Speaking Freedom and Oppression

An analysis of the discourse on racism within the World Council of Churches 1960-1969

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To my grandparents
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Foreword

'And we’ll rise
Over love
Over hate
Through this iron sky that’s fast becoming our mind
Over fear and into freedom’¹

Sometimes a good song is able to express in a few words what you were trying to say in a few pages. The lyrics of the song ‘Iron Sky’ by the Scottish singer Paolo Nutini are an example. The past months I have been thinking about discourse, power, knowledge, racism and the World Council of Churches. His words express powerfully how one’s mind can be blocked by an ‘iron sky’ that limits one’s thinking, seeing and understanding of the world. Although I do not think one can ever break free completely from the orders of knowledge we are part of, Nutini at least challenges us to ‘rise’ through it – to question the knowledges, the boundaries, the categories that we base our judgments upon. This is a challenge I would like to share.

Writing a thesis is a long and intense project and I am happy I can thank many people who helped me along the way. First of all: my friends, my family, Niels’ family and Niels. A special thanks to my friends Kristine, Maayke and Karlien who took the time to read parts of my thesis and comment on it. I would like to thank the archivists of the World Council of Churches, Anne-Emmanuelle Tankam and Hans von Ruette, for allowing me to see the uncatalogued boxes as well. My time in the archives turned out to be extra useful thanks to the enriching conversations I had with two of the other researchers at work: Christian Albers and Dr. Udi Greenberg. In terms of theory, Dr. Leonie Ansems de Vries helped me a lot to bring my analysis of power, knowledge and resistance to a higher level and to structure my thinking. Prof.dr. Luis Lobo-Guerrero challenged me to think of the archive in new ways and gave me the opportunity to write a chapter on it. With her sharp criticism and continuous support Dr. Barbara Henkes pushed me to bring the necessary context in the paper, to leave the unnecessary long quotations out, and to focus on a clear argumentation.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my grandparents. It is to them I want to dedicate my thesis.

Yara van ‘t Groenewout
August 2014

Introduction

‘The wind of change is blowing through this continent [Africa, YG]’, spoke Harold Macmillan, the British prime minister in 1960 to the South African parliament in Cape Town. The 1960s were a period of change. Liberation movements fought for the independence of their countries. The Cold War climaxed in the war in Vietnam and was deteriorated by the development of nuclear arms. Protest movements in the USA, but also in other parts of the world, challenged these wars. Students in Paris and other European capitals revolted. Industrialization heavily influenced life in many societies, heightened by urbanization and new forms of labour.

In this decade of protests, global tensions and new technologies, race relations became problematized and powerfully challenged. The civil rights movements in the United States struggled for equal rights for black citizens; liberation movements in Southern Africa tried to reveal the injustice going on in their countries led by white minority regimes. Also, the United Nations (UN) spoke out on this matter in 1960 with its ‘Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples’ in which it reaffirmed the right to self-determination and stated that every form of ‘alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights’. In 1965 the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD). It defined racial discrimination as ‘any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life’. It condemned apartheid and other policies of racial separation and segregation. In the 1960s an international civil society emerged demanding the end of apartheid and repressive rule in Southern Africa. This protest took shape in the many anti-apartheid movements all over the world and in already existing organizations, such as the churches. The World Council of Churches (WCC), an international ecumenical council established in 1948 with headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, was one of them. The discourse within the Council on racism from 1960 to 1969 is the object of my study.

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5 Ibid., Part 1, art.1, par.1.
The World Council of Churches and racism

'Few contemporary issues have more profoundly marked the life of the World Council of Churches and how people perceive it than the struggle against racism and in particular the involvement in South Africa. [...] The condemnation of racism as sin and the rejection of its theological justification as heresy were decisive in shaping ecumenical reflection about the unity of the church in its constitutive relationship to the quest for justice in human community'.

These are the words of Konrad Raiser, WCC General Secretary from 1993 to 2003, in the introduction of a volume celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) in 1994. In 1969 the Central Committee of the WCC adopted the Programme, after the Council’s General Assembly had demanded such a programme a year earlier. The aim of the PCR was to ‘eliminate’ racism. It defined racism as ‘ethnocentric pride in one’s own racial group’ coupled with the belief that the group’s characteristics are fundamental and with a negative feeling towards other groups consequentially excluding these groups from full participation in community life. It focused explicitly on ‘white racism’, referring to the ‘accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of the white peoples’. The Programme was presented as an act of solidarity, as the churches’ efforts so far were considered to be ‘too little and too late’. The most controversial part of the Programme was the Special Fund. This fund was set up to donate money to ‘organizations of oppressed racial groups or organizations supporting victims of racial injustice’. An amount of $200,000 was made available from the reserves of the WCC and the member churches were requested to collect an additional $300,000. The donations were meant as a tool to redistribute economic wealth and hence to balance political power relations.

The strong stance the Council took in 1969 against racism presents us with a case of discontinuity, according to the WCC literature on the Programme. Baldwin Sjollema, the first Programme Director, described it as a ‘turning point’ translating ‘challenging words into eloquent action’. Ans van der Bent, the first librarian of the Council, spoke of a ‘before and after 1968’ when the General Assembly demanded such a programme. Thomas Wieser, WCC staff member, defined the launch of the PCR as a moment of ‘Kairos’ – a crucial moment in time. They contrasted the concrete ‘actions’ taken as consequence of the Programme with the many

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10 Ibid., 270–277.
11 Ibid., 277.
12 Ibid., 273.
statements the WCC issued before 1968 without considerable effect. From its establishment in 1948 onwards the WCC took a stance against ‘race discrimination’ and ‘any form of segregation based on race, colour or ethnic origin’. These general and careful formulated statements on race relations were followed by more concrete study projects in Africa as a reaction to the apartheid policies of the white minority regime in South Africa and the processes of decolonization in Southern Africa. These studies brought knowledges on the relation between race and politics in Southern Africa to the headquarters of the WCC. The 1960 Cottesloe Consultation, a multi-racial consultation initiated by the WCC with church representatives in Cottesloe (South Africa), is very important in this regard. Here, a position against apartheid was adopted, going more into detail on the practical consequences of this policy on the daily life of the South Africans than was done before. As a consequence, two South African member churches, the white Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk, both firm supporter of the apartheid regime, left the World Council of Churches.

Over the 1960s, the new member churches from Africa, but also representatives affiliated to the civil rights movements in the USA pushed the Council to take a stronger stance against racism. 1960 to 1969 is the time period I research. In 1960 not only the Cottesloe consultation was held, also the Secretariat on Race and Ethnic Relations was established. The path towards the consultation and the work of the Secretariat are the starting point of my paper: both reflect the trend to move away from the very general and neutral statements on race relations to more detailed analyses of specific situations. 1969 is the end point of the research. In this year the Programme to Combat Racism was approved and entered into force. The Programme allowed for new policies, such as the withdrawal of investments in Southern Africa and the lobby to companies and governments to do the same. I will consider these new policies and relate them to my analysis of the 1960s.

**Understanding discontinuity**

This apparent discontinuity is the focus of my thesis. Inspired by the French philosopher Michel Foucault, I will analyse how the discourse on racism evolved in the 1960s within the WCC enabling the adoption of the PCR. Foucault asked the question ‘How is it that at certain moments and in certain orders of knowledge, there are these sudden take-offs?’ He answered his question by considering ‘what governs statements’, in other words, what allows certain

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knowledges, ideas, and identifications to become powerful. He thereby provides us with an intriguing conception of power; not as a physical or constraining force, but as a circulation and productive force. We can visualize power as circulating in a ‘web’, an order of knowledge. It creates identifications, it produces knowledge and it promotes certain ideas. The production of knowledge and the functioning of power are inseparable. They meet each other at the level of the discourses, which can be defined as the body of statements (thought, spoken, written, behavioural expressions etcetera) referring to a certain subject or theme, thereby creating a stable unity. It is within the discourse, within the collection of all these statements, that certain concepts, knowledges, narratives, and identifications make sense, or do not. Behind these discourses lay a set of rules determining what can be said, what counts as scientific, what is accepted by others. Through an analysis of discourse, the expression of this set of rules, one gets an understanding of the power relations being produced by knowledge and producing knowledge.

In this essay, I will examine the identifications, stronger or weaker linkages to other discourses, new hierarchies among knowledges, and the transitions of ideas within the discourse on racism produced in the context of the World Council of Churches. I will focus mainly on texts that challenged the standpoints of the WCC. As Foucault noted, by looking at opposition one gets a better understanding of the knowledge system, the *regime du savior*, the regime through which power functions. Opposition is not to be understood as a force outside power, rather it functions within the circulation of power. This understanding of opposition as internal to power is crucial for my thesis. I discovered that challenges to the WCC’s discourse on racism came not only from ‘outsiders’. Opposition and power are in this case not two opposites. Instead, throughout the 1960s staff members working on the issue of ‘race and ethnic relations’ problematized the work of the Council with regards to ‘race relations’. They worked actively to emphasize certain identifications and to spread certain knowledges that pushed the boundaries of generally accepted understandings. My research shows that looking back the Programme to Combat Racism might seem to be a sudden break with the past; at the level of discourse one can trace many discursive elements in the 1960s that enabled this Programme. Many knowledges on which the Programme was based circulated already in the discourse on racism, but were subjugated – they only reached a small circle of participants in the discourse. Hence, I see the adoption of the Programme not so much as a break, but rather as a reshuffling of discursive elements which allowed change through their constant interactions and reactions. Throughout the analysis I will consider how the discourse was produced: what kind of statements were expressed, how were they dispersed, who was allowed to speak on basis on what criteria and

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when? Secondly, I aim to disentangle how the discourse functioned within the WCC: how did it react to power relations and influence them? How did it align with or separate itself from other discourses? Lastly, I consider its productivity: what identifications, ideas and knowledges did it normalize? In short, I ask three questions: how was the discourse on racism produced; how did it function; and what did it produce?

In order to grasp the transformations in the discourse on racism I analysed texts – speeches, conference reports, correspondence, preparatory papers, minutes, studies – dealing with racism and race relations. I visited the archives of the World Council of Churches for three weeks collecting more than 5,500 pages of primary documentation. Combined with the articles in the journal of the World Council of Churches *The Ecumenical Review* and official WCC reports kept in the library of the University of Groningen, this is a considerable amount of ‘discourse’ to analyse. As said, the Programme to Combat Racism is considered to be one of the main achievements of the WCC. This is reflected in how the PCR is remembered within the WCC: there are quite some accounts of the Programme and the involvement of the WCC against racism written by former staff members.23 Also, the WCC archives give a considerable amount of attention to the Programme: its collection is prominently mentioned on the website and the collection is catalogued very detailed.24 For a researcher it is very convenient to use a collection that contains so much useful information. However, it is also a risk: it can lead to an uncritical repetition of the story line that is produced by the archives by following its orderings and categorizations.25 Therefore, I am grateful to the archivists of the Council by allowing me to use uncatalogued boxes as well. This gave me the opportunity to contextualize the sources in a new way and to find criticisms to the decisions that were made.

**Terminology**

When speaking on a discourse on racism it is necessary to reflect on the definition of racism. My aim is not to define ‘racism’; rather I reflect the usages within the WCC of ‘racism’. Up to the mid-1960s texts usually referred to ‘race and ethnic relations’ without defining to the two terms.

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Usually the concepts were used in a similar way as categories such as nationality or religion – as categorizations that divide people. In statements on ‘race and ethnic relations’ race is discarded as fundamental category – to God all are equal. When talking about practices that one might label as racism, often terms as ‘racial tensions’ or ‘racial inequality’ were used. These years are marked by moderate wordings. It is only after the WCC’s World Conference on Church and Society in 1966, one of the bigger conferences organized by the WCC to speak about the ‘technical and social revolutions’ of that time, that the term ‘racism’ is introduced. Although I analyse the discourse on racism, I include these early statements on ‘race and ethnic relations’ as well. I see them as part of the discourse on racism, although they were labelled differently.

Under the heading of ‘race and ethnic relations’ a variety of issues was discussed: racism as an interpersonal phenomenon, decolonization, apartheid, migration, development, the USA civil rights movement. It does not mean these problems were the same, but all were understood through the use of similar conceptualizations. Again, I will follow the statements and analyse when what situation was considered to be an issue of ‘race and ethnic relations’. The consequence is that I do not always distinguish apartheid in South Africa or the Rhodesian white minority regime. Within the discourse on racism they were usually treated at the same time as part of the same problem. Another consequence of relying on the conceptualizations of the Council is that my analysis has a strong focus on the WCC’s involvement in Africa. The discourse on racism in the 1960s became increasingly dominated by a European versus African dichotomy. Although the input of the USA civil rights movement activists is crucial in understanding the transformation in the discourse on racism, it was mainly characterized by its focus on events in Southern Africa. The Americans provided the words used to react to racism in Southern Africa. The Programme to Combat Racism continued to focus dominantly on Southern Africa, although other ‘racial oppressed groups’ got funding as well.

A few other concepts demand some further clarification. The discourse on racism produced within the World Council of Churches is clearly marked by Christian language. Certain concepts, such as unity or universality, have more meaning to them than a non-theologian, like me, notes at first sight. The above two notions have a distinctive meaning in Christianity, which I have tried to explain in chapter 2. Similarly, the relation between Church and politics is an object of heated debate between different Christian traditions. Again, I have attempted to understand the debate in the second chapter by characterizing some of the traditions represented in the World Council. These characterizations and theological explanations are far from complete, but, to my opinion, adequate enough to provide a well-informed understanding of the discourse on racism.
A last short remark is that I will use the word ‘churches’ referring to the individual congregations and the word ‘Church’ when referring to the whole of Christian believers.26

**Historiography and relevance**

The history of the WCC and the programme against racism is very well recorded, not in the last place by the WCC itself. The Council has published extensively on its ‘struggle’ against racism. Twenty-five years after the PCR was initiated, Pauline Webb former vice-chairman of the Central Committee of the WCC, edited a volume with reflections of amongst others Baldwin Sjollema and Elisabeth Adler, the first reviewer of the Programme.27 Many articles in *The Ecumenical Review* make reference to the PCR and the Council’s involvement against racism. The search ‘the programme to combat racism’ gives 201 results at the website of this journal; some articles are reports by staff on the work done in name of the Programme, other articles are reflections on the history of the Council in relation to racism.28 In the book *Breaking down the Walls* the first librarian of the Council, Ans van der Bent made a selection of statements by the WCC on racism, also including statements on ‘race and ethnic relations’ or ‘interracial relations’.29 Besides that, the development of the World Council of Churches in the period 1948-1968 is extensively covered in the edited second volume of *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*. Most of the pieces of this work are written by people closely involved with the WCC at that moment, like Baldwin Sjollema and Eugene Carson Blake, the second General Secretary.30 The periods before and after are well documented in the first and third volume of this series.31

There is however not much scholarship on the World Council of Churches in general and its involvement with racism in particular written outside the WCC context. Two recent edited volumes on the WCC and the ecumenical movement show an emerging interest in the Council.32

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29 Bent, *Breaking down the Walls*.
Both volumes do not consider the involvement of the WCC against racism, but focus on other discourses such as human rights and the unity of the churches. In addition, there is some research on the debates within member churches on racism and apartheid, such as the dissertation of Dutch theologian and historian Erica Meijers on the position of the two biggest Protestant churches in the Netherlands on apartheid in the period 1948-1972. In her study she connects the events within the WCC to the positions within the two Dutch churches. However, a research to the changes in the discourse on racism enabling the PCR is missing.

My research fills this vacuum. It thereby adds to our understanding of political life. Politics is more than interaction between states, government decisions or political parties. This research shows how the World Council of Churches as a societal actor is involved in politics by expressing its solidarity with ‘the oppressed’, by handing over money, by circulating power. Through the Council, member churches all over the world were connected which allowed the circulation of knowledge from one place to the other. Through The Ecumenical Review, the conferences and the reports on the main events perspectives on racism, thinking on the role of the Church, identifications such as oppressors and oppressed, were spread. As I have argued above, knowledge is an intrinsic part of power, and the other way around. By contributing to knowledge production, the Council operated in power relations and thereby in politics.

In my attempt to grasp the changes within the discourse on racism produced within the WCC, I contribute to thinking on change and opposition. In both cases, I try to avoid the production of a dichotomy: of a ‘before and after’, and an ‘in- and outside’ binary. Instead, I think of change as continuous discontinuity. As opposition is part of power, both power and knowledge contain many ambivalences and ambiguities. These uncertainties constantly challenge power from within and constantly allow for transformations in the discourse. In the first chapter I delve into the work of Michel Foucault to give a more elaborate understanding of power, knowledge, change and opposition. I use this theoretical chapter to try to understand the changes in the discourse on racism.

Konrad Raiser called the Programme ‘decisive in shaping ecumenical reflection about the unity of the church in its constitutive relationship to the quest for justice in human community’. In the third and fourth chapter I will argue that it is the other way around: thinking on the unity of the Church and the role of the Church in safeguarding justice is crucial to understand the adoption of the Programme. Throughout these two chapters I will try to challenge the dominant story lines on the Council’s involvement against racism authorized by the WCC. Instead of a story with clear pro- and opponents and with a marked turning point, I

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35 Raiser, “Foreword.”
will consider the struggles, the irregularities and the continuous discontinuities in the discourse on racism. To provide for a better understanding of the development of this discourse in 1960-1969, the second chapter presents a history of the WCC from 1948-1960. I will highlight some developments, some crucial concepts and policies, that continued to influence the discourse on racism in the 1960s. The most important are the theological discourses on unity, universality, and the role of the Church in politics and society; the notion of a responsible society; the Rapid Social Change programme; and the statements concerning ‘race and ethnic relations’ and apartheid. The third and fourth chapter present the analysis of the discourse on racism in the period 1960-1969. In the conclusion, I will come back to the three questions I asked before: how was the discourse on racism produced; how did it function; and what did it produce?

This thesis is written in the Netherlands in a time that a group of young thinkers challenges institutional racism. They are supported by studies of the Dutch Institute for Human Rights and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance who observe, often implicit, discrimination based on race on the work floor, in education and in the public debate.\textsuperscript{36} Especially the debate whether or not the figure of Zwarte Piet is racist is very heated. The changes within the discourse on racism within the WCC illustrate that exchanges of perspectives, of knowledges and of experiences are necessary to foster mutual understanding. Through the interaction with people from Asia, Africa and Latin-America, the European and North-American Christians were confronted with other perspectives on what they considered to be normal. Only through such interaction one can come to understand why apparent harmless gestures hurt other people. The WCC’s involvement against racism offers an optimistic example how some men tried to escape the ‘iron skies’ that limited their thinking in order to open up for others.

Chapter 1: Power circulations and how to research them

Within the World Council of Churches a transition took place: the policies proposed by the Programme to Combat Racism would not have been approved a decade earlier. Based on the thinking of the French philosopher Michel Foucault, I will examine this transition at a discursive level and analyse how identifications, categorizations, ideas and knowledges changed in the 1960s allowing for the Programme to be adopted. This chapter explores the work of Foucault in order to give an understanding of power as a circulatory force enabling and enabled by knowledges. This will help to understand the discontinuity within the WCC not as a radical break, but rather as a change in the direction of the circulation of power enabled a constant reshuffling of discursive elements in the preceding years.

1.1 Truth and Power

Foucault has written extensively on the workings of power and the relation between power and knowledge. Instead of asking ‘what is power’, he poses the question ‘how does power function?’37 He conceives power as circulation – it cannot be located in a stable centre, but it is dispersed, it circulates, it spreads or diminishes.38 Power forms a web of knowledges, identifications, narratives and categories which enables what is known, and what is considered ‘normal’. In an interview in 1975, Foucault stated: ‘in thinking of the mechanisms of power, I am thinking rather of its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives.’39 In this, he differs from philosophers who hold a negative conception of power: power as prohibiting and limiting. Instead, Foucault considers power to be productive – it shapes subjects, categories, hierarchies of knowledge, and therefore ‘truth’. Furthermore, it is a form of action: power comes into being when it is exercised – when it acts upon actions.40 In doing so, it affects knowledge and in return, knowledge reaffirms power relations.41 This makes power omnipresent: it is constantly produced and producing.42

Power functions within a certain context. Foucault took Western modern society as his object of research; I will limit myself to the World Council of Churches, although the Council obviously

37 Foucault, “The Subject and Power.”
38 Foucault, The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge.
40 Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 789.
41 Foucault and Gordon, Power/knowledge, 50.
42 Foucault, The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge, 1:93.
functioned within a broader web of power relations. The Palestinian-American professor in English and literature studies Edward Said has extended Foucault’s circulation of power to an international context. In his works *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) he points out how power is carried by material interactions, but also by works of literature and other cultural artefacts. The crucial point Said makes is that imperialism was much more than an economic or political adventure, it had a very important cultural component: power was exercised through practices of defining, categorizing, and labelling. In literature, but also through science, categories were repeated, and thereby became a solid foundation for further policies. He based his argument on what he calls ‘Orientalism’: a European invented image of the ‘Orient’ upheld by teaching, writing and researching the Orient as object. A discourse was stabilized which was based on a distinction between the ‘Orient’ and the ‘Occident’ and thereby reaffirmed European authority over the ‘Orient’: expressions about the ‘Orient’ had to refer to this discourse in order to make sense. The constant repetition and reaffirmation of categories and identities enabled a hierarchy between ‘civilizations’ and ‘peoples’. Through this system of thought practices of dominance were supported. This hierarchy became the basis for further policies and for further writing, which thereby strengthened this discourse.

This means that power and knowledges are interacting with each other, enabling, challenging and limiting each other. This interplay shows itself at a discursive level, in that what is said, written, thought, behaved. Foucault looks at how statements relate to each other, ‘the interplay of their appearances and dispersion’. He asks how statements together can create a body of knowledge, which he calls a discursive unity: according to what rules are certain statements included, activated and legitimized in such a discursive unity? If one can define a set of rules regulating the appearance of statements, it is possible to speak of a discourse. A discourse contains discursive elements: building blocks of the discourse, such as identifications, categorizations, narratives, knowledges, debates. I will examine the discourse on racism, meaning that I will analyse the texts produced within the WCC producing understandings of racism (and of race relations in the period up to 1968). The aim of my analysis is to understand the conditions that determined what statements on racism were accepted, rejected, normalized or ridiculed. Foucault speaks of ‘discursive formations’ which are the orders behind discourses - the ‘correlations, positions and functionings, transformations between a number of statements.'

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45 Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 35.
47 Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 35.
His objects of analysis are the rules of formation - the conditions of existence - of the statements within such a discursive formation.

Expressions of power are interfering in the production of knowledge in the sense that they enable and limit what can be said, who is allowed to speak based on which characteristics in what circumstances. On the other hand, they also exclude others thereby confirming a hierarchy between subjects: between expert and layman or between the studying subject and the studied object. In short, discourse 'is a space of differentiated subject-positions and subject-functions'. Subjects are categorized, hierarchized, ordered and labelled and their behaviour is assessed accordingly. In return, power is confirmed through discursive practices, contributions to a discourse 'establishing norms for developing conceptualizations that are used to understand the phenomena which emerge as a result of the discursive delimitation'. The American International Relations Scholar James Der Derian used the notion of intertextuality to indicate how texts copy concepts of each other, refer to each other, and repeat each other. In this way, stability of identifications, categorizations and ideas is produced: meaning is derived from an interrelationship of texts. A discourse on a certain issue, in this case racism, exists by value of these stabilities: these influence what is considered normal and what not, who is considered an expert and who not. In this way power finds its expression in discourse: in the texts, the addresses, the correspondence, the papers, all that is said on a certain issue.

To conclude, being in the position to add to or to change the direction of a discourse is hence a position of power – it makes discursive practices also political practices. Knowledge, or discourse as Foucault calls it, is not only the result of the struggle for power, it is also the battlefield itself – ‘it is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power to seize’.

1.2 Change and power as movement

‘Who’s gonna sing the song of change if no one can image life outside the beaten track?’ asks the Danish singer-songwriter Tina Dico. This question is very relevant to this research into the transition that took place within the World Council of Churches. Changes at the discursive level enabled the adoption of the Programme to Combat Racism. In this part I will try to understand

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49 Said, Orientalism.
53 Ibid., 6.
54 Foucault, “The Order of Discourse,” 110.
change. This questions intrigues, because if all are operating in an order of knowledge, if statements are enable or disabled by certain conditions, if we are all captured in a web of power, which determines ‘normality’, how is this change possible? How is it possible for subjects to think differently? Based on Foucault, we can see power as ordering. It establishes a web of knowledge, identifications, and categorizations which influences the acting of the subjects operating within that web. It would however be a misconception to conceive of this web as static. Instead, it is constantly working to stabilize itself reacting to expressions that challenge it. In order to understand change, I would like to find out how forms of resistance to this power operate in relation to the circulation of power. Foucault’s chapter in his first volume of *The History of Sexuality* called *The Will to Knowledge* is extremely helpful to get a clearer understanding.

In his explanation of the functioning of power, Foucault does not define power as one uniform force, but as a multiplicity of ‘force relations’. These are constantly interacting which each other trying to determine to flow of power through the web it has produced. The ‘force relations’ are always at work through ‘ceaseless struggles and confrontations, [which] transforms, strengthens, or reverses them’.\(^5\) It is therefore not possible to rely on a power-resistance binary, which opposes the two with each other. As IR-scholar Leonie Ansems de Vries argues: such a relation ‘fails to grasp the complexities and relationalities’ which are at play in the governance/resistance relation.\(^6\) Power and resistance do not exist as two forces opposed to each other; resistance is not exterior to power and neither is power exterior to resistance: both function through the multiplicity of force relations in the same web. Power is everywhere, and so is resistance.

In her upcoming book, Leonie Ansems de Vries aims to ‘re-imagine political life in a way that embraces difference and resistance’.\(^7\) She does so by combining the work of Foucault and Gilles Deleuze with Thomas Hobbes and Immanuel Kant. Using Hobbes work, she comes to a conceptualization of political life as being in ‘motion’ similar as the blood-circulation within the human body. This is a very powerful visualisation of the workings of power which is applicable to the case of the WCC as well. Let us imagine power circulating through a web in a similar way as blood is flowing through the body. It is an ever circulating cycle carrying all kinds of goods – nutrition, waste, oxygen, bacteria and viruses. In a similar way, power carries all the forces that are operating within it and through it to the parts of its web. The forces are struggling in order to direct the bloodstream, trying to get at the vital functions of the body. Consequentially, we can see resistance not so much as an outside reaction to power aiming to overthrow a power regime.

\(^5\) Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, 1:92.
Rather, it is part of power trying to influence its direction by aligning with other ‘force relations’ or by acting against them. Together, ‘force relations’, whether they are called power or resistance, produce an order which is adapting to the struggles going on within, which is comparable to blood that is constantly flowing, ordering, and reacting to ‘events’ within the body. The work of Foucault, but also forthcoming publications of Leonie Ansems de Vries are useful in that they move away from a binary opposition between inside and outside, between dominating and dominated, between power and resistance. Instead, they show that rarely one domination is dominating; it can be plural. Also, power and resistance are not clear-cut categories. Resistance functions through the web of power as well, not always being recognized as resistance, and also not always recognizing itself as resistance. It is dispersed and can take multiple forms. It can circulate in the margins, it can be silenced, but it can also be accepted when considered to be harmless.

How to translate this concept of power to the World Council of Churches? In my upcoming chapters I will not use the WCC as a stable centre from which power flowed into the member churches and spread over the world. Instead, I will take the Council as a web, in which power was operating. I see the Council as the consequence of the knowledges and force relations among those who operated within its web trying to establish its identity and policies. Consequentially, the identity of the WCC is not fixed: individuals and groups are struggling, not physically, but discursively, and as such defining the WCC and their relation to it. In this thesis the WCC is conceived as a ‘web’ through which power flows as result of the force relations within trying to influence – whether this is to alter radically, change lightly, or to confirm – the course of power. Resistance is hence not so much an attempt for a radical breakdown of the order produced by power, but rather challenges the course of power operating within power itself.

This changed course of power is expressed in discourse, but also influenced by discourse. Foucault stresses not to use discourse as something fixed with clear defined categories: multiple discourses exist next to each other, borrowing from each other, weakening, strengthening, opposing or confirming each other. They are the grids within a web enabling, but also hindering the force relations in their attempts to direct the course of power. Just as power contains resistance in it, discourses contain ambiguous and open identifications, ideas, and knowledges. Power as movement always tries to fix these categories, but the fixation it tries to achieve is constantly challenged as well. Within a discourse these ambiguities and ambivalences remain and thereby allow the possibility of change. This change is not coming from the outside as there is no exterior to discourse either. It is the result of discursive elements getting normalized and institutionalized by power.

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59 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge.*
Knowledge produced by power and expressed in discourses is not singular: multiple knowledges exist produced by the force relations operating in power. Foucault mentions subjugated knowledges, these are knowledges that are present, but which are ‘disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy’. We will see in the upcoming chapters how subjugated knowledges move from the margins to the centre of the power circulations, how they are made legitimate and valuable. In a similar way, multiple identifications of people within a discourse exist, labelling the same person for example as communist or as freedom fighter. While these multiple identifications are present within a discourse, some are more visible as they are institutionalized: they are more actively spread, more often reaffirmed, and constantly repeated by the circulation of power. In the upcoming chapters, I will analyse the shifts in what identifications got institutionalized, and how others lost their institutionalized position.

1.3 Discourse analysis

Based on the ideas of Foucault, I will analyse the discourse within the World Council of Churches on racism. I will try to capture the changing identifications, knowledges, and categorizations and how discursive elements were introduced and configured. The question Foucault asks is ‘How did they [power relations] make possible these kinds of discourses, and conversely, how were these discourses used to support power relations?’ This is similar to what I aim to find out about the discourse on racism within the WCC: how was the discourse on racism produced and how did it function in relation to the power relations? What did it produce as result?

In order to answer these questions, I will analyse the discourse on racism within the World Council of Churches in the period 1960-1969. I will use the written remains of this period as my data: publications, study reports, correspondence, minutes, addresses, preparatory papers, conference reports. As Der Derian argues it is through the interplay of these texts, through the way they refer to each other, through their repetition or silencing of each other that stable meanings emerge. The American International Relations scholar Roxanne Doty comes with the discursive practices approach to analyse these meanings and to reveal the conditions of formation that allowed them to emerge. She uses a Foucaultian perspective on power to contribute to a broader understanding of foreign policy making – how the ones making foreign policy are part of a network of power relations, producing knowledges, ideas and subjects. She is interested in ‘how the subjects, objects, and interpretive dispositions were socially

60 Foucault and Gordon, Power/knowledge, 82.
61 Foucault, The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge, 1:97.
62 Der Derian, “The Boundaries of Knowledge and Power in International Relations.”
constructed such that certain practices were made possible’. In her work she analyses representational strategies that naturalize, categorize and define subjects in North-South relations. These strategies are: 1. Presupposition – creating background knowledge that is taken to be true; 2. Classification – the placing of human beings into categories; 3. Surveillance – procedures of observation and examination turning subjects into objects of science: how was seemingly objective knowledge established over certain subjects?; 4. Negation – the denial of effective agency by neglecting, ignoring, dismissing knowledge coming from these subjects. An example Doty gives is the statement ‘people without history’; 5. Positioning subjects vis-à-vis one another; and, 6. Predication – the qualities the subjects are related to.

With her work, Doty offers very useful tools to conduct a discourse analysis. My analysis is inspired by it, but I have used her framework loosely. Doty’s analysis could lead to a rather static presentation of a discourse, while I would like to open up its dynamic nature focusing on the contradictions and ambivalences it entails: how the discursive elements reacted to each other allowing for new dominations and new norms to be stabilized. Therefore, I will present my analysis chronologically to show how the discourse on racism was produced at certain moments in time at certain places and how this differed from before and from what would come. For these moments in time, I ask: who was allowed to speak and why; what identifications did they use; what themes did they address; what was the impact of their statements? How were discursive elements used, shuffled, strengthened or weakened through these statements? How did the discourse on racism relate to other discourses within the WCC?

The next question is how to select the events and the documentations that were part of these events? In order to limit my search criteria I chose to follow the historical accounts produced by the WCC staff telling which events were important in the WCC’s involvement against racism: the two General Assemblies in 1961 and 1968; the Cottesloe consultation of 1960; the consultation on Christian Practice and Desirable Action in Social Change and Race Relations in 1964; the World Conference on Church and Society in 1966; and the Notting Hill consultation in 1969. Also, the work of the Secretariat on Racial and Ethnic Relations is relevant. This Secretariat was established in 1960 to, as the name already tells, study ‘racial and ethnic relations’. These events structured my research in the archives of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. I collected preparatory correspondence, preparatory speeches, section reports, and final reports of these events in the archives. Beforehand, I wanted to focus on texts that opposed the order of the WCC. However, as my theoretical introduction has shown, such a dichotomy between order and opposition would impose a rather static categorization on this history. Therefore, I have used all

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texts dealing with racism; the texts to which is referred by others in texts on racism and race relations; texts who dealt with other relevant issues as development, universality, unity, church and politics, the use of violence. This thesis is too small to present all of the statements to you. In my text I have highlighted the passages which are most often referred to by other texts or who capture most adequately the arguments also made in other texts. All statements together are the basis for my account of the reshuffling of the discursive elements in the discourse on racism within the WCC in the 1960s.
Chapter 2: The World Council of Churches and racism in 1948-1960

This chapter will introduce the World Council of Churches in order to understand in what context and for what reasons the WCC was established. It introduces the organizational structure of the WCC and the most relevant debates concerning the identity of the Council in order to comprehend the changes in the discourse on racism from the 1960s onwards. Lastly, I will present the WCC policies and statements concerning ‘racial and ethnic relations’, apartheid and decolonization.

2.1 The founding of the World Council of Churches, 1910-1948

2.1.1 The Ecumenical Movement
The World Council of Churches has its roots in the Christian student movements and the missionary movements of the nineteenth century.66 Ruth Rouse, who was involved herself in the student movements, identifies the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA, founded in 1844), the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA, founded in 1854), and the Student Christian Movement (SCM) as ‘experimental laboratories in which new ecumenical attitudes, individual and corporate, were produced’.67 The missionary movements convened at missionary conferences such as the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910. This conference is usually considered as the start of the modern ecumenical movement out of which the World Council of Churches emerged.68 It brought together 600 representatives of missionary societies in order to discuss ‘missions among non-Christian peoples’.69 Most of the participants were Protestant and came from Europe or the United States. Only seventeen of them represented so-called ‘younger churches’, a label referring to churches emerged out of mission in non-Western territories. Following the conference, representatives of missionary societies and leaders of the Christian student movements initiated new steps to promote ecumenical unity, although their efforts did not immediately result into one official body. Three new movements were set-up after the 1910 conference in Edinburgh: the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work (Life and Work, 1925); the Continuation Committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order

(Faith and Order, 1910); and the International Missionary Council (IMC, 1910). They formed the basis for what in 1948 would become the World Council of Churches.

All had a different approach. The Continuation Committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order was established in 1910 by the American Bishop Charles H. Brent, who was dissatisfied with the attempts of the Edinburgh Conference to overcome divisions in faith. He wanted to create a forum to discuss the causes of division on a theological level in order to remove them. Faith and Order offered a theological approach to the quest for unity: it aimed at finding 'truth', which was understood as the path that God had set for humanity, together. The third movement, the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work, was initiated by the Archbishop of Uppsala Nathan Söderblom and the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America in 1925. In contrast to Faith and Order, this movement aimed at bringing the different churches together not in faith, but in common action. This movement was based on the belief that doctrine divides, but common service and common action in social affairs unite. The International Missionary Council evolved from the continuation committee of the Edinburgh Conference and was formally established in 1921 in the USA. Its aim was ‘to help unite the Christian forces of the world in seeking justice in international and inter-racial relations’.

Another often cited example is the book by the secretary of the IMC Oldham called Christianity and the Race Problem, in which he stated: ‘we must allow no walls of difference to shut us off from the humanity that is in every man. Whatever significance race may have, it cannot do away with the claim of every man to be treated as a man.’

Inspired by the League of Nations, the representatives of these three movements and the Christian student movements took steps to achieve further cooperation in the 1930s and

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71 Latourette, “Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Council.”
75 This committee was installed to ‘carry forward the activities and to perpetuate the spirit of the Edinburgh gathering’ by doing investigations, studies, publications, organization of conferences, and correspondence. John R. Mott, “The Continuation Committee,” The International Review of Missions 1, no. 1 (1912): 63.
In 1937 these men, as it were almost all men at this stage, proposed a new organization that would become the World Council of Churches. Both the Faith and Order and the Life and Work movement would be integrated in this new council; the International Missionary Council and the upcoming council would be in association with one another. The Dutch theologian Willem Adolph Visser ‘t Hooft (1900-1985) was appointed as the General Secretary of this Provisional Committee. He would become the first General Secretary of the World Council of Churches and remain in this position until his retirement in 1966. He was inspired by the Social Gospel and the neo-Orthodoxy of Karl Barth. The Social Gospel is an American Protestant theology applying Christian ethics to social issues as inequality and racial injustice. Visser ‘t Hooft wrote his PhD dissertation in 1928 on the Social Gospel and its origins. He concluded with his appreciation for the Social Gospel. He praised the sense of responsibility it carries for all and the challenge it poses to the order of society. Also the work of the renowned German theologian Karl Barth has formed the thinking of Visser ‘t Hooft. Barth represents the conservative turn in Christian theology. He rejected the use of theology for political purposes and he drew a strict line between the realm of the Church and of politics. Not only theologically Barth had a great influence on Visser ‘t Hooft, also politically. Barth had taken a strong stance against Nazism in the 1930s and pushed the Provisional Committee of the WCC in 1939 to do the same. Visser ‘t Hooft, in his attempt to keep all involved parties together, could not answer to Barth’s demands. In his memoires Visser ‘t Hooft remembers his own frustration not being able to speak on behalf of the ecumenical movement against Nazism, because of the internal differences inhibiting decision-making. Not only did the staff experience the frustration of internal decision-making, also the first General Assembly, initially planned for 1941, was delayed to 1948.

2.1.2 Amsterdam
At the first general assembly in 1948 in Amsterdam, the World Council of Churches came into formal existence. Representatives of 147 member churches, mainly Protestant and European

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81 Willel Adolph Visser ‘t Hooft and Cornelis Michael de Vries, Memoires: Een Leven in de Oecumene (Amsterdam etc.: Elsevier Kampen: Kok, 1971), 29.
82 W.A. Visser ‘t Hooft, The Background of the Social Gospel in America (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1928).
83 Linda Woodhead, An Introduction to Christianity (Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 375.
85 Visser ‘t Hooft, The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches Held at Amsterdam August 22nd to September 4th, 1948, 28.
or North American, came together and gave their approval to this ‘fellowship of churches’.\textsuperscript{86} Although the WCC did not get any legislative authority over the churches, it could issue public statements expressing the opinion of ‘the Church’. This had been one of the main motivations behind the efforts of the ‘pioneers’ of the WCC: to establish a council that would speak with a Christian voice about world affairs.\textsuperscript{87} What such a voice would say was continuously discussed. One of the tasks of the new council was to conduct studies in order to be able to react to world affairs. Furthermore, it had to facilitate common action, promote ‘the growth of ecumenical consciousness in the members of all churches’, keep relations with other ecumenical bodies, and organize world conferences.\textsuperscript{88}

As proposed by the Provisional Committee, the World Council of Churches was, and still is, composed of two main bodies, the General Assembly and the Central Committee. The General Assembly is the ‘principle authority’ of the Council. It exists of representatives of (groups of) member churches and meets every five to seven years. The Assembly elects the ninety members of the Central Committee, which functions as the ‘governing body’. This Committee meets yearly and is supported by its Executive Committee meeting twice a year. The General Secretariat (General Secretary, Associate General Secretaries and Assistant General Secretaries), supported by departmental committees, is responsible for the daily conduct of the WCC – preparing the Assemblies and the meetings of the Central and Executive committee, keeping relations with other ecumenical bodies, coordination of the work of the commissions and departments. Lastly, departments with commissions on specific issues support all the above mentioned bodies.\textsuperscript{89} Full-time staff members conduct the work of the departments. The Department on Church and Society was one of them. It was established to carry on the work of the Life and Work movement, which considered questions about the role of the Church in society. This department had a key position in stimulating thinking on racial and ethnic relations and is therefore crucial to understand the development of the discourse on racism. The Secretariat on Racial and Ethnic Relations established in 1960 was part of this department.

This organizational structure is important. While the General Assembly is the highest decision-making body of the Council, other departments plan study reports, conferences and are in charge of the correspondence. It matters crucially who is in what position, who is in the position to invite speakers, to hire other staff members, and to decide on the themes of

\textsuperscript{88} World Council of Churches, “IX. The Constitution of the World Council of Churches.”
upcoming events. WCC staff members could invite certain political figures and neglect others, they could emphasize certain events in their articles for *The Ecumenical Review*, and give less attention to other events. These men were able to decide on the programme of the events they organized and by maintaining correspondence with some and not with others, they were able to create an inner circle and an outer circle of persons involved with the WCC. Thereby they had a significant influence on what ideas were spread and what knowledge would be repeated. In other words, they had key positions in influencing what discursive elements would be circulated through the World Council of Churches.

2.2 The World Council of Churches in the world

In the years after the first Assembly in Amsterdam, debates continued on the nature of the Council, on its authority, on its membership, on the issues it had to react to and on its position in the world. Two issues are especially relevant for the discourse on racism in the 1960s: the universality of the WCC and the role of the Church in politics. The next part will discuss these two issues to enable a better understanding of the Council and to contextualize the positions towards racism within the Council.

2.2.1 Universality and unity

While the organizational structure was clearly set by the Provisional Committee and approved by the first General Assembly, the exact nature of the WCC was less obvious. In 1950 the Central Committee adopted the statement “the Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches” in which it tried to give a clearer conception of the Council. This was not an easy task as ‘how [...] can [one] formulate the ecclesiological implications of a body in which so many different conceptions of the Church are represented, without using the categories or language of one particular conception of the Church’. In its attempt to include as many ecclesiological conceptions, the staff of the WCC emphasized the Council was not a ‘Super-Church’ or ‘the World Church’. Instead, the WCC was defined as a ‘fellowship of Churches’ who strove for the unity of the Churches. This notion of the WCC, not as ‘Super-Church’, but as fellowship existing by virtue of its members, was central to the WCC’s self-understanding. It included not only a hesitance to overrule members, but also certain inclusiveness. All were welcome to join as long as they would not try to impose their perspectives on other members. Neither, would any church ‘need fear that by entering into the World Council it is in danger of denying its heritage’.

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91 Cit. in ibid., 113–119.
92 World Council of Churches, *The First Six Years*. 

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This inclusiveness is related to the wish of resembling the unity of the Church and growing into a universal fellowship. The unity of the Church refers to the ideal that there is one universal Church covering all Christian believers.\footnote{McGrath, \textit{Christianity}, 154.} This ideal was a main motivation of the so-called 'pioneers' of the ecumenical movement. They reacted to the plurality of denominations which was a contradiction to this unity of the church.\footnote{Visser 't Hooft, \textit{The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches}.} In the constitution document on the WCC’s programme and policies, the Provisional Committee noted that the WCC is the consequence of member churches desiring to 'express their unity in Christ', meaning that despite the difference they wanted to work to unite themselves, whether this was theologically or in common service. It called the current state 'a partial and imperfect unity' which could only be removed by the churches themselves. The Council had to 'provide opportunity for a frank discussion of existing differences in the hope that such discussion may lead to new insight and ultimately to full unity'.\footnote{World Council of Churches, \textit{Documents of the World Council of Churches}, First Assembly of the World Council of Churches. Amsterdam, 1948 (Amsterdam: N.V. Drukkerij, 1948), 36.} The second wish of the founders was to become a universal body. The universality or catholicity of the church can have various meanings, namely the church being everywhere (geographical universality); open to everyone, no matter what background; covering all aspects of life; answering to all needs; and being timeless.\footnote{McGrath, \textit{Christianity}, 155–156.} Initially this notion of universality applied to the Council referred to the first two dimensions. The WCC was said to be a council for both theologians as laymen, for people from all denominations. Also it had to become geographically universal.

This last aim was problematic. The three movements, Faith and Order, International Missionary Council, and Life and Work had been Western products and their membership had been copied to the WCC. Despite some efforts to get more of the ‘younger churches’ to Amsterdam, they were still a small minority at the assembly. The Indian Chandran Devanesen putted in the following words: ‘from the point of view of numbers, too, the representatives of the Younger Churches were swamped in a sea of delegates from the Older Churches’.\footnote{Chandran Devanesen, “Post-Amsterdam Thoughts from a Younger Church,” \textit{The Ecumenical Review} 1, no. 2 (1949): 142–49.} The top of the WCC was well aware of the Western and Protestant overrepresentation. Attempts were made to diversify membership by including other denominations and opening up to other regions.\footnote{World Council of Churches, \textit{Documents of the World Council of Churches}, 12; Lukas Vischer, “The Ecumenical Movement and the Roman Catholic Church,” in \textit{A History of the Ecumenical Movement. Volume 2: 1948-1968}, ed. Harold E. Fey, 2nd ed. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2004).} The Indian Madathilparampil Mammen Thomas, the later chairman of the Central Committee (1968-1975), reflected in 1966 on how he became a staff member of the WCC: ‘In 1947, when I came to the staff of the World Student Christian Federation, it was said in WCC
circles that if you want to meet Dr. Visser ‘t Hooft you had to have a coloured skin or a beard [referring to the east-orthodox tradition YG]."99

Each step towards (geographical) universality was explicitly mentioned. When the Central Committee met for the first time outside Europe and North America, its chairman, the Bishop of Chichester spoke: ‘our move from our former meeting-places in the West to this eastern city has a symbolic value. It shows the determination of the World Council of Churches to be universal, and acknowledges the significance of the East to the Churches and to mankind’.100 Also, in cooperation with the International Missionary Council, an East Asia Commission was set up to organize an East Asia Conference (1949) and to study the possibilities for establishing an office in the region together with the IMC. These efforts led to the joining of some Asian churches.101

After 1948, nine new churches joined and after the Second General Assembly in Evanston (1954) nineteen new churches became member. In its report to the Assembly, the Central Committee notes that in 1954 the regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America are still weakly represented, but a hopeful comment is made: ‘A number of new applications from Asia, Africa and Latin America will be submitted to the Assembly itself. The membership of the Council would thus seem to be becoming more truly worldwide’.102

2.2.2 The role of the Church

The thinking on unity and universality was the domain of the Faith and Order movement. Life and Work had been more concerned with the role of the Church in society. The document on the policy and programmes of the WCC stated that one of the ‘raison d’être’ of the Council was to give ‘a united witness’: to spread the gospel, to answer the needs of ‘modern society’ and to aid those who need help.103 The Council was authorized to issue statements expressing the opinion of the member churches on certain events or dilemmas. The Commission of Churches on International Affairs was established in cooperation with the International Missionary Council in 1946 to react specifically to international issues. One of its first statements concerned the Korean War, denouncing the actions of China.104

An important question that concerned many within the WCC was what the role of the Church in general and the Council in particular was in politics. The role of the Church in relation to society is a crucial one and Christian traditions differ in their perspectives on this. The Social

100 World Council of Churches, Minutes and Reports of the Fifth Meeting of the Central Committee (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1953).
103 World Council of Churches, Documents of the World Council of Churches, 36.
104 World Council of Churches, The First Six Years, 119.
Gospel and Social Christianity influenced the thinking within the World Council of Churches on this. The Social Gospel is a stream in American Protestantism focusing on the social element in the Gospel. It can be dated back to the period after the American Civil War as a reaction to the poverty in the American industrial and capitalist society. It was closely affiliated to the abolitionist movement and the female equal rights demands. It differs from more orthodox conservative Christianity which believes only in a spiritual and heavenly Kingdom. The Social Gospel was inspired by progressive orthodox Christians who thought the ‘Kingdom of God’ was realizable on earth as well. They believed in both a spiritual and terrestrial Kingdom. A second difference is that Orthodox conservative Christian traditions are individualist: they focus on one’s personal relationship with God. Social Gospel adherents reject this purely individualist notion; according to them individuals have a duty towards society as well. Individuals can work for society to realize this Kingdom on earth. Social Christianity challenged hence the notion of a strict division between Church and politics drawn by a conservative theologian as Karl Barth. Although Barth had clearly rejected Nazism and had asked the WCC to do the same, he saw this as subservient to his faith. He did not believe that God meanings could be understood through worldly events.

William Temple, one of the men closely involved in the creation of the World Council of Churches, was a key thinker in the UK variant of the Social Gospel, called Christian Socialism. In contrast to Barth, he believed that one could discern in all the human activities an order to which God aimed to bring the world. The Social Gospel movement and Christian Socialism are characterized in their belief that one can find God’s way in world affairs. Christians have the task to interpret his message and attempt to align men’s action with this message. These traditions are positive about change and revolutions as these are seen as signs of progress towards the earthly Kingdom. Other traditions prefer a more static perspective and are less optimistic of change. In his chapter on Christianity and resistance, the political scientist Søren Dosenrode frames the dilemma in Christian theology as follows: ‘if all governance comes from God are Christians allowed to resist Government at all?’

The staff of the World Council of Churches had to mediate between these and other perspectives on the relation between Church and politics. The dominant perspective was that the WCC had to react to what happened in the world. ‘Somehow the Church has entered once

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107 McGrath, *Christianity*, 248.
more into a period in which willingly or unwillingly it has to play its role in world history’, observed the Visser ’t Hooft in 1949, to continue with, ‘since we live in a feverish world dominated by political conflict, we are constantly called away from that urgent and immediate task [to strengthen the bonds between the member churches and to further develop the WCC, YG] in order to give attention to the extraordinarily difficult problems which arise when churches individually or all churches together enter into conflict with the world around them’.110 The tension between the realms of politics and church life and whether the church should interfere with the first is carried in a statement of one of the WCC presidents Eivind Berggrav. He argued that although the responsibility of the Church lies primarily in the Church sphere, not in the political, the churches cannot be cut out from the context of this world’.111

Central to the role of the WCC in the world was the approach of studying, collecting facts and gaining expertise. Visser ’t Hooft wrote: ‘the Churches had no right to express a conviction about specific world problems unless they could do so on the basis of a thorough study of the issues undertaken by men whose competence would be respected’. The 1950s and 1960s are characterized by a strong request for facts in order to be able to come to an ‘objective judgment’ of political issues: a collection of facts had to give the WCC the authority and neutrality to speak on political matters. According to Henry P. van Dusen, chairman of the study department committee, the work of the study department was ‘of action and for action’: to spread what Christian action was undertaken, missing, and required.112 How far could the WCC go in its actions? Visser ’t Hooft noted the dilemma between ‘involvement’ and ‘responsibility’. The churches should be involved and act as ‘conscience of society’, however they have the responsibility not to act too quickly and rapidly. If they do so, they might find themselves in a position from where it is impossible to be involved: they could be rejected by the society that they try to influence.113

An obstacle to get ‘involved’ was that the staff wanted the WCC to be neutral and inclusive. In the official reports and in the report of the General Secretary in The Ecumenical Review the issued statements on political events were explained and defended in order to avoid that the WCC would be seen as a political organisation or as presenting only one perspective. Hence, statements like: ‘Neither the Council as a whole nor the churches individually should identify themselves to such an extent with any social or political ideology that Christianity becomes exploited for purely political ends’.114 Instead, the Council presented itself as supra-national and

It wanted to keep its neutrality. Nevertheless, it found it had to be able to
judge existing political systems. In order to do so, it came with the notion of ‘Responsible
society’, which turned out to become a key concept in ecumenical social thought. Such a
society was defined as a society ‘where freedom is the freedom of men who acknowledge
responsibility to justice and public order and where those who hold political authority or
economic power are responsible for its exercise to God and to the people whose welfare is
affected by it’. This notion would be challenged already in the 1953 when the Central
Committee met for the first time outside Europe and North America, in the Indian city Lucknow.
The Asian churches made clear that the concept of responsible society did not capture the
changes their societies were going through at that moment. In 1955 the study programme ‘the
Common Christian Responsibility Towards Areas of Rapid Social Change’ was launched to
address the issues the churches in countries of ‘rapid social change’ experienced.

2.3 First involvement against racism

The theological discourses described above – on the universality of the World Council of
Churches and on the relevance of the Church to society – are important to understand the
discourse on racism in the 1960s. In this last part, I will consider three main issues within the
discourse on racism in the 1950s. First of all, the conceptions of racism in general; secondly the
reactions to apartheid in South Africa; and lastly the study programme of rapid social change.
The study programme was not framed as a study into race relations. I will mention it here
because this programme was a reaction to decolonization and would turn out to be a breeding
place for ideas on the World Council of Churches’ involvement against racism.

2.3.1 Racial and Ethnic tensions

In the period up to 1960 the word ‘racism’ is barely used. Rather terms as ‘race discrimination’
or ‘racial and ethnic relations’ are used. At the 1948 Amsterdam assembly race discrimination –
without defining it - is denounced, but not extensively discussed.\textsuperscript{119} In the years thereafter this changed, although the report on the period 1948 to 1954 called \textit{The First Six Years} does not mention ‘racial or ethnic tensions’ explicitly. In the same period, \textit{The Ecumenical Review} published only a handful of articles on the issue, mainly in relation to South Africa. Nevertheless, in a UNESCO brochure from 1954, Visser ‘t Hooft discussed the involvement of the churches with the ‘Racial Problem’.\textsuperscript{120} He observed that it has taken a while before the churches discovered their “prophetic task” with regards to race relations, but at least they have begun raising their voice against racial discrimination and injustice.\textsuperscript{121} However, he acknowledged there is still a ‘serious gap’ between what the churches know they ought to do and what they do. Here he noted the tension between ‘involvement’ and ‘responsibility’ in which too much involvement could lead to a disconnection of contacts disabling the possibility to act according to the responsibility to influence a society.

At the General Assembly held at Evanston in 1954, themed ‘Christ is the Hope of the World’ the issue is discussed with the member churches. One of the six section topics was ‘Intergroup Relations: The Churches amid Racial and Ethnic tensions’.\textsuperscript{122} The Churches were called to work for the ‘unity of all mankind and to strive through social and political action to secure justice, freedom and peace for all’. The section report related the issue of ‘racial and ethnic fears, hate and prejudices’ to the responsibility of the Church in society, namely to challenge the conscience of society – ‘to protest against any law or arrangement that is unjust to any human being’ – and to serve as a bridge between opposing camps.\textsuperscript{123} The report also speaks of the worldwide and local character of ‘racial and ethnic tensions’: ‘all churches and Christians are involved, whether they recognize it or not, in the racial and ethnic tensions of the world’.\textsuperscript{124} However, according to the report the real issue of segregation is local- at the level of the divided church. It recognized the arguments often used to defend this segregation as the result of cultural differences or residential patterns. However, the Assembly rejected these arguments and concluded that churches must overcome these racial barriers: ‘the Church is called upon to set aside such excuses and to declare God’s will both in words and deeds’.\textsuperscript{125}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{119} Visser ‘t Hooft, \textit{The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches Held at Amsterdam August 22nd to September 4th, 1948.}, 10.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Visser ‘t Hooft, \textit{The Ecumenical Movement and the Racial Problem.} The brochure was part of a series titled the race question and modern thought. Also the Catholic Church contributed to this series.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 59.
\item \textsuperscript{122} The sections were ‘Faith and Order: our oneness in Christ and our disunity as Churches’; ‘Evangelism: the mission of the Church to those outside her life’; ‘social questions: the responsible society for world community’; ‘international affairs: Christians in the struggle for World Community’; ‘Intergroup Relations: the Churches amid Racial and Ethnic tensions’; and ‘the Laity: the Christian in his vocation’. Visser ‘t Hooft, \textit{The Evanston Report: The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches 1954.}
\item \textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 155–157.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 153.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 154.
\end{itemize}
The report and following resolutions followed the line of action typically of the World Council of Churches: speaking strong words against injustice, while recognizing the complexity of the situation, and proposing studies in order to bring people together and overcome the divisions. One of the resolutions indeed proposed to establish a department to assist the churches with regards race relations by studying the problem, exchanging information and educational material for church members. This resolution is answered only a few years later. The Division of Ecumenical Action got the task to follow-up the resolutions as a ‘strategy of action’ was considered necessary. At the Central Committee meeting at Galyatető, Hungary, in 1956, this Division presented the plan to draft a plan based on three months of consultations and visitations.

This proposal was accepted and Oscar Lee, executive director of the Department of Racial and Cultural Relations of the USA National Council of the Churches of Christ (NCCC USA), was asked to do this job. In his function for the NCCC USA, Lee had been involved with the US civil rights movements. He strongly propagated an inclusive church, integrating black people in white churches, but also integrating white people in black churches. Furthermore, he demanded the churches to act: to sympathize with the civil rights movements and supporting their claims for equal rights. Oscar Lee proposed to set-up a Commission on Racial and Ethnic Tensions within the WCC. The Central Committee approved his plan to hire a consultant ‘who could help the churches to help one another more effectively in the field of racial and ethnic relations’. In 1959, Daisuke Kitagawa, who had participated in the Rapid Social Change programme, was hired as field consultant. His first study visit was to the United States (1959) in order to find out how the American churches were dealing with racial tensions and what help they might need. After this visit he was installed as director of the Secretariat on Racial and Ethnic Relations in 1960 and planned visits to East and Central Africa.

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126 Ibid., 160.
127 World Council of Churches, Minutes and Reports of the Ninth Meeting of the Central Committee (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1956), 29.
131 World Council of Churches, Minutes and Reports of the Tenth Meeting of the Central Committee (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1957), 28.
132 World Council of Churches, Minutes and Reports of the Twelfth Meeting of the Central Committee (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1959), 168.
2.3.2 Apartheid

As the above sub-section indicates, racism was discussed in the first twelve years of the WCC’s existence. One of the main events influencing and fuelling the debates on racism was the apartheid policy in South Africa. In 1948 the National Party of D.F. Malan won the elections in South Africa. This party was a proponent of the apartheid policy segregating the people in the country based on their racial appearance. Almost every meeting, the Central Committee discussed the developments in South Africa.\textsuperscript{134}

A first important event was the visit of Visser ’t Hooft to South Africa in 1952. Initially, the Central Committee aimed at sending a multi-racial delegation to South Africa to discuss the ‘race situation’. This proposal was rejected by all South African member churches, although several of them did invite Visser ’t Hooft to visit them.\textsuperscript{135} He presented his observations to the Central Committee and in The Ecumenical Review in 1953 in very moderate terms. In the two reports he stressed the need for the Council to make a contribution by bringing together the different parties. He found the ‘distrust’ between the different groups of the population ‘extremely serious’.\textsuperscript{136} However, he warned outsiders not to judge too quickly: ‘We can, however, help only if we are not pharisaical in our attitude. We must not speak, as if it is only South Africa that has failed in regard to race. We must never forget the many other situations in which the Churches have failed in solving problems of relationships between races and ethnic groups’.\textsuperscript{137} In The Ecumenical Review he writes: ‘What we need is an attempt at understanding, a facing of all facts, a frank conversation. And the Churches have a special opportunity and, therefore, also a special obligation to relate South Africa in a constructive way to other nations’.\textsuperscript{138} His carefully formulated reports are followed by a discussion in the 1953 Central Committee at Lucknow, in which the representatives from Indian churches, Rajah Maharaj Singh and Dr. Devadutt, as well as the representative of a former anti-slavery church in the US, Bishop Walls, are especially clear: although the situation is complex and there is a risk of pharisaism, the WCC should be clear that racial segregation is against the Gospel. In its resolution the Central Committee is still mild: it does not judge the apartheid supporting churches in South Africa, but says that the racial division is incompatible with the Church of Christ.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{134} Bent, “Logs in Our Eyes: The Struggle of the Ecumenical Movement Against Racism.”
\textsuperscript{135} W.A. Visser ’t Hooft, “A Visit to the South African Churches in April and May 1952” 5, no. 2 (1953): 174–97. At this point in time the WCC had six member Churches in South Africa: the Dutch Reformed Church of Transvaal, the Nederduitsh Hervormde Kerk, the Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglican), the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church and the Congregational Union.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 183.
\textsuperscript{137} World Council of Churches, Minutes and Reports of the Fifth Meeting of the Central Committee, 19.
\textsuperscript{138} Visser ’t Hooft, “A Visit to the South African Churches in April and May 1952,” 185.
\textsuperscript{139} World Council of Churches, Minutes and Reports of the Fifth Meeting of the Central Committee, 20.
The WCC kept monitoring the situation in South Africa and sending delegates.\(^{140}\) As said, at Evanston the issue of ‘racial and ethnic tensions’ gained a prominent position on the agenda. One of the two main speakers was Ben Marais, one of the first white South Africans in the Dutch Reformed Church to speak out against apartheid. Also Alan Paton, a South African writer known for his critical book on the structures of segregation in his country Cry, the Beloved Country took part in the debate. The Assembly adopted a resolution with a strong condemnation of ‘segregation based on race, colour or ethnic origin’ as ‘against the Gospel’, words which would be often repeated in the following years.\(^{141}\) The Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa expressed their disagreement with the resolutions: ‘we would deplore it deeply if the impression created that this report and these resolutions are intended as the last word in a matter that vitally affects the mission of some churches and which, we feel bound to say, has not been considered in all its aspects during our talks at Evanston’ [...] ‘[we] wish to keep the door open for further conversation. We wish to place on record that we have experienced at Evanston much evidence of what we truly believe to be real Christian goodwill and an attempt to understand the peculiar difficulties we have to face’.\(^{142}\)

It is here that the tension between ‘involvement’ and ‘responsibility’ of which Visser ‘t Hooft spoke arose: more criticism could lead to a break in the contacts with the Afrikaner member churches. In other words, more ‘involvement’ could lead to a situation in which less influence could be exercised to keep the involved parties together. The aim of the WCC was to bridge opposing camps and their different perspectives. In this way staff members hoped the WCC could positively change ‘tensions’ among the opposing camps. As the German theologian Gerhard Brennecke wrote in his article in The Ecumenical Review in 1954: ‘it is indeed one of the accomplishments of the Assembly that it demonstrated how the ecumenical movement maintains its fellowship in Christ while dealing with tensions and issues that disturb the relations of its own member Churches and about which these member Churches hold so many conflicting views’.\(^{143}\) In this perspective, dominant within the WCC up to the mid-1960s, the Council had a responsibility to all churches, even to the churches that acted against the dominant convictions within the WCC.

The staff members were in contact with the WCC’s member churches in South Africa and maintained relations with the South African Institute for Race Relations, a research institute


\(^{142}\) Ibid., 328.

\(^{143}\) Gerhard Brennecke, “Inter-Group Relations —the Church Amid Racial and Ethnic Tensions,” The Ecumenical Review 7, no. 1 (October 1954).
highly critical of the apartheid policies and promoting free citizenship and a shared society.\textsuperscript{144} The staff members of the South African Institute for Race Relations, like Fred van Wyk, Quintin Whyte, Maurice Webb and Edgar Brookes, were an important source of information to the WCC on the apartheid policies. They would be involved in many of the conferences in the 1960s. Despite these correspondences and awareness of the critical situation, it took the Sharpeville shootings on March 21\textsuperscript{st} 1960 to press again for a multi-racial conference. That day the South African police killed 69 and wounded 180 people, who were demonstrating against the new pass laws requiring all black South Africans to carry passes with their personal details.\textsuperscript{145} Shortly after the shootings plans were made for an investigative research by WCC staff member Robert Bilheimer and for a consultation to be held the same year in South Africa.\textsuperscript{146} This was the Cottesloe Consultation, which would turn out to be a major event in the WCC’s involvement against apartheid and racism.

### 2.3.3 Rapid social Change

Although the WCC continued to be dominated by the churches from Europe and the USA, not only numerical, but also in the leadership positions, delegates of the new member churches succeeded in setting the agenda from the mid-1950s onwards.\textsuperscript{147} The study programme ‘Our common Christian Responsibility towards Areas of Rapid Social Change (hereafter the Rapid Social Change programme) initiated at the Central Committee meeting in Lucknow, 1953, was the most important one. According to Paul Abrecht (1917-2005), Executive Secretary of the WCC’s Department on Church and Society, this programme ‘led to a remarkable broadening of social perspective and concern, and a significantly new stage in the development of a truly universal Christian social ethic’.\textsuperscript{148} In this statement, made in 1970, he implicitly added another dimension to the notion of universality, namely the political. He recognized that geographical diversity would have consequences for the understanding of social ethics within the WCC.

Abrecht, an American Baptist theologian, worked from 1949 until his retirement in 1983 for the World Council of Churches and became a prominent thinker within the WCC during this period. From 1954, he led the Department on Church and Society of the WCC. In this position he published extensively on the position of the Church in international society. In a special issue of The Ecumenical Review that was dedicated to Paul Abrecht, the third General Secretary, Phillip

\textsuperscript{144} Ellen Hellmann, \textit{The South African Institute of Race Relations, 1929-1979: A Short History} (Johannesburg: The Institute, 1979). Not to be confused with the Christian Institute of Christiaan Beyers Naudé established in 1963.


\textsuperscript{146} Franklin Clark Fry, Ernest A. Payne, and W.A. Visser ‘t Hooft, “Letter from WCC Officers to the Member Churches in South Africa,” \textit{The Ecumenical Review} 12, no. 4 (1960): 489.

\textsuperscript{147} Abrecht, “The Development of Ecumenical Social Thought and Action,” 250.

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 249.
Potter, distinguished three characteristics of the work of Abrecht. The first characteristic is that Abrecht challenged the Church to participate in debates on human society. Theologically, he can be placed in the traditions that challenge a fixed distinction between the political and the Church. Secondly, he argued the Council should not only participate in debates, but should also apply the conclusions of these debates to its own community. The last characteristic Potter distinguished is that Abrecht aimed to include ‘all those concerned’ in ecumenical debates. This last point is visible in his attempts to open up ecumenical thinking to and making it relevant for Christians in the (former) colonized countries. He continuously challenged the social ethic thinking within the WCC, which was Western biased according to him. In 1961 he wrote that the identification of the Gospel with one way of life, in this case the European and North American way of life, ‘inevitably’ would lead to ‘a kind of Christian social and cultural imperialism’. In line with the United Nations, imperialism was strongly denounced within the WCC, adding extra weight to these words of a prominent figure within the WCC.

The most concrete example how Abrecht tried to incorporate all involved in debates within the World Council of Churches was the Rapid Social Change programme he directed from 1955 to 1961. This programme studied industrialization, urbanization, the introduction of new technologies, rural change, nationalism – all labelled as markers of ‘rapid social change’ – focusing on Africa, Asia and Latin America. It aimed to develop Christian social thinking that would be relevant to the people experiencing these processes of change. Furthermore, the study had to enhance the understanding of the ‘outside’ churches on the problems in these countries. Proponents of the study programme brought the argument that the churches in general had not been able to formulate answers to the questions of Christians in Africa, Asia and Latin America. As consequence the churches, and in this case the WCC, had to respond soon and open up to these new situations, in order to ensure its relevance. The propagated urgency of such a programme is very well captured in the following quote of a churchman in Africa cited in a first reportage in The Ecumenical Review in 1957: ‘nothing is more necessary here [Africa, YG] than such a study of rapid social change. The Churches are years out of date in their thinking, and we are all in danger of being bystanders at the birth of a new age, instead of the one midwife having the wisdom and ability necessary to procure a safe delivery!’

150 Ibid., xiii.
151 Ibid.
154 World Council of Churches, Minutes and Reports of the Eighth Meeting of the Central Committee, 104–105.
155 Minutes and Reports of the Eighth Meeting of the Central Committee.
Quotes like these directly appealed to the wish of the founders to create a universal and relevant Council. In the Rapid Social Change programme the two aims came together. According to Abrecht, in order to be relevant the Council’s programmes had to answer and react to the particular contexts in which many Christians found themselves: Christian social thinking had to look for new perspectives in order to answer these demands. This argumentation had as consequence that the notion of universality got a political element in it as well: to become universal also meant to open up for and legitimize perspectives, problems and demands from the (former) colonized people in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The question whether nationalism was a threat or a positive force was one of the early debates in which the political nature of geography was revealed. Nationalism was on the agenda of a meeting in Thessalonica, Greece, bringing together 146 participants to discuss the outcomes of the Rapid Social Change programme. Half of them came from Africa, Asia or Latin America, the other half from Europe and North America: a fact that is prominently mentioned in the report of the event. The ‘European churches’ just experienced the harmful consequences of ‘aggressive nationalism’ on their own continent and pointed to ‘the dangers’ of it – referring to the two World Wars. The ‘African churches’, on the other hand, defined nationalism as a means to express their ‘group individuality’.

The Thessalonica conference in 1959 is remarkable as it is after the Central Committee meeting in Lucknow in 1953, the next event where differences of perspectives between the so-called older and ‘younger churches’ came to the fore. Through these events and the Rapid Social Change programme the traditional Cold War perspective on the world, dividing it in ‘East’ and ‘West’ was challenged. Egbert de Vries, the Dutch chairman of the working group of the Department on Church and Society, stated in his contribution to the Central Committee that the difference in wealth between ‘North’ and ‘South’ was the main dividing factor. Robert C. Mackie, Associate General Secretary and Director of the Division Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees, agreed: ‘the man in the street – or shall we say the man in the pew? – is more aware than ever before of the great differences in standard of living between the continents, and of the appalling conditions in which masses of his fellow men exist’. This understanding of the world divided by differences in wealth between ‘North’ and ‘South’ contributed to a conceptualization of a responsibility for the churches in the ‘North’ to help the ‘South’, to redistribute wealth. According to O. Frederick Nolde, Associate General Secretary and Director of the Commission of

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157 Together with the fact that fourteen participating churches from Africa were represented, the largest group of representatives from Africa on an ecumenical event so far. “Report on the International Conference on Rapid Social Change Thessalonica, Greece,” The Ecumenical Review 12, no. 1 (October 1959): 92–99.
158 World Council of Churches, Minutes and Reports of the Eleventh Meeting of the Central Committee (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1958), 16.
159 World Council of Churches, Minutes and Reports of the Eighth Meeting of the Central Committee, 80.
Churches on International Affairs, the churches in the ‘North’ should make some sacrifices and adapt economic policies fostering cooperation and balanced development for other countries.\textsuperscript{160}

This responsibility was fostered by the fear that newly independent states would turn to communism if the churches would not help them out. In a Central Committee meeting in 1958 on rapid social change, Madathilparampil Mammen Thomas, staff member of the Rapid Social Change programme, called communism ‘the heir of Christian hope when the latter fails to show the way in society’.\textsuperscript{161} Such a statement served as a ‘shock’, as a means to raise awareness on how to Church should make itself relevant to the (former) colonized people. Within the Council many were highly critical of capitalism; two of the important Christian traditions influencing the thinking within the Council – the Social Gospel and Christian Socialism – had emerged as reaction to the ‘ills’ of capitalism and industrialization.\textsuperscript{162} Even though within the Council socialist ideas were normalized, such a statement on communism functioned as a threat.

\textsuperscript{160} World Council of Churches, \textit{Minutes and Reports of the Ninth Meeting of the Central Committee}, 88.
\textsuperscript{161} World Council of Churches, \textit{Minutes and Reports of the Eleventh Meeting of the Central Committee}, 15.
Chapter 3: making the Church relevant

After the introduction to the World Council of Churches and the developments related to the changing discourse on racism in the 1950s, it is time to look at this discourse. How was it produced, how did it function and what were its effects? The discourse on racism itself is not easy to grasp – as Foucault noted: it is not a well-defined set of statements with solid boundaries. It functioned in and in relation to a broader web next to other discourses, from which it borrowed. The discourse on racism is also indissolubly connected to theological discourses on unity, universality and the role of the Church in politics and society. In reports and at events often the wish was expressed to make the WCC a universal council with a worldwide constituency. In order to achieve this aim, the WCC had to become relevant to churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The WCC study programme on Rapid Social Change was a result of the pressure by church leaders from these continents, mainly Asia, to make the Council relevant for them by studying their particular situations. This programme is of great importance in the early 1960s. It contributed to the circulation of still marginal knowledges to inner circles of the WCC. Also, many of the closely involved researchers, Paul Abrecht, Daisuke Kitagawa and Madathilparampil Mammen Thomas, influenced the discourse on racism through their prominent positions in the WCC.

Next to these discourses, the discourse on racism existed by value of interfering discourses on development, human rights, liberation and theological debates on violence and revolutions. In the next two chapters, I will look at how these discourses and the debates within them interacted and enforced each other enabling a continuous developing understanding of racism. The third chapter considers the period 1960-1968. It will examine how the discourse on racism changed in this period looking at the Cottesloe Consultation, the Secretariat on Racial and Ethnic Relations, the Third General Assembly in New Delhi, the Consultation on Christian Practice and Desirable Action in Social Change and Race Relations, and the World Conference on Church and Society. The fourth chapter takes off with the General Assembly in Uppsala with its request for ‘a crash programme to guide the Council and the member churches in the urgent matter of racism’. This request was the basis for the formulation of the Programme to Combat Racism. This request is considered as ‘a breakthrough’. In the fourth chapter starts with an analysis of the Uppsala Assembly and studies the preparations of the Staff Coordinating Committee on Racism for the Notting Hill Consultation, the Notting Hill Consultation in 1969, the Central Committee of 1969 which adopted the Programme to Combat Racism, and the lobby against investments

afterwards. I present the statements made before, during and after these events in order to understand the changes in the discourse on racism. In the next two chapters, I argue that although the Programme to Combat Racism can be identified as a landmark, it does not present such a radical break with the past. It is based on discursive elements that already functioned in the discourse on racism.

3.1 Bridging and Studying

3.1.1 ‘Mission in South Africa’
One of the important issues the WCC staff directed its eye to was apartheid in South Africa. After the Sharpeville shootings on 21st March 1960 the WCC staff increased its efforts to organize such a multi-racial consultation.\textsuperscript{164} Visser ‘t Hooft and Kitagawa corresponded with their contacts in South Africa, all white churchmen who were very critical of the apartheid policy.\textsuperscript{165} It was decided not to issue an official statement or to take further action until more information reached the WCC headquarters. When this happened, it was decided to send staff member Robert S. Bilheimer to South Africa to consult the member churches on apartheid and a possible multi-racial consultation.\textsuperscript{166}

Robert Bilheimer (USA) was a Presbyterian minister who joined the WCC staff in 1948 and worked as administrator of the first three General Assemblies and mid-level governing committee meetings. From 1954 to 1963 he served as Director of the WCC’s Studies Division. In this position, he was send to South Africa in April 1960 to prepare the first multi-racial consultation ‘that would confront Christians everywhere with the intrinsically heretical nature of apartheid’, according to the ‘in memoriam’ of Bilheimer in 2008.\textsuperscript{167} The same ‘in memoriam’ describes him as ‘an early advocate of anti-apartheid activism within the churches’.\textsuperscript{168} From April 1960 to the Cottesloe Consultation in December 1960 he travelled back and forth to South Africa to convince all South African member churches to participate in the multi-racial consultation. In his reports and statements he wrote in these months he spoke out against ‘racial segregation’, arguing it was against the Gospel. Also, in response to debates whether the Church had to act in political questions, he wrote that, although ‘the state and the church have different

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
functions’ the Church has to ‘watch and warn’.\textsuperscript{169} ‘To watch and warn’ can be freely translated to study and to give a well-informed advise based on the bible.

The document on the WCC’s involvement from the Sharpeville shootings in March to the Cottesloe Consultation in December 1960, written by Bilheimer as Secretary of the WCC Delegation, is called ‘mission in South Africa’.\textsuperscript{170} The ‘mission’ consisted of ‘bringing ecumenical fellowship’ and give ‘witness’ to the convictions of the WCC.\textsuperscript{171} The first referred to the idea that the WCC could reconcile. The staff members tried to bring together the different parties, in this case the representatives of the member churches in a multi-racial consultation. By providing a forum allowing the parties to communicate with each other, the staff hoped to reconcile them.\textsuperscript{172} The second ‘mission’ meant spreading an understanding of race relations based on the bible endorsed by the WCC. It used the consultation to convince especially the Afrikaner member churches to reject apartheid. The already introduced notions of ‘involvement’ and ‘responsibility’ are crucial to understand this ‘mission’: according to the organizers of the consultation the WCC had a responsibility to get ‘involved’ – to express its convictions -, but also a ‘responsibility’ to all parties concerned.\textsuperscript{173} The statements that the WCC staff issued are clear in their rejection of apartheid. However, they tried to express this in such a way that the Afrikaner churches would not be too much offended. In order to change the apartheid policies, the staff members wanted to keep the relations with these churches intact. It is therefore that General Secretary Visser ‘t Hooft did not answer to the request of the Archbishop of Cape Town, Joost de Blank, to expel the Dutch Reformed Churches from the WCC. According to Visser ‘t Hooft the cutting off of relations with these churches would disable the opportunities to influence the apartheid policies in South Africa.\textsuperscript{174} Especially because the Dutch Reformed Churches had close ties with the South African government and, hence, could be of great importance in changing its policies.

These churches had been hesitant to join the WCC and since the statement by the Second General Assembly calling ‘racial segregation against the Gospel’ they were suspicious of any action by the WCC concerning race relations. How sensitive the issue was is illustrated by the threat of the \textit{Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk} to cancel its participation in the consultation in 1960. In a preparatory meeting, Reverend Andries Oosthuizen, representative of this church, warned that his church did not want to defend itself for its policies: ‘the stress which Dr. Bilheimer had

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{173} Visser ‘t Hooft, \textit{The Ecumenical Movement and the Racial Problem}.
laid on the interest shown in the conference throughout the world, plus the emphasis which the proposed statement laid on the multi-racial nature of the conference created the impression that his Church in South Africa would be placed on trial at the December Conference'. To avoid tension, the chairman of the consultation, Franklin Fry, also chairman of the WCC’s Central Committee, reaffirmed that the WCC had no authority to make judgment on its member churches: ‘we come from the outside: it will be easy for us to be suspected of having already found answers, which is not so. We are humble, instead, and sometimes frightened’.

After the efforts of Bilheimer, representatives of the eight member churches met from 7 to 14 December 1960. A commission with representatives from all these churches had decided on the questions to be discussed during the consultation: 1) the factual situation in South Africa; 2) the Christian understanding of the Gospel for relationships among races; 3) the history of South Africa; 4) the current emergency situation in South Africa; and 5) the Church’s witness. The first and the third agenda item can be seen as an attempt to create a mutual common ground, a basis for further debate. It indicates a belief in the neutrality of facts that is seen throughout the WCC in these years. However, as is noted in the report: multiple times contesting facts were presented by the different parties, which formed an obstacle to come to ‘sound conclusions’.

Facts turned out to be political as well. The same goes for the report on the Cottesloe Consultation, which mostly addressed the ‘white’ churches. This is exemplified by the use of the label ‘we’. ‘We’ is used to include all Christian South Africans, but also sometimes to refer to the white population of South Africa. The label ‘we’ is never used to refer to the ‘Bantu’. Furthermore, the report located the possibilities of action within the white South African community: for example, the report asked how to deal with the rural, the urban and the educated ‘Bantu’ or with the ‘Bantu reaching maturity’ (‘as they grew to maturity, they desired the privileges of maturity’)? The question how to deal with the ‘the rural, the urban and the educated ’White’ was not coined.

This observation must be understood in the power relations of that time. As said before, most staff members considered it important to keep the support of the Dutch Reformed Churches as


177 These were the following churches: the Congregational Union of South Africa; Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika; Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk – Transvaal; Bantu Presbyterian Church; and church of the Province of South Africa.

178 unknown, “Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Committee Set up to Plan the December 1960 Conference.”


180 Cottesloe Consultation, “Statement.”
they had a strong influence on the South African government. Furthermore, the report was based on the exchange of views between the WCC’s member churches, which were mostly white and Dutch Reformed in comparison to a ‘coloured’ minority. Therefore, the report gives an enriching insight in this exchange of perspectives influenced by the differences in power. An example is the following statement: ‘it seems incontestable that the Emergency resulted from deep dissatisfaction, unrest and bitterness among a comparatively large number of the urban Bantu population’.\(^{181}\) Such a statement was contested by the ones critical of apartheid stressing ‘the danger that African Christians are facing in these present days’.\(^{182}\) Furthermore, these participants referred to the laws that were only made by a small group South Africans and the rights that were denied to the ‘Non-Whites’.\(^{183}\) They claimed the ‘Bantus’ should at least be consulted, or even better, should be granted equal voting rights.\(^{184}\)

When discussing the role of the Church, some participants mentioned the identification of the Church and the missionaries with the white ruling class. According to them the churches had failed in expressing their concern for the less privileged.\(^{185}\) As result, ‘Bantu Christians had increasingly difficulty in propagating the faith, because they could not give adequate evidence of the Church speaking out clearly against the evils which were in the forefront of their people’s thought’.\(^{186}\) This statement is an early indication of what would become two important arguments in the coming decade. Firstly, speakers pushing for stronger action by the WCC against racism argued that by not acting the churches were implicitly choosing sides with the status quo, in this case apartheid: not-acting was also acting. The second argument was that by not speaking out the Church was losing its appeal to ‘Bantu’, ‘Indians’ and ‘coloured’ in South Africa. Both arguments linked, again, to the pressure felt within the WCC to be relevant and universal. These two points were already part of the discourse on racism, but they functioned in the margins. The latter one would reach a bigger audience at the third General Assembly at New Delhi, in 1961; the first needed more time to get normalized – it is only at the WCC’s World Conference on Church and Society in 1966 that it is expressed at a public conference.

The statement of the Consultation proposed some policy changes to the apartheid regime, which were basic human rights: the right for all South Africans to own land and not only the white South Africans, equal access to education, opening up all jobs for all South Africans, and direct representation in the parliament.\(^{187}\) With the Rapid Social Change programme, the Cottesloe Consultation was one of the first occasions that black and coloured South Africans

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\(^{182}\) Ibid., 44. The label ‘African’ was used to refer to ‘black’ and ‘coloured’ South Africans.
\(^{183}\) Ibid., 16; 55.
\(^{184}\) Ibid., 13; 16.
\(^{185}\) Ibid., 47.
\(^{186}\) Ibid., 49.
\(^{187}\) Cottesloe Consultation, “Statement.”
could speak on a WCC event. Both the Consultation and the study programme brought knowledges into movement within the WCC web, because these Southern Africans could share their experiences. This brought more insights into the daily, practical consequences of racial discrimination enabling the connection that was made in these years between race relations and unemployment, difference in level of education, poverty, and criminality.

The Consultation was considered to be a success, even though the conservative Afrikaner Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk in Afrika immediately withdrew from the WCC. Also the Dutch Reformed Churches from the Cape and Transvaal gave up their membership a few months later. According to Franklin Fry, the WCC had through the consultation nevertheless succeeded in bringing the opposing parties together. This might sound a bit optimistic, but the consultation had raised some more doubts among some of the participants of the Dutch Reformed Church. One of them was the Reverend Christiaan Beyers Naudé, who would question the policy of apartheid in the following years in the newly founded magazine Pro Veritate. Furthermore, he was one of the founders of the Christian Institute in 1963 that would become a hub in white resistance to apartheid in South Africa. He would stay closely involved with the work of the WCC regarding racial discrimination and apartheid the next decades. The withdrawal of the Dutch Reformed Churches and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk in Afrika meant that the voices of the strongest proponents of complete racial segregation were tuned down within the WCC.

3.1.2 The Secretariat on Racial and Ethnic Relations
While the preparations for the Cottesloe Consultation were made, in 1960 the WCC formally established the Secretariat on Racial and Ethnic Relations as requested by the General Assembly in 1954. The Secretariat was located in Paul Abrecht’s Department on Church and Society and worked together with the Division of Studies chaired by Robert Bilheimer. The Reverend Daisuke Kitagawa was installed as the first director of the Secretariat. Kitagawa was born in Japan, but finished his studies in the USA. He worked for the Episcopal Church. He was hired by the WCC in 1955 as consultant in the Rapid Social Change programme together with Paul Abrecht, Egbert de Vries and Madathilparampil Mammen Thomas. Kitagawa took his experiences of this programme with him to his new position, even more so because he continued to cooperate closely with two of his colleagues of the study programma: Abrecht and Thomas. Consequentially, Kitagawa combined his consultations on race relations with the insights from the Rapid Social Change programme. For example, he visited the Copperbelt mines in Rhodesia.

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188 No South African Indian churches were member of the WCC. As most churches in South Africa were racially divided, this had as consequence that no South African Indians were present at the Consultation.
to describe the tensions between the different groups working and living there.\textsuperscript{190} This area had been researched before as part of the Rapid Social Change study programme. In one of his reports, Kitagawa responded to this earlier study: he wrote that the problems that had been researched as part of the Rapid Social Change programme were actually caused by ‘the chronic tension between two racial communities’.\textsuperscript{191} He noticed how race relations had been ‘built into the social structure itself’ and had been internalized by the individuals of that society. He saw race as a category objectivized by legislation and socially accepted customs. In this way Africans ‘become African’ and all whites ‘become European’.\textsuperscript{192} As a result, he focused on racial tensions not so much as an interpersonal problem, but rather as a societal problem. Although he did not give it that label, his approach towards race relations can be understood with the term ‘institutional racism’. According to him the problem was not so much people consciously acting in a racist way, but people not being aware of the racist structures in their society. It is therefore that he called the problem of racial tension ‘a problem of the otherwise good and decent people’.\textsuperscript{193} It is the problem of people who behave as decent citizens, but who are nevertheless upholding racial inequality by being ‘unconcerned’ to these inequalities.\textsuperscript{194}

Kitagawa’s work is an indication of the strong impact of the Rapid Social Change programme. The discourse on racism became inseparably related to the discourse on rapid social changing societies: on the power relations within societies and the poor living conditions as result of industrialization and urbanization. He wrote: ‘The line that divides the two [the two ethnic groups, Africans and Europeans, in the Copperbelt mines. YG] racially is immediately the line that divides them status or class-wise, as well as culturally’.\textsuperscript{195} According to him, the Church had to support the oppressed and act as a mediator between different racialized groups: ‘the Church needs to learn how to listen discerningly to the often voiceless voice of the oppressed group and then to communicate it to the hard-hearted oppressor or the indifferent neighbour’.\textsuperscript{196} Under his leadership, the Secretariat became concerned with race relations defined as relations between the powerful oppressors and the voiceless oppressed: the powerful usually being white Europeans, the oppressed black Africans. He noticed how race and ethnicity got politicized, how political standpoints were created based on ethnicity.\textsuperscript{197} Furthermore, through the link with the


\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 2.

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., 4.


\textsuperscript{196} Kitagawa, “Pattern of Ethnic Group Relations in Africa: A Preliminary Observation.”

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid.
Rapid Social Change programme race relations were understood in socio-economic terms as well.

In Kitagawa’s reports and letters, one can detect an admiration for the Africans struggling for more freedom and equal rights. He sympathized with Kenneth Kaunda, opposition leader in Rhodesia and the first Prime Minister of Zambia in 1964. In his book Race Relations and Christian Mission in 1965 Kitagawa expressed this admiration and criticized the ‘white Europeans’ in Africa for not seeing the patience, the suffering and the talents of the ‘Africans’.198 He wrote: ‘The peaceful coexistence the Europeans were so proud of was almost entirely due to the patience of the Africans most likely due to Africans’ wisdom, too. The oppressed usually understand their oppressors infinitely better than the oppressors understand their victims. African people, understanding the Europeans living among them much better than the Europeans understand them, seem to be infinitely more tolerant and forgiving toward the Europeans than the European can begin to appreciate. Thus there is a sense in which the African people have already won the ultimate victory in the conflict between races, even though the masses of them may not see it at all’.199 In this statement, he implicitly recognized that the society the ‘African people’ lived in was harmful to them. Such recognition, here expressed in a confidential letter, was important in the later debates on violence.

Next to his critique of the ‘white Europeans’ in African societies, he criticized the churches for not supporting men as Kenneth Kaunda. In his first memo he wrote how the Church increasingly became identified with white oppressive rule in the USA and Africa. He made the link between missionary activities, the identification of white oppressive rule with the Christian Church and negative attitudes towards the Church as a result of this identification.200 Thereby, he challenged the perspective of the Church as the bringer of education and ‘civilization’. The missionaries had also contributed to the spread of white rule across the world. This link, the link between the Church and the colonial enterprise, was hardly explicitly mentioned. It is an example of the in Chapter 1 mentioned subjugated knowledge: by the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s, this knowledge was known, but it had no prominent place in the discourse on racism yet. It functioned in the margins of the discourse and this knowledge was only circulated amongst a small ‘inner circle’ of WCC staff members and their informants in confidential correspondence and reports marked as ‘not for publication’. It was discussed at a meeting of the ad hoc advisory group of Kitagawa’s secretariat in Paris in 1962: ‘Because most peoples of colour consider all white people to be Christian, white political domination and economic exploitation of black

198 Kitagawa, Race Relations and Christian Mission.
199 Ibid., 56.
people is regarded as Christian action. Many people of the subordinate group thus become alienated from the Church and from faith in Christ. Faithful black Christians are torn between two loyalties - to the ['white'] church and to their racial group. The first loyalty disarms them because they find it difficult to hate and to fight their white brethren in Christ. The second loyalty torments their consciences with the thought that they betray their brethren “in flesh” when they do not engage in nationalistic struggles. As happened at Cottesloe, the identification was problematized because it was seen as an obstacle to the aim of becoming a universal council.

Kitagawa’s work was influenced by the ideas of the Social Gospel. In his publications he propagated a Church that would work with the Bible in one hand, and the newspaper in the other. He was an advocate of a leading Church: a Church that would stand up and guide the revolutions and a Church that understood society well enough to react to society's needs. His approach fitted the statements of Robert Bilheimer at Johannesburg: the Church had to watch and warn; it had to foster fellowships and to share its convictions. The Social Gospel minded Christians were a majority among the WCC staff in the crucial positions with regard to ‘racial and ethnic tensions’.

It is remarkable that Kitagawa took a much stronger stance against racial inequalities, the role of the Church and the ‘apathy’ of the white people in Africa in confidential reports and correspondence and in his book that was published in 1965 after he resigned from his function at the WCC in September 1962. The early 1960s show some discrepancy between the official statements of the WCC and the words of its staff members during private meetings and in correspondence. More sensitive issues, such as the use of violence and the involvement of the Church in imperialism, were addressed confidentially, but not discussed publicly. For example, Kitagawa expressed his statement on the ultimate victory of the Africans in race conflicts in correspondence with Kenneth Kaunda and African National Congress president Albert Luthuli.

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203 Another noteworthy observation is that most men involved with the question of race relations at the WCC staff in the early 1960s were Americans: Paul Abrecht, Daisuke Kitagawa and Robert Bilheimer had all received theological training in the USA and all came from church denominations that were open to the Social Gospel. Furthermore, as said before, Visser ’t Hooft had written his PhD dissertation on the Social Gospel.
but never in one of his WCC publications. Instead, in those publications, he emphasized the good things that Europeans had done so far in Africa.

In correspondence among staff members the position of the WCC towards ‘racial and ethnic tensions’ was outlined and discussed. Through this correspondence and consultations a more progressive inner-circle of WCC staff members and close contacts developed. Although the WCC staff kept correspondence with the Dutch Reformed Churches, main figures as Kitagawa, Bilheimer and Abrecht had more frequent contact with like-minded thinkers in Southern Africa, Asia and the USA. For example, after the Cottlesloe Consultation the Department on Church and Society had more frequent correspondence with the liberal South African Institute for Race Relations (SAIRR) than with the conservative and apartheid supporting South African Bureau of Race Relations (SABRA). Both the Institute and the Bureau were concerned with race relations, the first one having a predominant white and English speaking constituency, the latter one white and African speaking. The SAIRR criticized apartheid policies and aimed to alleviate the socio-economic conditions for Africans, coloured and Asians in South Africa. Some of its staff members were affiliated to the Liberal Party. The SABRA can be described as a ‘think tank of Afrikaner nationalism’. It offered academic support to the pro-apartheid National Party.

This discrepancy between what was published and what was expressed confidentially can be explained by considering how the WCC staff thought of the role of the WCC: not judging the member churches and bringing them together. The responsibility to bring parties together, to reconcile, was considered the main task of the Council. Being more critical could lead to disconnection with the white minorities in Southern Africa, and thereby the opportunity to influence their thinking would be lost. This fear was reflected in the rather mild statements by the WCC on race relations in Southern Africa. On a discursive level, we can already detect many crucial ideas that would be expressed publicly in the years to come: the recognition that racial divide was also a class divide, the identification of the church with white minority rule; and the legitimacy of violence used by Africans to overthrow violent regimes. Although the statements by the WCC in the early 1960s on race relations seem rather mild, especially from today’s perspective, they served as a curtain behind which more radical thinking on racism was going on.

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206 Correspondence: p.30 print list plan for handling wcc responsibilities in the field of racial and ethnic relations; p.30 print Abrecht – need to hear from negro leaders.’; 1960 Makulu (p91)


3.1.3 New Delhi

One of the first public events of the WCC’s Secretariat on Racial and Ethnic Relations was the Third General Assembly at New Delhi from 20 November to 5 December 1961. 166 churches were represented to discuss the main theme ‘Jesus – the Light of the World’. The reports of all three the sections (named Unity, Witness and Service) and the addresses of the public speakers showed a high concern among the Assembly participants about a changing world. Chairman of the Central Committee Franklin Fry called it the ‘winds of history […] here and there twisting into actual cyclones’.\(^{209}\) The ‘struggle for racial equality’ was one of the many ‘revolutions’ in international society discussed at the Assembly.\(^{210}\)

Daisuke Kitagawa presented the Secretariat and its planned study programme. In this report, approved by the Assembly, he reaffirmed the statements of the Second General Assembly, namely that racial discrimination was against the Gospel.\(^{211}\) Also, he proposed a study programme articulating what he thought were crucial issues concerning race and ethnic relations. Two are relevant for later events, namely a study into ‘Christian action in political, economic, social and Church life’ and a study to ‘the theological basis of non-violence’.\(^{212}\) They are indicative for how Kitagawa related race relations to the discourse on the relevance of the Church – what action the Church could and should take to be a credible actor, meaning that it practiced what it preached – and to the question whether violence could ever be legitimate – a question he had discussed confidentially, but not publicly. The Assembly committee discussing the report declared that ‘the churches have not acted dynamically enough since the Evanston Assembly for the elimination of segregation in the church and in society’ and called the churches to do so in the future.\(^{213}\) Also the section ‘Service’ shortly discussed the ‘struggle for racial equality’. The report of this section contained words of gratitude to the churches which tried to break racial barriers; it reaffirmed the statements made by the Second General Assembly; and it rejected the idea of ‘separate development’ propagated in South Africa.\(^{214}\) It stated that the churches should always identify themselves with the oppressed race, but also should help the oppressor through education and reconciliation.\(^{215}\) The Assembly adopted a resolution calling the churches to ‘act more resolutely than they have heretofore’ [on the issue of race, YG].\(^{216}\) How


\(^{212}\) Ibid., 183–184.


\(^{215}\) Ibid., 103.

\(^{216}\) Ibid.
to act was not further specified. The report is mild, reaching a hand to all parties involved, not explicitly mentioning examples of racial inequality and not judging.

Although race relations as such did not receive much attention apart from the Secretariat’s work; the same questions came to the fore as the ones circulating within the Secretariat. Behind the scenes ideas on the changing societies in the world and race relations had been linked already. At the Assembly this was not the case yet. Looking strictly at debates on race relations, this Assembly did not offer much new and it did not add much to the discourse on racism. However, some relevant themes were addressed. These themes are important to highlight, as they would become part of the discourse on racism in the coming years.

The first is the unity of the Church and the problematization of the identification of the Church with the West (understood as North America, Europe and the white minority regimes in Southern Africa). The WCC aimed to become a universal council expressing the unity of the churches. At the General Assembly Madathilparampil Mammen Thomas, Egbert de Vries (both had participated in the Rapid Social Change study programme) and the section on Service all mentioned the negative consequences of the identification of the Church with the West and with white oppressive rule. The report noted: ‘the assumption that Western culture is the culture and that therefore Christian culture is necessarily identified with the customs and tradition of Western civilization is a hindrance to the spread of the Gospel and a stumbling block to those of other traditions’. Thomas and De Vries connected this critique with the observation of social change and the role the Church should play therein. Thomas spoke as follows: ‘The Church’s identification with the Western Culture and power on the one hand and the Church’s pietism and fear of organized group action to change political and social structures, on the other, have been hindrances to the development of a positive responsible relation to the peoples struggle for a new life.’ Egbert de Vries presented his idea of the dynamic society, a society changing, reacting to other societies and turning into a world community, to which the churches should adapt. He especially warned the Western churches trying to ignore the dynamics going on: ‘Churches cannot trace out a frontier between church and society in the hope that society will not trespass upon church life. That hope is vain and most churches feel the urgent need to be guided by the Gospel exactly in the field of social and economic organization’. He found the churches in the West had to respond to these dynamics: ‘the churches in the West [...] must proceed further and more deeply into the meaning of solidarity and common responsibility’. In their statements, Thomas and De Vries connect the aim to be a universal council to the policies of the Council.

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According to them, in order to become universal, the Council had to consider the situations in the non-Western parts of the world and respond to it. They politicized the conception of 'universality' and thereby they turned the theological debates on universality into forums to discourse race relations as well. Thomas and De Vries referred to ‘North’ and ‘South’ relations. In the years thereafter ‘North’ became identical to ‘white’; and ‘South’ identical to ‘black’.

Thomas and De Vries were not the only ones with strong ideas on the lacking universal character of the Church, with a positive attitude towards change, and supporter of Church interference in political, social and economic affairs. Throughout the Assembly, social change and revolution were discussed. The East German Elizabeth Adler, who would get more involved with the Programme to Combat Racism in the early 1970s, called a revolution ‘a pregnant situation’ in which people have a vision and hope. According to her, the churches should focus on those places changing’. Most of the speakers agreed that in this process of social change, the Church could not just watch or simply ignore the events. Thomas considered the ‘action towards selfhood’ - the struggle for self-determination - in Africa and Asia to be a positive development, as a sign of Christ presence and action in the current world. He gave the Churches the task to discern ‘the promise and judgment of Christ’ in them. This approach can be found in the Social Gospel and Christian socialism as well: both looking positively towards emancipation and revolution as these changes were perceived to carry the work of God. Events have a certain purpose, a meaning which can be understood by Christians, and when understood, helps them to direct their own action. The Japanese Professor Takenaka compares the processes of change going on in the world with a busy street corner in New York City. According to him ‘churches on the busy street corners must open their eyes and ears to find out what Christ is doing in the midst of the changing world for the restoration of true humanity’.

The Indian theologian Paul Devanandan thought the Church had to move beyond simple generalization and easy statements. It had to consider the new realities in the world and ‘address’ itself to it. It could, however, only do so by ‘putting loyalty to their common Lord above all other loyalties’.

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223 Atherton, Social Christianity.
225 That manifold revolution underlies the tremendous challenge the Church is facing today. Behind the attraction for communism for many in Asia and Africa today and the bitter opposition to any pretence of colonialism, the is still the fear that the white race will never shed their assumptions of superiority whether it stems from biology, culture or more rapid progress in historical time. In such a world Christian witness cannot rest content with vague generalities, but must address itself to the concrete realities of the contemporaneous situation in order to express more fully in human relations God’s will for peace, justice, equality and freedom on earth. But Christians can do this only if they are willing to cross all frontiers in their relations with one another, by putting loyalty to their common Lord above all other loyalties’. Paul Devanandan, “Called to Witness” (presented at the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, New Delhi, 1969).
all other loyalties’, which could be understood as its loyalty to ‘order’, to European governments, to its member churches supporting white minority regimes. A similar remark can be found in the address of De Vries, who stated that the Church can only interfere in society if they are ‘spiritually free of their immediate social environment’. Both statements can be understood in the critique on the Church in general, and on the WCC in particular, to be a product of Western civilization. In order to become a universal council, the WCC had to free itself from its Western biased social environment. Furthermore, both can be seen as push to the WCC to broaden its horizons and at least concern itself with the developments going on in Africa, Asia and Latin America. These and other speeches carried an acceptance of change as something positive. The report on the Assembly still presented the ‘revolutions’ as a challenge to the churches. The addresses however present the changes as an improvement which the churches should stimulate and not hinder. It is therefore very telling that Kitagawa cited the following passage of the Assembly statements in the journal of his Secretariat *Race Relations in Ecumenical Perspective*: ‘where oppression, discrimination and segregation exist, the churches should identify themselves with the oppressed race in its struggle to achieve justice. Christians should be ready to lead in this struggle. The revolution is taking place whether we recognize it or not, and without Christian leadership it may be tragically perverted’.226 This citation showed some acceptance of the revolutions as means to overthrow an unjust order and it encouraged Christians to act in this overthrow. The Assembly used the words ‘tragically perverted’ to illustrate the need for Christians to act: they could guide these revolutions, limit violence and bring the opposing parties together. In this call to Christians to act, we still see the idea of reconciliation: this was a means to avoid tragedies.

From 1962 onwards, the Secretariat on Racial and Ethnic Relations decreased in importance. By the end of 1961 Kitagawa resumed office in the USA and it took until September 1963 until the American pastor and former missionary in Angola Thomas Okuma was appointed as his successor (starting in February 1964).227 The search for a new secretary reveals an awareness of the sensitivity of race. In correspondence many names were mentioned and discussed. For example, Kitagawa suggested asking someone from Ceylon, as a Ceylonese would have experience with racial tensions and would not be received negatively in Africa. On another candidate he notes ‘the fact that he was a missionary may discredit [him] rather severely’. It is an indication of the problematization within the WCC of the entanglement of Church’s history

with imperialism. While Okuma made visits to South Africa and continued the Secretariat of Racial and Ethnic Relations, his work was overshadowed by two upcoming events. The first was the consultation on 'Christian Attitude to Social Change and Relations' in 1964. The second was the Church and Society conference planned in 1966.

3.2 Rapid Social Change and Race Relations

3.2.1 Christian Practice and Desirable Action in Social Change and Race Relations

The upcoming consultation and conference were an initiative of the Department on Church and Society. Robert Bilheimer was one of the brains behind the Consultation on Christian Practice and Desirable Action in Social Change and Race Relations. He organized it with some of his close contacts: Fred van Wyk, a staff member of the South African Institute for Race Relations, and Donald M'Timkulu of the Rhodesian Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation. The Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation was a new founded institute in Kitwe (Northern Rhodesia, called Zambia since the 24th of October 1964) and an ally of the WCC: Kitagawa had done some of his research in the region and the institute would host upcoming consultation.

The 1964 consultation in Kitwe was concerned with race relations in Southern Africa. It linked race relations and 'rapid social change'. This is not surprising since its organizer Bilheimer, and also other staff members of the Department on Church and Society, namely Daisuke Kitagawa and Paul Abrecht, had worked for the Rapid Social Change programme. All were known as a proponent of Church involvement in societal affairs. In their invitation to the consultation the organizers stated: 'None can escape the problems of social change and of race relations. We are aware that the churches, sometimes a source of leadership, are frequently behind in these matters in the present day'. The presentation of the churches as 'being behind' was crucial in this consultation: it turned out to be a fruitful ground to demand further action of the churches in racial affairs.

Besides addressing the role of the Church, the organizers aimed to come with concrete advice to Christians living in Southern Africa amidst social change and racial tensions. The consultation asked the participants what both 'non-white and white Africans' could do from a Christian perspective to change the racial patterns through political action or economic actions.

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229 Okuma visit to South Africa p.21-22
231 Whyte writes to Bilheimer: 'the Christian African faces many problems and conflicts. If a real understanding of the ways in which to handle his basic Christian beliefs in the political context within which he works is obtained through such a conference, he achieves a sureness and a certainty, and an integrated and a spiritually powerful approach to his function'. "Whyte to Bilheimer."
and ‘what dilemmas and opportunities are involved in these changes for Christians?’

It is interesting to compare these questions with the study outline of a ‘race relations group meeting’ organized by the Secretariat on Race and Ethnic Relations two years earlier in Paris. Where the upcoming consultation asked what ‘non-white and white Africans’ could do and how they could change society, at the meeting in Paris questions were posed as ‘what specific methods of organized action can Christians support for the reduction of harmful racial and ethnic tension in all spheres of life?’

The difference between supporting action (from the outside) and taking action (as insider) shows how the staff of the WCC increasingly tried to make the Council and thereby the Church relevant for people suffering racial oppression: not by considering how Europeans should think of the changes going on in these territories, but by giving the people living in these systems of oppression guidelines based on Christian thinking to face their situation.

In order to answer these questions, the organizers invited a mix of social scientists, political leaders and theologians, mainly from Southern Africa. A considerable representation of the WCC staff was present. Daisuke Kitagawa and Oscar Lee, who were no longer part of the Secretariat on Racial and Ethnic Relations, were present. Besides them, General Secretary Visser ‘t Hooft, Abrecht, Bilheimer, Alan Booth (representing the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, CCIA) and Zachariah K. Matthews participated. Matthews was a South African theologian, academic and an African National Congress (ANC) politician. He was a strong opponent of the apartheid policies in his country and he promoted a radical, but non-violent change with equal rights for all its citizens. He was present at the Cottesloe Consultation and a year later he was invited to work as staff member for the WCC. He was one of the first black Africans to work at the headquarters in Geneva. He was closely involved in the organization of influential conferences, such as this consultation in 1964. In Kitwe, he gave the speech ‘the road from non-violence to violence’, which would turn out to be an important landmark in the WCC’s debates on the use of violence.

The participants list reflected the thinking of the involved staff members: anti-apartheid, seeing racial injustice as part of a broader system of injustices and willing to get the WCC in particular, and the churches in general, more involved in changing the unjust situations in Southern Africa. Also the South Africans present were strong critics of the apartheid regime:

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Christiaan Beyers Naudé, a Reverend who was forced to give up his position in the Dutch Reformed Church after his support for the Cottesloe Consultation and his efforts to question the apartheid policy using the Bible; Edgar H. Brookes, member for the Liberal Party supporting the ‘one man, one vote’ idea, giving equal franchise rights all South Africans and member of the South African Institute for Race Relations; Gerhardus C. Oosthuizen, professor Religious Studies in South Africa; and Z.K. Matthews, now working for the WCC.235

3.2.2 Race Relations in Southern Africa
The consultation addressed racial tensions in the Southern African context, as a local problem with a universal appearance: racial tensions could be found everywhere. What made the Southern African situation urgent for the organizers was the combination with ‘rapid social change’. As the organizers had envisaged, the speakers and participants placed racial tensions in a broader framework of injustices, such as unequal education, job opportunities and voting rights. The apartheid policies of South Africa were considered to be similar to the white minority regime in Rhodesia. Shelby Ncgobo, an economist from Southern Rhodesia, saw the racial relations as interrelated with unequal job opportunities, limited access to education and unjust discriminatory laws. According to Ncgobo, racial relations could only be improved if the nature and structure of government in the Southern African countries were transformed to give equal rights to all its citizens.236

In the consultation report also connected ‘race relations’ to political, social and economic inequality. The report answered the question why anger, violence, and world concern had grown with regard to the race problem as follows: ‘Because, on well-attested fact, political rights, civil liberties, and economic opportunity are denied to millions of people; because in the organization and customs of society men are deprived of their dignity; and these things are justified on the grounds of racial differences [...] Resentment of this treatment by black people is growing. It reaches the boiling point when, after repeated attempts over decades to improve conditions, there now appears to be no way out’.237 According to Ncgobo, the Christian church should support the attempts to change these societies. By referring to William Temple, one of the founders of the WCC and known as a Christian socialist, Ncgobo gave further legitimacy to argument – he connected his words to the ideas of a prominent figure within the ecumenical

movement. 238 In a similar way, Edgar Brookes referred to the Social gospel by quoting John Bennett and Reinhold Niebuhr, two other prominent Christian theologians also involved with the establishment of the WCC. He put forward that one can be disobedient to the state when obedience to this state means disobedience to the God.239 Reverend S.P. Lediga from South Africa agreed. He firmly rejected the distinction between politics and Christianity and proposed instead a vital relationship between the two.240

The necessity for the Church, and in this case the WCC, to speak out against racial injustices and to act against them was firmly emphasized during the consultation. Kenneth Kaunda, the new Prime Minister of Northern Rhodesia spoke of his doubts on the role the church could play. Had she not been too much concerned with herself, he asked.241 Also others highlighted the need for the church to make itself relevant to the lives of many oppressed in Southern Africa, especially because the Church had become identified with the white ruling class. Ncgobo told how the Christian church was perceived to be the 'handmaid of European capitalism and imperialism in the past and of being in support of white interests and the status quo at present time'.242 Robert Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia, came with a story how the Church was identified with white domination.243 While both added that this identification was false, they did make the suggestion the Church should look for a renewed relevance to the Southern Africans. The report of the Consultation reaffirmed the importance of the contribution the Church had made in education. However it criticized the churches for not opposing racial superiority of 'the white man' and for not acting against social and economic injustice.244 In this way, the report related to the earlier statements of Kitagawa on the role of the Church and the mission in imperialism. While Christian missionaries brought education, they also contributed to the spread of Western power. At this consultation in 1964 and in the speech of Madathilparampil Mammen Thomas at the New Delhi General Assembly, the link between Christianity and Western society gets problematized for multiple reasons. It is considered to be an obstacle to the long wished unity of all Christians, but it is also seen as a reason for the Church failing to react effectively against racial injustice.

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Highly related to the idea of social change, was the question whether Christians could use violence in order to achieve freedom. Bilheimer was keen to address this issue. He wrote to Matthews: 'While we would not advertise the fact, we could under this heading discuss the great and burning issue of violence and non-violence in changing race patterns and Christian attitudes to these problems'. The question whether liberation movements could use violence was opted at the General Assembly in New Delhi and it was discussed confidentially. Kitagawa wrote to Kaunda that he could understand if Africans turned towards violence, even though it would be better if they would not do so. He called it ‘an irony of human affairs that the very victim of racial injustice has almost always to bear the main burden of social and political actions to correct the long-established wrongs and pay an enormous price for it’. Kitagawa and Bilheimer made their statements privately: these ideas were present in the discourse on racism, but functioned in the margins of it. The question whether oppressed people could use violence was very sensitive, as is illustrated in a footnote on the first page of the report: ‘There were members of the consultation who felt bound to dissociate themselves from any suggestion that the use of industrial disruption [striking, YG], the invoking of sanctions or other forms of international interventions, or the use of internal violence are permissible to secure social justice. Some members of the consultation were of the opinion that it is not the task of the Church as an institution or organization to undertake to produce and to carry into effect specific economic and political solutions to human problems’.

The main address of the consultation concerning violence was held by Z.K. Matthews called ‘the road from non-violence to violence’. He firstly addressed how Africans have tried to adapt to the European lifestyle and how this failed. Then he considered what means of opposition to the repressive laws have been used by Africans: litigation, petitions, strikes, campaigning. These forms of opposition have been made illegal. Therefore, Matthews explained, the African looks for new ways as ‘being under domination of another group is not exactly a pleasant thing for those who have to suffer it, and there is nothing else for the latter group to do but to continue to fight against domination until they overcome it’. He pointed to the important role of the white Southern Africans: if they were willing to make concessions, violence would not be necessary. In his speech Matthews quoted Nelson Mandela, at that time the leader of the armed wing of the ANC: "After a long and anxious assessment of the South African situation, I and some colleagues...

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246 Kitagawa, “Letter Kitagawa to Kaunda.”


249 Ibid.
came to the conclusion that as violence in this country was inevitable, it would be unrealistic and wrong for African leaders to continue preaching peace and non-violence when the Government met our peaceful demands with force.”

Mandela had delivered this speech during the so-called Rivonia trial, taking place from October 1963 to June 1964, in which he and other ANC-leaders were accused of preparing a ‘violent revolution’ and sabotaging. Only nine days after the Consultation on Christian Practice and Desirable Action in Social Change and Race Relations in Kitwe had ended, Mandela and the other accused, except one, were sentenced to life imprisonment.

With this quote, Matthews illustrated that violence was used when all peaceful means have been tried and did not yield success. He introduced a new element to the discourse on racism, namely the argument that violence needs to be understood as last resort. In the years before, the use of violence was publicly rejected by the WCC, for example by calling those who used violence ‘extremists’. With his address in Kitwe, Matthews attempted to redefine this definition. According to him the ‘extremists’ were only using extreme measures, because they were forced to do so by those in power. He added an understanding for those who used violence by positioning them not as ‘extremists’, but as reasonable men who have tried all non-violent ways before. His definition fitted the ideas of many of the relevant WCC staff members, such as Kitagawa, which had not been expressed publicly yet. Matthews fulfilled another implicit aim of the consultation, namely to address violence used by the state. His words thereby marked a new stream in the discourse on racism, which questioned the legitimacy of certain governments, mainly in Southern Africa, and challenging more conservative Christian perspectives dismissing revolutionary action.

Matthews spoke publicly, but the report of the consultation was only spread in close circles and only two short notices on it appeared in The Ecumenical Review. His speech was published in the quarterly of the Secretariat of Racial and Ethnic Relations, but anonymously. This secrecy was deemed necessary in order to avoid repercussions, especially with regard to the participants from South Africa. Paul Abrecht wrote to Roswell Barnes, executive secretary of

250 Ibid.
the WCC office in New York City, that ‘while the South African government probably knows these facts [who spoke at the consultation, YG] also, the wide publication by us of such facts could endanger the people who participated from South Africa’.255

In this early 1960s an inner circle of more pro-revolutionary minded people within the WCC emerged which was in contact with similar minded people in the USA and throughout Africa. The consultation at the Mindolo Ecumenical Center in 1964 was important as it tightened the link between the idea of ‘rapid social change’ in Africa and racial tensions. At New Delhi these two had been discussed separately, but at this consultation they were emphasized to be interrelated. Furthermore, the notion of responsible society, introduced in 1948, was placed in a new context, namely what to do if a society is irresponsible? What kind of action is permissible for a Christian? The consultation again confirmed, as New Delhi had done, that the Church should identify itself with the oppressed and support action to counter the domination. In order to maintain its relevance the Christian Church had to speak out more strongly, according to the participants of the consultation. This conclusion fitted how WCC staff members had tried to frame the WCC, namely as a relevant actor in world affairs achieving more than expressing mere statements. This call from the participants directly related to the aim of the Council to make a contribution to the world.

3.3 World Conference on Church and Society

‘The world has changed and the struggle of the ecumenical movement to keep up with the implications of that change has at times seemed like a losing battle rather than a victorious march of the armies of the Lord. […] We have much hard thinking to do, much new thinking to do, even much revolutionary thinking to do, before we can define with any confidence the role of the Church in the world in which we live’.256 With these words, Paul Abrecht presented in 1962 the aim of the World Conference on Church and Society to be held in 1966. The aim of the conference was to facilitate ‘new thinking’ by bringing together social scientists, theologians and political actors.257

Abrecht and his fellow organizers had high ambitions: the conference had to be a landmark in ecumenical thinking on the role of the Church.258 The Conference was placed in a line of


258 Kitagawa stressed in a letter to Okuma the importance of this conference. Paul Abrecht gave clear instructions to the speakers telling them the purpose of their address and the importance. Daisuke Kitagawa, “Letter Kitagawa to Okuma,” no date, 243.07 World Conference on Church & Society. Geneva 1966 Preparation of the conference. Map 2.,
remarkable other ecumenical conferences, such as the Life and Work conferences in 1925 and 1937, dealing with questions on the relations of the Church to society. Four preparatory volumes with contributions of 83 authors (both laymen and theologians) were published before the conference took place. The forewords all stressed the innovative character of the essays in the volumes and of the upcoming conference. Editor Egbert de Vries spoke of ‘a new stage in Christian reflection on the problem of divining the patterns of human living for our time’; John C. Bennett introduced his volume on Christian social ethics as ‘much fresh theological thinking about social ethics’; Zachariah Matthews hoped his volume on responsible government would be a stimulus for the ‘new and many-faceted debate about the Christian responsibility in political life’; and Denys Munby called his volume on economic growth ‘a new effort of study and thought’.

The two main organizers were Paul Abrecht (secretary) and Madathilparampil Mammen Thomas (chairman). Like Abrecht, Thomas had been involved in the Rapid Social Change study a decade before, focusing on Asia. His engagement with the ecumenical movement started shortly before the First Assembly. He participated in the preparatory meetings, being the only representative from the ‘Third World’. After the Rapid Social Change study programme he stayed at the WCC headquarters working for the Department on Church and Society. He was appointed as chairman of the Central Committee in 1968 and he would remain in this position until 1975. This was a prestigious function and Thomas was the first layman (non-theologian) and non-Westerner in this position. Working for the WCC and for the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society in India (established by himself), he developed his thoughts on church and society. Thomas was a supporter of the Indian nationalist movement and disagreed with the Christian thinking that the Church should support the state in order to maintain order. According to him it was possible to be both Christian and to support movements that work to change the order. He saw no contradiction in this; while more conservative Christians would.


259 World Council of Churches, World Conference on Church and Society: Official Report.

261 Vries, Man in Community; Bennett, Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World; Matthews and Thomas, Responsible Government in a Revolutionary Age; Munby and Kuin, Economic Growth in World Perspective.
His approach, being optimistic about the future and promoting the struggles for change going on in the world, was characteristic for the World Conference on Church and Society.

3.3.1 The Church and Revolutions

‘The fact, Ladies and Gentlemen is this, that there is a revolution in the world today’. Many of the participants at the World Conference on Church and Society in 1966 agreed with this observation of the Nigerian Reverend Adeolu Adegbola. Visser ’t Hooft spoke of a ‘world in which the very foundations are being shaken’. The image used for the booklet introducing the conference illustrated the statement of Visser ’t Hooft. It showed a scattered globe falling into three pieces.

![](image)

1 Front page booklet on World Conference on Church and Society 1966

It is the process of renewal, the idea of ‘global revolutions’ in all areas of life (politically, socially, economically) that gave the conference its legitimacy, according to chairman Madathilparampil Mammen Thomas. He stated the Church had to respond to them: ‘The new technology, the new nations, the struggle for new ethos which challenges all religions, including traditional Christian institutions and theologies. They demand a reformulation of the relation between Church and Society and a Christian social ethics which assimilates and is more challengingly relevant to the new secular humanism’.

What was this ‘revolution’ Adegbola spoke about? The transfers of power in former colonial countries, process of industrialization, new technologies, individualization, new means of

266 World Conference on Church and Society 1966 (Lausanne, no date).
267 Thomas, “Opening Session on 12th July 1966.”
communication, a new system of international relations: all these changes were discussed at the conference in relation to the idea of a revolution going on. While in some speeches the changes taking place in Europe and the US were addressed, most focused on the changing societies in Africa, Asia and Latin-America. The German theologian Heinz-Dietrich Wendland pointed to influences coming ‘from the West’, such as the Western principle of individualism and Western political ideas, affecting life in Africa and Asia. Others copied this direction of influence, from the West to the South. However, most stressed that modernization or revolution would not make the developing countries a copy of the West. Instead, Thomas, the chairman, noted that the cultural past could be reused in the different responses these revolutions.

The idea of change and revolution was a sensitive issue. The same questions as asked at the Consultation in Kitwe in 1964 were posed in Geneva as well: what action can Christians take? How should they approach the revolutions taking place? From the texts in the booklet and the four preparatory volumes written, one could expect that during the Conference those supporting Church action in the revolution would get considerable attention. One of the editors of the preparatory volumes was the American John C. Bennett. Atherton lists him as one of the key proponents of the Social Gospel. The booklet on the Conference introduces Bennett’s volume as follows: ‘The churches in the fellowship of the World Council of Churches have in the past spoken together on particular social, political, and economic issues, but theology has been often been more implicit than explicit in these statements. The essays in this volume show that this limited ecumenical consensus is being challenged today’. […] ‘Christian social thought is inadequate in its response to rapidly changing society’. The words ‘limited’ and ‘adequate’ illustrate that the organizers wanted to expand Christian thinking to make it adequate – to make the Church relevant to this ‘revolutionary world’.

At the World Conference, many presented ‘revolution’ as something positive; as the hand of God. Especially speakers from East-Europe, such as the Russian Orthodox Archpriest Borovy and the Czech theologian J.M. Lochman stressed the revolutionary character of Christianity. They considered ‘radical renewal’ necessary to move to a new and perfect social order: revolutions were a means to move to a more perfect order and to break ‘with the power of sin’. They shared this perspective with the American theologian Richard Shaull, who also saw revolutions as something positive: he proposed a theology that would address the issues Christians in a

269 Atherton, Social Christianity.
270 World Conference on Church and Society 1966, 14.
272 Borovy, “The Challenge and Relevance of Theology to the Social Revolutions of Our Time.”
As these speakers defined revolutions as something positive, they rejected the current world order and a Christian conservatism to it. Lochman asked 'how many times has the Church not contributed to the transformation of society, but to its confirmation, and even to the conservation of the status quo?' Too many times, he argued, and many other speakers agreed.

Characteristic of the World Conference on Church and Society was that the status quo of that time was presented as negative, linking it to economic injustices. A dichotomy between the 'old order' - the status quo - and a 'new order' - the future - was established in these speeches. The accepted dividing line in the conference was between 'North' and 'South', between 'developed' and 'developing', between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', between 'old' and 'new'. This dichotomy was applied to an international scale. As result, the notion of a 'responsible society', introduced at the First General Assembly, was also transferred to the international sphere. The speakers asked the Church to work for a responsible international society.

While many did not agree with the appraisal of the revolution by Borovy, Shaull and Lochman and putted forward a more moderate perspective, nearly all speakers rejected Christian conservatism. According to them, the Church had to accept the future and try to be part of it. Explicitly, the Church was identified being part of the old order, and thereby as an obstacle to change. The Indonesian Simatupang, one of the four presidents of the Indonesian Council of Churches who had been involved in the Indonesian independence struggle, gave the Churches the following option: 'Will Christians serve as agents for conciliation between the new and older states working to overcome both resentment and the sense of superiority.' Also, the Colombian professor of Sociology, Orlando Fals Borda, and the Kenyan minister of Labour, J.G. Kiana, pushed the Churches to make a stronger contribution to just economic relations. Kiana 'challenged the Christian church to undertake a crusade for economic justice in our modern

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277 The Japanese Professor Takenaka stated; just a negative judgement of the existing situation or trumpeting the revolutionary march will not help much'. Instead, he thought the world should contribute to a ‘relevant, realistic alternative’. M. Takenaka, “Conference Address by Professor M. Takenaka,” 1966, 243.12 Geneva 1966. Publications. Map 5, WCC Archives.
278 Simatupang, “The Increasing Role of Government and Responsible Participation.”
world’ and Fals Borda expressed his hope for a Church that ‘militantly sides with the ‘have-nots’.279

The new General Secretary, Eugene Carson Blake, agreed with them: ‘the Church as Church must act, take a stand, and march with those in society who alone cannot win their battle for justice, freedom and equality’.280 The economist and Roman Catholic guest Barbara Ward confirmed the Church has the duty to work for the poor and stressed the influence the Church had: ‘Christians alone straddle the whole spectrum of rich nations, and therefore Christians are a lobby or can be a lobby of incomprehensible importance in this field. And if we don’t do it, and when we come to see God ultimately, before our heavenly Father, and He says: “did you feed them, and did you give them to drink, did you clothe them, did you shelter them”? And we say: “Sorry Lord, but we did give .3 of our gross national product I don’t think it will be enough.”281

The above mentioned debates on revolutions and the status-quo is relevant for the discourse on racism, as unequal power relations were addressed. It sketched a broader frame from which the discourse on race relations borrowed. The addresses mark a transition in thinking on order and change. We see that at this conference the more radical thinkers on change and ‘revolution’ within the ecumenical community were dominant. The Message of the Conference approved these positions:

‘As Christians, we are committed to working for the transformation of society. In the past, we have usually done this through quiet efforts at social renewal, working in and through the established institutions according to their rules. Today, a significant number of those who are dedicated to the serviced of Christ and their neighbour assume a more radical or revolutionary position. They don’t deny the value of tradition nor of social order, but they are searching for a new strategy by which to bring about basic changes in society without too much delay. It is possible that the tension between these two positions will have an important place in the life of the Christian community for some time to come. At the present moment, it is important for us to recognize that this radical position has a solid foundation in Christian tradition and should have its rightful place in the life of the Church and in the ongoing discussion of social responsibility’.282

3.3.2 Race Relations and Global Injustices

‘Racial and Ethnic Relations’ was an item on the agenda, part of the Section on ‘Man and Community in Changing Societies’. Next to this it was addressed by the working group discussing ‘Theological Issues in Social Ethics’. This working group’s statement considered race as a historical-cultural distinction unlike the male-female distinction which ‘belongs to creation

279 Kiana, “Economic Relations between the Developed and the Developing Countries.”
282 World Council of Churches, World Conference on Church and Society: Official Report, 49.
It noted on race: ‘this historical-cultural distinction has, however, often been absolutized by men, who have south a false self-identity in racial forms. This idolization of race has in some cultures become the basis for one race seeking to oppress and dominate others whom they consider inferior. Such idolatry, or group self-deification which is the consequence of human sin, oversteps creaturely limitations and defies God’. This definition is remarkable as it defined race as a construct, not as a biological fact. While before race was not always defined as essential category, it was usually used as a marker of cultural differences.

A working group related racial relations with political and economic power: ‘At this moment of history, the white race dominates the world economically and politically. This domination prevents the development of authentic human community both in nations and on an international level. Christians should be passionately concerned that this pattern of domination be broken down, in order that a more truly human society may be built’. This passage is noteworthy: it is the first explicit and public statement in the WCC context in which racial tensions are tied to the white race and power relations. This consolidation of power in the ‘white race’ is problematized. The discourse on racism borrowed from the debates on other injustices. To the dichotomy between ‘North’ and ‘South’, ‘developed’ and ‘developing’, ‘haves and have nots’ a race perspective was added. The ‘haves’, ‘developed’, and the ‘North’ were identified as ‘white’. In this way, race relations were framed as an international problem and put in a framework of global injustices as economic inequalities and power differences. An example is the speech of the Nigerian lawyer and former president of WSCF, Bola Ige, who criticized ‘neocolonial interferences’ in the new independent states. According to him, it stroke with the political freedom of these countries. He connected race relations to a broader perspective of injustices on both national and international scale. Thereby, he framed the struggle for racial equality as one between the ‘new nations’ versus the ‘old nations’; between African, Latin-American and Asian states versus European and North American states. In doing so, he made race relations part of international power relations and an issue to be solved internationally.

The shifts in the thinking within the WCC are clearly visible in the World Conference. No longer were the revolutionaries the only object of study. Instead the gaze turned towards those who supported the status-quo. Change was promoted and defended; those who did not support it were being labelled as ‘the old order’. Bola Ige puts it very clearly: ‘the new nations are going to impress it upon the rest of the world, East or West, that the problem of the world is not the poor, but the rich’. He turned the gaze of the conversation towards the ‘haves’. Post-colonial

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283 Ibid., 204.
284 Ibid.
285 Ibid.
287 Ibid., 5.
theorist Homi K. Bhabha presents the ‘turning of the gaze’ as important strategy of resistance: it is an attempt to change subject-object relations challenging the normalized perspective of looking.\textsuperscript{288} He sees the ability to look and to define as both an act and consequence of power. Within the WCC, until this conference European and North American representatives were able to define the Third World and to discuss what was needed to change in order to develop. With this World Conference, and the previous consultation in Kitwe in 1964, the focus of the debate shifted from the Third World to the structures created by Europeans and North Americans. This shifting focus is a result of changing power relations: certain perspectives came to circulate within the WCC as a result of the introduction of new speakers. These speakers had expressed their opinions before, but were now allowed to take the floor during this important conference. With their replacement from the margins to the core of the discourse on racism, they were able to move the focus of the discourse to the structures created by the Europeans and North Africans. Thereby, they confirmed the subjugated knowledge, before expressed in private by Kitagawa, on the link between the Church and colonialism. As consequence, the Church was included as actor in the discourse on racism: as a force that consolidated the power structures causing racial oppression.

The failure of the Church to defend the oppressed; the ‘revolution’ going on; and institutional oppression, are most powerfully expressed by Martin Luther King Jr. He was going to give the closing sermon at the World Conference, but decided not to come, because of protests in the USA going on at that moment. In his sermon, he compared ‘millions of Africans’ with a man knocking on his friends’ door asking for three leafs of bread – faith, hope and love – and being rejected by his friend: ‘One of the shameful tragedies of history is that the very institutions which should remove man from the midnight of racial segregation participates in creating and perpetuating the midnight. In the terrible midnight of war men have knocked on the door of the church to ask for the bread of peace, but the church has often disappointed them’. ‘And those who have gone to the church to seek for the bread of economic and justice have been left in the frustrating midnight of economic deprivation. In many instances the church has so aligned itself with the privileged classes and so defended the status quo that it has been unwilling to answer the knock at midnight’.\textsuperscript{289}

4. The story has been told: action is demanded

The World Conference on Church and Society in 1966 had a huge influence on the WCC. Its recommendations were discussed within the Central and Executive Committees.290 In the media, the ‘new course’ of the WCC was discussed. It is telling that the Director of the WCC’s Department of Information, Philippe Maury, ends his overview on the ‘media responses’ to the Conference with a quote of Roger Mehl. This professor in theology marked the Conference as an ‘important stage in the life of the churches’ characterized by cooperation ‘with all social groups which are trying to elaborate a valid ethics for the new age outlined by the technological transformations and social mutations. They think that the demands of the Gospel can be translated concretely in terms of the organization of a ‘responsible society’’.291 This is the message on the Conference that was repeatedly carried around: in reports on the Conference and in articles in The Ecumenical Review, and also in narratives on the history of the WCC, the Conference is characterized as a crucial moment in time, in which the Church was challenged to engage with the world. It is identified as a ‘truly ecumenical’ conference, in which Christians from Asia, Africa and Latin-America were equally represented as well and were ‘healthily dominating’.292

At that time and today, this Conference was considered to be a landmark in the thinking within the WCC on its position in the world. It marked and enabled a shift from a more diplomatic attitude - inspired by the United Nations and expressed in the notions of ‘influence and responsibility’ by Visser ‘t Hooft - to a more activist engagement with the world. As the World Conference was of an advisory nature, the Assembly still had to approve its findings.293 As we will see, the Assembly followed the trend set by the Conference and urged the WCC to get more engaged with political affairs. This makes the World Conference on Church and Society a crucial event in the understanding of the discourse on racism: the demand to the WCC to act in political affairs was applied to ‘racial discrimination’ as well. This happened at the Fourth

290 1967 August Central Committee Committee. Statement ‘the obligation of Christians in the present world racial crisis’.
293 Abrecht, Report to the Uppsala Assembly on the 1966 World Conference on Church and Society and the Subsequent Discussion in the Churches.
General Assembly. Its participants asked for ‘a crash programme to guide the Council and the member churches in the urgent matter of racism’. In WCC literature, the Fourth General Assembly therefore is identified as a landmark in the WCC’s involvement against racism.

The Assembly took place shortly after the assassination of Martin Luther King and the death of Zachariah K. Matthews, two men who had inspired thinking within the WCC on racial injustice; four years after Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment in the Rivonia trial; in a time that the apartheid regime in South Africa and white minority regimes in Southern Rhodesia and Angola were still in power; in the decade that the number of African member states to the UN rose by 32 as result of decolonization. The Assembly was influenced by these events. It gave racism, ‘white racism’ in particular, a central role in the revolutions discussed two years earlier at the World Conference. In the next paragraphs I will look what was said specifically on race relations, oppression and development, and revolutions in order to understand how this General Assembly became the ‘corner stone’ for the later Programme to Combat Racism.

4.1 The Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala

4.1.1 ‘A step forward’

704 Delegates met in 1968 at Uppsala, Sweden, for the Fourth General Assembly. The theme of the conference was ‘Behold, I make all things new’ – a passage of the Revelation of John (21:5) in which he foresees the ascendance of the New Jerusalem and in which God speaks these six words. This theme was related to the dichotomy between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’; the ‘past’ and the ‘future’ in which the Church was challenged to become part of the ‘new’, firmly established at the World Conference in 1966. With this theme, staff members wanted to debate how the Church should interpret the changes, ‘the revolutions’, of that time in relation to the coming Kingdom. Should Christians act and support these changes or should they hold on to the established order? While some, as many of the speakers at the 1966 Church and Society conference did, saw the hand of God in revolutions, more traditional, conservative Christians opposed the idea of revolution. In the preparation for Uppsala, those optimistic about change were dominant. In a staff meeting on the theme of the Assembly, the participants agreed that the findings of the World Conference on Church and Society should be guiding the preparation and development of

297 Goodall, The Uppsala Report 1968, xv.
ideas on renewal.299 Also, similar to the initiators of the Church and Society conference, the WCC staff wanted the Uppsala conference to be ‘a step forward’. In a staff discussion, the Swiss Hans-Ruedi Weber, Associate Director of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, stated: ‘if we deal with this theme just as theologians, we will repeat Evanston, but we may be called to go a step forward. We ourselves, and not only the scientists, are caught up in a new world’.300 With ‘Evanston’ he referred to the Second General Assembly in 1954 meaning that the WCC would take a step back by closing its eyes for the ‘new world’. This notion of the ‘new world’ needs to be understood in the dichotomy established by the World Conference on Church and Society in which ‘the old’ was presented as negative and ‘the new’ as positive. ‘The old’ was characterized by structures of inequality and ‘the new’ was portrayed as challenging these structures. Within the WCC staff and its inner circles, one could hear repeatedly the idea that the time has come for the churches to act: to make itself relevant and to sympathize with the oppressed people in the world. Only in this way the Church could make its contribution to this ‘new world’. In this context, the concept of a ‘step forward’ meant taking further initiative to engage with this ‘new world’: to understand it, like social scientists do, and try to influence it.

One strong proponent of this idea of taking a ‘step forward’ was the second General Secretary of the WCC, the American Presbyterian Reverend Eugene Carson Blake, who had succeeded Visser ‘t Hooft in 1966. He had been director of the National Council of Churches of Christ (USA), the same council that had send Oscar Lee and Robert Bilheimer to the WCC. In the USA he was known as a supporter of the civil rights movement.301 He had participated in the 1963 ‘March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom’ demanding equal civil rights and jobs for black people in the USA. It was this march during which Martin Luther King delivered his ‘I have a dream’-speech. Blake spoke as well at this event as representative of the NCCC. He blamed the white American churches for not acting against segregation in their own churches and in society and he expressed his hope for the establishment of full racial justice in his country: ‘Yes, we [NCCC] come to march behind and with those amazingly able leaders of the Negro Americans who, to the shame of almost every white American, have alone and without us mirrored the suffering of the Cross of Jesus Christ’.302 In other speeches he encouraged other Americans to do their Christian duty, for example to join in marches promoting equal rights, to try to influence the Congress to support strong civil rights legislation, or to stimulate managers to open up jobs for black American as well.303

300 Ibid.
303 Ibid., 57.
Blake saw racial injustice as interrelated to socio-economic inequalities (in the US and worldwide). He linked it to the lack of universal franchise, the bad housing conditions for many black US citizens, the high-rate of unemployment amongst them, and the unequal opportunities they had in education. He argued the only solution was to solve these inequalities all together.\(^{304}\) Like earlier WCC consultations and conferences, Blake recognized the interrelated nature of racism with differences in wealth and power. This meant that more had to change than just interpersonal attitudes. He blamed ‘white Christians’ for ‘isolating our bodies from the realities of the city by living in the suburbs and our minds from the realities of the injustice our laws and social patterns impose upon Negroes by forgetting all about them whenever they become quiet and patient’\(^{305}\). In this statement of July 1963, he criticized the white Americans for closing their eyes for the injustices inflicted upon the black population. According to Blake, by not acting they consolidated this system of oppression and, hence, they were guilty to it. He would continue to express this perspective at the WCC as he thought that the Church had an important duty in the transformation of society by identifying itself with ‘the cause of the poor, the discriminated against, the alien, the prisoner, the rejected and the outcast’.\(^{306}\) Like many of the speakers at the World Conference on Church and Society, he rejected a conservative attitude upholding a harmful status-quo. In his report to the Uppsala Assembly he noted: ‘I for one am glad that black people in my own country have been stirred up (I believe by the Almighty God) to challenge the whole structure of our society and are not content to wait for little bits of justice’.\(^{307}\) Instead of rejecting this challenge, Christians should ‘try to discern what God is now requiring of us’.\(^{308}\)

As the last statement by Eugene Carson Blake illustrates, also the Assembly was concerned with the oppressive social structures and the need to change them. The influence of the World Conference on Church and Society on the Assembly is clearly visible in statements as: ‘we recognize that there are situations in which development is prevented by the existing power structure, and in which revolutionary action to achieve a radical change of social structures or of the political regime seems the only way to arrive at a social order based on greater justice’.\(^{309}\) This statement in the preparatory booklet was followed by the nuance that revolutionary action should not be idealized. It makes clear that the idea that the structures of society could be oppressive as well was getting institutionalized. It is illustrative that a paragraph discussing and recognizing both non-violent as violent resistance against structures of injustice was coupled to the ‘I am prepared to die’ speech of Nelson Mandela given at the Rivonia trial in 1964.\(^{310}\) Some

\(^{304}\) Ibid., 54.

\(^{305}\) Ibid.

\(^{306}\) Blake, “How the Church Contributes to the Transformation of Society,” 461.


\(^{308}\) Ibid.


\(^{310}\) Ibid., 116; 129.
excerpts of his speeches were published in the preparatory booklet: the ones in which Mandela explained why he turned to violence (all lawful options had been made impossible by new legislation) and why he planned sabotage (it did not involve ‘loss of life’ and ‘it offered the best hope for future race relations’). Also the famous last paragraph of the speech in which Mandela claimed to be prepared to die for the ideal of a ‘democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities’ was cited.\textsuperscript{311} Like Z.K. Matthews did in his speech ‘the road from non-violence to violence’ the texts in the preparatory booklet point to the oppressive structures of a society as the cause of violence. Also, it identifies men as Mandela not as ‘extremists’, but as men with no other choice. Revolutionary action was not problematized, instead it was understood. In contrast, it were now the ‘oppressive structure’ of society that were problematized. Since the Consultation on Christian Practice and Desirable Action in Social Change and Race Relations four years earlier in Kitwe, this problematization was normalized.

\textit{4.1.2 Development and Human Rights}

One reason why the discourse on racism became so powerful, enabling the later Programme to Combat Racism, was because the participants and the speakers of the Assembly related racism to the unequal power structures the Assembly wanted to agitate against. While in the Drafts for the Sections - the preparatory papers which serve as a basis for the discussions during the Assembly - the link between race and power structures was not made very explicitly, the drafts did reject the unequal power structures and supported a new humane order.\textsuperscript{312} Furthermore, they accepted a more holistic approach towards development, linking political, social and economic development. This approach was repeated by many speakers in Uppsala. The Anglican Robert Gardiner (Ghana, director of the UN economic commission for Africa) quoted Martin Luther King jr. to make the argument that the Gospel was not just concerned with the soul, but ‘ministers to the whole man’.\textsuperscript{313} According to him the Gospel applied to man’s experience in all realms of life, also social, political and economic. Kenneth Kaunda illustrated this point speaking of ‘man’s complete development’: ‘we cannot and do not separate the economic from the human, nor can we divorce development from the socio-economic and political setting within which it takes place. For justice (with which the Church is greatly concerned) can only be fully considered and realized in the context of the total situation of life’.\textsuperscript{314}

\textsuperscript{311} Ibid., 129–130.
\textsuperscript{312} World Council of Churches, \textit{Drafts for Sections}.
These speakers repeated a world-wide trend to take a wider perspective on development, linking economic development to human rights. The Fourth General Assembly took place in the first Development Decade of the UN, in which a plan was laid down to assist ‘developing countries’ to achieve ‘self-sustained growth’, with a minimum target of 0.5% annual growth of the national income.\footnote{United Nations General Assembly, United Nations Development Decade. A Programme for International Economic Co-Operation, vol. 1961, 1961, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/1710(XVI)%281961%29&Lang=E&Area=RESOLUTION. \footnote{Ibid., 153.}} This programme foremost considered economic development, promoting the industrialization, diversification and an increase in agricultural production. In 1965 the Secretary General of the UN, U Thant, added for the first time ‘human rights’ as a chapter to a report on the Development Decade.\footnote{Olav Stokke, UN and Development: From Aid to Cooperation (Bloomington, IN, USA: Indiana University Press, 2009), 152–154. \footnote{Ibid., 153.}} He challenged governments to direct economic and social development to further implement human rights.\footnote{United Nations General Assembly, “International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.”} The discourse on development within the UN shifted focus from economic development on state level, to both development on the level of the individual and development as a duty of international society. The statements of Kaunda and Gardiner on ‘full human development’ need to be seen in this context. They refer to the idea of development on the individual level also encompassing political rights and social rights, such as the right to education and the right to vote. International society had a duty to stop exploitation of people and to guard their human rights.

were explicitly mentioned as examples of ‘violations of human dignity’ that should be eliminated.321

The interface between development, human rights, and racial discrimination at the UN stage, gave speakers at the Fourth General Assembly of the WCC the words to place the gap between rich and poor in a human rights framework. Already in the 1950s, within the WCC a lot of attention was given to development economics. The Rapid Social Change programme with Egbert de Vries who was also Director of the International Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, the Netherlands, is an early example. He had an expertise in socio-economic development policies in Indonesia. Over the years, many development economists like De Vries were invited to speak at WCC consultations and share their knowledge. In the 1960s the discourse on development changed, both within the WCC as in other international organizations like the OECD and the UN. Whereas in the 1950s and early 1960s development co-operation was used as a way to help developing countries with their economic and social policies, it the mid-1960s increasingly the developed countries and international institutions were addressed: they were seen as obstacles for the full development of the developing countries.322 At the end of the Development Decade the gap between the rich and the poor countries had not closed, it only had become bigger. This gap was discussed at the World Conference on Church and Society in Geneva, and again in 1968 in Uppsala.

4.1.3 White Racism

At the Assembly, the dichotomy between ‘affluent’ and ‘poor’ countries and between ‘white’ and ‘black’ people was repeated. The overlap between the discourses on human rights and development, both within the UN and the WCC, allowed for a further problematization of the apparent growing gap between these categories in terms of wealth. The growing gap was framed as the proof of the unjust international economic structures. Janet Lacey called it the ‘greatest human scandal of our time’.323 Many speakers pointed to the need to change these structures and urged developed countries to give up their privileged position and share their wealth.324

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322 Stokke, UN and Development.
Japanese Kiyoko Takedo Cho stated ‘affluent societies are simply small parts in the world today and they often exist at the price of other suffering people in the under-developed areas’. The earlier established dichotomy connecting ‘poor’ with ‘black’ and ‘affluent’ with ‘white’ allowed for an understanding of this gap as causing and caused by racial injustice.

The World Conference on Church and Society had specifically pointed to the concentration of power in the hands of ‘the white race’ as an obstacle to ‘authentic human community’ in which all are free and equal. The Fourth General Assembly continued this focus by pointing to ‘affluent societies’ as partly causing the harm experienced by the people in ‘developing’ countries. It did so by using a new term ‘white racism’. This term was introduced in the report of the Department on Church and Society in which it recommended a programme to ‘eliminate racism’. This name is noteworthy, as it is one of the first instances that the term ‘racism’ is used publicly instead of the before often used notions of ‘racial tensions’ and ‘race relations’. The term racism was defined as the belief in the superiority in one’s own racial group coupled with negative feelings towards other groups, based on the convictions that the characteristics that separate these groups are biological. This definition confirmed the trend, also seen in the United Nations, to define racism or racial discrimination not as the necessary consequence of essential differences between people, but as the outcome of a belief in the construct ‘race’. In its recommendations, the Department on Church and Society focused explicitly on ‘white racism’. It defined ‘white racism’ as ‘the conscious or unconscious belief in the inherent superiority of persons of European ancestry (particularly those of Northern European origin), which entitles all white peoples to a position of dominance and privilege, couples with the belief in the innate inferiority of all darker peoples, especially those of African ancestry, which justifies their subordination and exploitation’.

This definition related racism to the same power structures also problematized in the discourses on development and human rights. Foucault argued that discourses can overlap, interact, interfere, weaken and strengthen each other. In this case, the discourses on development, human rights and racism enforced and directed each other. The notion of ‘white racism’ was used as discursive element in the discourses on development and human rights. The definition of the Department on Church and Society, endorsed by the Assembly, implicitly placed the idea of the superiority of the white race at the basis of these unequal power structures: this belief had enabled the ‘subordination and exploitation’ of other races. Thereby, it allowed for an understanding of racism as a crucial obstacle to the creation of ‘full human development’ on an individual level and of an international responsible society, in which all nations are equal. Secondly, by its focus on ‘white racism’ this definition confirmed the dichotomy created between

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325 World Council of Churches, World Conference on Church and Society: Official Report, 204.
'developed' and 'developing countries' in the development discourse. It strengthened this dichotomy by adding 'race' as a category to it. The label 'developed' was linked to the white race and the label 'developing' to other races, especially to 'Africans'. While the report of the Department on Church and Society stated it recognized other forms of 'ethnocentrism', the European/North-American (white) racism of Africans was at the heart of the racism discourse within the WCC. This international dichotomy expressed in the concept of 'white racism' was applied to the level of society as well: apartheid in South Africa, racial discrimination of the Afro-Americans in the USA, the oppressive white minority regimes in Angola and Rhodesia were explained according to this logic.

4.1.4 The churches and racism

The World Conference on Church and Society offered a forum for the more radical voices pushing the churches to come into 'action' against these structures. The theme of the Assembly 'Behold, I make all things new' was a reaction to this call and the result of the felt need to make 'a step forward. In his opening address on the main theme, the Metropolitan Ignatios Hazim of Latakia related the Revelation of John to the 'evolution of the modern world'. According to him, the Church had to 'live them [the events of the world, YG], perceiving in them him who is coming, and promoting his coming through them'.327 In other words, the Church had to interpret the changes of that time in order to understand the future, the coming Kingdom. In this way, the Church could act as the 'living, prophetic conscience': to translate this message to the daily concerns of people and act accordingly.328 The Dutch theologian Berkhof applied this perspective to the World Council of Churches, which he described as a 'world-wide pressure group'. He believed that in order to know in what direction to press, the Council had to interpret the 'signs of the time'.329 In his report to the Assembly, General Secretary Blake related this perspective to racism. He expressed his hope that no participant would leave the conference 'still supposing that the concern here with white racism, for example is somehow a diversion from the proper and central concern of the church'.330 Most speakers moved away from the traditional distinction between Church and politics drawn by, among others, the theologian Karl Barth. Instead, they argued the Church had a duty to find a message of God in the changes of that time.331 Related to the discourses on development and human rights, many of these speakers wanted the Church

328 Ibid., 303.
331 Thomas, “Issues Concerning the Life and Work of the Church in a Revolutionary World”; Hazim of Latakia, “Main Theme Address”; Berkhof, “Our Common Confession and Its Implications for Today.”
not only to interpret, but also to act – to engage with the world in order to improve the structures. After the World Conference on Church and Society, the Church, and also the WCC, was again called to action.\textsuperscript{332}

This was done, among others, by the youth participants. They organized a teach-in with the British Roman Catholic economist Barbara Ward and the Indian Professor Samuel Parmar stating: ‘We believe that the question of rich and poor nations is the key question for this assembly. We feel the churches and the World Council stand or fall in their ability to implement resolutions on this point’.\textsuperscript{333} In another statement, the youth participants agreed that the churches had to ‘find concrete ways to stop their conscious or unconscious \textit{de facto} support of the status quo, and throw their whole weight behind the demands for radical change in the present international structures and particularly in the domination of these structures by the rich countries’.\textsuperscript{334} They problematized the international structures and pointed to the role of the churches in upholding these structures. According to them ‘not acting’ was also an activity. Hence, the WCC had to express its solidarity with ‘the oppressed’ and the movements that supported them. They and other speakers challenged the churches to use their influence in order to bring about a change of the structures, because by not doing so, the churches were accomplice to the injustices inflicted upon the victims of these structures.\textsuperscript{335}

The American author James Baldwin combined the notions of guilt, oppressive structures, ‘white racism’ and the role of the Church in his speech ‘White Racism or World Community’. In nearly every narrative written on the Programme to Combat Racism reference is made to his speech and especially to his opening paragraph in which he presented himself as ‘one of God’s creatures, whom the Christian Church has most betrayed’.\textsuperscript{336} Baldwin spoke about the structural racial inequalities in the USA, which according to him were approved and constituted by the Christian Church. He explicitly mentioned the involvement of the Church in colonialism, slavery and white domination. He blamed the Church for upholding a one-sided view of history (in which Africa is presented as a discovered continent and slavery as an improvement to the living conditions in Africa) and of strengthening the feelings of inferiority of black people to white people. He spoke: ‘it seems to me, then, that the most serious thing that has happened in the world today and in the Christian conscience is that Christians, having rationalized their crimes for so long, though they live with them every day and see the evidence of them every day, they

\begin{footnotes}
\item[335] Ward, “Rich and Poor Nations”; Gardiner, “Christianity and Human Rights.”
\end{footnotes}
put themselves out of touch with themselves’. According to Baldwin, most people were ‘lazy’, afraid to ‘act on what they know’ and thereby they held on to old ideas, such as the inferiority of the black race, rather than to open up for new knowledge. He compared Stokely Carmichael, a Black Panther Party leader, with the South African government. While the first was characterized as a ‘dangerous, radical, black fanatic racist’ by many white Christians, Baldwin argued that Carmichael was ‘not nearly as dangerous as the people who now rule South Africa’. He portrayed Carmichael as a Christian, not as a racist, who fought for ‘self-determination’, for the right to be not-defined by others. Baldwin accused the Church for participating in the creation of the structures that made both black and white Americans believe that black Americans are less worth than white Americans. According to him, the Christian Church had the power to change these ideas and thereby the ‘crimes’ that followed from such ideas: ‘the Christian Church still rules this world, it still has the power, to change the structure of South Africa. It has the power if it will, to prevent the death of another Martin Luther King junior’.

The speech of Baldwin was such an important contribution, because he linked the problematized structures to the also problematized inaction of the churches. According to him, by not acting the churches, as Western institutions, were supporting these oppressive power structures in which black people are made to feel ‘inferior’. Thereby, he and the others who used similar arguments, made the Council directly responsible for the status-quo. They labelled the Church as ‘guilty’ to the global injustices and racial inequalities. According to many of the narratives on Programme to Combat Racism, this speech delivered on the third day of the Assembly, less than 24 hours after the speeches of Kaunda and Ward, convinced many of the Assembly participants to vote in favour of the programme ‘the Elimination of Racism’ proposed by the Department on Church and Society. This programme, which would become the Programme to Combat Racism, was seen as the action that was needed in order to guide both the Council and the churches ‘in the urgent matter of racism’.

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337 Ibid., 53.
338 Ibid., 51.
339 Ibid., 53.
340 Ibid., 55.
4.2 After the Assembly

4.2.1 Staff Coordinating Committee on Racism

The General Assembly gave a mandate to the staff of the WCC to develop a programme for action. The Staff Coordinating Committee on Racism (SCCR), a new committee within the WCC, prepared for a new consultation in the spring in 1969 in order to explore ‘racism’, and in particular ‘white racism’, and to come with proposals for a programme of education and action.\(^{343}\) The fact that this Committee carries in its name the term ‘racism’ instead of ‘race and ethnic relations or tensions’ indicates that the term racism was institutionalized by then. This committee existed of some familiar persons, such as Eugene Carson Blake (chairman), Paul Abrecht and Daisuke Kitagawa, but also of some new staff members, such as Baldwin Sjollema, Hank Crane and Rena Karefa-Smart. They sketched the contours of the Consultation. They proposed to present ‘racism’ as a ‘world-wide phenomenon with different national and regional contexts’\(^{344}\). Furthermore, they confirmed the focus on ‘white racism’, stating ‘racism was of Western origin’.\(^{345}\) In selecting the speakers for the upcoming Consultation, the SCCR could exert influence on the debates of the consultation. It wanted to have one public meeting with two speakers. President Eduardo Mondlane of the Mozambique Liberation Front, who had spoken at the World Conference on Church and Society as well, was invited to give one of the addresses. Before the Consultation took place, he was assassinated. ANC chairman Oliver Tambo replaced him. The other speaker was the Anglican-priest Trevor Huddleston, a known anti-apartheid activist: he wrote the book *Naught for your comfort* in 1956 criticizing apartheid and would become the president of the British anti-apartheid movement in 1981.\(^{346}\) With these two speakers, the SCCR had selected two men who actively resisted apartheid.

The assassination of Eduardo Mondlane raised the question if the WCC could express its solidarity with Mondlane’s liberation movement FRELIMO. The minutes of that SCCR meeting tell that ‘members of the group were unable to decide whether any official statement of


sympathy to FRELIMO officials was in order’. The dilemma to the committee was whether such a statement would be a gesture of approval of the violence used by FRELIMO and whether the Council could give such political recognition. The doubts within the WCC to what extent the Council could express its solidarity with Southern African movements, such as FRELIMO, are exemplified by the correspondence of Alan R. Booth, the Secretary of the Commission of Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) in New York, with other staff members. The CCIA had gone through some changes in the years before. At the end of the 1960s, some of its long-time staff members had retired. New staff members were hired bringing more geographical diversity into the Commission. Eugene Carson Blake wrote in his report to the Central Committee in 1969 that as a result of these shifts the CCIA was less dominated by American or Anglo-Saxon concerns. With such a statement Blake recognized that geography was political: the geographical background of commission members had a great influence on the agenda setting. Alan Booth noted another development in the strategy of the CCIA: from diplomatic to activist. He made this observation shortly before a consultation in The Hague to reconsider the work of the CCIA, twenty years after its establishment. Booth wrote to Elfan Rees, another staff member of the CCIA: ‘the real issue seems to me to be whether we are to turn into a protest movement living on dramatic utterances or whether the W.C.C. seriously wants to continue some kind of diplomatic operation with governments and inter-governmental bodies’. Looking at the advisory committee of Eugene Carson Blake he concluded it was ‘inevitably weighted on the “protest” side’. With his concerns about the activist movement within the WCC, Booth represented a well-established strand in the WCC supporting statements and consultations, but no political involvement. According to him, the WCC should not align itself with political movements.

In a memorandum of 1969 he quoted his conversation with Rena Karefa-Smart, secretary of the Staff Coordinating Committee on Racism, who told him that the ‘staff of Geneva’ hoped the upcoming Notting Hill consultation ‘could go further’ than a neutral position and ‘could commit the World Council to a more open support for Liberation movements’. Also the new director of the Commission of Churches on International Affairs, Leopoldo Nillus, agreed with this hope of the staff. To Booth’s concerns on putting ‘ecclesiastical authority behind particular freedom movements’ he wrote ‘I think the least Christian who take their obedience seriously should do is

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347 “Meeting of Staff Coordinating Committee on Racism, February 11, 1969 10.00-12.00 A.m. Salle V.”
350 Ibid.
352 Ibid.
to point out that when all possibilities to recur to “agrarian movements”, “worker movements”, “trade-union activity” are not only barred, but heavily penalized, what else can the “have-nots” do besides forming liberation movements?

Niilus was one of the supporters for WCC support to these ‘have-nots’. At the end of the 1960s the influential positions were increasingly taken by men, and some women, who supported WCC solidarity with the liberation movements in Southern Africa. It is this transition that made a man like Booth somewhat sceptical about the Consultation in 1969. He called their dominance ‘a new kind of absolutism’ referring to earlier ‘absolutists’ who criticized the concerns of the CCIA with politics. He delegitimized both views as unqualified, because they did not leave room for nuance. In the next paragraph I will set out what happened in the consultation in Notting Hill (the United Kingdom) that upset long-time WCC prominent men, such as Booth.

4.2.2 Notting Hill: Manifesto and speeches

After the Fourth Assembly in Uppsala n 1968, preparations started for a consultation on racism by the Staff Coordinating Committee on Racism chaired by Blake. They prepared a six day consultation (19-24 May 1969) with 39 participants. Afterwards, many of its participants spoke of a remarkable event, because of two incidents on the third and the fourth day of the consultation. On the third day a group of National Front supporters, a British far right political party, entered the public session interrupting the speeches of Oliver Tambo and Trevor Huddleston. The day after, Black Power supporters presented ‘a Declaration of Revolution’:

‘For hundreds of years, white Christians have taught black people to love their neighbours; to be mock, humble and obedient; to love their white God; above all – to be non-violent, to turn the other cheek. But this is only one instance of white double-standard, of white double-dealing. To the white man, Christianity has taught only POWER, with military, economic and political power. [...] “Onward, Christian Soldiers”, sing these preachers of peace and non-violence; onward to the conquest and exploitation of another continent’.


355 In her dissertation, Dutch theologian Erica Meijers writes about the Ulvenhout consultation, a confidential meeting of XX number of men closely involved with the WCC but worried about the new ways of involvement of the WCC with apartheid, decolonization and equal rights. Some of its participants were Robert Bilheimer, W.A. Visser ’t Hooft. Alan Booth, C. Burgess Carr and P. Groth. Meijers, Blanke Broeders, Zwarte Vreemden, 331–340.

356 World Council of Churches, Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. Minutes and Reports of the Twenty-Third Meeting.

This ‘Declaration’ or ‘Black Manifesto’ stressed the ‘guilt’ of the Church: its complicity to the current situation and its hypocrisy by teaching non-violence while at the same time supporting white domination. In response to this manifesto, the consultation spoke that the WCC on many points agreed, but that it had no formal authority within the WCC: ‘Many of your detailed proposals and others like them have been before us during the week. We assure that they will be passed to the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches to which we must make our report in the summer’.358

Indeed, the days before many speakers at the Notting Hill Consultation had emphasized the urgency of the situation and called for further action by the WCC. Racism was considered as a question of world peace.359 Again, race relations were linked to world poverty and the growing gap between rich and poor.360 In many speeches, racism was qualified as a white construct: ‘a classification device’ and ‘man’s most dangerous myth’.361 The speakers criticized the idea of racial superiority and the ‘neo-colonial attitude’ still found among ‘white men’ in the USA, Europe and Africa.362 A. Sivanandan, staff member at the British Institute for Race Relations, called racial superiority ‘a fictitious stature based on the black man’s worthlessness’.363 According to these speakers, it was this myth that functioned as an excuse, a ‘rationalization for the status-quo’.364 Oliver Tambo saw this myth reflected in Christianity with its white God and angels, and a devil with a black skin.365 Racism was defined as a belief system which determined economic, political and social structures. Especially the attitude of ‘white men’ and Western civilization was problematized. Again, as in Geneva in 1966 and in Uppsala in 1968, the gaze was

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358 Ibid., 31.
361 Kenneth Little, “Some Notes on the Nature of Racism,” 1969, 4223.1.02. Notting Hill Consultation Map 2: Consultation papers: preparatory papers II (8-14), WCC Archives. Also Tambo calls white supremacy a myth. Tambo, “Racism as a Major Obstacle to World Community.”
364 Tambo, “Racism as a Major Obstacle to World Community.”
365 Ibid.
turned towards the ‘oppressors’: they had to change. It is this group who is portrayed as the weaker group, as being conditioned and brainwashed to accept the racist ideas.

Western civilization and the governments that claimed to be democratic, like Rhodesia and South Africa, were labelled as violent at the Consultation. Instead, the Black Power movement was normalized. The behaviour of the freedom movements is presented as the only logical outcome in the current structures. The American Roman Catholic Father James Groppi shared an anecdote of a young man who wanted to stab the first white he would encounter with a knife. This young man had just found his little sister trying to scrub off her black skin. Sivanandan stated: ‘It is the violence of a people so utterly violated in their being that they prefer to die fighting than to protract, in the lines of Eliot, “the chilled delirium of their brains”.’ According to Tambo ‘tolerance and non-violence became inadequate in the face of a sustained racist aggression against the African people, couples with a violent denial of their basic human rights’. Hence, Trevor Huddleston stressed again the urgency to improve race relations now. He cited the famous quote of one of the characters of Alan Paton’s book Cry, the Beloved Country, who expressed his fear that “when they [the whites] are turned to loving; we [black South Africans] shall be turned into hating”.

Again, the speakers and authors of the preparatory papers stressed that the churches had to choose sides: they had to act. Like the Black Manifesto, these speakers stressed that words alone were not enough. According to Robert Nelson, an American theologian, the ‘acts of the WCC and the Christian church have not yet told the world that the Christian churches are the enemies of racism and the agents of human reconciliation’. Visser ‘t Hooft, reflecting upon the positions and deeds of the WCC against racism saw this as a failure of the WCC: the WCC had believed too much in persuasion through statements. The speakers demanded a variety of action, but as before, most of them wanted the Church to open up for the oppressed and to contribute to the change of society. The American Democratic politician Channing Phillips wanted the WCC to

371 Tambo, “Racism as a Major Obstacle to World Community.”
372 Huddleston, “Text of the Bishop of Stepney’s Speech to the World Council of Churches’ Consultation on Racism.”
become an ‘institution of power: making economic and political inputs into societies to effect new equilibria of power’. Others argued the Church had to express its solidarity with the victims of racism. According to James Groppi and Roger A. Harless the Church had to listen to ‘suffering people’ in order to improve its understanding of ‘white racism’ and its functioning. Next, Harless wanted the church to be ‘a target of the revolution’. According to him, the churches had to go through changes as well in order to be open for the concerns of the victims of racism. A clear example was given by Daisuke Kitagawa, who addressed the racial hierarchies within most churches anywhere: ‘White Christians must learn to sit at the feet of competent black leaders before they can stand side by side with them and work hand in hand with them.’

Although the speakers of the consultation had been critical of the acts of the WCC so far and of the involvement of the churches in sustaining the status-quo, the Black Power supporters wanted more concrete results. In their reaction to the response of the consultation on their Black Manifest, they made clear: you are either with us or against us: ‘if you endorse our demands, in principle, but not in practice, we say you are lying, that you are in the camp of the enemy, because all our principles must lead to action, revolutionary action; action is the action demanded by the realities of power, the distribution of power in the modern world’. This friend or enemy binary fitted into the already normalized dichotomy of ‘old’ vs ‘new’; ‘powerful’ vs ‘oppressed’ in which the WCC was demanded to take sides with the new and the oppressed. Together they created the ‘absolutism’ Booth agitated against in which each sign of doubt to this new course was explained as support for the ‘old order’. The participants of the consultation aligned themselves with the demands of the Black Power supporters and demanded the WCC to do the same. In its statement, the consultation adopted the concept of institutional racism – the infringement of racism with political and economic power and the minds of people: ‘The Consultation clearly revealed that the Church and the world are filled with the insidious and blatant institutional racism that is producing increased polarization and threatening an escalation of the struggle for power between white and coloured races into violent conflict’. [...] ‘Racist ideologies and propaganda are developed and disseminated as tools in economic, political and military struggles for power. Once developed they have a life of their own, finding a place in the traditions and culture of a people’. 

380 Ibid., 1.
Also, the consultation adopted the language of urgency and repeated the identification of the Church with the status quo by which it meant that the Church ‘has remained, in effect, part of the racial problem and not a means of eliminating it’.\textsuperscript{381} This identification was expressed in one of the recommendations to the World Council of Church, namely to pay ‘reparations to exploited peoples and countries (recognising the churches’ own involvement in such exploitation and hence, reparation)’. The notion of ‘reparations’ was linked to the identification of the Church as guilty: it had to pay off this guilt by financially supporting the groups that fought against the oppression the Church had supported. Although this idea was controversial, it was the main driver of the Special Fund, a fund established as part of the Programme to Combat Racism in order to financially support the ‘liberation movements’ in all parts of the world who struggled against ‘white racism’.\textsuperscript{382} In order to change the status quo, the consultation called for economic sanctions against corporations practicing ‘racism’ and it wanted the WCC to lobby at governments to do the same. The scope of the debated was extended from only the churches to governments and corporations. Lastly, the consultation fully followed the speakers in their demand for support for the liberation movements. The list of recommendations ends with the following step: ‘all else failing, the Church and churches support resistance movements, including revolutions, which are aimed at the elimination of political or economic tyranny which makes racism possible’.\textsuperscript{383} The use of the words ‘political or economic tyranny’ is illustrative how the language within the WCC-context had changed: it is a combination of words, which would not be seen publicly a decade earlier. Even at the closed events, such as the consultation on Christian Practice and Desirable Action in Social Change and Race Relations in 1964, the speakers used more careful expressions nuancing their critiques.

### 4.3 The Programme to Combat Racism

#### 4.3.1 Central Committee at Canterbury (1969)

Based on the recommendations of the Notting Hill Consultation, the ‘Plan for an Ecumenical Programme for the Elimination of Racism’ was presented to the Central Committee in Canterbury in August 1969. General Secretary Blake introduced the plan stating that the ‘nature and urgency’ of racism demanded ‘a new initiative’ of the Council.\textsuperscript{384} He spoke: ‘Since 1954 the World Council of Churches has generally spoken well and acted dynamically on race and racism. But the fact is that Christians have not either deracized their own structures and life nor have

\textsuperscript{381} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{382} Not to be confused with the International Defence and Aid Fund.


\textsuperscript{384} World Council of Churches, \textit{Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. Minutes and Reports of the Twenty-Third Meeting}, 35.
they made a very significant contribution to the improvement of race relations in the nations and in the world'.\textsuperscript{385} His call was supported by others, for example the vice-chairman of the Central Committee Pauline Webb, also the author of the book that appeared to celebrate the 25\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the Programme to Combat Racism called \textit{A Long Struggle}. Webb spoke of the ‘the voice of God’ that had happened to the consultation – identifying the event as a message of God to be translated by the WCC.\textsuperscript{386} She repeated the central ideas of the consultation, speaking of ‘white racism’ as a ‘terrible evil’, ‘allied as it is with political, economic and military power’ and a ‘demonic force’. She expressed her hope the Central Committee would take the proposal further by using the WCC resources to change the balance of power, in short calling for ‘actions that make our words credible’.\textsuperscript{387}

Both Webb and Blake stressed the need for ‘action’ and repeated the argument that ‘words alone did not help’. An important element of the Programme was its critique on the Churches (‘Christians often engage in irrelevant and timid efforts to improve race relations – too little and too late’) and, hence, the need for the Churches to make up for this inadequate response.\textsuperscript{388} The Programme proposal noted that ‘many have even despaired’, because of the careful reaction by the Churches.\textsuperscript{389} Thereby the Programme responded to this sense of ‘guilt’ created by the speakers at the 1969 Consultation who referred to the Church’s involvement in creating and upholding the structures that caused ‘white racism’. The diplomatic approach of ‘influencing’ and ‘responsibility’ was challenged and instead a more activist approach was supported by the Programme: it was based on the idea that by not ‘speaking out’ against the structures, by not acting against them, the Church was actually acting in favour of them. The most important action proposed was the establishment of a ‘Special Fund’ to hand-over ‘reparations’ to liberation movements. $200,000 was made available from the reserves of the WCC and an additional $300,000 was requested from the member churches. This money had to go to ‘organizations of oppressed racial groups or organizations supporting victims of racial injustice’.\textsuperscript{390} This fund was enabled by the sense of guilt based on the identification of the Church with the oppressive structures: the Church had to make itself relevant and make up for its failure to do so in the past. The new Programme and its Fund were considered to be an act of solidarity.\textsuperscript{391} The argument

\begin{footnotes}
\item[387] Webb, “Untitled (Speech to Central Committee at Canterbury).”
\item[389] Ibid., 272–273.
\item[390] Ibid., 276–277.
\item[391] “Summary Record of the First Meeting of the International Advisory Committee for the Programme to Combat Racism, from May 31 to June 3, 1970 in Geneva,,” 1970, 4223.2.01 World Council of Churches. Programme to Combat
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that only through financial reparations the concentration of power in ‘white’ hands could be undermined was central to this Fund.

A crucial development in these years is the focus on ‘white racism’. Through the overlap of the discourses on racism, development and human rights, ‘white racism’ was considered as one of the causes of all injustices in the world. The definition of ‘white racism’ influenced all other discourses and the debates operating within the Council. This is reflected in the policies of the WCC. In the 1950s and 1960s, racism was addressed mainly within the Department on Church and Society. With the new Programme, all other divisions and departments were asked to respond to the plan and to integrate the plan in their own affairs. The PCR was established as a WCC-broad programme and therefore placed under the direct supervision of the General Secretariat. Because ‘white racism’ was considered to be at the basis of development issues, human rights violations and other problem in the world, the Central Committee made it a concern of all other divisions and committees. The discourse on racism expanded from a well-defined corner within the order of the Council to all other parts of this order. The adoption of the Programme was enabled by the central position the definition of ‘white racism’ took in other discourses, which, by repeating this definition, strengthened it in such a way it could not be denied anymore.

4.3.2 The Programme to Combat Racism in ‘action’

After the Central Committee in Canterbury in 1969 approved the Programme to Combat Racism, a staff unit was established with the Dutch Baldwin Sjollema as its Director. The Staff Coordinating Commission on Race preferred a white director as racism was considered to be a white problem and the majority of the member churches was white. Sjollema had been working for the WCC for some years at the Inter-Church Aid department. He was part of the SCCR and one of the people that wanted the Notting Hill consultation to ‘go further’, to push the WCC to ‘make a step forward’ as feared by Alan Booth. He would lead the PCR-staff from 1970 to 1981.

In these years the discourse on racism continued to develop. It strengthened the ideas expressed at Notting Hill and normalized them within the WCC. The activist approach taken by the WCC grew. The combination of the sense of guilt and labelling of the ‘old world’ as oppressive and the ‘new world’ as an improvement led by God, made it difficult for men as Booth to get an audience for their concerns. A sign of doubt or of critique to the Programme was easily explained as an act of solidarity with the ‘old world’, a world that was increasingly despised by

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many within the WCC. In the first meeting of the International Advisory Council of the PCR, General Secretary Blake defended the Programme. According to him, the WCC ‘cannot possibly trim the PCR to make it more palatable to our critics, even if we incur financial loss’. It illustrated that at that moment, the early 1970s, the most influential staff members were less concerned with bridging and reconciling with those critics, and more with creating stronger ties with ‘the racially oppressed’. Sjollema called these ‘our real constituency which we are in danger of forgetting’. In her assessment of the Programme to Combat Racism, five years after its establishment, Elisabeth Adler problematized the concept of reconciliation when it is ‘regarded as the more essentially Christian task and used prematurely to calm down conflict – and this at the expense of those who suffer injustice’. This can be seen as an assault to the proponents of the ‘diplomatic’ course. They too were now identified as part of the problem. The dominant view was that the WCC had to align with the oppressed, no matter what. Not doing so was considered as a means of support of the status quo, as an act of solidarity against the oppressed.

This view was combined with an altered conceptualization of violence – the status quo was violent - which made the use of violence in order to achieve transformation more acceptable. The burden of proof had shifted from those who had to defend their struggle for freedom to those who wanted to slow down the pace of change. The statements of the Central Committee in the years following 1969 illustrate this. In reaction to the critique on handing over money to organizations that might use it to buy weapons, the Central Committee stated in 1971: ‘The churches must always stand for the liberation of the oppressed and of victims of violent measures which deny basic human rights. It calls attention to the fact that violence is in many case inherent in the maintenance of the status quo’. The Fund is publicly defended referring back to the question of violence. In their response to critique on the decision of the Central Committee at Arnoldshain (1970) to approve the first grants to liberation movements as part of the Special Fund, Webb and staff member Ernest Payne distinguished between violence that represses and violence that liberates. They argued that ‘the programme to combat racism aims at helping forward efforts to secure basic human rights and to so within certain agreed and well defined guidelines’.

394 Ibid.
395 Elisabeth Adler, A Small Beginning: An Assessment of the First Five Years of the Programme to Combat Racism (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1974), 63.
396 Ibid., 64.
This conceptualization of violence in combination with the idea of the ‘guilt’ of the Church allowed for the approval of ‘reparations’ and the Special Fund. With their normalization, they also cleared the way for further economic action. At the Central Committee meeting in Utrecht in 1972 it was decided to withdraw all of the WCC’s investments in Southern Africa and to call companies and governments to do the same. Churches were asked to use their influence to convince corporate life to do so. This was one of the controversial aspects of the Programme: handing over money to movements that might use violence. The PCR brought the debates on violence and on the relation between economics and racism together and both served as discursive elements that spurred further projects within the Programme especially in their combination. The issue was again tested at the Fifth General Assembly held in Nairobi, 1975. The Anglican South African Bishop Philip Russell submitted a resolution recommending that the churches would not support the PCR ‘unless an assurance is given that no assistance will be given from the Special Fund to organizations that at the time of their application are such that their course of action is likely to cause the inflicting of serious injury or the taking of life’. His amendment was rejected with 62 in favour, 325 against and 22 abstentions. In the debate on this resolution, the same arguments were used as presented above. The wordings of the PCR committee proved to be well integrated with the participants of the Assembly. In relation to the policy, again the question arose: should the Church be involved in this kind of political questions. Pauline Webb answered the question in the affirmative: ‘the issues are not strategic but theological. They delve again into the deep question of what the church is for’.

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Conclusion - Darkness and Light

The Dutch rapper Typhoon sings in his song on Dutch multicultural society ‘the light needs the darkness in order to know itself’ [translation YG]. Looking back, many narratives of the PCR written by those involved reject the hesitance of the WCC to support liberation movement in the 1950s and 1960s. The General Assembly in Uppsala in 1968 is defined as ‘Kairos’, a moment of enlightenment. A contrast is established between how the WCC was and how the WCC became and was supposed to be. One sees in this new phase a dominance of the ideas that were introduced over the 1960s. Before, the concept of revolution and the position of the church in societal transitions were heavily discussed, after Uppsala it was more or less accepted that the WCC interfered in political affairs. The dichotomy between a ‘before’ and ‘after’ Uppsala was already introduced shortly after the Programme was adopted. The past was used as a way to frame the WCC as opening up to a new future. It goes too far to state that in these the documents the current state was presented as the light and the pre-1968 WCC as the darkness, but somehow the earlier years are used as an example of what the WCC should not become (again), namely a resemblance of the ‘international political situation’ with power being ‘very much in the hands of white people’.

In this research I have tried to understand this transition. The starting point of this essay was to analyse how the discourse on racism within the World Council of Churches changed in the years 1960-1969 enabling the adoption of the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) in 1969. The WCC literature on this Programme presents it as a radical break with the past: a new era. In my thesis I reject this dichotomy between a ‘before’ and ‘after’ the PRC. Instead, I argue that the approval of the PCR was only possible because of the normalization of certain knowledges, identifications and ideas over the years. The changes present a continuous discontinuity with some discursive elements being introduced and institutionalized and others problematized. These discursive elements stood not in an ‘all or nothing’ relation to each other; instead, they are in a constant process of reacting to each other: adopting, rejecting, denying, borrowing, cooperating, dismissing. The discourse on racism cannot be understood in isolation: it was constantly influenced by other discourses, most importantly theological discourses on universality, unity and the relation between church and politics; the discourse on development and the discourse on human rights. In the introduction I asked: how was the discourse on racism produced, how did it function and what did it produce? Paraphrasing the words of Foucault:

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402 Typhoon, Van De Regen Naar De Zon, Lobi Da Basi (TopNotch/Universal, 2014).
403 Adler, A Small Beginning: An Assessment of the First Five Years of the Programme to Combat Racism, 5.
‘How did power relations enable the WCC discourse on racism, and conversely, how was this discourse used to support power relations?

*Production of the Discourse on Racism*

In order to understand the production of the discourse on racism, events, such as the assemblies and the World Conference on Church and Society, are of crucial importance. I focused mainly on the statements on ‘racism’ or related issues made during these events, combined with the correspondence, publications and studies by the WCC staff before and afterwards. Usually WCC staff members developed certain ideas and definitions in correspondence and in private meetings, on basis of which certain consultation or conferences were organized. Manu of these greatly influenced the arguments expressed at the General Assembly, as is the case with the World Conference on Church and Society and the Fourth General Assembly at Uppsala. The staff members were in the important position to select the speakers for the events and thereby they had a crucial role in the circulation of power. By choosing speakers that challenged or confirmed certain knowledges, identifications of ideas, the staff members were in the position to direct the power circulation. The fact that many of the American staff members were involved in the Civil Rights movement is noteworthy: they took with them certain ideas on institutional racism. At the end of the 1950s and in the early 1960s Daisuke Kitagawa and Robert Bilheimer actively build a network of more progressive minded thinkers on racism. They maintained contact with political figures, such as Kenneth Kaunda and Eduardo Mondlane, and produced internal reports which contained statements that would be normalized in the years to come. Also Eugene Carson Blake, the second General Secretary from 1966 to 1972, is important to mention in this regard. As a Presbyterian clerk and president of the USA National Council of Churches of Christ he marched for equal rights for black US citizens and spoke about the need for white Christians to express their solidarity with the demand for equal rights. He was closely involved with the Programme to Combat Racism: he chaired the meetings of the Staff Coordinating Committee on Racism that prepared the Nothing Hill consultation and he convinced the Central Committee of 1969 to support the Programme. It is in his years as General Secretary that the neutral term ‘race relations’ was replaced by the word ‘racism’.

The discrepancy between the public statements on ‘racial and ethnic relations’ and the confidential exchange of ideas through correspondence and internal reports in the early 1960s is noteworthy. These public statements were very carefully formulated in the attempt to keep all parties together. However, staff member expressed more outspoken attitudes in their correspondence with each other, with political leaders, such as Kenneth Kaunda, and with experts, such as the South African Institute for Race Relations. Many of the ideas developed through these interactions would gain leverage in the years after. For example, Kitagawa wrote
in 1960 already on the link between the Church, colonialism, and white oppression. He connected the missionary activities of the churches to the white minority regimes in Southern Africa: the churches did not only bring education and civilization, but also contributed to the consolidation of power in white hands. He only discussed this linkage between the churches and white oppression privately, in a confidential report to WCC staff members. Many participants at the consultation on Christian Practice and Desirable Action in Social Change and Race Relations in Kitwe in 1964 repeated this linkage. However, this was a private consultation with not many publicity around it. It is only in 1966, during the World Conference on Church and Society, that the connection between the churches and white oppression is discussed publicly. At the Fourth General Assembly in Uppsala and the Notting Hill this linkage is again confirmed. It created the basis for the sense of guilt: the churches were accomplices to the current oppression. This feeling of guilt was the basis assumption on which the ‘reparations’ through the Special Fund were based.

My analysis shows that the confidential reports and the confidential correspondence by staff members of the Council are a good indication of the public statements that are going to come. The change was not coming from ‘the outside’: the discursive elements that contributed to change were part of the discourse on racism already. At different moments in time these elements, such a changed conception of violence, were taken up by the main circulation of power reaching into the grain of the WCC, thereby being institutionalized. The knowledge that Kitagawa presented was a subjugated knowledge: it was known, but considered to be inappropriate to disseminate as it could disturb the relations within the WCC. These subjugated knowledges did exist already and circulated within small circles of WCC staff members. Through the correspondence, the private consultations and the bigger events these circles enlarged, making the knowledge increasingly acceptable to a bigger audience. The above is highly related to who is allowed to speak based on what characteristics. In the 1950s only few men outside Europe and the US were present at important events. As result of the aim to be a ‘universal council’ - understood as having a world-wide membership - speakers were sought from Africa, Asia and Latin-America. For consultations in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the WCC staff was actively looking for ‘able Africans’ who could contribute. Despite these efforts, the majority of the participants and of the WCC staff remained white and living in the USA or Europe.

The Functioning of the Discourse on Racism

The discourse on racism should be understood in relation to two important theological debates within the World Council of Churches, namely on the universality of the Church and on the role of the Church in society. From the start the Council was portrayed as aiming to be universal (understood as world-wide), but not being so yet. The lack of African, Asian and Latin-American
staff members and member churches was problematized and efforts were undertaken to diversify geographically. In this diversification the issue of race relations came to the fore. The aim for universality provided a forum on which race relations could be discussed challenging white dominance. It is in these statements on universality that white dominance is problematized. The second theological debate was the role of the Church in society. Within the World Council of Churches, the question was raised what actions churches could take and what responsibilities they had. For a long time, the WCC was presented as serving as a bridge between opposing parties, for example during the Cottesloe consultation. The notions of ‘involvement’ and ‘responsibility’ used by Visser ‘t Hooft were for a long time determining the activities within the WCC. Over the 1960s this approach was questioned. With reference to the influential thinkers of the Social Gospel and Christian Socialism, many speakers emphasized the ‘involvement’ side: they wanted the WCC to choose side, instead of keeping a ‘neutral’ position. According to these speakers not acting was an action as well. This changing discourse allowed for the activist approach taken by the PCR.

We see that the discourse on racism functioned within a web of circulation of ideas on what the WCC should be and should do. By relating itself to these ideas, the discourse on racism gained leverage. This leverage increased as the discourse of racism also adopted elements from other discourses. Especially, the above two mentioned theological discourses, the discourse on development and the discourse on human rights turned out to contain influential elements. In the interaction of these discourses, the idea that an order could be violent as well was normalized. Speakers pointed to the violence inflicted upon, for example, black South Africans by the government leaving them with no choice than to resist. The speech of Zachariah K. Matthews ‘the road from non-violence to violence’ is very important in this debate. The arguments he used would recur often in the years to come. From the discourse on development the discourse on racism borrowed the idea of the connectedness of economic, social and political injustice and their influence on development. The notion of ‘full human development’ circulated within the United Nations already and was an important discursive element in the WCC discourse on racism. It had two effects: it allowed for an understanding of racism as institutional, not so much as an conscious act, but as ingrained in the power structures of society. Secondly, racism came to be considered as an obstacle to ‘full human development’. In short, racism was not just caused by the structures of society; it was also determining these structures. Consequentially, the definition of ‘white racism’ could take a central position in other discourses. It gave the discourse on racism weight, which allowed that the Programme to Combat Racism could become such a marker for the identity of the Council. It is illustrative that in 1960 race relations were discussed by the Secretariat on Race and Ethnic Relations, while in 1969 all departments and
divisions were asked to formulate a policy response to the Programme to Combat Racism. It moved from the margins to the centre of the web.

*The Productivity of the Discourse on Racism*

As result its central position, the discourse on racism could contribute to a new understanding of the ‘World Council of Churches’. At the same time as the discourses on human rights and development, also within the discourse on racism the knowledge on institutional racism got normalized. In relation to this knowledge, the WCC was portrayed as being part of the institutions upholding racist structures. As a consequence, the identification of WCC as bridge was moved to the margins and more emphasis was laid on the WCC as bringer of change. Speakers argued the WCC had to be at the forefront in order to be relevant and to change the structures that made the WCC itself racist as well. In this way the discourse on racism contributed to a new identification of the WCC.

Related to this was the disqualification of the status-quo as violent, which enabled a more positive understanding of revolution. A dichotomy was established between the old and the new, the past and the future, the violent order and the hopeful future. The WCC was identified as being part of the ‘old order’, and, as said, it had to become part of the ‘new world’. This positive attitude towards change and the identification of the order as violent enabled new ideas on revolutionaries. At the Third General Assembly in 1961 in New Delhi those who wanted to bring change peacefully are praised, but the world is warned for the radical and extreme nationalist movements. At the Fourth General Assembly in Uppsala and at Notting Hill Consultation, these ‘extremists’ are presented as people who have tried all other options and have no choice. One of the drafts of the sections for the Fourth Assembly referred to the Rivonia trial of Nelson Mandela, citing his ‘I am prepared to die’ speech. The circulation of power carried the approval of the work of Mandela. He had been referred to before, at the smaller consultation on Christian Practice and Desirable Action in Social Change and Race Relations in Kitwe in 1964. Now his words on his motivation to engage in opposition to the apartheid policies had moved from the margins to the core of the discourse on racism.

Also, by strengthening the linkages between race relations, oppression, poverty and development, the discourse on racism influenced a new understanding of the notion of a ‘responsible society’. This notion was at first confined to a society within the boundaries of a state. The work of Kitagawa from 1960 to 1962 focuses on race relations within this context. It is with the World Conference on Church and Society in 1966 that the notion of a ‘responsible society’ is taken to an international level by pointing out the oppressive relations between rich and poor countries, between white and black peoples. Again, this changed the focus of the WCC: not only the local churches were blamed for their inaction in improving race relations, but also
the WCC was pushed to influence these structures at a global level. It paved the way for the withdrawal of investments, which were considered to be part of the problem locating the money in white hands.

1968/1969: a break?

This thesis argued that the approval of the Programme to Combat Racism was not a radical break with the past. Instead, the PCR was enabled by the changes in the discourse on racism which were the result of the struggles between knowledges, identifications and ideas over the 1960s. Neither was the Programme the result of the action of opponents of the WCC, challenging the WCC-order from the outside. Rather, the discursive elements that allowed for the Programme to develop were part of the power structure already. Their constant reshuffling, normalization, problematization and institutionalization allowed for the change. Because of the aim to create a universal and relevant Council there was an openness within the order of knowledge of the WCC to ‘other’ knowledges, ideas and identifications. Hence, the Programme to Combat Racism was not a breakthrough through an ‘iron sky’ as song about by Paolo Nutini. It was the result of constant challenges posed to this sky enabling the discourse to change.
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