



## Chapter 7

# Black Theology and Radical Theology: The Case for a Critical Encounter

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### Introduction

In recent years, several theologians have contemplated the possibility of,<sup>1</sup> made the case for,<sup>2</sup> or staged a critical encounter between Continental philosophy of religion and South African theologies.<sup>3</sup> This shows that there are intersecting points of concern that have gained purchase for both discursive measures. These considerations coincide with the disconcerting observation that black theology is experiencing a discursive malaise. Different diagnoses have been given for this phenomenon. Mokgethi Motlhabi points to the lack of a paradigm as one of the key causes of this discursive malaise.<sup>4</sup> Urbaniak, on the other hand, points to the co-optation of theological discourse by politicians as one of the causes.<sup>5</sup> Though both discourses described above are concerned with improving the state of South African theology, none of them explicitly brings these concerns together.

- 1 Khegan M. Delpont, "Philosophical Theology in South Africa?" *Journal of Systematic Theology* 1.3 (2022): 1–60.
- 2 A. H. Verhoef, "The Relevance of Continental Philosophy of Religion for Contemporary South Africa." *Acta Theologica* 37,2 (2017): 160–187.
- 3 Calvin D. Ullrich, "Theopoetics from Below: A South African Black Christological Encounter with Radical Theology." *Black Theology: An International Journal* 19.1 (2021): 53–70.
- 4 Mokgethi Motlhabi, "Phases of Black Theology in South Africa: A Historical Review." *Religion and Theology* 16.3–4 (2009): 162–180.
- 5 Jakub Urbaniak, "Faith of an Angry People: Mapping a Renewed Prophetic Theology in South Africa." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 157, (March 2017): 7–43.

In what follows, I will make the case for staging a critical encounter between black theology and radical theology. The central claim I am making here is that there is historical precedence for a critical encounter between black theology and radical theology, and this historical moment has lessons that can lead to fruitful developments in South African theology. To this end, I will draw on Daniel Magaziner's historical account of the early stages of the development of black theology. In this account, I will draw attention to the fact that black theology was developed in the University Christian Movement, an organisation that fostered a discursive environment that had both postcolonial and the postmodern impulses.<sup>6</sup> The postcolonial impulse is represented by black theology and the postmodern impulse is represented by secular theology. The polemic thrust of this historical account lies in the fact that it clearly demonstrates that both the postcolonial and the postmodern impulse sought to undermine the socio-political and the theological imagination of apartheid that was underpinned by a metaphysics of presence.<sup>7</sup> Commenting on those early stages of the development of black theology, Magaziner observes that "just as SASO's philosophy of liberation broke with the political theories of the past, so too did black South African Christians open a space for a radical rethinking of the faith."<sup>8</sup> I seek to revisit the assortment of theological influences that were on the table as the space was being opened for "a radical rethinking of the faith." This will all be in service of exploring the possibility of a generative encounter between black theology and radical theology.

## The Hegemonic Ideo-theological Orientation

In an effort to understand the interpenetration of the theological and political discourse that congealed between black theology and black consciousness philosophy in the 1970s, Magaziner

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6 Daniel Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2010), 8.

7 Joel Modiri, *The Jurisprudence of Steve Biko*. Unpublished Dissertation. Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 2017, 135. I draw on Joel Modiri's characterisation of colonialism and apartheid as being a metaphysics of presence here.

8 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 57.

invites us to take a “detour from student struggle to consider wider debates about the relationships between church and state that conditioned this discourse’s emergence.”<sup>9</sup> This choice is in epistemological and methodological agreement with Mofokeng’s own assumptions. He would call Magaziner’s historical account a study of the “epistemological ruptures in the hermeneutic circle [of theology].”<sup>10</sup> Magaziner notes that the church, particularly the Dutch Reform Church, gave its unfettered theological sanction to the apartheid government. The Christian mythos was crucial to the development of the collective political identity of the Afrikaner people. As a Calvinist community, they made use of Calvin’s doctrine of election to style themselves as a people chosen by God. The irony of this identity construction is that it draws from the Hebrew mythology but is also anti-Semitic. “This is because,” Derrida explains, “the ‘Hebrewistic’ mythology of the Boer people, coming out of its nomadic origins and the Long Trek, excludes any other ‘Chosen People’.”<sup>11</sup> The Calvinism that the Afrikaner community drew from was a peculiar kind. Mabogo More’s account of the institutional history of philosophy and theology in the country signals to us the source of these peculiarities. He writes, “from the outset, the dominant tradition in most Afrikaans universities has been Kuyperian neo-Calvinism combined with neo-Fichtean nationalism, both of which provided the bases for the apartheid system.”<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, both Magaziner and More turn to Bantu Affairs minister, M. C. de Wet Nel’s 1959 House of Assembly speech to flesh out the official ideo-theological self-understanding of the Afrikaner community. In this speech, he says:

The philosophy of life of the settled white population in South Africa, both English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking in regard to the colour or racial problem . . . rests

9 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 59.

10 Takatso Mofokeng, “The Cross in the Search for True Humanity: Theological Challenges Facing South Africa Today.” *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 3.2 (1989): 38.

11 Jacques Derrida, “Racism’s Last Word.” *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (1985): 297.

12 Mabogo More, *Looking Through Philosophy in Black* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018), 204.

on three basic principles . . . The first is that God has given a divine task and calling for every People in the world, which dare not be destroyed or denied by anyone. The second is that every People in the world, of whatever race or colour, has an inherent right to live. In the third place, it is our deep conviction that the personal and national ideals of every individual and every ethnic group can best be developed within its own national community. Only then will the other groups feel that they are not being endangered. *This is the philosophic basis of the policy of apartheid...* To our People this is not a mere abstraction, which hangs in the air. It is a divine task, which has to be implemented and fulfilled.<sup>13</sup> [my emphasis.]

The first of the above-stated principles demonstrates that they were not only the philosophical basis of the policy of apartheid, but also its theological basis.<sup>14</sup> Operating out of the conviction of the veracity of this first principle, “white theologians were doing their best at theological dehumanisation of blacks – their ideological task as theologians at work on behalf of the Christian oppressor class to which they belong.”<sup>15</sup> The white theologians in question embraced this neo-Calvinism that is articulated above by de Wet Nel. Magaziner further explains: “The DRC followed the lead of the prominent Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper, whose “neo-Calvinism” proclaimed that *God’s will manifested itself in the maintenance of “diversity of nations, tongues, etc.”*”<sup>16</sup> [my

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13 M.C. de Wet Nel, quoted in More, *Looking Through Philosophy in Black*, 205.

14 Derrida, “Racism’s Last Word,” 296–297. Derrida gives an example of this theological imagination unfolding in political life when he cites the Institute for National Christian Education’s position on the role of Christianity on public life and in education. Their policy recommendations for education were informed by this Kuyperian neo-Calvinism.

15 Takatso Mofokeng, *The Crucified among the Crossbearers: Towards a Black Christology*. (Kampen: Kok, 1983), 1.

16 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 61. A qualification I would add to this assertion is that the theological discourse in the DRC was not monolithic. Ernst Conradie’s account of the reception of Kuyper’s theology provides some caveats that are important to highlight. First, not every DRC theologian was a proponent of apartheid theology; Ernst Conradie, “Revisiting the Reception

emphasis.] Where Kuyper's theology gave theological justification for the development of apartheid, Fichte's influence was felt philosophically. More writes:

Fichte invoked the concept of 'nature' to justify the maintenance of the separation between groups of different 'origins' or 'languages.' Coupled with his view that the individual is subordinate and only an aspect of the self-development of the Absolute Spirit as that which reveals itself historically in the life of a community, Fichte's philosophy found favour with apartheid ideologists.<sup>17</sup>

These were the intellectual foundations of the apartheid political philosophy and state theology that the black theologians and the philosophers of the black consciousness movement contended against. It was a theology and philosophy that "was built on a binary or dualism that not only separated whites from Blacks but also established a hierarchy between them that privileges whites and devalues Blacks."<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, Modiri follows this description up with a footnote where he says: "This resembles what Jacques Derrida in the *Margins of Philosophy* refers to as the 'metaphysics of presence'<sup>19</sup> in the way that it 'installs hierarchies and orders of subordination in the various dualisms it encounters' and 'privileges one side of an opposition and ignores or marginalises the alternative terms of the opposition'."<sup>20</sup> This characterisation brings to relief the significance of this historical account for the purposes of my argument.

It should be noted that even though black theology and black consciousness responded to apartheid, they did not see the government as their interlocutor. Instead, both black theology and black consciousness philosophy directed their energies to empowering black people as opposed to directly entering

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of Kuyper in South Africa," in *Creation and Salvation: Dialogue on Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for Contemporary Ecotheology* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 15–53 (29).

17 More, *Looking Through Philosophy in Black*, 204.

18 Modiri, *The Jurisprudence of Steve Biko*, 135.

19 *Margins of Philosophy* (Brighton: The Harvester Press Limited, 1982), 195–196.

20 Modiri, *The Jurisprudence of Steve Biko*, 135.

into fruitless debates with these Kuyperian neo-Calvinist theologians and neo-Fichtean nationalist philosophers. This attitude is wonderfully captured by Biko when he says, “we tend to dismiss ASB [Afrikaanse Studentebond] as an incorrigible group with whom no worthwhile contact can be maintained.”<sup>21</sup> Despite avoiding direct engagement with the government in their theologising, black theology faced considerable resistance and censorship. Mofokeng recounts that the development of the fundamental concepts, methods and epistemological assumptions of black theology took place under extreme conditions. “This very important element of theological reflection,” writes Mofokeng, “was done in an atmosphere of extreme tension which is characteristic of black existence in South Africa. It was done in an ideological battleground...”<sup>22</sup> What follows is an account of the intellectual environment of resistance to the above-described ideo-theological orientation.

## The Dissenting Theological Voices

There was a variety of theological voices that dissented to this political state of affairs. Among these was the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society, the South African Council of Churches, and the University Christian Movement. The stated intention of the SPROCAS project was to present “a conscious attempt to get beyond the elusive simplicity of the established party positions and to formulate a theory of change which, by a multiple-strategy approach, takes account of the complexity of the South African political dilemma.”<sup>23</sup> This intervention represented the sentiments of the liberal church that saw the alliance between the DRC and the apartheid regime as a disastrous state of affairs. Magaziner notes that some of the English churches refused to bow to the pressure of the State that they cede their schools to the government. But to some extent, this really amounted to window dressing because, in the final analysis, there

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21 Steve Biko, *I Write what I Like: A Selection of his Writings* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2004), 15.

22 Mofokeng, *The Crucified among the Crossbearers*, 1.

23 A. S. Mathews, “Report of the Spro-cas Political Commission.” *Black Sash* (August 1973): 18. [https://disa.ukzn.ac.za/sites/default/files/pdf\\_files/BSAug73.0036.4843.016.006.Aug1973.10.pdf](https://disa.ukzn.ac.za/sites/default/files/pdf_files/BSAug73.0036.4843.016.006.Aug1973.10.pdf).

was very little, if any, substantive political support lent by these churches to blacks involved in the struggle. Magaziner observes, “during the 1960s, then, English-speaking church authorities typically conceded the theology-politics debate to the DRC’s extant achievements, and most black Christians accepted this state of affairs.”<sup>24</sup>

Another major liberal theological intervention in South African politics is represented by the South African Council of Churches’ 1968 *Message to the People of South Africa*. In this message, “It asserted that ‘Christians are called to witness to the significance of the Gospel in the particular circumstances of time and places in which they find themselves,’ and it argued that this necessitated speaking out against apartheid.”<sup>25</sup> This message was an appeal to the liberal Christians to reconsider their loyalties so that they first lie with God, followed by the state. Two years later, another major liberal theological intervention came in the form of *Twelve Statements: A Christian Election Manifesto*. It reminded Christians of the moral obligation they have to use their vote to build a government that is in accordance with the precepts of scripture. This intervention was met with some resistance, especially from the Afrikaans community. One of the objections levelled against it was that it drew religious matters and political matters too closely together and it was too prescriptive in that it all but pushed Afrikaner Christians to vote for the Progressive Party. Magaziner notes that the commitment that the *Twelve Statements* was calling for was already being shown by the likes of Beyers Naude; a rising star in the DRC who made the choice to give up his position in the church so that he can continue with his work of critiquing the DRC and the state through the Christian Institute and *Pro Veritate*, the institute’s magazine. *Pro Veritate*, according to Magaziner, “had emerged as one of the few Afrikaans voices against apartheid.”<sup>26</sup> Such efforts caught the government’s attention, and the government sought to enforce strict censorship through a crackdown on any of the proponents of the above messages and their sympathisers. Government sought to enforce

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24 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 65.

25 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 65.

26 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 67.

a strict demarcation between religious affairs and politics. Not only did this affect the Christian Institute, but the crackdown also affected the black theology project that was running under the aegis of the UCM. Basil Moore recounts:

Black Theology from the beginning was subjected to severe harassment. Many students who participated were suspended from their universities and/or banned. Academics were not infrequently dismissed from their posts and/or banned. Clergy were deported, banned, imprisoned and in various ways hounded by their own church establishment.<sup>27</sup>

The state characterised dissident theological voices such as the UCM and the CI as “spiritual terrorists who aimed to destabilise the state.”<sup>28</sup> This is why it was the security branch that acted on behalf of the state to undermine these efforts.<sup>29</sup> Despite these being the consequences, there are people who continued to support resistance against the state’s intimidation. An example cited by Magaziner is that of A.Z Mzara, who sought to impress it upon his readers that it is nonsensical to try to make a clean demarcation between religious life and political affairs. In his letter to the newspaper editor of *World*, “Mzara blurred conceptual lines in search of wholeness.”<sup>30</sup> Mzara’s argument sought to do away with the demarcation that was created between the secular and the sacred. This blurring of lines was part of a larger trend in theological discourse the world over, but also in South Africa more specifically. The UCM was another such example; the most radical of all the examples given up to this point. What made the UCM particularly radical is the fact that while all the other organisations that we have discussed up to this point drew from

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27 Basil Moore, “Black Theology: In The Beginning.” *Journal for the Study of Religion* 4,2 (1991): 27.

28 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 68.

29 Derrida, “Racism’s Last Word,” 297. Derrida points out the irony of the situation where the name of Christ is used to both support and to condemn the state. He also calls attention to the hypocrisy of formally having democratic governance and yet excluding almost three quarters of the population from the democratic processes.

30 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 69.

the same metaphysical well as the hegemonic ideo-theological orientation, the UCM sought to destroy it.

## Secular Theology in the UCM

Magaziner describes a religious sensibility that not only challenged the secular/sacred distinction, but collapsed it. He writes, “the UCM sought to change the meaning behind the very terms *sacred* and *secular*.”<sup>31</sup> This is seen in the liturgical practices and theological reflections that came out of the UCM from its inception. From the outset, there was a call for a relevant faith; faith that responded to the concrete conditions that the people lived in. They called this a secular faith. “Secular faith meant fully aware subjects working in a world made free by the breaking down of old structures.”<sup>32</sup> As a result, some members of the UCM began to embrace talk about the death of God. According to Magaziner, “They created an environment in which the avowedly Christian treasurer of a Christian organization could write to a Christian general secretary and sign off ‘God is dead, Love, Rob’ without raising doubts about his faith.”<sup>33</sup> This is where the postmodern impulse I noted above is at its starkest. Where apartheid developed a politico-theological discourse that rested on a “Calvinist reading of Scripture [that] condemns democracy...,”<sup>34</sup> the UCM’s response was “God is dead.”

The UCM drew inspiration for their theology of secularisation from Harvey Cox, the author of *Secular City*. In this book, Cox argued that secularisation is in fact a good thing. According to him, secularisation should be seen as an indication that society is ready to assume responsibility that God had all along charged it with. “For Cox, the central message of the Gospel was a call for people to become ‘mature and responsible stewards’ of the world by constantly seeking social change.”<sup>35</sup> This, according to Cox, expresses itself in a variety of political

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31 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 70.

32 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 71.

33 Daniel Magaziner, “Christ in Context: Developing a Political Faith in Apartheid South Africa.” *Radical History Review* 99 (2007): 90.

34 Derrida, “Racism’s Last Word,” 297.

35 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 71.

modalities. He sought to impress upon his readers that answering questions about how we ought to live together in this world was also talking about God and the Kingdom of God. The underlying message that attracted the UCM to Cox's theology is, "Faith was concerned with human relations, and politics was its business."<sup>36</sup> This led some of the figures in the UCM, with Moore leading them, to rethink the idea of God. "Moore made God concrete, seeing 'it' exclusively in human affairs. 'It' was not something a mature person sought but something that a mature person 'did' by participating in 'ethical behaviour,' choosing and living to bring more liberating experiences into the world."<sup>37</sup> This theology had its detractors both from outside the organisation and from within. For the purpose of the argument this chapter seeks to make, we will only consider critiques from within the organisation, specifically critique from black members.

### **Black Theologians' Response to Secular Theology**

There was a variety of responses to secular theology among black theologians. We will consider two responses from black members of the UCM, Mokgethi Motlhabi and Gabriel Setiloane. Motlhabi represents the positive response among the students. According to Magaziner, he found secular theology to be a breath of fresh air. Secular theology was a welcome alternative to the conservative theology that he was taught. It provided one with the latitude to use practical wisdom when assessing the ethics of a given situation. Put differently, Motlhabi felt liberated from the strictures of the prescriptive and inhibiting theology he was being taught. Setiloane, by contrast, rejected the propositions of secular theology. By his assessment, "it was pernicious – yet another foreign concept designed to separate the black man from his God." "We are smothered to death by Western theologies," he wrote, "vying with each other in seeking so much to cut God to size that some have now actually got rid of Him (I mean the God is dead thing!)." <sup>38</sup> Setiloane was not the only one who held these sentiments. The likes of Sabelo Ntwasa and Barney Pityana

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36 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 72.

37 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 75–76.

38 Setiloane, quoted in Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 76.

also share this outlook. Consequently, secular theology was condemned to irrelevance, particularly among black students in the UCM. That said, Magaziner does note that, secular theology “transformed the relationship between faith and politics for many South African students. Secular theology had opened new possibilities for articulating what it meant to be a Christian, and even its critics bear witness to its legacy.”<sup>39</sup> According to him, the three benefits to its existence include that it undermined the hegemonic position that the DRC enjoyed theologically. Second, it found a language to incisively describe the problem with the English churches’ liberal response to apartheid policies. Third, secular theology’s call to turn to your neighbour or one’s community allows it to be contextualised and therefore creates the opportunity to temper its Euro-American influence.

### Concluding Thoughts

This leads us to several conclusions that are important for the theoretical encounter I wish to make the case for between black theology and radical theology. First, the above history shows us that black theology did not have fully formed ideas from the start. The development of black theology’s fundamental ideas arose from a confluence of responses to a set of historical circumstances and debates about the appropriate theological response to the circumstances in question. One of the possible directions that black theology could have taken is that which was proposed by secular theology. Second, black theology was not an isolated theological response, but was developed in the midst of an array of theological positions that represented a wide variety of ideological orientations. For some orientations, it was easy to see why they had to be dismissed. Others, particularly the liberal and the radical theological orientations, required a more nuanced engagement and more deliberate efforts at distinguishing themselves from them. Third, the UCM, the organisation that opened discursive possibilities for both black consciousness and black theology, turned to secular theology in response to the incestuous relationship between the church and the state.

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39 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 77.

Even though secular theology never gained traction within black theology circles, it influenced black theology in ways that matter. In Magaziner's words: "Secular theology might have been dismissed as foreign by some black South Africans, but its insights were keenly felt."<sup>40</sup> The most important of these influences was the development of the hermeneutical gesture of destabilising the distinction between the secular and the sacred. While secular theology took this in the direction of embracing the death of God, black theology took to reconsidering the thought forms of their ancestors that did not make a distinction between the secular and the sacred.

### **The Case for Radical Theology**

Magaziner's historical account represents a meticulous history; what Caputo would call a "micrological"<sup>41</sup> history. The intention of this micrological reading is to reopen a crucial debate that was closed in the early stages of the development of black theology; a debate that opened some futures and foreclosed others. In the introduction, I situated my intervention between two discourses: that of the theologians that see the potential fecundity of a critical encounter between black theology and Continental philosophy of religion, and theologians concerned with the discursive malaise of black theology in post-1994 South Africa. In what follows, I will respond to two theologians, each representing the above-mentioned discourses. Concerning the discursive malaise of black theology, I will respond to Mokgethi Motlhabi. For the black theology/radical theology discourse, I will respond to Calvin Ullrich.

### **On the Discursive Malaise of Black Theology**

In his essay, "Phases of Black Theology in South Africa: A Historical Review," Mokgethi Motlhabi argues that black theology has had five phases in its development. By his observation, black theology in post-1994 South Africa has experienced a lull. "So far

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40 Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 79.

41 John D. Caputo, *In Search of Radical Theology: Expositions, Explorations, Exhortations* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 25.

there has been no recovery from the latest lull, which is attributed mainly to the need for a new paradigm."<sup>42</sup> My response to this diagnosis is two-fold. First, it is not so much that black theology in post-1994 lacks a paradigm. Instead, a greater appreciation for the programmatic character of Biko's call for the development of a black theology would open a space that could create the possibility of developing a paradigm.<sup>43</sup> By this, I mean that each time Biko called for the development of black theology, his call was always subtended by discrete aims.

Let us examine two instances where he calls for the development of black theology. In the first instance, his essay titled "We Blacks," Biko argues for a more nuanced understanding of apartheid. By his assessment, it is not just a mechanism for socio-political oppression; it also has a psychological element. He names the impact that apartheid machinations have on the psychological level "spiritual poverty."<sup>44</sup> In response to this problem, he suggests a programme that would address both the socio-political and psychological oppression, i.e., black consciousness. This program has multiple vehicles to execute its goals. One of these is black theology. Principally, black theology needs to make religious concerns to speak to the lived experience of oppressed blacks. To achieve this, Biko proposes that black theology must have four objectives: 1) to address the problem of spiritual poverty; 2) to contest the assumption that Christianity is superior to African traditional religion; 3) to demonstrate how contextualizable the Christian faith is; and 4) to portray Jesus as one who fights against oppression.

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42 Mokgethi Motlhabi, "Phases of Black Theology in South Africa," 162.

43 See Malesela John Lamola, "The Thought of Steve Biko as the Historico-philosophical Base of South African Black Theology." *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 3.2 (1990): 1. I single out Biko because of his stature and influence in the project of South African black theology. On this matter, John Lamola comments, "no historical account of Black Theology, or of the debates accompanying its development, would be complete without taking account of the philosophy of Steve Biko, which was seminal in the development of Black Theology in South Africa."

44 Steve Biko, *I Write what I Like*, 30.

Another occasion wherein Biko called for the development of black theology is in his essay, "Black Consciousness and the Quest for True Humanity." In this essay, his central contention is that whites subjugate black people and yet they also want to dictate how blacks must respond to this subjugation. Part of the way whites attempt to control black response to subjugation is by dictating to them how to appropriately analyse this problem. To this, Biko's response was, "We believe we know what the problem is, and we will stick to our findings."<sup>45</sup> By this, he meant that white dialectical analysis was inadequate to deal with their situation, and blacks had developed their own dialectical analysis which they were happy with. Part of this dialectical analysis included a theological element. This is where black theology came in. Like the previous occasion, he identifies four key objectives: 1) to reconcile God and Jesus to the black experience; 2) to portray Jesus as a God who has a preferential option for the poor; 3) to be a theology that addresses the existential problems that come out of the black experience; and 4) to re-introduce the divine element to the black person's lived experience.

When looking at these two instances, several things stand out. First, the objectives articulated in each instance are unique. This indicates that Biko's invitation has theoretical mileage that has not yet been exhausted and calls for further engagement. Put differently, there is a theological research programme in Biko and not enough has been done to fully engage it. Second, inasmuch as his programmatic invitations suggest a variety of loci of reflection, there is also thematic coherence. This means that theologians who take up this research programme would be contributing to a variety of theological disciplines, but their contributions would amount to a coherent conversation. Third, much of what he raised as concerns that black theologians should take up still applies to the lived experience of many blacks in South Africa today. That said, we cannot simply take Biko's invitation to develop black theology and repeat it without alteration. More on this below.

My second response to Motlhabi's diagnosis is that one of the reasons black theological discourse in South Africa has

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45 Steve Biko, *I Write what I Like*, 99.

stalled is because the socio-political context of post-1994 South Africa is more complicated than in South Africa in the apartheid era. To elaborate on this, I turn to Sizwe Mpfu-Walsh's text, *The New Apartheid*. The central thesis of this book is simple: *apartheid* did not die, it was privatised. He further explains, "for *apartheid* to be privatized, it also had to be marketized, de-legislated, denationalised, digitised, fractalized, internalised, deracialised, and de-territorialised."<sup>46</sup> He explains how each of these features buttressed the emergence of a privatised apartheid. For the purpose of brevity, I will only pay attention to two of the listed features, the marketisation and deracialisation of apartheid. I choose these because race and class are the two dominant analytical categories that informed black theological discourse in apartheid South Africa.<sup>47</sup>

On the marketisation of apartheid, Mpfu-Walsh explains that apartheid was a system of racism that was codified by laws and enforced by the state. Post-1994, financial barriers have replaced legal barriers. Furthermore, this shift comes with benefits, a financial and a moral benefit. Now that it is pricing and not legal statutes that regulate access, there is a profit to be made by private entities. Also, this type of regulation does not carry the moral stigma of apartheid laws. With rhetorical flare, Mpfu-Walsh asserts that, "[b]y replacing legal barriers with financial ones, segregation is transformed from a public burden to a source of private profit. In classic neoliberal fashion, apartheid oppression now works on a 'pay-as-you-go' basis."<sup>48</sup> Since exclusivity is no longer legislatively regulated, it means

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46 Sizwe Mpfu-Walsh, *The New Apartheid* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2021) 17.

47 See Dwight Hopkins, *Black Theology USA and South Africa* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock 1989) 94. The following remarks from Frank Chikane support this claim: "Although the division on the surface seemed to be between the Black Consciousness Movement and the progressive democrats [the non-racial, Freedom Charter adherents] based on a play between the class and race models or the combination of these models in trying to understand the South African society, it seems that the really decisive matter was the attitudes of these groupings to the historical liberation movements African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC)."

48 Sizwe Mpfu-Walsh, *The New Apartheid*, 18.

that black people who have the means can participate in the logics of apartheid domination. This leads us to Mpopu-Walsh's second observation. Apartheid was deracialised. He qualifies this characterisation by explaining that "Some Black South Africans can now participate in its spoils, though *most* still experience the vast disproportion of its evils."<sup>49</sup> Where apartheid strictly used the rubric of race for both inclusion and exclusion, the new apartheid complicates things by continuing to exclude based on race but no longer strictly using the rubric of race for inclusion. Here lies the rub: "Black enmeshment in the system of privilege is *a key feature of the new apartheid.*"<sup>50</sup> [My emphasis] This is where the complication is painfully brought to full relief. Black enmeshment, according to Mpopu-Walsh, serves two functions in the new apartheid. First, it serves to turn attention away from the continued vitality of this system of oppression. Second, it encourages black people to be silent in the face of oppression. The great success of the new apartheid lies in its ability to decouple self-interest and social interest. Mpopu-Walsh observes that "[t]oday, self-interest and social interest diverge, as Black South Africans are increasingly torn between contradictory desires for spectacular wealth and revolutionary equality."<sup>51</sup> By my assessment, black theologians need to sincerely confront these complications and others if they are to develop a paradigm that speaks to post-1994 South Africa.

### **On the Radical Turn of Black Theology**

As stated above, Ullrich stages a critical encounter between black theology and radical theology. This intervention comes out of his conviction that the social issues we are faced with force us to re-think theology in South Africa today. He notes that public theology has been the most prolific theological respondent to this state of affairs. Part of what made this to be the case is that public theology is in constant conversation with other theological traditions. However, several theologians have shown the limitations of the contribution that public theology can make. This calls for a search

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49 Sizwe Mpopu-Walsh, *The New Apartheid*, 19.

50 Sizwe Mpopu-Walsh, *The New Apartheid*, 19.

51 Sizwe Mpopu-Walsh, *The New Apartheid*, 19–20.

for alternative theological interlocutors. This is where Ullrich then makes the case for a critical bi-directional supplementation that can happen between black theology and radical theology. His case study for this critical supplementation is that of Takatso Mofokeng and John D. Caputo; the former representing black theology, and the latter radical theology.

Before engaging with the substance of his argument, it is necessary for me to explain why I believe that Caputo's radical theology represents a compatible conversation partner for the discursive intervention that Ullrich and company are advocating for. In the historical account discussed above, we see Magaziner attributing the radical theological tendencies of the secular theologians in the UCM to Harvey Cox's influence – specifically his text *The Secular City*. The influence of secular theology on black theology in its incipient stages forms the basis of my case for reconsidering the radical turn of black theology. Why then, turn to Caputo instead of Cox for this radical turn? Jeffrey Robbins' genealogical account of postmodern theology provides a helpful answer.

Robbins locates Cox in the radical “death of God” theological movement, a movement that had a variety of voices that addressed a wide range of concerns. “What they all shared in common,” writes Robbins, “was a collective sense that the Western culture in general, and the Judeo-Christian tradition in particular, had entered a profound ‘ideological crisis’.”<sup>52</sup> This was a crisis of meaning. “Either religious language lost its meanings or, even worse, the inherited meanings had grown perverse in the wake of a long list of modern atrocities.”<sup>53</sup> This discourse, broadly speaking, provided a language to describe the limits that religious language and practice had come up against in the face of the undeniable suffering of the oppressed and the existential threat that nuclear weapons represented. This movement, according to Robbins, “helps establish the genealogy that would develop into

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52 Jeffrey W. Robbins, “Introduction: After the Death of God,” in Jeffrey W. Robbins (ed.), *After the Death of God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 1–26 (2).

53 Jeffrey W. Robbins, “Introduction: After the Death of God.” 2.

what we now know as postmodern theology.”<sup>54</sup> This is why Ullrich situates Caputo within this very tradition; a tradition that Mark C. Taylor would characterise as “the hermeneutic of the death of God.”<sup>55</sup> This ideological crisis brought into relief the distinction between Christendom and Christianity. This distinction was essential for creating the milieu that gave birth to radical theology. The legacy of this theological tradition is that it laid the groundwork for the critical intuitions of postmodern philosophies and theologies against the onto-theological God.

Theologies of secularisation may have inaugurated the radical theological movement, but there has been a marked transition from secularism to post-secularism. This is because the imagined future predicted by this cohort of theologians has “given way to a new “postsecular” understanding of the postmodern condition in which the return of religion is more determinative than the collapse of Christendom.”<sup>56</sup> One could even argue that the problem-space has shifted from the circumstances that occasioned the development of theologies of secularisation. It also becomes understandable why black theologians in South Africa rejected secular theology. The chances are that in their assessment, black theologians concluded that secular theology’s problem-space was not compatible to that of black theology. Mofokeng intimates as such when he avers that, “[t]he interlocutor of classic theology is an individual modern man (bourgeois) or a collective of modern men who have come of age. In Black Christology as in Black Theology the one whose questions and concerns are given priority is the black community which is struggling to remove all the obstacles which prevent it from coming of age *in its own way*.”<sup>57</sup> This brings to relief the incompatibility of secular theology and black theology on two fronts. First, the historical circumstances and political conditions that gave theologies of secularisation their salience and discursive purchase in the Euro-American discourse no longer hold.

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54 Jeffrey W. Robbins, “Introduction: After the Death of God.” 3.

55 Taylor quoted in Jeffrey W. Robbins, “Introduction: After the Death of God,” 3.

56 Jeffrey W. Robbins, “Introduction: After the Death of God,” 11.

57 Takatso Mofokeng, “A Black Christology: A New Beginning.” *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 1.1 (1987): 7.

Second, even though they both sought to subvert the colonial metaphysics of European modernity, there remains an enduring incompatibility between the critical intuitions of theologies of secularisation and the critical impulses of black theology. This is best articulated by Gayatri Spivak when she laments the unfortunate fact that the most critical interventions to come out of the Western philosophical tradition tend to – wittingly or unwittingly – reinscribe the tendencies they aim to subvert.<sup>58</sup> In the case of secular theology, the effect of its attempt to undermine the metaphysical infrastructure of apartheid's Christian nationalism unwittingly reinscribed the same tendencies that destroyed the African onto-metaphysical infrastructure as well.

The above reflections demonstrate two things. First, there is value in returning to the historical moment when the influence of secular theology on black theology was still an open question. For one thing, it reopens futures that, for complicated reasons, were foreclosed for black theology. These are futures that have the potential to provide an appropriate theological response to today's complicated context. Second, a retrieval of this historical moment cannot be a wholesale, uncritical retrieval. Instead, it needs to be one that shows sensitivity to the shift within radical theology from secularism to postsecularism, and one that shows a critical awareness of the discursive currency that religious language still holds in South Africa.

With all this in mind, let us return to Ullrich. We have already noted above that the motivation for his intervention comes out of his belief that the problems that South Africa is faced with require a theological response. He has a specific kind of theological response in mind: one that facilitates a critical, bidirectional supplementation between black theology and radical theology. Before discussing the value of this critical supplementation, let us explore Caputo's relationship to theologies of secularisation/death of God theologies. The purpose of my description is not so much to give a substantive definition of Caputo's theology – Ullrich has done good work on that front.

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58 Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (London: Macmillan Education, 1988), 66–111 (66).

Instead, it is to situate his theology in a manner that makes legible its salience for South Africa today.

Ullrich genealogically associates Caputo's theology with the death of God theologies of the 1960's. But he quickly differentiates Caputo from that cohort of radical theologians by noting a key limitation that they have that Caputo avoids. That is, these theologians "ended up in the process of killing the God of metaphysics, also killing the possibility of God altogether..."<sup>59</sup> The unfortunate consequence of this limitation is that it reinscribes the very tendency they sought to subvert. This is why Caputo draws from the death of God theologies but does so in a qualified sense. He qualifies his association with death of God theology in three ways. First, death of God theology makes a valuable contribution to the extent that it implies the death of an all-powerful God. Second, the death of the *deus omnipotens* creates room for what Caputo calls "the birth of God."<sup>60</sup> Specifically, the birth of the suffering God. Third, death of God theology remains valuable to the extent that it is understood to be the never-ending task of deconstructing the God that anchors sovereignty. That said, he also has some reservations about this theological tradition.

Caputo's key objection to death of God theologies is that they end up falling into the same trap of classical theology by producing a grand narrative. This happens because they tell a linear story of religious progression from Judaism to Christianity to modernity or postmodernity, which comes at the expense of Judaism. He sees this to be a problematic schema. He criticises the way these theologies present the death of God as a completion of a metaphysical narrative, transferring being from the religion of the Father (Judaism) to the advantage of Christian incarnation. He even criticises Mark C. Taylor, who disregards the broader context of deconstruction and its scepticism towards such periodising and incarnational frameworks. He writes, "[d]espite the fact that Taylor is telling us deconstruction spells the end of the Book and of History, he does not resist this schema. Indeed, he completes

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59 Ullrich, "Theopoetics from Below," 4.

60 He fleshes out the implications of this expression in his book, *The Insistence of God*.

or perfects it.”<sup>61</sup> Briefly stated, Caputo identifies with the polemic thrust of death of God theologies against the metaphysical God. But he sees their critical gestures to be somewhat ham-fisted. Consequently, these theologies end up reproducing the very thing they seek to subvert. So where does this leave Caputo in relation to death of God theologies? Ullrich answers this question in the following terms, “[f]or Caputo, God ‘is’ not (God is dead) but we can still speak of God, justice or faith, insofar as these names ‘name’ an undeconstructible event.”<sup>62</sup> So how does this theological posture contribute to black theology?

### Positive Identification

Ullrich argues that radical theology can critically supplement black theology’s hermeneutic of positive identification by constantly accentuating its potential risk to become an “act of classification and stratification [that] might be in fact a re-enactment of the gaze of the ‘White Face’.”<sup>63</sup> A good example of this risk materialising is in the work of Albert Cleage. Allan Boesak describes Cleage’s theology in the following terms: “Cleage’s theology is determined by his belief that Jesus was a *black* leader of a *black* people struggling for national liberation against a *white* Rome”<sup>64</sup> (my emphasis). My italicisation of “black” and “white” in the preceding quote seeks to underscore that Cleage’s use of these terms denotes race. Unlike Cone, Cleage’s identification of Jesus as black is not simply a hermeneutical gesture of Jesus’ identification with, and a preferential option for the poor. Instead, it is a phenotypic characterisation of Jesus.

This has ethical implications that Cleage himself draws out. Boesak uses two examples of Cleage’s interpretation of the Bible to make his point, namely, the Sermon on the Mount and the story of the Good Samaritan. Both of these instances serve to concretely delimit what Cleage calls the Black Nation. From these

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61 John D. Caputo, “Spectral Hermeneutics,” in *After the Death of God*, edited by Jeffery W. Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 47–88 (69).

62 Ullrich, “Theopoetics from Below,” 5.

63 Ullrich, “Theopoetics from Below,” 14.

64 Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Economic Study on Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll: Orbis Book, 1976), 117.

two examples, Boesak concludes that Cleage's contention is that "[f]or Jesus, the whole idea of brotherhood and love had to do with love *within* the Black Nation."<sup>65</sup> We see the risk that Ullrich identifies and cautions against in the hermeneutic of positive identification starkly unfolding here. In his words, "it is important to be reminded that any and all identification or naming is an act of othering made possible only by a distinction between 'us and them'."<sup>66</sup> Cleage most explicitly articulates his brand of positive identification in the following terms:

Nobody can love everybody. The white man does not love you... You have less reason to love him than he does to love you... [To love the enemy] is ridiculous. We have to concern ourselves with justice, not love. We can't go to the white man and ask him to love us... It's futile. We want justice, we are going to fight for justice... Love is only something for *inside* the Nation.<sup>67</sup> (my emphasis.)

Not only do we see the act of othering unfold in this brand of positive identification, we also see the ethical implications this "us and them" dynamic comes with. This is why Ullrich asserts that "this first area of supplementation that refers to 'positive identification' is not merely a linguistic exercise in responding to the exigencies of nomination, it also has concretely felt implications."<sup>68</sup> Boesak shows sensitivity to these concretely felt implications in his judgement of Cleage's theology. He writes, "Cleage's total identification of the gospel with his particular brand of Christian Nationalism is totally unacceptable."<sup>69</sup> The source of his recalcitrance to Cleage's theology is that "[h]is concept of an 'ethic of the nation only' is disturbingly reminiscent of the 'for the *Volk* only' theology black South Africans must reject."<sup>70</sup> Put differently, Cleage's theology evinces the very metaphysics of presence that black theology seeks to overturn in its quest for justice. Further still, Ullrich's turn to Mofokeng

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65 Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 118.

66 Ullrich, "Theopoetics from Below," 14.

67 Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 119.

68 Ullrich, "Theopoetics from Below," 14.

69 Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 119.

70 Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, 119.

also shows us that this risk that the hermeneutic of positive identification comes with does not only unfold between groups, but also *within* a group. He notes that Mofokeng sees the limitation of his nomenclature of “crossbearers.” This is why Mofokeng further differentiates between “crossbearers” and “the crucified people.” Ullrich’s contention is that the acknowledgement of this limitation “reveals the importance of Derrida’s formulation that ‘every other is wholly other,’ because it assigns infinite value to anything and anyone that is excluded.”<sup>71</sup> The stakes of this caution, Ullrich asserts, are most trenchantly revealed by the womanist critique on the place of the black woman in black theology.

### **The Theodicy Question**

Ullrich goes on to adumbrate a second area of supplementation of black theology by radical theology. He points out that Mofokeng remains concerned about the problem of the Long Good Friday. The strength of this preoccupation, in Ullrich’s assessment, is that it does not glorify suffering. Instead, it evinces a sensitivity to the tragic character of the condition of the crucified people. In his words, “Mofokeng goes a long way to avoid entering what radical theology would call an ‘economy of redemption,’ that somehow sinful structures are to be endured for a justice to come.”<sup>72</sup> That said, Mofokeng’s tragic sensibilities do not go far enough. Ullrich demonstrates this by asking a pointed question, “what are we to then do with these ‘crucified people?’”<sup>73</sup> This question accentuates the exigencies of suffering in the here-and-now. This second area of supplementation is an enactment of one of the key tenets of radical hermeneutics. That is, “hermeneutics as an attempt to stick with the original difficulty of life, and not to betray it with metaphysics.”<sup>74</sup> Mofokeng’s treatment of the question of theodicy is akin to Caputo’s description of the tendency of the metaphysician who opens the question of Being as presence and

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71 Ullrich, “Theopoetics from Below,” 14.

72 Ullrich, “Theopoetics from Below,” 15.

73 Ullrich, “Theopoetics from Below,” 15.

74 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 1.

then quickly forecloses this line of questioning when things get tough. It falls back on the metaphysical theology of “the God of classical ‘two worlds’ Augustinianism.”<sup>75</sup> This is seen with stark clarity everytime Mofokeng uses the word “glory” in his work.

In effect, this critical supplementation is an invitation to “[unleash] a radical force in [the question of theodicy], a deeply critical power which [is] intent on keeping the question of [theodicy] open, on letting [black theology] to tremble so that the whole would shake (solicitare) and give way to movement (*kinesis*).”<sup>76</sup> This takes the black consciousness maxim “Black Man (sic) You Are On Your Own” to a whole new level. It transforms the self-understanding of the crossbearers so that they see themselves as what Caputo would call the messianic generation: a generation that does not wait for the Big Other to save them from the Long Good Friday. Crossbearers who take this critical supplementation seriously would describe themselves by declaring:

*We are the ones who have all along been expected – by the dead. We occupy the messianic position – to make right the wrongs that have been done to them. But our messianic powers are weak. We cannot make the dead live again. We cannot alter the past and restore them to a life in which they will not have suffered these wrongs or will have been compensated for them. So we can at best remember them, recall them, mourn them with an impossible mourning, by righting the unjust conditions now from which they suffered then, by seeing to it that... their death will not have been in vain.*<sup>77</sup>

### **Idealised Discourse**

Ullrich argues that black theology can supplement radical theology’s idealised discursive register. By his assessment,

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75 Ullrich, “Theopoetics from Below,” 5.

76 See, Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 2. This is a rephrasing of Caputo’s description of Heidegger’s intervention in *Being and Time*.

77 John D. Caputo, *The Folly of God: A Theology of the Unconditional*. (Polebridge Press: Salem, 2016), 57–58.

radical theology runs the risk of “[operating] potentially as an Anglo-American theology of *abstraction from lived experience*”<sup>78</sup> [my emphasis]. I italicise the phrase “abstraction from lived experience” to underscore the strained relationship between Caputo’s theology and the question of materiality, in his critics’ account of his work. What gives credibility to Ullrich’s proposed area of supplementation is the fact that he does not only address this concern in response to the potential criticism of epistemic colonialism of black theology by radical theology. He also raises this concern in other places in his work. A good example of this is his article *Theopoetics to Theopraxis*. Where Mofokeng provides a critical supplementation in *Theopoetics from Below*, Simon Critchley provides a critical supplement in *Theopoetics to Theopraxis*. In the latter, Ullrich articulates the central objection against Caputo in the following terms, “... the political-ethical implications of Caputo’s radical theology are seen for some to be too compromising in the face of the hegemony of the neoliberal order. A theology of event on this reading still dreams of a ‘world-disclosure’ that appears to denigrate the materiality of the particular because too much distance is created in the passage from undecidability to decision.”<sup>79</sup> Ullrich’s evaluation of this criticism is that it has credence, but in the final analysis, it is not a completely fair representation of Caputo’s theology. That said, Caputo himself does concede that the political/material implications of his theology are still nascent. Ullrich’s intervention, then, is an attempt to push past this nascent phase into a better developed and explicit political theology.

Read in this discursive context, the Mofokengean supplement opens discursive forays that can fully ground Caputo’s theology in the political register. Such a critical supplementation is a more rigorous enactment of what Caputo calls “the political reduction.” In his own words, “[t]his is the reduction of theology to theopraxis, which is *theo-poetics* in the most literal sense of God-making (making), making God happen here and now,

78 Ullrich, “Theopoetics from Below,” 4.

79 Calvin D. Ullrich, “Theopoetics to Theopraxis: Toward a Critchlean Supplement to Caputo’s Radical Political Theology.” *Forum Philosophicum* 25,1 (2020): 164–165.

making the kingdom of God happen come true.”<sup>80</sup> In Ullrich’s account, a Mofokengean supplement reminds radical theology of two things. First, its particularising gesture supplements radical theology by reminding it of the importance of the concrete aspects of a community’s identity. Second, a hermeneutic of positive identification “is a part of the very calculus that makes it possible for a radical theo poetic reading to occur.”<sup>81</sup> Put differently, Mofokeng’s historicising hermeneutic serves as a crucial reminder that it is the material conditions of the lived experience that give occasion to the desire to turn to the activity of making the kingdom of God happen here and now. In Ullrich’s words, “irreducible particularity [has] to be entered into.”<sup>82</sup> Also, Mofokeng’s insight that the anthropological question is embedded in the Christological question, opens the conditions of possibility for the Caputian chiasm to congeal. Beneath this hermeneutic of positive identification lies the Fanonian whisper that, “black consciousness is immanent in its own eyes. I am not a potentiality for something, I am wholly what I am.”<sup>83</sup>

With all that said, it seems that Ullrich himself is in need of a Mofokengean supplement. By this, I mean his hermeneutic needs to more fully enter into the irreducible particularity of the South African situation. There is an insufficient acknowledgement of the spectre of whiteness in his critical reflection. This should not be conflated with the vacuous performance of acknowledging one’s positionality in service of superficially demonstrating reflexivity. That is virtue signalling and it is unhelpful. What I am referring to comes out of his own stated motivations for staging a critical encounter between black theology and radical theology in the first place. He names two South African social issues that underscore the potential fecundity of this critical encounter, i.e., gender-based violence and xenophobia. I read Ullrich’s hermeneutical choices as a black theologian; a theologian who is black and a theologian who is doing black theology. The key theological contribution that black theology makes is to show how

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80 Caputo, *In Search of Radical Theology*, 19.

81 Ullrich, “Theopoetics from Below,” 15.

82 Ullrich, “Theopoetics from Below,” 16.

83 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 103.

race irreducibly conditions the lived experience of black people and how theologically significant race is. This is not to say that Ullrich must do black theology, but when engaging black theology, the fact of blackness and the spectre of whiteness need to be more explicitly acknowledged. That would be truly engaging black theology on its own terms. This does not reduce the value of his contribution to the conversation; to the contrary, it demonstrates how important it is. I highlight this limitation simply to caution those who, like me, are sold on his argument for the critical supplementation between black theology and radical theology. Our shared investment in the reinvigoration of black theology in South Africa, and making radical theology to have contextual significance for South Africa, must carry with it a sensitivity of the risk of hermeneutic colonisation of black theology.

### **Lessons from an Historical Moment**

My turn to the historical moment that Magaziner so meticulously sketches comes from my belief that historical conditions give rise to the development and articulation of ideas. When this is done well, these interventions give conceptual clarity to the exigencies of the historical moment in question. In this instance, I argue that the call for the critical engagement between black theology and radical theology in post-1994 South Africa is an astute and historically sensitive suggestion. Magaziner's historical account affirms this argument in two ways. On the one hand, it shows us how the concretely felt pressures of life that gave rise to the development of black theology and radical theology in South Africa still persist today. On the other hand, the very same historical sketch shines a light on the (obvious and not so obvious) way in which present historical conditions differ from those of the past.

Viewed in this light, Magaziner's historical account assist us in a few ways. First, it provides a conceptually rigorous reconstruction of the past that serves as a helpful backdrop for constructing a useful picture of South Africa's political present and concomitantly anticipated future. Second, it presents, with consummate clarity, the epistemic contours that the theologians in question were operating within. Third, it convincingly draws

connections between the historical conditions of the period it is investigating, the questions these conditions gave rise to, and the answers proffered by the participants of the discourse.

In short, it gives us a reliable starting point to construct what David Scott calls a *problem space*. That is, “an ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes (conceptual as well as ideological-political stakes) hangs.”<sup>84</sup> Toward the end of his book, Magaziner reflects on the different relationships that blacks across the political spectrum have with the past. He sees an impasse that all these groups come up against. To explore this impasse, he turns to David Scott, who cogently identifies a limitation that most postcolonial responses are beset with. Magaziner expresses full agreement with Scott’s contention that our engagement with discursive contexts of the past run the risk of amounting to an uncritical retrieval of the interventions of a given problem-space. Scott asserts that “an adequate interrogation of the present (postcolonial or otherwise) depends upon identifying the *difference* between the questions that animated former presents and that animates our own.”<sup>85</sup>

It is my contention that a theological intervention that facilitates a critical engagement between black theology and radical theology will provide adequate conceptual resources for identifying and responding to the animating theological questions of South Africa today. The particularising gesture of the hermeneutic of positive identification provides us with the critical sensibilities and conceptual resources to adequately interrogate the post-1994 present. Radical theology, on the other hand, gives us the critical resources to facilitate the task of “identifying the *difference* between questions that animated the former presents and our present.”<sup>86</sup> This is the value of a theological disposition that is intent on exposing the historical contingency of any given community of believers together with their beliefs and practices.

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84 David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 4.

85 David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 3.

86 David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 3.

## Conclusion

This chapter is an attempt to demonstrate that there is historical precedence to the efforts of facilitating a generative conversation between black theology and radical theology. This argument is made in service of buttressing the claim that revisiting this historical moment can lead to fruitful developments for both theological traditions in South Africa today. The historical account details the philosophical and theological foundations of the apartheid regime and the array of theological responses to this hegemonic ideotheological orientation. Of particular interest are the theological responses that came out of the UCM, namely, black theology and secular theology. For complicated reasons, black theologians chose not to entertain the possibility of a critical engagement between the two theological traditions. Turning to the present day, I then call for the reconsideration of this historical moment in light of the discursive malaise that black theology is experiencing today. I nuance this call by engaging two theologians, Motlhabi and Ullrich. Magaziner's historical account brings into sharp focus the discursive potential that both theological traditions have to respond to the animating questions that South Africa has today. A critical encounter between the theological traditions that draws lessons from this historical moment can benefit both traditions. For black theology, it will facilitate the construction of a new paradigm that is both relevant and sustainable. For radical theology, it will improve its contextual relevance in South Africa today.