



Protestant Theological University

Credibility of Churches' Antiracism Engagement

van der Ham, K.; Reddie, Anthony; Smit, P.B.; Klomp, M.C.M.

Published in:

Journal of Religion in Europe

DOI:

[10.1163/18748929-bja10096](https://doi.org/10.1163/18748929-bja10096)

Published: 23/09/2024

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

van der Ham, K., Reddie, A., Smit, P. B., & Klomp, M. C. M. (2024). Credibility of Churches' Antiracism Engagement: A Study on Manifestations of the Entanglement of White Dutch Protestantism and Racism. *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 17(3), 209-235. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18748929-bja10096>

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons). You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

This publication might have been made available through the PThU Research Portal under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the PThU website: <https://www.pthu.nl/over-ptthu/bibliotheek-ptthu/diensten/article-25fa-taverne-amendement-end-user-agreement.pdf>

Takedown policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright, please contact us providing details, and we will investigate your claim and remove access to the work if necessary: bibliotheek@pthu.nl.

Downloaded from the PThU Research Portal (Pure): <https://pure.pthu.nl>.



BRILL

JOURNAL OF RELIGION IN EUROPE 17 (2024) 209–235

Journal of
Religion in
Europe
brill.com/jre

Credibility of Churches' Antiracism Engagement

*A Study on Manifestations of the Entanglement of White Dutch
Protestantism and Racism*

Kirsten van der Ham | ORCID: 0000-0003-3354-5608
Protestantse Theologische Universiteit, Utrecht, The Netherlands
kvanderham@pthu.nl

Anthony Reddie | ORCID: 0000-0003-3490-2881
Regent's Park College, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK
anthony.reddie@regents.ox.ac.uk

Peter-Ben Smit | ORCID: 0000-0002-7450-571X
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
p.b.a.smit@vu.nl

Mirella Klomp | ORCID: 0000-0002-6659-2411
Protestantse Theologische Universiteit, Utrecht, The Netherlands
mcmklomp@pthu.nl

Received 6 March 2023 | Accepted 19 August 2024 |
Published online 23 September 2024

Abstract

This article aims to explore how the entanglement of Protestant Christianity and race and racism is manifested in contemporary Dutch society, and to identify which themes for introspection this yields for majority white Dutch Protestant churches. We argue that introspection on perceived superiority of white Dutch Protestantism is crucial to uncover subtle, unconscious mechanisms and ideas that are present in majority white Dutch Protestant churches and that contribute to maintaining racism. Furthermore, we argue that contemporary topical issues such as racism and colonial history run the risk of being pushed to the margins again as long as there is no systematic review of power and privilege of white Dutch Protestantism.

Published with license by Koninklijke Brill BV | DOI:10.1163/18748929-bja10096

© KIRSTEN VAN DER HAM ET AL., 2024 | ISSN: 1874-8910 (print) 1874-8929 (online)

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the CC BY 4.0 license.

Keywords

racism – antiracism – Protestantism – Netherlands – majority white churches – nationalism

1 Introduction

European Christianity has been a powerful actor in the construct of race and in the colonial project and its transgenerational impact,¹ due to an interplay of theology, religious practices, politics, and culture.² In recent decades, movements within European Christian theology and practices have become critical toward their own involvement in race and racism, as is the case for Dutch Protestantism. Protestant churches have issued antiracist statements, organized events around the topic,³ and reflected on their use of language as well as on their role in enslavement in Dutch colonized lands.⁴ These efforts in

1 This article is part of the PhD research of Kirsten van der Ham at the Protestant Theological University (PThU) in Utrecht, who also authored drafts of this article. Draft and final versions of the article were discussed with Mirella Klomp, Anthony Reddie and Peter-Ben Smit, who supervise the research project.

2 Matthea Westerduin, “Questioning Religio-Secular Temporalities: Mediaeval Formations of Nation, Europe, and Race,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 54/1–2 (2020), 137–138; David Horrell, *Ethnicity and Inclusion: Religion, Race, and Whiteness in Constructions of Identities* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 7.

3 For example, the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN) published a statement in 2020 after large Black Lives Matter protests: René de Reuver, “Racisme is zonde,” <https://protestantsekerk.nl/verdieping/protestants-perspectief-racisme-is-zonde/>. “Wake: dare to connect” is an example of a Christian event to raise awareness and share faith reflections on racism in the Netherlands: Youth for Christ, “Wake: Dare to Connect,” <https://yfc.nl/wake-dare-to-connect>.

4 The Inter-ecclesial Foundation for Hymns (Interkerkelijke Stichting voor het Kerklied), of which several protestant denominations are part, composed a hymn book (2013) that includes the famous Dutch hymn, “Jeruzalem, mijn vaderstad” (Jerusalem, my happy home). One verse in the original text of this hymn contained the ‘n-word,’ which the poet Willem Barnard at time of writing (1960s) subversively chose to point at (and protest against) racial injustices. Advancing insights led to an adaptation of the lyrics in 2021, which led ISK to recommend a new version of this verse, that does justice to both advancing insights and the intentions of Barnard with his original text: *Volzin*, “‘N-woord’ in Jeruzalemlied geschrapt en aangepast aan de tijdgeest,” 7 December 2021, <https://volzin.nl/n-woord-in-jeruzalemlied-geschrapt-en-aangepast-aan-de-tijdgeest>.

The Moravian church has initiated a research project on its role in enslavement and to uncover voices of enslaved Africans in Suriname, carried out by Maurice San-A-Jong. The Protestant Theological University recently started a research project on legacies of slavery

antiracism are, however, merely scratching the surface of centuries of entanglement of Dutch Protestant Christianity in the construct of race and racism. Critical self-reflection in this regard is required if they truly want to dismantle racism in Dutch Protestantism.⁵

This article investigates which themes in particular require self-reflection regarding the entanglement of Dutch Protestant Christianity with race and racism—hence regarding Dutch Protestant Christianity (subconsciously) as maintaining racism in Dutch society—against the background of majority white Protestant churches' involvement in antiracism. The central question to this article is: How is Protestant Christianity's entanglement with race and racism manifested in contemporary Dutch society, and what themes for self-reflection does this yield for majority white Protestant churches' involvement in antiracism? To answer this question, we will first explore Protestant Christianity's entanglement with racism on a societal level, by regarding how Christianity is connected with (white) Dutch cultural and national identity in exclusionary mechanisms in contemporary Dutch society. We discuss how the construct of race is interrelated with the construct of religion and how these constructs function in white Dutch Christian nationalist identity-making. Thereafter, we explore Protestant Christianity's entanglement with racism on the level of Dutch Protestant theology and praxis to increase our understanding of how this entanglement is present in contemporary Protestant Christianity.⁶ We highlight two periods of time in which Dutch theologians and practitioners

and the PCN: Protestantse Theologische Universiteit, "Kerk en slavernij," <https://www.pthu.nl/kerk-en-slavernij/>. The Dutch Council of Churches has published a confession of guilt for the involvement of churches in slavery: Raad van Kerken in Nederland, "Verantwoording Slavernij," 15 June 2013, <https://www.raadvankerken.nl/nieuws/2013/06/verantwoording-slavernij>. The Lutheran church in Amsterdam and the Moravian church in Amsterdam have starting a working group which has resulted, among other things in the publication of Egbert Boeker, Rhoinde Doth, Urwin Vyent, and Andreas Wöhle (eds.) *Heilzame Verwerking van het Slavernijverleden voor "Wit" en "Zwart"* (The Hague: SLUB, 2020).

5 Kirsten van der Ham, "White Racism and Dutch Churches: In Search of Liberative Practices," *NTT Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion* 77/1 (2023), 11.

6 By this, we mean what practical theologian Clare Watkins terms "an integrated whole-theology" that is displayed in different levels, namely: (1) embodied in Christian practices themselves, (2) practitioners' own theological articulation of their practices, (3) the Christian tradition, in its various understandings of scripture, church teaching, etc. and (4) academic theology. All these levels are interdependent and influence each other in an ongoing feedback loop, which is not without power imbalances: Clare Watkins, *Disclosing Church: An Ecclesiology Learned from Conversations in Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 39, 45–48. She writes this in her revisiting of Helen Cameron, Deborah Bhatti, Catherine Duce, James Sweeney, and Clare Watkins, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

have addressed this issue: the 1980s and 1990s, and mid-2010s until now. Last, we answer the research question by identifying themes for self-reflection for white Protestant churches regarding the entanglement of white Dutch Protestantism with race and racism, and we make suggestions for further research.

Before we start our exploration, we need to clarify what we understand by (white) racism. We perceive racism as a multilayered system that normalizes white bodies, cultures, and ideas and assigns nonwhite bodies, cultures, and ideas a social (power) position based on their proximity to whiteness, in intersection with other identity categories such as gender and class, resulting in white privilege.⁷ Racialized identities are constructed through an interlinkage of historical, social, political, and cultural locations.⁸ Racism is often automatically and unconsciously transmitted from generation to generation when it is not openly challenged and deconstructed.⁹ Furthermore, we follow Gloria Wekker, pioneering anthropologist researching racism in Dutch society, who argues that race “is not only a matter of ideology, beliefs, and statements about a particular group of people; race also becomes transparent in praxis, in the way things are organised and done.”¹⁰

We use ‘whiteness’ in this article to refer to a social location of privilege in a Dutch context. By people of color, we understand everyone who is not granted white privilege in the racist system. We use this term to align with current antiracist policies about use of language in the Netherlands.¹¹ We present people of color as a broad, diverse group that experiences racism in different gradations in Dutch society. This category, as well as the category ‘white,’ is a simplification of reality and does not do justice to all lived intersectional realities concerning racism in Dutch society, as is often the case with social constructs. It is furthermore not always clear whether someone can be categorized as one or the other: whether Jewish people should be categorized as white, for example, and how antisemitism functions in the larger racist system is open to

7 Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 58–64.

8 Stuart Hall, “What is this ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?,” *Social Justice* 20/1–2 (1993), 111.

9 Lida M. van den Broek, “Neither With, Nor Without Them—Ethnic Diversity on the Work Floor: How Egalitarianism Breeds Discrimination,” in Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving (eds.), *Dutch Racism* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 260.

10 Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016) 50–51.

11 See, for example, Code Diversiteit & Inclusie, “Handreiking Waarden voor een nieuwe taal,” 6 May 2022, <https://codedi.nl/artikel-training/handreiking-waarden-voor-een-nieuwe-taal>.

(scholarly) debate.¹² However, in the context of this article, these categorizations do help us to describe larger trends in Dutch society. When manifestations of racism target a specific racialized group, we will make this clear.

2 Christianity, Whiteness, and Their Relation in Dutch Nationalist Identity-Making

Although church attendance has been decreasing since the mid-1900s, centuries of dominance of Protestant Christianity can still be felt in contemporary society and culture(s), for example in nationalist identity-making of the Netherlands as white and Christian.¹³ In this section we unpack the interconnectedness of the constructs of whiteness, Dutchness, or Europeanness, and Christianity in contemporary mechanisms of nationalist exclusion. Second, we describe how these mechanisms are manifested in contemporary Dutch society. We conclude with identifying themes for self-reflection of majority white Protestant churches regarding the entanglement of Dutch Protestant Christianity and race and racism, based on our findings in this section.

2.1 *Unhiding the Race-Religion Constellation and Exclusionary Mechanisms*

Racism is not often connected to Christianity in Dutch society, for race is generally perceived as a secular category and thus not connected to the domain of religion, according to theologian Matthea Westerduin. That is also why Islamophobia is often not recognized as racism. Westerduin exemplifies:

Whenever scholars, activists, or politicians address this type of racism their critique is sidestepped via “religion,” either by arguing that Islamophobia cannot be racism “because Islam is a religion, not a race,” or via a dislocation of the conversation: “indeed, discrimination of Muslims is a problem, but what about ...”, then “a critique of religion” often follows, with questions such as “what about the oppression of women/gays in Islam?”¹⁴

12 We will not discuss antisemitism in depth in this article. For more information, see for example Dik van Arkel, *The Drawing of the Mark of Cain: A Socio-Historical Analysis of the Growth of Anti-Jewish Stereotypes* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 391–424.

13 Wekker, *White Innocence*, 16.

14 Matthea Westerduin, “Race and Religion: Re-Membering Their Displacements, Supersessions, and Geographies,” dissertation (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, 2023) 318.

Westerduin points out that the disconnection of ‘race’ and ‘religion’ is underpinned by how these categories are described in the religion/secular divide: race as phenotypes that someone is born with and religion as something an individual chooses.¹⁵ Not only do these understandings of race and religion exclude racializing of other categories than phenotypes as plausible, but they also disconnect race from its Christian theological legacies that remain to influence contemporary Dutch society.¹⁶ Westerduin, together with postcolonial theologians Janneke Stegeman and Mariecke van den Berg, stress: “Calvinist Christianity’s role in colonial and racializing discourses and practices is largely absent from the current debate on the Dutch colonial past.”¹⁷

Current common perceptions of race in Dutch societal debates reduce race to a biological fixed category and mask historical and contemporary interconnectedness of race and religion, according to political philosopher Anya Topolski.¹⁸ She uses the term ‘race-religion constellation,’ building on the work of Du Bois, “to refer to the connection or co-constitution of the categories of race and ‘religion.’ More specifically, I [Du Bois] use the term ‘race-religion constellation’ to refer to the practice of classifying people into races according to categories we now associate with the term ‘religion.’”¹⁹ The category ‘religion’ was mainly used for denominations of Christianity in Europe until the eighteenth century. Topolski explains that “non-Christians were most often viewed as heathens and barbarians, uncivilized lesser beings.”²⁰ The construct of religion as Christianity was connected with a colonial mindset, creating a hierarchical binary between Christian and non-Christian, alongside European and non-European, white and non-white. In the Dutch context, the privileged form of Christianity in this construct was “rational” dogma-based Protestantism, condescending Catholicism and Judaism associated with “flesh” and cult rituals.²¹ Centralizing and privileging Christianity over other religions remained key, also when religion and race became two separate categories and race became more associated with (secular) physical sciences than with theology during

15 Westerduin, “Race and Religion,” 16–17, 318.

16 Westerduin, “Race and Religion,” 318.

17 Janneke Stegeman, Mariecke van den Berg, and Matthea Westerduin, “Indecent Calvinists and Vanilla Secularism: Redefining Decency in the Netherlands,” *Feminist Theology* 26/3 (2018), 315.

18 Anya Topolski, “The Race-Religion Constellation: A European Contribution to the Critical Philosophy of Race,” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 6/1 (2018), 70.

19 Topolski, “The Race-Religion Constellation,” 59.

20 Topolski, “The Race-Religion Constellation,” 63.

21 Anya Topolski, “The Dangerous Discourse of the ‘Judaean-Christian’ Myth: Masking the Race-Religion Constellation in Europe,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 54/1–2 (2020), 86.

the Enlightenment.²² Although the category religion now included other religions, the hierarchy between Christianity and other religions remained. "In this vein, the social construction of 'religious' categories served to further affirm the universalism and supremacy of Christianity and of European civilization."²³

Constructing the category of religion first as synonymous for Christianity, and later to present Christianity as the true religion of (white) European civilisation has led to various forms of racism, such as antisemitism—both in the past and present—and Islamophobia, according to Topolski.²⁴ What is worth considering here, is that Dutch national or cultural identity has not only been associated as Christian in contemporary Dutch and European public debates, but also framed as "Judeo-Christian" since the 1990s. Topolski views this as an exemplary case of how the categories European and Christian are intertwined and remain to be functional in creating exclusionary social constructs. It has shifted from excluding Jews and Catholics to "symbolically" including them, to exclude Muslims.²⁵ Christianity remains the perceived white European religion—even when secularism has replaced Christianity as the dominant belief system in Europe, with Islam as its primary colonial other, according to Westerduin, Stegeman, and Van den Berg. When Christianity is othered or portrayed as irrelevant or backward, it is not in a racialized discourse.²⁶

Christianity and the construct of religion have thus been connected with the construct of race through centuries of Dutch history. This can also be found in wider European history with other forms of Christianity as well, as Colin Kidd shows.²⁷ Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that as racism transforms over the years, different socially constructed categories can become racialized or can be emphasized over others in forms of racism, as with the current emphasis on culture.²⁸ Taking note of historical constructs and reconstructs of categories such as race and religion and how they are entangled with European Christianity can help us to analyze current related manifes-

22 Topolski, "The Race-Religion Constellation," 63–65, 75–76.

23 Topolski, "The Dangerous Discourse," 84.

24 Topolski, "The Race-Religion Constellation," 73.

25 Topolski, "The Dangerous Discourse," 83, 86.

26 Stegeman, Westerduin, and Van den Berg, "Indecent Calvinists and Vanilla Secularism," 312–313.

27 Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

28 Topolski, "Race-Religion Constellation," 60, 74.

tations of racism in Dutch society and identify what challenges these pose to Christian theology and praxis.

2.2 *Nationalist Narratives and Migration Politics as Illustration*

Constructs of whiteness, Dutchness or Europeanness, and Christianity are used in nationalist exclusionary narratives in contemporary Dutch society. This is mainly expressed in claims to cultural values and ethnicity. Anthropologist Halleh Ghorashi notes that nationalist exclusionary narratives focus on the perceived need to protect Western cultures from outside influences.²⁹ Explicit references to race (*ras* in Dutch) are uncommon in Dutch society, partially because of its association with the Holocaust. References to skin color or race are often avoided in Dutch society and can even be labeled as racist in themselves.³⁰ Instead, the term ‘ethnicity’ is used in a racialized manner. Wekker finds that ‘ethnicity’ is used to term the social construct that categorizes people based on appearance, history, culture, and religion. Wekker writes:

Ethnicity, culture, and culturalization, supposedly softer entities, which, again supposedly, operate on cultural rather than on biological terrain, have been used in such hardened ways that biology and culture have become interchangeable in the stability that is ascribed to the cultures of others.³¹

Still skin color and other phenotypes are used as markers to categorize people, for example, a white person is associated with the Netherlands and Christianity.³² In Wekker’s words:

Those who can phenotypically pass for Dutch, that is, those who are white, are in an advantageous position. It is migrants with dark or olive skin who do not succeed in enforcing their claim on Dutchness or have it accepted as legitimate.³³

29 Halleh Ghorashi, “Racism and “the Ungrateful Other” in the Netherlands,” in Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving (eds.), *Dutch Racism* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 103. The terms (non-)Western as well as Judeo-Christian Dutch culture are used in public debates. These are not our characterizations.

30 See, for example, Philomena Essed and Sandra Trienekens, ““Who Wants to Feel White?” Race, Dutch Culture and Contested Identities,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31/1 (2008), 52–72.

31 Wekker, *White Innocence*, 22.

32 Wekker, *White Innocence*, 22–23.

33 Wekker, *White Innocence*, 7.

The rise of exclusionary nationalist narratives in the Netherlands can be seen as part of a larger European development. Leading scholar of migration Nicholas de Genova, for example, highlights how these European nationalist narratives around culture or ethnicity hardly refer to race and even claim that racism does not exist in Europe.³⁴

Christianity as part of Dutch national identity has been particularly emphasized in Dutch political debates about migrants. For example, Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet—leaders of political parties on the extreme right of the political spectrum—use this frame as part of their antimigrant and anti-Islam agenda.³⁵ Wilders and Baudet use the category 'Christian' not as a matter of faith, but to make claims to Christian values and civilization. According to Wilders, those values are standing up for "our own people" and preventing so-called Islamization of Dutch society. According to Baudet, the central values of Christianity are the essence of "the West," which is the best form of civilization. Hence, in his argument, Christianity is the foundation of Western civilization.³⁶

Antimigrant and nationalistic statements are not only found in the extreme right wing, but can be found across the political spectrum and Dutch society at large. For example, former prime minister Mark Rutte—member of a center-right party—stated in 2013 that "we will make sure, ladies and gentlemen, that we give this beautiful country back to the Dutch."³⁷ Furthermore, Wekker shows that the Dutch integration model that applies to migrants from outside Europe aspires to a monocultural society.³⁸ Finally, Dutch government agencies, such as the tax administration, deployed a fraud detection system in which people with a double nationality are checked more often and more extensively than people with one nationality, as became clear in the childcare benefits scandal (*kinderopvangtoeslagenschandaal*).³⁹

34 Nicholas De Genova, "The 'Migrant Crisis' as Racial Crisis: Do Black Lives Matter in Europe?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41 (2017), 10.

35 Ghorashi, "Racism and Ungrateful Other," 108.

36 Karin Neutel, "The Bible in Migration Politics in Northern Europe," *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 87 (2022), 93–94.

37 Ghorashi, "Racism and Ungrateful Other," 102; see NOS Nieuws, "Antisemitismebestrijder: Baudet verspreidt oude antisemitische complottheorie," 22 July 2022, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2437908-antisemitismebestrijder-baudet-verspreidt-oude-antisemitische-complottheorie>.

38 Wekker, *White Innocence*, 6, 21.

39 For a detailed account of the childcare benefits scandal, see Jesse Frederik, *Zo hadden we het niet bedoeld: de tragedie achter de toeslagenaffaire* (Amsterdam: De Correspondent, 2021).

2.3 *Connection with Majority White Protestant Churches' Involvement in Antiracism*

Having shown that the entanglement of Dutch Protestant Christianity and race and racism is part of Dutch nationalist exclusionary identity-making, we now identify a number of issues that require self-reflection on the part of majority white Protestant churches in relation to racism.

First, as churches and churchgoers are part of Dutch society, people who sympathize with exclusionary nationalist narratives can be found in churches.⁴⁰ Topolski and Westerduin have historically constructed how white European Christian civilization was presented as superior to others in the colonial project. We have shown that politicians such as Wilders and Baudet remain to use this rhetoric and explicitly vocalize it. Research on Christianity in Western Europe indicates that people who identify as Christian and regularly attend church services are more likely to have a negative attitude toward migrants, Muslims, and Jews than people with no religious affiliation.⁴¹ They especially regard Islam as incompatible with their national cultural values (55 percent of church-attending persons over 41 percent of nonaffiliated persons).⁴²

Second, ideas and mechanisms that centralize, privilege, and universalize European Protestantism remain in Dutch society, as Topolski and Westerduin point out. These ideas and mechanisms can also be present among people who do not actively sympathize with exclusionary nationalist narratives in subtle, unconscious manners, also in churches, as a result of centuries of transgenerational transmission. The challenge for churches' introspection here is to uncover these subtle, unconscious mechanisms and ideas.

3 **Entanglement of Racism and Christianity in Contemporary Dutch Protestant Theology and Praxis**

Now we have discussed the entanglement of Dutch Protestant Christianity with race and racism in Dutch society at large, we focus on how the entanglement of racism and Christianity is manifested in white Dutch Protestant theology and praxis. We will do this by focusing on the work of theologians and church

40 Stegeman, van den Berg, and Westerduin, "Indecent Calvinists and Vanilla Secularism," 313.

41 This research report does not consider whether these results are the same for white Christians and Christians of color or Christians with and without migration background.

42 Pew Research Center, "Being Christian in Western Europe," 29 May 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/05/29/being-christian-in-western-europe/>.

movements that have actively aimed to address racism in Protestant theology and praxis in the Netherlands.

We can recognize two time periods in which racism in the Netherlands gained attention in Protestant theology and praxis. From the 1970s until the 1990s, the topic gained attention following the Program to Combat Racism (PCR) of the World Council of Churches (WCC), particularly in light of apartheid South Africa. Furthermore, as Black liberation theology and womanist theology developed in the United States, these forms of theology also gained attention through (1) the work of black Dutch theologians for whom Black liberation theology and womanist theology found resonance, such as Sonny Hof and Doreen Hazel, and (2) the work of the white Dutch theologian Theo Witvliet, who aimed to introduce the work of the founder of Black liberation theology James H. Cone, and later the field of liberation theology as a whole, to a European audience.

The second period starts in the mid-2010s and is ongoing. Alongside increasing societal attention for Dutch colonial history, churches and academic theologians increasingly attempt to uncover the role of churches and theologians in slavery. Alongside these developments, a number of white theologians, such as Matthea Westerduin, Janneke Stegeman, and Eleonora Hof, aim to connect insights about colonial history with contemporary Dutch Protestant theology and praxis and propose new postcolonial paradigms. Last, the topic of contemporary racism in relation to churches can be found in research on the relations of Protestant churches with Christian migrants.

3.1 1970s–1990s: *Introduction of Liberation Theology in the Netherlands*

3.1.1 Attention for Apartheid South Africa and Racism

Racism became a topic of interest in Dutch churches and theology in the second half of the twentieth century, mainly in accordance with the WCC's PCR with special attention on apartheid in South Africa. White Dutch Protestant churches moved from supporting white Afrikaners to supporting the oppressed people of color in the period 1948–1972, according to historian Erica Meijers. This was mainly articulated in their significant support for the WCC's program.⁴³

This widespread support would not remain uncontested in the decades that followed. Some members of the committee of the Dutch Council of Churches that oversaw Dutch churches' involvement in PCR feared that the attention on

43 Erica Meijers, *Blanke broeders—zwarte vreemden: De Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland en de apartheid in Zuid-Afrika 1948–1972* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2008), 399–401.

apartheid South Africa would distract Dutch churches from paying attention to racism in their own society.⁴⁴ Furthermore, some voices within Dutch Protestant churches had difficulties with supporting what they perceived as violent organizations of Black people protesting against apartheid.⁴⁵ In contrast, Martin Luther King Jr. received more widespread support, because he represented a nonviolent approach for Dutch Protestant churches. According to Meijers,

Martin Luther King appeals to western values of individual freedom and democracy and his non-violence method is a visible representation thereof. With his impeccable appearance and his virtuous language he creates an image of a black who has understood what the core of western civilization is better than many white heirs of the Enlightenment.⁴⁶

We present these two responses to antiracist movements to illustrate a key difference: white Dutch Protestant churches gave their support more easily to an antiracist movement apparently representing values that they could easily identify with than to South African anti-apartheid movements that used violence against their violent oppressors. British black liberation Theologian Anthony Reddie has named this ‘contractual compassion’: white people only supporting causes of people of color when they conform to white people’s terms.⁴⁷

Ethicist Sonny Hof builds on the work of Cone and questions who is committing violence in this case. He argues that claiming nonviolence and therefore not supporting oppressed people—Black and colored people in the case of apartheid South Africa—is cooperating in violence, because it does not disrupt the continuation of violence toward the oppressed. He perceives the violence against the apartheid regime as liberating counter-violence: violence that is used to counter the violence of the oppressors.⁴⁸ Hof rejects therewith supposedly neutral and unbiased positions when it comes to oppressive structural systems in society.

44 P.J. Teunissen, *Bevrijding als opdracht van de Kerken: het programma ter bestrijding van racisme van de Wereldraad van Kerken. Beleidsadvies van de Sectie Internationale zaken aan de Raad van Kerken in Nederland* (Amersfoort: Horstink, 1975), 87.

45 Meijers, *Blanke broeders—zwarte vreemden*, 399–401.

46 Meijers, *Blanke broeders—zwarte vreemden*, 238, 399; our translation from Dutch.

47 Anthony Reddie, *Working Against the Grain: Re-Imaging Black Theology in the 21st Century* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2008), 199–203.

48 Sonny Hof, *Geweld en Bevrijding: Een Theologisch-Ethische Reflectie* (Den Haag: Boeken-centrum, 1986), 13–14.

Churches' interest in the topic of racism mostly concerned racism outside of the Netherlands, but in the 1990s racism in Dutch society and churches also became a topical issue. One of the predecessors of the PCN (Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk) established a working group "Pluriform Society" in 1989, which from its foundation focused on the topic of racism. The group put the topic on the agenda of the general synod in 1992, which expressed that racism is a sin of pride, in which the church has shared by aggravating the pain and sorrow of Black people or by neglecting it.⁴⁹ The church decided to make overcoming racism within the church itself an aim, and therefore Pluriform Society—of which Dutch womanist theologian Doreen Hazel was part—created a booklet for congregations that could guide them in conversations about racism.⁵⁰ This booklet calls for critical follow-up for the attention on racism within Protestant churches to ensure that it remains a priority. They fear that otherwise the topic will fade into the background.⁵¹

Hazel herself writes in this booklet that the white Protestants she encounters often question her experiences of racism, and ask her to make her work on this topic more objective and abstract, detached from her own bodily experience and the impact on her life. She hopes that with this booklet, the discourse on racism can be altered to actually acknowledge the racism within churches.⁵² In her later work, Hazel develops womanist resources for Black women in Dutch society and for a dialogue with white people to face racism. She argues, "It requires more than preferential policies, education and equal opportunities. The unresolved past harms Black people, but also white people. For white people, the past is mainly manifested in fear for Black people. That is, fear for the rage of Black people."⁵³

3.1.2 Ecumenism and Emphasizing Unity

Having seen the attention on apartheid and increasing awareness on the urgency to address racism within Protestant churches themselves, we now discuss manifestations of the entanglement of white Dutch Protestant Chris-

49 Gé Speelman and Doreen Hazel, "Inleiding," in Hervormde Projectgroep Pluriforme Samenleving, *En God zag dat het zeer goed was ... Racisme is zonde* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993), 10.

50 Otto Ruff, "Kerk en Racisme," in Hervormde Projectgroep Pluriforme Samenleving, *En God zag dat het zeer goed was ... Racisme is zonde* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993), 42–43.

51 Ruff, "Kerk en Racisme," 42.

52 Doreen Hazel, "Het beest dat racisme heet," in Hervormde Projectgroep Pluriforme Samenleving, *En God zag dat het zeer goed was ... Racisme is zonde* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993), 11.

53 Doreen Hazel, *Dochters van Cham* (Gorinchem: Narratio, 1998), 87.

tianity and racism in ecumenical relations, which theologians Theo Witvliet and Sonny Hof critically assessed in 1980s–1990s. White Protestantism in the Netherlands mainly focused on unity and ecumenism from a supposedly neutral and Christian universalist viewpoint at the time, according to Witvliet. Inspired by Cone, Witvliet critiques this attitude, because it reduces differences between Christian denominations to confessional differences, such as baptism and Eucharist, whereas other “theological and social conflicts” are ignored.⁵⁴ Although Witvliet does not clarify what those theological and social conflicts are, we may well assume that he speaks, among other things, of racism and colonial power imbalances, as he situates his work in legacies of (Black) liberation theologies. Witvliet perceives reducing ecumenism to overcoming confessional differences as a white European normative stance of “modern Western theology” that prioritizes ratio and objectivity over embodied knowledge.⁵⁵ He promotes ecumenism and intercultural church relations based on “eucharistic hospitality” that is characterized by an attitude of being willing to learn from what people of other cultures and religions might bring to the table. “Perhaps, most of all, it means creating open space for dialogue, however difficult, in situations of growing anguish, animosity and mutual stigmatization.”⁵⁶

Sonny Hof also challenges the danger of the too one-sided focus on unity of mainstream white Dutch Protestant theology at that moment, because it covers multiplicity and structures within white Dutch Protestant theology itself that contradict equity of humankind. He argues that Dutch Christian theology and praxis should stop prioritizing unity and start unmasking and addressing racism within itself. Then it can connect to the multiracial society that the Netherlands is, and Dutch society—Christianity included—can become an open society in which there is space for reciprocal influencing.⁵⁷ In Hof’s words, building on Cone: “To become a society in which a black person is not only able to breath ‘when they say yes to everything that is white,’ but a society in which a white person has also learned to say yes to what is black.”⁵⁸

54 Theo Witvliet, *The Way of the Black Messiah: The Hermeneutical Challenge of Black Theology as a Theology of Liberation* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 83; Theo Witvliet, *Gebroken Traditie: Christelijke religie in het spanningsveld van pluraliteit en identiteit*, (Baarn: Ten Have, 1999), 10.

55 Witvliet, *Gebroken Traditie*, 74.

56 Theo Witvliet, “Christian Identity in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” in Martien Brinkman and Dirk van Keulen (eds.), *Christian Identity in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 179.

57 Sonny Hof, “Onderweg naar een multiraciale samenleving: Een theologische verkenning,” *Rondom het Woord* 22/3 (1980), 62.

58 S. Hof, “Onderweg naar een multiraciale samenleving,” 64.

3.1.3 White Hegemony in Dutch Protestant Theology and Praxis

White hegemony in Dutch Protestant theology and praxis is the last issue we discuss in this section on the period 1980s–1990s, because it is a recurring theme in the work of Hazel, Witvliet, and Sonny Hof.

In 1992, both S. Hof and Hazel note that nonwhite and non-Western theologies have been largely ignored by white Dutch Protestant discourses, in a popular article for which they are both asked to reflect on the question “how white is Dutch theology?” as two Black theologians working in majority white Protestant spaces. Dutch theology is a European product, and although Christianity has roots elsewhere, Dutch theology tends to present itself as European and hence of universal importance and internationally leading, according to Hazel and S. Hof.⁵⁹

S. Hof elaborates on why the few Black theologians that are present in the Netherlands are not influential in the mainstream theological discourses. On the one hand, he writes, Black Christian communities or individuals do not have the (financial) resources to produce a strong tradition of Black theology in the Netherlands. On the other hand, it is questionable whether the mainstream Dutch discourse would take their theology seriously. S. Hof signals that Black liberation theology is generally not perceived as relevant for white Dutch Protestantism, and therefore, it is not included—or only minimally—in theology curricula or church programs.⁶⁰ Hazel adds that when so-called contextual forms of theology are discussed by white Dutch Protestant theologians, they are often depicted as a form of reaction-theology: reacting solely to societal issues or reacting to other forms of theology and therefore not valid on its own. In her experience, debates about nonwhite non-European theology quickly turn into ideological debates about said societal issues rather than a serious discussion about theological implications.⁶¹ S. Hof also observes that Black theology is often reduced by white Dutch Protestant theologians to theology about racism, as if it only addresses white peoples' dehumanization and segregation of Black people, which again centralizes a white problem, namely white racism that is supported by white Dutch Protestant theology. According to S. Hof, mainstream white European and Dutch theology ignores aspects of power, joy, freedom, and healing in Black theology.⁶²

59 Sonny Hof, “Hoe wit is Nederlandse theologie?,” *Opstand: Christenen voor het socialisme* 1 (1992), 7; Doreen Hazel, “Hoe wit is de Nederlandse theologie?,” *Opstand: Christenen voor het socialisme* 1 (1992), 9.

60 S. Hof, “Nederlandse theologie,” 7–8.

61 Hazel, “Hoe wit is de Nederlandse theologie,” 9.

62 S. Hof, “Nederlandse theologie,” 8.

Hazel concludes her contribution by challenging white Dutch theologians and practitioners to ask themselves what their context is, what their preconceptions about Black people and their theologizing are, and by inviting them to a theological debate about white Dutch context(s).⁶³ She signals such a discourse is largely lacking, as Dutch white theology is often not able to connect theological themes with particular realities, but aims to construct a universal theology which becomes a standard for all theologies to adhere to. This not only pushes theologies that do connect with particular realities in their own corner of contextual theology, it also masks the context of theologians themselves. Hazel stresses the importance, from her positionality, to be able to connect realities of being a Black woman in a majority white European context with themes such as guilt, sin, repentance, and God's Kingdom.⁶⁴ Witvliet also signals that white Dutch theologians generally fail to contextualize their theology. He notes that Cone's theology has been viewed negatively—or has been met with silence—by most white European theologians. They fear a reduction of the gospel to political ideology and an overidentification of Black people's struggle for freedom with God's will. Yet these critiques, Witvliet notes, fail to recognize that dominant theological traditions also depart from a particular ideology, namely white normativity.⁶⁵ Cone himself already pointed out in 1969 how white Western theology, rooted in the Enlightenment, prioritizes abstraction, rationality, and objectivity, which is used as a standard for all (academic reflection on) Christianity. Consequently, he argued, white theology lacks focus on embodied realities and remains detached from reflections on day-to-day life.⁶⁶

When we look at the period 1980s–1990s, we see movements in Protestant churches have sought to address racism, by first supporting antiapartheid movements to a certain extent and later by acknowledging racism within Dutch society and churches and creating resources to create awareness on the topic. Hof, Hazel, and Witvliet point at topics that require reflection regarding the entanglement of white Dutch Protestantism with race and racism. This concerns a focus on unity and rational dogmatic differences in ecumenism, and a lack of attention for multiplicity and racial power imbalances. Furthermore, they challenge Dutch Protestant theology and praxis's white hegemony, that does not take seriously other forms of theology.

63 Hazel, "Hoe wit is de Nederlandse theologie," 10.

64 Hazel, "Hoe wit is de Nederlandse theologie," 9.

65 Witvliet, *The Way of the Black Messiah*, 76–77, 247.

66 James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, [1969] 2008), 62.

3.2 2010S–2020S: *Postcolonial White Self-Criticism*

3.2.1 Attention for History of Enslavement and Colonialism

The year 2013 marked the commemoration of the official abolition of slavery in Dutch colonies 150 years ago.⁶⁷ The Dutch Council of Churches published a declaration, recognizing churches' involvement in slavery and the slave trade,⁶⁸ and the book *God is niet wit* (God Is Not White) was published to educate people on the role of Dutch churches in slavery and to provide a platform for Christians of color to share their knowledge and experience on Dutch colonial history and racism.⁶⁹ After 2013 the topic somewhat faded into the background, until in 2017 the Lutheran church of Amsterdam and the Moravian church of Amsterdam started a process of reflection and healing of their shared past in a joint working group "Wholesome Processing of a History of Slavery" (Heilzame Verwerking Slavernijverleden).⁷⁰ Both the Moravian church and the Lutheran church are known for their presence in colonial Suriname. The Moravian church mainly undertook missionary work among enslaved Africans, with the result that most Moravian churches in the Netherlands are predominantly Afro-Surinamese communities. The work of this group gained more attention, through different symposia, conferences, news articles, and an edited book in 2020.⁷¹ This increasing attention also moved other churches to explore their colonial history, and specifically their involvement in slavery, which has resulted in a historical research project on the role of the predecessors of the PCN in slavery—which not only concerns the transatlantic slave trade, but also enslavement in the former Dutch East Indies—and further academic contributions on the topic.⁷²

67 This year (1863) is controversial, because the enslaved people had to work under state supervision for ten more years. The actual abolition of slavery in Dutch colonies is usually dated at 1873.

68 See Raad van Kerken in Nederland, "Verantwoording van het slavernijverleden," 14 June 2013, <https://www.raadvankerken.nl/files/2023/01/verantwoording-slavernijverleden.pdf>.

69 See Gea Gort and Eva Mabayoje (eds.), *God is niet wit: ons slavernijverleden, wat doen we ermee?* (Amsterdam: Ark Media, 2013).

70 See Diaconie Evangelisch-Lutherse Gemeente Amsterdam, "Heilzame verwerking slavernijverleden," <https://www.diaconie.com/themas/slavernij/>.

71 See Boeker et al., *Heilzame Verwerking van het Slavernijverleden voor "Wit" en "Zwart."*

72 See for published research, for example: Bente de Leede and Martijn Stoutjesdijk (eds.), *Kerk, kolonialisme en slavernij: Verhalen van een vervlochten geschiedenis* (Kampen: Kok, 2023); Martijn Stoutjesdijk, "Een zwarte stem in een witte tekst: De totslaafgemaakte christen Isabella in het werk van Jan Willem Kals," *Kerk en Theologie* 74 (2023), 38–56; Martijn Stoutjesdijk, "In openlijken strijd met den geest des Christendoms? De kerk in het Nederlandse slavernijverleden," in Rose Mary Allen, Esther Captain, Matthias van Rossum, and Urwin Vyent (eds.), *Staat & Slavernij: Het Nederlands koloniale slavernijverleden en zijn doorwerkingen* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Gennep, 2023), 372–381.

Stegeman observes that societal debates on the history of Dutch slavery and colonialism have influenced white Protestant theology and praxis, which has contributed to the increasing attention for the topic, but the debates within Protestant theology and praxis have difficulties to simultaneously influence the wider societal debates, whereas Christianity has been an important aspect of the Dutch colonial project.⁷³

3.2.2 Strategies to Challenge White Protestant Universalism, Normativity, and Perceived Superiority

Next to increasing attention and research on Protestant theology and praxis in colonialism and slavery, theologians address and challenge white Dutch Protestant universalism, normativity, and perceived superiority as part of the entanglement of white Dutch Protestantism with race and racism in the period 2010s–2020s.

Westerduin draws attention to how white Christianity's claim to universalism of Christianity erases (cultural) differences. She argues how especially Paul's "neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ" of Galatians 3:28 has been interpreted in universalist and supersessionist manner. Based on this text, the idea of Christianity as a postculture religion emerged, superseding Judaism as a "particularistic and ethnic 'cult.'"⁷⁴ Westerduin uncovers alternative interpretations of Galatians 3:28, such as readings of a universalism that do not erase difference—which European colonial readings did—but rather in a manner that affirms different ethnicities alongside each other. She writes: "These readings of Paul may be productive for envisioning alternative futures in which differences can be affirmed instead of assimilated. Such readings however, cannot undo the importance of 'Paul' in the making of European supremacist universality, religion, whiteness, and race."⁷⁵ In addition, Stegeman draws attention to the non-contextuality of white Dutch Protestantism and how this contributes to images of white European Protestantism as universal, normative, and neutral.⁷⁶ Based on an analysis of four sermons held in the PCN, she argues that white Dutch Protestantism generally aims to connect with the central character of a bibli-

73 Janneke Stegeman, "The Bible and the Dutch Empire," in R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 324.

74 Westerduin, "Race and Religion," 83–84.

75 Westerduin, "Race and Religion," 84.

76 Janneke Stegeman, "Decoloniality, Theology and Bodies: Tamar and Jesus as Examples of Othering and Bonding," in Britta Konz, Bernhard Ortmann, and Christian Wetz (eds.), *Postcolonialism, Theology and the Construction of the Other* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 124–125.

cal narrative—in this case Jesus—rather than allowing biblical narratives to challenge its own position of power and/or privilege. Stegeman invites white Dutch Protestants to reflect on their own positionality, power, and privilege, and whether this is indeed connected to that of the central character of the text, instead of trying to find neutral or normative interpretations.⁷⁷ She writes: “‘Othering’ in this positive sense is the process by which white, Dutch protestant theologians like me can rediscover our non-normativity and our provinciality.”⁷⁸

Perceived superiority of white Dutch Protestantism is mainly manifested in an attitude of perceived superior knowledge about (theological, societal etc.) issues. Missiologist Eleonora Hof, for example, identifies lecturing people of color about white privilege and racism as one of the pitfalls for white Dutch Protestantism in engagement with marginalized perspectives on the issue of racism.⁷⁹ Therewith, white theologians and practitioners do not acknowledge their own responsibility in maintaining racist structures, but make people of color the focus of attention.⁸⁰ Furthermore, Stegeman highlights another pitfall for white Dutch Protestantism in engagement with marginalized perspectives on the issue of racism that is connected to the idea of perceived superior knowledge: the tendency of white Protestants to try to solve problems from a superiority point of view, rather than asking themselves whether they are part of the problem.⁸¹ This tendency is also recognized in international research on the entanglement of Christianity and racism. Leading expert in Black liberation theology Willie James Jennings argues that this attitude supposes superior knowledge grounded in the idea that white European Christianity knows what is good for the rest of the world.⁸²

E. Hof, Westerduin, and Stegeman propose ways to dismantle white Dutch Protestant universalism, normativity, and perceived superiority, for example by contextualize whiteness. However, they also recognize that theology that explicitly relates with its context—or more specifically with race—remains to be presented in Dutch academic theology and theology curricula as theology

77 Stegeman, “Decoloniality, Theology and Bodies,” 130–131.

78 Stegeman, “Decoloniality, Theology and Bodies,” 127–128.

79 Eleonora Hof, *Reimagining Mission in the Postcolonial Condition: A Theology of Vulnerability and Vocation at the Margins* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2016), 155.

80 E. Hof, *Reimagining Mission in the Postcolonial Condition*, 63.

81 Janneke Stegeman, *Alles moet anders! Bevrijdingstheologie voor witte Nederlanders* (Utrecht: Kokboekencentrum, 2017), 57.

82 Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2020), 137.

for everyone who is not white, intercultural theology or simply contextual theology.⁸³ In international research this is recognized as a mechanism for white Christian theology and praxis to maintain its power position. Practical Theologian Courtney Goto, for example writes, that academic contributions of theologians from the majority world and/or marginalized positions are usually only judged as legitimate when they explicitly engage with their marginalized position and are seen as representative of that position.⁸⁴ Theologies that explicitly arise from lived realities are trapped in a system: they are supposed to display diversity in an academic field in which the rules continue to be set by white theologians.⁸⁵

3.2.3 Christian Migrants and Whiteness of the Protestant Church

The topic of racism also occasionally surfaces in studies on Christian migrants and international churches in the 2010s and 2020s. Theologians Martha Frederiks and Nienke Pruiksmā researched relations between migrant Christians and long-established churches in the Netherlands, including the PCN. They recall that in 2008 the general secretary of the PCN called it “far too white.” Although there are many Christians of color in the Netherlands, they rarely find their way to the PCN.⁸⁶ Policy papers of the PCN formulate ecumenical contact and further cooperation—preferably leading to membership of the PCN—with international churches and Christian migrants in the Netherlands as one of its aims, at least since 2008.⁸⁷ However, according to Frederiks and Pruiksmā, “For many of the immigrant communities this is, of course, not an option as there is no denominational kinship, historical tie, or sufficient proximity in belief and church governance.”⁸⁸ Also, they write, on a national institutional level the urge to connect with migrant Christians in the Netherlands is felt, but for local PCN congregations the necessity to connect with interna-

83 Westerduin, “Race and Religion,” 52; Stegeman, *Alles moet anders*, 45–47; Hof, *Reimagining Mission*, 155.

84 Courtney T. Goto, “Writing in Compliance with the Racialized ‘Zoo’ of Practical Theology,” in Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie Miller-McLemore (eds.), *Conundrums in Practical Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 128–129.

85 Goto, “Writing in Compliance with the Racialized ‘Zoo’ of Practical Theology,” 112–116.

86 Martha Frederiks and Nienke Pruiksmā, “Journeying Towards Multiculturalism? The Relationship between Immigrant Christians and Dutch Indigenous Churches,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 3/1 (2010), 141.

87 Frederiks and Pruiksmā, “Journeying Towards Multiculturalism,” 142–143; Protestantse Kerk in Nederland, *Van U is de toekomst: ontvankelijk en waakzaam leven in genade* (Utrecht: Dienstorganisatie Protestantse Kerk, 2020).

88 Frederiks and Pruiksmā, “Journeying Towards Multiculturalism,” 143.

tional churches is often not recognized, especially outside of the larger cities. "PCN congregations at the grassroots, apart from inviting maybe the occasional exotic gospel choir to grace a service, showed little interest; they are in general too wrapped up in their own problems."⁸⁹ Frederiks and Pruiksmā further question whether, although the PCN has intentions to connect with migrant Christians, they actually respect cultural differences, and whether they will be able to facilitate a space in which diversity is visible in all facets of the organizational structures and in the decision-making.⁹⁰ In other words, will theologies and praxis of Christians of color be taken as seriously as white Dutch Protestantism, so they will have space within the PCN locally and nationally?

Eleonora Hof recognizes similar patterns in mission practices. She identifies these patterns as centrist perspectives: centralizing white efforts and thereby remaining to push people of color to the margins.⁹¹ She argues that encounters of white Christians with Christians of color in the Netherlands can only lead to deeper connections when white Christians engage with the discourse of racism, so that they can recognize which of their motives and behaviors toward Christians of color are grounded in privilege and power. Second, she argues that when white Dutch PCN churches approach majority people of color churches with a different cultural background, they should do this from a place of vulnerability.⁹²

To summarize, the role of white Dutch Protestant theology and praxis in colonial slavery—as a manifestation of the entanglement of white Dutch Protestantism with race and racism—has gained attention and is under critical introspection. Other manifestations of entanglement of white Dutch Protestantism and racism have not gained as much attention. Universalism of white Dutch Protestant theology and praxis erases differences and centralizes white Dutch Protestantism and pushes the perspectives of people of color to the margins. Furthermore, majority white Dutch Protestant churches appear to determine the agenda for interchurch relations with majority people of color churches. Both of these issues point at the necessity of introspection on the power position of white Dutch Protestant theology and praxis. Westerduin, Stegeman, and E. Hof already propose some starting points for this reflection and contextualizing white Dutch Protestant theology and praxis.

89 Frederiks and Pruiksmā, "Journeying Towards Multiculturalism," 146.

90 Frederiks and Pruiksmā, "Journeying Towards Multiculturalism," 128.

91 E. Hof, *Reimagining Mission*, 207.

92 E. Hof, *Reimagining Mission*, 297.

3.3 *Connection with Majority White Protestant Churches' Involvement in Antiracism*

Having shown how the entanglement of white Dutch Protestant Christianity with race and racism is addressed within Dutch Protestant theology and practices in the 1980s–1990s and 2010s–2020s, we now identify a number of issues that require self-reflection of majority white Protestant churches in relation to racism.

In the two time periods, theologians that seek to challenge the entanglement of white Protestant Dutch theology and praxis, mainly point at the hegemony of white Dutch Protestantism. First, this hegemony entails dominant forms of white Dutch Protestantism that aspire to be neutral and objective, which is perceived as universal and normative. Theologies that explicitly reflect on lived realities and work of non-Western theologians therefore do not get a large foothold and are generally not taken as seriously as white Dutch Protestantism, which maintains its power position. This might explain the disconnection between the two periods we discussed in this section. We can establish that the current attention for the topic of racism is not new, but academic theologians such as Stegeman, Westerduin, and E. Hof do not build on the Protestant theology and praxis of the 1980s and 1990s that address racism. This poses a challenge for majority white Protestant churches concerning racism, as they may well also be unaware of existing resources on this topic. Furthermore, the perceived universality and normativity of their own theology—and therewith lack of engagement with their own context—also does not simplify introspection on the entanglement of white Dutch Protestantism and race and racism, because this hides their own whiteness and how this impacts their theology. In the 2010s and 2020s, Stegeman, E. Hof, and Westerduin proposed several strategies to recontextualize theology, to carefully engage with power positions and white privilege, and uncover voices that have been silenced. These strategies might be helpful for majority white Protestant churches' involvement in antiracism.

Second, the hegemony of white Dutch Protestantism entails a power position for majority white Dutch Protestant churches in interaction with (migrant) Christians of color. In the 1980s–1990s, Witvliet and S. Hof discussed this issue regarding ecumenical relations. White European churches and theologians have the power to set the ecumenical agenda, and in this focus on ideals of Christian unity that tend to erase differences in culture and practices. This also includes being unaware of their own contextual perspective on theology and their repetition of colonial racist attitudes. In the 2010s–2020s, the power position of the PCN in relations with Christian migrant communities is highlighted. Hof, Frederiks, and Pruiksma show that PCN congregations often engage in

these relations from their own point of interest, imposing their own agenda on international churches, from a stance that does not engage with their own position of power.

4 Conclusion, Discussion, and Suggestions for Further Research

We will now formulate an answer to the central question to this article: How is Protestant Christianity's entanglement with race and racism manifested in contemporary Dutch society and what themes for self-reflection does this yield for majority white Protestant churches' involvement in antiracism? Based on this article, we identify two manifestations of this entanglement in Dutch society.

The first manifestation we identify is exclusionary Dutch nationalist identity-making. This nationalist identity-making is connected with mechanisms that centralize, privilege, and universalize white Dutch Protestantism. The entanglement of Protestant Christianity with race and racism leads to two themes of self-reflection. First, as exclusionary nationalist identity-making has recently gained ground, there is no reason to think that this is not the case among people in white majority Protestant churches. Second, these exclusionary nationalist ideas and mechanisms can also be present among people—and hence in churches—who do not actively sympathize with exclusionary nationalist narratives. Namely, in subtle subconscious manners, as a result of centuries of transgenerational transmission. The challenge for churches' self-reflection here is to uncover these subtle, unconscious mechanisms and ideas among themselves.

Second, hegemony of white Dutch Protestantism in Protestant theology and praxis can be seen as manifestation of the entanglement of Protestant Christianity and race and racism, as we have shown in section 3. This leads to two themes of self-reflection, namely the alleged neutrality and power position of white Dutch Protestantism.

The alleged neutrality and normativity of white Dutch Protestant theology and praxis is connected with its supposed universalism and white Dutch Protestantism's lack of explicit reflections on contexts it derives from. This leads to gatekeeping of what is considered mainstream and taken seriously in Dutch Protestantism and pushes other forms of Christianity to the margins. The risk for majority white Dutch Protestant churches is that this alleged neutrality and normativity pushes contemporary topical issues in Dutch society, such as migration, colonial history, and racism to the margins. This risk can only be averted with self-reflection on the power and privileges that white Dutch Protestantism has gained in ages past.

The second theme for introspection is the power position of majority white Dutch Protestant churches in relations with majority people of color churches. This concerns the power to set the agenda, but also to set cultural and theological standards. Unawareness of these power imbalances in interactions and (subconsciously) setting standards for interactions with majority people of color churches is problematic, because without challenging these (subconscious) mechanisms, they are often maintained and repeated.

We suggest that further research should focus on how perceived superiority of white Dutch Protestantism—which is both present in white Dutch nationalist identity-making and hegemony of white Dutch Protestantism—is manifested in majority white Protestant churches in the Netherlands. Research can especially help to uncover the subtle subconscious manners in which this hegemony is present. Second, further research should focus on un hiding people of color and their theologies and praxis in Dutch Protestantism, and taking their perspectives seriously. This may be realized, for example, in historical research on the presence of people of color in Dutch Protestantism in preceding centuries, as a way of un hiding their presence and challenging the image of Dutch Protestantism as (historically) white.

Engaging in a process of self-reflection regarding the entanglement of white Dutch Protestantism with race and racism is important for majority white Dutch Protestant churches and theologians to do justice to their antiracism statements and actions.

References

- Arkel, Dik van, *The Drawing of the Mark of Cain: A Socio-Historical Analysis of the Growth of Anti-Jewish Stereotypes* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009).
- Boeker, Egbert, Rhoinde Doth, Urwin Vyent, and Andreas Wöhle (eds.), *Heilzame Verwerking van het Slavernijverleden voor “Wit” en “Zwart”* (The Hague: SLUB, 2020).
- Broek, Lida M. van den, “Neither With, Nor Without Them—Ethnic Diversity on the Work Floor: How Egalitarianism Breeds Discrimination,” in Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving (eds.), *Dutch Racism* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 255–271.
- Cameron, Helen, Deborah Bhatti, Catherine Duce, James Sweeney, and Clare Watkins, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010).
- Code Diversiteit & Inclusie, “Handreiking Waarden voor een nieuwe taal,” 6 May 2022, <https://codedi.nl/artikel-training/handreiking-waarden-voor-een-nieuwe-taal/>
- Cone, James H., *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, [1969] 2008).

- Diaconie Evangelisch-Lutherse Gemeente Amsterdam, "Heilzame verwerking slavernijverleden," <https://www.diaconie.com/themas/slavernij/>.
- Frederik, Jesse, *Zo hadden we het niet bedoeld: de tragedie achter de toeslagenaffaire* (Amsterdam: De Correspondent, 2021).
- Frederiks, Martha, and Nienke Pruiksmā, "Journeying Towards Multiculturalism? The Relationship between Immigrant Christians and Dutch Indigenous Churches," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 3/1 (2010), 125–154.
- Genova, Nicholas De, "The "Migrant Crisis" as Racial Crisis: Do Black Lives Matter in Europe?," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41 (2017), 1765–1782.
- Ghorashi, Halleh, "Racism and "the Ungrateful Other" in the Netherlands," in Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving (eds.), *Dutch Racism* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 101–116.
- Goto, Courtney T., "Writing in Compliance with the Racialized "Zoo" of Practical Theology," in Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie Miller-McLemore (eds.), *Conundrums in Practical Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 110–133.
- Hall, Stuart, "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?," *Social Justice* 20/1–2 (1993), 104–114.
- Ham, Kirsten van der, "White Racism and Dutch Churches: In Search of Liberative Practices," *NTT Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion* 77/1 (2023), 1–21.
- Hazel, Doreen, "Hoe wit is Nederlandse theologie?," *Opstand: Christenen voor het socialisme* 1 (1992), 9–10.
- Hazel, Doreen, "Het beest dat racisme heet," in Hervormde Projectgroep Pluriforme Samenleving, *En God zag dat het zeer goed was ... Racisme is zonde* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993), 11–17.
- Hazel, Doreen, *Dochters van Cham* (Gorinchem: Narratio, 1998).
- Hervormde Projectgroep Pluriforme Samenleving (eds.), *En God zag dat het zeer goed was ... Racisme is zonde* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993).
- Hof, Eleonora, *Reimagining Mission in the Postcolonial Condition: A Theology of Vulnerability and Vocation at the Margins* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2016).
- Hof, Sonny, "Onderweg naar een multiraciale samenleving: Een theologische verkenning," *Rondom het Woord* 22/3 (1980), 60–64.
- Hof, Sonny, *Geweld en Bevrijding: Een Theologisch-Ethische Reflectie* (Den Haag: Boekencentrum, 1986).
- Hof, Sonny, "Hoe wit is Nederlandse theologie?" *Opstand: Christenen voor het socialisme* 1 (1992), 7–8.
- Horrell, David, *Ethnicity and Inclusion: Religion, Race, and Whiteness in Constructions of Identities* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2020).
- Jennings, Willie James, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).
- Jennings, Willie James, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2020).

- Kidd, Colin, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- Leede, Bente de, and Martijn Stoutjesdijk (eds.), *Kerk, kolonialisme en slavernij: Verhalen van een vervlochten geschiedenis* (Kampen: Kok, 2023).
- Meijers, Erica, *Blanke broeders—zwarte vreemden: De Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk, de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland en de apartheid in Zuid-Afrika 1948–1972* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2008).
- Neutel, Karin, “The Bible in Migration Politics in Northern Europe,” *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 87 (2022), 85–105.
- NOS Nieuws, “Antisemitismebestrijder: Baudet verspreidt oude antisemitische complottheorie,” 22 July 2022, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2437908-antisemitismebestrijder-baudet-verspreidt-oude-antisemitische-complottheorie>.
- Pew Research Center, “Being Christian in Western Europe.” 28 June 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/05/29/being-christian-in-western-europe>.
- Protestantse Kerk in Nederland, *Van U is de toekomst: ontvankelijk en waakzaam leven in genade* (Utrecht: Dienstenorganisatie Protestantse Kerk, 2020).
- Protestantse Theologische Universiteit, “Kerk en slavernij,” n.d., <https://www.pthu.nl/kerk-en-slavernij>.
- Raad van Kerken in Nederland, “Verantwoording van het slavernijverleden,” 14 June 2013, <https://www.raadvankerken.nl/files/2023/01/verantwoording-slavernijverleden.pdf>.
- Raad van Kerken in Nederland, “Verantwoording Slavernij,” 15 June 2013, <https://www.raadvankerken.nl/nieuws/2013/06/verantwoording-slavernij>.
- Reuver, René de, “Racisme is zonde,” n.d., <https://protestantsekerk.nl/verdieping/protestants-perspectief-racisme-is-zonde>.
- Reddie, Anthony, *Working Against the Grain: Re-Imaging Black Theology in the 21st Century* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2008).
- Ruff, Otto, “Kerk en Racisme,” in Hervormde Projectgroep Pluriforme Samenleving, *En God zag dat het zeer goed was ... Racisme is zonde* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993), 42–43.
- Speelman, Gé, and Doreen Hazel. “Inleiding,” in Hervormde Projectgroep Pluriforme Samenleving, *En God zag dat het zeer goed was ... Racisme is zonde* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993), 8–10.
- Stegeman, Janneke, *Alles moet anders! Bevrijdingstheologie voor witte Nederlanders* (Utrecht: Kokboekencentrum, 2017).
- Stegeman, Janneke, “The Bible and the Dutch Empire,” in R.S. Sugirtharajah (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 296–328.
- Stegeman, Janneke, “Decoloniality, Theology and Bodies: Tamar and Jesus as Examples of Othering and Bonding,” in Britta Konz, Bernhard Ortmann, and Christian Wetz

- (eds.), *Postcolonialism, Theology and the Construction of the Other* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 124–132.
- Stegeman, Janneke, Mariecke van den Berg, and Matthea Westerduin, “Indecent Calvinists and Vanilla Secularism: Redefining Decency in the Netherlands,” *Feminist Theology* 26/3 (2018), 308–320.
- Stoutjesdijk, Martijn, “Een zwarte stem in een witte tekst: De totslaafgemaakte christen Isabella in het werk van Jan Willem Kals,” *Kerk en Theologie* 74 (2023), 38–56.
- Stoutjesdijk, Martijn, “‘In openlijken strijd met den geest des Christendoms’? De kerk in het Nederlandse slavernijverleden,” in Rose Mary Allen, Esther Captain, Matthias van Rossum, and Urwin Vyent (eds.), *Staat & Slavernij: Het Nederlands koloniale slavernijverleden en zijn doorwerkingen* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Genneep, 2023), 372–381.
- Teunissen, P.J., *Bevrijding als opdracht van de Kerken: het programma ter bestrijding van racisme van de Wereldraad van Kerken. Beleidsadvies van de Sectie Internationale zaken aan de Raad van Kerken in Nederland* (Amersfoort: Horstink, 1975).
- Topolski, Anya, “The Race-Religion Constellation: A European Contribution to the Critical Philosophy of Race,” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 6/1 (2018), 58–81.
- Topolski, Anya, “The Dangerous Discourse of the ‘Judaean-Christian’ Myth: Masking the Race-Religion Constellation in Europe,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 54/1–2 (2020), 71–90.
- Volzin, “‘N-woord’ in Jeruzalemlied geschrap en aangepast aan de tijdgeest,” 7 December 2021, <https://volzin.nl/n-woord-in-jeruzalemlied-geschrap-en-aangepast-aan-de-tijdgeest>.
- Watkins, Clare, *Disclosing Church: An Ecclesiology Learned from Conversations in Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2020).
- Wekker, Gloria, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).
- Westerduin, Matthea. “Questioning Religio-Secular Temporalities: Mediaeval Formations of Nation, Europe and Race,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 45/1–2 (2020), 136–149.
- Westerduin, Matthea, “Race and Religion: Re-Membering Their Displacements, Super-sessions, and Geographies,” dissertation (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, 2023).
- Witvliet, Theo, *The Way of the Black Messiah: The Hermeneutical Challenge of Black Theology as a Theology of Liberation* (London: SCM Press, 1987).
- Witvliet, Theo, *Gebroken Traditie: Christelijke religie in het spanningsveld van pluraliteit en identiteit* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1999).
- Witvliet, Theo, “Christian Identity in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” in Martien Brinkman and Dirk van Keulen (eds.), *Christian Identity in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 165–179.
- Youth for Christ, “Wake: dare to connect,” n.d., <https://yfc.nl/wake-dare-to-connect>.