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Editor's Preface

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This issue of *Religion & Theology* appears at the end of an extraordinary year in world history. First, there was the long simmering racial discord that gave rise to the Black Lives Matter movement that, since July 2013, mobilised the American public against police violence towards black people (but which movement also reverberated and found iterations in other countries – "Black Lives Matter" has now become the worldwide iconic image of protest against racism and racial discords). It came to a head on 25 May 2020 with the killing of George Floyd in police custody in the city of Minneapolis, Minnesota, which led to rolling millions-strong protests in the streets of American cities that in some cases erupted in violence, like the mostly peaceful protests in Portland, Oregon, that flared later into vandalism, arson, and militarised government agency interventions to suppress the protests. Countered in multiple locations by demonstrations by heavily armed right wing extremists, scenes regularly played out of very tense stand-offs, extrajudicial actions and (in some cases) lethal violence. Public and social media were flooded by images of protest and violence. "Systemic racism" has become one of the most circulated phrases and concepts in 2020. All of this was exacerbated by the heightened tensions and divisions occasioned by the presidential election in the United States of America with the current President, Donald J. Trump, and then Republican Party candidate for the 2020 election, openly supporting right-wing extremism.

Second, 2020 is also the year of the Covid-19 pandemic. First identified as a new outbreak of a coronavirus epidemic in the Chinese city of Wuhan at the end of 2019, it very quickly spread worldwide to other countries in Asia, Europe, North America, Africa, and South America. The rapid escalation of infections and resulting deaths (a number of online sites host Covid-19 counters that are daily updated), together with the first months of frantic attempts to understand the virus (SARS-CoV-2, or novel coronavirus) and its origins, its way of transmission, its effects on the human body, and how to contain its spread and treat the infection (for the first few months the science was changing by the day), changed the world overnight. The pandemic interrupted "normal" life as

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we knew it. Governments scrambled to come to grips with the Covid-19 pandemic – caught on the wrong foot, government responses ranged, on the one hand, from half-hearted fumblings to acknowledge the seriousness of the pandemic, to follow the science, or to introduce containment measures, to on the other hand, extreme lockdown measures that confined large populations to their places of domicile and restricted movement and travel as well as social gatherings. Economic activity was severely curtailed (there were widespread talks of economic collapse; at least also a rethink of economics and projections for a post-Covid economic recovery, with talks of a new Green economy as urgent desideratum), with attendant extreme hunger, poverty, and deprivation (who can forget the images of long lines of desperate people awaiting delivery of food parcels?), resulting in the need for wide-ranging emergency social relief programmes; social distancing was, is still, enforced; mask-wearing not only mandatory but for a while also a site of political contention; an immense strain placed on medical and other essential services workers (plus the fear of contagion accompanying such services); massive disruption of education, with a wholesale shift to online learning which might endure beyond the pandemic; shifts away from office-bound to work from home, with all the attendant problems of the erasure of boundaries between private and professional life; the erasure of social trust and trust in governments; the exponential increase in fake news, and the general erosion of trust in fact and science. Once the initial novelty of all the charitable offers of free books, free films, free online concerts and virtual museum access wore off, reality set in: over it all hang the sense of loss, alienation and loneliness, fear and doom (who can unsee the unsettling images portrayed in television films of the desperate situation in Italian hospitals, or the gruesome images of mass graves in New York, for instance?). The litany of effects of the pandemic is probably endless, but what is true is that life as we knew it is probably over. This is the New Normal, as we wait for what lies beyond mass vaccinations and Covid-19.

Into this context the first two essays of the issue, Warren Goldstein, "The Racialization of the Jewish Question: The Pseudo-Secularization of Christian Anti-Judaism into Racial Anti-Semitism," and Handri Walters and Kees van der Waal, "Creating the Coloured Other in South Africa in Light of the "Jewish Question" in Germany," trace the intertwinement of religious discourses (and Christian theology) with the biologisation, scientification, and racialisation of the bias against certain social groups: the Jews in Germany and the Coloureds in South Africa – the acme of both processes occurring simultaneously, roughly in the decade between 1930 and mid-1940s.

The role of Christian theologians in the making of a Christianity devoid of any Jewish background, a Jesus that was an Aryan, and effecting a recon-

ciliation of National Socialism with religious belief and practice, has already been densely documented, in particular the role of the famous New Testament scholar, Gerhard Kittel.[1] It is worth highlighting in this regard the figure of Gerhard Kittel. Kittel was a conservative who joined the Nazi Party in May 1933, being enamoured of the blossoming of the German *Volk* under the Nazi regime – he decried the embrace of Enlightenment values in the post-World War I Germany. While not a member of the *Deutsche Christen* ("German Christians"; the Protestant movement that excised all vestiges of the Old Testament from their theology, and fused pagan and Christian elements into a Christian ethnic mysticism), or at least only for a very short period after which he distanced himself from them, he did participate in the Reichsinstitut für Geschichte des neuen Deutschlands, and was a specialist writing for the Forschungsabteilung Judenfrage within the institute, to whose publications he richly contributed. The extent of Kittel's support for the full political programme of the Nazi regime is an ambiguous matter, since he received witness support in his denazification trial after the war not only from fellow theologians but also from German Jews to support his own claims that he never identified with radical Nazism. And indeed, in his earlier academic work up to the beginning of the 1930s, he evinced a tolerant attitude to Judaism and defended the Old Testament as essential to understanding Jesus and the early Christian tradition, as well as defending Judaism. The turn came with his 1933 lecture and book, *Die Judenfrage* ("The Jewish Question"), in which he forcefully addressed the political question of what to do with the Jews in Germany. After rejecting assimilation and Zionism as options, he identified assimilation as the big problem regarding the Jews (and I cite Robert Ericksen's discussion at length because it illustrates what Goldstein describes in his article):

> [Assimilation] resulted in racial mixing and, more importantly, led directly to decadence; "It is this decadence and nothing else which is actually the basic problem of the contemporary Jewish question." Assimilation led to a literature and journalism before which nothing was holy, a legal practice which did not serve the interests of the *Volk*, and an irrespon-

1 For the following, see Robert P. Ericksen, "Theologian in the Third Reich: The Case of Gerhard Kittel," *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, no. 3 (1977): 595–622, doi.org/10.1177/002200947701200309. For a much more extensive and extensive discussion, see Anders Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann*, Studies in Jewish History and Culture 20 (Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill, 2009), Part IV: Nazi Exegesis and the Jews, "Gerhard Kittel: Jewish *Unheil* Theologically Founded," 417–530.

> sible seeking after money in all professions. Kittel admitted some Germans were like this and some Jews were not. But he believed that assimilated Jewry was the *Mutterboden* for this decadence. Assimilation is thus the key for Kittel's entire thesis. The Wilhelmine Germany which he was old enough to know had disappeared. The Weimar Republic and everything it represented – defeat, shame, disrespect for religion, disrespect for the established classes, secularism, immorality, dangerous radicalism, i.e., all of the effects of modern urban life – all of this had one simple cause, assimilated Jewry, Jews torn from their roots, Jews corrupted by the Enlightenment.[2]

The solution to the Jewish Question was to introduce the *Gastzustand*, stripping away full citizenship from Jews – in effect, Jews would be made foreigners, forced out of a range of professions (particularly the university professoriate, the practice of law, and medicine), and put under a ban against mixed marriages. After *Die Judenfrage*, Kittel's work took a turn towards anthropological justifications for his theses on the racial composition of Jewry and the effects thereof on the society they were part of, as against his earlier arguments based on the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. The die was cast: "[T]he Christianity he defended was a religion which earned its place in the Third Reich, not as a protector of the Jew but as an effective anti-Jewish force. … He worked to substantiate and clarify the reality of the Jewish menace."[3]

In the middle of the war, Kittel collaborated with the anthropologist and race scientist, Eugen Fischer,[4] on a volume titled, *Das antike Weltjudentum. Tatsachen, Texte, Bilder*, published in 1943 as volume 7 of *Forschungen zur Judenfrage*. In the first part of the book, surveying the spread of Jews through the ancient world and in the Roman Empire, Kittel argued that the diaspora led to Jews to become racially mixed, to assimilate with their host societies and cultures, and thus to attain positions of power and influence. The second and third parts of the book were devoted to interpretations of artifacts and artwork taken to portray Jewish figures – Kittel wrote the introductions, and Fischer supplied the anthropological and "scientific" interpretations (these "scientific"

2 Ericksen, "Theologian in the Third Reich," 604–605.

3 Eriksen, "Theologian in the Third Reich," 610.

4 Eugen Fischer was the anthropologist whose 1913 work on the so-called "Rehoboth bastards" underlay the later Nazi and South African race science. See Handri Walters and C.S. (Kees) van der Waal, "Creating the Coloured Other in South Africa in Light of the 'Jewish Question' in Germany," in this issue, 210, 226. Fischer's hair colour and texture table was used in the Stellenbosch project.

interpretations were based, to a large extent, on complete misidentifications and spurious speculation). In accordance with the standards encoded in the race science toolkits used at the time, which were also used in the Stellenbosch project, on purely physiognomical grounds were portraits and figurines identified as Jewish, and imbued with all kinds of imputed negative characteristics.

As Walters and Van der Waal point out, the construction of the racial Other and the situation in South Africa was not an exact copy of how it played out in Germany, even if the racialisation of the Coloured population operated with the same "technology" as was employed in Germany. As a case in point, other than was the case among conservative German theologians at the time, for whom the relation of Jesus and Christianity to Judaism, and the link (or theological continuity) between the New and Old Testaments, constituted a constant problematic, for theologians of the Reformed churches (particularly the Dutch Reformed Church [DRC], "Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk") the Old Testament was of paramount significance in arguing for both the imposition of the policy of apartheid and for the racial othering of the Coloured population. In this regard, as Walters and Van der Waal point out, the 1933 (mis)translation of the Bible both encoded already existing racial attitudes against the Coloureds and the blacks, but also provided justification for the DRC's support for, and active participation, in the setting up of the policy of apartheid. While this history of the Bible as the mythological foundation for apartheid has been described in detail, a history which stretched in official DRC theology up until the revocation of the official race policy in the 1986 document, *Kerk en Samelewing* ("Church and Society"), these events Walters and Van der Waal have described, have not (as far as I am aware) been considered in relation to the infamous heresy trial of Prof. Johannes du Plessis in 1930.[5] The events leading up to and surrounding the trial have also been extensively described, mostly in connection with its effect on the further theological developments in the DRC. Some salient facts about Du Plessis, however, help tie the process leading up to his dismissal as professor of theology at Stellenbosch University to the process of racialisation of the Coloured population, with which it largely coincided.

5 The phrase, "heresy trial," is used here as a shorthand for a series of actions by bodies of the DRC against Du Plessis (the Circuit of Stellenbosch, the Curatory of the Seminary), his defence, the eventual appeal before the Supreme Court in Cape Town, and sessions of the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa (the DRC of the Cape Province) between May 1928 and October 1932. For personal reminiscences on the events surrounding Du Plessis's heresy trial by a student of his, see F.E. O'Brien Geldenhuys, *In die stroomversnellings: Vyftig jaar van die NG Kerk* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1982).

After returning from his doctoral studies in Edinburgh, Scotland, Johannes du Plessis was ordained minister of the DRC in 1894, and for the first years of his career did missionary work across Africa, to become the DRC's General Secretary for Mission in 1903. His mission work stood in the sign of ecumenism (perhaps also due to the contacts he made as a result of it), and, arguably, it also stamped Du Plessis as a person with a social conscience. As a founding member of the South African Institute of Race Relations (it was founded in 1929 as a liberal research organisation), he was involved in an interracial coalition pushing for the retention of the Coloured and black franchise after the adoption of the 1910 Constitution of the Union of South Africa, and generally to roll back, or at least to soften, racial discrimination against persons of colour in the 1920s. I would argue that it was this political "liberalism" that made the DRC sensitive to his scholarly views. On 4 May 1916 Johannes du Plessis was inaugurated as professor of New Testament Introduction and Exegesis, while later the discipline of Missiology was added to his professorial duties. As a brilliant academic, Du Plessis was a proponent of Higher Criticism (what we now know as the historical critical method), and following from that, he promoted the idea that one should not take the Old Testament account of Genesis as literal historical truth, that the Old Testament historical narrative did not portray events as they historically unfolded (also that Moses did not write all of the first five books of the Old Testament), as well as promoting the idea of evolution as a way of explaining the ongoing unfolding of creation. While the immediate cause of the heresy charge by the Circuit of Stellenbosch and the Curatory related to his stance of a "soft kenosis" of Jesus Christ (that is, that Jesus laid aside some of his divine abilities in the process of incarnation, so as to explain why Jesus professed not to know future events or why he misunderstood certain pronouncements in the Old Testament), it was arguably his undermining of the authority of the Old Testament at exactly that time when racial interpretations of the Old Testament undergirding the racialisation of the Coloured population and the emerging call for a racial organisation of the South Africa along apartheid lines strongly took shape in the DRC as the authoritative body to influence the public and state through its influence on the National Party, that raised the ire of his opponents. Du Plessis won his appeal in the Supreme Court against his suspension by the Synod from his professoriate, but nevertheless, he was dismissed from his chair in October 1932.

There were other such tragic histories relating to dissident theologians in South African church history, but the case of Du Plessis is iconic in the sense that the heresy charge against him coinciding with the racial science experiments at the university where he taught, and which led to the "scientific basis" for the racialisation of the Coloureds (but mutatis mutandis also in general,

the apartheid exclusion of blacks from political franchise and economic participation), demonstrates the political rhetoric and ideological speech-actness inherent in theological discourses.

The two articles by Goldstein and Walters and Van der Waal enunciate powerfully a perspective on religion and theology as second-order reflexive discourses, as well as the first-order practicing of religion, as social discourses. As such, religious discourses do their mythmaking, identity formation and – maintenance, boundary drawing and authority construction, social formation, and ideological work, as the "real referents" of the contents of religion-speak. In the two essays by Sarojini Nadar and Fatima Seedat, "Between Boundaries, towards Decolonial Possibilities in a Feminist Classroom: Holding a Space between the Qur'an and the Bible," and Lee-Shae Salma Scharnick-Udemans, "Religion: The Final Frontier of the Rainbow Nation," in various ways, the social locations where religious and theological discourses do their social, cultural, and ideological work, are elucidated. In essence, Nadar and Seedat describe their particular pedagogical project as a special kind of interreligious hermeneutics, namely scriptural reasoning, but with a difference. By framing their reading project explicitly with both decoloniality and feminism, they illuminate the complex processes of negotiating sacred tradition within the two traditions, i.e., Islam and Christianity, in the analysis of the hermeneutical stances at play. In addition, when this is further parsed through questions of decoloniality, the role of social location and issues of power and authority come to stand starkly in the spotlight. Scharnick-Udemans moves more explicitly on the terrain of the social, cultural, and ideological work performed by religious discourses in exploring conservative, evangelical Christian counteractions against *halaal* certification in the South African food industry. When in such circles (as some of the video recordings show) the *halaal* label – and by implication Islam itself – is framed in apocalyptic language as the "sign of the Beast," and Islam as an impersonation of the end-time Antichrist, as an imperial religion bent on usurpation of hegemonic dominance in the construction of a Muslim society out of South Africa under sharia law, one is perilously close to the kind of racialising and othering that constructed the Jews in Germany and the Coloureds in South Africa as disenfranchised outsiders (Kittel used the term *Unheilsgeschichte* with reference to the phenomenon of assimilated Jewry's supposed influence in the making of Enlightenment values in Europe). In such a context, one views the world in apocalyptic terms. As I explained in another context, an apocalyptic worldview "is a strongly evaluative social discourse, embodying strong sentiments of disaffection, dissociation, and alienation."[6] It is conditions of *perceived* social alienation and marginalisation that

6 Gerhard van den Heever, "The Usefulness of Violent Ends: Apocalyptic Imaginaries in the

feed apocalyptic worldviews. Such a worldview is not only a social commentary on the state of things, it is also implicitly a call to arms to marshal the troops, so to speak, in an attempt to eradicate the grey zone, the area of compromises that gets erased under the pressure of societies that bifurcate under identity, ideological, and economic stresses and tensions. *Purification is the "simplification" of the social aggregation*.[7]

The two articles by Stephen D. Milford, "The Problem with Sandra: Addressing the Unfortunate Consequences of Relational Ontological Personhood," and Chris L. de Wet, "'*Illius sponsi thalamus fuit uterus virginis*': The Womb of Mary as Bridal Chamber in Augustine's Thought about Sexuality," pursue the kinds of approaches that *Religion & Theology* aims at, namely to reconceive and redescribe conventional theological themes through discourses extraneous to theology. In Milford's article, personhood and, by extension, the threefold (a.k.a. Trinitarian) personhood of God, is recalibrated through consideration of recent calls (and court cases in which this was pleaded) to attribute personhood to non-humans. This has obvious implications for reconceiving theological anthropology and the Trinity. Chris de Wet reads Augustine's late thought on sexuality through the lens of modern sexual discourse analysis, and in doing so, highlights a shift in Augustine's thinking on incarnation. Incarnation, in this view, is a thoroughly sexual discourse. In this respect, this study expands Augustinian theology of incarnation beyond theology into something very material, and in doing so, evinces a kind of "history of the present." Both essays link up thematically and theoretically with the thrust of Pityana's "Statement."

Lastly, this issue closes with N. Barney Pityana's "A Theological Statement on the Coronavirus Pandemic." With this "statement" this issue of *Religion & Theology* returns to the other significant aspect of the context in which we discoursed in 2020, namely the Covid-19 pandemic. While *Religion & Theology* is not a theological journal as such, with his invocation of H. Richard Niebuhr's vision of theology as taking its place among the other sciences as one constituent voice in the making of contemporary discourse, as "servant among disciplines of the university,"[8] Pityana intimates a Bonhoefferian character for theological discourses. It is as well that this issue of the journal closes with this type of statement, since it signals the kind of redescription of scholarly discourses and practices the journal promotes. In this regard, I would like to close

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Reconstruction of Society," in *Reconceiving Religious Conflict: New Views from the Formative Centuries of Christianity*, eds. Wendy Mayer and Chris L. de Wet, Routledge Studies in the Early Christian World (Abingdon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 282–325; here 309–310.

7 Slightly adapted from the original; the last sentence is my added emphasis.

8 See page 346 of this issue.

by returning to an introduction that appeared in *Religion & Theology* in 2008:[9] For Bonhoeffer the discourses of theology, society, science, and economy are not insular or isolatable discourses. This complex interdependency – for "discourse" is the collective noun for the whole ensemble of representations that together constitute the way/s in which we know and understand reality, and act accordingly – means that theologians have a right and even the responsibility to involve themselves in other domains of reality representation. Further: Bonhoeffer's concepts of a "religionless Christianity" and the "non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts" for a world come of age, imply that exactly the seemingly untheological discourses and fields of politics, ecology, the natural sciences, economic interchange and social formation, are indeed the domain of religious and theological discourse.[10] This means that the proprium of theological and religious discourse is no longer a *sui generis* language and conceptual apparatus, but the language spoken in the fields of "ordinary" human ways of doing things. If, following Bonhoeffer, a "religious interpretation" is one conceiving of an otherworldly salvation concerning a worldless, transcendental, subject, the so-called "worldly interpretation" implies that the world is the theatre of action for fully immersed human agents, who have to act out their social vision on their own responsibility. Such a kind of theology enunciates a come of age social agency, of moral authority residing squarely with the human sphere. It means, furthermore, that other conceptual languages, namely, those deriving from the world of human doings (i.e., the humanities, the social sciences, economics, the natural and medical sciences, etc.) now become the languages with which to speak religion *and* theology, as disciplines and as practices. As Pityana states, enunciating a vision for the discourse and practice of theology, the Covid-19 pandemic has issued a call to revision how we do theology and Christian practice.

Second Advent, Pretoria, 2020.

9 Gerhard van den Heever and Heike Omerzu, "Editorial," *Religion & Theology* 15, no. 1 (2008): 1–7, here 7, doi.org/10.1163/157430108X308127.

10 The literature on Bonhoeffer is vast. A few pointers must suffice: Ernst Feil, *Die Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers. Hermeneutik, Christologie, Weltverständnis* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1991 [1971]); English: *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, tr. Martin Rumscheidt (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985). See also Peter H.A. Neumann, ed., *Religionsloses Christentum und nicht-religiöse Interpretation bei Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Wege der Forschung 304 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990); and Stephen Plant and Ralf K. Wüstenberg, eds., *Religion, Religionlessness and Contemporary Western Culture: Explorations in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Theology*, International Bonhoeffer Interpretations 1 (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2008).