reveals the ultimate (divine liberation and black divinity) which is

¹⁰³ Cone, J. H., *God of the Oppressed*, 135.

¹⁰⁴ Cone, J. H., 137.

then relayed back onto the world as a robust theological grounding for political action, and in which the revelation of the divine is found. By Paipais' standards, then, Cone's is found to be a thoroughly *political* theology, one which articulates the divine for a particular struggle without laying claim to eternity, but without reducing itself to the merely ontical. Cone recognises the limitations of human talk of the divine, and human action that attempts to faithfully respond to divine imperatives, whilst confidently invoking the divine promise of liberation as both authorising and elevating the struggle against white supremacy.

In the preceding three sections of this chapter, this thesis has argued that certain aspects of Cone's theology resonate deeply with multiple sites at which the aporias of universalism, abstraction, and political metaphysics are discussed in contemporary works which address crucial themes for the field of political theology in IR. McNay criticises socially weightless ontologies which purport to be concerned with disempowerment that they render themselves unable to speak of. Badiou takes to task abstract universal ethics as a mask for the elevation of the West as the only true agents of history, with 'the Rest' demoted to being only its victims, advocating instead concretely grounded universalities that do not fall into a trap of relativism. Paipais casts foundational, anti-foundational, and post-foundational ontologies as unwittingly depoliticised in failing to sustain a non-derivative relationship between the ontological and the ontic. My argument here is that Cone's theology pre-empts and exceeds each of these important arguments, in sharing their critical concerns, and meanwhile in *doing* what they each *advocate*. Cone's theology *is* committed to a particular struggle, it *does* draw ethics from a concrete situation whilst laying claim to the ultimate, and it *does* establish a necessarily confident yet inevitably insufficient framing of Messianic subjecthood. In their shared advocacy of the need for metaphysical questions to be concretely engaged and articulated through, and in dialectic with, particular struggles, exposure to Cone's thought reveals the considerable difficulty in leaping from advocacy to the performance of that advocated. Whilst it is simple enough for this thesis to point this out, it must be remembered that one cannot simply decide to produce the sort of politically prophetic theology that Cone does. Instead of charging these thinkers, and political theology more broadly to 'do' something else, this thesis rather suggests that political theology in IR may find deep resources to help in its questions around universality, theology, ontology, and

politics, in projects and traditions located outside its normal canon of thought, that may already be performing and constructing what our deepest critiques render as yet-to-come.

Concrete Universality

It is important here to briefly mention a recent group of continental philosophical engagement with political theology. The overlap between what can be termed 'concrete universality' in the thought of Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek and Cone's thought seems at first glance to be great, but as we shall see Cone stands at an important distance from these thinkers.

Ernesto Laclau, followed to an extent by Slavoj Žižek, in the realm of political ontology invokes a concrete understanding of universality in addressing the opposition universality/particularity, in which only the latter seems *empirically* verifiable. This confession of the lack of verifiability of universality comes with the caveat that particularity, when invested in alone as providing the limits of ontological or ethical discussions, produces a deeply nihilist relativism stripped of shared referents (this framing is crucial for Prozorov). Laclau therefore writes both of the impossibility, and the absolute necessity, of a frame, appeal, or claim to universality.

Alongside many contemporary thinkers, Laclau points to deep theological origins of thought-structures which remain prominent into the present. He locates the roots of a conception of universality embodied in particularity in the logic of the incarnation, that being the way in which God became human in the person of Jesus:

"A subtle logic destined to have a profound influence on our intellectual tradition was started in this way: that of the privileged agent of history, the agent whose particular body was the expression of a universality transcending it. The modern idea of a 'universal class' and the various forms of Eurocentrism are nothing but the distant historical effects of the logic of incarnation."¹⁰⁵

Whilst Cone emphasises the particularity of Jesus' Jewishness (as opposed to his Christian-ness, Europeanness, whiteness), Laclau draws attention to the Incarnation as such, to the logic written into the Incarnation as the process by which God became, in Jesus, human. For Laclau

¹⁰⁵ Laclau, E., *Emancipation(s)* (Verso, 1996), 23.

it is the Incarnation as such that provided the model for claims to a transcendental universality, whereas for Cone it is the de-Judaification of Jesus and the early Christian movement, which purged the significant, if not crucial, embodiment *as* a worldly particularity.

For Laclau, Enlightenment reason was a direct response to the essential mystery of the Incarnation, an attempt to undo the paradox at the centre of Christianity: that Christ was both God and human. This project, however, failed because the source of the universal in Christ, far from being overcome by reason as such, was simply displaced into the intellectual, cultural and expansionary projects of European modernity/coloniality. This project came to represent the progression of humanity *as such*, and any resistance to it as a counter-historical resistance to the manifestation of divine purpose in historical progress:

“The resistances of other cultures were, as a result, presented not as struggles between particular identities and cultures, but as part of an all embracing and epochal struggle between universality and particularisms - the notion of peoples without history expressing precisely their incapacity to represent the universal.”¹⁰⁶

In recognising this theological origin of European universalism masking a deeply inscribed sense of cultural superiority, Laclau addresses the problem of universality and particularity from a remarkably similar position to that of Cone. As a secular political theorist, though, Laclau ends up at importantly different conclusions.

The reason that the logic of the Incarnation for Laclau feeds into the same problem of cultural supremacy against which Cone rails is that in the process of its secularisation, ‘the universal’ became internal to the world, and could thus be claimed to be embodied by certain groups. For Laclau, this claim is the same as the ontological privilege of the proletariat, which would become their epistemological privilege. This means that the claim to universality of the proletariat shares the same root (the Incarnation, and its logic of the worldly embodiment of universality, or divinity) as so much Eurocentrism and European expansionary and epistemic imperialism. Laclau accepts this situation, and as a deeply Gramscian thinker he writes that the universal cannot be dispatched but must be wrestled over by contingent, particular groups in the overlapping attempts to establish and consolidate hegemony.

¹⁰⁶ Laclau, E., 24.

Laclau's resolution to the universality/particularity dichotomy in political thought is summarised well by Slavoj Žižek. In *The Ticklish Subject*, Žižek summarises Laclau's position on concrete universality as holding that:

"...the Universal is empty, yet precisely as such always-already filled in, that is, hegemonized by some contingent, particular content that acts as its stand-in - in short, each Universal is the battleground on which the multitude of particular contents fight for hegemony."¹⁰⁷

In Laclau we see the function of the depiction of claims to universality as expressions of hegemony and counter-hegemony. A radically democratic politics accepts the hegemonic nature of all ultimate claims, and engages in and gives life to anti-hegemonic discourses that challenge this very embodiment of universality by particular political groups. The reason he does not want to give into the epistemic privileging of the oppressed is that the singular, necessary (but yet impossible) universal that must not be dethroned is some form of democracy. Depicting the universal as the site of hegemonic claims leads to its being rendered as always subject to counter-hegemonic claims:

"The theory of hegemony presupposes, on the one hand, that the 'universal' is an object both impossible and necessary – always requiring, as a result, the presence of an ineradicable remainder of particularity – and, on the other, that the relation between power and emancipation is not one of exclusion but, on the contrary, one of mutual – albeit contradictory – implication."¹⁰⁸

Whilst Laclau's account of the drift of the divine into human politics of domination in the enlightenment era resonates with Cone's critique of white theology, it is importantly distinct from Cone's thought for the reason that for Cone it is not some possibility of democracy that must remain in metaphysical treatments of politics, but liberation. Liberation is Cone's theological bottom line, whereas for Laclau it is the maintenance of the grounds for democracy. Whilst Laclau 'makes a stand' against hegemonic claims to universality...

¹⁰⁷ Žižek, S., *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (Verso, 2000), 100–101.

¹⁰⁸ Butler, J., Laclau, E., and Žižek, S., *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (Verso Books, 2011), 8.

“If democracy is possible, it is because the universal has no necessary body and no necessary content; different groups, instead, compete between themselves to temporarily give to their particularisms a function of universal representation.”¹⁰⁹

...asserting his own equally impossible counter-hegemonic claim, for Cone the content of the universal is revealed in the Christian message as liberation. The divine, therefore, for Cone, *has* content, it is the promise of liberation and the revelation of this promise in Jesus Christ.

On Žižek

Philosopher Slavoj Žižek intimates a similar depiction of ‘concrete universality’ to that of Laclau. Drawing upon Hegel he invokes the inherent tension in absolute concepts: “each concept is simultaneously necessary... and impossible.”¹¹⁰ For Žižek this extends to universality itself. Taking seriously the essential paradox at the heart of a necessary but impossible universality, Žižek writes that “...far from signalling the failure of our thought to grasp reality, the inherent inconsistency of our notional apparatus is the ultimate proof that our thought is not merely a logical game we play, but is able to reach reality itself, expressing its inherent structuring principle.”¹¹¹ Despite the inevitable failure of any particular concept to really ‘be’ its universal concept, Žižek, like Laclau, asserts the necessity of striving towards this universality. This can usefully be termed *struggling universality*. Invoking a musical analogy, as did Milbank in presenting his counter-myth of ontological harmony, Žižek clarifies the way in which a concrete universality struggles:

“...let us take the concept of a *violin concerto* – when, in what way, do we treat it as an actual ‘concrete universality’? When we do not subdivide it simply into its particular forms (the Classical violin concerto, the great Romantic concertos from Mendelssohn via Tchaikovsky to Sibelius, etc.), but conceive its ‘species’ or ‘stages’ as so many attempts to grasp – to determine, to give a form to, to struggle with – the very universality of the concept.”¹¹²

Žižek’s notion of struggling universality does not indicate the universality of political struggle as such, but the way in which a concrete universality struggles with its concept (and ultimately

¹⁰⁹ Laclau, E., *Emancipation(s)*, 35.

¹¹⁰ Žižek, S., *The Ticklish Subject*, 99.

¹¹¹ Žižek, S., 99.

¹¹² Žižek, S., 101.

fails): "...each of them is not just a particular case of the universal concept of 'violin concerto', but a desperate attempt to hammer out a position with regard to the very universality of the concept... in short, there never has been a violin concerto that fully 'realized its concept'".¹¹³ All universalities thus fail to fulfil their own expectation, to 'be' universal, because they will always be fated attempts to 'actualize' their own notion.

These Hegelian abstractions would be sure to frustrate Cone. Why, Cone might ask, do we need an account of the impossibility of attaining a universal notion when we already know that there is a fundamental divide between human speech and God? It is in the protestant but also the black radical tradition that Cone lies in looking not to Hegel and the pantheon of European philosophical greats, but to scripture and the black religious traditions of the United States. Here we see an important division in political theology writ large, between those who might be understood as falling under the umbrella of postmodern theology in which stories about the ultimate are constructions of myth and counter-myth, ultimately an application of the 'death of God' to theology itself, and those who still hold scripture and tradition as revealing divine truth. The dominant tradition of philosophical political theology lies in the former camp, whilst Cone lies in the latter.

Cone's thought does not therefore neatly fulfil or indicate the concrete universality of either Laclau or Žižek. At a metaphysical level, the latter want to indicate the emptiness of the throne as a site of essential contestation towards which particularities struggle, and this is both a necessary and impossible process. In this model, a particularity projects itself onto the universal, and the competition of multiple such projections is the site of democratic or dialectical engagement. This is the same process which Prozorov describes as the hegemonic universalisation of a particular world. Divinity however, in Cone's thought, is drawn from what he sees as divine sources (Scripture, Revelation, Incarnation) and is not just a human projection. He mobilises the contingent categories of blackness to articulate the *meaning* of these divine truths for current generations, but this meaning is not the 'concept' of divinity itself. For Žižek and Laclau, as well as for Milbank, the throne appears empty, and the discussion of political theology pertains to the question of with what we are to project upon it. For Cone, however, the throne is always-already inhabited by a liberating God who makes

¹¹³ Žižek, S., 102.

a promise to the oppressed of the world. Voltaire's suggestion that if God did not exist, we should have to invent him resonates here: thinkers like Žižek and Laclau are busy laying the ground for the democratic and dialectical legitimacy of the invention of (various) Gods, whilst Cone insists on his *revelation* in scripture, telling us of the divinity of liberation from suffering. This is a crucial divide in political theology today.

The tension between reason and faith abounds in the field of political theology. Whilst Laclau and Žižek present well-reasoned accounts of the necessity yet impossibility of claims to universality, and their function in democratic competitions of hegemony, this impossibility is bridged by Cone through faith in a liberating God, a God who sits upon the throne that philosophers deem empty. If political theology today addresses the necessity of Gods through the power of reason, does it have space for expressions of faith that hold God not to be impossible-but-necessary, but actively involved in human affairs? It seems that even the realm of political theology must reckon with reproductions of a "division within humanity between those with Reason and others embracing Faith."¹¹⁴

In the following, and drawing upon the recent work of J. Kameron Carter, it will be argued that Cone's reaction to the problems of universality and abstraction invite us into a much deeper problematic that cuts to the core of Christian theology. This problematic is that of Christian Supersessionism, and following this section, the final two chapters of the thesis will seek to demonstrate just how entrenched Christian Supersessionism is in key sites of the history of both Christian theology, as well as ostensibly secular philosophy.

Theological Concreteness

J. Kameron Carter's discussion of the commitment to theological 'concreteness' in Cone's work helps us to better understand this dimension. Carter depicts this aspect of Cone's thought as resisting abstraction and grounding his theology in a very worldly concreteness:

"...the brilliance of Cone's thought—indeed its underdeveloped apex—is in its analysis of Being's "concreteness," which is revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. A concrete conceptualization of Being stands over against abstract conceptualizations of Being,

¹¹⁴ Pasha, M. K., 'Religion and the Fabrication of Race', 332.

along with their racial politics.¹¹⁵ Central to Cone's analysis is the place he accords, especially in his early thought, to Jesus' Jewishness."¹¹⁶

Carter depicts Cone as seeing theological abstraction as a mechanism of white theology whereby the specific experience of racism and white supremacy can be glossed over and discussed obliquely, if at all, in veiled terms such as an abstract notion of 'suffering'. Jesus' Jewishness is not, for Carter, to be understood as a racial designation, but as "the perpetual sign of God's embrace of Jew and non-Jew (or, in scriptural parlance, Gentile) alike."¹¹⁷ A Christian theology of Israel is thus central for the overcoming of modernity and its racial reasoning, which is attached to the separation of Jesus from his Jewishness. For Cone, theological abstraction is the "perennial problem of white theology and Euro-American racism as a whole", ¹¹⁸ leading to the inauthentic expression of Christianity of both white theology and the white church. The problem here is the failure of white Christianity to live concretely in relationship to God, and to reflect concretely upon the relationship between humans: "Rather, white Christianity is an abstract mode of life, and white theology is an abstract mode of thought."¹¹⁹ Cone's theology of liberation therefore attempts to return Christianity to a concreteness both lived in the present, and located in Christ himself.

Cone's commitment to theological concreteness is also drawn from the Christological commitment to know God through Jesus Christ, rather than through 'reason alone'. Only that which approaches God through Jesus Christ can be Christian, and theology which tries to approach God directly via 'enlightened reason' makes the hubristic error of bypassing his revelation in Christ. For Carter this emphasis on understanding God through his revelation in Jesus Christ is a characteristically Barthian position, but as he details, Cone diverges from Barth's Christology in important ways. Barth stressed the levelling effect of Jesus' resurrection, that it renders humanity utterly without distinction. As Barth writes: "God can be known only when men of all ranks are grouped together upon one single step..."¹²⁰ For Cone the notion of undoing all distinctions is a mask for the erasure of experiences of racism

¹¹⁵ See chapter 5.

¹¹⁶ Carter, J. K., *Race*, 158.

¹¹⁷ Carter, J. K., 158.

¹¹⁸ Carter, J. K., 160.

¹¹⁹ Carter, J. K., 160.

¹²⁰ Barth, K., *The Epistle to the Romans*, 6th ed. (Oxford University Press, USA, 1968), 100.

and white supremacy under the rubric of a generalised human experience. This was undoubtedly not what Barth, however, intended.

For Cone, too, Christ is central, but he is inseparable from the man, Jesus, and his Jewishness is interpreted as central to his being. Returning an abstracted Christ to a concretely understood Jewish Jesus is a method, for Cone, of engaging others not in abstract terms, as abstract subjects, but concretely and in terms of their real experiences and identities. For Carter this theological, Christological position is a defining feature of Cone's thought, and holds much potential for bringing to light the theological roots of the problem of abstraction, and its manifestation in what Carter calls 'modern racial reasoning': "The brilliance of Cone's early insight into the significance of Jesus' Jewishness and, thus, into the problem of Christian Supersessionism is the connection he intuits between this problem and racial reasoning in the modern world."¹²¹ Here Carter names that theological notion that will guide the rest of the discussion of this thesis, and which will draw us into a discussion of deeper stakes of political theology, and indeed political philosophy, to which Cone's theological project points.

Putting Jesus' Jewishness in a central position thus brings our awareness to the problem of Christian Supersessionism, which will be the subject of, and discussed at much greater length in, the following two chapters. This is a critical expression of the interplay between the spiritual and the material in Cone's black theology. As Carter writes, Cone "is critical of any Christology that would unduly sever the relationship between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith."¹²² Jesus' concrete revelation of God is not as any man but as *Jewish* man. Those theologies which seek to separate Christ from the Jewish Jesus, and so to make of Christ a pure abstraction as the ground of a universal vision, are for Cone committing a most grave error, as Carter writes: "a sign of abstract thought is the cleaving of the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith, such that one values one over the other."¹²³

Carter depicts this dimension of Cone's thought as his deepest insight into theology and its potential relevance for contemporary political situations, but he holds that Cone in the end too deeply entrenches blackness as an ontological category, to the point that he forecloses

¹²¹ Carter, J. K., *Race*, 166.

¹²² Carter, J. K., 169.

¹²³ Carter, J. K., 169.

the possibility of transcending a condition that has been created for black Americans by white oppressors. This is a basic echo of Cone's most widely recognised critic, Victor Anderson.

Ontological Blackness

In 1998, Victor Anderson issued a strong challenge to the centrality of blackness as an ontological affirmation in Cone's theology. Anderson argues that the reification of blackness as an ontological category is powerful because it mobilises the idea that "to lack any one property renders one a member of a pseudospecies."¹²⁴ Not only does ontological blackness, for Anderson, present a racial standard of *being*, in the face of which one can 'fail' and be rendered 'less than', it also rests on a standard of being that has been created by white supremacy: "Ontological blackness signifies the blackness that whiteness created."¹²⁵ In this depiction, ontological blackness creates a binary—black good, white bad—that is bound to its 'unresolved' reverse: slavery and freedom, outsiders and insiders. In its ontological entrenchment, this binary is thus one that cannot be transcended, a totality that constricts those who must live under it. Anderson advocates bell hooks' notion of postmodern blackness, where "black identities are continually being reconstituted as African Americans inhabit widely differentiated socio-economic spaces along divisions of education, income, and occupations."¹²⁶

With a close reading, however, it is evident that Cone's notion of blackness is not quite the pure racial-ontological essence that it can be constructed to be. The closing paragraph of Cone's first text is instructive:

"Being black in America has very little to do with skin color. To be black means that your heart, your soul, your mind, and your body are where the dispossessed are... Some may want to argue that persons with skins physically black will have a running start on others; but there seems to be enough evidence that though one's skin is black, the heart may be lily white. The real questions are: Where is your identity? Where is your being? Does it lie with the oppressed blacks or with the white oppressors?"¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Anderson, V., *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 11.

¹²⁵ Anderson, V., 13.

¹²⁶ Anderson, V., 12; hooks, b., 'Postmodern Blackness', *Postmodern Culture* 1, no. 1 (9 January 1990).

¹²⁷ Cone, J. H., *Black Theology and Black Power*, 151–52.

In his later writing, too, Cone is acutely aware that African American middle classes can become included in, and benefit hugely from, a system of capitalist liberalism, and recognises that there is a need to distinguish 'between' African Americans who have and do not have access to financial and social capital. Sadly, however, these nuances are not explicated further in Cone's works, and not incorporated into his substantive early works. They do, however, point to a willingness to see blackness not as such an ontologically entrenched identity as Anderson depicts it. Further, Cone's continuous insistence that theology is mere human talk, highly fallible in the face of objective reality, and that theologians must adjust their interpretations as social and political times change, suggests that he did not quite envisage blackness as the eternal enclosure that Anderson fears. Throughout much of Cone's work, however, it cannot be doubted that blackness is given a central and existential meaning.

For Carter, the problem of ontological blackness persists because Cone is a dialectical thinker who relies on an analogy between 'who Jesus was' and 'who Jesus is', a dialectic that draws Cone away from Barth and towards, in Carter's account, Paul Tillich. Cone shifts from an "...analogy of faith situation between Jesus and us... [to an] analogy of existential situation and condition between Jesus and us", ¹²⁸ which "allows Cone to resolve the dialectical relations between "Jesus *is* who he *was*," "Jesus *is* who he *is*," and "Jesus *is* who he will *be*" into "Jesus *is* black."¹²⁹ This transition into an existential analytic between Jesus the Jew and the black Jesus is too strong, too exactly existential, for both Carter and Anderson. This entrenchment of blackness as an existential characteristic closes the door to the overcoming of racialised existence ushered in by modernity and white supremacy.

A particularly resilient defence of Cone in this regard is forwarded by Trevor Eppheimer, who argues that Cone's use of blackness must be understood at the level of parable: "'Blackness' is used parabolically by Cone to articulate, for the church, the theological significance of the emerging revolutionary consciousness among Black America in the 1960s, and for the ongoing cause of Black antiracist struggles at present. Cone's "Blackness," was, I would argue, never advanced for its own sake, but was enlisted, primarily, for the cause of parabolic gospel proclamation."¹³⁰ In 2011, Vincent W. Lloyd, too, published an article which contained a

¹²⁸ Carter, J. K., *Race*, 171.

¹²⁹ Carter, J. K., 171.

¹³⁰ Eppheimer, T., 'Victor Anderson's Beyond Ontological Blackness and James Cone's Black Theology: A Discussion', *Black Theology* 4, no. 1 (1 January 2006): 103.

defence of a number of aspects of Cone's theology. Lloyd argues that the charge of ethnocentrism can only be levelled from within a secularist expectation that such problems are at least available to be 'solved' once and for all. He argues that Cone's work remains fundamentally theological because it does not stray from the Christian motif of essential paradox. Lloyd argues that in Cone's work 'blackness' is at the same time an ontological category and a signifier that has 'nothing to do with skin colour', and it is this *paradox* which shows that Cone is a theological thinker who doesn't simply create a metaphysics to decorate secular Black Power politics: "This is precisely the work of paradox. Two images are held at once, irreconcilable in worldly, secular terms: Blackness is at once literal and symbolic."¹³¹

Despite these criticisms, Carter is clear about the potential of Cone's thought, and particularly the direction in which it gestures, to move beyond certain impasses of modernity. Indeed, this impasse over the implications of an 'ontological blackness' are not to be solved here, and perhaps their inability to be solved points to, via Lloyd's suggestion, a fruitful dimension of the theological for a reminiscent impasse between universality and particularity. The paradox of blackness as literal and symbolic parallels the essential Christian paradox of Jesus as a particular human and Christ as God. Attempts to solve this second paradox have seen the necessity of abstracting Jesus from his particularity as a Palestinian Jew in order to have a more abstracted, and so universally relevant, figure at the centre of the Christian story.

From here we must go back and delve into this idea which Carter reveals Cone as responding to. Cone's thought draws our attention to an absolutely central tension in Christianity vis-à-vis political thought, one that must be brought to light so that it may be discussed clearly. As we will see when we return to Carter's work in Chapter 6, this process has contributed to the very problematic of race thinking to which Cone responds, as well as to a philosophical frame of abstraction that questions the *essential* significance of particular existences. The themes of concreteness and abstraction in Cone's theology thus point to a deep tension in Christian

¹³¹ Lloyd, V. W., 'Paradox and Tradition in Black Theology', 273. It must be noted here that Lloyd has also been sharply critical of Cone's legacy, arguing that he has been co-opted into the academy in a tokenistic manner: "Three decades have passed, and that interruption, like the interruption affected by Martin Luther King, Jr., has been incorporated into the status quo. King represents diversity for the nation; Cone represents diversity for the theological guild. We are in an era of neoliberal multiculturalism." Lloyd, V. W., 'For What Are Whites to Hope?', *Political Theology* 17, no. 2 (2016): 169.

theology, one which must be investigated for any discussion of the political implications of Christian thought.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn out and elaborated upon a sub-textual dimension of Cone's work, that being the dialectic he weaves between the spiritual and the material. Cone avoids creating either a social theory purely derived from scripture, or a total instrumentalization of religious practices and institutions, he maintains a careful interplay of transcendental and immanent elements of and inspirations for a politics of liberation. He weaves appeals to, and faith in, an eternal divinity with analyses of concrete struggle to create a political theology that is reducible to neither absolute universality nor pure immanence. Instead, the two are put into a mutually referential and dependent dialectic where each is oriented both towards each other and outwards. Upon introducing this dimension of Cone's thought, this chapter put Cone into conversation with thinkers who span political ontology, ethics, and theology: Lois McNay, Alain Badiou, and Vassilios Paipais.

The resonances between Cone's work and McNay's are important. Both lament metaphysics which attempt to dis-embed themselves from ontic referents. For McNay dispatching the ontical in favour of the purely ontological produces thought which is more and more disconnected from worldly political problems. For Cone, however, this disconnection is a mask for the status *of* such thought as in the interests of the dominant classes of society. Both, however, advocate firm grounding in worldly struggles when approaching metaphysical (whether ontological or theological) questions.

Despite his sharp criticism of particularistic calls for recognition in *Saint Paul: Foundation of Universalism*, Alain Badiou's later work shows interesting affinities with Cone's. Against the problem of the essential abstraction of notions such as 'Man' or 'the Other' as a ground upon which to build an ethics, Badiou advocates 'situated universals', which are built *from* particular situations but which are not reducible to relativism. This resonates with Cone's Risk of Faith, and both Badiou and Cone are acutely responsive to the dehumanisation that lies below the surface of abstracted appeals to a universal humanity. In both we find the vocabulary of a latent conservatism hidden behind appeals to a universal referent, which is presented as creating a split subject of Ethics which presents the Western man as an agent of change, with his other as its mere victim. Rather than trying to rehabilitate an 'authentic'

universalism (towards which, admittedly, Badiou gestures in *Saint Paul*), both argue that the remedy to this hidden hierarchicalisation is the elevation of concrete locations as providing the necessary grounding from which to speak of the universal.

In neither working down from the purely transcendental nor up from the purely immanent, Cone's theology, too, resonates with Paipais' depiction of what constitutes a *political* metaphysics. Cone understands the necessity of divine authorisation for a deep political practice, as well as the necessity of attachment to concrete political struggle, and that the subordination of either to the other would produce either a secular ideology or a religious dogma that fails to call for the political manifestation of the promise of liberation.

As I argued throughout these sections, Cone *already performs*, to a great degree, what each of these thinkers advocate. That his thought can therefore be seen as pre-empting and exceeding their thought draws our attention to the difference between the deeply critical-scholarly engagements of McNay, Badiou, and Paipais, and the more ostentatiously prophetic, works of Cone. Cone's thought therefore complements, rather than negates, their thought, and invites the field of political theology in IR into deep engagement with theological projects that at first appear highly unfamiliar. These texts are cast in different fires: the former in the meticulous and creative dissection and compartmentalisation of great parts of recent works on political ontology and ethics in the Western scholarly tradition, the latter in the African Methodist Episcopal church, sanctuary amongst Jim Crow Arkansas, and an existential crisis when the accelerating civil rights and black liberation movements confront Cone's formal theological education and specialisation in the thought of one of Germany's most influential theologians, Karl Barth. Though their standpoints regarding the 'problem of the universal and the particular' have considerable overlap, it is important to recognise that they are distinct and complementary.

Following this engagement with contemporary political thought, this chapter began to set the stage, and to introduce the problems and vocabularies that will enliven the remainder of the thesis. From here we see the utter centrality of a concrete conception of Christianity's heart: a particular man, who came at a particular time, to a particular people. This contrasts starkly with the off-hand abstractions of the person Jesus into an abstract principle (for example, of suffering), which themselves, we shall see in Chapter 6, become secularised and racialised into the colonial-modern world. This process, which is named Christian Supersessionism, to

which Cone responds, is deeply seated in both theological and philosophical thought, and so bears serious investigation for political theology both inside and outside IR.

Finally, we discussed one of Cone's most strident critics, Victor Anderson, who takes Cone to task for reifying an ontologically 'pure' notion of blackness that casts in stone a problematic rubric of racialised subjectivity for African Americans, but upon closer inspection was found to be less rigid eternal than Anderson's critique implies. It remains, however, an important line of critique that must be discussed in any appraisal of black theology.

It is the intended purpose of the remainder of this thesis to point to the persistence of the problem of Christian Supersessionism, that being the core abstraction which is bound up with the abstraction of Judaism as much as with the abstraction of any particularity, that lies tantalisingly, though not always reproduced, at the centre of Christian thought. Chapter 5 will focus on explicitly theological works, and Chapter 6 will focus on two giants of secular thought, in whom the logics of Supersessionism can be differently identified: Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger.

Chapter 5: Supersessionism in Christian theology

“A cultured man is one who knows how to impress the stamp of universality upon all his actions, who has renounced his particularity, and who acts in accordance with universal principles.”¹

Cone’s work is grounded in an understanding of Christianity’s central figure in which his divinity does not eclipse his ethno-religious particular humanity.² This insistence on ‘theological concreteness’ reveals Cone as responding to a theme in Christianity that has deep import for any attempt to engage it as a potential source for contemporary questions in political thought. This thesis thus names and identifies ‘Christian Supersessionism’ as a key problem for any Christian political theology. Most contemporary discussions of supersessionism focus on the extent to which revelation in Christ nullifies the Covenant of Israel, and whether Jews and Christians can be reconciled at least in terms of an exclusive or inclusive doctrine of election. As a doctrinal dimension of Jewish-Christian relations, David Novak writes that if theological relativism is to be avoided (as he argues it must) then some form of supersessionism will always be employed by those that believe that Jesus Christ came as the Messiah. Without some form of supersessionism, Christians would be unable to answer to themselves why they do not understand themselves as Jewish: “A complete denial of supersessionism leaves Christians unable to affirm Christianity as having brought something new and fuller to the ancient covenant between God and Israel. Without some kind of supersessionism, Christians have no cogent reason for not going back to their Jewish origins.”³ We, however, are interested not in supersessionism as shaping the capacity for Jewish-Christian dialogue, but in excavating the theme of a growing Christian sense of universality as fundamentally tied to its relation to Israel specifically. Supersessionism is thus a two-sided coin which on the one side carries the very possibility of Christian universalism, but which is intrinsically attached, on the other, to the aggressive process by which Christianity understood itself as transcending particularity *as Judaism*. Christianity’s universality is,

¹ Hegel, G.W.F., *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History (1857)* (Cambridge University Press, 1975), 56–57.

² This tension, and the interrelation of Jesus’ divinity and humanity, is a deep site of discussion and contestation throughout the history of theology. Any attempt to take stock of the major positions would here be a considerable diversion, and we shall remain focused on the relationship as we find it in Cone’s thought. For an overview of the main positions, see: Knox, J., *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ: A Study of Pattern in Christology* (Cambridge University Press, 1967).

³ Novak, D., ‘Supersessionism Hard and Soft’, *First Things*, no. 290 (2019): 3.

therefore, its very particularity, expressed in and through early processes of distancing itself from Judaism.

In this chapter I will present Christian Supersessionism as a narrative in which the Christian frame of universality is intimately linked to the supersession of the 'old Israel.' Supersessionism entails firstly the de-Judaizing of Christianity, and secondly the consolidation of Christianity as offering salvation beyond just the Jews, but also to Gentiles, and even barbarians. With time this promise would become reversed, and converting the Jews would become a preoccupation of many Gentile Christians. In building a narrative of the persistence of Christian Supersessionism we will look at the Apostle Paul, the *Adversus Judaeos* literature, as well as such pivotal Christian thinkers as Origen of Alexandria, St Augustine of Hippo, The reformer Martin Luther and Karl Barth. A direct discussion of Paul is a necessary starting point for this discussion, and in light of modern scholarship it becomes clear that he cannot be understood as the narrowly supersessionist figure of his classical rendering, although this is the way he *has* been overwhelmingly interpreted, as our discussion shall show. These are undoubtedly monumental figures, and each of them makes available a huge supply of material, both primary and secondary literature. Their discussion here will inevitably be unsatisfactorily brief, but instead of delving into a smaller number more deeply, the intention here is to demonstrate the *persistence* of supersessionism as a recurrent and core theme in Christian theological thought.

In the previous chapter, this thesis excavated sub-textual dimensions of Cone's work, and in particular the theological problematic to which he in large part responds, that being the entrenchment of abstraction at the heart of Christian thought, and it being posited as more true, more essential, or more fundamental than an explicitly particular and grounded articulation of Christian truth. Having brought this tension to the fore, the remainder of the thesis will identify this problem as Christian Supersessionism. Bringing to the surface, and dealing with the problem of Christian Supersessionism is, as Cone's project demonstrates, a key task of any discussion of the political potential of Christian theology. This discussion of supersessionism opens up questions that are beyond the scope of this thesis, but which are crucial in bringing to light the underpinnings of theological abstraction, which will in turn prepare the ground for more sustained discussion.

This chapter will discuss key moments of the reproduction of Christian Supersessionism in Christian theology. Invariably, the key thinker which supersessionism is associated with is the Apostle Paul, and so it is his writing, and interpretations of it, which are mostly discussed here. Paul is a central pillar of Christian thought, and in many pivotal moments and movements in Christian thought he is present, usually as proof of an originary Christian message from which the church has drifted, and to which it must return. As Simon Critchley writes, “Paul has... always been the figure for a reformation motivated by intense political disappointment.”⁴ Such returns to Paul are usually critical of the stagnations and perceived perversions of established religious institutions: “Saint Paul is trouble. It is simply a fact about the history of Christian dogma that a return to Paul is usually very bad news for the established church.”⁵

This chapter will establish the background of an idea that will be, in the following chapter, discussed in regard to its adoption into two key thinkers of European philosophy, Kant and Heidegger. Whilst Paul, Origen, and Augustine are central figures for both Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christianity, with Luther and Barth we moved into the reformed tradition in which Cone is, at least nominally, located. The argument that Supersessionism is a problematic issue for political thought is, in the final analysis, stated in an intellectual milieu that primarily stems from a dominant Protestant North Atlantic world. An analysis of the presence of supersessionism in contemporary Christian Orthodox theology, or in Roman Catholicism after the counter-reformation, is not offered here.

This chapter will be divided into two sections. After a brief explanatory introduction of the two dimensions of Christian Supersessionism, it will firstly focus on Christian works which sought to distance Christianity from its Judaic origins, and as such to claim from Judaism the mantle of God’s chosen people, for Christianity itself. This section will involve a discussion of Paul, along with a discussion of the later *Adversus Judaeos* literatures, which were a series of polemical writings which criticised Judaism and Christians who retained many Jewish religious practices.

Secondly, it will look at Christianity’s emerging claims to universality and the offer of universal salvation. This second dimension of supersessionism entails the gradual distancing of

⁴ Critchley, S., *The Faith of the Faithless*, 13.

⁵ Critchley, S., 155.

Christianity not just from its particular Judaic origins, but also from any particular community at all. Key to this is Paul's emphasis on justification by faith rather than justification by adherence to the law that would become a cornerstone of the Reformation. In justification by faith alone, the cornerstone of Christian salvation is faith in Christ, rather than adherence to worldly religious practices that inevitably require inclusion in a particular (linguistic or geographical) community. Finally, I will point to key figures in which we can see clear emphases on the centrality of faith rather than on the inclusion in a particular community defined by particular religious practices. Here we will touch upon Origen of Alexandria, Augustine, Martin Luther, and Karl Barth.

As we shall see, the contemporary logics of supersessionism that we can find in the work of Kant and Heidegger in the following chapter do not by any means emerge fully formed in Paul's writings and then get passed down through time. Rather, the seed of an idea emerges, or is read *back* into Paul, and develops over time to become what can be recognised in contemporary political thought as a persistent recourse to a supreme frame of universality and abstraction.

In drawing out the notion of Christian Supersessionism, firstly in theology here, and in the following chapter, in ostensibly secular philosophy, this thesis will establish the theological landscape into which Cone's challenge runs much deeper than being simply a political challenge about manifest supremacy and its religious apologists and institutionalisation. This chapter will slowly draw out a narrative on supersessionism, a persistent narrative in Christian thought, which will itself reveal how Cone's challenge cuts to the core of theological thought and its long-standing traditions. It is the concept of supersessionism, its political ramifications, and its permeation in ostensibly secular European philosophies to which Cone's theology can draw our attention, as well as his central call to rage over black suffering.

A fine example of Christian Supersessionism, by way of opening illustration, can be found in Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*. This instance of extant supersessionism reveals both its theological content and draws our attention to how this theological content

can become hidden, in time, when theological worldviews become inherited by, and incorporated into, a secularised canon of thought.⁶

Hegel is concerned with figuring out the meaning of history, and in particular the direction in which history moves in what is obviously (to Hegel) a meaningful progression. Despite Hegel's inclusion in a secular philosophical canon, it is clear from his text that he understands the teleological question of history in religious, Christian terms. Indeed, other than four words of Latin in the Appendix (from Horace's *Odes*, though attributed only by the translator, H.B. Nisbet), the only direct quotations offered are from I Corinthians (2:10) and Ecclesiastes (1:9).⁷ Beyond this evidence, Hegel amply expresses not only his belief that history is governed by providence but that in such questions of knowledge, history, and reason, the Christian man reigns supreme in his unique ability to conceive of and consider notions of such universal significance.

We see in Hegel the position that it is with the advent of Christianity that the possibility of universal knowledge is initiated. In the revelation of God in Christ, Hegel writes, the possibility of understanding the nature of mankind has been 'granted,' offering the possibility of overcoming this 'impenetrable mystery'. The revelation of God in Christ, furthermore, actually initiated the 'development of the thinking spirit' which is now able to ascertain, in the full comprehension of thought, what was previously only available to 'emotional and representational faculties'. Whether or not the capacity of mankind to comprehend its own nature has come depends on whether the "ultimate end of the world has yet been realised in a universally valid and conscious manner."⁸ Hegel here argues that the revelation of God in Christ, and the establishment of the religion of Christianity, has indeed brought this time. The significance of Christianity "...for the history of the world is therefore absolutely epoch-making, for the nature of God has at last been made manifest."⁹ Christianity, then, delivers a universally valid epoch to mankind in which the merely emotional and representational faculties are overcome by rational thought, which alone can deliver us understanding of the hitherto impenetrable mysteries of nature and God.

⁶ It is clear from even the most surface reading of Hegel that he is not a secular thinker in the modern sense, though he is often depicted as a cornerstone of an ostensibly secular canon of philosophy.

⁷ Hegel, G.W.F., *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History (1857)*, 36, 45, 161.

⁸ Hegel, G.W.F., 40.

⁹ Hegel, G.W.F., 40.

Here we begin to see two elements, religion and reason, which contribute to Hegel's great synthesis. For Hegel God is knowable and it is Christianity's *duty* to seek this absolute knowledge of the providential design of history. To an extent, Hegel picks up Kant's epistemological project, and his thought here correlates with Kant's pursuit of a critique of pure reason which hopes to attain the possibility of making synthetic *a priori* (and thus universal) judgement. Kant's pursuit of the possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge is itself an attempt to overcome the restrictions of knowledge based on, and only verifiable through, mere experience.¹⁰ For both Kant and Hegel, Christianity provides the basis of the possibility of thought that can exceed empirical reference, and the mere 'emotional and representational faculties', delivering mankind to (or opening the door for) universal knowledge of these impenetrable mysteries. In Paul Tillich's words, this pursuit of knowledge of God, the absolute, and providence puts the philosopher 'on the throne', and so points to the extent to which epistemological secularisation emerges from Christian thought and its own imagination of the possibilities and duties of deciphering ultimate truths: "Hegel's interpretation of history is the application of the idea of providence in a secularized form, in a form in which the philosopher, so to speak, is on the throne of God, looking into his providential activities and describing them."¹¹

For Hegel it is really *only* Christianity which can provide the cosmological vessel in which such eternal truths can (and must) be approached. Indeed Christianity is, for Hegel, uniquely able to provide access to 'universal ends', unlike the 'limited ends' of Judaism which is only concerned with the 'preservation of the Jewish people'. Hegel writes that Christians are 'initiated into the mysteries of God', which 'supplies us with the key to world history.' that key provided by Christianity is a 'definite knowledge of providence and its plan' with providence being revealed by Christianity as that which (in conjunction with the divine government) rules the history of the world.¹² The universal significance of this providential

¹⁰ "And precisely in these latter cognitions, which go beyond the world of the senses, where experience can give neither guidance nor correction, lie the investigations of our reason that we hold to be far more preeminent in their importance and sublime in their final aim than everything that the understanding can learn in the field of appearances, in which we would rather venture everything, even at the risk of erring, than give up such important investigations because of any sort of reservation or from contempt and indifference. These unavoidable problems of pure reason itself are God, freedom and immortality." Kant, I., *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 139.

¹¹ Tillich, P., *A History of Christian Thought, from Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*, 426.

¹² Hegel, G.W.F., *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (1857), 41.

plan is in part articulated as overcoming the restriction of history to the pursuit of 'limited ends', represented by the preservation of the Jewish people: "This doctrine is opposed both to the idea of chance and to that of limited ends (such as the preservation of the Jewish people). Its end is the ultimate and absolutely universal end which exists in and for itself."¹³

This passage expresses the two elements, or perhaps they are stages, of Christian Supersessionism which this chapter will discuss. Firstly, Christianity supersedes Judaism as that community which has unique access to God, and who therefore can be understood, or depicted, as his chosen people. Secondly, Christianity supersedes its cultural, religious and geographical origins to become a universal faith not restricted by the 'limited ends' of ethno-religious particularity. By Hegel's time these notions, which in the early days are consolidated and solidified gradually, over centuries, are expressed by an assumed supremacy: only Christianity, and Christians, can conceive of something as eternal as a world spirit of providential history, and so only they are the proper pursuers of absolute knowledge.

This chapter will be divided into two sections. After a brief explanatory introduction of the two dimensions of Christian Supersessionism, it will firstly focus on Christian works which sought to distance Christianity from its Judaic origins, and as such to claim from Judaism the mantle of God's chosen people, for Christianity itself. This section will involve a discussion of Paul, along with a discussion of the later *Adversus Judaeos* literatures.

Secondly, it will look at Christianity's emerging claims to universality, to being a story of, and path towards, universal salvation. This entails the abstraction of Christianity not just from its particular Judaic origins, but also its abstraction from any particular community at all. Key to this is Paul's emphasis on justification by faith rather than justification by adherence to the law. Finally I will point to some key moments of the inheritance of this centrality of faith, and the universality it carries with it, in the pantheon of Christian thought, touching upon Origen of Alexandria, Augustine, Martin Luther, and Karl Barth. As we shall see, the contemporary logics of supersessionism that we can find in the work of Kant and Heidegger in the following chapter do not by any means emerge fully formed in Paul's writings and then get passed down through time. Rather, the seed of an idea emerges, or is read *back* into Paul, and develops over time to become what can be recognised in contemporary political thought as a persistent

¹³ Hegel, G.W.F., 41.

recourse to a supreme frame of universality and abstraction. This chapter and the one that follows, thus, attempt to demonstrate that this aspect of political thought is deeply rooted and has a deeply theological background.

Christian Supersessionism at a Glance

Supersessionism has two interlinked dimensions that can be meaningfully distinguished. The first dimension of supersessionism refers to the idea that with the Crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, his revelation as Christ the Son, rather than just Jesus the carpenter, created a pivotal moment in history following which the followers of Christ replace, or *supersede*, the Jews as the chosen people of God. This notion, along with finding Jews writ-large guilty for having ‘killed Jesus’, has been, at crucial junctures, used throughout Christian history to justify all manner of anti-Judaic and anti-Semitic thought and action.¹⁴

Christian Supersessionism also indicates the idea that the followers of Christ supersede their ethno-religious identity to become part of a *universal* church of salvation, which was understood as offering membership not just to Jews but also to Gentiles. This is particularly associated with the letters of the Apostle Paul and the ways in which his interpretation of the meaning of the Crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Christ gradually became dominant over a competing faction, based in Jerusalem, which saw Jesus as the Messiah promised to the Jews.

It is primarily the second aspect of supersessionism that is of greater relevance for this thesis. However, it is useful to consider them together to see that the heritage of the idea of the universal church, was first concretely articulated as a distinction from Judaism and as orienting the Christian community ‘beyond’ it. This moving ‘beyond’ Judaism would become, at times, an aggressive relation that claimed for the universal Christian church the position of chosen-ness. The racialisation of ‘the Jews’ upon which Christian supersession is built, would also with time provide the model for the sense of Christian and European supremacy over other ‘merely particular’ group, who fall short of Christianity’s epoch-making reason.

¹⁴ As Thomas Kaufmann writes, Martin Luther held “...that the Jews ‘crucified’ Christ; they deserved their misery. They had ‘always been Christ’s greatest enemy’ and would not grant that he was God, ‘enduring sin and death, but they continue to live in their sins’.” Kaufmann, T., *Luther’s Jews: A Journey Into Anti-Semitism* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 47.

Superseding Judaism to become God's New Israel

The first dimension of supersessionism, regarding the claim to chosen-ness, is often called replacement theology, as it posits that the Christian church *replaced* Israel as God's chosen people. This is often discussed in texts aimed at a wider audience than narrowly academic theologians, and often pursues the question of whether this supersession can be considered a truly biblical doctrine.¹⁵ The second type of supersessionism is more abstract, and more commonly discussed by intellectual historians, philosophers, systematic theologians, and often has to be extracted from more elusive discussions.

In many realms of thought it seems unimaginable that frameworks laid down nearly two millennia ago might still have effect, but in philosophy and theology this is certainly the case. The standard explanation of supersessionism is that it was *revealed* at the point of Jesus' resurrection. Ideas do not really emerge and permeate a community in such an instantaneous moment, but are introduced and gradually accepted and adopted over time. A little excavation of some distinguished early proponents of supersessionism will help us to see that despite its claims that Christianity is a properly universal religion, even this idea itself developed in a highly particular manner, and within a parochial setting.

This account of the first dimension of supersessionism will begin with a discussion of Paul and his reception. Paul, as the Apostle to the Gentiles, provides robust material for authorising, and appears himself to instigate, Christianity's separation from Judaism and its elevation to a universal religion based primarily upon faith in Christ's salvation. Amongst his thirteen epistles, it is Paul's letter to the Romans that stands out as a key source for discussing his impact on the newly developing Christian church. In this letter, for example, Paul draws upon his scriptural education, writing that even Abraham was justified by faith rather than obedience to law: "For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.... For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to

¹⁵ Such as: Sloane, J. P., *The Evil History of Replacement Theology: An Illustrated History of the Church's Dark and Shameful Treatment of the Jews* (Avington House Publishing, 2016); Vlach, M. J., *Has the Church Replaced Israel?: A Theological Evaluation* (B&H Publishing Group, 2010).

all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham...”¹⁶

The first occurrence of ‘justification by faith’ in Paul’s epistles comes in his letter to the Christian communities in Galatia. Here he speaks to a Jewish Christian audience about his vision of a Christ-centred Judaism in which faithful gentiles can also be saved. Here Paul criticises Jewish Christians who (fearing what Paul calls the ‘the circumcision faction’) began to refuse to eat with Gentiles. Paul reminds the Galatians that their justification comes through faith in Christ and not through observance of the Jewish law.¹⁷

In Galatians, too, Paul counterposes the Spirit of God (that comes via faith) with the flesh, as the concern of much of the Law. It is thus by hearing the Good News of the Gospel, and not by practicing the law, that Paul calls upon the Galatians to recognise their own salvation in Christ.¹⁸ Here again Paul invokes the authority of Abraham, writing that it is those that *believe*, who are the ‘descendants of Abraham’, to whom the scriptures revealed that the Gentiles would be justified by faith.¹⁹

Returning to Romans, we find the need for redemption as existing universally and ‘without distinction.’²⁰ Here the Gentiles become included in the promise of salvation, opened up to them by the universality of God revealed in Christ: God is not just the God the Jews, but of the Gentiles also, and they can share in redemption for their sin in sharing faith in Christ. Both the circumcised, and the uncircumcised, will be justified on the same grounds: faith.²¹ In a

¹⁶ ROM 4:13-17 Coogan, M. D. et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1620.

¹⁷ “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.” GAL 2:15-16 Coogan, M. D. et al., 1683.

¹⁸ “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so much for nothing? —if it really was for nothing. Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?” GAL 3:1-5 Coogan, M. D. et al., 1684.

¹⁹ “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.” For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.” GAL 3:8-9 Coogan, M. D. et al., 1684.

²⁰ “For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith.” ROM 3:22-25 Coogan, M. D. et al., 1619.

²¹ “For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. Or is God the God of

similar invocation of Hebraic scriptural authority to his appeals to the faith of Abraham, here Paul writes that faith is a *completion* of the law, its upholding, rather than its negation and destruction.²²

Paul invokes Abraham's faith, and faith in Christ as upholding the law as an appeal to recognised religious authorities in a Jewish thought-world. Alongside these appeals to Hebraic scriptural authority, we also find in his writings more aggressive depictions of the relationship between the 'new Jerusalem' and the 'present Jerusalem.' For example, in Galatians, Paul invokes the allegory of Hagar and Sarah: "For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman [Hagar] and the other by a free woman [Sarah]. One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise."²³ Paul allegorises these contrasting births as representing the 'two covenants': that with 'the present Jerusalem', born of the flesh and in slavery, and the 'new Jerusalem', born of the promise and to freedom. In contrast to Jews and Gentiles sharing in the inheritance of Abraham, and the new faith upholding the law, here we find a more aggressive injunction. Paul quotes Genesis 21:9-10 thus: "But what does the scripture say? "Drive out the slave and her child; for the child of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman."²⁴ It must be noted here that much modern scholarship seeks to problematise the interpretation of Paul as a one-dimensionally anti-Jewish thinker. With regards to the allegory of Hagar and Sarah, specifically, it is argued that Hagar was allegorised not to represent Jews or Judaism, but Christians who continue to practice aspects of the law. According to this interpretation, Paul writes of a tension *within* the early Christian communities, between 'God's apocalyptic act in Christ', and established religious practices within the community.²⁵ Whether or not this is the most accurate interpretation, this allegory in Galatians *has been* mobilised as a scriptural source of anti-Jewish sentiment.²⁶

Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith." ROM 3:28-30 Coogan, M. D. et al., 1619.

²² "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law." ROM 3:31 Coogan, M. D. et al., 1619.

²³ GAL 4:22-23 Coogan, M. D. et al., 1687.

²⁴ GAL 4:30 Coogan, M. D. et al., 1687.

²⁵ Martyn, J. L., *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Yale University Press, 1998), 37; See also Frank J. Matera, *Galatians* (Liturgical Press, 2007).

²⁶ "Luther is one of a number of interpreters, for example, who, over the centuries, have given a distinctly anti-Judaic reading to Gal 4:21-5:1, finding the synagogue in the enslaving covenant of Hagar and the church in the

Paul continues in Galatians with a more aggressive tone regarding attempts to be justified in the law. Speaking in reaction to certain Galatian Christians holding that even Gentiles must practice circumcision, Paul writes that those who attempt to be justified through continued adherence to the law are 'obliged to follow the whole law', and thus to forsake the promise of the new covenant. This meant remaining 'children of the flesh'. The continued adherence to this practice, as an attempt to be justified by law, results in being 'cut off' from Christ and falling away from grace.²⁷ Paul is thus clear that the faithful are 'not under law but under grace'.²⁸

Paul's account of the covenant offered in Christ is another basis for the supersessionism of Judaism that would be read into, and drawn from, his letters. Paul writes that the covenant between God and Abraham stands, but it is not one inherited by all of Abraham's descendants. Invoking again the Genesis account of the sons of Hagar and Sarah (Ishmael and Isaac, respectively) Paul recalls again that the 'children of the promise', and *not* the children born of the flesh, are the true heirs to God's covenant with Abraham.²⁹ The 'sons of Ishmael', those born of the flesh, in slavery, and circumcised by Abraham, will be made a 'great nation' and father of twelve princes, but will not inherit the covenant.³⁰

The relationship between Israel, or the followers of the law, and the followers of Christ that we find in the writings of Paul is thus one in which the teachings of the latter supersede the former. The relationship is sometimes one of fulfilment, invoking the inheritance of Abraham's covenant, and holding that faith completes and upholds the law. Elsewhere, however, it is more polemical and aggressive, writing that those who commit to any part of the law are obliged to follow it fully, and therein to lapse and fall away from Christ. Paul draws

liberating covenant of Sarah... the reformer's interpretation has happily influenced — to one degree or another — most readings of the letter since his time." Martyn, J. L., *Galatians*, 35.

²⁷ "You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace." GAL 5:4 Coogan, M. D. et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1688.

²⁸ ROM 6:14 Coogan, M. D. et al., 1622.

²⁹ "For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants; but "It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants ROM 9:6-8 Coogan, M. D. et al., 1627.

³⁰ God said, "No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; I will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year." GEN 17:19-21 Coogan, M. D. et al., 35.

upon the Genesis account of the son of Hagar as born of the flesh, and that of Sarah as born of freedom, as authorising the Christian inheritance of the covenant, but also leading to an aggressive riposte to ‘drive out the slave and her child’.

Whether or not Paul envisaged what would become a supersessionist Christianity, or even a Christianity fully removed from Judaism itself, is a topic of much current scholarship.³¹ However, whether he would have anticipated it or not, Paul *has been* memorialised as the founder of Christianity’s supersession of Judaism. From here we will move from our brief discussion of some of the key aspects of Paul’s writing for the question of Christian Supersessionism, to a number of works which are part of the *Adversus Judaeos* literature. These texts were developed after Paul’s writings, and they consolidated and extended the interpretation of Christianity as superseding, fulfilling, and replacing Judaism.

Early Christianity ‘against the Jews’: *Adversus Judaeos*

With the growing success of Christianity as a new and distinct religious movement, and in a theological atmosphere of soteriological competition with Judaism, numerous testimony texts, scriptural compilations presented as testimony of given interpretations, would be compiled ‘against Jews’. Speaking of this *Adversus Judaeos* tradition, Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that church authorities were engaged in exegetical competition with their ‘rabbinic rivals’. These texts appeal to the scriptural authority of the books of the Hebrew Bible, using selected passages to justify interpretations which support Christian claims. Ruether writes that this literature “builds up a case against the Jewish religious community and its teachers”³² with the express purpose of demonstrating that the new revelation of God in Christ fulfils, completes, and overcomes the Jewish understanding of Hebrew scripture and religious practice. Radford argues that a Christ-centred and anti-Judaic exegesis of the Hebrew Bible itself preceded and provided the basis for the New Testament, and this exegetical outlook carried over into the writings of the Church Fathers.

³¹ Sanders, E. P., *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Fortress Press, 1983); Lim, T. H., ‘Studying the Qumran Scrolls and Paul in Their Historical Context’, *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity*, 1 January 2003, 135–56; Taubes, J., *The Political Theology of Paul*.

³² Ruether, R. R., ‘The *Adversus Judaeos* Tradition in the Church Fathers: The Exegesis of Christian Anti-Judaism’, in *Aspects of Jewish Culture in the Middle Ages: Papers of the Eight Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies*, ed. Szarmach, P. E. (State University of New York Press, 1979), 27–28.

The Apologetic movement can, Paul Tillich writes, “rightly be called the birthplace of a developed Christian theology.”³³ Justin Martyr (100-165CE) was a Second Century Christian Apologist who for Tillich was perhaps the ‘most important’ figure in the Apologetic movement.³⁴ One of his few surviving works, the *Dialogue with Trypho*, provides evidence of the early-church claim to Christianity’s chosen-ness. This text is a fictional dialogue between Justin and Trypho, a Jew, in which Justin ‘demonstrates’ that Christianity has not only superseded Judaism but has established a new universal faith.

Justin’s dialogue is littered with claims that the Christian church is the ‘true spiritual Israel’. In a similar fashion to Paul, Justin lays claim to the authority of Abrahamic lineage (through Isaac, son of Sarah, Abraham’s heir born of the promise and not of the flesh). Although ‘uncircumcised’, Abraham was “approved and blessed by God *because of his faith*” and would become called the ‘father of many nations.’³⁵ The inheritance of the Abrahamic lineage through Isaac (and not through Ishmael) is evidently a core assertion upon which the early Christian claim to being the ‘true spiritual Israel’ is based. Abraham’s circumcision is regarded as merely ‘a sign’ and not ‘a justification’, and his justification is narrated as deriving only from his faith. Justin presents the argument that since women cannot be circumcised in the flesh, it is merely a *symbol* of the Jewish covenant and *not* the source of God’s justification.³⁶ Physical circumcision has been superseded in those who come to God through Jesus Christ, by spiritual circumcision, conveyed in the sacrament of baptism.³⁷

Justin scorns Jews who not only persecute Christians, but who also ‘have slain Christ’ and refuse to accept that Christ is the Messiah. Justin depicts the Jews as permanently poised ‘to do evil’ because they do not ‘repent’, instead hating and persecuting the followers of Christ who believe in God through faith in Christ. Christians are cast here as pious and caring, praying ‘for you and for all men’ despite being hated and persecuted by the very Jews for whom they pray. Justin’s claim to the moral high ground is clear: “For he taught us to pray even for our enemies, and to love those that hate us, and to bless those that curse us.”³⁸

³³ Tillich, P., *A History of Christian Thought, from Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*, 24.

³⁴ Tillich, P., 27.

³⁵ Saint Justin (Martyr), *Dialogue with Trypho* (Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 21.

³⁶ Justin (Martyr), 38.

³⁷ Justin (Martyr), 65.

³⁸ Justin (Martyr), 201.

Justin's words point to the Christian perspective of the obsolescence of Judaism through the claim that the Christian God *is* the God of the Jews, and that, with the revelation of Christ, the former has superseded the latter not only with regard to the Jewish community, but for all men. Justin employs the vocabulary of obsolescence to argue that the law, which was intended only for the Jews, has been replaced by a new universal law that is 'simply for all men'.³⁹

The covenant of faith with Christ thus abolishes the covenant of law, and the covenant of faith is one available universally. Here Justin is clear about the relation between the new and the old covenants. Justin writes that 'a later law' which opposes a previous one 'abrogates' it, and so the new covenant 'voids' the earlier one. The 'everlasting and final' law revealed in Christ is one which will, Justin writes, never be superseded by any 'law, or commandment, or precept.'⁴⁰ The way in which Christianity supersedes Judaism in Justin's dialogue involves the adoption of the Abrahamic lineage and the replacement of physical circumcision with 'spiritual circumcision', conveyed in the sacrament of baptism. From a clear position of the moral high ground, Christ offer to the Jews inclusion into this new, universal covenant, an absorption that requires their transformation into Christians who come to Christ with 'faith in their hearts and a prayer on their lips'. The merely particular and temporary ends of Judaism are thus superseded by this universal and eternal faith. This shows clearly the intertwining of Christianity's move away from Judaism specifically, and towards universality in general, as two sides of the Christian Supersessionist coin.

Pseudo-Gregory of Nyssa's *Testimonies Against the Jews* (*Testimonia Adversus Judaeos*) is a later example of the scriptural *testimonia* tradition that collects Biblical passages and organises them to present scriptural proof of particular beliefs. Written in the second half of the Fourth Century, Pseudo-Gregory's *Testimonia* collates Old and New Testament passages which support the idea that the Jews had fallen out of favour with God, and that Jewish practices no longer provide justification. As in Paul's letter to the Galatians, circumcision is a clearly articulated practice which represents the 'old covenant' and the religious practices of the 'children of the flesh'. Pseudo-Gregory writes that the Jews, whilst circumcised in the flesh, are uncircumcised in the heart, invoking the commandment in Jeremiah to 'remove the

³⁹ Justin (Martyr), 20.

⁴⁰ Justin (Martyr), 20.

foreskin of your hearts'.⁴¹ The physical practice of circumcision is thus relegated as 'justifying no-one' and, after the coming of the Messiah, rendered as 'superfluous to God.'⁴²

In Pseudo-Gregory, too, we find Hebrew scriptural authority invoked to claim the eternal rule of the Christ's Kingdom. Pseudo-Gregory quotes the apocalyptic book of Daniel in which Daniel recounts a vision of seeing one 'like a human being' (or 'like a son of man') coming 'with the clouds of heaven' to the 'Ancient of Days'. The passage from Daniel is quoted in full: "To him was given the honor, the rule, and the kingdom. And all the peoples, tribes, and tongues will serve him. His authority is an eternal authority which will not pass away, and his kingdom will not be destroyed."⁴³ The vision of eternal and universal rule that these writers claimed for Christ's Kingdom was thus embedded in the recognised authority of Hebrew scriptures. As with Paul, these figures drew upon Abrahamic authority and scriptural prophecies to cast the new revelation of God in Christ as fulfilling and superseding the old. Their evident respect of the authority of scripture, renders the suggestion that they were anti-Semitic or anti-Judaic in the modern sense as an unnecessary simplification. These thinkers were to varying degrees embedded in a Jewish thought-world, and at times expressed deep respect for the keepers of the covenant before Christ. The gradual expression of Christianity as theologically distinct from Judaism became the platform upon which its claim to universality and eternity was articulated. This had the effect of the Christian claim to universality being articulated, precisely, *Against the Jews*.

The gradual theological consolidation of supersession would have lasting ramifications for the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. As Justin's text makes clear, the separation of Christianity from Judaism was the first part of a two-stage supersession: firstly, Christianity was separated from Judaism and its practices, and secondly, it was rendered 'for all men'. The problem of this legacy for contemporary political thought is that the latter, the 'for all' for which Christianity is often seen as a site for the rehabilitation of inclusive and egalitarian politics, is *fundamentally bound up with* the 'end' of Judaism, with the end of the existence of unfaithful Jews who deny the new covenant.

⁴¹ JER 4:4 Coogan, M. D. et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1077.

⁴² "That circumcision justifies no one is clear from these things... Therefore, ...the strange things [that prevailed] during the old order were then thrown out as superfluous to God." Albl, M. C. (Trans.), *Pseudo-Gregory Of Nyssa: Testimonies Against The Jews* (Leiden: BRILL, 2004), 41.

⁴³ DAN 7:13-14 Albl, M. C. (Trans.), 39.

Here we move to a more explicit discussion of the second dimension of Christian Supersessionism, that being the consolidation of Christianity as an eternal and universal message of salvation.

Supersession-Universality

“Light and day will come to everyone universally when the time of the future age arrives; in comparison with that age, the period of this present world is called darkness.”⁴⁴

The mainstream account that Paul is an out and out anti-Jewish thinker has been strongly challenged in recent years, particularly with the publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls and what they bring to light about the community, based at Qumran, who hid them there, along with a revival of Paul scholarship in Jewish thought.⁴⁵ As George Bradford Caird notes, “For Paul's theology, even at its most universalist, is deeply rooted in his Jewish past.”⁴⁶ In his essay on ‘replacement theology’, another name for supersessionism, Michael J. Vlach writes that what he, and R. Kendall Soulen call ‘economic’ supersessionism “focuses on God’s plan for the people of God to transfer from an ethnic group (Israel) to a universal group not based on ethnicity (church). In other words, it was God’s plan from the beginning that Israel’s role as the people of God would expire with the coming of Christ and the establishment of the church.”⁴⁷

A thorough account of anti-Jewish rhetoric in the ‘early Jesus movement’ is offered by Abel Mordecau Bibliowicz. In his book, *Jews and Gentiles in the Early Jesus Movement* Bibliowicz constructs an account of anti-Jewish rhetoric and themes in both early church thinkers as well as gospel writers, discussing such an array of authors as Paul, Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, Revelation, Hebrews, Barnabas, Ignatius, Justin, Melito and Chrysostom.

Bibliowicz is honest about the inevitable ambiguity of interpreting ancient writers: “It is probable that we will never know with certainty what Paul’s true attitude toward Judaism

⁴⁴ Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans Books 6-10* (Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 231.

⁴⁵ Taubes, J., *The Political Theology of Paul*.

⁴⁶ Caird, G. B., *New Testament Theology*, ed. Hurst, L. D. (Oxford University Press, 1994), 53.

⁴⁷ Vlach, M. J., ‘Various Forms of Replacement Theology’, *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 20 (2009): 61; Soulen, R. K., ‘Karl Barth and the Future of the God of Israel’, *Pro Ecclesia* 6, no. 4 (1997): 413–28.

was."⁴⁸ He is clear that Paul is one of the most studied New Testament writers, and regarding whom a vast number of interpretations have been forwarded: "Great efforts have been made by theologians and by academics to interpret and to harmonize Paul's theological statements. These efforts have produced a bewildering maze of arguments and counter-arguments. Incursions into this minefield are demanding and rewarding. The superstore of Paul interpretation offers a wide array of brands. Each creedal, theological, and denominational predisposition has its team of favorite scholars."⁴⁹

Bibliowicz argues that many of the ostensibly 'anti-Jewish' sentiments in Paul's writings were actually typical of other Jewish sectarian groups who also levelled criticism against mainstream Judaism: "The claims "you have forfeited God's favor," "we are the new Israel," and "you are irredeemable" echo similar claims by the Enochic, Jubilean, and Qumranic texts."⁵⁰

Bibliowicz's research shows that the radical elements of Paul's early writings vis-à-vis Judaism might be best understood as part of a Jewish tradition of radical thought which often made some claim to a messianic over-turning of a stagnant mainstream. In the case of the 'early Jesus movement', these radical assertions would have great effect. The 'unique and admirable' Jewish tradition of self-criticism was, Bibliowicz writes, employed by parts of the early Jesus movement in aid of the internal struggle between those who wanted to remain within the orbit of Judaism and those who appear to wish to move away from it. The application of these arguments back onto Judaism itself would result in the perception of the 'continuing existence' of Judaism as a threat to the 'legitimacy and hegemony' of the church.⁵¹ Ultimately, in Bibliowicz's account, Paul's thought is inextricable from Christian Supersessionism, whether or not that is how he intended it to be interpreted. When Gentiles required authority for refusing to adopt Jewish religious practices and beliefs, Paul provided all the 'theological and polemical' support required.⁵² Indeed, at times, Paul's polemic against Jews is unavoidable:

⁴⁸ Bibliowicz, A., *Jews and Gentiles in the Early Jesus Movement: An Unintended Journey* (Springer, 2013), 103.

⁴⁹ Bibliowicz, A., 21.

⁵⁰ Bibliowicz, A., 104.

⁵¹ Bibliowicz, A., 107.

⁵² Bibliowicz, A., 107.

“Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh...”⁵³

Despite the ambiguity of Paul raised by recent scholarship, it has played a key role in inspiring and authorising myriad Christian claims to universality. Here we move to a number of key theological thinkers in whose work we find the inheritance of this supersessionist universalism. The following sections, though each will remain short, will demonstrate that a sense of universality attached to supersessionist origins is a concurrent theme in multiple key figures of Christian theology. The argument of the thesis in this regard is that supersessionism is identifiable as a persistent theme in influential Christian thought.

Origen of Alexandria

Origen of Alexandria (184-253CE) was a prolific early third century theologian who lived at the peak of Christian Gnosticism, and was a strident critic of it. He was also one of the earliest Christian Neoplatonists, and is regarded as an early thinker to weave Christian faith with rigorous philosophical arguments, producing ‘the first great theological system’.⁵⁴ Origen’s inclusion in our discussion is indicated by a recent article in *The Journal of Theological Studies*⁵⁵ in which Matthijs den Dulk argues that precursors to modern discourses of racism can be identified in Origen’s thought. Den Dulk recognises that calling Origen ‘racist’ in the modern sense is neither possible nor particularly interesting. However, he fails to make the link between a modern discourse of racism and its parent-concepts of Christian Supersessionism or Christian anti-Semitism, instead parsing off anti-Semitism as a separate issue. This renders his investigation of racism as a ‘theological problem’ limited before it has even begun. Here, instead, we will discuss universalism in Origen as an expression of Christian Supersessionism. This will help us to build an account of the pervasiveness of supersessionism as a core problematic of theological thought that does, with time, manifest as a modern conception of race but is not reducible to it.

⁵³ PHIL. 3:2-4 Coogan, M. D. et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1704.

⁵⁴ Tillich, P., *A History of Christian Thought, from Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*, 50.

⁵⁵ den Dulk, M., ‘Origen of Alexandria and the History of Racism as a Theological Problem’, *The Journal of Theological Studies* 71, no. 1 (2020): 164–95.

It is around the idea of salvation that Origen articulates his vision of Christian universality. The potential inclusion of 'Jew, Greek, or barbarian' in the Gospel demonstrates, for Origen, the righteousness of God.⁵⁶ Origen invokes here the inclusive salvation offered by God, expressed in Matthew 11:28.⁵⁷ Here Jews are included, but only in so far as they accept Christ as the Jewish Messiah and accept the 'new law' of faith in Christ. As we saw with Justin Martyr, Origen is clear that God's favour has been transferred from the Jews to the Christians, who alone receive knowledge of this path to universal salvation. Origen writes that the 'essence of religion' has 'transferred' *from* the Jews and to the Gentiles. The symbols of worldly religious practice being overcome by faith and spirit is articulated as part of this transference of religious legitimacy.⁵⁸

In his *Homilies on Luke*, Origen appears to take particular exegetical license when interpreting the passages regarding the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist. Here the Priest Zechariah, John's father, is rendered mute by the Angel Gabriel for unbelief in things that will 'become fulfilled with time'.⁵⁹ Origen interprets the inability of Zechariah to speak as representing the Jewish inability to 'give reason' for their religious practices.⁶⁰ This silence renders, for Origen, Jewish practices as 'empty signs', because Jews cannot give adequate explanation of their meaning, and they are thus 'mute deeds'.⁶¹ This resulted in the Jews being 'abandoned and rejected' by God, with salvation passing over to the Gentiles: "Christ ceased to be in them. The Word deserted them... The Jews were left behind and salvation passed to the Gentiles.... The Jews were rejected for our sake; on our account they were abandoned."⁶²

⁵⁶ Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans Books 1-5* (Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 87.

⁵⁷ "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." MAT 11:28 Coogan, M. D. et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1401.

⁵⁸ "In the entire preceding text of the epistle the Apostle had shown how the essence of religion has been transferred from the Jews to the Gentiles, from circumcision to faith, from the letter to the Spirit, from shadow to truth, from fleshly observance to spiritual observance." Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans Books 6-10*, 191.

⁵⁹ "But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur." LUK 1:20 Coogan, M. D. et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1469.

⁶⁰ "Consider the Jewish practices. They lack words and reason. The Jews cannot give a reason for their practices." Origen, *Homilies on Luke* (Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 20–21.

⁶¹ "Passover and other feasts are empty signs rather than the truth. To this very day the people of Israel are mute and dumb. The people who rejected the Word from their midst could not be anything but mute and dumb." Origen, 21.

⁶² Origen, 21–22.

Origen articulates clearly that Christianity reveals the universal message and audience of God, though characteristic of Christianity's universality drawn from its supersession of Judaism, it is a universalism that comes *over and against* the Jews. God bestows salvation upon the Gentiles in the same motion as taking it away from the Jews, revealing their practices as mere 'empty signs', replaced by the meaningful signs of the faith and spiritual observance of this new, Gentile-centred religion. However, the 'rejection of the Jews' that Origen reads into Luke 1:5-25 is a little less blunt in other passages, where he writes that not only Gentiles are 'destined to believe', and not all of Israel 'were to be totally excluded:' "many from Judea and Galilee were destined to believe".⁶³

From Origen we move here to Augustine, another Neo-Platonist and another 'early' theologian whose thought would resonate down the ages. As Origen emphasised the rejection of the Jews and the replacement of 'fleshly observance' with 'spiritual observance', in Augustine we find a more nuanced approach to the interplay of justification by faith and justification by worldly works.

St Augustine of Hippo

St Augustine of Hippo (354-430CE) is an important figure in our narrative about the persistence and development of Christian universalism rooted in supersessionism. Augustine is a deeply influential thinker, not least on the reformer Luther who began his career as an Augustinian monk. Far from promulgating a simplistic or one-dimensional Pauline universalism rooted in justification by faith alone, he writes that the universal offer of salvation for the faithful does not come without conditions. For Augustine, faith is not enough *alone* to gain justification: whilst it is a necessary condition for justification, it is not alone sufficient. Augustine writes that justification by faith and not by works must not result in an open door for the faithful to live 'a wicked life.'⁶⁴ The law of worldly religious practice in Augustine thus has two sides: the law of things like circumcision (sacramental law) and the moral law. For Augustine, Paul's diatribe was against the first, and not the second.

For Augustine, through Paul, we live in grace by faith in Christ. Augustine was concerned with how sinful humans can attain grace and so transcend 'fleshly desires' into a more permanent

⁶³ Origen, 88.

⁶⁴ St Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions* (Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 195.

condition of salvation. He invents a four-stage schema of the journey from sin to salvation, which applies both individually to each human, and universally to the whole of humanity. In the beginning we sin without even realising it and have no urge to resist fleshly desires. When these desires begin to be restricted by moral rules, we ultimately lose. When we gain faith in Christ we live under grace, reckoning with sin and this time succeeding to overcome our desires because we have been given the gift of virtue and love. However, despite the faithful living in grace and free from sin, fleshly desires stay with us until we are relieved of our bodies and delivered to eternal life. The Messianic moment of Christianity lies in the middle of this schema, at the transition between living under moral law (but still failing to overcome sin), and managing to overcome it through the grace given for faith in Christ. Whilst faith allows us to overcome sin in this world, it also promises eternal peace from fleshly desires, the fourth and final stage in this schema of justification.⁶⁵

Thus for Augustine it is the attainment of grace, achieved not least in casting away law and accepting faith in Christ, that all humans might escape the fleshly desires of this world and of our bodies. Living according to law represents the second stage, and having received grace through faith in Christ, humans progress beyond the need for law, and move one step closer to transcending fleshly existence. Indeed, Augustine is explicit that it is via the failure of the Jews that salvation is brought for the Gentile: "For the impiety of the Jews was the Jews' downfall and yet provided salvation for the Gentiles."⁶⁶ Whilst Augustine's schema suggests that this path was predestined, implying that failing to eradicate sin was really no fault of the Jews themselves, they are also blamed for their failure to live according to the promises of their own scripture, and to recognise that Christ is their promised Messiah.

Thomas P. Scheck and Joseph T. Lienhard note that the early Augustine's exegesis of Paul was remarkably similar to Origen's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, though by the time that the Pelagian controversy⁶⁷ had taken place Augustine had moved slightly away from

⁶⁵ Cary, P., *Inner Grace: Augustine in the Traditions of Plato and Paul* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 43.

⁶⁶ St Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions (The Fathers of the Church, Volume 70)*, 52.

⁶⁷ The Pelagian controversy was a debate between Augustine and a rival theologian Pelagius, over a number of theologian questions including predestination, original sin and grace. Pelagius accorded greater freedom to the individual to live without sin, and argued that we could earn grace through our inherent capacity for goodness. St Augustine, *Four Anti-Pelagian Writings* (Catholic University of America Press, 2010). Scheck and Lienhard argue that Augustine's insistence on the maintenance of moral law must be understood as a polemical point in the context of the Pelagian controversy: "...Augustine's main point in affirming this more comprehensive understanding of law is to assert the need for God's helping grace. The context is polemical and is clearly directed

Origen, particularly on questions of original sin, human powerlessness, and predestination.⁶⁸ These differences are far more complex than can be discussed here, but it is interesting to return here to Augustine's distinction between two types of 'law' in Paul's writing: sacramental law (ie. Jewish religious practices like circumcision and Sabbath observance) and moral law, which meant adherence to the Ten Commandments. For Augustine, Paul's rejection of law was a rejection of sacramental law, but not necessarily of moral law.

For Augustine it is thus not faith *alone* that leads to the gift of grace: works, too are important, though he stands with Paul, who argues that no *prior* good works are needed. Augustine writes that the Jews 'vaunted themselves' over Gentile Christians, arguing that they had earned grace through their good works, through obedience to the Law. This resulted in many law-obedient Jews 'taking offense' at the extension of grace to faithful Gentiles who *had not* been obedient to the law, and who were not even circumcised. So, Augustine writes, Paul argues that that Gentiles can receive the grace of Christ without works (a byword for observing the practices set out in the law): without *prior* works. Gentiles can thus attain justification by faith, but they must go on to do good works, and to obey the moral laws of scripture.⁶⁹

Paula Fredriksen draws our attention to Augustine's defence of Judaism and the Jews.⁷⁰ Whilst Augustine's theological approach to justification puts him squarely in the orthodox Christian camp in which the new covenant of faith replaces and supersedes the old covenant of Law, he cannot be simplistically depicted as producing the same aggressively anti-Semitic rhetoric of, for example, the *Adversus Judaeos* writers. In a drawn-out correspondence with Saint Jerome of Stridon over interpretation of Paul's letter to the Galatians, Augustine writes with little objection that Paul continued to observe the law, even after he had become a Christian

against the Pelagians." Scheck, T. P. and Lienhard, J. T., *Origen and the History of Justification: The Legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 93. Nicholas Rengger's monograph discusses the persistence of 'anti-Pelagian' sentiment in a wide array of Political Theorists and International Relations Theorists. Rengger, N. J., *The Anti-Pelagian Imagination in Political Theory and International Relations*.

⁶⁸ Scheck, T. P. and Lienhard, J. T., *Origen and the History of Justification*, 86–88.

⁶⁹ St Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions (The Fathers of the Church, Volume 70)*, 194. In contrast to Origen and Paul before him, Augustine lived in an era of Christian tolerance in the Roman Empire, being born shortly after the reign of Constantine the Great (306-337CE). Augustine's concern to re-instate good works in the form of obedience of moral law as a source (alongside faith) of justification may reflect the new socio-political position of Christianity in the empire, as a widespread religion of large populations.

⁷⁰ Fredriksen, P., *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (Yale University Press, 2010).

Apostle.⁷¹ Against Jerome, Augustine here does not devalue the law *as such*, but only argues that it cannot promise salvation. In this account Paul took no issue with practices like circumcision when they are understood as practices handed down, only cautioning that they should not be conferred upon Gentiles as part of a promise of salvation.⁷² In his writings against Faustus of Mileve, Augustine turns the traditional criticism of Jewish failure to interpret the law spiritually on its head, praising the Jews for diligently keeping the law given to them by God. Critically for Augustine, they had not just preserved the law given to them, but *enacted* it in historical time, conferring upon their ‘lives and words’ the character of prophecy: “No less than did Jewish scripture, then, Jewish rites and Jewish behavior—God’s word interpreted *proprie*—also served as *signa translata*, signifying divine truths.”⁷³ Whilst Jewish religious practices can no longer be understood as a source of grace, Augustine invites Christians to look upon the Jews with reverence, respect, and gratitude for having kept the flame of God alight.

For Augustine faith ultimately trumps works, though living according to moral law (and not sacramental law) is still a central commandment for any Christian. Whilst Augustine emphasises the necessity of good works, writing that even the faithful who live ‘wickedly’ cannot attain grace, echoing Origen faith in Christ remains the central pillar of justification, “an interior process of “being-made just” through the transformative indwelling of Christ”.⁷⁴ As we shall see in the following chapter, the essentially inner process of attaining grace by faith in Christ as a key aspect of the supersession of Christianity’s predecessor, Judaism, sets the stage for universalist conceptions of man which follow the pattern of Christian Supersessionism’s aggressivity towards that ‘merely particular’ subject that it purports to transcend.

Martin Luther

The Protestant Reformation instigated by the German Augustinian Friar Martin Luther (1483–1546) profoundly transformed Christianity in Europe and the wider Christian world. Luther stands firmly in the lineage which we are addressing in this chapter, and the revolution his

⁷¹ St Augustine, *Saint Augustine: Letters, Volume 1 (1 - 82)*, ed. Deferrari, R. (The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 171–79.

⁷² Fredriksen, P., *Augustine and the Jews*, 239.

⁷³ Fredriksen, P., 244–45.

⁷⁴ Scheck, T. P. and Lienhard, J. T., *Origen and the History of Justification*, 103.

thought instigated is pivotal in the emergence of the world of secularism, the transition to which is a key process for the field of political theology.⁷⁵ As we shall discuss in Chapter 6, his thought would also have its influence upon that of Heidegger,⁷⁶ and shaped the thought-world in which Kant was located.⁷⁷

Both Paul and Augustine were utterly central to Luther. For Diarmaid MacCulloch Luther was influenced deeply by Augustine's reading of Paul, in which he finds an 'all-powerful God' offering salvation to an 'utterly fallen, utterly corrupt' humanity.⁷⁸ In Augustine's reading, humans are so lost and helpless that we can do nothing for our own salvation but rely on God. Luther saw the Church of his day telling the faithful that they *could* do something for their salvation. He was incensed about the hubris and fakery behind these practices and their pretence to have any effect on God's judgement whatsoever. Luther brought Augustine's doctrine of grace to bear as the central principle of his new critique of the Church.

Luther harboured and promoted both aspects of supersessionist thought, from a negative attitude to the Jews, to the utter centrality in his theology of justification by faith alone. In a 1523 text entitled *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*, Luther argued that Jews should be treated with compassion in Christian societies, in the hope that they might be converted. This text, however, is postured polemically against the Latin church, and concerns proving the virginity of Mary along with the best scriptural basis upon which to set about converting Jews to Christianity.

By 1543 Luther had become disappointed that Jews had not converted to Christianity en-masse. Responding to 'erroneous rumours' that Jews were in fact trying to convert *Christians*, and were even advocating and practicing circumcision upon them, Luther 'launched a vicious attack on them.'⁷⁹ In his not-so subtly titled *The Jews and Their Lies*, a document manifestly pressing up against the anti-Semitic side of Christian Supersessionism, Luther writes of the divine justice meted out to the Jews in the 70CE sack of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple.

⁷⁵ Gregory, B. S., *The Unintended Reformation*.

⁷⁶ See Armitage, D., *Heidegger's Pauline and Lutheran Roots* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2018).

⁷⁷ See Kanterian, E., *Kant, God and Metaphysics: The Secret Thorn* (Routledge, 2017), 1–2.

⁷⁸ MacCulloch, D., *All Things Made New: The Reformation and Its Legacy* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 3–4.

⁷⁹ Rudolph W. Heinze, *Reform and Conflict: From the Medieval World to the Wars of Religion, A.D. 1350-1648* (Monarch Books, 2006), 112.

“For such terrible wrath of God is sufficient proof that they certainly must be in error and doing wrong; even a child can grasp that. For no one should think of God so terrible that He would punish his own nation so unmercifully and keep silent by neither comforting words nor indicating the duration or end of such misery! Who would want to believe in such a God, hope in Him, or trust in Him? Therefore, this wrath leads to the conclusion that the Jews are certainly rejected by God and are not His people anymore, and He also is not their God anymore...”⁸⁰

This text would be Luther’s last, and Luther is clear by this point that he has no interest in attempting to convert Jews, and is happy to consign them to damnation: “St. Paul says they are given over to wrath. The more you try to help them the harder and more wicked they become. Let them alone!”⁸¹ Indeed, Thomas Kaufmann argues that Luther wrote *On the Jews and their Lies* precisely because of the failure of the reformed Church to convert significant numbers of Jews. Due to this failure Luther therefore held that there was no point in holding back “the ‘definitive truths’ about the Jews.”⁸²

Alongside his well-documented and much discussed anti-Semitism and criticism of the practice of indulgences nailed to the church door at Wittenberg (with 94 other theses, of varying controversy), Luther placed in the centre of his new theology the Pauline insistence on justification by faith alone.

Luther makes it clear that he holds Paul’s writings, and in particular the letter to the Romans, as utterly central to Christianity. As Luther opens his Preface to the Letter to the Romans: “This letter is truly the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest Gospel. It is well worth a Christian’s while not only to memorize it word for word but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul.”⁸³ As would become so influential and central a doctrine in the Protestant world, and as expressed clearly in his Lectures on Romans,⁸⁴ Luther holds that God’s justification is earned by faith alone. The

⁸⁰ The obvious political intentions of this translation can be clearly detected by the name of the publisher, and should be kept in mind with regard to its textual reliability. Luther, M., *The Jews and Their Lies, 1543* (Christian Nationalist Crusade, 1948), 10–11.

⁸¹ Luther, M., 26.

⁸² Kaufmann, T., *Luther’s Jews*, 98.

⁸³ Luther, M., *Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans and Concerning Christian Liberty (1522)* (Benediction Classics, 2010), 4.

⁸⁴ Whilst they reveal an understanding of Paul that is evidently central for Luther’s later reformation work, we must keep in mind that these lectures were unpublished until 1908, and so must be understood as indicating

righteousness of God is revealed 'by that faith alone' through which the faithful believe in God. This righteousness of God, revealed through faith alone, is the 'cause of salvation': "Here, too, "*the righteousness of God*" must not be understood as that righteousness by which he is righteous in himself, but as that righteousness by which we are made righteous (justified) by Him, and this happens through faith in the gospel."⁸⁵

Luther's emphasis on justification by faith alone must be understood as part of the Pauline tradition of universality by which Christianity is made into a faith universally available, though this universal availability would almost never extend to an unrestricted doctrine of universal salvation. In its theological context, the emphasis on justification through faith alone must be understood as an important departure from the Scholastic understanding of justification by grace, and the Augustinian understanding of justification by faith for the most part, but also works, particularly following moral law. This departure would be central for the emergent reformation movement, in which we can still see that *salvation by faith alone* is a doctrine of such central importance.

In Luther we also see conditionalities placed on Pauline universality and the possibility of universal salvation. Whilst the Messiahship of Christ and the ensuing necessity of baptism and faith was held to be universally *applicable*, salvation was by no means universally *available*. Not only are the Jews held to be unruly and misguided refuseniks who have fallen from chosen-ness, even those *with* genuine faith might not be granted a place in the elect. Luther writes that God wills sin in order to preserve the 'greater glory' of the elect:

"One must, rather, say that according to his will and pleasure he does not justify some in order through them to display an all the greater glory in the elect. And so when he wills sins, he wills them for the sake of something else, namely, for the sake of his glory and for the sake of the elect."⁸⁶

In Luther we see an example of both sides of supersessionism: the Jews are most certainly fallen from God's grace and replaced by the Christians, and by the end of his life Luther was

Luther's understanding of the gospel rather than as a central text of Lutheran or Protestant scholarship before their publication. Pauck, W., ed., 'General Introduction', in *Lectures on Romans*, by Luther, M. (Westminster John Knox Press, 1961), xvii.

⁸⁵ Luther, M., *Lectures on Romans (1515-1516)* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1961), 17–18.

⁸⁶ Luther, M., 30.

so frustrated that his reformed faith had not drawn a significant number of Jewish converts that he cast them out with his acerbic text, *The Jews and their Lies*. In his more explicitly exegetical work, too, Luther entrenches into Protestant Christianity a heavily Pauline doctrine of justification by faith alone which removes Christianity from the sort of culturally identified religion of which Judaism is a particular example. The ultimate requirement of faith alone opens up Christianity to all Gentiles and with time would drastically change the role of the church itself in many Christian denominations. As with all universal doctrines, there are always those who must be deemed outside the newly articulated community. In this case it would be firstly the Jews, but also those sinners whose sin God creates in order to retain the greater glory of the elect.⁸⁷ Luther's reformation would catapult justification by faith alone to the centre of a religious revolution in Western Europe, and pave the way for the further disconnection between Christianity and firstly the Jews in particular, and secondly any formally recognised idea of a particular community. Whilst other denominations would take these abstractions much further, Luther stands at a pivotal point in theology in instigating the transformation of Christianity in the West.

Karl Barth

Karl Barth (1886-1968) was a hugely influential protestant theologian of the twentieth century. In the transition from this chapter to the next, where we will discuss Kant and Heidegger, the connection follows from Luther but not from Barth. Whilst a contemporary of Heidegger, there is not significant evidence of Barth having influenced him, although it is likely that Barth was aware of Heidegger's work.⁸⁸ So whilst in this lineage Barth is a dead-end, he provides an important link to Cone: Cone began as a Barthian. Although he would come to reject the white (and particularly German Protestant) theology of which Barth was a part, Barth would still have great influence upon his thought. It would therefore be a conspicuous silence to *not* discuss Barth with regard to the supersessionist firmament that is being brought to the surface in this chapter.

⁸⁷ This points to the complicated relationship between Christian universality and doctrines of omnipotence which we will unfortunately lack space to discuss here. An excellent account of the implications of doctrines of omnipotence for modernity can be found in Gillespie, M. A., *The Theological Origins of Modernity*.

⁸⁸ See the overview offered by Timothy W. Stanley on his website: Stanley, T. W., 'Heidegger Read Barth...', Timothy Stanley, accessed 9 August 2021, <https://timothywstanley.com/notes/2013/10/11/heidegger-after-barth>.

Barth was a proponent of Pauline universalism and the universality of salvation understood through Paul's letters. For Barth, God is undoubtedly the God of all humanity, not just a particular community over whom he looks. Barth emphasises that this results in the breaking down of all worldly distinctions. God's righteousness is 'attested' by its universality, and it is 'not irrelevant'...

"...that it is precisely Paul, who, daring, in Jesus, to put his trust boldly in grace alone, is able, in Jesus, also to perceive the divine breaking down of all human distinctions. Indeed, Paul's courage proceeds from his insight. Because he is the Apostle of the Gentiles, he is the Prophet of the Kingdom of God... His mission did not erect barriers; it tore them down. God can be known only when men of all ranks are grouped together upon one single step..."⁸⁹

For Barth, the Pauline message breaks down human barriers and renders all humans sinners together, which itself reveals the universality of salvation in Christ. Living under sin is a universal condition which for Barth exposes 'the cause of the dissolution of every distinction.' Barth argues that no 'positive possession' of humans is able to offer a basis for 'human solidarity', because every such "positive possession—religious temperament, moral consciousness, humanitarianism—already contains within itself the seed of the disruption of society."⁹⁰ Human solidarity can thus for Barth only be established negatively,⁹¹ not on the basis of a shared 'positive possession' but on the basis of what is communally lacking.

For Barth, any attempt to contemplate, describe, or represent the divine, in short any and all 'religion' as such, is a highly risky and questionable endeavour because it seeks to render knowable in contingent, worldly, categories that which is fundamentally not of this world. Here we see the potentially politically paralyzing dimension of Pauline universality, Christian Supersessionism, and divine justification through faith, for movements which require statements of identity and solidarity with particular communities. It threatens the effect of a great levelling in which 'the political' is located 'below' the existential, or metaphysics. It suggests a subsumptive universality that folds all distinctions within itself and relegates

⁸⁹ Barth, K., *The Epistle to the Romans*, 99–100.

⁹⁰ Barth, K., 100.

⁹¹ Though it is not a theology, this is reminiscent of Sergei Prozorov's Void Universalism Project.

political conflicts to a lower order of human affairs, keeping the metaphysical a clean homogenous space in which there can be 'no distinction' between sinners.

As became common in theology after the attempted eradication of European Jews by the Nazi regime, and regimes aligned with it, in the first half of the twentieth century, Barth produced a formal 'doctrine of Israel.' Barth's doctrine of Israel is, as R. Kendall Soulen writes, "fraught with promise and peril".⁹² Soulen details three forms of supersessionism: economic supersessionism (God's purpose for Israel was "destined to be fulfilled and completed by Christ's coming"),⁹³ punitive supersessionism (God has rejected Israel and its covenant for failing to recognise the Messiah in Christ), and structural supersessionism (the rendering of Hebrew scriptures as indecisive, and their becoming largely forgotten in Christian doctrinal discussions). Soulen argues that Barth's theology, which places Christ in such an utterly central position to the point of eclipsing all other sources, involves the repudiation of punitive and structural supersessionism, but not of economic supersessionism, which Soulen holds to be supersessionism's most 'intractable form': "Barth not only preserves and reaffirms economic supersessionism: he propounds it in an unusually rigorous way."⁹⁴ What Barth propounds so rigorously is that Christ fulfils God's covenant with Israel, and in doing so converts Israel into its timeless, universal form: "Thereafter, Israel's sole legitimate destiny is to be taken up into the church, the new and true Israel, where the significance of its identity as a carnal people is permanently transcended."⁹⁵

The influence of Barth upon Cone necessitates a short discussion of whether Cone himself inherits supersessionism from Barth. Upon first glance, it would seem as though thinkers like Victor Anderson, who criticise Cone for ontologising blackness, would argue that his entrenchment of blackness involves a supersessionist relation to any previously understood identities: a new, fuller humanity which relegates others to a less-than fulness, a relation in which the former is aggressively superseded by the latter.

Cone's rejection of Christianity's universal claim would seem to negate such an accusation, since he makes no suggestion that he speaks to and of all humanity, or to and for all times.

⁹² Soulen, R. K., 'Karl Barth and the Future of the God of Israel', 413.

⁹³ Soulen, R. K., 415.

⁹⁴ Soulen, R. K., 418.

⁹⁵ Soulen, R. K., 423.

Indeed, it is in *liberation* that salvation is found for Cone, rather than in an ontological condition of blackness, which he recognises as a highly political and polemical category of suffering in a society which is shot through with latent and manifest notions of white supremacy. On the question of universality upon which an accusation of supersessionism in Barth must finally rest, Cone is markedly un-Barthian. Instead of seeking a levelling of all humanity before a Christ who revealed God for all, Cone sees the need for recognising and clearly articulating worldly differentiations as the grounds upon which divine liberatory acts can be conceivable at all.

Understanding the events that would unfold in the decades following the publication of Barth's commentary on Romans (the second edition was written in 1921), his commitment to a Christologically grounded universal humanity must be understood as entailing a somewhat radical political position *against* the nationalist political mainstream of the day. However, despite its invocation of the universality of humanity, its fundamental flaw is that this universality is constructed over and against Judaism and the Jews, who continued to refuse Christ as the Messiah. The idea that Judaism was thus a 'thorn' in the side of Christian Europe, would be mobilised and transfigured to justify the genocides and pogroms of that era, as well as so many before. As Giorgio Agamben writes of Erik Peterson's position that the Kingdom of Heaven can never be attained as long as the Jews continue to refuse Christ's Messiahship:

"If the eschatological advent of the Kingdom will become concrete and real only after the Jews have converted, then the destruction of the Jews cannot be unrelated to the destiny of the Church. Peterson was probably in Rome when, on October 16, 1943, the deportation of a thousand Roman Jews to the extermination camps took place with the conniving silence of Pius XII. It is legitimate to ask ourselves whether, at that moment, Peterson became aware of the terrible ambiguity of a theological thesis that tied both the existence and the fulfilment of the Church to the survival or disappearance of the Jews."⁹⁶

Alongside Cone's indictment of white theology and the white church, this passage reminds us what is at stake in Christian Supersessionism in its theological form. This juxtaposition, of the enactment of genocide, alongside the theological thesis of supersessionism, puts in stark

⁹⁶ Agamben, G., *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 16.

relief the ways that deeply abstracted theological positions can manifest as the violent horrors of extermination. As we shall see in the following chapter, supersessionism had by this time already branched into a more secularised and biological pattern in the form of a modern discourse of race. It is in this, racialised form that Cone demands us to recognise the terrible ambiguity of a new theological thesis of Christian Supersessionism.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented Christian Supersessionism as a story in which the universal frame established by Christianity is inextricably tied up with the supersession of the 'old Israel.' Supersessionism involves firstly the de-Judaizing of Christianity, and secondly the establishment of Christianity as offering salvation to all humanity. In detailing the inheritance of this idea over time, we have looked at the Apostle Paul, the *Adversus Judaeos* literature, and made reference to Origen, Augustine, Luther and Barth. A detailed account of Paul is necessary for any such discussion, and in light of modern scholarship it becomes clear that he cannot be understood as the narrowly supersessionist figure of his classical rendering. Despite the growing understanding of Paul's location in a thoroughly Judaic thought-world, he has nevertheless been posited as clearly articulating Christian faith as offering salvation to the Gentiles and not only to the Jews (who accept Christ). The *Adversus Judaeos* literature begins in earnest the process of whittling down these nuances and establishing Christianity as a message of universal salvation against Judaic particularity. I returned to Paul and particularly the universalist outlook that is drawn from him, identifying supersessionism in the thought of some key thinkers of the canon of Christian thought: Origen of Alexandria, St Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, and Karl Barth. These latter two identify our focus as shifting towards the world of Protestantism in particular. The North Atlantic thought world in which this thesis understands itself as located, as well as the protestant tradition in which Cone is located, necessitates a particular focus on reformed thought, and in it we find particularly acute examples of a highly abstracted Christ offering salvation to a very flat plane of universal humanity, a plane which has on its underside a tormented relationship to Christianity's deeply particular origins.

This interpretation of the writings of Paul, Epistle to the Gentiles, would become dominant not just in Pauline scholarship, but in Christianity as a whole. It can be recognised in both Reformed tradition as well as in calls to return to a more essential Christian faith, such as that

offered by Leo Tolstoy, which earned him excommunication from the Russian Orthodox Church for implicitly associating 'fleshly observance' with the practices and traditions of Orthodox Christianity.⁹⁷ The distinction between an ethno-culturally particular religion of practice and adherence to tradition, and a universal religion of faith in salvation as revealed by Christ, would become pivotal in the distance first preached, then practiced, between Christianity and Judaism. The implications of the central tenets of Paul's writings would be a shift from a Jewish community of faith in Christ to a story of universal salvation through faith. Christianity thus becomes a religion that can be, critically, observed by anyone: faith in Christ is what really matters, not membership of a particular, worldly group.

Nothing in this chapter will have surprised any reader with a cursory understanding of Christianity. It is not intended to offer any new reading or interpretation. Of course Christians distinguished themselves from the Judaism from which many of them formally converted, of course faith is required, and of course God is considered universal. What this chapter sought to demonstrate is that these parts of Christianity are the second step in a two-step dance. The first step, the one rarely explicitly mentioned, is an aggressive relation vis-à-vis Judaism, a devaluation of Judaism and its practices, a proving that Judaism is wrong, that it has fallen from grace. This vilification of Judaism as intertwined into the fabric of Christianity's most basic tenets sets the stage firstly for the formal racialisation of the Jewish people, and secondly for their *function* in Christianity to be transferred to other racial groups. To serve the purposes of European empire and capital, this theological function of Judaism was secularised and transferred onto the shoulders of multiple racialised groups, not least amongst them black Africans. With time, they would provide the image of a particular, fallen, limited peoples in contrast to whom White Christian Europeans could understand themselves, their thought, and their cultures as universal, graced, and capable of unrestricted expansions.

Therefore, since we are deeply interested in the interrelation between theological and political thought we must excavate another layer of the inheritance of this idea. The following chapter will discuss Christian Supersessionism as can be identified in two towering figures of philosophy, who are regularly mobilised in political thought. Articulating the transition of Christian Supersessionism into the world of secular thought is central for establishing the

⁹⁷ Tolstoy, L., *The Gospel in Brief: The Life of Jesus*, trans. Condren, D. (Harper Collins, 2011).

depth to which Cone's theological challenge to modernity goes. By excavating the inheritance of supersessionism, we see that Cone's challenge is much deeper than a political challenge about black humanity in a white supremacist world, but that it *also* (for the political challenge must remain front and centre), cuts to the core of philosophical and theological concepts of universality. Black Liberation Theology challenges the supersessionist tradition of Christian universality over and against Jewish particularity, and reclaims the Christian God for the oppressed of this world.

Chapter 6: Christian Supersessionism in Modern Philosophy

“I became obsessed with the cries of black blood, and angry about the silence of white theologians and their churches. They study Kant and Hegel and Heidegger, and a host of other Europeans who regarded blacks as inferior, and unimportant as a source of philosophical and theological reflection. And as a result, they render spilled black blood insignificant.”¹

“Even as Heidegger performs himself as the most removed from Christianity, to me it seems he has the opposite problem, namely, that he does not remove himself far enough from one of the fundamental, indeed clichéd and knee-jerk, operations of Christianity, namely, its supersessionist aggressivity toward those other groups it claims to transcend. Heidegger stumbles on the stumbling stone of the Christian problem for philosophy. Read this way, despite himself, Heidegger’s open revolution becomes haunted by dark and not so veiled threats toward those whom the revolution would transcend, so many ‘liberals’ who would soon enough become in Heidegger’s writings so many ‘Jews’.”²

In order to demonstrate that the problem of supersessionism Cone’s theology seeks to unravel is not just located in the abstract depths of Christian theology and unlikely to have implication for the ostensibly secular fields of political philosophy and theory, this chapter will discuss Christian Supersessionism with regard to two titans of philosophy: Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger. Discussion of Kant will springboard from the work of Carter, for whom the anti-Judaic impulses of supersessionism will become intricately written into key aspects of Kant’s thought. With a little help from the recent work of Seán Molloy we will see how closely the problem of supersessionism rubs up against the field of IR. More ambiguously, as is characteristic of such an ambiguous thinker, the theme of supersessionism will be discussed in relation to he who looms over much political theology and ontology, as discussed in Chapter 1: Martin Heidegger.

¹ James H. Cone, ‘Black Theology and Black Power’ (Yale Divinity School, 20 April 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyP7BrmII9U>.

² Blanton, W., ‘Anarchist Singularities or Proprietorial Resentments? On the Christian Problem in Heidegger’s Notebooks of the 1930s’, 111.

Whilst evidence of Heidegger's anti-Semitism can no longer be overlooked, this chapter will demonstrate the ambiguity of Heidegger with regards to Christian Supersessionism. Despite everything which evidences his contempt of Judaism, taken in a vacuum, his fundamental ontology in its endless cycle of ontic and ontological engagement appears quite un-supersessionist, doubtless a key reason why he remains central for so many contemporary political thinkers. Heidegger's legacy remains stained but ambiguous, as so many take his philosophy away from its author and context. Despite this, it is undoubtable that Heidegger is deeply implicated in questions of anti-Semitism more explicitly, and supersessionism more abstractly. This chapter argues that this ambiguity casts Heidegger as a problematic figure for the elaboration of political theologies which explicitly seek to move beyond supersessionism as *both* aggressive Christian universality, and its underside of latent anti-Semitism.

At the inaugural meeting of the Society for Post-Supersessionist Theology in 2018, R. Kendall Soulen articulates the transformation that Christianity has undergone in the aftermath of the Holocaust. He stated that since the apostolic era Christian thought has 'seldom if ever' experienced a change with regard to its relationship to Judaism and Jewish people 'as profound' as it has since the Holocaust. Soulen compares this change to the 'formation of the doctrine of the Trinity' and the Reformation, which he argues both actually stood 'in substantial continuity' with pre-existing ideas. Shaken awake by the Holocaust, Soulen writes that, slowly at first, Christian communities around the world have refigured paradigmatic Christian teachings on Judaism and the Jewish people, deeming them "...not just ambiguous or incomplete, but false and contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ as attested by the Scriptures."³

The Society for Post-Supersessionist Theology seeks to establish the grounds upon which systematic theology can follow Christian congregations in this transformation. The works of Soulen, amongst others, has begun a serious conversation in systematic theology of the possibility of post-supersessionist theology.⁴ However, as we shall see with the account of supersessionism's secularisation and transformation into a modern discourse of race, these works which only address the theological roots of Christian anti-Semitism maybe be merely

³ Soulen, R. K., 'Introducing the Society for Post-Supersessionist Theology' (Inaugural Meeting: 'An Agenda for Post-Supersessionist Theology', Denver, Colorado, United States, 16 November 2018), https://9b878d63-4fee-4cef-a339-be50a71d9f0f.filesusr.com/ugd/d21797_d19f0679799f4c2ca3929dc8b6af10f5.pdf.

⁴ See in particular: Soulen, R. K., *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Fortress Press, 1996).

closing the stable door after the horse has already bolted into the pastures of secularity, concealing itself behind biological doctrines of race.

As J. Kameron Carter remarks, “Cone anticipated by at least two decades the flurry of research into the importance of Jewish existence for understanding what it means to be Christian.”⁵ Cone himself already saw the linkage between Christology and a modern discourse of racism, and already set about building a counter-theology to it. Cone was thus several steps in front, and only now is the linkage between Christian Supersessionism and white supremacy beginning to be fully articulated. Indeed, Carter finds the work on supersessionism of thinkers such as Soulen inadequate because it *doesn't* identify the strong linkage between European Christianity's supremacist relationship to Judaism with its secularised and racialised variant in white supremacy. Carter's frustration with Soulen in this regard points to the wider problem of 'post-supersessionist theology' which remains insulated in academic, systematic theology. Supersessionism therein becomes treated as a deeply doctrinal issue that is addressed only at a deeply doctrinal level, which misses the ways in which supersessionism may have already been transformed from the doctrinal and into other areas of human thought.

Soulen, then, fails to consider the way in which Christian Supersessionism has *already* undergone at least one significant transformation, and through this transformation has “come to do new work in forging the modern world as we know it.”⁶ Whilst Soulen's account of supersessionism in Kant fails to address its role in informing Kant's hierarchical anthropologies, scholars of the history of the idea of race who find in Kant a pivotal example of Enlightenment racism also often fail to make links with theology.⁷ In a discussion of Kant and race, Charles W. Mills points out the religious (Christian) origins of race and speculates that despite his 'orthodox Christianity'⁸ it was perfectly possible that Kant could hold onto a Christian universality whilst considering 'breeds within a species' as distinct in identifiable ways. This light-touch approach to Kant's Christianity and his racism misses the point that Carter drives home: it may not be *despite* his Christianity that Kant constructed hierarchical

⁵ Carter, J. K., 'Christology, or Redeeming Whiteness: A Response to James Perkinson's Appropriation of Black Theology', *Theology Today* 60, no. 4 (2004): 533, n. 14.

⁶ Carter, J. K., *Race*, 383, n. 14.

⁷ Acharya, A., 'Race and Racism in the Founding of the Modern World Order', *International Affairs* 98, no. 1 (2022): 23–43.

⁸ Mills is not clear enough on this point: Kant was an orthodox *Lutheran* Christian.

anthropologies, but *because of* it.⁹ Whilst much work on Kant and race thus focuses on the biological dimensions of his account of race, here we will attempt rather to discuss the deeper, supersessionist dimensions of his thought, thereby identifying a theological root of the ‘problem of race’ in Kant’s thought.

The linkage between Christian Supersessionism and the modern ‘problem’ of race will be addressed below with specific reference to Carter’s work on Kant. What is further missed out in the systematic theology discussion of supersessionism are the ways in which supersessionism had already, in its enlightenment-era and pre-Holocaust variants, become woven into influential thought *outside* systematic theology. It is the intention of this chapter to begin to draw out and expose the existence of supersessionist thought in two thinkers who are hugely influential in the secular fields of political thought.

The discussions in this chapter reveal the depth of the challenge that Cone’s (already anti-supersessionist) theology issues to engagements with theology for political thought. It shows that the work of thinkers such as Cone, which is often bracketed as ‘merely particular’ or contextually relevant, does not operate *within* an inscribed particularity as subordinate to universality, but that it fundamentally re-writes the entire frame of universality-particularity as it is imagined in the mainstream canon of theological and philosophical thought. This re-writing of the foundations of our political thought reveal the depth at which the Christian offer of universality is tied up with the supersessionism of Judaism, which would shape in modernity, a European sense of supremacy.

Cone’s theology also offers a deeply politicised alternative Christianity which insists on particular political commitments not as well as, nor despite, but *by* making a claim to the divine. Cone’s theology informs his politics, and his politics inform his theology, and therein he avoids a depoliticised metaphysics, reminiscent of Paipais’ schema. His unapologetically political metaphysics does not instrumentally lead from ontic to ontological nor from ontological to ontic, but reshapes the relationship between the human and the divine to make them mutually dependent. Cone’s thought thus encourages living, understanding, and writing

⁹ Mills, C. W., ‘Kant’s Untermenschen’, in *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy*, ed. Valls, E. (Cornell University Press, 2005), 185.

politics theologically and theology politically, and to do so *without* recourse to a hegemonic and abstract frame of a universal salvation offered to an abstract human subject.

Immanuel Kant

“In Kant’s view, a Jewish way of life could not transcend empirical conditions. This question as to the possibility of independence from material considerations formed the very heart of Kant’s critique of traditional metaphysics.”¹⁰

In this section I will discuss Christian Supersessionism in the thought of Immanuel Kant, along with, at the same time, its re-articulation as part of the framework for a very modern ‘race problem’. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant sets out a methodology for the pursuit of analytic and synthetic judgements that are not dependent on ‘mere experience’ for verification. The ‘highest form’ of such knowledge would be, for Kant, a synthetic *a priori* judgement, in which an external concept (like ‘goodness’) is accorded to the object of discussion without any need for empirical or experiential reference. The possibility of building a form of reason upon the basis of which a meaningful and universal statement about that which lies completely out of human experience, such as “God is good”, can be made, is exactly Kant’s aim. Having access to the ‘most transcendental’ elements of existence in a way that *overcomes the dogma* of traditional metaphysics is what Kant seeks: “These unavoidable problems of pure reason itself are God, freedom and immortality.”¹¹ The pursuit of ‘pure reason’ is about overcoming particularity and establishing transcendental metaphysics that require no reference to particular experience.

The two figures whom we shall discuss in this chapter are themselves connected in important ways. As James S. Churchill writes in the translators introduction to Heidegger’s *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, “Heidegger looks upon Kant as being engaged in the same task as that with which he himself is occupied in *Sein und Zeit*, namely, in showing how it is possible for man as a “finite being which as such is delivered up to the essent” to have a comprehension of Being by virtue of which this being “is able to bring forth the ontological

¹⁰ Mack, M., *German Idealism and the Jew: The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), 24.

¹¹ Kant, I., *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), 139.

structure [Seinsverfassung] of the essent", i.e., render objective experience possible."¹² Thus, Heidegger and Kant are interested in the same problem of metaphysics, that being how to establish fundamental characteristics of reality. Heidegger, in that text, is clear that what he calls the 'school-concept' of metaphysics owes its peculiar development to two considerations. Firstly, the 'devout Christian interpretation of the world' led to structuring of metaphysics according to its content in which 'all that is not divine is created'. Amongst God's creations man enjoys the privileged position of that around whom all of creation is centred, for the purpose of 'the welfare of his soul and his own external existence.' In accordance with this belief, "the essent in totality is divided into God, nature, and man", with each having its own dedicated discipline of study: Theology, cosmology, and psychology. These three, for Heidegger, make up the field of 'special metaphysics', whilst ontology arches over them to form the field of 'general metaphysics,' which concerns 'the essent in general.'¹³

The organisation of metaphysics, with ontology as the overarching study of the *essent in general*, thus owes much to a Christian belief in the separation of God, nature, and man, which give rise to the different areas of study which remain somewhat distinguishable. The second consideration concerns a problem in which Kant was deeply involved, concerning the 'mode of knowledge' and the methodology by which it is attained. Because ontology is the highest form of study, the 'queen of the sciences', the question of how knowledge of it is achieved is of the highest import. Following Kant, mathematical knowledge is posited here as that which is 'free from the contingencies of experience', and so it is "...in the strictest sense rational and *a priori*, i.e., it is a pure, rational science."¹⁴

Kant's metaphysics is thus concerned with both 'the essent in general', and the method (pure reason) by which meaningful judgements can be made concerning it. How does this connect to questions of theology, faith, and supersessionism? The desire to transcend situated knowledge available to merely particular experience is echoed in Kant's more political works, in which he desires to save fallen human beings and deliver them to higher political and social systems. As Seán Molloy writes in the conclusion to his text, *Kant's International Relations*, it

¹² The word *Essent* was coined by Ralph Manheim to translate the word *Seiendes* used by Heidegger. It can be rendered in simpler terms as 'being'. Churchill, J. S., 'Translator's Introduction', in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, by Heidegger, M. (Indiana University Press, 1965), xvii.

¹³ Heidegger, M., *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics (1929)* (Indiana University Press, 1965), 13.

¹⁴ Heidegger, M., 13.

is through faith in an idea of humanity that humans can be saved from the ‘political and social systems’ that are the result of merely ‘prudential calculation of interest’ based on limited and imperfect knowledge, and not a higher, universal purpose or rationality. Human beings are thus cast as chronically insufficient, as chronically limited. Can they be saved from these conditions? Kant argues that, when limited to what we know from ‘the faculty of understanding and technical practical reason’ the answer must be no. However, if we understand this technical practical reason as merely preparatory for ‘pure practical reason and rational morality’ and place our faith in the idea of humanity which is its object, we might be saved. Humanity as a whole, through which salvation might be gained, is thus the subject of faith, whilst the human being is the subject of knowledge.¹⁵ It is on the basis of failing to properly acknowledge this theological keystone that Molloy criticises contemporary Kantianisms in IR.

The connection between this advocacy of faith in an idea of humanity and the methods of a transcendental metaphysics in pure reason, is the idea of moral religion that provides such a basis for faith that can be staked on pure reason.

“...between reason and Scripture there is, not only compatibility but also unity, so that whoever follows the one (under the guidance of moral concepts) will not fail to come across the other as well. Were this not so, we would either have two religions in one person, which is absurd, or a religion and a cult, in which case, since the latter is not (like religion) an end in itself but has value only as a means, the two would have to be often shaken up together that they might, for a short time, combine; like oil and water, however, they would soon have to separate again and let the purely moral religion (the religion of reason) float to the top.”¹⁶

There can be no doubts that this moral, rational religion which Kant invokes can only be Christianity: “...of all the public religions so far known, the Christian alone is of this type...”¹⁷ Now that we have done some of the groundwork in establishing some very basic features of Kant’s thought as it is relevant to our discussion of supersessionism, we are ready to move into a discussion of the recent work of J. Kameron Carter.

¹⁵ Molloy, S., *Kant’s International Relations*, 138–39.

¹⁶ Kant, I., *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 64.

¹⁷ Kant, I., 95.

J. Kameron Carter's account of supersessionism in Kant

Whilst Carter has been described as one of a generation of 'new black theologians',¹⁸ he himself resists this, defining himself as located in the field of Black Studies. Carter's work, *Race: A Theological Account* makes links between Christian Supersessionism and the construction of a modern notion of race, paying particular attention to the thought of Kant. The bridge that this work addresses is crucial to our thesis that seeks to bring the theological project of James Cone to bear upon political theology in IR. Carter's work on Kant provides an indispensable account of the process by which Christian Supersessionism became transformed into a racial, secular, 'scientific' story of white supremacy, which would become a significant part of the political and theological world against which Cone explodes in 1969. Kant therefore stands at the convergence of multiple threads: Christian Supersessionism in both its anti-Semitic and universalist forms; the transition and concealment of theological concepts into secular philosophies, and; the transition of Christian Supersessionism into a secularised understanding of race where White comes to signify Christian chosen-ness and universality, with Black signifying Jewish fallenness and particularity. Bringing the notion of Christian Supersessionism to bear upon the thought of Kant therefore reveals the significance of Cone's theological challenge: it is not only anti-racist and anti-universalist, but also in important respects anti-modern, whilst itself being articulated from within a deeply modern condition.

In *Race: A Theological Account*, J. Kameron Carter traces Christian Supersessionism as it becomes secularised into the philosophy of the enlightenment. Focusing primarily on Kant, Carter's aim is to link Christian Supersessionism as the implicit superiority (or chosen-ness) of Christians over Jews with one of its contemporary, secularised variants: modern racial reasoning. Carter is clear about what constitutes modern racial reasoning, and this points to the manifestations and secularisations of supersessionism as a theological problem in the modern western world. Carter writes that the 'racial imagination' of modernity originates from "Christianity's quest to sever itself from its Jewish roots."¹⁹ Carter calls upon the two steps of supersessionism to argue that the severance between Christianity and Judaism

¹⁸ Teel, K., 'The "New Black Theology" and the Dream of Post-Racialization', *Black Theology* 15, no. 1 (2 January 2017): 3–20.

¹⁹ Carter, J. K., *Race*, 4.

involved firstly casting Jews as ‘a race group in contrast to Western Christians’,²⁰ against whom Western Christians could understand themselves in relation to. Having racialised Jews, they could be cast as an inferior *group* and not just people who practice a religion that has, according to much Christian thought, been fulfilled and replaced by Christ and Christianity. What is key here is that the *racialisation* of the Jews is the first step in the separation between Christianity and Judaism, and, for Carter, their being cast as an *inferior* peoples is the second. This corresponds to the two dimensions of Christian Supersessionism discussed in Chapter 5, with specific emphasis that those peoples, religions, or cultures deemed un-Christian and particular, are also deemed inferior.²¹

Carter’s argument is that modern racial reasoning, and thus racism, must be understood as not just a social or political problem, but as a problem of theology. Theology must therefore reckon with racism as a brainchild of supersessionism, a persistently prominent aspect of Christian thought. Carter precedes his discussion of Kant with a discussion of Foucault’s genealogy of race presented in his 1975-1976 lectures entitled *Society Must Be Defended*.²² Therein Foucault analogises the ‘mythico-religious discourse of the Jews’ with the anti-despotic attitude of the Protestant Reformation that he argues is typical of an attitude of modernity, whilst recognising that Jewish survival constitutes a counter-historical refusal to abide to the power of the times. For Carter, by association with the symbol of ancient, biblical Israel, the Jewish people thus embody the “principle or attitude of counterhistory.”²³

‘Jewish existence’ is here pivotal to understanding what Foucault depicts as the ‘attitude’ of modernity, as well as to understanding what it is that ‘history’, in a very Hegelian sense, is trying to overcome. For Carter this centrality of the Jews does not just involve their cultural or religious differentiation, but central to it is their racialisation: “Foucault has tapped into the fact that the question of race arises inside the question of Israel, inside the question of

²⁰ Carter does not articulate the time-scale on which this takes place. If he is talking about the contestations taking place in the Apostolic period, for example represented in Paul’s letter to the Galatians, then ‘Western Christians’ is an anachronism, and here he makes equivalences between early processes of Christian self-articulation and self-definition and early-modern processes of Occidentalism defined against an Orient. Carter also mobilises the signifiers of East and West which cannot be projected back onto early Christianity: the centres of Christian thought and life would not become ‘the West’ for many centuries. This thesis offers the discussion in Chapter 5 as pointing to some key stages on this journey of the idea of Christian Supersessionism into the thought of modernity.

²¹ Carter, J. K., *Race*, 4.

²² Foucault, M., *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*, 1st ed. (Picador, 2003).

²³ Carter, J. K., *Race*, 73.

the theopolitical meaning of Jewish existence.”²⁴ So, for Carter, the ‘Jewish problem’ which, as we have seen, has been discussed by Christian theologians for centuries, is at the same time a ‘race problem’.

Whilst for Foucault anti-Semitism plays only a small role in the idea of race until the 19th century, for Carter the so-called ‘Jewish problem’ is central to the development of the modern invention of race *and* the modern invention of religion. Whilst Cone does not present a genealogy of race, his Christological insistence upon Jesus’ Jewishness is a crucial move in resisting the confluence of supersessionism and racism in modernity: it turns theology away from the abstract and the universal, and ‘returns’ it to a concretely located frame in which liberation, rather than universal salvation, can be articulated as Christianity’s core message.

Carter is not content to leave this analysis at an analogical level, instead seeking to nail down the ways in which the ‘problems’ of Judaism and race became central, though not in name, to political thought in modernity. Here Carter clearly articulates the linkage between early supersessionism and its implication in the theological-political condition of modernity. The anxiety produced by race in modernity, its signifying for the white world the inability to overcome mere particularity, mirrors theological anxiety over Jewish existence, “...and over what Jewish existence theopolitically signifies for a modern world struggling to come of age.”²⁵ Whilst Judaism is thought, in the supersessionist imagination, to hold humanity back from achieving universal salvation, so do the racialised, in the white supremacist imagination, hold back modernity from becoming a universal condition not beholden to particular boundaries.

Carter’s argument is that Kant’s vision of modernity is one in which the Jewish problem and the race problem, are overcome by the enlightenment figure of rational man, and the appropriation of Christianity into the essential property of ‘western civilisation’. Herein Kant figures Christianity as ‘modernity’s supreme, rational religion’, upon which his account of pure reason are built.²⁶ In *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant seeks to identify the extent to which Christianity is ‘patient of rational interpretation’. This results in the foregrounding of the Pauline-universal strand of Christian thought, and “the harshest criticism

²⁴ Carter, J. K., 73.

²⁵ Carter, J. K., 80.

²⁶ Carter, J. K., 81.

against the Israelite dimension of Christian faith.”²⁷ In Kant’s text we see clear undertones of the Christian supersession of Judaism as a crucial part of its claim to universality. For Kant, the ‘teacher’ of a pure rational religion would instruct “...that not the observance of external civic or statutory church duties but only the pure moral attitude of the heart shall be able to make a human being pleasing to God”.²⁸ The potential of Rational Religion for producing universally the ‘pure moral attitude of the heart’ is the ideal type against which Christianity must be judged, usurping ‘its place at the center of the religious universe.’²⁹ As Soulen notes, this displacement is merely performative, as Kant’s Rational Religion is actually a “remarkably faithful distillation of the church’s standard canonical narrative”.³⁰ He simply refigures the foundation of rational religion, from the revelation of the God of Israel in Christ, and the church’s confession of it, to a ‘universal moral experience.’ Whilst Kant reproduced the ‘standard narrative’ of Christianity, servitude to ‘civic or statutory church duties’ understood as remnants of the Judaic, law-observant elements of Christianity are regarded as in utter denial of the teaching of Christ as the teacher of a pure moral religion. Kant goes so far as to deny Judaism of the status of a religion at all, instead casting it as a merely statutory arrangement: “Now, although it also cannot be doubted that the Jews later on probably produced, each for himself, such and such a religious faith that was mingled in with the articles of their statutory faith, that religious faith nonetheless has never amounted to a component belonging to the legislation of Judaism.”³¹ Kant’s diatribe against Judaism in this text continues, including discussion of the symbolism of circumcision and criticism of early teachers that tried to articulate the meaning of Christ within the framework of Judaism.³² Here Kant reproduces the core problem of Christian Supersessionism as it pertains to the universality he seeks to establish in Rational Religion: The Christian attempt to establish universality is at the same time its attempt to establish itself as a religion distinct *from* Judaism. This is the paradox at the centre of Christian universality, which is drawn out by its identification with and in Christian Supersessionism. Its claim to universality *is* its claim to particularity, its claim to newness and uniqueness vis-à-vis its Judaic origins.

²⁷ Soulen, R. K., *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 59.

²⁸ Kant, I., *Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason (1793)*, trans. Pluhar, W. S. (Hackett Publishing, 2009), 173.

²⁹ Soulen, R. K., *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 62.

³⁰ Soulen, R. K., 62–63.

³¹ Kant, I., *Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason (1793)*, 140.

³² Kant, I., 141.

Kant did thus not imagine a secular modernity, and neither did he imagine a modernity that surpassed Christianity. In fact, Christianity is articulated into modernity's Rational Religion, upon the basis of which moral life can be impressed upon all without recourse to 'statutory duties.' This articulation of Christianity as the Rational Religion of modernity in conjunction with the European enlightenment and its self-centred chauvinism results in an obscured, supersessionist Christianity becoming masked as Western civilisation. And since this Western civilisation is articulated, too, with regard to the white race in Kant,³³ we find in him the complex overlapping of Christian Supersessionism with white supremacy, and its deep concealment in Kant's ideas of human universality and moral politics.

With political modernity as a transition from 'the people' existing in relation to a sovereign, to 'the people' existing in relation to an outside people or peoples, Carter argues that in Kant it is the Jew that is constructed as Europe's 'internal other': "*Aufklärung*, or Enlightenment, names the sociopolitical process of the internal organization and perfection of the species, a process that had as a central component isolating the other who was internal to the body politic of whiteness. It is here that I show this internal other to be the Jews, which Kant reads as a race group, one inferior to the European or to the race of whites."³⁴ Carter explains Kant's casting of 'the human races' as a process of progressively de-racialising 'the white race', until they become a group who alone can overcome, or transcend, their racial status, a teleology which is explicitly related to their Christianity. Western civilisation thus becomes Christ's work, undertaken not by the church of Christians but by the white race, a 'structural-aesthetic order and a sociopolitical arrangement.' For Carter, Kant renders the racialisation implicit in this story by calling it "not the work of whiteness but the task of the species as such."³⁵

Race is thus a condemnation to, and entrapment in, particularity, which only 'the white race' has been (and will be) able to move past, or rather to perfect their race-type in being "an analogy or index of the universal".³⁶ This (potential) perfection of humanity in the 'highest'

³³ Susan M. Shell offers some quotations from Kant's unpublished reflections: "(Whites:) contain all natural motive springs in affects and passions, all talents, all predispositions to culture and civilization and can obey as well as rule. They are the only ones who constantly progress toward perfection... Blacks can become disciplined and cultivated but never truly civilized." Shell, S. M., 'Kant's Concept of a Human Race', in *The German Invention of Race*, ed. Eigen, S. and Larrimore, M. (Ithaca, United States: State University of New York Press, 2006), 56.

³⁴ Carter, J. K., *Race*, 81.

³⁵ Carter, J. K., 89.

³⁶ Carter, J. K., 90.

group, white Christians, is expressed in Kant over and against the 'negro race' as that which fundamentally cannot overcome its particularity. Just as with Christianity's supersession of Judaism, with the universal gospel of Christianity expressed in opposition to the ethno-religious particularity of Judaism, the potential universal perfection of Europeans is expressed in opposition to a group viewed as trapped in their own particularity. Carter argues that Kant's racial anthropology remains pivotal in his work of the 1780s and onwards: they become silent but do not recede in import. Though Kant shifts to more political concerns, the racial problem of white, Christian perfection is, for Carter, a cornerstone of his thought.

Carter's account of Kant resonates with the argument of Seán Molloy, in his *Kant's International Relations: Political Theology of Perpetual Peace*. Though Molloy does not make the same explicit link with the racialisation involved in Kant's elevation of those carriers of 'pure moral religion' as a rational system capable of delivering Europeans to a higher existence and freeing them from their mere particularity, he too argues that anthropological questions lie at the heart of Kant's thought. It is thus in response to the central anthropological question 'What is man?' that Kant develops "perhaps his most important political-theological theme: the conjunction of humanity and holiness, and, conversely, that of human beings and unholiness...."³⁷ Human beings are severely limited in their capacity to know how to respond to this question, 'knowing' only through experience and technical practical reason. Pure reason, which is based on and made possible by rational religion, makes possible not the full attainment of 'humanity', but at least 'its approximation.' Rational Religion, and pure reason, can help us to move from our humanness, and towards a universal humanity.³⁸

Humanity is thus holy, where mere *human beings*, consigned to particularity, cannot be. The interests of humanity, too, are different from those of human beings, and are only accessible by 'rational human beings' who have eschewed their particularity and thus are liberated to musing about universal arrangements. Carter is clear about how this humanity/human being distinction is established not in a theoretical bubble, but with clear reference to, in particular, Jews. Jewish people, unable to "abstract themselves from their own bodies and enter into an

³⁷ Molloy, S., *Kant's International Relations*, 30.

³⁸ Molloy, S., 30–31.

autonomous way of existence”,³⁹ are posited as the negative example against which a universal idea of humanity is established. In mobilising ‘the Jews’ as the racial alien within Europe, the constitutive other, Kant makes the Jews stand in for ‘all nonwhite flesh’:

“Put differently, all nonwhite peoples become positioned within, or an articulation of, the *Judentum* (a broad catch-all term to encompass the Jewish people and all things Jewish, including Jewish religion or Judaism); the *Rassenfrage* becomes a moment within the *Judenfrage*.”⁴⁰

The potential of a by-now well established Christian Supersessionism is the election of white, European, Christian culture to that within which abstract, universal knowledge might be approached, and this is articulated over and against firstly the Jews, and secondly, within the same frame, non-white, and so inferior, races. This narrative clearly places Kant as a key moment in the secularisation of Christian Supersessionism and how it became transfigured into a white supremacy by Christianity becoming the property of ‘the white race’ as well as the vehicle for its perfection, whilst the spectre of ‘the Jew’, consigned to particularity, became extended to include the ‘inferior’ races: those groups against and over whom the universal rationality of white, European Christians, can be defined and demonstrated.

In this section I have discussed the manifestation and transformation of Christian Supersessionism in Kant. Kant stands at the intersection between theology and secularity, where Christian Supersessionism slides into white supremacy. Kant’s notion of Rational Religion is deeply compromised by its identification with Christian Supersessionism as the latter reveals a core paradox of Christian universality: the point at which Christianity claims universality is the point at which it establishes its own particularity, as a new faith that has superseded Judaism, a faith that welcomes Gentiles, that does not require circumcision, and so on. The aggressive nature of this supersession points to the reservation with which any Christian notion of universality must be approached as the basis for an ethical politics. In Kant this supersessionism slides into a story about white western civilisation that cannot be reduced to its secular parameters: the frame of supersessionism reveals its theological background. It is thus in explicit reaction to this that Cone combines the imperatives of

³⁹ Carter, J. K., *Race*, 104.

⁴⁰ Carter, J. K., 104.

liberation from racism and white supremacy with his reading of the core Christian message. It is at its root, on a theological stage, that Cone understands the need to challenge racism, not as a biological doctrine confined to modernity, but as rooted in the heart of Christian theology.

Behind Kant's image of an enlightened, rational man, lies a supersessionist understanding of Christianity as the only possible rational framework, (a 'pure moral religion' that can be predicated on reason, unlike those which depend on experience) built upon an explicit anti-Semitism which with times becomes a latent white supremacy. Seán Molloy's recent work on Kant points clearly to the entrapment of contemporary Kantianisms in a theological thought world that, in their presumption to be speaking in and to a secular world, they struggle to account for.⁴¹ Carter's treatment of Kant follows similar lines of critique but with specific reference to Kant's inheritance of a supersessionist Christianity, and the transformation of that supersessionist outlook into a racialised story of European supremacy. Identifying and explicating the transformation of supersessionism in Kant's thought is utterly central to firstly understanding the depth of the problem of supersessionism. Molloy's account, along with his linking of Kant's thought to contemporary cosmopolitanism, provides an indispensable bridge between Cone, Carter, and the fields of IR and political theory, in pointing squarely to influential theories and fields that are the contemporary inheritors of Kant's vision for transcending human particularity. Further study may reveal supersessionism at play in the deepest recesses of contemporary Kantian political thought, as distant as it may claim to be from any explicitly theological articulations.

It is in reaction to the constellation of a supersessionist, abstracted theology of Christian universalism, and its providing a basis for modern discourses of race, that Cone rejects abstraction in theology. Cone explicitly criticises abstract modes of thought as fundamentally unequipped to both understand and address racism and white supremacy, a criticism he directs at his peers in academic theology who either ignore racism or try to approach it from the thought-frameworks of 'white theology'.

⁴¹ Molloy provides an excellent discussion of this in his *Epilogue to Molloy, S., Kant's International Relations*, 165–76.

Carter's work on Kant also provides an indispensable account of the process by which Christian Supersessionism became transformed into a racial, secular, 'scientific' story of white supremacy, which would become the political and theological world against which Cone explodes in 1969. For Carter it is Kant that provides the most salient opportunity for expressing this process, but it was a process with multiple sites of promotion and antagonism.⁴² This discussion provides the important beginnings of a direct account of the depth of the theological problems to which Cone responds, as well as beginning to develop a picture of the breadth of the reverberation of supersessionism in modernity. From here we move to our final interlocutor, who also offers a salient point of discussion for the inheritance of some of Christianity's more troubling features.

Here we move to our final interlocutor. Kant stands at the crucial crossroads between theology and secularity, and Christian Supersessionism and a modern discourse of race, revealing the deep import of Cone's counter-supersessionist black theology of liberation. Heidegger picks up Kant's questions about metaphysics and epistemology, seeking to root metaphysics not in logic but in Being, which the Scholastics before him had identified with God as the 'root of all beings.'⁴³ The question of the implications of Christian Supersessionism for political theology in IR is well elaborated with a direct discussion of Heidegger, as he stands over Kant as a key source spanning the themes that we presented in Chapter 1: For Milbank, Prozorov, Paipais and Critchley he is an important interlocutor. Addressing the question of supersessionism in Heidegger therefore brings to bear the import of Cone's counter-supersessionist theology upon this crucial source for much political theology scholarship. We will here discuss Heidegger's main work, *Being and Time*.

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*—a summary

Being and Time is a work which has influenced, and continues to influence, many figures and strains of continental philosophy and political metaphysics in the last century. In his landmark work, Heidegger repeatedly states that his purpose is to 'work out the question of the meaning of Being.' In pursuit of this question Heidegger argues that the meaning of Being as

⁴² See, in particular: Keel, T., *Divine Variations: How Christian Thought Became Racial Science* (Stanford University Press, 2019).

⁴³ Wolfe, J., *Heidegger and Theology* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 23.

a condition is essentially different from the mere existence of entities, and that it is somehow hidden behind and within apparent entities.

Heidegger argues that the question of Being is, whilst the most 'soaring of generalities', the most basic and the most concrete inquiry that a science can undertake. He posits his question of the meaning of Being as the most fundamental question, arguing that "*Basically, all ontology, no matter how rich and compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim, if it has not first adequately clarified the meaning of Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task.*"⁴⁴ In Heidegger's eyes, there really is no excuse for *not* conducting an inquiry as 'primordial' as that which he conducts, if the aim is to say anything meaningful at all about ontology.

To work out the meaning of the question of Being, Heidegger argues that we must choose a particular entity through which we will approach the meaning of Being in general: through whose particularity as an entity the inquiry must force, to access the more deeply held and 'primordial' condition of Being. The particular entity which Heidegger 'chooses' to conduct this inquiry is the inquirer ("we") itself, which is given the term "*Dasein*". *Dasein* is apparently distinguished for this task because, in its very Being, Being *is an issue* for it. *Dasein* is thus ontically distinctive because it *is* ontological: it alone seeks an answer to the question of the meaning of Being. Heidegger's inquiry is thus presented as a mere formalisation, and more rigorous pursuit, of what *Dasein* already does, which is to think and be concerned about its own Being.

Following the book's dedication to Edmund Husserl, Heidegger is quick to plant his flag in the camp of phenomenological inquiry. He is keen to use a method by which "this entity can show itself in itself and from itself",⁴⁵ and which attempts to strip away any presuppositions which have not been fully demonstrated: "Thus "phenomenology" means... to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself."⁴⁶ Heidegger makes an important point about distinguishing phenomenology from other 'sciences', like theology: "'Phenomenology' neither designates the object of its researches, nor characterizes the subject-matter thus compromised. The word merely informs us of the "how" with which *what*

⁴⁴ Heidegger, M., *Being and Time* (1927), 31.

⁴⁵ Heidegger, M., 37.

⁴⁶ Heidegger, M., 58.

is to be treated in this science gets exhibited and handled.”⁴⁷ Heidegger’s use of phenomenology is thus presented as a value-neutral method for allowing the meaning of Being to make itself self-evident.

Despite these appeals to the ‘most basic and concrete’ nature of the question of the meaning of Being, and despite the implications of trying to approach ontology from what is depicted as the most ‘ground-up’ method possible, Heidegger suggests that his pursuit moves towards, and thus acknowledges, a *transcendental* understanding of Being. Heidegger writes that whilst Being pertains to every entity, it and its structure lie ‘beyond’ mere entities: “Its ‘universality’ is to be sought higher up.”⁴⁸ Being is described here as “the transcendens pure and simple... *Phenomenological truth (the disclosedness of Being) is veritas transcendentalis.*”⁴⁹ This passage is worth dwelling on long enough to remark that it also gives away some hint as to some *content* of the *veritas transcendentalis* to be established by the following phenomenological analysis: “And the transcendence of Dasein’s Being is distinctive in that it implies the possibility and the necessity of the most radical *individuation.*”⁵⁰

Heidegger is keen to depict his analysis as distinct from previous appeals to metaphysics, stating that his phenomenological analysis revolves around the ‘everydayness’ of Dasein. Indeed this everyday, ordinary, self-evidence is taken as the transcendentalised starting point for the whole analysis of the question of the meaning of Being. Heidegger calls this Dasein’s existential spatiality, which is ignored “by the naïve supposition that man is, in the first instance, a spiritual Thing which subsequently gets misplaced ‘into’ a space.”⁵¹ Thus we see that an ‘essential structure’, or the ‘basic structure’ of Dasein is finite, and *from* that finite entity can we move towards a *transcendentalis*, and *not* the other way around.

Care

Through the illustration of the basic state of Dasein as fundamentally being *in the world*, we find one of the primary aspects of Dasein’s Being: care. Care can be seen in the most basic assertion of Dasein as an ontologically prior being: “Dasein is an entity for which, in its Being,

⁴⁷ Heidegger, M., 58–59.

⁴⁸ Heidegger, M., 62.

⁴⁹ Heidegger, M., 62.

⁵⁰ Heidegger, M., 62.

⁵¹ Heidegger, M., 83.

that Being is an issue.”⁵² Care (sometimes expressed as ‘concern’) is an essential ontological characteristic of Dasein: “Care, as a primordial structural totality, lies ‘before’ every factual ‘attitude’ and ‘situation’ of Dasein, and it does so existentially *a priori*; this means that it always lies *in* them.”⁵³ Dasein’s ontological care can be accessed through certain ‘states of mind’, such as anxiety: these states of mind show that Dasein is clearly a *concerned* Being, because if it didn’t *care* it could not *be-anxious*. For Heidegger these states of mind are not just physical phenomena but give us access to the deepest ontological truths about Dasein’s Being: “Essentially, a state-of-mind implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matters to us.”⁵⁴ Thus, care as an essential ontological trait of Dasein is *revealed*, or disclosed, to us in a very everyday experiential way, through moments of anxiety that show that, *prior* to particular attitudes and situations, Dasein has the fundamental characteristic of Being-concerned.

Being-fallen

Despite the claim that Dasein is first a finite entity, Heidegger argues that Dasein ‘finds itself’ as having been ‘fallen’ *from* itself (or from authenticity) *into* the world. This stems from the argument that in its full authenticity Dasein is oriented not towards the world, but towards its own potentiality-for-Being, and that this authenticity is found partly in ‘radical individuation’. Falling from the potential for authenticity, Dasein finds itself in the everydayness of Being-with Others in the world, bogged down with preconceptions and presuppositions encapsulated in “idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity [which reveal]... a basic kind of Being which belongs to everydayness; we call this the “*falling*” of Dasein.”⁵⁵ It is important to note that it is *from* the potentiality for *authentic* Being that Dasein falls, and it falls into a tempting and tranquilised state of good faith and ‘confident understanding’ which are the utmost alienation from Dasein’s radical potentiality for Being: “When Dasein, tranquillized, and ‘understanding’ everything, thus compares itself with everything, it drifts along towards an alienation in which its ownmost potentiality-for-Being is hidden from it. Falling Being-in-the-world is not only tempting and tranquilizing; it is at the same time *alienating*.”⁵⁶ Heidegger depicts the everyday as fundamentally empty: “Dasein plunges... into

⁵² Heidegger, M., 236.

⁵³ Heidegger, M., 238.

⁵⁴ Heidegger, M., 177.

⁵⁵ Heidegger, M., 219.

⁵⁶ Heidegger, M., 222.

the groundlessness and nullity of inauthentic everydayness. But this plunge remains hidden from Dasein by the way things have been publicly interpreted, so much so, indeed, that it gets interpreted as a way of 'ascending' and 'living concretely'.⁵⁷

The theological undertones of this fallen-ness have their roots in both Luther and Paul: "Heidegger's early conception of the world as a temptation obviously has theological sources, as the lecture on "The Problem of Sin in Luther" of 1924 delivered in Bultmann's seminar on the ethics of Paul invites us to think, but the concept of world in Heidegger is not itself theological but "formal," and has implications not limited to the theological sphere."⁵⁸

Against this fall Heidegger makes his account of authentic Being, though he is careful to say that it is not a physical ascent but something internal to Dasein's understanding of itself and of its potentiality-for-Being: "...*authentic* existence is not something which floats above falling everydayness; existentially, it is only a modified way in which such everydayness is seized upon... Far from determining its nocturnal side, it constitutes all Dasein's days in their everydayness."⁵⁹ Whilst Dasein is fundamentally a fallen entity, this characterisation is not presented simplistically as a 'bad' condition out of which Dasein can 'ascend' into authenticity. Being-fallen is fundamental to Dasein, along with its existence in a world (Being-in-the-world), which means that in striving for authenticity Dasein cannot simply step 'out of' the world and into some other loftier condition.

Here we glimpse the circularity of Heidegger's account of the fundamental ontology of Dasein: it exists in a perpetual cycle of authenticity and inauthenticity, truth and untruth, between being trapped in the ontical and glimpsing (but never being able to inhabit) its ontological potential. In Heidegger's account there is no way out of this circular structure, indeed it is ontologically fundamental to Dasein, but neither is it depicted with the anguish and frustration that might be expected of such a purgatory.

Being Authentically, or Being-towards-death

Heidegger argues that in Dasein there is always a lack, always the potential for something akin to further fulfilment: "As long as Dasein is, there is in every case something still outstanding, which Dasein can be and will be. But to that which is thus outstanding, the 'end' itself belongs.

⁵⁷ Heidegger, M., 223.

⁵⁸ Reid, J. D., *Heidegger's Moral Ontology* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 203 n.62.

⁵⁹ Heidegger, M., *Being and Time* (1927), 224.

The 'end' of Being-in-the-world is death."⁶⁰ Since Dasein's Being is most fundamentally structured by temporality (Being-towards-death), then care must 'reckon with' time,⁶¹ and it is only within the horizon of time that "the projection of a meaning of Being in general can be accomplished."⁶²

Existing temporally in Being-towards-death means that Dasein can never achieve wholeness, because the fulfilment of its temporal existence is at the same time its end in death. However, there are fleeting moments when Dasein can glimpse authentic Being: authentic Being is authentically Being-towards-death, just as an unripe fruit brings itself to fullness in *moving towards* ripeness, whilst not yet being ripe: "The fruit brings itself to ripeness, and such a bringing of itself is a characteristic of its Being as a fruit."⁶³ Judith Wolfe articulates this dimension of Heidegger's thought as accepted, though not in full, by a number of existentialist theologians that have featured in our previous discussions:

"'Existentialist theologians' such as Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich and John Macquarrie embrace Heidegger's early, 'existentialist' description of human life as fraught with anxiety in the face of our 'thrownness' and uncertain future, but reject (in one way or another) Heidegger's claim that it is in *accepting* the inescapable, undelegable possibility of death that humans find 'authenticity', and instead hold out Christianity as a salvation from that fate."⁶⁴

The trouble with this striving for authenticity is that the 'they' persist in tranquilising Dasein about its inevitable death: "The "they" gives its approval and aggravates the *temptation* to cover up from oneself one's ownmost Being-towards-death. This evasive concealment in the face of death dominates everydayness so stubbornly that, in Being with one another, the 'neighbours' often still keep talking the 'dying person' into the belief that he will escape death and soon return to the tranquillized everydayness of the world of his concern."⁶⁵ Thus we see how it is the 'they' who are implicated in Dasein's fall into inauthentic everydayness, denying Being-towards-death as the temporal horizon of authentic Being. Here we see Heidegger's

⁶⁰ Heidegger, M., 276–77.

⁶¹ Heidegger, M., 278.

⁶² Heidegger, M., 278.

⁶³ Heidegger, M., 287.

⁶⁴ Wolfe, J., *Heidegger and Theology*, 177–78.

⁶⁵ Heidegger, M., *Being and Time* (1927), 297.

suspicion of relationality: not only is transcendence achieved, or glimpsed, through radical individuation, but the 'they', and in fact all relationality, are depicted as dragging Dasein down *from* having the potential for soaring existential authenticity, *to* the mire and mess of inauthentic everydayness. Heidegger persists in stating that authentic Being is non-relational. As the most radical possibility of Dasein, death characterises the potential for Dasein's wholeness, though it provides nothing which can be actualised in Dasein's Being.⁶⁶ This means that it is only in the *anticipation* of death Dasein can glimpse authenticity: "Anticipation turns out to be the possibility of understanding one's *ownmost* and uttermost potentiality-for-Being—that is to say, the possibility of *authentic existence*."⁶⁷ This anticipation must be taken over by Dasein alone, as death cannot be experienced by the Other, and so is phenomenologically wholly individual:

"Anticipation allows Dasein to understand that that potentially-for-being in which its ownmost Being is an issue, must be taken over by Dasein alone. Death does not just 'belong' to one's own Dasein in an undifferentiated way; death *lays claim* to it as an *individual* Dasein. The non-relational character of death, as understood in anticipation, individualizes Dasein down to itself.... It makes manifest that all Being-alongside the things with which we concern ourselves, and all Being-with Others, will fail us when our ownmost potentiality-for-Being is the issue. Dasein can be *authentically itself* only if it makes this possible for itself of its own accord."⁶⁸

Heidegger returns to states-of-mind to suggest how authentic being-towards-death might manifest, arguing that it is in anxiousness that Dasein is truly free to be towards-death, as it is in anxiousness that Dasein sees the ultimate emptiness of its everyday existence, where the only solid ontological ground is the inevitability of death. This is depicted at the same time as sobering, and as utterly liberating Dasein from all self-concealments, bringing with it an 'unshakeable joy'.⁶⁹

In between and amongst the sites visited on this whistle-stop tour are a great number of tangents, clarifications, caveats, and additions. Many of these seem rather familiar to the

⁶⁶ Heidegger, M., 307.

⁶⁷ Heidegger, M., 307.

⁶⁸ Heidegger, M., 308.

⁶⁹ Heidegger, M., 358.

theologically-curious reader, including clauses on conscience and guilt, fallenness, fear, selfhood, historicity, discourse, and a great many more which cannot possibly be squashed into this summary.

Ultimately, *Being and Time* presents a narrative of the human condition as fundamentally—indeed ontologically—trapped in cyclical undercurrents which rage underneath waves of secularisation and the rejection of enlightenment liberalism: occasionally able to look up and see the surface (ontological fulfilment, authentic existence), but unable to get there due to the ontological essence of the circular motion itself. In this condition, all there is to do is to accept the inevitability of an isolated death, and to decide, wholly individually and for oneself, how to live authentically in anticipation of death. The salvation/redemption rug is firmly and resoundingly pulled out from under the feet of Dasein as it tumbles around between inauthentic everydayness and the *veritas transcendentalis*.

Heidegger and Christian Supersessionism

“From his early writings in which he finds in his fantasy of Paul-versus-the-Jews a vision of ‘struggle as such’ to the post-war fantasies of a technocratic-functional world handed over to a global ‘Jewish conspiracy’, Heidegger is actually not ever straying far from the everyday clichés of the Christian problem in Germany, never facing them, never overturning them, despite his claims to be moving ever farther afield from Christianity.”⁷⁰

Heidegger’s relationship to Christianity is far from one-dimensional. In his explicitly philosophical years he evidently rejected a theological frame. As John Peacocke writes:

“Despite this acknowledged debt to his theological past Heidegger believes that were he addressed by the call of faith, for him the real subject matter of theology, he would have to close up shop on thinking. Thinking and theology are seen to be radically incommensurable. He claims that “thinking” is that which man can pursue on his own and this falters or comes to an end when man is addressed by revelation.”⁷¹

⁷⁰ Blanton, W., ‘Anarchist Singularities or Proprietorial Resentments? On the Christian Problem in Heidegger’s Notebooks of the 1930s’, 108.

⁷¹ Peacocke, J., ‘Heidegger and the Problem of Onto-Theology’, in *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Blond, P. (Routledge, 2002), 94.

Evidence of Heidegger's supposed disdain for theology is often furnished with a quotation which evidences his assertion that Christianity is at odds with philosophy: in the *Introduction to Metaphysics* lectures, he states that "A "Christian philosophy" is a round square and a misunderstanding."⁷² This passage shows how, for Heidegger, philosophy is the realm of 'reason,' whilst theology is the realm of faith, and for that reason they are incompatible.

Despite this erstwhile distance between philosophy and theology, in recent scholarship much has been written about the theological nature of Heidegger's thought. In his book *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology*, Simon Critchley accounts the process by which Heidegger moves from Catholicism to Protestantism, and the increasing importance of the Apostle Paul for him: "Heidegger's break with Catholicism in 1919 leads him, the following year, to Paul. The first thing to note here is the essential Protestantism of Heidegger's turn to Paul."⁷³ In *Heidegger's Eschatology: Theological Horizons in Martin Heidegger's Early Work*, Judith Wolfe uses newly available early letters and texts of Heidegger's to build an account of his "continued debt to theological sources after his renunciation of academic theology and his turn towards the a-theistic philosophical method epitomized in *Being and Time* (1927)."⁷⁴ Despite the counter-argument against the 'secularisation of theological ideas' criticism claiming that Heidegger is simply speaking to greater depth than anything so dogmatic as theology has yet managed to plumb, Wolfe points out that, in the end, "Heidegger's eschatology, by positing death or Nothing rather than eternal life or God as the horizon of an eschatological (and therefore authentic) existence, itself runs into problems that may best be explained as consequences of attempting to eradicate the religious foundations of an irreducibly religious concept."⁷⁵ Heidegger's complex relationship with theology makes him all the more interesting for discussion in this chapter, as here we seek to suggest that supersessionism remains a deep problem for thought beyond the strictly defined corridors of academic systematic theology.

Heidegger does not at all easily fit the mould of a straightforwardly supersessionist thinker. Whilst he venerates the absolute, the ontological, he does not simply advocate an escape

⁷² Heidegger, M., *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935) (Yale University Press, 2000), 8.

⁷³ Critchley, S., *The Faith of the Faithless*, 168.

⁷⁴ Wolfe, J., *Heidegger's Eschatology: Theological Horizons in Martin Heidegger's Early Work* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

⁷⁵ Wolfe, J., 5.

from the banal existence of everyday life. In fact, he argues that it is in a certain approach to the everyday that the ontological is found. It is in personal introspection that one exists authentically for Heidegger: a direct, though not one-way, passage from the inner self to the absolute, reminiscent of Luther. In *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, Theodore Kisiel notes lectures delivered by Heidegger in 1919, whilst working at Freiburg as Husserl's assistant, and just a few years before his appointment to professor at 'Protestant Marburg':

"Heidegger concludes this particular course-hour with an extended example which will prove decisive for the coming years, by noting that the very emphasis on the self-world in the factic experience of life takes its starting point in the history of ideas from the experience of the early Christian community. But this Christian insight into the inner life of the self in pursuit of a Kingdom "not of this world" was from the start subjected to distortion and concealment by the "worldly" categories of ancient philosophy or "dogma"... It therefore had to be constantly renewed and reasserted, as in Augustine, Luther, and Kierkegaard... Christianity therefore gives rise to the "historical consciousness" in the West as well as to our sense of a self-world."⁷⁶

This combination of the inner life and historical consciousness is presented in the personality of Jesus, who points us to inner life but also beyond the 'merely theoretical transcendence'. God reveals himself as a historical reality in a 'redemptive history', placed in 'the thick of history.'⁷⁷ This is echoed by Judith Wolfe, who writes that for Heidegger, God is an intrinsically historical God, "to be grasped in and through historical existence."⁷⁸ However, this 'historical existence' also slides into an inner, personal experience: a worldly, ontical experience to be sure, but a highly abstracted one. The theological claim of Luther, that God can be known through suffering (represented by the passion of Christ), is refigured by Heidegger into an experiential understanding of access to the ontological which he locates in the 'passion of man', the suffering revealed to man by his finitude.⁷⁹

There lies here an important connection between an experiential understanding of suffering, drawn from and standing in for Luther's argument that the God revealed in Christ can only be

⁷⁶ Kisiel, T., *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (University of California Press, 1995), 77.

⁷⁷ Kisiel, T., 77.

⁷⁸ Wolfe, J., *Heidegger and Theology*, 24.

⁷⁹ "The temporal and restless existence of humans, in its difference and distance from divine peacefulness and stasis, is the main source of our suffering." Wolfe, J., 44–46, 46.

understood through the suffering of his Passion, and God. The ultimate is approached in temporal, factual, historical existence. Therein lies the inseparability between the ontological and the ontic, and Heidegger is clear that his thoughts themselves are intrinsically drawn from his own 'factual existence.' Theodore Kisiel writes that, contrary to 'the pronouncements of would-be purist Heideggarians' we cannot, therefore, afford to separate Heidegger's philosophy from his biography. Heidegger himself attests to this, writing that "I work concretely and factually out of my "I am," out of my intellectual and wholly factic origin, milieu, life-contexts, and whatever is available to me from these as a vital experience in which I live..."⁸⁰ Heidegger's philosophy cannot, therefore, be separated from his biography, nor from the contexts of the world in which he lived.⁸¹ Here we come to the charged topic of Heidegger's extant anti-Semitism.⁸²

As Pierre Bourdieu notes (published in 1991), "Not even the most ruthless investigators into the author of *Sein und Zeit's* murky compromises with Nazism have looked at the texts themselves for indices, admissions, or hints liable to reveal or elucidate the political commitments of its author."⁸³ Heidegger's philosophy, despite his declaration of the absolute centrality of his factual existence to his thought, is generally separated from his political commitments, treated as a separate, abstract structure:

"Whether they are opponents who reject his philosophy in the name of its affiliation to Nazism or apologists who separate the philosophy from its author's sympathy for Nazism, all the critics contrive to ignore the fact that Heidegger's philosophy might be only a sublimated philosophical version, imposed by the forms of censorship specific to the field of philosophical production, of the political or ethical principles which determined the philosopher's support for Nazism."⁸⁴

Much recent scholarship, however, has drawn attention to this, not least after the publication of the *Black Notebooks*. As Donatella Di Cesare's work on Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* shows,

⁸⁰ Quoted in Kisiel, T., *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, 78.

⁸¹ Kisiel, T., 79.

⁸² The publication of his 'Black Notebooks' has re-energised this topic, with sustained criticism declaring that "Heidegger's metaphysical anti-Semitism has a theological source, a political intention, and a philosophical rank." Di Cesare, D. E., 'The "Jewish Question" and the Question of Being: Heidegger before and after 1945', *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 4, no. 2 (3 July 2017): 173.

⁸³ Bourdieu, P., *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger* (Stanford University Press, 1991), 2.

⁸⁴ Bourdieu, P., 3–4.

Heidegger's anti-Semitism went far beyond a simple inheritance of supersessionism or replacement theology to a twisted logic about the destiny of Germany, now the concrete nation moving toward the fulfilment of world history, being sabotaged by the Jews, including how the Holocaust was in fact a Jewish 'self-annihilation' brought about by historical mechanisms of 'the Jews'' own creation.⁸⁵ His manifest anti-Semitism can no longer be of any doubt: "The old *topos* of the apolitical conformist no longer makes any sense."⁸⁶ The smoking gun of Heidegger's anti-Semitism, however, comes too late: his philosophy has already been separated from his political commitments, has been treated as a separate archive (as did this chapter in the above summary), and in *that* form it has become hugely influential in contemporary philosophy. Identifying that its author held explicitly anti-Semitic views cannot wind in the influence of Heidegger's philosophical work. Identifying supersessionist themes in Heidegger's thought may go some way in providing a conceptual bridge between the content of his philosophy (such as *Being and Time*), in which it is difficult to identify extant anti-Semitic themes, and the troubling relation of his thought vis-à-vis the spectre of Judaism.

Heidegger and the 'Christian problem'

"Heidegger, despite himself, remains centrally within an old, even ancient, set of philosophical coordinates that, as already mentioned, I like to call the Christian problem."⁸⁷

The vocabulary of the 'Christian problem' may help to begin to open discussion about supersessionist themes in Heidegger's thought. For Ward Blanton, Heidegger's entrapment within what he calls the 'Christian Problem' is fatal for Heidegger's extant philosophy of struggle. This is because it takes the Pauline struggle as an essential image of struggle, and so imagines that Paul's very real struggle against Jews and Jewish Christians can be depicted as an 'abstracted struggle' which floats above any worldly particularities. The reason that taking Paul's struggle as essential struggle produces this 'Christian problem' is precisely due to the two faces of supersessionism: the self-affirming and self-grounded 'singularity' of the Christian moment in Christ's resurrection being fundamentally attached to the struggle against the Jews and Jewish Christians. The 'for itself' of a fundamental ontology, especially

⁸⁵ Di Cesare, D. E., 'The "Jewish Question" and the Question of Being', 178.

⁸⁶ Di Cesare, D. E., 180.

⁸⁷ Blanton, W., 'Anarchist Singularities or Proprietary Resentments? On the Christian Problem in Heidegger's Notebooks of the 1930s', 101.

when located in the archive of Christian Supersessionism, as Blanton argues that Heidegger is, always also entails an 'against whom'. Heidegger is thus trapped in this 'Christian problem' which claims a transcendence which is gained by very worldly acts of wrestling for discursive power.

This embroilment in supersessionism has become more and more obvious after the publication of the *Black Notebooks*. Indeed, it is testimony to the difficulty of locating these currents in Heidegger's 'main' philosophy that their publication has resulted in such a sudden explosion of work on his anti-Semitism. But can we see it in the pages of his fundamental ontology?

Heidegger's ontology as summarised above can be depicted as an attempt to ground metaphysics in everyday life, where everyday life becomes an experience of the inner self and not of the self in a society. This centralisation of Dasein is radical indeed in the corridors of metaphysics, in which the experiencing individual is often nowhere to be found. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant explicitly wishes to purge it. But Heidegger's individual is so abstracted from anything *in which* it lives that its function is one of legitimation of Heidegger's fundamental ontology. Grounding ontology in Dasein invites the feeling of involvement in the reader, and ontological aspects of Dasein such as *care* are presented as fundamental because "Dasein is an entity for which, in its Being, that Being is an issue."⁸⁸ Cone, by contrast, is utterly dismissive of such abstracted invocations of Being as an existential condition, seeing the world into which we are thrown as providing adequate grounds for approaching fundamental questions. Dasein can seek to live authentically *towards* its 'most' finite horizon, death, but any other worldly manifestation or horizon of finitude, is utterly omitted. In this sense Heidegger seeks to follow Kant's aim in establishing a method by which the judgements necessary for a transcendental metaphysics can be emptied of dogma and can therein achieve generalisability. Heidegger's 'ontological moods' are one such attempt to appeal to everydayness without any culturally or socially particular content (and makes us think of Cone's polemical words against the Death of God 'controversy' being the territory of a 'suburban loneliness' available only to comfortable white middle classes in the US).

⁸⁸ Heidegger, M., *Being and Time* (1927), 236.

The essential, and potentially ontologically indicative experience of anxiety in Heidegger is intricately linked to the canon of Christian thought. Drawn from Kierkegaard's thought, such as *The Concept of Anxiety*,⁸⁹ the way in which Dasein approaches the question of the meaning of Being is through an experience that is linked to the idea of original sin. In his work Kierkegaard seeks to address original sin 'psychologically', in relation to the experience of anxiety which can tell us something essential about 'the dizziness of freedom'.⁹⁰ Probing into the ontological function of anxiety leads Judith Wolfe to draw clear parallels not with Kierkegaard, but with Luther. For Luther, true believers were those who could detect a '*status corruptionis*', and who could resist it in the present, instead 'expectantly awaiting' God. This echoes, Heidegger's position that philosophers are those who recognise Dasein's factual worldliness and 'resolute self-projection onto the future'. Because Dasein is temporally finite this self-projection must include the recognition of the inevitability of death. This expectant waiting, of either God or death, shows that anxiety rather than hope is the 'dominant mood of eschatological expectation', the mood in which the ultimate might begin to be accessed, understood, or in which it is revealed. In Heidegger the nothingness of death as the ultimate finitude of Dasein has replaced God as that for which we anxiously wait, providing 'the horizon of man's self recognition'.⁹¹

Whilst the inner experience of certain disclosive moods, such as anxiety, are located and experienced in the banal everyday, they lead Dasein into an ontological framework which is fundamentally oriented to what is beyond an unknowable horizon. But this anxiety, now a cornerstone of the revelation of the meaning of Being to Dasein itself, must be understood as something more than just a 'feeling'. As John D. Caputo writes, in a discussion of the relative disclosive-ness of different moods, the ontological moods of which anxiety is an example go beyond the mind-body binary in which philosophy had been stuck for some centuries. Caputo contrasts Heidegger with 'the empiricists', for whom moods are merely 'private mental states'. For Heidegger moods actually have great disclosive power, because they are 'a-tuned' to the world. Moods or feelings are thus a highly a-tuned response to the world, and a

⁸⁹ Kierkegaard, S., *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Oriented Deliberation in View of the Dogmatic Problem of Hereditary Sin* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2014).

⁹⁰ Pöggeler, O., 'Destruction and Moment', in *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in His Earliest Thought*, ed. Kisiel, T. and van Buren, J. (State University of New York Press, 1994), 143.

⁹¹ Wolfe, J., *Heidegger's Eschatology*, 83.

response to finding oneself thrown into it. Anxiety is the most important of these revelatory moods, having the potential to reveal Being itself.⁹²

What is perhaps most troubling about Heidegger is exactly that, despite his extant anti-Semitism and Nazi party membership, and mistreatment of Jewish colleagues, his philosophy at times appears to afford the most fundamental importance to just the kind of 'factual existence' with which Jews are identified by much Christian thought. Whilst for Kant factual existence is to be overcome, and can only be overcome by the rational, European, Christian man, for Heidegger it appears at times to be the basis of the deepest access to fundamental Being, and the constraining element in which a knowledge of Being cannot deliver Dasein from factual, experiential life itself. The factual for Heidegger is, however, expressed as an essentially inner experience. This leads to the impression that anxiety alone may serve a similar function for Heidegger as 'faith alone' did for Origen, Augustine, Luther, and Barth. The factual existence upon which Dasein approaches the question of the meaning of being is not in Heidegger's philosophy the factual existence of membership of a community, sharing particular practices, producing and reproducing a particular culture, and being ontologically defined by these.

Heidegger's intricate relationship to, and often dependence on, Christian theological thought can help in understanding *his* factual existence, and the ways in which his context gave rise to his thought (rather than abstracting his metaphysics out of his life-context and treating it as a pure philosophy of being-as-such). His insistence on the centrality of his life-context for his philosophy must not prevent us from overlooking his extant anti-Semitism as a core feature of his thought. Perhaps the abstraction of Dasein as 'any being that cares about its own being', and the mood of anxiety standing in for a 'faith alone', are the manifestation of a supersessionist logic in Heidegger's philosophy. His account of death, and the orientation of life towards it, as the moment at which authentic existence can be reached (and thus particular existence transcended) may be simply a temporal postponement, until death, of the Christian supersessionist desire to transcend particularity.⁹³

⁹² Caputo, J. D., 'Sorge and Kardia: The Hermeneutics of Factual Life and the Categories of the Heart', in *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in His Earliest Thought*, ed. Kisiel, T. and van Buren, J. (State University of New York Press, 1994), 336.

⁹³ Or, as Ward Blanton polemically puts it, Heidegger may perhaps be regarded as "A resentful dialectician looking to crush the opposition while spouting off about the openness of being and the singular (rather than

Returning to Cone

At this point the distance between Cone and Heidegger is considerable, the latter having been introduced in the discussion of the manifestation of supersessionism in modern European thought, a theological problem indicated by Cone's challenge to abstracted theology epitomised by his proclamation that Jesus is black because he was a Jew. Putting them in direct conversation is therefore difficult because of their apparent incommensurability. On a basic level, Cone would outright reject Heidegger's thought because he did not believe in a liberating God and held views about the inferiority of peoples. He was also engaged in philosophical discussions about the meaning of being at a deeply abstracted level, despite his assertion of the need to establish the most concrete of foundations. This concretion was found, evidently, in the individual verifiability of ontological moods rather than in some concretely worldly political or social relations.

What Cone offers that Heidegger cannot is an account of the meaning of being that means something to the oppressed. Heidegger's fundamental ontology is deeply isolating and can easily lead to despair about the absence of external meaning, hardly fruitful grounds upon which to build a worldly liberative politics that challenges white supremacy and theological abstraction. In the face of dehumanisation, Cone must be concerned with the active humanisation of a particular group, black people in the United States (as well as beyond). This is a project that demands particular commitments and worldly articulations, all of which is beyond Heidegger's remit, which as discussed here is confined to the pursuit of authenticity. For Cone, an authentic life would be an authentically Christian life, and the authentically Christian, for him, is that which actively realises liberation in this world. For Heidegger it is, instead, the individual embrace of death as the ultimate horizon of life, and therefore the impossibility of realising the ontological as such.

Cone does not write about the attainment of liberation, which indicates that he thinks of it not as a state but as a struggle that will never be final. In this sense his theology of liberation does resonate with the never-ending cycle between ontological and ontical conditions in

dialectical) site of emergence of being is just a revenge-monger masquerading as Schürmann's happy nominalist hippy. Or, differently put, the Heideggerian legacy must, now more than ever, face the fundamental philosophical problem that I call 'the Christian', the problem, to this day, of resentment in the form, precisely, of supersessionist aggressivity." Blanton, W., 'Anarchist Singularities or Proprietorial Resentments? On the Christian Problem in Heidegger's Notebooks of the 1930s', 112.

Heidegger. Cone is not fully clear about this, but his silence on what a 'liberated state' would look like suggests that he would see its pursuit as a constant process that infinitely renews itself as fallen humans oppress and subjugate each other.

The identification of what Ward Blanton calls 'the Christian problem' in Heidegger raises interesting questions for Cone, too. Cone is clearly a Christian thinker, holding Jesus to be the Messiah, in whom God came to earth. Much of Cone's account of the divinity of liberation is drawn from the Hebrew Bible, and the accounts of Israelite liberations, particularly from Egypt. What exactly is the relationship between Cone's Christianity and its Jewish parent? His insistence on Jesus' Jewishness seems evidences his resistance to the abstraction of Christianity from Judaism and its claim to be 'the new Israel', but his thought does draw heavily upon the history of the Israelites. Who does Cone's God favour? Have the oppressed of the world become God's chosen ones, and no longer the Jews? Whilst the appropriation of chosen-ness by an institutionally powerful Christian church smacks of aggressive supersessionism, does the claim to the favour of God by the oppressed also indicate a supersessionism? Have the Jews been superseded by the oppressed? Blanton's objection that Heidegger render's Paul's polemic against Jewish factions of early Christianity as 'struggle as such' might be reversed, leading to the argument that theologies such as Cone's place too much importance on the resistance to Paul's opening of the messianic arrival to Jews and Gentiles alike. That in Cone's account this very opening provided the roots for a Christian abstraction that would authorise and mask white supremacy adds another complication into the mix. These are discussions that the field of political theology must hash out in detail.

As with our discussion of Laclau and Žižek, we are left with a seemingly incommensurable divide between proclamations of faith and those which negotiate the philosophical tradition to make metaphysical assertions based in reason. Can a claim to the divinity of liberation be reconciled at all with an ontology built upon the void left by receding theological edicts? And is it at this elementary point that they irreconcilably depart from one another? This is not to mention the political void between a philosopher who saw in National Socialism an authentic grappling with death and civilisational decline, and a theologian resisting white supremacy from within a faith that has been weaponised in its very assertion of European superiority. The distance between them could perhaps not be greater.

This account of Heidegger and Kant's supersessionism, however, demonstrates the importance of approaching political theology from the 'outside' of a tradition implicated in supersessionism. Cone's thought is thus a crucial beginning for political theology to approach the theological outside, and with an oblique and privileged perspective on, these roots of supremacy. What we find in Cone is a political theology which is not (despite the above avenues of consideration) directly implicated in the inheritance of supersessionism, and which therefore constructs a different relation between Christianity and Judaism as a deeply rooted tension upon which European supremacy was based. This demonstrates the need for political theology to seek different points of entry that move beyond the considerable shadow cast by Heidegger in particular, to engage with such deeply political traditions as Cone's to gain insights into the blind spots and aporias of the mainstream tradition.

In Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed two key thinkers of contemporary European philosophy in relation to the transition of a supersessionist tradition of Christianity into a secular canon of philosophy. Firstly, I discussed J. Kameron Carter's account of the complicity of Immanuel Kant's anthropology in his later metaphysics, in which a supersessionist vision of Christianity as a truly 'rational' religion gives way to development of an image of rational man that rests on both anti-Semitism and a newly emergent white (Christian) supremacy. Discussing Kant in relation to supersessionism provides the perfect focal point for establishing the depth of the radicality of Cone's dismissal of theological abstraction, vis-à-vis both Christian Supersessionism *and* its transformation, well identified in Kant by Carter, into a very modern schema of 'scientific', and thus secular, race-thinking. To think with Cone is to think against both racism and contemporary white supremacy, but also to think creatively against a deep theme of Christian thought in which particular existence is imagined to be transcended only by the European inheritors of Christianity. Identifying Christian supersessionism, and its logic, in key junctures of Christian theology and modern European philosophy reveals just how counter-hegemonic Cone's black theology of liberation is. In Kant this theme is easily identifiable in the supreme status of Christianity as the only religion able to be built on the structures of pure reason, and so those carriers of Christian faith are those who can be delivered from worldly particularity and begin to attain a transcendent universal humanity. The implication of this transcendental Christian supremacy over Judaism slides in Kant into a

racial supremacy of Christians over Jews, which becomes a racial supremacy of white Europeans over all other races who must follow in the footsteps of Europe if they are to begin to attain full humanity.

After a brief summary of his most influential work *Being and Time*, and with somewhat greater difficulty, I depicted the work of Martin Heidegger as slightly more complexly identifiable in the archive of supersessionist thought. Not only does Heidegger's corpus present considerable evidence of manifest anti-Semitism, particularly with the recent publication of the *Black Notebooks*, some more abstract aspects of his philosophy can also be identified as attempting to fulfil a desire to transcend ontical existence, and which entraps him in what Ward Blanton calls the Christian problem. Whilst there can be no doubt about the rampant anti-Semitism held in a personal and professional capacity, it is much more difficult to identify in Heidegger's fundamental ontology the traces of a supersessionist logic, and a full consideration of this question could only be broached in a work far exceeding the current capacity. However, it is undeniable that in death, rather than in life, Heidegger imagines the attainment of transcendence of particularity, of '*the transcendens pure and simple*'.

The problem of supersessionism, so thoroughly and explicitly discussed in academic systematic theology, represents a deep problem for the secular fields of political philosophy, which in many instances draw in some way on either Kant and Heidegger. A couple of centuries of obscurity and formal secularisation have hidden its effects deeply, and much work needs to be done to excavate its effects and logics. Unlike many deep problems identified in the pages of philosophical treatises, we already have available to us a huge resource of theological thought that *already* explicitly attempts to think beyond supersessionism: Christian theologies of Israel, liberation theologies, black liberation theology, womanist theology, messianic Judaism, all offer deep sources of post-supersessionist thought. The secular fields of political thought, which have much work to do to bring supersessionist tendencies and logics to the surface, have many places to look for inspiration for deep thought and worldly practice beyond supersessionism. In presenting Cone's theology, and methods it employs to unravel the structure of supersessionism in political ontology and theology, this thesis hopes to present a fruitful contribution to this encounter

Conclusion

“The mere body was incapable of participating in a body politic whose idealist stake resided in the overcoming of corporeal conditions. Crucially, it is this divide between the body (nature) and the body politic (freedom) that has political implications... Kantian rationality, with its unbridgeable gulf between the realms of freedom and nature, sets out to demonstrate the worthlessness of bare life. Reason therefore dominates and overcomes nature by humiliating desires for objects in the external world.”⁹⁴

The central argument of this thesis has been that the theological project of James Cone raises serious questions and offers piercing insights for the current and ongoing move towards political theology in IR. As was argued in chapters 3 and 4, multiple dimensions of Cone’s work have direct relevance to this emerging field. Firstly, we find the main critique he sustains against what he calls ‘white theology’ to offer insights about the political underpinnings of abstractly articulated theological virtues. ‘White theology’ has two dimensions, with a sociological and a theological thrust respectively, and Cone’s identification and critique of both can fruitfully call political theology to closer reflection of its own sociological biases and political implications. Most pertinently, Cone’s theology questions whether love and harmony at the expense of liberation and justice adequately pay witness to a Christian message understood as delivering a promise of liberation.

Secondly, the dialectic Cone constructs between spirituality and materiality establishes in his work a political theological project that sees constant negotiation between spiritual imperatives and material realities as central to calling upon metaphysical authorisation whilst remaining grounded in a particular, worldly, political struggle. This aspect of his work can be directly mobilised into discussions about what it means for a theology, or an ontology, to remain or be political. What this conversation reveals is that Cone *does* what many thinkers of political theology *advocate*, by presenting a fully-fledged theology that is deeply grounded, indeed inseparable from, a particular political movement. This highlights the need for political theology to engage deeply with already-existent political theologies, which through worldly

⁹⁴ Mack, M., *German Idealism and the Jew*, 27.

commitments make deep contributions to the understanding of the entwinement of the theological and the political.

Thirdly, Cone's insistence on 'theological concreteness' bears witness to a theme in Christianity that has deep import for any attempt to draw upon theology as a potential source for enlivening contemporary questions in political thought. This thesis thus identified 'Christian Supersessionism' as a key problem for political theology in IR, and particularly the identification of theological themes in the canon of 'secular' political thought. A discussion of Christian Supersessionism was conducted with specific reference to key thinkers of both Christian theology (Paul, Origen, Augustine, Luther, Barth) and two titans of modern philosophy (Kant and Heidegger).

Supersessionism reveals a paradox at the heart of Christian and its transition to a universal message of salvation: its claim to universality is built upon its claim to particularity vis-à-vis its constitutive other, Judaism, which in its continued 'failure' to hear the message of Christ prevent a fuller universality of Christianity from being achieved. In the deepest recesses of systematic theology this paradox of Christian universality/particularity does not necessarily constitute a huge problem, but what it authorises in the manifestation of theological ideas in the worldly and political actions of believers and institutions is a deeply aggressive relation to any group considered unable to transcend their particularity. Whilst contemporary systematic theology works hard to re-interpret Christian doctrine to undo this dimension of supersessionism, in the secularisation of theological concepts, it has already become concealed. This concealment of supersessionism necessitates deep study, following the work of R. Kendall Soulen and J. Kameron Carter in theology, with a broad scope for pursuing supersessionist logics outside of theology itself.

At its heart, Cone's theology is anti-abstraction. Connecting black suffering in the United States with the meaning of Christ, and the promise of God's liberation, makes of Cone's thought a fuller political theology. Abstract engagements limit the potential of theological reflection because they fail to make deep and meaningful connections between the ultimate and lived realities. If Christianity is a promise to the sufferers of this world, political theology must make clear connections with the sufferers of this world. This is a core limitation of academic political theology, in both IR and beyond: a hesitation to plant a firm flag in real, worldly situations, preferring instead the general, the abstract, or the theoretical.

Cone's thought thus offers a vision of concretely grounded theological reflection, that cannot be reduced to either metaphysical relativity or hegemonic universality. He explicitly eschews secularity, affording a central role for a liberating God in human affairs. He attacks theological abstraction as the shoring up of the dominant white theology of his day, insisting on the centrality of Jesus' Jewishness for understanding what is revealed in him, and what he can possibly mean for those suffering under systematic racism and white supremacy. Finally, he articulates this concrete theology with the humility and reflexivity of a deeply *political* theological thinker.

In Chapter 1 I introduced nine key works which variously address three themes central to political theology. What holds these thinkers together is a sticky constellation of questions and problems around the foundation of the political that can be identified in relation to the three axes: philosophy-theology, universality-particularity, abstraction-concreteness. The question of a fundamental foundation of politics is located by each in relation to these three dimensions.

Philosophy and theology are considered in this field not as great opposites where one represents reason and the other dogma. Rather, a widening spectrum of the academy, partly in the light of post-secular philosophy, see philosophy and theology as both intrinsically linked, as Gillespie, Molloy, and Milbank all argue. For Badiou, Critchley, and Paipais, the theological is seen as offering a tradition that can be fruitfully tapped to aid in overcoming entrenched impasses of contemporary political thought. The secular nihilism of postmodernity lamented by Milbank reigns supreme, but it delivers us not to a liberated condition of an unmediated experience of reality, simply leaving us groping for new myths to escape the emptiness and violence of a nihilist world. As a theologian, Cone's thought is in full agreement with this. But in political theology the question is not just of the efficacy of the theological as a *good* story, but of its utter *centrality* to politics: some image of the divine is to be found in all political visions. This leads to the breaking down of the secular/sacred barrier and makes intelligible a conversation between Cone's thought and the field of political theology in IR.

Reading Cone reminds us of the indivisibility of theology and politics. Political theories and philosophies all make some claim or other to a divine or ontological principle, if not an agential God who is engaged in liberation. Cone's thought issues a call to approach

metaphysics, ontology, and theology in ways which render them explicitly political and politically *intelligible* to particular struggles. Indeed, his charge that there is no universal/particular distinction between the Christian message and black theology's call for liberation of the oppressed, that the former *is* particular and is engaged in a particular politics that manifests in particular movements, issues a stark challenge to the dichotomisation of the needs of particular worldly struggles and universal principles.

As displayed in Chapter 1, the field of political theology is engaged in two distinct projects. The first seeks to engage in an intellectual-historical project which reveals the theological underpinnings of thought that is presumed to be located firmly in secularism. Molloy's text on Kant is an example of this, as well as the growing attention being paid to Reinhold Niebuhr not as a political realist but as a Christian Realist.⁹⁵ This project of political theology in IR can also draw upon intellectual historical works outside IR that point more broadly to the theological roots of European modernity and Enlightenment thought.⁹⁶ The discussion of Christian Supersessionism in Chapters 5 and 6 contribute to this intellectual-historical project an account of the theological roots of the modern discourse of race. This is a crucial contribution to the account of modernity's theological roots, and the role of certain theological notions in the steady establishment of a global order of hierarchical racialisation.

The second project that political theology in IR actively pursues is an engagement with theology as a deep resource for questions and problems of political theory or political philosophy. This political theological project is concerned with both the problems of universality/particularity and the problem of abstraction/concreteness, concerns that it deeply shares with certain works which are more accurately described as located in political ontology. György Geréby's discussion of the tensions between Carl Schmitt and Erik Peterson clarifies competing approaches to political theology. Whilst Schmitt sees in secular thought theological concepts, he also employs theological concepts to establish a theological metaphysics of sovereignty. Peterson, on the other hand, argues that the properly Christian community can never be associated with power, instead 'labouring from below', in 'foreign

⁹⁵ Molloy, S., *Kant's International Relations*; Paipais, V., 'Reinhold Niebuhr and the Christian Realist Pendulum'; Hartnett, L., "The Impossible Possibility of Love"; Hartnett, L. and Ashworth, L., 'Introduction: Why Read Reinhold Niebuhr Now?', *Journal of International Political Theory* 17, no. 2 (1 June 2021): 118–22.

⁹⁶ Gillespie, M. A., *The Theological Origins of Modernity*; Gregory, B. S., *The Unintended Reformation*; Harrison, P., *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*.

cities'. Schmitt and Peterson point to two important paradigms of political theology. Peterson's vision of Christian political theology 'from below' is that to which Cone speaks, rather than to the Schmittian frame of sovereignty and authorisation of sovereign action drawn from the concept of the divine. For Cone theology is not the imagination of new transcendent orders but the breaking down of old orders, of struggling *against* the powers that be. It therefore connects political theology with political struggle.

A core problem overarching these projects is the question of what it means for a metaphysics to be 'political'. Paipais, for example, draws upon a Greek Orthodox visual depiction of Jesus as the battered and humiliated, utterly under question, 'King of Glory': a tragicomic subjectivity that embodies the 'broken middle' between confident political visions and their inevitable tragic failures.⁹⁷ For Cone, a political theology must negotiate between the needs of a particular struggle and the demands of faith in a Christian God. It is the responsibility of a Christian theologian to bear witness to and to articulate the liberatory nature of God, and they must articulate the meaning of God's liberatory message for current times. They must not, however, see their mere human talk as infallible, and must understand that their words and thoughts about the ultimate will always be insufficient. The ultimate, and the inevitable tragedies of our misunderstandings of it, cannot be tamed by our attempts to know it. The humility of the theologian and their insistence on the re-interpretation of the meaning of divine liberation for each new generation is what 'keeps' Cone's theology political: it does not try to establish a theological fixity, a fixed set of symbols.

Whilst not directly engaging with theological sources, Lois McNay is also concerned with keeping political metaphysics 'political'. She charges political ontology with depoliticisation, with forgetting the worldly in exchange for an abstracted realm that is hoped to deliver some ultimate ontological principles. McNay advocates a 'critical phenomenology' of suffering, in which the idea of social suffering is placed at the centre of the search for ontological principles. But whilst McNay is concerned with the abstraction from worldly experience that furnishes many political ontologies, she produces her own abstraction: an abstracted idea of 'social suffering'. Cone is deeply critical of theologies which engage with such abstractions as 'suffering in general', demanding that theologians relate the word of God to sufferers to

⁹⁷ Rose, G., *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society*, 1st ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 1992); Paipais, V., *Political Ontology and International Political Thought*, 227–28.

concrete situations of political oppression and struggle. For McNay, the over-reliance on theoretical abstractions results in a severely reduced sociological and political relevance of any political ontology. But abstraction is the lingua franca of political metaphysics precisely *because* it implies a location in the purely ontological, liberated from all the mess and constraints of the ontic.

John Milbank's counter-kingdom of ontological harmony is also understood as limited in its disconnect from worldly political struggles. Milbank seeks an ontology of peace and harmony that can counter the violence of postmodern nihilism, but in so doing he pulls the rug out from under the feet of struggles for liberation. In Cone's vocabulary this represents 'white theology', a subtle conservatism and pacification that underlies virtues like love, peace, and harmony. What do they mean for the oppressed? They douse the fires of liberatory political struggles with an abstract vocabulary that will always, in Cone's view, be turned to the benefit of the dominant classes of society, in his case 'white America'. This is evidenced by Cone in the pacifying effects of Christian piety in a society that holds those racialised as white to be superior to those racialised as black: turn the other cheek, love your enemies, and wait for your rewards in Heaven. Rather, for Cone, the Christian promise of liberation *must* be articulated as a word for the poor, a word for the dispossessed.

Whilst Paipais and McNay both warn against abstracted universality that tries to establish a final frame of reference, Sergei Prozorov seeks to re-energise the abstract-universal frame to provide the basis for a re-politicised universality. Prozorov presents the idea of a void, a nothingness existing between and beyond the many worlds which humans inhabit, as able to provide some positive political axioms. In Milbank's schema, Prozorov's void universalism *is* a political theology, as it stakes a non-provable claim to what is 'beyond' the world of the senses. Prozorov's axioms (equality, community, freedom) explicitly and unapologetically lay claim to universal intentions and abstract framing. Whilst Cone would lament the nihilism of Prozorov's universal (an empty void) as unconnected from the life experience and traditions of his community, the abstractions of equality, community, and freedom would also cause concern. The problem with these axiomatic abstractions is that they are presented as universal axioms to a deeply divided world. The reality of worldly struggles means that any such axioms must be explicitly related to the struggles of those who most *need* equality, those who *need* freedom, those who most *need* community. Cone is acutely aware of the co-

optation of abstract principles by the dominant forces of society, who interpret 'suffering' as the existential angst of a middle class, or 'love' and 'peace' as injunctions to nonviolence that dominant classes use as tools of pacification against those engaged in political struggle. In that sense, these abstracted axioms are deeply *depoliticised* because they fail to deliver tools to those engaged in liberatory struggles.

Alain Badiou is another thinker who invokes abstract universality, drawing upon the thought of St Paul. Badiou emphasises Paul's universality, which mobilises the hopes to overcome human distinctions, as a remedy to the proliferation of new markets being opened by claims to 'new' identities. Badiou wants to re-energise the 'event-al' dimension of Paul, through which 'the event' (for Paul, the event is Christ) totally transforms the world. In a similar fashion to Cone, Badiou does not see Christianity as a blue-print constitution for a new order but is a story of the throwing off of an old order. Badiou however flattens and universalises the audience for whom the Christ event takes place and provides promise: whilst for Badiou it is the whole of an undifferentiated humanity, for Cone it is 'the oppressed' as those engaged in struggle, an abstraction that is located concretely by Cone in the struggle against racism and white supremacy taking place in the United States. Whilst Badiou sees particular identity as that which must be dispatched to achieve a great levelling of humanity, for Cone particular experiences are crucial for concretely articulating the meaning of the promise of liberation for each generation. Despite the concerns of Victor Anderson about ontological blackness, discussed in Chapter 4, we find in Cone a more subtle understanding which articulates blackness as the symbolic representation of suffering in our times, a symbol which reflects the biblical promise of liberation, but a symbol which is not ontological beyond current struggles.

In another work which pays keen attention to St Paul, Simon Critchley advocates a Heideggerian reading of Paul that employs weakness, and human impotency, as that ontological principle to which we project ourselves and from which we are thrown into the world. For Critchley, freedom is found in embracing our weakness, our inability to reach the ultimate and transcend our thrown-ness. This constitutes a call that can demand of even the faithless a deep humility. Viewed from the vantage point of Cone's thought this is an appropriate mediation of human insufficiency to talk of things divine, but in failing to connect

theological talk with the divine promise of liberation it fails to properly articulate itself towards those engaged in particular, concrete political struggles.

These three dimensions, philosophy-theology, universality-particularity, and concreteness-
abstraction are not necessarily parallel to each other. However, they name three tensions, and point to a thematic web, into which this thesis inserts itself. By introducing the theological project of James Cone, this thesis seeks to problematise a casual association between universality and abstraction that can manifest either theologically or philosophically. Despite speaking *of* things held to be eternal, Christian theology is fundamentally situated in the human lives out of which it is articulated, just as God was, for Christians, revealed in a concrete human being, in a particular place and at a particular time. The thesis draws this argument from a concretely situated theology, the black liberation theology of Cone. Cone does not approach theoretical problems in abstract discussions, but rather responds to them in the concrete fray of a particular political movement. In paying close attention to Cone's negotiation of these dimensions of political thought, we see the potential for addressing these impasses whilst retaining fidelity to particular political struggles: Cone addresses himself to the 'eternal' without abandoning the every-day, and casts Christianity as a story of concrete liberation of particular oppressed peoples, in contrast to the dominant universalising vision in which Christ becomes the *abstracted* basis of universal salvation.

In our discussion of the critical dimensions of Cone's thought, this thesis argued that both senses of the term 'white theology' can be brought to bear upon political theology in IR. The widespread recognition of the Euro-American biases of the field of IR is growing apace already.⁹⁸ The thesis also argued that the second sense in which 'white theology' is used by Cone also requires deep attention. Here it discussed two contributors to political theology, to argue that such theological virtues such as love, harmony, and peace may produce a pacification that does not challenge but can even shore up the interests of dominant groups. Milbank's diagnosis of the ills of secular reason is ground-breaking, but his advocacy of a non-

⁹⁸ Vitalis, R., *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Cornell University Press, 2015); Sabaratnam, M., 'Is IR Theory White? Racialised Subject-Positioning in Three Canonical Texts', *Millennium*, 25 November 2020; Thakur, V. and Vale, P. C. J., *South Africa, Race and the Making of International Relations* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020); Chakrabarty, D., *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2009); Vasilaki, R., 'Provincialising IR? Deadlocks and Prospects in Post-Western IR Theory', *Millennium* 41, no. 1 (2012): 3–22; Hobson, J. M., *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760-2010* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

conflictual harmonious order in which ‘every note knows its place in relation to all others’ reveals his deep political conservatism, and severely hampers the possibility of political disruption for the attainment of liberatory justice. More briefly, we discussed Lianne Hartnett’s recent essay on Reinhold Niebuhr and the political potential of love.⁹⁹ Hartnett provides a nuanced discussion of Niebuhr’s thought, though in Cone’s account Niebuhr’s white paternalism and his over-emphasis on love at the expense of justice rendered him unable to undergird a theology that prioritises justice and liberation.

From here we began to scratch away at the aspects of Cone’s theology that invite serious discussion with works of political theology. Alongside the manifest complicity of mainstream Christianity in the West with white supremacy and systematic racism, Cone also reacts to the implications of a problem of theological abstraction, most fundamentally the abstraction of a disembedded Christ by which Christianity becomes a universal message of salvation offered by a commitment of faith in Christ. For Cone this abstraction leads to the privatisation of religion through which the pacifying injunctions of ‘white theology’ become possible. Furthermore, sharpening our focus upon theological abstraction points to a core process of Christian thought, that being its separation from Judaism, which is the platform from which it can launch its claim to offering a universal message of salvation. This ‘problem’ of abstraction at Christianity’s core is Christian Supersessionism. What a sustained discussion of supersessionism shows is the tension that lies at the heart of Christian universalism: its claim to universality is at the same time its claim to particularity. Its claim to be ‘for all’ is part of the same process by which it establishes itself as a particular faith distinct from its Judaic origins. Cone’s theology already performs a subversion of this abstracted universal Christianity, in his restoration of the meaning of divine liberation to particular groups and particular struggles at particular moments. Despite the existence of theologies which already move beyond supersessionism, the secularisation of theological thought into political and philosophical thought demands a thorough investigation of Christian Supersessionism as a problem which Cone’s theology calls our attention to.

Chapter 5 thus addressed itself towards Christian Supersessionism and demonstrated its persistence in key figures of Christian theology. The purpose of this chapter was to name and

⁹⁹ Hartnett, L., “The Impossible Possibility of Love”.

explicate this dimension of Christian theology, covering its key features and depicting its consistent emergence in influential Christian thought. Here it discussed the Apostle Paul, the early Christian *Adversus Judaeos* literature, and the work of Origen of Alexandria, Augustine, Martin Luther, and Karl Barth, who himself had such an influence on Cone. These thinkers are of course by no means exhaustive, and further study into supersessionism and particularly its influence beyond strictly systematic doctrines of Israel is much needed. Any sustained discussion of supersessionism, even one as brief as this, opens huge questions which this thesis poses and, of course, cannot answer. What it does do is present Cone's thought as already offering one serious response to Christian Supersessionism. The question that a sustained discussion of Supersessionism raises is whether Christian theology is always-already implicated in a politics of supremacy, from its very beginning.

In order to demonstrate that the problem of supersessionism is not just located in the abstract depths of systematic Christian theology, and unlikely to have implication for the ostensibly secular fields of political philosophy and theory, Chapter 6 discussed Christian Supersessionism with regard to two titans of philosophy: Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger. Our discussion of Kant drew from the work of Carter who uniquely connects supersessionism as a broader feature of Christian theology with the adoption of specific theological concepts into modern European philosophy. Carter's work brings to light the entanglement of the anti-Judaic impulses of supersessionism with the establishment of a 'race problem' in modernity which mirrored the 'Jewish problem' of theology, demonstrating how this became intricately written into key aspects of Kant's thought. A spectre of Christian Supersessionism, and its conceptual transition into a hierarchy of human races, hangs over Kant's epistemological philosophies of the establishment of pure reason on the basis of Christianity as the only truly 'rational religion'. With a little help from Seán Molloy's account of the persistence of the theological in both Kant and Kantianisms in IR, we saw how closely the problem of supersessionism rubs up against the field of IR. However, like many persistent problems of abstract and philosophical thought, it remains hidden between the lines.

As supersessionism is intricately linked to Christian anti-Semitism, and as many thinkers in both political theology and political ontology draw upon the work of Martin Heidegger, neglecting to discuss him would have been to willingly leave a gigantic elephant in the room. Any discussion of Heidegger in relation to Judaism must begin with a recognition that

evidence of Heidegger's extant anti-Semitism can no longer be overlooked, despite the persistence of separating his philosophy from his political commitments. Heidegger himself wrote that his life-context was utterly central for his philosophical thinking, though of course his text *Being and Time* was published before the rise of the National Socialist movement in Germany, and before Heidegger's involvement in it. As our discussion of supersessionism in Kant shows, however, that both theology and modern philosophy already have an anti-Judaism deeply woven into them. Despite Heidegger's anti-Semitism and his engagement with the thought of both Paul and Luther (and a very Lutheran reading of Paul), his philosophy in *Being and Time* does not appear to be an unambiguous reproduction of Christian Supersessionism. Rather, his insistence on the thrownness of Being and the inescapability of the ontical depicts a story in which worldly, fleshly existence cannot be transcended in this life. Despite the ever-presence of the ontical, for Heidegger we must orient ourselves towards death as our final fulfilment in order to live authentically. This points to the location of fundamental meaning 'beyond' the worldly and the experiential, with the caveat that fully transcending the ontical cannot be achieved in life, even if that is what we ineluctably seek, or towards which we project ourselves. It may be that Heidegger simply delays the transcendence of 'mere particularity' to the moment of death, in the anticipation of which we glimpse authenticity. The notion of thrownness in Heidegger unavoidably commits us to the ontical, to deeply rooted existence.¹⁰⁰ It is in contemplating the limits of these roots, whilst living within them, that we can begin to live towards-death. Perhaps this understanding of rootedness provided exactly the ground for his support of a political movement that appropriated the frame of deep cultural roots, of the German people. Perhaps Heidegger reproduces the first move of supersessionism, an aggressive overcoming of Judaism, without reproducing the second, since he "dares to reject the notion that what it means to be properly human is to respect universal norms".¹⁰¹

This thesis has thus provided a sustained and original discussion of the ramifications of the black liberation theologian James H. Cone for political theology in IR. Cone raises both sharply

¹⁰⁰ See, in particular, Heidegger, M., 'Building Dwelling Thinking', in *Basic Writings*, ed. Krell, D. F. (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), 343–64.

¹⁰¹ Fried, G., 'On Beyond Heidegger', in *After Heidegger?*, ed. Polt, R. F. H., New Heidegger Research (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018), 13.

political and deeply theological questions that demand to be reckoned with. Above all, thinking with Cone casts in stark relief the importance of engaging thinkers and traditions who exist on the margins of mainstream political and philosophical thought. The attention that his thought draws to the problem of supersessionism, its direct relevance to contemporary questions of racism and white supremacy, as well as its implication in a deeply rooted abstraction of Christian origins, casts an oblique and illuminating light on much theological and philosophical thought, and particularly on fundamental questions about the political potential and implications of Christian theology. The persistence of supersessionism in Christian thought begs the question of whether a sense of supremacy is endemic, or inherent, to it. Claiming the mantle of God's new Israel from the 'old Israel', it is possible that Christianity set in motion a pattern of thought through which one group can understand only themselves as chosen, as graced. But this is the very political potency of Christianity: it is the favour of God for Israel *in history* that Christians claimed for themselves against old Israel, and it is the favour of a liberating God *in history* that Cone claims for black people in the United States.

Whilst reckoning with supersessionism has become part of the vocabulary of academic systematic theology, it is rarely linked to the emergence of race-thinking in the enlightenment thought of figures such as Kant and is rarely pursued as a problem that has become secularised as a logic of supremacy and transcendence in political thought. The project of excavating supersessionism is a task of central importance for political thinkers. As engaging Cone's thought shows, the temptation to jettison theology as a compromised artifact is premature, as it is in theology that we find sharply political and deeply theological subversions of supersessionism and its contemporary manifestations in racialised hierarchicalisation.

The normative and theological traverse from Jewish inclusion to exclusion expressed in Christian Supersessionism has exploded into the ontical world in the violence of the Holocaust, just as its secularised corollary notion of a theologically-rooted white supremacy played its part in authorising the extreme violence of European imperialism and the political worlds that were created as it formally receded. Whilst Christian anti-Semitism is a visible manifestation of supersessionism, the roots of supersessionism in modern philosophy are much more obscured. Cone's project instigates deep and ongoing investigations of the persistent implications and heritage of a Christological abstraction within Christian

theological thought, particularly at the points where the break between the explicitly theological and the ostensibly secular are particularly hazy. The distinctiveness of Cone's challenge to supersessionism is that he does so by relating his theology to a particular struggle, and through articulating that struggle theologically he disturbs abstraction. His isn't a theoretical critique of abstraction but a performance of concrete theology of political struggle that troubles the supersessionist dependence on theological abstraction. This is what sets his thought apart in this conversation. Cone captures a particular political struggle in a theological frame, therein subverting the reliance on abstractions which imply a universality, a universality rooted in Christian Supersessionism.

Cone's thought deeply challenges a liberal consensus of mutual rights, and his theology casts liberalism as prioritising the status quo over liberation. Cone's project is also importantly distinct from other forms of pluralism. Situated knowledge and standpoint theory, for example, is built upon the epistemological premise that social positioning provides a crucial lens through which to assess knowledge claims. Social positioning is obviously crucial for Cone too, but epistemological insights stand underneath a claim to the divinity of liberation that is made at the theological level. As a theology that is situated but which calls upon a frame that exceeds all particular situations and the knowledge that we can draw from them, Cone's theology can address questions that epistemology cannot: what does it mean to be human? How should we act? What is the divine? Whilst theological speech *is* fundamentally limited by human inadequacies, scripture and tradition nevertheless stand as referents that call us to pay heed to a 'higher reality' than our own.

Cone's thought is also interestingly distinct from newly emerging (in IR) notions of the pluriverse and pluriversality. Cone recognises that he can and does only speak to and from his situation, which suggests the possibility of the recognition of 'other worlds' outside. But the God of Christianity is not one God amongst many: it is one God-head which exists in trinitarian form. Attempts to split the 'good' Christian saviour God from a 'cruel' creator God constitutes one of the Church's earliest heresies.¹⁰² As a devout Christian, Cone is unlikely to warmly accepted the reality of other 'transcendental orders', as Sergei Prozorov puts it, existing with

¹⁰² Such as Marcionism, a 'radical Paulinism' in which the Christian canon was considered to be only a shortened version of the book of Luke plus ten of Paul's epistles, rejecting everything else. Tillich, P., *A History of Christian Thought, from Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*, 34.

equal legitimacy in their occupation of 'other worlds.' However, by his later career Cone was in wide dialogue with other Christian churches, denominations and communities, and regarded himself as a contextual theologian offering one vantage point amongst many. Whilst this is written into Cone's use of blackness as a theological symbol from the very beginning, writing that his theology is *in sum* bounded by context severely limits the implications of his claim that liberation stands at the core of the Christian message. For Vincent Lloyd, this shift in his later career led to his work and career becoming easily assimilated into a liberal-multicultural mainstream.¹⁰³ However, all of Cone's substantive theological works were published within six years of his first book, and it is this corpus that we focus on, and here he does not at all claim to be a contextual theologian.

Cone's work is of obvious interest to scholars in IR seeking to overcome the endemic problem of political thought being built on the shoulders of the colonial-modern world. Mustapha Kamal Pasha reminds scholars of IR that religion and race are co-constitutive,¹⁰⁴ and as this thesis has argued, Cone's project invites us into deep investigations of the intertwinement of Christian Supersessionism, anti-Semitism, and a modern discourse of race. Cone stands at the important juncture between Christian theology and radical black thought, adding a theological voice to recent works in IR on various black political traditions.¹⁰⁵ Sustained study of any thinker outside the Western canon of secular or theological thought is a growing endeavour in IR, and this thesis has shown that Cone is not just interesting because of his curious externality. Whilst he does level a critique at the hegemonic thought of his discipline, the way he makes theology anew indicates that he is not just a critic orbiting around, but dependent upon white theology, but a visionary theologian whose thought exceeds the thought world of the Western academy. Cone thus brings deep insights about Christian thought and its political implications into conversations about theology and politics, with particular emphasis on the dangers of white theology and the reproduction of Christian Supersessionism in theological abstractions. It thus stages a deep problematisation of the

¹⁰³ Lloyd, V. W., 'For What Are Whites to Hope?', 169.

¹⁰⁴ Pasha, M. K., 'Religion and the Fabrication of Race'.

¹⁰⁵ Shilliam, R., *The Black Pacific*; Vitalis, R., *White World Order, Black Power Politics*; Henderson, E. A., 'Hidden in Plain Sight: Racism in International Relations Theory', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 1 (1 March 2013): 71–92.

theological roots of modern discourses about race that pivot upon the elevation of European Christians to a racialised stage of full humanity.

Cone's thought is thus of deep import for these ongoing and accelerating debates in IR regarding the effects and legacies of race, racism, and racialisation. This growing field seeks both to challenge what in W.E.B. Dubois' time was called the global colour line, a concept coming back into more regular use in International Relations to express the racial patterns of international inequalities. Taking Cone seriously, as this thesis hopes to have done, as a political theologian does something to question the impenetrability of this colour line. It is therefore part of a growing concerted effort to approach political problematics, taking key insights from the tradition of black radicalism.¹⁰⁶ The enclosure of political theology to the thought of European and North American white thinkers is to engage in the deepest impoverishment let alone eurocentrism, in remaining ignorant to oblique perspectives on the question of political theology that are so deeply expressed from outside these dominant canons. Whilst current studies of race in IR often focus (in typical IR fashion) upon the state as the most important unit of analysis,¹⁰⁷ Cone's thought draws our attention to the implication of racialisation and white supremacy in the deeper recesses of political thought. What Cone's thought brings is precisely the focus on the point at which race, and its history as an idea, intersects with the theological. This contributes deeply to the dominant approach to race in IR which either casts it as a product of Eighteenth-Century biological anthropologies, a scientific theory of racial differentiation, or which focuses on the subject-positioning of research itself.¹⁰⁸ The discussion of race and racism in theology shows that they can be identified as having much older roots than the Enlightenment obsession with typologies, categorisation, and hierarchicalisation of species. It can also identify the way in which religion continues to play a role in the production of subject positions.

Reading Cone into the field of IR brings explicit focus upon religion as a site of production *and* a site of resistance to the modern discourse of race. Religion remains in the blind spot of

¹⁰⁶ Getachew, A., *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton University Press, 2020); Shilliam, R., *The Black Pacific*; Anievas, A., Manchanda, N., and Shilliam, R., *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line* (Routledge, 2014).

¹⁰⁷ Vučetić, S., 'Against Race Taboos: The Global Colour Line in Philosophical Discourse', in *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line*, ed. Anievas, A., Manchanda, N., and Shilliam, R. (Routledge, 2014), 100.

¹⁰⁸ Sabaratnam, M., 'Is IR Theory White?'

contemporary accounts of race in IR. For example, a recent article in a special issue on race and racialisation, entitled 'Race and racism in the founding of the modern world order' almost completely neglects to mention the theological roots of race thinking. Despite extensive discussion of Kant's anthropology, the author fails to take stock of the way in which Kant's thought is beholden to theological themes which in him became transformed into secular notions of race.¹⁰⁹ Whilst the intellectual-historical account of this would render, for many, Christianity a condemned tradition, Cone's thought shows that it is always-already available to be transformed (or returned) to a site of struggle against the very forces it engendered.

Reading Cone thus invites students and scholars of racism in IR to look more deeply than the production of discrete human races by the biological sciences. It points to this deeply intellectual historical work, as well as to contemporary sites of religious resistance to the dehumanisations of racialisation and the global colour line. As advocated by Robbie Shilliam, it draws our attention to projects of self-redemption rather than projects of abolition emanating from the power structures of the imperial metropolis.¹¹⁰

Jasmine K Gani and Jenna Marshall, in a recent special issue on race and imperialism in IR, argue that IR must overcome its own legacy and foundational myths, rooted in racism and imperialism, if it is to meaningfully bridge the academic-practitioner divide and finally 'descend from the ivory tower'.¹¹¹ Cone is ideally situated to cut through these divisions because of the direct and systematic transfer of influence from academic theology into seminary education and onto the pulpit. Politicised theologians that think through issues of race and imperialism already transgress the academic-practitioner divide because they are often already themselves engaged in preaching to congregations and communities. Political theology thus holds the potential for a different, and perhaps more direct, transfer of knowledge between academic and practitioner, whilst being ideally situated to approach the deepest roots of racialisation and supremacy in Western thought.

Our final focus on Christian Supersessionism is of great import for IR as a whole. As thinkers like Nicolas Guilhot have argued, IR's political realism has its roots in the neo-orthodox

¹⁰⁹ Acharya, A., 'Race and Racism in the Founding of the Modern World Order'.

¹¹⁰ Shilliam, R., 'Black Redemption, Not (White) Abolition'.

¹¹¹ Gani, J. K. and Marshall, J., 'The Impact of Colonialism on Policy and Knowledge Production in International Relations', *International Affairs* 98, no. 1 (2022): 5–22.

Protestant movement of Christian Realism, which in turn adopts, and obscures, a deeply Schmittian heritage.¹¹² In contrast to Guilhot's position, Vassilios Paipais has argued that the pragmatism of IR's early realists is drawn not from Schmitt but from an Augustinian tension between 'ontological monism and ethical dualism': the tension between a good world and the existence of evil and suffering, via human will, within it.¹¹³ In both interpretations, early IR realism is deeply embedded in the theological. This thesis has stopped short of a discussion of supersessionism in IR specifically, but the potential connections seem evident, and a direct study of supersessionist logics in IR would make for an important project. Outside realism, the prevalence of both Kant and Heidegger in multiple fields of IR (such as cosmopolitanism, political ontology, or poststructuralism) indicate the potential for the inheritance of supersessionism directly into IR. IR theorists of multiple persuasions must therefore take seriously the concept of Christian Supersessionism, investigating the ways in which its thought-forms have carried over from the theological and into the secular.

This thesis points to multiple avenues of further study. Firstly, and moving directly from the focus of this thesis upon the work of James H. Cone, would be an engagement with Cone's later career in which he travelled and dialogued extensively around the world, as an expression of the 'international relations' of black theology. This is pointed to by a recent article which highlights Cone's dialogue with Third World Theologians.¹¹⁴ Such work would necessarily engage with the theological network of which Cone was a part, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, about which a few academic works exist, though not in the field of International Relations.¹¹⁵

Another interesting avenue of study for the field of international relations would be the international flow and exchange of black theological discourse, primarily taking place between the UK, the United States, and South Africa but also including the Caribbean, Africa, and Latin America. The relationship between Cone's black theology and the growing

¹¹² Guilhot, N., 'American Katechon'; Rengger, N. J., *The Anti-Pelagian Imagination in Political Theory and International Relations*, 107.

¹¹³ Paipais, V., 'Overcoming "Gnosticism"?', 1605.

¹¹⁴ Harris, M. M. and Davis, T. B., "'In the Hope That They Can Make Their Own Future": James H. Cone and the Third World', *Journal of Africana Religions* 7, no. 2 (2019): 189–212.

¹¹⁵ See <https://eatwotglobal.com/index.html> and, Joseph, M. P., *Theologies of the Non-Person: The Formative Years of EATWOT* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

movements of black Christian consciousness in those countries would provide a fascinating area of study and would help us to understand the reach of Cone's thought.¹¹⁶ Recent work also points to the influence of Cone in Aotearoa.¹¹⁷

One of the fastest growing religious movements in the world is Pentecostalism. The question of the extent to which it shares patterns with black theology is a fascinating one, though it seems for the most part that black theology does not engage seriously with Pentecostalism. One point of potential tension is that whilst Pentecostalism places utmost importance on the Spirit to the point that it becomes the central dimension of faith and worship, the Spirit is almost totally absent from Cone's thought. Whilst Cone addresses core topics of systematic theology (God, Christology, the World, Eschatology), he does not directly address pneumatology.¹¹⁸ One recent paper has suggested that black theology must be modified to take account of the 'spiritual liberation' that is a part of Pentecostal worship.¹¹⁹ As Gereby's discussion of Schmitt and Peterson shows, political theology in the Schmittian frame reduces the Trinity to a monotheistic God, and discussions of the centrality of the Spirit may provide interesting conversations between political theologies which hold the Spirit as central, and those that mask the persons of the Trinity behind a singular Godhead.

The symbolic centrality of Jesus' Jewishness, and our ensuing discussion of Christian Supersessionism, invites exploration of other 'post-supersessionist' theologies. This is an invitation that immediately draws us beyond the Western academy. Here the Liberation Theology springing from the Roman Catholic world may offer promise, along with the tradition of Womanist theology that in part drew upon Cone's work in the United States.¹²⁰ All of these movements are deeply interesting from a theological perspective. Theologies of liberation, in fact, appear to have been articulated in direct relation to many places and

¹¹⁶ Reddie, A. G., *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue* (Springer, 2006); Hopkins, D. N., *Black Theology USA and South Africa: Politics, Culture, and Liberation* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005); Campbell, J. T., *Songs of Zion*; Beckford, R., *Jesus Is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998).

¹¹⁷ Te Aroha Rountree, T. A., 'Jesus Does a Haka Boogie: Tangata Whenua Theology', in *Theologies from the Pacific*, ed. Havea, J., Postcolonialism and Religions (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 47–62.

¹¹⁸ See Yong, A. and Alexander, E., *Afro-Pentecostalism*.

¹¹⁹ Kgatle, M. S., 'Spirituality of Liberation in African Pentecostal Worship and Its Implications for Black Theology', *Black Theology* 19, no. 2 (4 May 2021): 168–80.

¹²⁰ Gutiérrez, G., *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Orbis Books, 1984); Gutiérrez, G., *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (SCM, 2001); Williams, D. S., *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Orbis Books, 2013).

political movements.¹²¹ One deeply lived non supersessionist tradition is that of Rastafari. This is a Biblical, though not strictly a Christian, tradition that rejects the white, European appropriation of Jesus and reads the Israelite story with specific reference to black Africans and the 'Babylonian captivity' of enslavement and transportation. The extent to which Rastafari claims the mantle of 'God's Israel' from both Christians and Jews suggests a fascinating discussion of its political theology vis-à-vis supersessionism.¹²² Aside from this question which may actually distract from the meaning of Rastafari, it is a fascinating example of a theological movement becoming a deeply influential political, cultural, and social movement.¹²³

The conversation between liberation theology writ-large and Orthodox Christianity is also important if we are to take stock of the ways in which its critique of Christianity differs across traditions. The first thing of notice is the apparent absence of a theology of liberation articulated in the Orthodox world. Pantelis Kalaitzidis reflects upon this, arguing that the role of the Church within the Byzantine Empire and subsequently the state in the Orthodox world has led (after the fall of Byzantium) to its fundamental attachment to the nation and the idea of national salvation. In this view, humans engage with history through the nation, and the nation with God through the national Church. The designation 'Christian' thus becomes an identity pertaining not to 'ecclesiastical requirements for personal or social life', but rather associated with 'traditional historical and cultural designations'.¹²⁴ Speaking of the proclamation in favour of 'economic globalization but not cultural globalization' of the Greek Orthodox Church, Kalaitzidis argues that the Church has 'reversed the Gospel criteria' of defence of the weak, the poor, and the needy, in favour of the "defense of an endangered ethnic and cultural identity".¹²⁵ In articulating this deeply contextual framing of Orthodox Christianity, the question is raised over whether the national liberations sought by certain Orthodox nations might be understood vis-à-vis the divine promise of liberation. For example,

¹²¹ Ateek, N. S., *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible, Justice, and the Palestine-Israel Conflict* (Orbis Books, 2017); Horn, G., *Western European Liberation Theology: The First Wave (1924-1959)* (Oxford University Press, 2015); Pungur, J., *An Eastern European Liberation Theology* (Angelus Publishers, 1994); Dabashi, H., *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* (Routledge, 2008).

¹²² Price, C., *Becoming Rasta: Origins of Rastafari Identity in Jamaica* (NYU Press, 2009), xv.

¹²³ Edmonds, E. B., *Rastafari: From Outcasts to Culture Bearers*, 1st edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). The question of Rastafari global connections has already been studied in IR by Robbie Shilliam: Shilliam, R., *The Black Pacific*.

¹²⁴ Kalaitzidis, P., *Orthodoxy and Political Theology* (World Council Of Churches Publications, 2012), 69.

¹²⁵ Kalaitzidis, P., 72.

can the long history of Serbian rebellion against Ottoman or Hapsburg rule in the Balkans be articulated as, or identified as drawing upon, liberation in the Biblical sense, resonating with Cone's liberation theology? Serbs were certainly disempowered and subjugated in both empires as an expendable and taxable peasant class, even if they were not strictly a minority in many of the empire's western regions.¹²⁶ The fall of the Ottoman empire, and the deliverance of multiple national Orthodox churches in the Balkan peninsula to varying levels of national independence points to an intriguing comparison between discourses of liberation, and the question of 'liberation to what?' in Eastern and Western Christianities.

This thesis has focused on the theological connections between Christianity and what would emerge as the world against which Cone rejects: a modernity shaped by discourses of race and supremacy that have their roots in Christianity's supersessionism of Judaism. But the strictly theological is only half of this story. Since the official adoption of Christianity into the Roman Empire in 325CE, Nicene Christianity has been the religion of myriad empires and emperors. This association with empire has shaped Christianity in important ways, and connections are doubtless to be found going in both directions: from theology to politics, but also from politics to theology. Much work has been done with regard to Christianity in the Roman and Byzantine empires, as well as the role of missionaries in the age of European expansion and empire. Discussion between these fields and the meaning and reach of white theology and Christian Supersessionism would strengthen their investigation by bringing empirical material into the conversation.

Excavating the process of the Western European appropriation of Christianity is central in the task of unpicking the ways in which Christianity has become interwoven with a sense of European supremacy. But this must be connected to the question of a framework of supremacy itself within Christianity. The Enlightenment and the dawn of the 'scientific age' is often regarded as the beginning of a shift to (western) European ascendancy, though an

¹²⁶ See in particular the practice of Devshirme, the 'taxation' of boys from Balkan Christian subjects for military and bureaucratic roles, along with the Austro-Hungarian practice of populating the frontier region between it and the Ottoman empire with Orthodox Christians considered less valuable than their Catholic counterparts. This created the 'Krajina Serb' population that would provide the basis for the declaration of Krajina Serb autonomy during the break-up of Yugoslavia, creating the short lived Republika Srpska Krajina in 1991. Braude, B., *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Incorporated, 2014).

often-fraught relationship between Western and Eastern Christians points to an older and more complex struggle. Global historian Peter Frankopan, for example, places emphasis on the success of the First Crusade as beginning a process in which western Christians began to think of themselves as closer to, and eventually *being*, the ‘centre of the world’.¹²⁷

The discussions of this thesis are oriented primarily towards the thought-world of the North Atlantic in general, and of Protestantism in particular. Protestant sensibilities and themes became almost seamlessly secularised into modernity, as Max Weber argues.¹²⁸ Karl Löwith, a student of Heidegger and the recipient of the letter in which the latter insists on the centrality of his life-context for his philosophy, writes of the centrality of Protestantism for Nineteenth Century German Philosophy, wherein we find so many titans of modern European philosophy.¹²⁹ Contemporary discussions of ‘Christianity’ in general, by contrast, are often not clear about *which* Christianity they are primarily speaking. One interesting effect of the period of energetic global missionary activity and evangelism is that with the steady formal secularisation of many European societies, Christianity is again becoming a faith most practiced outside Europe and the West. However, the Protestant or Latin character of most of Christianity’s global spread means that the Christianities most practiced globally are not extraneous to the occidental orientation of the Reformation and the Church of Rome.

As was a pointed early criticism of Cone, it is often remarked that these Christian traditions are inappropriate sources for building something like a ‘postcolonial theology’. Whilst our engagement with Carter focused on his diagnosis of race as a theological problem wound up with Christian Supersessionism, his willingness to engage, in seeking prognosis, more ‘orthodox’ sources of Christian thought has come under criticism. In *Prophetic Rage: A*

¹²⁷ “Christendom had been saved by the brave knights who had marched thousands of miles to Jerusalem. The Holy City had been liberated by the Christians – not the Greek Orthodox Christians of the Byzantine Empire, but those of Normandy, France and Flanders who made up the overwhelming majority of the expedition. The Muslims had been expelled from a city they had controlled for centuries. Bleak predictions of forthcoming apocalypse had been everywhere on the eve of the Crusade; these were now replaced by optimism, by strident self-confidence and ambition. In a matter of five years, expectations went from fearing the end of the world to welcoming the start of a new era – an age dominated by western Europe.” Frankopan, P., *The Silk Roads*, 115.

¹²⁸ Weber, M., *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Courier Corporation, 2012).

¹²⁹ “Philosophical criticism of the Christian religion began in the nineteenth century with Hegel and reached its climax with Nietzsche. It is a Protestant movement, and therefore specifically German; this holds true of both the criticism and the religion at which it was directed. Our critical philosophers were all theologically educated Protestants, and their criticism of Christianity presupposes its Protestant manifestation.” Löwith, K., *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, Revised ed. edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 327–28.

Postcolonial Theology of Liberation, Johnny Bernard Hill argues that despite Carter's attempt to undo the coloniality inherent in Western theology and to assert the possibility of a 'postcolonial Barthianism', he still remains in the orbit of 'colonial theology'. Hill, however, praises Carter for approaching race as a theological problem that 'may be reconciled through critical reflections on the "Jewishness of Jesus."' Carter, in Hill's account, encourages liberation theologies to reach back to pre-Augustinian days, "where the church might create a new way of being in the world."¹³⁰ Hill, by contrast, seeks to point "...to the ways in which human suffering and the quest for healing, redemption, and justice, in today's global world, serve as perhaps the ultimate and final authority on all life and reality, serving as a lens through which to view the transformative activity of God in the world."¹³¹ Whilst Carter advocates a return, Hill, after Cone, sees the present as the ultimate arbiter of life. In my reading, Cone's thought indicates the fact that such quests for healing, redemption, and justice, are already in motion in many traditions of religious practice, and so already point to and foster an ultimate frame of reality that is drawn from practice and experience.

This casts in stark relief the divide between academic study and political practice, that many scholars of politics wish to bridge. In Vincent Lloyd's account, despite his obvious influence in seminaries, Cone remained at a remove from politics: "Cone uses Christian theological language to suggest that blackness and liberation may offer such a critical political practice, but Cone's discussion remains at a distance from the practicalities of politics."¹³² This distance, between academic study and practical politics, resonates with Lois McNay's frustrations about ontological abstractions leading to such a distance from practical political situations as to be meaningless for them. Though it is an epistemological question that this thesis has not at all discussed, perhaps we must accept some degree of 'abstraction' and distance as part and parcel of sustained study of ideas, which are far easier to retrieve and distil from other academic texts than thoughts and actions. It is perhaps the highly specialised expertise of academics to *diagnose* problems, but offering *prognoses* is a matter more fraught with difficulty.

¹³⁰ Hill, J. B., *Prophetic Rage: A Postcolonial Theology of Liberation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2013), 16.

¹³¹ Hill, J. B., *Prophetic Rage: A Postcolonial Theology of Liberation*.

¹³² Lloyd, V. W., *Black Natural Law* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 160.

As Karen Teel notes, the ‘New Black Theologians’ such as Brian Bantum, J. Kameron Carter, and Willie James Jennings seek to move the conversation of the theological problematic of supersessionism and white supremacy into deeper territory than the ‘ontologically black’ antagonism of Cone’s more polemical work.¹³³ The nuances and subtleties of Cone’s project are largely forgotten in his depiction as a black nationalist theologian who entrenched blackness as an ontological fact of life, for all eternity. Our reading shows that he does not so simplistically make such entrenchments, but rather mobilises blackness in making sense of his own society, and the meaning of the Christian message of divine liberation *in* his society. The fact, however, remains that Cone did not produce the kind of historical-intellectual project of excavating and analysing that which he sought to reject, theologically and politically. Thus, to learn from Cone, and to learn where his thought points, we must also enlist the work of others, such as the ‘new black theologians’ (who, it must be recognised, resist the term). For Carter, Cone comes close to establishing such a non-supersessionist theology, but Carter argues that he leans too heavily on an ontological blackness which “disallows transcendence and thus recapitulates the inner logic of modern racial reasoning.”¹³⁴ Carter, amongst many others, wants a burdensome, problematic, and (they argue) fundamentally colonial spectre of ‘blackness’ to be overcome, though the question ‘with what’ looms large, and is a debate that I do not intend to enter into.¹³⁵ Carter, however, clearly articulates that the problem is not the *absence* of an appropriate signifier for those ‘outside’ the insiders of white supremacy, but is the very sense of whiteness itself.¹³⁶

In a similar vein, Vincent Lloyd argued in an article entitled ‘For What are Whites to Hope’ that whilst Cone’s work is ostensibly oriented towards black Christians, its real audience is white Christianity in the US. Lloyd laments that as the decades passed after Cone’s early texts, he came to embrace a contextual theology in which his thought was just ‘one vantage point among many.’ Lloyd compares the co-optation of Cone’s thought into a liberal multiculturalism with the posthumous co-optation of Martin Luther King, Jr., writing that in

¹³³ Teel, K., ‘The “New Black Theology” and the Dream of Post-Racialization’; Bantum, B., *The Death of Race: Building a New Christianity in a Racial World* (Fortress Press, 2016); Carter, J. K., *Race*; Jennings, W. J., *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (Yale University Press, 2010).

¹³⁴ Carter, J. K., *Race*, 158.

¹³⁵ See, for example: Bantum, B., *Redeeming Mulatto: A Theology of Race and Christian Hybridity* (Baylor University Press, 2010).

¹³⁶ Carter, J. K., *Race*, 372.

his later years Cone 'did this work himself'. But Cone's early theological vision 'was never as easily assimilable' into the liberal mainstream. Ultimately, Lloyd writes, "Black Christians have been doing Black Theology since time immemorial; it is whites who need a James Cone, and it is whites to whom he, essentially, speaks."¹³⁷

Cone's legacy is as the father of black theology, an academic field that has both shifted theological paradigms in progressive theology and at the same time been largely ignored by conservative theologians, identified as a merely contextual and ideological political project.¹³⁸ But as we have seen Cone speaks to, from and beyond his moment, and the political struggles of the civil rights movement in the United States. He invites us to observe penetrating questions about the legacy and potential of Christian theology for political thought, whilst retaining fidelity to the political struggle against racism. Political theology in IR learns much from this conversation, guided by Cone into a rich world of theological reflection rooted in political engagement.

¹³⁷ Lloyd, V. W., 'For What Are Whites to Hope?', 169.

¹³⁸ 'John Milbank's Twitter Bombshell on the Landscape of Identity-Based Theologies', Political Theology Network, 19 July 2020, <https://politicaltheology.com/john-milbanks-twitter-bombshell-on-the-landscape-of-identity-based-theologies/>.

Bibliography

- Acharya, A. 'Race and Racism in the Founding of the Modern World Order'. *International Affairs* 98, no. 1 (2022): 23–43.
- Adorno, T. W. *Negative Dialectics*. 2nd edition. New York: Continuum, 1981.
- Agamben, G. *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*. Stanford University Press, 2011.
- . *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*. Stanford University Press, 2005.
- Albl, M. C. (Trans.). *Pseudo-Gregory Of Nyssa: Testimonies Against The Jews*. Leiden: BRILL, 2004.
- Allen, R. *The Life, Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen: To Which Is Annexed the Rise and Progress of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America. Containing a Narrative of the Yellow Fever in the Year of Our Lord, 1793, with an Address to the People of Color in the United States*. Lee & Yeocum, 1888.
- Anderson, V. *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.
- Anievas, A., Manchanda, N., and Shilliam, R. *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line*. Routledge, 2014.
- Arendt, H. *The Human Condition*. University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- Armitage, D. *Heidegger's Pauline and Lutheran Roots*. Palgrave Macmillan US, 2018.
- Asad, T. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Ateek, N. S. *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible, Justice, and the Palestine-Israel Conflict*. Orbis Books, 2017.
- Augustine. 'The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus'. Translated by Roberts, A. and Donaldson, J. Accessed 26 November 2020. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/diognetus-roberts.html>.
- Badiou, A. *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. Verso Books, 2012.
- . *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Bain, W., ed. *Medieval Foundations of International Relations*. Routledge, 2016.
- . *Political Theology of International Order*. Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Bantum, B. *Redeeming Mulatto: A Theology of Race and Christian Hybridity*. Baylor University Press, 2010.
- . *The Death of Race: Building a New Christianity in a Racial World*. Fortress Press, 2016.
- Barth, K. *Church Dogmatics*. Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.
- Barth, K. *The Epistle to the Romans*. 6th ed. Oxford University Press, USA, 1968.
- . *The Only Way: How Can the Germans Be Cured?* Philosophical Library, 1947.
- Beckford, R. *Jesus Is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain*. Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998.
- Beitz, C. R. *The Idea of Human Rights*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Bibliowicz, A. *Jews and Gentiles in the Early Jesus Movement: An Unintended Journey*. Springer, 2013.
- Björk, M, and Svenungsson, J., eds. *Heidegger's Black Notebooks and the Future of Theology*. Springer, 2017.
- Blaney, D., and Tickner, A. 'International Relations in the Prison of Colonial Modernity'. *International Relations* 31, no. 1 (2017): 71–75.
- . 'Worlding, Ontological Politics and the Possibility of a Decolonial IR'. *Millennium* 45, no. 3 (2017): 1–19.
- Blanton, W. 'Anarchist Singularities or Proprietorial Resentments? On the Christian Problem in Heidegger's Notebooks of the 1930s'. In *Heidegger's Black Notebooks and the Future of Theology*, edited by Björk, M and Svenungsson, J., 99–130. Springer, 2017.
- Blond, P. *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*. Routledge, 2002.
- Bonhoeffer, D. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Fortress Press, 2010.

- Bourdieu, P. *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*. Stanford University Press, 1991.
- Braude, B. *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, Incorporated, 2014.
- Brincat, S. 'The Cosmology of Mādhyamaka Buddhism and Its World of Deep Relationalism'. In *Theology and World Politics: Metaphysics, Genealogies, Political Theologies*, edited by Paipais, V., 105–28. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- Bultmann, R. 'History and Eschatology in the New Testament'. *New Testament Studies* 1, no. 1 (1954): 5–16.
- . *Theology of the New Testament*. Baylor University Press, 2007.
- Butler, J., Laclau, E., and Žižek, S. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. Verso Books, 2011.
- Caird, G. B. *New Testament Theology*. Edited by Hurst, L. D. Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Campbell, J. T. *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa*. Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Camus, A. *The Rebel*. Penguin Books Limited, 2013.
- Cañizares-Esguerra, J. *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700*. Stanford University Press, 2006.
- Caputo, J. D. *Philosophy and Theology*. Abingdon Press, 2006.
- . 'Sorge and Kardia: The Hermeneutics of Factual Life and the Categories of the Heart'. In *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in His Earliest Thought*, edited by Kisiel, T. and van Buren, J., 327–44. State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Carter, J. K. 'Christology, or Redeeming Whiteness: A Response to James Perkinson's Appropriation of Black Theology'. *Theology Today* 60, no. 4 (2004): 525–39.
- . *Race: A Theological Account*. Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Cary, P. *Inner Grace: Augustine in the Traditions of Plato and Paul*. Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Chakrabarty, D. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Cherry, C., ed. *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*. UNC Press Books, 2014.
- Churchill, J. S. 'Translator's Introduction'. In *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, by Heidegger, M. Indiana University Press, 1965.
- Clay, E. 'A Black Theology of Liberation or Legitimation? A Postcolonial Response to Cone's Black Theology and Black Power at Forty'. *Black Theology* 8, no. 3 (2010): 307–26.
- Clinton, D. 'Reinhold Niebuhr: The Law of Love and the Omnipresence of Power'. *Journal of International Political Theory* 17, no. 2 (1 June 2021): 139–50.
- Cone, C. W. *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology*. Nashville, TN: AMEC, 1975.
- Cone, J. H. *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Orbis Books, 1970.
- . *Black Theology and Black Power*. Orbis Books, 1969.
- . 'Black Theology in American Religion'. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53, no. 4 (1985): 755–71.
- . 'Christian Faith and Political Praxis'. In *Praxis Cristiana y Producción Teológica*, edited by Pixley, J. V. and Bastian, J-P., 75–88. Salamaca: Ediciones Sigueme, 1979.
- . 'Christian Faith and Political Praxis'. *Bulletin de Théologie Africaine= Bulletin of African Theology= Boletín de Teología Africana Kinshasa* 2, no. 4 (1980): 205–18.
- . 'Christian Faith and Political Praxis'. *Encounter*, no. 43 (1982): 129–41.
- . *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*. Orbis Books, 1984.
- . *God of the Oppressed*. Orbis Books, 1975.
- . *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream Or a Nightmare*. Orbis Books, 1992.
- . *My Soul Looks Back*. Orbis Books, 1986.
- . *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968-1998*. Beacon Press, 2000.
- . *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian*. Orbis Books, 2018.

- . *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology*. Orbis Books, 1999.
- . *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Orbis Books, 2011.
- . *The Doctrine of Man in the Theology of Karl Barth*. Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., 1965.
- . *The Spirituals and the Blues*. Orbis Books, 1972.
- Connolly, W. E. *A World of Becoming*. Duke University Press, 2011.
- . *Why I Am Not a Secularist*. London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Coogan, M. D. et al. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Critchley, S. *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*. Verso Books, 2014.
- . *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology*. Verso Books, 2012.
- Dabashi, H. *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire*. Routledge, 2008.
- Danewid, I. 'White Innocence in the Black Mediterranean: Hospitality and the Erasure of History'. *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 7 (3 July 2017): 1674–89.
- Davis, C., Milbank, J., and Žižek, S. *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*. Duke University Press, 2005.
- Deleuze, D. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Patton, P. Revised ed. edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- Delgado, A. C. T. 'Suma Qamaña as a Strategy of Power: Politicizing the Pluriverse'. *Carta Internacional* 13, no. 3 (2018).
- Demaria, F., and Kothari, A. 'The Post-Development Dictionary Agenda: Paths to the Pluriverse'. *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 12 (2017): 2588–99.
- den Dulk, M. 'Origen of Alexandria and the History of Racism as a Theological Problem'. *The Journal of Theological Studies* 71, no. 1 (2020): 164–95.
- Derrida, J. *Writing and Difference*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Di Cesare, D. E. *Heidegger and the Jews: The Black Notebooks*. John Wiley & Sons, 2018.
- . 'The "Jewish Question" and the Question of Being: Heidegger before and after 1945'. *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 4, no. 2 (3 July 2017): 173–82.
- Dickerson, D. C. *The African Methodist Episcopal Church: A History*. Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Dumas, P. E. *Proslavery Britain: Fighting for Slavery in an Era of Abolition*. Springer, 2016.
- Edmonds, E. B. *Rastafari: From Outcasts to Culture Bearers*. 1st edition. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Efstathopoulos, C., Kurki, M., and Shepherd, A. 'Facing Human Interconnections: Thinking International Relations into the Future'. *International Relations* 34, no. 3 (2020): 267–89.
- Eppehimer, T. 'Victor Anderson's Beyond Ontological Blackness and James Cone's Black Theology: A Discussion'. *Black Theology* 4, no. 1 (1 January 2006): 87–106.
- Erdozain, D. *The Soul of Doubt: The Religious Roots of Unbelief from Luther to Marx*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Escobar, A. *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds*. Duke University Press, 2018.
- . 'Sustaining the Pluriverse: The Political Ontology of Territorial Struggles in Latin America'. In *The Anthropology of Sustainability: Beyond Development and Progress*, edited by Brightman, M. and Lewis, J., 237–56. Palgrave Studies in Anthropology of Sustainability. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2017.
- Faust, D. G. *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830–1860*. LSU Press, 1981.
- Feuerbach, L. *The Essence of Christianity*. C. Blanchard, 1855.
- Fonseca, M. 'Global IR and Western Dominance: Moving Forward or Eurocentric Entrapment?'. *Millennium* 48, no. 1 (2019): 45–59.

- Foucault, M. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*. 1st ed. Picador, 2003.
- Fox, J., and Sandler, S. *Bringing Religion Into International Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan US, 2006.
- Frankopan, P. *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2016.
- Fredriksen, P. *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism*. Yale University Press, 2010.
- Fried, G. 'On Beyond Heidegger'. In *After Heidegger?*, edited by Polt, R. F. H., 11–18. New Heidegger Research. Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018.
- Gani, J. K., and Marshall, J. 'The Impact of Colonialism on Policy and Knowledge Production in International Relations'. *International Affairs* 98, no. 1 (2022): 5–22.
- Gentry, C. E. 'Anxiety Politics: Creativity and Feminist Christian Realism'. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22, no. 2 (20 September 2016): 389–412. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-017-0097-x>.
- Gerbner, K. *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.
- Geréby, G. 'Political Theology versus Theological Politics: Erik Peterson and Carl Schmitt'. *New German Critique* 35, no. 3 (105) (1 November 2008): 7–33.
- Getachew, A. *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*. Princeton University Press, 2020.
- Gillespie, M. A. *The Theological Origins of Modernity*. University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Glaude, E. S. *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America*. University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Goldenberg, D. M. *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Grant, J. 'Black Theology and the Black Woman'. In *The Black Studies Reader*, edited by Bobo, J., Hudley, C., and Michel, C., 421–34. Routledge, 2004.
- Gregory, B. S. *The Unintended Reformation*. Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Guilhot, N. 'American Katechon: When Political Theology Became International Relations Theory'. *Constellations* 17, no. 2 (2010): 224–53.
- Gutiérrez, G. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. SCM, 2001.
- . *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*. Orbis Books, 1984.
- Hamilton, C. V., and Ture, K. *Black Power: Politics of Liberation in America*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011.
- Harris, M. M., and Davis, T. B. "'In the Hope That They Can Make Their Own Future": James H. Cone and the Third World'. *Journal of Africana Religions* 7, no. 2 (2019): 189–212.
- Harrison, P. *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Hartnett, L. 'Love as a Practice of Peace: The Political Theologies of Tolstoy, Gandhi and King'. In *Theology and World Politics: Metaphysics, Genealogies, Political Theologies*, edited by Paipais, V., 265–88. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- . "'The Impossible Possibility of Love": Reinhold Niebuhr's Thought on Racial Justice'. *Journal of International Political Theory* 17, no. 2 (13 December 2020): 151–68.
- Hartnett, L., and Ashworth, L. 'Introduction: Why Read Reinhold Niebuhr Now?' *Journal of International Political Theory* 17, no. 2 (1 June 2021): 118–22.
- Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History (1857)*. Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- Heidegger, M. *Being and Time (1927)*. Blackwell, 1967.
- . 'Building Dwelling Thinking'. In *Basic Writings*, edited by Krell, D. F., 343–64. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008.
- . *Introduction to Metaphysics (1935)*. Yale University Press, 2000.
- . *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics (1929)*. Indiana University Press, 1965.
- Heinze, Rudolph W. *Reform and Conflict: From the Medieval World to the Wars of Religion, A.D. 1350-1648*. Monarch Books, 2006.

- Henderson, E. A. 'Hidden in Plain Sight: Racism in International Relations Theory'. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26, no. 1 (1 March 2013): 71–92.
- Herzog, F. *Liberation Theology: Liberation in the Light of the Fourth Gospel*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013.
- Heschel, S. 'Theology as a Vision for Colonialism: From Supersessionism to Dejudaization in German Protestantism'. In *Germany's Colonial Pasts*, edited by Ames, E., Klotz, M., Wildenthal, L., and Gilman, S. L., 148–63. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005.
- Hill, J. B. *Prophetic Rage: A Postcolonial Theology of Liberation*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2013.
- Hobson, J. M. *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- . *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760-2010*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- hooks, b. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. South End Press, 1992.
- . 'Postmodern Blackness'. *Postmodern Culture* 1, no. 1 (9 January 1990).
- Hopkins, D. N. *Black Theology USA and South Africa: Politics, Culture, and Liberation*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005.
- . *Heart and Head: Black Theology—Past, Present, and Future*. Springer, 2002.
- Horn, G. *Western European Liberation Theology: The First Wave (1924-1959)*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Hurd, E. S. *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*. Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Hutchings, K. 'Decolonizing Global Ethics: Thinking with the Pluriverse'. *Ethics & International Affairs* 33, no. 2 (2019): 115–25.
- Inwood, M. *A Heidegger Dictionary*. Wiley, 1999.
- Irons, C. F. *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- Isakjee, A., Davies, T., Obradović-Wochnik, J., and Augustová, K. 'Liberal Violence and the Racial Borders of the European Union'. *Antipode* 52, no. 6 (2020): 1751–73.
- James H. Cone. 'Black Theology and Black Power'. Yale Divinity School, 20 April 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyP7BrmII9U>.
- Jennings, W. J. *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*. Yale University Press, 2010.
- Political Theology Network. 'John Milbank's Twitter Bombshell on the Landscape of Identity-Based Theologies', 19 July 2020. <https://politicaltheology.com/john-milbanks-twitter-bombshell-on-the-landscape-of-identity-based-theologies/>.
- Johnson, S. *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity: Race, Heathens, and the People of God*. Springer, 2004.
- Jones, W. *Is God a White Racist?: A Preamble to Black Theology*. Anchor Press, 1973.
- . 'Theodicy and Methodology in Black Theology: A Critique of Washington, Cone and Cleage'. *Harvard Theological Review* 64, no. 4 (October 1971): 541–57.
- Joseph, M. P. *Theologies of the Non-Person: The Formative Years of EATWOT*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Justin (Martyr), Saint. *Dialogue with Trypho*. Catholic University of America Press, 2003.
- Kalaitzidis, P. *Orthodoxy and Political Theology*. World Council Of Churches Publications, 2012.
- Kant, I. *Critique of Pure Reason (1781)*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- . *Religion and Rational Theology*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- . *Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason (1793)*. Translated by Pluhar, W. S. Hackett Publishing, 2009.
- Kanterian, E. *Kant, God and Metaphysics: The Secret Thorn*. Routledge, 2017.
- Kantorowicz, E. H. *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Kaufmann, T. *Luther's Jews: A Journey Into Anti-Semitism*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

- Keel, T. *Divine Variations: How Christian Thought Became Racial Science*. Stanford University Press, 2019.
- Kgatle, M. S. 'Spirituality of Liberation in African Pentecostal Worship and Its Implications for Black Theology'. *Black Theology* 19, no. 2 (4 May 2021): 168–80.
- Kierkegaard, S. *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Oriented Deliberation in View of the Dogmatic Problem of Hereditary Sin*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2014.
- King (Jr.), M. L. *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos Or Community?* Beacon Press, 2010.
- Kisiel, T. *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*. University of California Press, 1995.
- Knox, J. *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ: A Study of Pattern in Christology*. Cambridge University Press, 1967.
- Kurki, M. *International Relations in a Relational Universe*. Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Laclau, E. *Emancipation(s)*. Verso, 1996.
- Lévy, B. *Left in Dark Times: A Stand Against the New Barbarism*. Random House Publishing Group, 2008.
- Lim, T. H. 'Studying the Qumran Scrolls and Paul in Their Historical Context'. *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity*, 1 January 2003, 135–56.
- Ling, L. H. M. *The Dao of World Politics: Towards a Post-Westphalian, Worldist International Relations*. Routledge, 2013.
- Lloyd, V. W. *Black Natural Law*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- . 'For What Are Whites to Hope?' *Political Theology* 17, no. 2 (2016): 168–81.
- . 'Paradox and Tradition in Black Theology'. *Black Theology* 9 (22 June 2011): 265–86.
- Löwith, K. *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*. Revised ed. edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964.
- Luoma-Aho, M. *God and International Relations: Christian Theology and World Politics*. 1st edition. New York ; London: Continuum, 2012.
- Luther, M. *Lectures on Romans (1515-1516)*. Westminster John Knox Press, 1961.
- . *Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans and Concerning Christian Liberty (1522)*. Benediction Classics, 2010.
- . *The Jews and Their Lies (1543)*. Christian Nationalist Crusade, 1948.
- Lynch, C. *Wrestling with God: Ethical Precarity in Christianity and International Relations*. Cambridge Studies in International Relations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- MacCulloch, D. *All Things Made New: The Reformation and Its Legacy*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Mack, M. *German Idealism and the Jew: The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses*. University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Marsh, C. *Reclaiming Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Promise of His Theology*. Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Martyn, J. L. *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Yale University Press, 1998.
- Matera, F. J. *Galatians*. Liturgical Press, 2007.
- Mavelli, L., ed. *Towards a Postsecular International Politics: New Forms of Community, Identity, and Power*. Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015.
- Mayblin, L., and Turner, J. *Migration Studies and Colonialism*. Wiley, 2021.
- McNay, L. *The Misguided Search for the Political*. John Wiley & Sons, 2014.
- Milbank, J. *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People*. Wiley, 2014.
- . 'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism ': A Short Summa in Forty Two Responses to Unasked Questions'. *Modern Theology* 7, no. 3 (1991): 225–37.
- . *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009.
- . *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. John Wiley & Sons, 1990.
- Milbank, J., Pickstock, C., and Ward, G. *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*. Psychology Press, 1999.

- Milbank, J., Žižek, S., and Davis, C. *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology*. Brazos Press, 2010.
- Mills, C. W. 'Kant's Untermenschen'. In *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy*, edited by Valls, E., 169–93. Cornell University Press, 2005.
- Molloy, S. *Kant's International Relations: The Political Theology of Perpetual Peace*. University of Michigan Press, 2017.
- Moltmann, J. *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*. Fortress Press, 1993.
- Mondon, A., and Winter, A. *Reactionary Democracy: How Racism and the Populist Far Right Became Mainstream*. Verso Books, 2020.
- Moses, J. 'A Niebuhrian Pacifism for an Imperfect World'. *Journal of International Political Theory* 17, no. 2 (1 June 2021): 169–84.
- Niebuhr, R. 'Anglo-Saxon Destiny and Responsibility'. In *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, edited by Conrad Cherry. UNC Press Books, 2014.
- . *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*. Edited by Robertson, D. B. Westminster John Knox Press, 1992.
- Nordin, A., and Smith, G. H. 'Reintroducing Friendship to International Relations: Relational Ontologies from China to the West'. *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 18, no. 3 (2018): 369–96.
- Novak, D. 'Supersessionism Hard and Soft'. *First Things*, no. 290 (2019): 1–9.
- Origen. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans Books 1-5*. Catholic University of America Press, 2001.
- . *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans Books 6-10*. Catholic University of America Press, 2002.
- . *Homilies on Luke*. Catholic University of America Press, 2010.
- Pabst, A. 'International Relations and the "Modern" Middle Ages: Rival Theological Theorisations of International Order'. In *Medieval Foundations of International Relations*, edited by Bain, W., 166–85. Routledge, 2016.
- . 'The Secularism of Post-Secularity: Religion, Realism, and the Revival of Grand Theory in IR'. *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 5 (2012): 995–1017.
- Pabst, A., and Schneider, C., eds. *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2013.
- Paipais, V. 'Introduction: Religion or Theology? (Re)Introducing Political Theology into the Study of World Politics'. In *Theology and World Politics: Metaphysics, Genealogies, Political Theologies*, edited by Paipais, V., 1–22. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- . 'Overcoming "Gnosticism"? Realism as Political Theology'. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 29, no. 4 (2016): 1603–23.
- . *Political Ontology and International Political Thought: Voiding a Pluralist World*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- . 'Reinhold Niebuhr and the Christian Realist Pendulum'. *Journal of International Political Theory* 17, no. 2 (10 December 2020): 185–202.
- . 'The Promise of Ontology: Nihilism for a Pluralist World'. *Millennium* 45, no. 1 (2016): 64–71.
- Pasha, M. K. 'Ibn Khaldun and the Wealth of Civilizations'. In *Routledge Handbook of Ethics and International Relations*, edited by Steele, B. J. and Heinze, E., 554–64. Routledge, 2018.
- . *Islam and International Relations: Fractured Worlds*. Routledge, 2017.
- . 'Political Theology and Sovereignty: Sayyid Qutb in Our Times'. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22, no. 2 (20 September 2016): 346–63.
- . 'Political Theology and Sovereignty: Sayyid Qutb in Our Times'. In *Theology and World Politics: Metaphysics, Genealogies, Political Theologies*, edited by Paipais, V., 157–79. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- . 'Religion and the Fabrication of Race'. *Millennium* 45, no. 3 (2017): 312–34.

- Pauck, W., ed. 'General Introduction'. In *Lectures on Romans*. Westminster John Knox Press, 1961.
- Peacocke, J. 'Heidegger and the Problem of Onto-Theology'. In *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, edited by Blond, P., 93–102. Routledge, 2002.
- Perkinson, J. W. 'Rage with a Purpose, Weep without Regret: A White Theology of Solidarity'. *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 82, no. 3/4 (1999): 437–63.
- . *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Peterson, E. 'Monotheism as a Political Problem : A Contribution to the History of Political Theology in the Roman Empire (1935)'. In *Theological Tractates*. Stanford University Press, 2011.
- Petito, F., and Hatzopoulos, P., eds. *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Pickstock, C. *Aspects of Truth: A New Religious Metaphysics*. Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Pitre, B., Barber, M. P., and Kincaid, J. A. *Paul, a New Covenant Jew: Rethinking Pauline Theology*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2019.
- Plantinga, A. *The Ontological Argument from St. Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*. Macmillan, 1968.
- Pogge, T. *World Poverty and Human Rights*. Polity, 2008.
- Pöggeler, O. 'Destruction and Moment'. In *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in His Earliest Thought*, edited by Kisiel, T. and van Buren, J., 137–58. State University of New York Press, 1994.
- Price, C. *Becoming Rasta: Origins of Rastafari Identity in Jamaica*. NYU Press, 2009.
- Prozorov, S. 'Ex Nihilo in Mundum: A Reply to Paipais'. *Millennium* 45, no. 1 (1 September 2016): 72–79.
- . *Ontology and World Politics: Void Universalism I*. Routledge, 2013.
- . *Theory of the Political Subject: Void Universalism II*. Routledge, 2013.
- Pungur, J. *An Eastern European Liberation Theology*. Angelus Publishers, 1994.
- Querejazu, A. 'Encountering the Pluriverse: Looking for Alternatives in Other Worlds'. *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 59, no. 2 (2016).
- Rasmusson, A.,. "'Deprive Them of Their Pathos": Karl Barth and the Nazi Revolution Revisited'. *Modern Theology* 23, no. 3 (2007): 369–91.
- Reddie, A. G. *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue*. Springer, 2006.
- Reid, J. D. *Heidegger's Moral Ontology*. Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Rengger, N. J. *International Relations, Political Theory and the Problem of Order: Beyond International Relations Theory?* London: Routledge, 1999.
- . 'On Theology and International Relations: World Politics beyond the Empty Sky'. *International Relations* 27, no. 2 (1 June 2013): 141–57.
- . *The Anti-Pelagian Imagination in Political Theory and International Relations : Dealing in Darkness*. Routledge, 2017.
- Rojas, C. 'Contesting the Colonial Logics of the International: Toward a Relational Politics for the Pluriverse'. *International Political Sociology* 10, no. 4 (2016): 369–82.
- Rose, G. *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society*. 1st ed. Wiley-Blackwell, 1992.
- Rountree, T. A., Te Aroha. 'Jesus Does a Haka Boogie: Tangata Whenua Theology'. In *Theologies from the Pacific*, edited by Havea, J., 47–62. Postcolonialism and Religions. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021.
- Ruether, R. R. 'The Adversus Judaeos Tradition in the Church Fathers: The Exegesis of Christian Anti-Judaism'. In *Aspects of Jewish Culture in the Middle Ages: Papers of the Eight Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies*, edited by Szarmach, P. E. State University of New York Press, 1979.
- Sabaratham, M. 'Is IR Theory White? Racialised Subject-Positioning in Three Canonical Texts'. *Millennium*, 25 November 2020.
- Said, D. W. 'An African Theology of Decolonization'. *Harvard Theological Review* 64, no. 4 (October 1971): 501–24.

- Sanders, E. P. *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*. Fortress Press, 1983.
- Sartre, J-P. *Theology of the Absurd*. Newman Press, 1965.
- Scheck, T. P., and Lienhard, J. T. *Origen and the History of Justification: The Legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2016.
- Schellenberg, J. L. *The Wisdom to Doubt: A Justification of Religious Skepticism*. Cornell University Press, 2012.
- Schmitt, C. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty, 1922*. University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Shani, G. 'IR as Inter-Cosmological Relations?' *International Politics Reviews*, 19 July 2021.
- . 'Toward a Post-Western IR: The Umma, Khalsa Panth, and Critical International Relations Theory'. *International Studies Review* 10, no. 4 (1 December 2008): 722–34.
- Shell, S. M. 'Kant's Concept of a Human Race'. In *The German Invention of Race*, edited by Eigen, S. and Larrimore, M., 55–72. Ithaca, United States: State University of New York Press, 2006.
- Shilliam, R. 'Black Redemption, Not (White) Abolition'. In *Claiming the International*, edited by Tickner, A. and Blaney, D., 141–58. Routledge, 2013.
- . *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity*. Oxon: Routledge, 2010.
- . *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.
- Sloane, J. P. *The Evil History of Replacement Theology: An Illustrated History of the Church's Dark and Shameful Treatment of the Jews*. Avington House Publishing, 2016.
- Snyder, J., ed. *Religion and International Relations Theory*. Columbia University Press, 2011.
- Soulen, R. K. 'Introducing the Society for Post-Supersessionist Theology'. Presented at the Inaugural Meeting: 'An Agenda for Post-Supersessionist Theology', Denver, Colorado, United States, 16 November 2018. https://9b878d63-4fee-4cef-a339-be50a71d9f0f.filesusr.com/ugd/d21797_d19f0679799f4c2ca3929dc8b6af10f5.pdf.
- . 'Karl Barth and the Future of the God of Israel'. *Pro Ecclesia* 6, no. 4 (1997): 413–28.
- . *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*. Fortress Press, 1996.
- Southgate, C. *Theology in a Suffering World: Glory and Longing*. Hardcover. Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- St Augustine. *Eighty-Three Different Questions*. Catholic University of America Press, 2010.
- . *Four Anti-Pelagian Writings*. Catholic University of America Press, 2010.
- . *Saint Augustine: Letters, Volume 1 (1 - 82)*. Edited by Deferrari, R. The Catholic University of America Press, 2008.
- Stanley, T. W. 'Heidegger Read Barth...' Timothy Stanley. Accessed 9 August 2021. <https://timothywstanley.com/notes/2013/10/11/heidegger-after-barth>.
- Strauss, L. *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought*. SUNY Press, 2012.
- Taubes, J. *The Political Theology of Paul*. Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Taylor, C. *A Secular Age*. Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Teel, K. 'The "New Black Theology" and the Dream of Post-Racialization'. *Black Theology* 15, no. 1 (2 January 2017): 3–20.
- Thakur, V., and Vale, P. C. J. *South Africa, Race and the Making of International Relations*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2020.
- Tickner, A., and Blaney, D., eds. *Thinking International Relations Differently*. Oxon: Routledge, 2013.
- Tillich, P. *A History of Christian Thought, from Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*. Simon and Schuster, 1972.
- . *Systematic Theology, Volume 1*. University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Tolstoy, L. *The Gospel in Brief: The Life of Jesus*. Translated by Condren, D. Harper Collins, 2011.
- Vanhoozer, K. *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

- Vasilaki, R. 'Provincialising IR? Deadlocks and Prospects in Post-Western IR Theory'. *Millennium* 41, no. 1 (2012): 3–22.
- Vieira, M. 'The Decolonial Subject and the Problem of Non-Western Authenticity'. *Postcolonial Studies* 22, no. 2 (2019): 150–67.
- Vitalis, R. *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations*. Cornell University Press, 2015.
- Vlach, M. J. *Has the Church Replaced Israel?: A Theological Evaluation*. B&H Publishing Group, 2010.
- . 'Various Forms of Replacement Theology'. *The Master's Seminary Journal* 20 (2009): 5769.
- Voegelin, E. *Science, Politics and Gnosticism: Two Essays*. Simon and Schuster, 2012.
- Vučetić, S. 'Against Race Taboos: The Global Colour Line in Philosophical Discourse'. In *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line*, edited by Anievas, A., Manchanda, N., and Shilliam, R., 98–114. Routledge, 2014.
- Washington, J. R. *Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States*. Beacon Press, 1964.
- Weber, M. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Courier Corporation, 2012.
- Wight, C. *Agents, Structures and International Relations: Politics as Ontology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Williams, D. S. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Orbis Books, 2013.
- Wilson, E. K. *After Secularism: Rethinking Religion in Global Politics*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Wolfe, J. *Heidegger and Theology*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014.
- . *Heidegger's Eschatology: Theological Horizons in Martin Heidegger's Early Work*. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Wolin, S. 'Political Theory: From Vocation to Invocation'. In *Vocations of Political Theory*, edited by Frank, J. A. and Tambornino, J. University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- X, Malcolm. *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*. Grove Weidenfeld, 1990.
- Yong, A., and Alexander, E. *Afro-Pentecostalism: Black Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in History and Culture*. NYU Press, 2012.
- Žižek, S. *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*. MIT Press, 2003.
- . *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. Verso, 2000.
- Žižek, S., and Milbank, J. *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* MIT Press, 2011.