"Casting down the mighty from their thrones": A case study in reading the Gospel of Luke with critical attention to Whiteness.

Abstract

The Church of England is seeking to pursue 'cultural and structural change' in relation to race.[1] A critical White perspective argues that such change must include examining and undermining the dominance of White practices and power. This study uses insights from critical White theologian Rachel Starr to examine Whiteness and Bible study. Starr makes four suggestions for reading the Bible with attention to Whiteness, which this research seeks to apply to group Bible studies:

> First, do not ignore or attempt to justify violence present in text and context.

> Second, do not seek to escape your whiteness.

> Third, de-centre yourself.

> Finally, seek out possibilities for healing and solidarity.[2]

This research explores how these suggestions can be applied to group Bible studies, and then investigates the impact on White people of reading the Bible with critical attention to Whiteness, seeking to understand whether critical White Bible study is an effective tool for addressing racism in the church. This case study uses participant observation, autoethnography and semi-structured interviews with an all-White social justice group in a rural Church of England benefice, meeting weekly in Lent and Easter 2022 to read the Bible in structured sessions based on Starr's principles.

These sessions resulted in an increased awareness of Whiteness, increased confidence to speak about race and deepened faith among participants. Participants were able to identify Whiteness and the harm that it does, but the Bible studies seem to be insufficient to generate new antiracist action. This dissertation suggests that critical White Bible study may be a tool the Church of England can use in its antiracist work, although antiracist action should be integrated more closely to the approach.

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[1] The Church of England, 'New Task Force to Ensure Action over Racism in the Church of England', *The Church of England* <https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/new-task-force-ensure-action-over-racism-church-england> [accessed 22 August 2022].

[2] Rachel Starr, 'Borderline: Reading Mark 7.24–30 as a white woman', *Practical Theology*, 15.1–2 (2022), 10–22 (pp. 17–18) <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2021.2023960>.

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Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the aftermath of the murder of Black American George Floyd in May 2020 at the hands of White Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, questions of race and racism came into renewed focus for White people in the USA and UK.[3] Black Lives Matter marches were followed by organisations re-examining their policies and practices in relation to race. The Church of England established the Archbishops' Anti-Racism Taskforce, to revisit the Church's previous antiracist initiatives and to lay the ground for a later Commission to bring about "'cultural and structural change' within the Church of England on race."[4] Some local churches responded by forming antiracist groups, including the Oakbury benefice in the West Midlands, the subject of this research.[5] This study considers whether reading the Bible with critical attention to Whiteness in such groups might be an effective tool for addressing racism in the church.

Whiteness is understood as an ideology, a system of ideas, processes and practices which maintain a racist social hierarchy which privileges White people above those of other racial identities.[6] The title of this dissertation references the Magnificat as inspiration for the pursuit of casting down the harmful dominance of Whiteness, and

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[3] This dissertation capitalises words referring to race (White, Black, Global Majority, etc) in order to highlight that these words are not neutral adjectives but are indicators of "personhood, culture and history." 'Capitalizing Black and White: Grammatical Justice and Equity' <https://www.macfound.org/press/perspectives/capitalizing-black-and-white-grammatical-justice-and-equity> [accessed 22 August 2022].

[4] The Church of England, 'New Task Force to Ensure Action over Racism in the Church of England', *The Church of England* <https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/new-task-force-ensure-action-over-racism-church-england> [accessed 22 August 2022].

[5] Names have been changed.

[6] Anthony Reddie, *Is God Colour-Blind?: Insights from Black Theology for Christian Ministry* (London, England: SPCK, 2009), p. 51; Janet E. Helms, 'The Challenge of Making Whiteness Visible: Reactions to Four Whiteness Articles', *The Counseling Psychologist*, 45.5 (2017), 717–26 (p. 718); Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 13.

in particular the might of uncritical White biblical interpretation in favour of a more nuanced exploration of Whiteness and openness to the voices of Global Majority people.[7] Critical White scholarship argues that an important element of antiracist action is examining and undermining the dominance of White practices and power.[8] This research takes the Oakbury social justice group as a case study, exploring the impact on members of this group of seven weeks of meeting weekly to read the Bible with critical attention to Whiteness during Lent and Easter 2022. During this period of the group's meetings, I acted as both facilitator and researcher of the group.

This research asks:

What is the impact on White people of reading the Bible with critical attention to Whiteness?

Additionally, it seeks to understand

Is critical White Bible study an effective tool for addressing racism in the church?

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[7] Global Majority is a term that resists the idea that Black and Brown people are a minority. A term coined by Global Majority people, it rejects terminology imposed by a White minority, instead reclaiming the power of self-identification and asserting agency. For more see Rosemary M. Campbell-Stephens, *Educational Leadership and the Global Majority: Decolonising Narratives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 1–22.

[8] Shona Hunter and Christi van der Westhuizen, 'Viral Whiteness: Twenty-First Century Global Colonialities', in *Routledge Handbook of Critical Studies in Whiteness*, ed. by Shona Hunter and Christi van der Westhuizen (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), pp. 1–28 (pp. 1–2).

A White church

As the church begins to recognise its complicity in upholding and perpetuating colonialism, it is also confronted with racial inequality in the church today.[9] In 2020, the Church of England's General Synod apologised for racism experienced by Global Majority people in the Church of England since the arrival of the Empire Windrush liner in 1948, and in April 2021 published *From Lament to Action*, a report and series of recommendations to "address the sin of racism in our church."[10] The report illuminates the many failures to implement action for racial justice in the church, focusing on the experiences of Global Majority people in the Church of England. Interestingly, the body of the report makes only one mention of Whiteness, noting that the culture of the Church of England is predominantly White and middle class, and that Global Majority people are expected to assimilate to this culture. The report authors recommend that the Racial Justice Commission consider the ways that this culture "acts as a barrier for full participation of UKME/GMH communities within the Church".[11] Black theologian Anthony Reddie goes further, pointing out that for the political right, "Christianity equals Whiteness", while Willie James Jennings argues that Christians must "struggle against the fusion of Christianity and Whiteness."[12]

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[9] Darcie Fontaine, *Decolonizing Christianity: Religion and the End of Empire in France and Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Archbishops' Anti- Racism Taskforce, *From Lament into Action* (Church of England, 22 April 2021).

[10] The Church of England, 'General Synod Votes to Apologise over Racism', *The Church of England* <https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/general-synod-votes-apologise-over-racism> [accessed 22 August 2022]; Archbishops' Anti- Racism Taskforce, p. 7.

[11] Archbishops' Anti- Racism Taskforce, p. 54. UKME is an abbreviation of UK Minority Ethnic. GMH is an abbreviation of Global Majority Heritage. The First Biannual Report of The Archbishops' Commission for Racial Justice (published June 2022) likewise makes only one mention of Whiteness, quoting this section of From Lament to Action.

[12] Anthony G. Reddie, 'Do Black Lives Matter in Post-Brexit Britain?', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 32.3 (2019), 387–401 (p. 393) <https://doi.org/10.1177/0953946819843468>; Willie James Jennings, 'Can White People Be Saved? Reflections on the Relationship of Missions and Whiteness', in *Can 'White' People Be Saved? Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*, ed. by Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramírez-

This research takes Jennings's challenge seriously, and seeks to understand whether critical White Bible study might prove a useful tool to scrutinise and challenge the White culture of the Church of England.

Critical White theologian Rachel Starr highlights the dominance of Whiteness in biblical studies and outlines an approach for White people seeking to read the Bible with critical attention to Whiteness in 'Borderline: Reading Mark 7.24–30 as a white woman':

> First, do not ignore or attempt to justify violence present in text and context.
>
> Second, do not seek to escape your whiteness.
>
> Third, de-centre yourself.
>
> Finally, seek out possibilities for healing and solidarity.[13]

Starr's guidance is offered in an academic context, and implicitly for individual application. This research seeks to see how it might be adapted for usage in non-academic, group setting. Thus, a third research question is:

How can Rachel Starr's guidance be applied to group Bible studies?

Chapter 2 contextualises this study in the field of critical Whiteness and Biblical studies, demonstrating how Starr contributes to this field and this study seeks to apply her insights in an applied setting.

Johnson, and Amos Yong, Missiological Engagements (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, An imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2018), pp. 27–43 (p. 28).

[13] Rachel Starr, 'Borderline: Reading Mark 7.24–30 as a white woman', *Practical Theology*, 15.1–2 (2022), 10–22 (pp. 17–18) <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2021.2023960>.

Critical White method and methodology

The methodological approach and method of this study are outlined in detail in

Chapter 3. This research uses the methodological framework of critical theory,

specifically critical Whiteness, in conjunction with a theological action research

approach.

The research began with work to translate Starr's four suggestions into a framework

for reading and discussing the Bible in a group, using the principles of Contextual

Bible Study. This framework was then applied over seven sessions during Lent and

Easter with a group of White people in Oakbury, a rural Church of England benefice

in the West Midlands. The research participants were mostly members of an existing

group formed in response to the murder of George Floyd, and all of them attended

churches in the Oakbury benefice.

Whilst planning and facilitating the sessions I kept a research journal, noting my

thoughts, feelings and reflections, as well as my observations of the group. This was

then used to analyse my experience as the group's facilitator, using autoethnography

and layered accounts to invite the reader to consider the experience emotionally as

well as analytically.[14] The research journal was also used in conjunction with semi-

structured interviews with the participants in the weeks after the last session. These

interviews were transcribed and analysed for themes, then examined in the light of

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[14] Michelle Ortlipp, 'Keeping and Using Reflective Journals in the Qualitative Research Process', *The Qualitative Report*, 13.4 (2008), 695–705 <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2008.1579>; Drick Boyd, 'Autoethnography as a Tool for Transformative Learning About White Privilege', *Journal of Transformative Education*, 6.3 (2008), 212–25 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344608326899>; Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, 'Autoethnography: An Overview', *Historical Social Research*, 36.4 (2011), 273–90 <https://doi.org/10.12759/HSR.36.2011.4.273-290>.

scholarship exploring Christian adult learning, racial identity, and critical

Whiteness.[15]

A White researcher

Critical theory and practical theology both recognise the importance of the context

and commitments of research and researcher. I do not come to this study from a

disembodied objective position, but rather as a White, middle-class woman, newly

ordained in the Church of England, influenced and inspired by liberation theology.[16]

I first truly realised that I was White in 2012, when I visited communities in rural

Colombia who had been used as pawns in the country's long-running civil war. Our

presence, as a majority-White, British group sponsored by an international aid

agency, would, we were told, make the communities safer, less vulnerable to attack.

A few years later, as part of studying for an MSc in Development studies at Birkbeck

University, I took a class on "'Race', Racism and Postcoloniality", taught by Dr

Yasmeen Narayan, and learned to view the world through a racialised lens. At work

in an office, I sat next to a Black woman, and began to see how her professional life

was dotted with microaggressions I didn't experience. I worshipped in a church

where Global Majority people made up most of the congregation I was in, whilst the

wider Church of England was majority White, and seemed to be largely oblivious of

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[15] Colin Robson, *Real World Research: A Resource for Users of Social Research Methods in Applied Settings*, 3. ed (Chichester: Wiley, 2011), pp. 474–88; Nigel King, Christine Horrocks, and Joanna M. Brooks, *Interviews in Qualitative Research*, 2nd edition (Los Angeles London New Delhi Singapore Washington, DC Melbourne: SAGE, 2019), pp. 192–210; Helen Cameron and Catherine Duce, *Researching Practice in Mission and Ministry: A Companion* (London: SCM Press, 2013), pp. 102–7.
[16] Zoë Bennett and others, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 5, 12–14.

the racial dynamics at play in its life. I began to wonder what it would mean for the Church of England to recognise itself as a White majority church, to respond to the challenges from James Cone, Anthony Reddie and James Perkinson to really engage with the perniciousness of Whiteness, and to seek a new way of being a White church, in opposition to White supremacy.[17]

Influencing a White church

From Lament to Action outlines seven priority areas for action. These priorities are shaped by the formal structures and institutions of the Church of England: they include training for people in leadership roles; increased access for Global Majority people to participate fully in decision making; and new governance bodies. The report recognises the need to change the church's institutional culture and proposes implementation pathways that make use of existing structures.

These measures, whilst vital, feel far removed from my experience as someone who has spent most of my time in the Church of England as a lay person, interested but not influential in institutional structures. By contrast, this study considers whether small group Bible study might be a way to grow change from the local level. My early faith formation took place in churches which placed emphasis on the importance of small group Bible study for discipleship. In churches I have attended since then, Lent and Advent courses facilitating discussion in small groups have been seen as an important way of growing in holiness.

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[17] James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), p. 150; Anthony G. Reddie, pp. 400–401; J. Perkinson, *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2004).

This idea is not a new one – in Latin America, reading the Bible in small groups played a significant role in the development of liberation theology. Beginning in the 1960s but continuing to the present day, small Base Ecclesial Communities, use a "hermeneutic circle" to allow their lived experiences of injustice to inform their Bible study, and then for the text to influence their lives.[18] Reading the Bible in this way was a catalyst for community action in the struggle for social change.[19]

Inspired by Base Ecclesial Communities, this study seeks to test whether the practice of Bible study for faith formation and discipleship already common in the churches I am familiar with might be a tool for antiracism in the church.

Resisting White norms

Tom Beaudoin and Katherine Turpin identify five key features of (non-critical) White practical theology: a focus on the individual, belief in linear progress; White supremacy or normativity; preference for orderliness and procedural clarity; and belief in meritocracy and "the system".[20] These are characteristics I can recognise in myself, and throughout this research I have tried to resist these norms, holding space for ambiguity and change which does not follow a linear process. I have tried to avoid the traps of seeing myself as a "White saviour" who "guides people of color from the margins to the mainstream" or an exceptional White person, ascribing myself more influence and innocence in relation to racial inequality than I truly

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[18] Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts about the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond* (London: Tauris, 1987), p. 60.

[19] Justo L. González and Ondina E. González, *Christianity in Latin America: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 250–53 <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511803543>.

[20] Tom Beaudoin and Katherine Turpin, 'White Practical Theology', in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*, ed. by Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), pp. 251–69 (pp. 255–61).

have.[21] Perhaps inevitably, I have fallen into these patterns of thought and

behaviour, but I have tried to note and reflect upon them, such that they themselves

form part of the data analysed in this dissertation.

A White social justice group

The Oakbury group was formed in Summer 2020, as the Benefice's response to the

murder of George Floyd. Originally named the "Oakbury Churches antiracist group",

the group renamed themselves in Autumn 2021 the "Oakbury Churches social justice

group," due to their desire to address other topics, such as conflict in the Holy Land.

Most members of the group are retired professionals, including teachers and medics.

The members are active in their local community, participating in musical groups,

refugee projects and disability action, as well as the life of the local church. For the

purposes of this research, the group met most weeks from the beginning of Lent

until shortly after Easter, seven times in total. Although these meetings did not

constitute a formal course of learning, they were advertised as a "Lent course",

making use of terminology that was familiar to those in the Oakbury churches.

Meetings took place in a hired village hall, the cost of which was meet by the

Queen's Foundation.

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[21] Cammarota, J. (2011). Blindsided by the Avatar: White saviors and allies out of Hollywood and in education. The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies, 33, 242–259. (p.243), quoted in Rachel Alicia Griffin, 'Problematic Representations of Strategic Whiteness and "Post-Racial" Pedagogy: A Critical Intercultural Reading of The Help', *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 8.2 (2015), 147–66 (p. 150) <https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2015.1025330>; Jessica Ringrose, 'Rethinking White Resistance: Exploring the Discursive Practices and Psychical Negotiations of "Whiteness" in Feminist, Anti-racist Education', *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 10.3 (2007), 323–44 (p. 327) <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320701503330>.

Focus and development of the project

Robert Beckford writes that documentary filmmaking "is always part record and part signifying practice… subject to layers of editing and reworking so that the final product is a representation of what took place."[22] I have found something similar to be true in this research project. As the project continued, I became more interested in the impact of the Bible studies in terms of the experiences of the facilitator and participants than in more measurable ways of assessing impact. As I regularly wrote in the research journal my attention was drawn to the fact that the participants' experience was mediated through my observation of them. Even when they spoke to me directly about their experiences, what was captured and how it was analysed was influenced by my interests. [23] At the same time, I grew in relationship with participants and felt less able to adequately represent, let alone analyse, the complexity of our meetings and their participation in them. As a result, the data I had the most direct access to, and was most able to legitimately analyse was my own experience. Chapter 6, which explores the experience of participants, also includes reflections on how I responded to their comments and behaviour.

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[22] Robert Beckford, *Documentary as Exorcism: Resisting the Bewitchment of Colonial Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), p. 190.
[23] Cameron and Duce, p. 57.

Structure

Chapter 2 of this dissertation gives an overview of the principles of critical Whiteness studies and the stages of positive White racial identity. It summarises how critical Whiteness and theology, and Whiteness and biblical studies have interacted, providing context for the development of Starr's suggestions. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and methods of this research. Chapter 4 demonstrates how Starr's suggestions were developed into a framework for Bible studies, in conversation with Contextual Bible Study techniques, addressing the first of this research's secondary questions. Chapter 5 analyses my experience as facilitator and researcher during the Bible studies, whilst Chapter 6 turns critical attention to the experience of participants. Together, these two chapters address the primary research question, and the second of the secondary questions. Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation, returning to the research questions and considering what can be said to be the impact on the group of critical White Bible study, and whether a framework based on Starr's guidance might be a useful tool for the Church of England to engage with its Whiteness.

Chapter 2: Critical Whiteness and Biblical studies

A critical view of Whiteness

This dissertation is positioned within the field of critical Whiteness studies. Critical theory research aims to address inequality, identifying and challenging sociocultural norms that marginalise some groups for the sake of the domination of others.[24] Critical Race theory arises out of this discipline, and is specifically concerned with addressing racial inequalities across society in areas as wide ranging as economic systems, education and the law.[25] Critical Whiteness Studies considers the ideological construction of Whiteness, its role in perpetuating racism and how it might be dismantled or leveraged in the struggle for racial justice.[26]

Whiteness is not simply a category of racial identity, but the category of racial identity that has been positioned at the top of an invented racial hierarchy, that privileges White people at the expense of those who are not White.[27] Black theologian Anthony Reddie describes Whiteness as "a concept of supremacy, superiority and normality (where Black is counterpointed as the direct opposite of these terms)".[28] Helms describes Whiteness as "the overt and subliminal socialization processes and practices, power structures, laws, privileges, and life experiences that favor the White racial group over all others."[29] Individual White

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[24] Raymond A. Morrow and David D. Brown, *Critical Theory and Methodology* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications, 1994), chaps 1, Paragraph title "Critical Theory as a Human Science".

[25] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (NYU Press, 2001), pp. 2–3.

[26] *Critical White Studies: Looking behind the Mirror*, ed. by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).

[27] Alcoff, pp. 179–80; Paul Kivel, *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*, 4th Edition (Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers, 2017), p. 13.

[28] Anthony Reddie, p. 51.

[29] Helms, 'The Challenge of Making Whiteness Visible: Reactions to Four Whiteness Articles', p. 718.

people may choose to collude with or reject these practices, power structures and privileges. However, doing so necessitates recognising the reality of Whiteness operating in this way, which many find challenging.[30]

Issues of race are connected to other political and social identities, such a class, gender and sexual orientation. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" to describe how each individual experiences the interconnectedness of these experiences, so that, for example, a Black woman uniquely experiences marginalisation through her Blackness and through womanhood.[31] To say that White people experience certain privileges is not to deny other ways in which they may be marginalised – for example, through class or gender identity.[32]

Developing an understanding of Whiteness

Critical White scholar Paul Kivel argues that the responsibility of White people, once they recognise racism and the way it privileges White people, is to seek to understand and challenge this system.[33] One of the obstacles in antiracist work is the invisibility of Whiteness to many White people. White people often struggle to describe their ethnic identity – sometimes reaching for terms such as "normal". Questions of racial identity are not part of the everyday experience of many White

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[30] Anthony Reddie, p. 51.

[31] Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989.1 (2015) <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>.

[32] Kivel, pp. 6–7.

[33] Kivel, p. 30.

people, and as a result, they generally speak and act as if Whiteness is the default or normal racial identity, or as if only Global Majority people have a racial identity.[34]

Psychologist Janet Helms develops a six-point model for understanding the experiences of White people as they are confronted with the reality of Whiteness as an ideology, wrestle with it, and begin to build a positive White racial identity. It is divided into two sections: firstly, "abandonment of racism", and secondly "defining a nonracist identity."[35]

The first status Helms describes is Contact.[36] Here, White people accept the racial ordering of society, seeing themselves as "normal". They understand racism to be a matter of individual acts of discrimination, and often consider themselves "colour-blind." As they begin to recognise the realty of racism, a second status may be experienced: Disintegration. This status is often experienced through personal encounters with Global Majority people. White people realise there is tension between their professed values, such as belief in freedom and dignity for all, the ways that they, often unconsciously, rationalise and legitimise racial oppression.[37]

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[34] Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations About Race* (London: Penguin, 2021), pp. 93–94.

[35] Janet E. Helms, 'Toward a Model of White Racial Identity Development', in *Black and White Racial Identity: Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. by Janet E. Helms, Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies, 129 (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1993), pp. 49–66 (p. 56); Janet E. Helms, 'A Review of White Racial Identity Theory: The Sociopolitical Implications of Studying White Racial Identity in Psychology', in *Psychology Serving Humanity: Proceedings of the 30th International Congress of Psychology: Volume 2: Western Psychology*, ed. by Saths Cooper and Kopano Ratele (London ; New York: Psychology Press, 2014), pp. 12–27 (p. 24); Helms, 'The Challenge of Making Whiteness Visible: Reactions to Four Whiteness Articles', pp. 719–20.

[36] Whilst Helms uses the language of "stages" in her initial work (1993), but later changed her terminology to "statuses" (for example in Helms, 'The Challenge of Making Whiteness Visible: Reactions to Four Whiteness Articles').

[37] Joe R. Feagin, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2020); Helms, 'Toward a Model of White Racial Identity Development', pp. 55–59.

One common response to recognising deep racial inequality is to feel daunted and threatened – once this view has been exposed, the individual cannot return to the comfort of ignorance. Secondly, feelings of fear, shame and guilt are a common response to recognising that there is no neutral space between racism and antiracism.[38] The cognitive and emotional barriers to recognising the power of Whiteness in our society act as a powerful incentive not to examine Whiteness. This in turn perpetuates the invisibility of Whiteness, and the invisibility of Whiteness becomes a key element of how racial inequality and White privilege are maintained.[39]

The third status White people experience in Helms's model is Reintegration. A response to the discomfort of Disintegration, the individual returns to the comfort of White norms. Feelings of guilt are converted into anger directed at Black people. [40] Beverly Daniel Tatum writes, "most White people who speak up against racism will attest to the temptation they sometimes feel to slip back into collusion and silence."[41]

Helms categorises the remaining statuses as "redefining a positive White identity."[42] The person with Pseudo-Independent status blames bad White people for racism. They condemn racism, but still harbour paternalistic attitudes or consider their White culture superior.[43] In the Immersion/Emersion status, the White person is

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[38] Robert P. Amico, *Exploring White Privilege*, New Critical Viewpoints on Society Series (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), p. 34.

[39] Peggy McIntosh, 'White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack', *Peace and Freedom*, July/August (1989), 29–34 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351133791-4>.

[40] Helms, 'Toward a Model of White Racial Identity Development', p. 60.

[41] Tatum, p. 101.

[42] Helms, 'Toward a Model of White Racial Identity Development', p. 61.

[43] Helms, 'The Challenge of Making Whiteness Visible: Reactions to Four Whiteness Articles', p. 720.

looking to rebuild their worldview without the White racial frame. They may seek to

learn more about other White people who have made a similar journey as they try to

understand what it means to be a White person in contemporary (racist) society. The

final status in Helms's model is Autonomy, in which a new, positive understanding of

Whiteness emerges, but will always be in process, as this final stage involve

continual openness to learning, self-examination and new perspectives.[44]

One way that White people can support one another through these statuses, is by

meeting in White affinity groups. These are spaces for White people to practice

talking critically about race without the presence of Global Majority people, and as a

way of acknowledging White responsibility to reflect on race and racism. They also

provide space for the emotional processing associated with White racial identity

development. Importantly affinity groups are only one tool for antiracism – they do

not replace interracial dialogue and action.[45]

Whiteness and theology

The church is not immune to the pernicious effects of Whiteness, and has often been

complicit in upholding White dominance. This can be seen in the church's

entanglement in the colonial project; in the prayers of 19th century Southern

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[44] Helms, 'Toward a Model of White Racial Identity Development', pp. 62, 66.

[45] Taryn Strauss, Elizabeth Nguyen, and Jennica Davis-Hockett, *Guide to Race Based Affinity Groups* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, undated), p. 1 <https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/r/race_based_affinity_groups.pdf> [accessed 22 August 2022]; Jessica Apgar and Michelle Jewett, 'Participating in a White Affinity Group to Extend and Deepen Anti-Racism Work', in *The 8th Annual CNM Conference on Teaching and Learning*, 2020; Ali Michael and Mary C. Conger, 'Becoming an Anti-Racist White Ally: How a White Affinity Group Can Help', *Perspectives on Urban Education*, 6.1 (2009), 56–60 (pp. 56–57); Tatum, p. 204; *Names We Call Home: Autobiography on Racial Identity*, ed. by Becky W. Thompson and Sangeeta Tyagi (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 104.

American White women for more obedience from the Black people they enslaved; in depictions of Jesus – a middle eastern man – as White skinned, conflating divinity with Whiteness.[46]

Much of the critical engagement with how Whiteness and the Church interact in poisonous ways comes from Black theologians. James Cone and Anthony Reddie both call for more White theological engagement with critiquing Whiteness and its implications for Christianity.[47] One significant voice seeking to rise to this challenge is that of James W. Perkinson.

Perkinson argues that a positive White theology must be apostate, traitorous to the ideology of Whiteness, just as early Christians were apostate to the powers of Rome. The Christian tradition of exorcism, separating an individual from malicious influence, is helpful here, providing a theological framework through which refusing the trappings and privileges of Whiteness can be understood. Perkinson develops the idea of Baptism as a sacrament for rejection of Whiteness: the act through which Christians die to self and submit to new life in God. This is to cross the border between nonracist to antiracist, to commit oneself in a way that cannot be turned back from. Perkinson draws on Paul's image of labour and birth pangs to illustrate that this process is not pain-free, but is also fundamentally creative and positive. The

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[46] Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy: Christianity, Racism, and Religious Diversity in America* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2017), pp. 5–10; Lauren F. Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage, and Sin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 59; Chine McDonald, *God Is Not a White Man: And Other Revelations* (London: Hachette UK, 2021), p. 15.

[47] Anthony Reddie, p. 50; James H Cone, 'Theology's Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy', *Black Theology*, 2.2 (2004), 139–52.

results are new possibilities for healing from the wounds of supremacy, and a totalising transformation of the whole person.[48]

Similarly, Mary L. Foulke suggests that Helms's developmental statuses can be understood as a spiritual journey, through which White people are more able to become their authentic selves: "Identity and community are journeys. We journey to come into our own, with commitments to justice in the fullness of our complex and contradictory selves that are put under pressure by our racist, class-stratified hetero-patriarchal society. We journey toward God, with God and with one another."[49]

Whiteness and Biblical studies

White-centric readings of the Bible have been used to marginalise and dehumanise Global Majority people, sanctioning cruelty, exploitation and enslavement.[50] At the same time, theology and Biblical scholarship by those with marginalised identities, particularly non-White racialised identities, are still often treated as supplementary to Western theological thought, in ways that reinscribe Orientalism and racial inequality.[51] Ekaputra Tupamahu describes the "invisible collective identity of Whiteness" in biblical studies, which means that White interests, concerns and perspectives dominate the field, even as this dominance goes unrecognised. Yet

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[48] Perkinson, pp. 240–44.

[49] Mary L Foulke, 'Coming Out as a White/Becoming White: Racial Identity Development as a Spiritual Journey', *Theology & Sexuality*, 5 (1996), 22–36 (p. 35).

[50] Renita Weems, 'Re-Reading for Liberation: African American Women and the Bible', in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, ed. by R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015).

[51] R. S. Sugirtharajah, 'Introduction: Still at the Margins', in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, ed. by R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015).

White biblical scholars are "as localized, particularized and historicized as other readers of the Bible."[52]

In a move to cast down the might of Whiteness in biblical studies, some White scholars pay attention to the ways their own Whiteness, and the Whiteness of the discipline influence their readings. Jayme Reaves and Jennifer Harvey both address questions of who the reader identifies with when studying a Biblical text. Reaves describes her impulse to identify with Hagar, the marginalised character claimed by womanist theology. Instead, she argues, it is more appropriate for her, as a White woman, to identify with the text's oppressor, to be open to challenge by identifying with Sarah. She identifies Sarah as both a victim of patriarchy and a perpetrator of abuse, and traces how, historically, Sarah has been read by White people as the matriarch whose story justifies White women's abuse of those they enslave.[53]

Similarly, Harvey questions the benefit of White people asking, "What would Jesus do?" by examining its implicit identification of oneself with Jesus, in so doing reaffirming the power of the White person. Instead, she suggests that White people seeking to reject pernicious Whiteness can learn from Zacchaeus, who recognised his complicity in an unjust system, and chose repentance and restitution.[54]

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[52] Ekaputra Tupamahu, 'The Stubborn Invisibility of Whiteness in Biblical Scholarship.', *Political Theology*, 2020 <https://politicaltheology.com/the-stubborn-invisibility-of-whiteness-in-biblical-scholarship/>.

[53] Jayme Reaves, 'Sarah as Victim and Perpetrator: Whiteness, Power, and Memory in the Matriarchal Narrative', *Review & Expositor*, 115.4 (2018), 483–99 (pp. 483, 487–89, 494–97) <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637318806591>.

[54] Jennifer Harvey, 'What Would Zacchaeus Do? The Case for Disidentifying with Jesus', in *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?*, ed. by George Yancy (Basingstoke: Routledge, 2012), pp. 84–100 (pp. 95–98).

Ron M. Serino and David G. Horrell focus on recognising racialised readings of Scripture in the Western tradition. Serino calls attention to how White Christianity has appropriated the identity of new "Israel" for itself, and thus read the supposed heroes of the Biblical stories as White. He traces how European identification with King Solomon justified the colonial project. Such a reading made the hints of critique of Solomon that can be found in the texts invisible to White readers. We must, he argues, repent of the traditions of interpretation that have upheld structures of inequality.[55]

Horrell asks questions about perspective and location. He illustrates how Whiteness and Christianity have been conflated, so that White worldviews (even as they change from imperialism to liberalism) are found and justified through interpretation of the Bible. He calls for scholars to be aware of how their interpretation is influenced by cultural norms.[56]

Rachel Starr's guidance brings some of the ideas present in the field of critical White biblical studies together, to begin to build a critical White reading of the Bible. Her suggestions form the basis of the Bible studies developed for this research project.

First, do not ignore or attempt to justify violence present in text and context.

Second, do not seek to escape your Whiteness

Third, de-centre yourself

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[55] Ron M Serino, 'Solomon, Sheba, and the Haunting of Race in the Church and Biblical Interpretation', *Review & Expositor*, 116.2 (2019), 225–32 (pp. 225–26, 230) <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637319856587>.

[56] David G Horrell, 'Paul, Inclusion and Whiteness: Particularizing Interpretation', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 40.2 (2017), 123–47 (pp. 124, 133, 137–38, 141) <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064x17739204>.

Finally, seek out possibilities for healing and solidarity.[57]

The second and third suggestions have a clear relationship with the work of Reaves and Harvey, since they focus on who the reader is inclined to identify with, and how they relate to their Whiteness. The first point, to not ignore or justify the violence of the text, is also found in Reaves's work, as she explores the cruelty and abuse Sarah inflicts on Hagar. Finally, the fourth idea, to "seek out possibilities for healing and solidarity" through learning from the work of Global Majority scholars relates to Serino and Horrell's work, recognising the inadequacy of White traditional interpretation, and instead practicing a posture of openness to other perspectives.

Conclusion

Whiteness functions as a largely invisible force in society, structuring power and social norms to the benefit of White people at the cost of Global Majority people. Christianity is not immune from the power of Whiteness, and the emerging field of critical White theology seeks to grapple with this reality. In the field of Biblical studies, attention has been given to the racialised history of interpretation, and the ways that the Bible has been interpreted to justify colonialism and oppression, as well as how readers approach the text today. This research seeks to apply some of the principles of academic critical White biblical studies in the non-academic context of a local church. The design and methodological approach of this research is outlines in the following chapter.

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[57] Starr, pp. 17–18.

Chapter 3: Methodology and method

Introduction

This Chapter outlines the methodology and method of this study, demonstrating

how critical theory and practical theology approaches can be used in complementary

ways in theological action research. The challenges of addressing the study's

research questions are explored, and the methods used in the study are discussed.

Finally, the ethical considerations of the study are reviewed.

Methodology

This research brings together several research approaches: action research, critical

theory, and practical theology.

Action research

Action research identifies a problem, seeks to address it and expects that the

research will result in social change.[58] This piece of action research is concerned with

racism in the Church of England, and analyses a potential tool for change. As is

common in action research, the practitioner (group facilitator) and the researcher

are the same person. This makes self-reflection essential, but also blurs the

distinction between researcher and research participant. Participants are also invited

to be active in the research through reflection and analysis.[59]

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[58] Jean McNiff, *Action Research: From Practice to Writing in an International Action Research Development Program.* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 17.
[59] McNiff, pp. 15–17.

Critical theory

Critical theory approaches challenge the social structures which uphold the domination of some groups of people by others - critical Whiteness studies and critical race theory are both forms of critical theory approaches. Critical theory asserts that knowledge and truth are socially constructed, and so under constant revision as power shifts. Race is one such socially constructed category, strongly ingrained in unjust social structures. Critical theory is an appropriate methodological framework for action research since it aims to change perspectives and encourage activism.[60]

Practical theology and theological action research

This is also a piece of practical theology, bringing together practice and theology, in the belief that each can illuminate the other.[61] Theological action research fuses action research with practical theology, assuming that Christian practice expresses theology, and that examination of these practices can help us understand and develop our theological perspectives.[62]

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[60] Morrow and Brown, pp. 3–12; John Swinton and Harriet Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2., rev. ed (London: SCM, 2016), pp. 70–71; John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Los Angeles, 2018), pp. 29–30.

[61] Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2017), pp. 8–9.

[62] Cameron and Duce, p. xxx; Clare Watkins, 'Practising Ecclesiology: From Product to Process: Developing Ecclesiology as a Non-Correlative Process and Practice through the Theological Action Research Framework of Theology in Four Voices', *Ecclesial Practices*, 2.1 (2015), 23–39 (pp. 35–36) <https://doi.org/10.1163/22144471-00201009>.

Research design

This research seeks to explore one overarching question and two secondary
questions:

1. **What is the impact on White people of reading the Bible with critical
   attention to Whiteness?**
   a) **Is critical White Bible study an effective tool for addressing racism in
      the church?**
   b) **How can Rachel Starr's guidance be applied to group Bible studies?**

The first part of the research project explored how to apply Starr's guidance to group
Bible studies. This was done using Contextual Bible Study techniques, which were
then piloted and refined, developing a series of session outlines. The second part of
the project used these outlines to facilitate critical White Bible study with the
Oakbury group as a case study through which to investigate the first two research
questions. Impact was assessed through analysis of participant observation,
autoethnography and semi-structured interviews, since objective measures were
deemed neither possible nor desirable in this case.

Converting Starr's guidance into a framework for Bible study

The first stage of the research was concerned with applying Starr's guidance to group
Bible studies. Contextual Bible Study was identified as an approach to Bible study
that aligns with Starr's approach, since both are rooted in liberation theology. The
two were worked together into a framework to use for group critical White Bible
study. This framework was tested with a pilot group comprised of students at the
Queen's foundation, after which the amount of content included in each session was

reduced, and a greater focus on Whiteness maintained. The process of weaving

Starr's suggestions into the CBS framework is explored in detail in Chapter 4.

Case study

Case study research examines a "particular contemporary phenomenon within its

real life context."[63] This case study examines the experience of the Oakbury social

justice group of reading the Bible with critical attention to Whiteness. This group was

chosen for two reasons: firstly, it was an example of a local church seeking to

respond to racism. Contrasting with the Church of England's Archbishops' Anti-

Racism Taskforce, this was a grassroots activity. This group represented a ready

formed research sample with whom to test the impact and effectiveness of critical

White Bible study at the local level. Secondly, as an existing group already professing

an interest in racial justice, the group were likely to be more open to discussion of

Whiteness than those who were completely new to the topic.

Impact and effectiveness

In order to determine the impact and effectiveness of the Bible studies as an

antiracist tool, objective measures were considered and discounted. Instead, the

research focused on less tangible elements of the impact of the Bible studies,

especially the emotional and spiritual experiences of facilitator and participants. This

was data that was both more readily available and that provided space to explore

the nuance and subtlety of the experience. Participant observation,

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[63] Robert Yin, quoted in Robson, p. 136.

autoethnography and semi structured interviews were used to gather a rich picture

of the experience. This data was then analysed for themes.

Objective measures

Objective tools for measuring racial discrimination are contested, and most do not

work with subjects who know that race is the topic of the research they are

participating in, so would not be appropriate for this group.[64] Project Implicit's

"Implicit Association Test", which measures participants' positive or negative

associations with Black and White people was considered for this study. However,

the test is designed as an educational tool, and its designers discourage its use as a

"before and after" diagnostic. Furthermore, changes in test results might indicate

familiarity with the test rather than a change in biases.[65] Finally, all these existing

tests consider racial bias generally, rather than explicitly investigating participants'

relationship to Whiteness. Instead of seeking a verifiable external measure, then,

this study instead uses observational and reflective methods, combining participant

observation, autoethnography and semi-structured interviews with participants to

explore impact.

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[64] Rebecca M. Blank, Marilyn Dabady, and Constance F. Citro, *Measuring Racial Discrimination* (Washington DC: National Acadamies Press, 2004), p. 177; Rahshida Atkins, 'Instruments Measuring Perceived Racism/Racial Discrimination: Review and Critique Of Factor Analytic Techniques', *International Journal of Health Services : Planning, Administration, Evaluation*, 44.4 (2014), 711–34.
[65] Project Implicit, 'Frequently Asked Questions' <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/faqs.html#faq10> [accessed 22 August 2022]; Project Implicit, 'Ethical Considerations' <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/ethics.html> [accessed 22 August 2022]; Anthony G. Greenwald and others, *The Implicit Association Test at Age 20: What Is Known and What Is Not Known about Implicit Bias* (PsyArXiv, 7 April 2020), p. 18 <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/bf97c>; Tom Bartlett, 'Can We Really Measure Implicit Bias? Maybe Not', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2017, 7.

Participant observation

This study used participant observation in the form of a research journal which captured both notes on participants, their backgrounds, behaviour and contributions to the group, and facilitator reflections. The research journal encapsulates the necessity for the researcher to hold in tension "insider" and "outsider" roles in relation to the group being studied. As facilitator and analyst, the researcher is an outsider, but they must also become a member of the group to access data that is otherwise unavailable, and to gain the trust of the group, to have the best chance of minimising the group's sense of being under observation. When studying questions of Whiteness and race this is particularly important, since a desire to look good, or a lack of self-awareness, might make a participant unlikely to disclose certain information in, for example, an interview.[66]

After each meeting, detailed notes on the session were recorded in the research journal. As the weeks went on, a structure for these notes emerged, which enabled comparison between weeks and created a framework that could be used for later thematic analysis. The sessions were also recorded, so that more detail could be included later, and key moments could be revisited.

Autoethnography

As well as capturing participant observation, the research journal was also used as a place for reflection and recording the experience of facilitating and researching the

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[66] Swinton and Mowatt, p. 157; Cameron and Duce, p. 53; Robson, pp. 317–19; Howard S. Becker and Blanche Geer, 'Participant Observation and Interviewing: A Comparison', in *Social Research Methods: A Reader*, ed. by Clive Seale, Routledge Student Readers (London ; New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 246–51 (p. 248).

group. in addition to notes on each meeting, the journal also consisted of jotting notes and reminders, reflection on the dual role of facilitator and researcher, and, in one case, a lengthy theological reflection on one of the interactions that took place during a session. The research journal drew on Michelle Ortlipp's techniques and topics, including exploring the researcher's location in relation to the research, exploring epistemologies and the researcher/participant dynamic, and critically reflecting on the experience of facilitating, interviewing and analysing data.[67]

Ethnography seeks to produce a "thick description" of a culture, and autoethnography does so from the perspective of personal and interpersonal experience. Notes are developed into narrative and used to explore and analyse this experience.[68] These techniques are used in Chapter 5 to draw out the impact and experience of facilitating and participating in a critical White Bible study from the perspective of the researcher.

Interviews

Interviews gave participants an opportunity to participate actively in reflection and data-gathering, an important element of theological action research.[69] The semi-structured design of the interviews, with open, non-judgemental questions, ensured that key topics were covered in the conversation, whilst leaving space for participants to introduce other topics. Following Robson, some questions were designed to approach the same topic from different angles, to discern beliefs and

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[67] Ortlipp.
[68] Ellis, Adams, and Bochner.
[69] Helen Cameron and others, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010), pp. 57, 64–65.

attitudes among respondents.[70] Some members of the group chose to participate in

the interviews in pairs, rather than one to one was originally planned. This enabled

them to feel more at ease, but may have impeded how freely they spoke.

Thinking back to when you first heard about the Lent course, was it on a topic you
were interested in at the time?
Follow up:
When did you become interested in the topic?
OR
Would you say it's a topic you are interested in now?

…

Have any of your ideas or opinions about the topic of the course changed during
the course?

…

Can you tell me about an idea or a moment from the Lent course that has
particularly stayed with you?

Figure 1: excerpts from semi-structured interview guide

Analysis

The content of the interviews and the research journal were then analysed to

identify key themes. Quotes from interviews and research journal were gathered

under thematic headlines so that patterns and points of contrast could emerge –

themes included "Faith and doubt", "Whiteness" and "emotional experience." A

note was made of how many of the interviews this theme arose in, and how many

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[70] Robson, p. 280; King, Horrocks, and Joanna M. Brooks, pp. 79–82.

times it came up across the interviews. The participants' contributions to discussion

in the meetings and reflections in the interviews were considered in the light of

Helms's White Racial Identity model, as well as insights from faith development and

adult education.

Ethics

This research underwent the Queen's Foundation's process for ethical clearance. All

participants were given a verbal briefing as well as an information sheet and about

the research aims, written in accessible language and available in video format

(Appendix 1). The information sheet explained that names would be changed and

that every effort would be made to remove any identifying information when the

research was written up. Participants were also free to withdraw from continuing

with the Bible studies or interviews, with the conditions of this withdrawal laid out in

the information sheet. Participants signed a consent form indicating that they had

read and understood this information.

Learning from feminist research practice, the sessions were designed and facilitated

to foster mutual co-operation, so that participants felt able to comment and

contribute to the research. This was apparent when participants made suggestions

about how the sessions could be improved, and offered their own insights into the

process. Over the weeks that the group met, trust and openness grew, although

there was always an asymmetry of power, since the researcher/facilitator role

controls what is and is not recorded, the focus of the discussion and direction of questions.[71]

Participant discomfort

Discussing Whiteness is often an uncomfortable and awkward process for White people, since it requires a reassessment of how one sees the world, which can result in feelings of shame, guilt and powerlessness, as explored in Chapter 2 above. The group were encouraged to support each other in this process, as well as to seek pastoral care from the Rector of the Benefice if they would like to. Contact details for the Samaritans were also included in the information sheet.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the methodology and methods that structure this research. Critical theory and practical theology complement each other to underpin this piece of theological action research. The study does not use objective measures of impact, but rather combines participant observation, autoethnography and semi-structured interviews to gather data on the experience of the critical White Bible studies. The results of analysis of this data are explored in the following chapters.

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[71] Swinton and Mowatt, pp. 51–62; Nigel King, Christine Horrocks, and Joanna Brooks, *Interviews in Qualitative Research* (London: SAGE, 2018), p. 32; Jane Ribbens and Rosalind Edwards, 'Living on the Edges: Public Knowledge, Private Lives, Personal Experience', in *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives*, ed. by Jane Ribbens and Rosalind Edwards (London: SAGE, 1997), pp. 1–23 (pp. 3–4).

Chapter 4: Applying Rachel Starr's guidance

A key question this study seeks to address is "how can Starr's guidance be applied to group Bible studies?" This chapter outlines how Starr's guidance, intended for an academic audience and not explicitly for group usage, was developed into a framework and used in a group setting. Finally, participant reflections on the guidance are explored.

Adapting for a non-academic audience

As the supervisor of this study, Starr suggested that her suggestions be reworded to better suit the Oakbury group, since the group was non-academic, and less familiar with the work and principles of critical Whiteness. Together we rephrased them to:

1) Do not ignore the violence present in the text.

2) Be attentive to your own power and vulnerability.

3) Consider who you identify with in the story. Do you need to be the central character?

4) Seek out possibilities for healing and solidarity through listening to the voices of Global Majority people.[72]

Adapting for group usage

To facilitate group Bible study, this research combines Starr's guidance with principles and practices from Contextual Bible Study (CBS), as outlined by the

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[72] Starr, personal correspondence, 04/11/2021

Ujamaa Centre, South Africa. CBS encourages participants to read the Bible in the light of their contexts and experiences, and in turn to allow the Bible to speak into these contexts. CBS arose out of the practice of Base Ecclesial Communities reading the Bible in Latin America, which then spread to South Africa and across the world. It is rooted in a critical analysis of social structures, prioritising the needs of people who are poor and marginalised. From this perspective, the Bible is read carefully and closely, and reflected upon theologically. CBS is rooted in a commitment to change, to work for transformation.[73] CBS is appropriate for this case study, since, like Starr, it seeks to challenge injustice through Bible reading, and as with this research, to seek to address unjust structures in society, in this case racism.

Designing the Meetings

The five-step framework for CBS developed by the Ujamaa Centre for Contextual Biblical Studies was used to design the meetings.[74] A session plan was first tested with a pilot group, where it became apparent the content should be simplified, so that there was only one focus for each section. Over the weeks of the regular Bible study, the repeated structure of the meetings was a helpful framework to keep conversation focused.

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[73] Gerald O. West and Ujamaa Centre Staff, *Doing Contextual Bible Study: A Resource Manual* (KwaZulu-Natal: Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research, 2015), pp. 4–8; John Riches and others, *What Is Contextual Bible Study?: A Practical Guide with Group Studies for Advent and Lent* (London: SPCK, 2010), pp. xi–xiii, 3–4.
[74] West and Ujamaa Centre Staff, pp. 9–12.

Step One – Identifying a theme. The theme for the meetings was already set by the topic of my research, reading the Bible with critical attention to Whiteness.

Step Two – Discerning a biblical text. I was keen to focus on a single book of the Bible to allow close study and to increase the sense of stability for the group. Drawing on David G. Horrell, who argues that the conflation of Whiteness and Christianity is particularly problematic for New Testament studies, I was interested in using a New Testament text.[75] In consultation with the group, the Gospel of Luke was chosen, as it is the Gospel for Year C, the year of the Revised Common Lectionary that the research was undertaken.

Step Three – Formulating questions. This stage of the sessions is designed to bring the context (Whiteness) into conversation with the chosen biblical text. The Ujamaa centre describes this as "fusing community consciousness with textual consciousness."[76]

Each session of these meetings followed the same structure: opening activity and question(s); reading the text together; input from a Global Majority scholar or artist; closing reflections.

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[75] Horrell, pp. 113, 140.
[76] West and Ujamaa Centre Staff, p. 12.

Opening activity

Small cards with images and shapes, as well as some blank cards, are laid out on
the table.
Discuss with your neighbour or think about which shape or image best describes
how you are feeling about Whiteness, or draw your own image

Figure 2: example opening activity

Figure 2 is an example of an opening activity used as participants arrived to start the

Bible study. These activities were designed to establish Whiteness as the lens and

context through which the group approached the rest of their time together. They

also allowed the facilitator to gauge participants' moods, receptivity and feelings

about the meeting. This example is inspired by a similar activity used by Starr when

teaching about White privilege, and on the second of Starr's suggestions, by drawing

attention to participants' Whiteness.[77]

During the pilot session, the opening question was "Can you think of a time when

you realised you were White?" Most respondents gave examples of witnessing the

racism of other White people towards Global Majority people, rather than reflecting

on their own experience of being White. This was a helpful indicator of how some

White people approach questions about race – seeing Whiteness as neutral, and the

racialised experience of Global Majority people as remarkable.[78] Learning from this,

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[77] Starr, personal correspondence, 04/11/2021
[78] Tatum, pp. 93–94.

and from research into affinity groups, the opening activity was facilitated quite closely, to keep attention on Whiteness in particular, rather than race in general.

Learning from affinity groups, the sessions were designed to be a place where Whiteness was named explicitly and wrestled with, despite the discomfort that this usually generates, enabling "White people to practice talking about race."[79] Through building familiarity with discussing the topic, the opening questions for each study sought to address some of the emotional experiences of coming to terms with Whiteness identified in Critical Whiteness scholarship, such as denial of racism, guilt, or a desire to distance oneself from Whiteness.[80]

Step Four – Articulating and Owning. In this step, participants are encouraged to bring the text and context into conversation with each other. For this group, the idea of "owning" the interpretation encouraged in CBS was held in tension with Starr's principle of de-centring the self and being open to new perspectives.

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[79] Michael and Conger, pp. 57–58.
[80] Helms, 'Toward a Model of White Racial Identity Development', pp. 55–59; Amico, p. 34.

Reading the text together

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Text: Luke 19:1-10

Copies of the text are distributed, the text is read aloud by a member of the group.

First question: "What jumps of the page at you?"
(general discussion)

Activity: Read the text alone or in a pair and underline the verbs. Talk to your neighbour about what the exercise reveals for you. What do they indicate about who has what power?

Questions in plenary:
Can you think of situations in your life with similar power dynamics?
How is race a factor in these situations?

</div>

Figure 3: example close reading activity

Figure 3 is an example of a close reading activity. Participants were given printed sheets with the passage on them to keep the attention on the chosen passage rather than other biblical texts, and so that a shared translation was used, to focus on meaning rather than difference between translations.[81] Following Riches et al, after reading the text the group was always offered a chance to say what spoke to them about the text.[82] Sometimes comments connected the text to questions of race, and other times they were about other things. On the occasion outlined in Figure 3, one participant was disturbed by Jesus describing Zacchaeus as a "son of Abraham", perceiving this as an excluding term. The group then discussed inclusion and exclusion in social groupings. This was an example of not ignoring the (social) violence that might be found in the text, as per Starr's guidance. Some participants

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[81] Riches and others, p. 60.
[82] Riches and others, p. 62.

expressed relief at being able to honestly express their unease about Jesus' words, whilst others found it more uncomfortable to critique Jesus' behaviour.

Underlining verbs was an activity drawing on Anna Carter Florence's ideas for reading the Bible, and was appropriate for a group of retired professionals.[83] The meetings were designed to be creative and stimulating, in part to counterbalance the discomfort that discussion of Whiteness often causes. Activities used a mixture of reflecting individually, in pairs or small groups and in plenary to introduce variety and to encourage intimacy and trust. This also allowed conflict to be handled sensitively and to encourage those who were more reticent to participate.[84]

In preparation for each session, a reference paper was produced for the facilitator's use, outlining mainstream commentary on the chosen passage (drawing on sources such as John Muddiman and John Barton *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, Margaret Aymer, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and David A. Sanchéz *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The New Testament*, Greg Carey *Luke: all flesh shall see God's salvation,* Mikael C Parsons *Luke*, N.T. Wright *Luke for Everyone)*[85] as well as some of the perspectives of Global Majority scholars (including Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder, Wil Gafney, Justo L. Gonzalez).[86] This enabled questions about, for example, historical context or

[83] Anna Carter Florence, *Rehearsing Scripture: Discovering God's Word in Community* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2018), pp. 41–42.

[84] Margaret Cooling, *How to Engage with the Bible in Small Groups* (Cambridge, England: Grove Books Limited, 2010), pp. 8–11.

[85] John Muddiman and John Barton, *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The New Testament*, ed. by Margaret Aymer, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and David A. Sanchéz (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2015); Greg Carey, *Luke: All Flesh Shall See God's Salvation : An Introduction and Study Guide* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2015); N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (London: SPCK, 2004).

[86] Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder, 'Luke', in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, ed. by Brian K. Blount and others (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2007), pp. 158–85; Wilda C. Gafney, *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church: Year W* (New York: Church

the interpretive tradition to be addressed, as well as to introduce the voices of

Global Majority scholars. An example reference paper is included as Appendix 2.

Input from Global Majority voices

Text: Luke 4: 1-13
Image: Laura James *Jesus with creatures* [87]

Possible conversation topics:
- Wilderness in womanist theology – where women meet God, where God offers survival.[88]
- How we can be set free when we acknowledge our temptations (e.g. to walk away from antiracist work).[89]
- Jesus' resources in the wilderness: we do not live by bread alone[90]
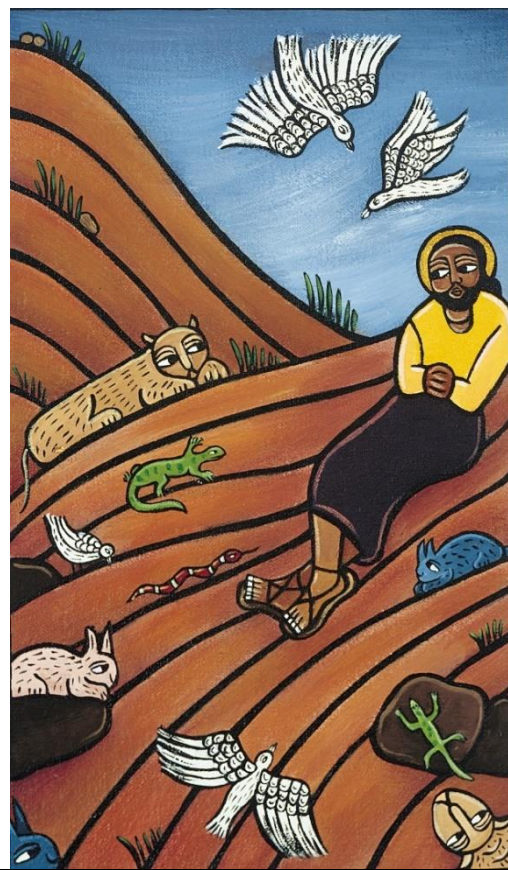

Figure 4: extract from planning sheet

The next section of the meetings was intended to make sure that the voices of

Global Majority people were always heard, to encourage Whiteness to be decentred

and to seek hope, following the third and fourth of Starr's suggestions. Mindful that

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Publishing, 2021); Justo L. Gonzalez, *Luke: Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

[87] Laura James, 'Book of Gospels - Laura James Fine Arts', *Book of Gospels* <https://www.laurajamesart.com/collections/book-of-gospels/> [accessed 22 August 2022].

[88] Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), pp. 96–97.

[89] Michael and Conger, p. 59.

[90] Lowell Hennigs, 'Text Study for Luke 4:1-13 (Part Six)', *The Acedic Lutheran*, 2022 <https://lowellhennigs.com/2022/03/05/text-study-for-luke-41-13-part-six/> [accessed 22 August 2022].

the Reintegration stage of seeking to abandon racism can include converting feelings

of guilt about Whiteness into anger towards Global Majority people, these voices

were introduced in ways that maximise the chance of the participants being

receptive and open.[91] This included drawing on paintings, music and literature to

communicate through art, carefully timing when Global Majority perspectives were

introduced and ensuring that their work was contextualised.[92] However, in some

sessions, work that was forthright or expressed anger was also included, to offer

challenge to participants and to demonstrate the range of emotional responses to

racism.

Step Five – Developing a plan of action

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[91] Tatum, p. 14; Helms, 'Toward a Model of White Racial Identity Development', pp. 49–66.
[92] Hans-Ruedi Weber, *The Book That Reads Me: A Handbook for Bible Study Enablers* (Geneva, Switzerland: Published for the World Student Christian Federation by WCC Publications, 1995), pp. 46–47.

Closing reflections

Text: Luke 1: 39-56

Individual activity: take some time to gather your thoughts from the session.

Reflecting on the conversation we have had, if you were writing a new Magnificat,

what would you say? Paper and pens are provided for you to write yours down.

Group activity: Participants are invited to share excerpts from their rewritten

Magnificat in plenary, and to share a new insight that has arisen from the

discussion.

To take away: Commit to one thing that you are going to revisit and reflect on

during the week. You might like to write it on a post-it to take home with you.

Figure 5: example of closing reflections

The final activity of each session was a chance to reflect on the material discussed.

The group were given a chance to speak to their neighbour or reflect individually,

either with prompt questions, or an activity, as in Figure 5, above. Recognising the

importance of time to think about the topics discussed, one week was dedicated to

individual exploration of art, prayer prompts, poetry, music and craft activities

drawing out connections between the Sermon on the Plain and race in the UK today.

Every week, participants were asked to choose an idea from the session to

reconsider during the week. This was designed to encourage participants to engage

in self-reflection each week, and to continue learning between sessions, recognising that this lays the foundations for White people to be able to engage in antiracist work.[93] Chapter 6 considers whether more explicit challenge to take antiracist actions would have increased the effectiveness of the Bible studies as a tool for addressing racism.

Starr's suggestions, used in conjunction with the CBS framework, were woven into the design of each meeting of the Oakbury group during Lent and Easter, through opening activities that drew attention to Whiteness, honest engagement with the text which did not shy away from violence, openness to the perspectives of others and Global Majority. They were also included in the information sheet given to participants at the start of the research, and displayed in the room the group met in each time. At the last meeting, the group were given a booklet containing Starr's suggestions and an overview of the topics and passages discussed each week (Appendix 3).

Participant feedback on the guidance

Responses to Starr's suggestions varied among the participants. The point that participants were most keen to discuss in interviews was the idea of decentring oneself, expressed to the group as "Consider who you identify with in the story? Do you need to be the central character?"

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[93] Michael and Conger, p. 60.

One participant was unpersuaded of the value of this approach, as it contradicted the principle of "seek the mind of Christ" he had previously been encouraged to follow – perhaps a forerunner to the "What would Jesus do" phenomenon explored by Jennifer Harvey.[94] He said "I've always identified with wanting to be like Jesus, you know, helping the disadvantaged and the underprivileged… I've got to behave like Jesus, and everything will be alright." Starr's writing seeks to explicitly undermine this tendency of White people to identify as the saviour figure.

Another participant, however, seemed to have grasped Starr's idea, that decentring oneself might allow new voices and perspectives on the text to emerge, saying that whilst she used to look for herself in the text, the experience of the Bible studies "has stopped me doing that, because I've though it's not about what I – it's about everybody. And I don't think I'd ever looked at it like that." Others commented that this was not the first time they had encounter the idea, but appreciated the "continued opportunity to practice."

Participants also appreciated the fourth guideline, to look for possibilities for healing and solidarity through the voices of Global Majority people. They commented on the "interesting materials, the variety", "the art and music" and "trying to see [the texts] in new ways."

Some commented that the Bible studies had made them more attentive to their "power and vulnerability" in areas of their lives outside the meetings. Reflecting on this point, one participant said "it might not even be words you use, it might be how

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[94] Harvey.

you physically react or something without even knowing it," acknowledging the subtle ways that power operates in social settings.

Only one of the participants commented on the question of violence, saying "the violence is a bit worrying at times, but it was violent world, and still is. And so I suppose the violence is going to be in the text isn't it, so you can't just get away from that."

The suggestions which focused on decentring oneself and listening to the voices of Global Majority people most engaged the group. This might imply that these are the suggestions that are easier to grasp and apply – violence in particular is not an easy topic to address. However, the group's openness to the guidance, willingness to apply it to Bible study and in their lives indicates that the Bible study design successfully made the suggestions accessible and workable in a non-academic small group context, and helped the group to lean about and engage with critical White readings of the Bible.

Conclusion

This study has found, then, that Starr's guidance can be applied to group Bible studies with some rephrasing, and in conjunction with CBS methods. In this case, participants engaged better with some suggestions than others – this may in part be due to the texts studied, and also that some guidelines are more comfortable to engage with than others. The following chapters examine in more detail the

experience of facilitating and participating in a group reading the Bible with critical

attention to Whiteness.

Chapter 5: My experience

Introduction

Zoe Bennett et al write that practical theological researchers should expect to be changed by their work, perhaps as new perspectives emerge, assumptions are questioned and learning takes place.[95] This chapter focuses on my experience as facilitator and researcher over the course of the meetings, exploring three processes of change. Firstly, I moved from an attitude of control to co-learning, growing in confidence to allow the group to steer the discussion and activities. Secondly, I became less focused on progress, and more interested in the experience and perspectives of participants, and small signs of change. Finally, I grew in confidence to share my perspectives honestly, even when that meant engaging in conflict. Each of these processes had uncomfortable elements, but were also rewarding, and enabled me to better develop my own understanding of Whiteness.[96]

From control to co-learning

Much of the material about antiracist learning is designed for use in a classroom, with a clear hierarchy of power, or for professional development settings, in which a trainer is expected to divulge knowledge to a group.[97] I felt it was important that I

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[95] Bennett and others, pp. 8–9.

[96] I am grateful to two very different self-reflective pieces of writing which inspired and helped me to shape this chapter: Susan Durber, 'White Daughter of Empire', *The Ecumenical Review*, 72.1 (2020), 87–97 <https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12486>; Carol Rambo Ronai, 'The Reflexive Self through Narrative: A Night in the Life of an Erotic Dancer/Researcher', in *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience*, ed. by Carolyn Ellis and Michael G. Flaherty (Newbury Park: SAGE, 1992), pp. 102–24.

[97] For example, Susanne Bohmer and Joyce L. Briggs, 'Teaching Privileged Students about Gender, Race, and Class Oppression', *Teaching Sociology*, 19.2 (1991), 154–63

did not try to assume these roles, for which I am not trained. However, this was not fully borne out in my practice. As the person designing and facilitating the course, it was inevitable that I had a greater level of control about the direction of conversation and our meetings more generally. Additionally, the group often looked to me as an expert, in part because I had spent more time reflecting on these issues than others.

In my research journal I noted in earlier weeks that I often felt that, as I tried to establish good ways of working within the group through activities, offering discussion questions and suggesting points of interest, I was forcing them into something they weren't keen to do: "like an over enthusiastic holiday rep", I wrote. For each meeting, I drew up a plan, with timings, activities, and prompt questions. Comparing the first weeks with later weeks, I can see that as the weeks went on I prepared less material, giving more time to free flowing discussion, with extra activities in reserve rather than trying to get through a particular amount of material.

In the second week, whilst looking at the Magnificat, I found that the activity I had planned – to each spend some time individually writing our own versions of the Magnificat – would not work.[98] The group was agitated about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which had taken place that week, and struggled with the shift from discussion to personal reflection, perhaps because as individuals, they did not feel

<https://doi.org/10.2307/1317846>; Betsy Lucal, 'Oppression and Privilege: Toward a Relational Conceptualization of Race', *Teaching Sociology*, 24.3 (1996), 245–55 <https://doi.org/10.2307/1318739>; Marc D. Rich and Aaron Castelan Cargile, 'Beyond the Breach: Transforming White Identities in the Classroom', *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 7.4 (2004), 351–65 <https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332042000303379>; Timothy Lensmire and others, 'McIntosh as Synecdoche: How Teacher Education's Focus on White Privilege Undermines Antiracism', *Harvard Educational Review*, 83.3 (2013), 410–31; Ali Michael, *Raising Race Questions: Whiteness and Inquiry in Education* (New York, London: Teachers College Press, 2015).
[98] This activity is outline in Chapter 4, Figure 5.

they had the personal resources to address the theological questions the invasion

had stirred in them. Instead of trying to force the group to write on their own pieces

of paper as I had planned, I instead suggested we each write a line at a time on post

it notes, to form a kind of "consequences game" style Magnificat, with lines from all

the participants mixed together, so that we could share ideas and comfort in

response to this upsetting event. This was an important moment for me, as it proved

that I was able to react to the needs of the group in the moment, according to

context.

Together with becoming more relaxed in my planning, I also felt more able, as the

weeks went on, to allow the group to steer the conversation in directions I hadn't

expected. For example, on one occasion I showed them Laura James's painting, *Jesus*

with Creatures.[99] I had expected the group to be interested in James's positive

depiction of the wilderness, and planned to introduce the idea of wilderness as a

place of protection or encounter with God in Black and womanist theology.[100]

Instead, the group expressed surprise at the depiction of Jesus as a Black man, and

we discussed the work and ideas of James Cone.[101]

I grew more relaxed about tangents, especially those that I saw as self-justifying or

trying to demonstrate former experience with Global Majority people. In my

research journal I note that "it gets easier when you remember that people need to

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[99] This activity is outline in Chapter 4, Figure 4. James, 'Book of Gospels - Laura James Fine Arts'.
[100] Williams; Dwight N. Hopkins, 'Slave Theology in the "Invisible Institution"', in *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology*, ed. by Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), pp. 790–830 (pp. 817–18).
[101] James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*; James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation: 50th Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2020); James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2012).

be able to protest their own innocence of racism, and the point of these meetings is to meet them where they are." As I stopped trying to hold the group to unrealistic standards, and instead enter the dialogue as a participant, rather than judge, I relaxed, and began to learn more myself.

In my research journal I note, "I'm reminded that this is a space for me to practice talking about race too – this group doesn't always expect me to be perfectly eloquent, which is nice." On another occasion I reflect "I am so impressed by the determination of some of the group. They have been speaking out for justice since before I was born." By stepping out of the role of leader, and into co-learner, I was able to experience some of the benefits of White affinity groups myself.

Paul Kivel asserts that critical attention to power and control is a crucial part of uprooting racism. White people often seek to exert control in conversations about race, especially if they feel defensive.[102] Learning to cede control in these racial conversations, even in all White groups, is an important practice.

From narrow to broad interest in the experience

I started Lent with a clear idea of what the outcomes I desired for the meetings to be – that the group would grow in their understanding of Whiteness, progressing in their antiracist journey and empowered to take more action. I hoped that they would see the ways that nothing in British society is untouched by racial inequality. It soon became apparent that my desire for such clear-cut progress was not just

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[102] Kivel, pp. 78–79.

unrealistic but also fell into some of the traps of uncritical Whiteness, as I cast myself

in the role of White antiracist hero who saves others from racism through linear

progress.[103] I was also at risk of instrumentalising the participants for the sake of

tidy, perhaps even impressive, research outcomes.

Instead, I built relationships with a group of people with a range of positions and

perspectives on matters of faith and race, who were more interested in exploring

ideas than being corralled along a path of "progress". At first, I found this frustrating

and disappointing – one extract from my research journal reads "I'm having a bit of a

mid-point wobble now – is there any point in this exercise? Are we getting

anywhere? We're three weeks in and today one participant said they weren't

convinced they had an ounce of prejudice in them!"

Reflection helped me to see that one source of my frustration was that the group

largely perceived racism as a problem external to themselves, in what Betsy Lucal

describes as an "absence/presence model", which allows White people to look at

race with detachment.[104] My challenge to the group to consider Whiteness turned

the focus of conversations about race inwards and encouraged participants to

scrutinise themselves and their communities using a racial analysis, introducing a

relational model of race.[105]

This clash of analysis was also theological. The claim to be without "an ounce of

prejudice" implicitly expressed the view that the participant was uncontaminated by

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[103] Griffin, p. 150; Ringrose, p. 327; Beaudoin and Turpin, pp. 255–56.
[104] Lucal, pp. 245–46.
[105] Lucal, p. 246.

the evils that exist in society at large.[106] I was encouraging the group to see a

different, again more relational, view. Implicit in my approach was the belief that

humans are most able to manifest the image of God when we have good

relationships with God, humanity and creation, and that all human relationships

impacted by racial inequality, thus impeding our ability to most fully occupy the

imago Dei.[107]

Recognising this clash of perspectives helped me to understand why the group,

which I was experiencing as open minded and interested in learning about

antiracism, also seemed resistant to the perspectives I was offering – they were

viewing the world through a completely different lens. It also helped me to realise

that a focus on progress was limiting my ability to see the other ways that the group

experienced the impact of the Bible studies, such as through a deepening of their

faith. These impacts are explored in Chapter 6. Whilst I remained committed to my

perspective, understanding the model held by many of the participants also helped

me learn from them better, as I had insight into their assumptions about race.

I judged that it would be inappropriate to try and "teach" the group a new

perspective – rather I sought to demonstrate relational perspectives in the materials

used, questions I asked and views I offered. I hope that this might have provided the

group with an alternative view that they might reconsider in future. This also seemed

a better way to resist the temptation to impose a narrative of progress onto

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[106] Cameron and others, p. 54.

[107] Elaine Padilla, 'Embodied Love: Explorations on the Imago Dei in the Caribbean Latina Theology of Ada María Isasi-Díaz', *Perspectivas*, Spring.13 (2016); 'We Are All Immigrants! Imago Dei, Citizenship, and The Im/Possibility of Hospitality', *Practical Matters Journal*, 2018 <http://practicalmattersjournal.org/2018/08/27/we-are-all-immigrants-imago-dei-citizenship-and-the-im-possibility-of-hospitality/> [accessed 22 August 2022].

something more complex.[108] I also adopted a new practice, of noting in my research journal any small signs of changed attitudes or behaviours, learning to celebrate modest shifts rather than expecting wholesale conversion. These small changes, such as one participant commenting she felt more confident to challenge racist comments, and another saying they were noticing race more in the news are perhaps more accessible shifts in behaviour than a whole new perspective on the world.

From drained to confident

Despite seeking to allow myself to be a co-learner, ceding control to the group, I still had responsibilities as the facilitator, which was a role I found very demanding. I would spend hours preparing a tailored Bible study that was seeking to direct attention to questions of Whiteness, whilst also addressing questions raised in the previous week, and give enough space for actual Bible study. These hours would come to their critical point in a small village hall for 75 minutes, during which I would seek to guide a group through discussion of uncomfortable, contentious and complex issues.

Facilitating these discussions often meant challenging assumptions, disagreeing with the group consensus and introducing awkward ideas – which was draining. My experience was similar to one Ali Michael describes, whereby the group needed to be repeatedly brought back to the topic of Whiteness. [109] Sometimes, for example,

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[108] Beaudoin and Turpin, pp. 255–56.
[109] Michael, pp. 104–5.

members of the group were keen to explore their own marginalisation, perhaps

demonstrating what Paul Kivel describes as an attempt to escape White identity

through competing victimisation.[110]

My research journal records how, in early meetings, I struggled to judge how to

respond to participants pushing back against the idea that they were in any way

implicated in racist structures. I usually moved the conversation on from these

comments without engaging with them, but later worried that by not addressing

them I was losing opportunities to influence and persuade. At the same time, I was

concerned that the group would stop attending if I was constantly contradicting or

"correcting" them.

A crux moment occurred for me a few weeks into the study when a participant

repeatedly used the word "coloured" to refer to Global Majority people, even after I

had paused the conversation to remind the group that this was not an acceptable

term. The conversation moved on, but a few minutes later a participant used the

term "coloured" again. At this point I paused the discussion to repeat that this term

was not acceptable. This participant objected and asked if her used of "coloured"

was offending me. I replied that it wasn't a term used anymore, and that Global

Majority people find it offensive. I gave examples of terms that can be used instead.

The participant responded that she didn't like any of these terms, and asserted that

her "coloured" friends didn't mind it. I stated that the term was not considered

acceptable and that I didn't think we should use it in our meetings. She agreed not to

use it in our meetings in future, although she did not see any problem with the

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[110] Kivel, pp. 6–7, 76–77.

language herself. After the session, some of the participants commented that they were pleased I had addressed this use of language, even if they had not said so at the time.

During the confrontation I felt very uncomfortable – my heart was beating fast and my lips felt dry. I found it hard to marshal my argument and what I said sounded (to me, in the moment) weak and nit-picky. Reflecting afterwards I think I did manage the situation well – I made my case clearly, was firm about what was and wasn't acceptable and why. Afterwards I reflected on how Whiteness was operating in the situation –particularly how Whiteness asserts an illegitimate right to name, categorise and thus control others, and maintains taboos around questioning this claim.[111]

After this had occurred, I wrote a lengthy reflection in my research journal, considering how Jesus refused to accede to accepted social norms and instead broke taboos, just as I had broken the taboo of politely ignoring offensive language. It was only later that I realised I had myself fallen into some of the traps Jennifer Harvey and Rachel Starr identify– by identifying myself with Jesus, the saviour and central character in the narrative.[112] This helped me see afresh how I was also learning with the group, making mistakes, and growing. I came to a new appreciation of the open-mindedness of the group, their willingness to be challenged and to learn alongside each other.

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[111] Campbell-Stephens, pp. 5–6.
[112] Harvey, pp. 95–98; Starr, pp. 17–18.

After this encounter, and as the weeks went on, I discovered a new confidence meant I found the meetings less draining. Good relationships meant I felt more able to challenge the group and encourage them to address difficult topics, and I knew that the group would respond thoughtfully and supportively. Later, when they expressed a lack of confidence in challenging racism, the group shared phrases and techniques that they could use when they wanted to address a racist comment or joke. I felt that I was more able to empathise with their nerves and lack of confidence in this area because of having been recently reminded of how difficult it can be myself.

Conclusion

My experience of reading the Bible with critical attention to Whiteness was one in which I learned to cede control in favour of co-learning; to broaden from a narrow focus on progress to see the multifaceted nature of the experience and the joy of the exchange of ideas; and to move from apprehensiveness to confidence discussing race with fellow White people. None of these processes were without some discomfort – but ultimately, they helped me learn, a process investigated more in Chapter 6, along with the experience of the other participants in the Oakbury group.

Chapter 6: Participant experience

This chapter is focused on the experience of the members of the Oakbury social justice group over the course of the seven meetings. It draws mainly on how these participants self-reported the experience in interviews, as well as comments made during the meetings, and notes from participant observation. As such, it is mediated through my perception and analysis of the group's experience, something that has been an uncomfortable experience for me. After considering this, the chapter outlines three facets of the impact of the experience on the participants: how emotional responses facilitated learning, the impact on their faith, and the impact on their understanding of their White racial identity. Finally, the question of whether group critical White Bible study is an effective tool for tackling racism is addressed.

Participant/observer

Ruth Behar notes that participant observation is an oxymoron – it requires the researcher to at once be part of a group, and to keep distance. When the research period is over the researcher must "dust yourself off, go to your desk, and write down what you saw and heard."[113] Whilst I do not think objectivity is possible – or even desirable – in research of this kind, critical analysis does require a degree of judgement. I wish to maintain my integrity as an antiracist researcher, and name patterns of Whiteness at work as I observe them. At the same time, I want to honour the relationships I built during the research, and respect the good intentions, open-

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[113] Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), p. 5.

mindedness, and generosity of the group though participating in the meetings. As the researcher, I have power which participants do not, to report events and share my interpretation. Inevitably, my perception of the group's experience, and my interpretation of what they have recounted it to me dominates, and may differ to how they would describe and analyse the events.[114] In what follows, I have tried to hold good relationships and respect in tension with critique and challenge, not exempting myself from this process.

Impact 1: Learning through discomfort

In interviews, participants often linked their emotional experience of the meetings with learning. For example, one talked about how "frightening and concerning statistics" about race would "stay with him", whilst another talked about being "entranced" by the music of Taizé, an international ecumenical community. In an initial analysis of these reflections, words and phrases were categorised as either positive or negative. Quotes such as "a wonderful opportunity…really worthwhile", and "enlightening, open, encouraging" were categorised as positive, whilst "saddened", and "humiliated" were negative. However, this was a binary that soon broke down. One participant commented that "sitting in discomfort can actually be really useful", whilst others commented on the "challenging" and "disruptive" nature of the meetings as something that made them stimulating.

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[114] Swinton and Mowatt, pp. 51–52.

Exploring this phenomenon, Jennifer Smith advocates for what she calls a *disruptive-inclusive* approach to Christian adult learning. She uses the term *disruption* to describe the "fear, pain and confusion" of a circumstance, particularly one which challenges deeply held beliefs or perspectives.[115] This disruption should not be avoided, but rather embraced, since it contains the possibility for growth. The disruption of finding that one's former perspective is no longer sufficient can generate a new freedom whilst also opening a new understanding of the self and others – a new connectedness, or *inclusion*.[116] In this view, the emotional impact of the experience of reading the Bible with critical attention to Whiteness, particularly the emotional discomfort, was part of what enabled learning and growth to take place.

Impact 2: Exploring faith

I had expected reflections on antiracism and Whiteness would dominate the interviews, but found that contemplation, faith and doubt featured prominently in the participants' reflections on the experience. I had assumed that, as regular church goers, the group would be familiar with reading the Bible in small groups and exploring faith through discussion. Instead, some participants commented that they had previously avoided such groups, especially Lent courses, because they perceived them as too formal or uninteresting.

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[115] Jennifer Ruth Smith, 'What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning? In Fresh Perspective, Conversation and Practice: John Hull's Theological Pedagogy as Disruptive-Inclusion.' (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2022), p. 36.
[116] Smith, pp. 36–68.

Question of faith and doubt

Several participants commented on the opportunity the Bible studies provided to take time for reflection – mentioning the "contemplative aspect", "gentle pace" and opportunity to think and talk. Others remarked on the facilitation techniques and use of art and music. They talked about how the group meetings were had helped them think in more depth about the Bible. One participant in particular spoke about how he struggled with questions around life's meaning and appreciated the space to consider them without pat answers. The same participant had experienced other groups as oppressively focused on questions of salvation. Implicit in his interview was a feeling that this group allowed him more freedom to explore ideas.

For this group the experience of regularly reading the Bible in a small group provided something that they did not usually have – space to be reflective, a chance to consider the questions of life and to engage with biblical texts from a fresh perspective. Faith development researchers James Fowler and Nicola Slee both note that expressing faith in a conversational context allows individuals to articulate and understand the meaning of faith in their lives.[117] Fowler argues that an important transition between faith development stages is the ability to reengage with symbol and abstract faith expression after having applied rational critique to faith, and this project seems to have allowed some increased faithfulness through broadening participants' sources of inspiration and holding space for uncertainty.[118]

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[117] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, New edition (New York, NY: Bravo Ltd, 1995), p. 37; Nicola Slee, *Women's Faith Development: Patterns and Processes* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004), p. 62.
[118] Fowler, pp. 194, 198.

Connecting racial reflection with faith

Conversation about faith also expresses the theology of those engaged in dialogue, in this case revealing the connections they draw between faith and matters of race.[119] Several participants talked about faith and the Bible as a motivating factor in their personal commitment to social justice – using the language of "serving the community" and faith as the place "Where it all starts for me… the moral base [of social justice work]." The group were less able to articulate if or how the Bible studies had helped them link faith and race. One member commented "I thought it would be a bit more explicit, we might be dissecting the text and pointing out in a more specific way that this was marginally racist, or that wasn't… it wasn't as obvious as I thought." However, as the conversation continued, the same participant mentioned how he found it interesting to think about "how we're influenced by our Whiteness in terms of our faith." He recalled a moment in one of the Bible studies when he realised he was imagining Jesus as White, and the devil as "Black and nasty", saying "there's a racist implication in all that." This conversation reflects the trajectory of the group during Lent – from expecting race and faith to be something straightforward, to understanding how racial identity and faith are engaged in a more complex interplay, and realising how their own prejudices influenced their faith. This was reflected in other participants' comments, with one person saying, "when you get to our age, you think you've sorted everything out in your head, and you probably haven't actually." Another said, "things that one takes for granted, it just made me question."

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[119] Cameron and others, pp. 56–58.

Mary L. Foulke describes racial identity development as a spiritual journey, intertwining her experiences of exploring spirituality, sexuality and racial identity to demonstrate these connections, and how together they have contributed to a fuller, deeper understanding of herself and the world around her. In so doing, she illustrates the inseparability of the aspects that make up human identities.[120] The experience of this group seems to mirror this: as participants deepened their understandings of themselves as White, they also deepened their faith.

The meetings, then, helped participants to engage with their faith in new and deeper ways, and to begin to see the complexity of how their racial identity and White culture impacts how they read the Bible and engage with their faith, and the wider world.

Impact 3: engagement with Whiteness

The third impact on the group that analysis reveals is fresh engagement with Whiteness. This is apparent when the experience is looked at through two lenses: firstly, through Helms' racial identity development model; and secondly through the impact on how the group think and speak in relation to race.

Recognising, wrestling with, and rebuilding Whiteness

One way of judging how participants engaged with Whiteness, and the impact of this experience, is to use Helms's White racial identity schema. As discussed above in Chapter 2, this offers a guide to the psychological statuses experienced by White

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[120] Foulke.

people engaging with Whiteness, firstly through unlearning racism and secondly through constructing a positive White racial identity. Throughout the meetings and in interviews after Easter, participants in the critical White Bible studies showed indicators of a range of Helms's statuses, from Contact, through to Immersion/Emersion.

The opening activity of the first meeting was an invitation to "talk with your neighbour about a time when you realised you were White." Most participants gave examples of the first times they encountered Global Majority people or witnessed racial violence. Some members said that they did not see themselves as White, because race was not important to them. Broadly, the group's response might be understood to characterise Helm's first status of unlearning racism, "Contact", in which the significance of race is denied, consciously or unconsciously.[121] Some members of the group saw drawing attention to questions of race to be part of the problem of racism – saying "we are all one" – a phrase very similar to Helms's example quote for Contact: "My race is the human race."[122] One participant in particular was passionate about antiracism, but very concerned that attention to racial identity was divisive and unhelpful. This was a position she maintained throughout the meetings.

In the fifth meeting, the group had an extended conversation about White cultural norms, and whether it was racist to prefer them. There was criticism of immigrants who "kept to their little cultural groups and didn't want to integrate", and cultures

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[121] Helms, 'Toward a Model of White Racial Identity Development', p. 55.
[122] Helms, 'A Review of White Racial Identity Theory: The Sociopolitical Implications of Studying White Racial Identity in Psychology', p. 15.

who were perceived to resist progress and best practice. This might suggest that the group was experiencing Reintegration, which often includes a reassertion of White norms.[123] On another occasion, one participant seemed to experience the Pseudo-independence, in which individuals begin to acknowledge White responsibility for racism, with "feelings of commiseration" with Black people."[124] In his interview he said, "I feel sorry for people of colour who have a really grim struggle."

In interviews after the sessions, some participants reflected on how the course had changed their perspective on the ways they had participated in racism in their past. Two discussed together how they had played with "g****w** dolls", recognising them as racist, saying of the term "we should never have used it". This acknowledgement of the harm that Whiteness has done and one's own participation in this harm could be an indicator of Immersion-Emersion status.[125] This stage is also characterised by seeking the example of other White people to show the way.[126] During a discussion of a second piece of artwork by Laura James, "Joy in Motion", the group discussed the only White person in the picture, who is depicted to the side, joining in but not taking centre stage. They discussed identifying with him, and spoke approvingly of the way he didn't dominate the group: "he looks typical Church of England", "he's the other priest, but he's standing to the side." This could also indicate Immersion-Emersion status, as they explore aspects of positive White identity.

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[123] Helms, 'The Challenge of Making Whiteness Visible: Reactions to Four Whiteness Articles', p. 719.
[124] Helms, 'Toward a Model of White Racial Identity Development', p. 61.
[125] Helms, 'The Challenge of Making Whiteness Visible: Reactions to Four Whiteness Articles', p. 720.
[126] Helms, 'Toward a Model of White Racial Identity Development', p. 62; Tatum, p. 201.

Figure 6: "Joy in Motion" by Laura James[127]

Helms is wary of attempts to see the schema as rigidly linear, describing it as "an ongoing process involving stagnations, reversals, and progressions" and Beaudoin and Turpin's warning about White theologians' tendency to prioritise progress over nuance is also cogent here.[128] It is also unlikely that seven meetings would be sufficient to permanently establish and consolidate new patterns of thinking. Most participants, for example, found it hard to name what they had learned or had changed as a result of taking part in the Bible studies, even if their responses to other questions suggested that their thinking had developed. Nonetheless, Helms's

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[127] Laura James, '"Black Is Blessed": The Biblical, Inclusive Art of Laura James - Laura James Fine Arts' <https://www.laurajamesart.com/black-is-blessed-the-biblical-inclusive-art-of-laura-james/> [accessed 22 August 2022].

[128] Helms, 'A Review of White Racial Identity Theory: The Sociopolitical Implications of Studying White Racial Identity in Psychology', p. 24; Beaudoin and Turpin, pp. 255–56.

schema does reveal that participants reflected on and wrestled with their White identities through participating in the meetings.

Further disrupting the narrative of progress that it is tempting to ascribe to the Bible studies, is the participant, mentioned above, who attended throughout Lent, but repeated "we are all one" in an interview after Easter, saying that attention to racial identity "just perpetuates racism".

Critical White sociologist Jessica Ringrose observes that White researchers can be quick to label people who do not respond as expected to antiracist input as resistant, and evidence of the researcher's superior antiracist position over the racist research subject. The researcher's desire to rescue fellow White people from racism can fall into the very traps of White exceptionalism that they are trying to dismantle. Doing so divides research subjects into two categories – those who are resistant, "receptacles of racism" and those good White people who are "exceptions to this problem".[129] Doing so elides the complexities of White supremacy at both the individual and societal level.

Ringrose suggests that more nuance is needed. Often, further conversation with those dismissed as "receptacles of racism" can reveal analysis of racial dynamics that would be aligned with critical White perspectives.[130] In this case, in the same interview, the participant talked about asking questions about her experience of Whiteness and the privileges that accompany that as a result of participating in the meetings. She was also passionate about overcoming racism, even as she continued

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[129] Ringrose, pp. 326, 335.
[130] Ringrose, p. 338.

to hold her "colourblind" position. To cast her as a resistant "receptacle of racism" would be to do her a disservice and wilfully overlook her commitment to racial justice.

What can be said, then, is that the group did engage, to mixed degrees, with their Whiteness, demonstrating behaviour characteristic of a range of Helms's statuses to a degree that implies some development in their racial identity. Such models should be used with caution, though, and it is important to resist simple narratives of progress, or categorising others as "good" and "bad" White people.

Seeing and speaking from a racially-aware perspective

As well as engaging with their own racial identity as White people, there was evidence that the group began to grow in ability and confidence to analyse the world with a racial perspective. Three examples illustrate this well: firstly, the change of view expressed by one group member about how White and non-White refugees are treated; secondly, engagement with information about how to talk about race; and thirdly a conversation between participants in which one challenged another's perspective.

In the second week of the group's meetings, Russia invaded Ukraine. This was a topic that was prominent in the news throughout the period of the meetings, and some members of the group, already engaged in voluntary work for charities supporting refugees, were prominent in organising their local area's efforts to welcome Ukrainian refugees. In an early meeting, there was discussion about Ukrainian refugees, the offers of space in homes across Europe and the lack of "refugee camp" style accommodation for them. Some members were very resistant to the

suggestion that there was a racist double standard at work – that White refugees from Europe were receiving a warmer welcome than those from Africa and the Middle East. "I don't think that's true", said one participant. Several weeks later, the same participant, apparently not remembering the initial conversation, commented that spending time each week talking about race had meant she had noticed discrepancies between how Ukrainian and Sudanese refugees were treated. In particular, she had observed that Ukrainian refugees were consistently called "refugees" whilst those from other countries were often described in the media as "illegal immigrants." This example illustrates how, for this participant, regular discussion of questions of racial justice were changing her perspective in other areas of life.

During one early meeting, the group discussed how they did not feel confident challenging racism or talking about race with others. In that session and later ones, resources were shared with the aim of building that confidence – in particular a "terminology" resource sheet produced by the Right Revd Lusa Nsenga-Ngoy, written when he was BAME Mission and Ministry Enabler in the Diocese of Leicester.[131] In interviews, several participants commented that the document helped build their confidence that they weren't going to accidentally use offensive language. The group also discussed phrases or techniques they could use to challenge someone telling a racist joke or expressing a racist idea.

During a later meeting, two participants were discussing the merits of a "colourblind" approach to race. The first participant in this conversation said that she

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[131] Lusa Nsenga-Ngoy, 'Terminology' (Leicester: Diocese of Leicester, 2019).

didn't think about the ethnicity of her Global Majority friends, and that they didn't think of themselves that way either. As she spoke, another participant challenged this view – suggesting that being able to "forget" one's ethnicity was something that White people can do, but would be harder for Global Majority people in a world that is dominated by Whiteness. This example was notable because it was one of the first times members of the group disagreed with each other's analysis of a situation, and offered an alternative view using perspectives discussed during the meetings.

These examples illustrate how the group grew in confidence and ability to notice racial dynamics at play in their lives, to discuss issues of race with others, and to challenge and disagree with each other when discussing race.

Is this an effective tool?

The second question that this research asks is "Is critical White Bible study an effective tool for addressing racism in the church?" The above exploration of impact found that, in this case, critical White Bible study has helped White people to develop their White racial identity in positive, antiracist ways, and to grow their ability and confidence to analyse and talk about racial issues. The meetings have many hallmarks of an affinity group – they provided a space for people to practice talking about race, to process their racial identity development and provide mutual

support.[132] The faith element of the meetings should not be undervalued – the

impacts explored above took place in the context of Bible study, and so the meetings

had a more explicit theological element. Participants considered how their theology

was impacted by Whiteness, and explored the possibilities of antiracist hermeneutics

and theology. Drawing on the traditions of liberation theology and Contextual Bible

Study, this group broke down the dualism of the material and spiritual, to apply

theological questions to material injustice, and vice versa. The activity of critical

White Bible study, then, clearly has value as a means to challenge White hegemony.

A note of caution must also be considered. Whilst group members engaged with

questions of Whiteness and grew in their ability to analyse and talk about racial

issues, there is no evidence from this study that this experience has resulted in

participants engaging in antiracist action to materially challenge racial inequality.

Some participants did say they felt more equipped to challenge racist comments, but

none expressed any intention to undertake new explicitly antiracist action. It is

possible that a longitudinal project involving behavioural study might have revealed

some change, but this is not certain. If, as Paul Kivel suggests, the work of White

people seeking to be antiracist is to "understand and challenge such a destructive

system", the Bible studies have helped participants to understand racism, but not

necessarily led to challenging it in significant ways.[133]

The Midwest Critical Whiteness Collective argue that examination of White privilege

can stifle antiracist action. It can result in White people feeling they have undertaken

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[132] Michael and Conger; Apgar and Jewett.
[133] Kivel, p. 30.

what antiracism demands of them, in the form of confessing their privilege. This can reinforce individualistic understandings of racism, and function to relieve White guilt, without transforming it into action.[134] Whilst the scope of the critical Bible studies went beyond examination of White privilege and confessional activities, this criticism does seem to apply, at least in part, to this study. For critical White Bible study to be an effective tool in challenging racism in the church, it cannot stop at self-reflection and examination, but must instead build up confidence and competence to undertake antiracist action.

In his book *Uprooting Racism*, Kivel weaves reflection and points for action together, so that the reader is encouraged to move beyond introspection into action. This model is one that might improve critical White Bible study as a tool for tackling antiracism in the church, particularly if participants were given concrete suggestions of actions they could take in their own churches. The fifth step of the Contextual Bible Study model might also be helpful here, since it suggests collaborating as a group to develop an action plan in response to the discussion.[135]

Conclusion

The above exploration of impact highlights the ways in which critical White bible study might be an effective tool for the church to use to tackle racism. In this study, learning through discomfort, participants found that their faith was deepened, even as they experienced a range of Helms's statuses of racial identity development. The

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[134] Lensmire and others, pp. 420–21.
[135] West and Ujamaa Centre Staff, p. 13.

group grew in confidence to analyse and speak about racial issues, but there was no evidence from this study of increased participation in concrete antiracist action. This might be encouraged through better integrating action into the design of the meetings more explicitly.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Introduction

This dissertation has explored three research questions, covering the impact of reading the Bible with critical attention to Whiteness, the effectiveness of doing so as an antiracist tool, and whether Starr's guidance might form the basis for developing this critical White reading. This concluding chapter revisits these questions, to summarise and evaluate the findings of this research. The implications of these findings are explored, including some personal reflections on my experience as the researcher. Finally, the chapter considers the contribution this research makes to practical theology and its potential application for the church in seeking to challenge racism.

What is the impact on White people of reading the Bible with critical attention to Whiteness?

The title of this dissertation references the Magnificat's promise that the mighty will be dethroned, since the might of uncritical White perspectives in biblical studies and theology have contributed to racism in the church. It seeks to understand whether critical White Bible study might help to "cast down" the dominance of Whiteness in the church.

This research considered the impact on myself as a White facilitator and on White participants of engaging in critical White Bible study. The experience of the Bible studies was varied between participants, and I have tried to resist the (White)

impulse to tidy the group's experiences into a model of linear progress. Consequently, the only simple answer to this research question is that the impact on each person is different. Rather than try – and doubtlessly fail - to test levels of racial bias, or critical attention to Whiteness before and after the course, I chose instead to explore participants' spiritual and emotional responses to the Bible study.

As facilitator

As facilitator I learnt to be attentive to my own desire to exert control, allowing the meetings to be a place that I could benefit from the practice talking about race, rather than always steering the conversation. I came to better understand that the experience of confronting one's own Whiteness is not always one of linear progression, that the exchange of ideas can have value for developing thinking as a group, and to celebrate small signs of change. I grew in confidence to encourage challenging conversations about race, and to respond to outdated language. This experience also helped me to relate to the nerves participants expressed about challenging racism.

For participants

I found it challenging to try to analyse the experience of participants when I had come to see myself as a member of the group. Nonetheless, three key impacts of the experience were identified. Firstly, the group experienced a range of emotional responses, in particular challenge and discomfort, which enabled learning and growth. Secondly, the group deepened their faith, and made connections between issues of race and faith. Thirdly, the group engaged with their own White identities, and built their confidence to think and speak about race.

Conclusion

Both the facilitator and the participants found that the Bible studies increased their awareness of their own Whiteness and the behaviours that emerged from them. Both grew in confidence to talk about race and challenge outdated language or racist comments. Participants also experienced a deepening of faith and a range of emotional reactions.

Is critical White Bible study an effective tool for addressing racism in the church?

Chapter 6 shows how participants engaged with the reality of Whiteness and their own White identities. This is an important step for addressing racism in the church - as Helms writes, "Naming a wrong means that one has the possibility of ending it."[136]

However, the internal work of addressing Whiteness should not be confused with action to materially address White supremacy in the church. Participants in this study did not seem to take renewed antiracist action. There is a risk that White self-examination and confession acts as a conscience-appeasing substitute for significant antiracist action.[137] One way to make the Bible studies a more effective tool might be to include in the meetings suggested actions that participants could take, or getting the group to work together to make a plan of how they will act to respond to the content of the meetings.

[136] Helms, 'The Challenge of Making Whiteness Visible: Reactions to Four Whiteness Articles', p. 719.
[137] Lensmire and others.

Conclusion

Critical White Bible study is an effective tool for highlighting Whiteness and helping White people recognise the harm of the White culture identified in *From Lament to Action.* However, in this case it seems to have been insufficient to generate new antiracist action. This might be addressed by integrating action planning into the meetings.

How can Rachel Starr's guidance be applied to group Bible studies?

Starr's guidance was presented to an academic audience in the context of her own personal reading of Mark 7. To apply her suggestions in a group context, this study drew on the practices and techniques of Contextual Bible Study (CBS). Working with Starr, new language was developed to express the suggestions in less academic, more entry-level terms. These suggestions underpinned the Bible study meetings and were displayed on the wall each time the group gathered. Despite this, in interviews after the 8 weeks of meetings were complete, familiarity with the guidance varied between participants, with one saying they had not noticed them during the meetings, whilst others intended to apply them more widely in their lives. Commenting on the content of the Bible studies, participants particularly appreciated the material that aimed to "seek out possibilities for healing and solidarity" from the voices of Global Majority people.

Conclusion

Starr's guidance provided a helpful framework for developing materials for group critical White Bible study, in particular when used in conjunction with CBS resources. Awareness of the suggestions varied among participants, but they generally appreciated the prominence given to the voices and perspectives of Global Majority people.

Implications and recommendations

This study has highlighted the benefits and limitations of critical White Bible study as a tool for the antiracist cause in the church. Through reading the Bible with critical attention to Whiteness, participants engaged in self-exploration of Whiteness in ways that helped them to recognise the pernicious effects of Whiteness. They did not, however, appear to concretely change their actions or behaviour. This study recommends that future attempts to use critical White Bible study as a tool for growing antiracist identities should integrate antiracist action more explicitly into the group's activities.[138] This could be done, for example, by giving participants a challenge to complete each week, or through the group collectively making a plan for action in the meetings.

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[138] Lensmire and others; Kivel; West and Ujamaa Centre Staff, p. 13.

Contribution

The Church of England's Racial Justice Commission has so far not engaged with the White culture of the Church of England in any depth, simply acknowledging it as one of many barriers to the full inclusion of Global Majority people in the Church. It also has generally been more concerned with influencing the structures of the church, rather than grassroots activity. This case study has, in a small way, contributed to the research the Church might draw on when it comes to devote closer attention to how this White culture might be addressed in local church contexts. It has found that critical White Bible study can help White people engage critically with Whiteness, but does not seem to be enough by itself to stimulate concrete antiracist action.

Conclusion

This case study in reading the Gospel of Luke with critical attention to Whiteness has found that, after the meetings, participants had explored their White identities and were better able to recognise the dynamics of Whiteness in their lives and society. They were impacted by the experience of learning through discomfort, and grew in faith and engagement with the Bible, as well as drawing connections between faith and race. Starr's guidelines, when adapted for small group use, provide a useful framework for these conversations, although they are designed for those who are not new to the concept of critical Whiteness, and need to be adapted accordingly for inexperienced groups. Critical White Bible study appears to have the potential to be a useful tool for addressing racism in the church, but should be developed with antiracist action more explicitly integrated in the design of the meetings. It is my

hope that as the Church of England continues to look at ways to become and

antiracist church, this research will make some contribution to the body of material

available to it.

Appendix 1: Information sheet and consent forms

Information for research participants (Bible study and interview)

Introduction

When we read the Bible, we always read it from a particular context – perhaps whether we are feeling happy or sad, what time of day it is, or how our week has been. We are also influenced by other factors, such as our gender, race, social class, economic status, dis/ability etc.

Racism in our society has meant that sometimes people who are White have interpreted the Bible in ways that have reinforced racial inequality, and the voices of people of Global Majority Heritage (sometimes called BAME or UKME people) have been disregarded.

This research studies the impact among White people of applying four principles to Bible study:

1) Do not ignore the violence present in the text.
2) Be attentive to your own power and vulnerability
3) Consider who you identify with in the story? Do you need to be the central character?
4) Seek out possibilities for healing and solidarity through listening to the voices of Global Majority Heritage.[139]

These principles are designed to help us read the Bible with critical attentiveness to our Whiteness. I hope that this research will help the church understand more about how Bible study can be used to tackle racism.

How can I take part?

There are two ways that you can participate in this study:

1) **Bible study Lent course**- attending the Bible studies and taking part in them. The studies will take place on Thursdays during Lent and after Easter at [venue redacted]. Each meeting will last about an hour and fifteen minutes. The studies will be recorded and observed by [researcher name] for the purposes of her research.

You may also wish to take part in

2) **One-to-one interview** – being interviewed by [researcher name] after the Lent course about the experience and its impact on you. This would be recorded and transcribed by [researcher name] for her research.

Do I have to take part?

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[139] These principles were developed by Dr Rachel Starr, a White Theologian, and presented at the Dismantling Whiteness Conference in April 2021

Participation is voluntary and choosing not to take part will not have any negative consequences.

You have the right to withdraw from continuing with the research at any point during the Lent course and interviews. If you choose to withdraw, your participation in any group work prior to your withdrawal will be retained, as it is integral to the project. If you have taken part in a one-to-one interview and would like to withdraw this contribution, you may do so at any time before 15th May 2022.

What happens to the information the researcher gathers?

All of the information gathered will be stored securely in a password protected digital file. It will be accessed by the researcher ([researcher name]) and her dissertation supervisor, but nobody else.

When the research is written up, no individuals will be named and every effort will be made to remove any identifying features.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of the research will be written up for a Master's dissertation. After this, they may also be published in an academic journal.

I will present the general findings of the research to members of the Oakbury Group of Churches after the dissertation is complete, being especially careful that no individuals are identifiable in this presentation.

The Bible studies that are used for the Lent course may be improved using the findings of this research and published for wider use in the church.

Who is organising the funding of the study?

The Queen's Foundation is covering the costs of my travel and venue hire.

Who has approved the study?

The study has been approved by the Queen's Foundation Research Ethics Panel.

Contact for further information

[Researcher contact details redacted]

Dr Rachel Starr (supervisor) starrr@queens.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this information sheet and considering taking part.

Talking about race and racism can be challenging. I hope that our discussions will be helpful and relaxed, but because difficult topics can arise, these contacts may be useful for you:

[Team Rector contact details]

Samaritans: a charity that provides emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope or at risk of suicide, open 24/7. Call 116 123

Additional information about one-to-one interviews

Interviews will take place in April after the Lent course has finished. They will last approximately 45 minutes.

[researcher name] will record and transcribe the interviews. You will have the chance to read the transcript if you wish and correct any mistakes in it.

Questions will focus on the experience of taking part in the Bible study, such as "How did the studies make you feel?" "Did your ideas change over the course of the study?"

Informed Consent form (Bible studies only)

Title of project: Bible study as an antiracist tool

Name of researcher: [researcher name]

1) I confirm that I have read and understand the attached information sheet giving details of the project.

2) I have had the opportunity to ask the researcher any questions that I had about the project and my involvement in it.

3) I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw from continuing at any time during the Lent course, without giving a reason and without any consequences for me.

4) I understand that my participation in the Lent course prior to my withdrawal will be retained as part of the research.

5) I have been informed that the Bible studies will be recorded and give my consent for this recording to be made.

6) I understand that data gathered in this project may form the basis of a report or other form of publication or presentation.

7) I understand that my name will not be used in any report or other form of publication or presentation and that every effort will be made to remove any identifying features.

8) I agree to the use of anonymised direct quotes from my participation in the Lent course in any report or other form of publication or presentation.

9) I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant name	Researcher name
Participant signature	Researcher signature
Date	Date

Informed Consent form (Interviews)

Title of project: Bible study as an antiracist tool

Name of researcher: [researcher name]

1) I confirm that I have read and understand the attached information sheet giving details of the project.

2) I have had the opportunity to ask the researcher any questions that I had about the project and my involvement in it.

3) I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time during the interview or until 15th May after the interview, without giving a reason and without any consequences for me.

4) I have been informed that the interview will be recorded and give my consent for this recording to be made.

5) I understand that data gathered in this project may form the basis of a report or other form of publication or presentation.

6) I understand that my name will not be used in any report or other form of publication or presentation and that every effort will be made to remove any identifying features.

7) I agree to the use of anonymised direct quotes from my participation in the Lent course in any report or other form of publication or presentation.

8) I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant name	Researcher name
Participant signature	Researcher signature
Date	Date

Appendix 2: Reference paper

Week 4: Luke 10: 25-37

Source	Key points
John Muddiman and John Barton. *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2007)	Lawyer tests Jesus' credentials Jesus twists the question – make the lawyer rethink his presuppositions Unclear whether command to love God and neighbour were joined in this way before Jesus Indictment of the lawyer's attitude "Priest and Levite are not objects of attack but examples of the deficiencies of the best in Judaism"[140]
N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone*. (London: SPCK, 2004.)	Not just a moral lesson about helping people Temple officials wishing to avoid impurity by touching a corpse – at the expense of God's "law of love". Question and answer don't quite match up Question about neighbour designed to show the scandal of Jesus' expansive view.[141]
Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2015.)	Jesus responds with own questions – rhetoric Draws on both Jewish and Greco-Roman conventions – which Mosaic rule should prevail? The commandment to love neighbour should always prevail Greek view of philanthropy in the ancient world Christological reading possible but unpopular

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[140] Muddiman and Barton, p. 942.
[141] Wright, pp. 126–29.

	Lawyer's reluctance to utter the word "Samaritan" Go and do likewise – an example story? A call by Jesus to imitate the compassionate Samaritan.[142]
Margaret Aymer, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and David A. Sanchéz, eds. *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The New Testament*. (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2015.)	Inherit – God's promise of inheritance to Abraham's descendants Testing – dialogue to discover answers Sequence of Levite following priest implies a third Israelite who would pass by – Samaritan subverts expectations If hearers identify with the Samaritan, the parable is an astonishing example of transgressing barriers to help someone. If they identify with the wounded man, as the lawyer likely would, they are the ones needing help from someone deemed deficient. Rather than example – play the role of needing help.[143]
Justo L. González, *Luke: Belief, a Theological Commentary on the Bible*. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.)	Warning on the misuse of theology to self-justify "In situations of racial or ethnic discrimination, it is also used as a call to recognise the goodness of the excluded, and to be ready to receive and learn from those who are considered outsiders." Religious differences as well as racial/ethnic – action of God in those whose theology we find fault with Go and do likewise – not just love your neighbour but become a neighbour to those in need, no matter how alien

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[142] Parsons, pp. 123–25.
[143] Aymer, Briggs Kittredge, and Sanchéz, pp. 238–40.

	they may be – draw near to those who for whatever reason may seem to be alien to us[144]
E. Frank Tupper, *A Scandalous Providence: The Jesus Story of the Compassion of God*. (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2013.)	expectation that the parable will make an anti-clerical critique about those who do not wish to risk their ritual purity But then a Samaritan is introduced... None of the listeners would have allowed a Samaritan to help them if they had a choice Jesus shifts the lawyer's question - not who is my neighbour to help? But who will be my neighbour to help me? Neighbour is not an object to define but any needy person he encountered Shift from object to subject Jesus asks, which of these proved neighbour to the beaten up man?: Requires the lawyer to adopt the posture of the victim - the neighbour can only be the subject who provided help **The view from the ditch** is essential to understand and answer Jesus' question - Jesus puts the lawyer in the vulnerable position, the person in need of help "The Samaritan overcame his sense of victimization and responded with compassionate neighbour-love and the victimized Jesus abandoned racial hatred and accepted the neighbour-love of a despised enemy"

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[144] Gonzalez, pp. 138–40.

	Lawyer could quote the law from memory but not admit the woundedness in his own life
	He had not experienced anyone "doing mercy" to him
	inability of the lawyer to practice the lifestyle of compassion
	We can do nothing but accept the mercy of the God who offers eternal life (it is not a question of "what must I do?")
	The one who proves to be neighbour to us in perhaps unbearable circumstances is the one whom God commands us to love as ourselves.
	refusing to confess his own broken condition, he claimed not to require the compassion of a neighbour
	Resist turning the parable into platitudes and caricatures
	this is an interpretation that does not centre on the actions of the Good Samaritan, but the interrelationship between the compassionate Samaritan and his victimized Jewish enemy - reciprocity and mutuality
	the lawyer locked in habitual self-justification refused to become like the Compassionate Samaritan, failed to experience Jesus' promise of Joy.[145]
Amy-Jill Levine, and Marc Zvi Brettler. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard*	Priest and Levite don't bypass injured man because of ritual

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[145] E. Frank Tupper, *A Scandalous Providence: The Jesus Story of the Compassion of God* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2013), pp. 233–46.

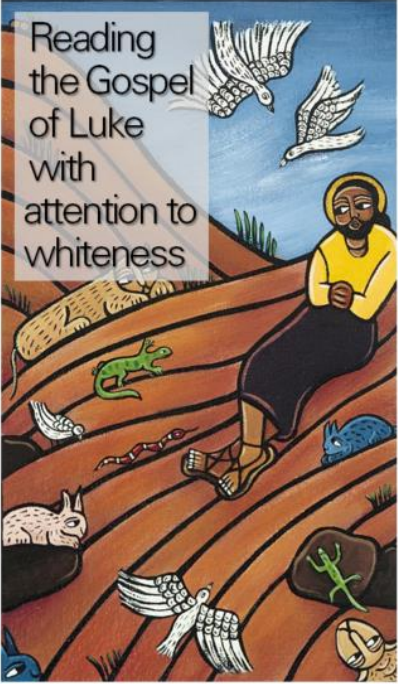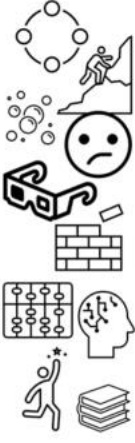|	
Version Bible Translation. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.)	purity concerns - m Naz. 7.1 insist even "A high priest or a Nazarite [a person under utmost purity] … may contract uncleanness because of a neglected corpse. Levites are not forbidden from contact with corpses. Further suggesting the issue is not purity: the priest is not going up to Jerusalem, where impurity would have prevented him from participating in the Temple service, but "down from" the city. Point is about community – mention of two out of three of the main Jewish groupings – parable shocks by mentioning a third person who is not an expected Isrealite but Samaritan. Evokes 2 Chr 28:8-15, wherein enemy Samaritans care for Jewish victims. "more important than determining the difference between neighbor and stranger are the commandment to love both."[146]
Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder, 'Luke'. In *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, edited by Brian K. Blount, Cain Hope Felder, Clarice Jannette Martin, and Emerson B. Powery, 158–85. (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2007.)	Luke does not call the Samarian "good". Race of the beaten man is not identified Relationship between hospitality and ministry.[147]
Martin Luther King 'I've Been to the Mountaintop'. Memphis, Tennessee, 1968. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RyzjELAzE4.	What about if those men did not approach because they were afraid the man was faking it to ambush?

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[146] Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 136.
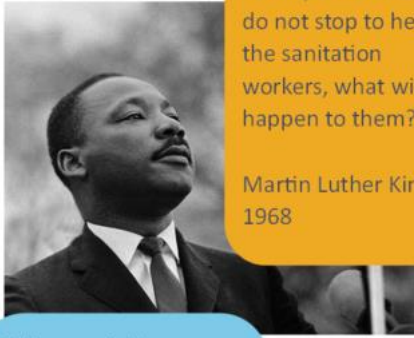[147] Crowder, p. 170.

	"If I stop and help this man, what will happen to me?" vs "If I do not stop and help this man, what will happen to him?"[148]

[148] Martin Luther King, 'I've Been to the Mountaintop' (Memphis, Tennessee, 1968) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RyzjELAzE4> [accessed 22 August 2022].

Appendix 3: Participant booklet

Panel 1:

Reading the Gospel of Luke with attention to whiteness

Panel 2:

Rachel Starr's suggestions for developing a critical white reading of biblical texts

Do not ignore the violence present in the text.

Be attentive to your own power and vulnerability

Consider who you identify with in the story. Do you need to be the central character?

Seek out possibilities for healing and solidarity through listening to the voices of people of Global Majority Heritage.

Rachel Starr (2022) Borderline: Reading Mark 7.24–30 as a white woman, Practical Theology, DOI: 10.1080/1756073X.2021.2023960

Panel 3:

What can Zacchaeus teach us about rejecting the privileges of Whiteness?

Luke 19:1-10

♫ The Zacchaeus Song by The Porter's Gate

'Jesus and Zacchaeus' by Soichi Watanabe

Mary's rebel anthem

Luke 1:39-56

My Lord in which I trust, I have difficulty in how you will act in these awful circumstances

Bravery and horror in our current world need your attention immediately

Where are you God? My whole being is searching for you

You created the world and yet you care for me

Speak to those who most need to hear your voice. Put down the powerful and lift up the vulnerable

Panel 4:

Jesus in the wilderness

Luke 4:1-13

Which icon best represents how you feel?

'Jesus with the creatures' by Laura Jarnes

The Sermon on the Plain
Luke 6: 17-26

Bullet Points

JERICHO BROWN

I will not shoot myself
In the head, and I will not shoot myself
In the back, and I will not hang myself
With a trashbag, and if I do,
I promise you, I will not do it
In a police car while handcuffed
Or in the jail cell of a town
I only know the name of
Because I have to drive through it
To get home. Yes, I may be at risk,
But I promise you, I trust the maggots
Who live beneath the floorboards
Of my house to do what they must
To any carcass more than I trust
An officer of the law of the land
To shut my eyes like a man
Of God might, or to cover me with a sheet
So clean my mother could have used it
To tuck me in. When I kill me, I will
Do it the same way most Americans do,
I promise you: cigarette smoke
Or a piece of meat ...

5

Who is my neighbour?
Luke 10:25-37

"The question is, if I do not stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?"

Martin Luther King, 1968

Whiteness is "a concept of supremacy, superiority and normality (where Black is counterpointed as the direct opposite of these terms)"

Anthony Reddie, 2009

6

The Crucifixion
Luke 23: 32-49

"Despite the obvious similarities between Jesus' death on a cross and the death of thousands of black men and women strung up to die on a lamp-post or tree, relatively few people, apart from black poets, novelists, and other reality-seeing artists, have explored the symbolic connections. Yet, I believe this is a challenge we must face. What is at stake is the credibility and promise of the Christian gospel and the hope that we may heal the wounds of racial violence that continue to divide our churches and our society."

Cone, James H. The Cross and the Lynching Tree. Orbis, 2011.

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Resurrection Hope
Luke 24:13-36

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