



GNPT
Global Network for
Public Theology



**VRIJE
UNIVERSITEIT
AMSTERDAM**

GNPT AMSTERDAM 2026 • CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Public Theology in a Fractured World

Voices, Visions, and Vulnerabilities

19–21 October 2026

Additional activities on 22 and 23 October

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

The Netherlands



GNPT
Global Network for
Public Theology



Interim Meeting
AMSTERDAM
19–23 October 2026



An interim meeting of the Global Network for Public Theology
Amsterdam • Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

WORKPLACE
OF HOPE



**VRIJE
UNIVERSITEIT
AMSTERDAM**

Amsterdam Centre for
Religion and Sustainable
Development.



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Program updates

Updates to the program will be posted at <https://www.gnpublictheology.net/amsterdam-2026>



Welcome to Amsterdam and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Dear colleagues and friends,

On behalf of the hosting team, we are delighted to welcome you to Amsterdam, to the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and to this interim in-person meeting of the Global Network for Public Theology. We hope these days bring generous conversation, new friendships and renewed energy for our shared work.

We begin with deep gratitude to Prof Sebastian Kim and the organising committee at Fuller Theological Seminary for hosting an exceptional [GNPT Consultation in 2025](#). Their commitment kept our community connected when an in-person meeting proved impossible. We also thank Prof Kim for his service as President of the GNPT Executive Committee and for remaining on the Executive in an advisory capacity. Dion Forster now serves as hosting Chair and President until the next regular GNPT meeting in Hong Kong.

The Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam was [founded](#) in 1880 by the theologian, journalist and statesman Abraham Kuyper. It has long history of scholarship where faith, society and public life meet. Its [honorary graduates](#) include Martin Luther King Jr, Beyers Naudé, Dom Hélder Câmara, José Míguez Bonino, Karen Armstrong, Nicholas Wolterstorff and most recently, Marilynne Robinson. This heritage makes it a fitting home for thoughtful and socially engaged public theology.

Public Theology in a Fractured World

[Voices, Visions, and Vulnerabilities](#) is the thematic focus of our meeting. Social and political polarisation, ecological crisis, violent conflict, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, technological disruption and migration reveal profound vulnerabilities. They also bring forward voices calling for justice and healing and visions that reimagine the common good.

Together we will ask how public theology can respond with intellectual depth, moral courage and spiritual imagination: nurturing dialogue and solidarity, drawing on scriptural, ethical and spiritual resources for hope, and remaining self-critical and open to learning from the margins.

Our conversations are organised through five working groups:

- Group A — Political Power, Democracy, and Conflict in a Fractured World (Convenor: Rudolf von Sinner)
- Group B — Justice, Economy, Labour, and the Conditions of Life (Convenor: Demaine Solomons)
- Group C — Embodiment, Gender, Sexuality, and Vulnerability (Convenor: Esther McIntosh)
- Group D — Land, Soil and Water: Healing Fractures, Making Home (Convenor: Jonathan Weider)
- Group E — Public Theology Beyond the Echo Chamber: Communication, Culture, and Critique (Convenor: Sebastian Kim)

The core meeting takes place from 19 to 21 October 2026, with optional activities on 22 October and [Dion Forster's inaugural](#) professorial lecture [on 23 October](#).

May our work together be rigorous and hopeful, and may you experience both the joy of our network and the hospitality of Amsterdam. We wish every participant a fruitful, safe and memorable meeting!

The GNPT Amsterdam 2026 Hosting Team

[Dion Forster](#), [Jan Jorrit Hasselaar](#), Javier Salcido and Daniëlle Roeleveld

Participant information

Venue and registration

VU Main Building (Hoofdgebouw) – [google maps](#)

De Boelelaan 1105
1081 HV Amsterdam
The Netherlands

Registration and the initial welcome will take place in the entrance hall of the Main Building. Further conference information and assistance will be available on the 15th floor in HG-15A37.

Urgent contacts and emergencies

Contact	Details
Dion Forster	+31 6 8494 6304 — WhatsApp, Signal, SMS or iMessage d.a.forster@vu.nl
Javier Salcido	+31 6 4887 3697 — WhatsApp, Signal or SMS
Registration support	registration.expertisecentrum.frt@vu.nl — Daniëlle Roeleveld
VU campus emergency	+31 20 598 2222
Life-threatening emergency	112 — police, ambulance or fire service

For non-urgent security assistance, the VU Security Desk can be reached on +31 20 598 5854. See [Safety at VU Amsterdam](#) for official emergency, reporting and campus-safety guidance.

Wi-Fi access

Most participants should be able to connect to [EDUROAM](#) using the username or institutional email address and password supplied by their home university or institution. If you cannot connect, a number of guest Wi-Fi passes will be available. Please ask the hosting team, visit the registration desk, or come to HG-15A37 for connection details.

Finding the rooms

All scheduled HG rooms are in the [Hoofdgebouw](#). In a code such as HG-15A37, HG identifies the Main Building (Dutch, hoofdgebouw), 15 is the floor, A is the wing or corridor, and 37 is the room. Lifts / elevators run from the ground floor to the upper floors. VU hosts and porters, normally identifiable by blue shirts near the main entrance, can help with directions. Please allow a few minutes to find your room, especially before your first session.

Food, coffee and campus facilities

Conference coffee and tea will be served in **HG-15A37 on the 15th floor**. The Main Building has a bookshop and coffee corner on the ground floor, and the Social Foodhall restaurant in the basement offers varied and affordable meals. A SPAR supermarket is on Campus Square behind the main building. Across the square, the New University Building (NU) contains cafés, the Griffioen and Bar Boele. And the centre of Amsterdam is just a short Metro or Tram ride from [Amsterdam Zuid](#) to [Amsterdam Centraal station](#). Ask the hosting team for directions or recommendations.

Social safety and community standards

The GNPT and VU Amsterdam are committed to a welcoming, inclusive and respectful environment. Treat colleagues with dignity, listen across differences, respect personal boundaries, and make room for people whose voices are often marginalised. Bullying, discrimination, racism, sexual harassment, intimidation, aggression and violence have no place at this meeting.

If you experience or witness behaviour that causes concern, please speak to a member of the hosting team or a working-group convenor. You may also approach a VU host, reception desk or the Security Desk in the basement of the Main Building. Concerns may be reported through the official [VU Amsterdam safety channels](#) and will be handled as sensitively and confidentially as possible.

Emergency and evacuation procedures

Evacuation instructions are displayed in all venues. If an alarm sounds, stop the session, follow the directions of VU staff and the posted evacuation signs, and leave through the nearest safe marked exit. Do not use the lifts. Assemble outside at the location indicated by staff and do not re-enter until permission is given. For an urgent incident on campus call +31 20 598 2222; for a life-threatening emergency call 112.

Photography, recording and social media

Please ask permission before photographing or recording a person, presentation or discussion, and respect anyone who declines. Do not share sensitive or personal contributions without explicit consent. Participants who post publicly about the meeting are encouraged to use the hashtag **#GNPTAmsterdam2026**.

Getting to VU Amsterdam

Amsterdam's public transport is safe, accessible and efficient. You can 'tap on' and 'tap off' using a bank card or credit card. [Amsterdam Zuid](#) is the nearest major station (only 1 stop from Schiphol Airport on the NS train service), with national trains, metro and tram connections; the [Main Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam Building](#) is a few minutes walk away from Amsterdam Zuid. Tram and bus services also stop at De Boelelaan/VU close to the university entrance. Because services and engineering work can change, check your route shortly before travelling. Google maps works well for choosing suitable transport routes and methods. The Amsterdam City Centre (via [Amsterdam Centraal](#)) is just a few stops on the Metro or Tram from [Amsterdam Zuid station](#).

Official directions and accessibility information: [VU route description](#).

Information for presenters

Please **locate your room in advance** and arrive early to check the equipment. Each room has a data projector, USB-C and HDMI connectivity, and a dedicated computer. Keep a backup copy of your presentation where possible. Room volunteers and the hosting team can assist with technical problems.

Unless the programme states otherwise, each paper has a **total allocation of 30 minutes**: no more than **20 minutes for presentation** and approximately **10 minutes for introduction and discussion**. Working-group convenors will chair the sessions and help speakers keep to time.

Programme highlights and further information

The programme includes keynote plenaries, five working groups, regional meetings (Tuesday, 20 October, 15:30–17:00; see the listed venues) and the GNPT business meeting. Details of Thursday's optional Amsterdam activities will be circulated separately. All participants are invited to [Dion Forster's inaugural](#) professorial lecture in the [VU Aula at 15:45 on Friday](#), followed by a reception. For all Global Network for Public Theology information, see: www.gnpublictheology.net.

Programme at a glance

Time	Event	Venue	Chair
Monday			
Mon 09:00	Registration, coffee and tea	HG-15A37	
Mon 10:00	Words of greeting - prof. dr. Arjen van Witteloostuijn , Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam	HG-10A00	Dion Forster
Mon 10:10	Opening ceremony and welcome	HG-10A00	Dion Forster
Mon 10:30	Keynote plenary - Dr Shadaab Rahemtulla, University of Edinburgh	HG-10A00	Jan Jorrit Hasselaar
Mon 12:00	Lunch	Own arrangements	
Mon 13:30	Working Group Session I	Eight parallel rooms	Working-group convenors
Mon 15:00	Coffee and tea	HG-15A37	
Mon 15:30	Working Group Session II	Eight parallel rooms	Working-group convenors
Mon 17:30	Words of greeting - prof. dr. Jeroen Geurts , Rector Magnificus, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam	HG-15A37	
Mon 17:40	Welcome with finger foods and drinks	HG-15A37	
Tuesday			
Tue 09:00	Keynote plenary - Revd Prof Jerry Pillay, World Council of Churches	HG-14A00	Eva Kyeni Abel
Tue 10:15	Coffee and tea	HG-15A37	
Tue 10:45	Working Group Session III	Five parallel rooms	Working-group convenors
Tue 12:15	Lunch	Own arrangements	
Tue 13:30	Working Group Session IV	Five parallel rooms	Working-group convenors
Tue 15:00	Coffee and tea	HG-15A37	

Time	Event	Venue	Chair
Tue 15:30	Regional meetings	Africa — HG-12A32 — Stephan de Beer Asia — HG-13A24 — Paul Rohan Europe — HG-14A36 — Esther McIntosh North America — HG-02A32 — Teresa L. Smallwood Oceania — HG-09A40 — David Tombs South America — HG-02A16 — Jefferson Zeferino	Regional representatives
Tue 17:00	Drinks and Eats, conversation and relax	HG-15A37	
Wednesday			
Wed 09:00	Words of greeting - prof. dr. René van Woudenberg , Scientific Director (Head of School), Religion and Theology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam	HG-14A00	Javier Salcido
Wed 09:10	Keynote plenary - Prof dr Katja Tolstoj, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam	HG-14A00	Javier Salcido
Wed 10:15	Coffee and tea	HG-15A37	
Wed 10:45	Working Group Session V	Four parallel rooms	Working-group convenors
Wed 12:15	Lunch	Own arrangements	
Wed 13:30	GNPT business meeting	HG-14A00	Dion Forster and Jan Jorrit Hasselaar
Wed 15:00	Closing session	HG-14A00	Dion Forster
Wed 15:30	Farewell coffee and tea	HG-15A37	
Thursday			
Thu all day	Optional cultural and theological excursions	On-site and Off-site	
Friday			
Fri 15:45	Inaugural lecture of Dion A. Forster	Aula, VU Amsterdam	Miranda Klaver
Fri afterwards	Reception	Outside the Aula	

Monday, 19 October | Opening and framing the theme

Time	Event	Venue	Chair
09:00-10:00	Registration, coffee and tea	HG-15A37	
10:00-10:10	Words of greeting - prof. dr. Arjen van Witteloostuijn, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities	HG-10A00	Dion Forster
10:10-10:30	Opening ceremony and welcome	HG-10A00	Dion Forster
10:30-11:45	Keynote plenary - Dr Shadaab Rahemtulla, University of Edinburgh	HG-10A00	Jan Jorrit Hasselaar
12:00-13:30	Lunch	Own arrangements	
13:30-15:00	Working Group Session I	Parallel rooms below	Working-group convenors
15:00-15:30	Coffee and tea	HG-15A37	
15:30-17:00	Working Group Session II	Parallel rooms below	Working-group convenors
17:30-17:40	Words of greeting - prof. dr. Jeroen Geurts, Rector Magnificus	HG-15A37	
17:40-19:00	Welcome with finger foods and drinks	HG-15A37	

Working Group Session I | 13:30-15:00

Working Group A1: Political Power, Democracy, and Conflict | Authoritarian nationalism and theological legitimization | HG-12A32

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
13:30-14:00	Songhan Chung	Distorted Ethical Authority and Political Power: Rereading Herman Bavinck on Sin and Governance
14:00-14:30	Wanderley Rosa	The Reception of Karl Barth's Theology in Contemporary Brazil: A Christocentric Counterpoint to the Theology of Domination and Bolsonarism.
14:30-15:00	Philip Gorski	From Nationalism to Civilizationism: the New MAGA Intelligentsia

Working Group A2: Political Power, Democracy, and Conflict | Race, democratic immorality, and the American public | HG-14A40

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
13:30-14:00	Juan Floyd-Thomas	Declarations of Interdependence: Rewriting America's Racial-Ethnic and Religious Future
14:00-14:30	Stacey Floyd-Thomas	Selling the Shadow to Support the Substance: Womanist Theology Confronting Democratic Immorality in "These Yet to Be United States"
14:30-15:00	Melanie Jones Quarles	America May Go To Hell: Revisiting Vincent Harding's "Is America Possible?" and Reimagining Democracy

Working Group B1: Justice, Economy, Labour, and the Conditions of Life | Racial justice, memory, and ecclesial transformation | HG-13A24

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
13:30-14:00	Wynand Marc Breytenbach	Breaking the Boereworsgordyn: How Shared Meals Transform Anxiety into Empathy as a Pathway to Racial Justice and Inclusive Ecclesiology
14:00-14:30	Robert Vosloo	B.B. Keet's critique of apartheid theology and its public reception
14:30-15:00	Convenor-led cluster discussion	Synthesis and discussion for Group B

Working Group B2: Justice, Economy, Labour, and the Conditions of Life | Justice, theological erasure, and capitalist formation | HG-09A41

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
13:30-14:00	Allison deForest	Restorative Justice as a Public Theology Paradigm
14:00-14:30	Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty	The Theological Politics of Erasure
14:30-15:00	Elijah Keay	Towards Just Ends: A Teleological Anthropology Against Capitalist Formation

Working Group C: Embodiment, Gender, Sexuality, and Vulnerability | Sexual violence, embodiment, and theological anthropology | HG-09A40

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
13:30-14:00	Rachel Baard	The Body is Not the Problem: an Incarnational Public Theology
14:00-14:30	Erin Dufault-Hunter	The Cross as Sexualized Humiliation: Implications for Victims and Perpetrators
14:30-15:00	Kjersti Wee	The Silenced Voices: The Bible, Power and Ordinary Malagasy Women

Working Group D: Land, soil and water | Indigenous land and sacred identity | HG-05A32

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
13:30-14:00	Adam DJ Brett	Healing the Sacred: Land, Water, and the Work of Restoring Relational Worlds
14:00-14:30	Chenijan Patton	Land as Sanctuary and Sacred Identity for Tribal Communities in North East India: An Indigenous Perspective
14:30-15:00	Charles Uesile Tupu	Faaola Fanua: A Samoan Public Theology of Taking Care of Customary Land (Fanua faa-le-aganuu)

Working Group E1: Public Theology Beyond the Echo Chamber | Shared publics, testimony, and public dialogue | HG-06A28

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
13:30-14:10	Gesche Tuchtfield-Haug and Frederike van Oorschot (joint paper, 40 minutes)	Fragmented or Shared Publics? Testimonial Epistemologies in Public Theologies
14:10-14:40	Paul Rohan Joseph Clement	From Proclamation to Public Dialogue: Revisioning Evangelization as Dialogical Communication beyond Ecclesial Echo Chambers in Asia
14:40-15:00	Convenor-led cluster discussion	Synthesis and discussion for Group E

Working Group E2: Public Theology Beyond the Echo Chamber | Listening and communication in fractured public spheres | HG-14A28

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
13:30-14:00	Kristoff Reese Grosfeld	Obedience as Listening: Barth, Balthasar, and Public Theology in a Fractured World
14:00-14:30	Tanya Van Wyk	Beyond diplomacy and reconciliation? On moral pluralism, echo chambers and the waning appetite or lost art of listening and talking to each other
14:30-15:00	Convenor-led cluster discussion	Synthesis and discussion for Group E

Working Group Session II | 15:30-17:00

Working Group A1: Political Power, Democracy, and Conflict | Migration, hospitality, and exclusionary nationalism | HG-12A32

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
15:30-16:00	Karen Freire Duarte Sturzenegger	Democratic Hospitality versus Fortress Nationalism: A Public Theological Response to Authoritarian Populism and Anti-Immigrant Politics
16:00-16:30	Javier Salcido	"Purge Me with Hyssop, and I Shall Be Clean": A Theological Reflection on Remigration, Purity Culture, and Affective Polarization in the Netherlands
16:30-17:00	Safwat Marzouk	Confronting Exclusivist Nationalism: Universalism and Peculiarity in Micah 4:1-5

Working Group A2: Political Power, Democracy, and Conflict | Religion, minority rights, and democratic representation | HG-14A40

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
15:30-16:00	Pauline Kollontai	Handmaids in Red: Religion, Populism and Gender Equality in Israel
16:00-16:30	Moakumla Longkumer	Between Custom, State and Individual Rights: Public Theology and the Crisis of Democratic Representation in Ao-Naga Society
16:30-17:00	Convenor-led cluster discussion	Synthesis and discussion for Group A

Working Group B: Justice, Economy, Labour, and the Conditions of Life | Moral economy, value, and the growth of justice | HG-13A24

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
15:30-16:00	Yago de Castro Martins	Economics Demoralization as a Theological Problem
16:00-16:30	Torsten Meireis	From 'just growth' towards a growth of justice
16:30-17:00	Filipe Maia	The Lost Values of Christian Nationalism: Notes on the Political Economy of Christian Nationalism

Working Group C1: Embodiment, Gender, Sexuality, and Vulnerability | Healing, pastoral practice, and women's public agency | HG-09A40

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
15:30-16:00	Zamantshali Dlamini	Fractured Bodies, Fractured Spiritualities: Reimagining an African Public Pastoral Theology of Emthonjeni for Women's Healing and Resistance
16:00-16:30	Trista Soendker Nicholson	Faithful Resistance: An Ongoing Call to Organize for Women's Rights
16:30-17:00	Convenor-led cluster discussion	Synthesis and discussion for Group C

Working Group C2: Embodiment, Gender, Sexuality, and Vulnerability | Embodied vulnerability, resistance, and public prayer | HG-09A41

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
15:30-16:00	Fundiswa Kobo	A Womanist Reflection on Black Women's Embodied Vulnerability in a Fragmented World
16:00-16:30	Seipati Ngcobo	Embodied stillness as resistance in the purple movement's fight against gender based violence in South Africa (A Theological perspective).
16:30-17:00	Ryno Louis Van Der Riet	Prayer, Queer Embodiment, and Public Theology in South Africa

Working Group D: Land, soil and water | Home, displacement, and land conflict | HG-05A32

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
15:30-16:00	Johann Meylahn	The Commodification of Home: Dwelling, Displacement, and the Son of Man
16:00-16:30	Jefferson Zeferino	Public Theology and Space: Land Conflicts, Land Ecumenism, and Lutheran Engagement in Brazil (1970s–1980s)
16:30-17:00	Convenor-led cluster discussion	Synthesis and discussion for Group D

Working Group E1: Public Theology Beyond the Echo Chamber | AI, education, and digital formation | HG-06A28

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
15:30-16:00	Devon Goings	Embodied Users: AI, Education, and Formation
16:00-16:30	Manfred L. Pirner	AI-generated Religious Story-Telling as Research Field and Challenge for Public Theology
16:30-17:00	Henco van der Westhuizen	Hoping to Think? A theological exploration of language and thinking in an age of artificial intelligence

Working Group E2: Public Theology Beyond the Echo Chamber | Nationalism and public theology in hypernervous societies | HG-14A28

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
15:30-16:00	Sebastian Kim	The Rise of Christian Nationalism in US Politics and the Response of Public Theology
16:00-16:30	Niels den Hertog	Public Theology for a Hypernervous Society
16:30-17:00	Meg Jenista	Preaching as Public Theology: shaping the socio-political imagination

Tuesday, 20 October | Engagement and collaboration

Time	Event	Venue	Chair
09:00-10:15	Keynote plenary - Revd Prof Jerry Pillay, World Council of Churches	HG-14A00	Eva Kyeni Abel
10:15-10:45	Coffee and tea	HG-15A37	
10:45-12:15	Working Group Session III	Parallel rooms below	Working-group convenors
12:15-13:30	Lunch	Own arrangements	
13:30-15:00	Working Group Session IV	Parallel rooms below	Working-group convenors
15:00-15:30	Coffee and tea	HG-15A37	
15:30-17:00	Regional meetings	Africa — HG-12A32 — Stephan de Beer Asia — HG-13A24 — Paul Rohan Europe — HG-14A36 — Esther McIntosh North America — HG-02A32 — Teresa L. Smallwood Oceania — HG-09A40 — David Tombs South America — HG-02A16 — Jefferson Zeferino	Regional representatives
17:00-18:00	Drinks and Eats, conversation and relax	HG-15A37	

Working Group Session III | 10:45-12:15

Working Group A: Political Power, Democracy, and Conflict | Postcolonial conflict, sovereignty, and apartheid's legacies | HG-12A32

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
10:45-11:15	Cyril Hovorun	Interpreting the Ukrainian war in postcolonial terms
11:15-11:45	Silakhe Singata	Who are “the People”? Reflecting on the Theological Problem of Political Sovereignty with and Beyond Sobukwe
11:45-12:15	Convenor-led cluster discussion	Synthesis and discussion for Group A

Working Group B: Justice, Economy, Labour, and the Conditions of Life | Surveillance capitalism, datafication, and unequal power | HG-13A24

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
10:45-11:15	Reggie Nel	Reading a Fractured World Through Eyes of the Belhar Confession: An African-Reformed Perspective on Surveillance Capitalism and its Consequences on Conditions of Life
11:15-11:45	Andrew Shepherd	"You're just another brick in the wall": Datafication, Tech Billionaires, and the Future of Babel.
11:45-12:15	Stephen Brown	Toward an Ecumenical Public Theology of Artificial Intelligence

Working Group C: Embodiment, Gender, Sexuality, and Vulnerability | Queer embodiment, belonging, faith, and public-theological practice | HG-02A24

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
10:45-11:15	Charlene van der Walt	What does it feel like to be a problem? From Violence to Belonging when Cruising Utopia with José Esteban Muñoz
11:15-11:45	Esther McIntosh	Critiquing Notions of 'Safe Space' and 'Vulnerability': Trans Voices Reflecting on Faith and Higher Education in England
11:45-12:15	Ashwin Thyssen	Violence and Voyeurism: Exploring the Possibilities of Queering Public Theology

Working Group D: Land, soil and water | Water, environmental stewardship, and communal restoration | HG-05A32

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
10:45-11:15	Elia Maggang Maggang	Jesus, the Way of Water: An Archipelagic Public Christology
11:15-11:45	Cody Zuiderveen	Common Concern for our Common Home: Abraham Kuyper's Contribution to Theo-Political Environmentalism
11:45-12:15	Stephan de Beer	Alienation, reclamation and healing: Overcoming urban apathy through community-led stewarding of land, soil and water in the City of Tshwane

Working Group E: Public Theology Beyond the Echo Chamber | Decolonial public theology, migration, and solidarity with the poor | HG-06A28

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
10:45-11:15	Hadje Sadje	Beyond the Liberal Echo Chamber: Maldonado-Torre's Combative Decoloniality as Methodological Critique for Public Theology
11:15-11:45	Raj Bharat Patta	A. Towards A Brit(ish) Public Theology of Liberation: Dalit Theological Offerings
11:45-12:15	Alex Villas Boas	Van Gogh and the Option for the Poor Avant la Lettre: Chromatology, Institutional Critique, and Political Spirituality

Working Group Session IV | 13:30-15:00

Working Group A: Political Power, Democracy, and Conflict | Theological resources for resisting authoritarian power | HG-12A32

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
13:30-14:00	Annette Langner-Pitschmann	Less metaphysical modesty? The discursive standards of public theology in the face of authoritarianism
14:00-14:30	Rudolf von Sinner	Populism and "People": Precarities and Polarizations in Political and Theological Terms
14:30-15:00	Teresa L. Smallwood	The Threat of white Christian Nationalism to Our Democratic Futures

Working Group B: Justice, Economy, Labour, and the Conditions of Life | Land, extraction, economy, and ecological justice | HG-13A24

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
13:30-14:00	Kjetil Fretheim	Explore and Extract: Deep Sea mining, international relations, and conditions of life
14:00-14:30	Siyamthanda Mqhayisa	Economy & Ecology: On Public Theology in the Age of the Capitalocene!
14:30-15:00	Jayabalan Murthy	The Land Shall Not Be Held by the Few": Dalit Resistance, Missionary Defiance, and the Struggle Against the Mirasdar System in Tamil Nadu.

Working Group C: Embodiment, Gender, Sexuality, and Vulnerability | Gendered ecclesial power and embodied liberation | HG-09A40

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
13:30-14:00	Sanjana Das	Towards a Prophetic Liberationist Theology of Embodiment: Reframing Marginalized Bodies as Sites of Resistance and Divine Encounter
14:00-14:30	Nina Müller van Velden	The violent debate on women's ordination, yet again: A case-study from the Reformed, Afrikaans-speaking context of South Africa
14:30-15:00	David Tombs	Using Torture Reports to Read Crucifixion: Vulnerability, Sexual Identity, and Punitive Sexualised Violence

Working Group D: Land, soil and water | Rootedness, refuge, and the political imagination of land | HG-02A16

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
13:30-14:00	Jonathan Weider	Putting down roots in your native soil – critical reflections on a politically effective metaphor of coming home
14:00-14:30	Christine Luckritz Marquis	“Come and take comfort in my shade” (Judges 9:15)? Trees as Sites of Rootedness, Refuge, Resistance, and Rot in the Christian Tradition
14:30-15:00	Convenor-led cluster discussion	Synthesis and discussion for Group D

Working Group E: Public Theology Beyond the Echo Chamber | Cities, media, and vulnerable speech in anxious societies | HG-06A28

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
13:30-14:00	Emmanuel Akatukunda	The City as Theological Classroom: Participatory Methods in Urban Theology
14:00-14:30	Martin Laubscher	Christina Landman, the columnist as a public theologian?
14:30-15:00	Anna Cho	Vulnerable Speech in a Fractured Public Sphere: A Speech Act Theological Account of Public Responsibility

Wednesday, 21 October | Integration, future directions, and closing

Time	Event	Venue	Chair
09:00-09:10	Words of greeting - prof. dr. René van Woudenberg, Scientific Director (Head of School), Religion and Theology	HG-14A00	Javier Salcido
09:10-10:15	Keynote plenary - Prof dr Katja Tolstoj, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam	HG-14A00	Javier Salcido
10:15-10:45	Coffee and tea	HG-15A37	
10:45-12:15	Working Group Session V	Parallel rooms below	Working-group convenors
12:15-13:30	Lunch	Own arrangements	
13:30-15:00	GNPT business meeting	HG-14A00	Dion Forster and Jan Jorrit Hasselaar
15:00-15:30	Closing session	HG-14A00	Dion Forster
15:30-16:00	Farewell coffee and tea	HG-15A37	

Working Group Session V | 10:45-12:15

Working Group A1: Political Power, Democracy, and Conflict | Formation, democratic capacity, and prefiguring public futures | HG-09A40

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
10:45-11:15	Ednardo Duarte	Catholic and Protestant Social Practices for Students' Faith-Seeking Embodiment
11:15-11:45	Peter-Ben Smit	Prefiguring Potential Futures: Conflicting Constructions of Time as a Site of Public Theology
11:45-12:15	Diane Ziegler	Academy and Congregation Together: Building Public Capacity for Nurturing Democracy

Working Group A2: Political Power, Democracy, and Conflict | Ecclesial responsibility, punitive power, and criminal governance | HG-13A24

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
10:45-11:15	Esisha Mengistu Elema Esisha	Democratic Fracture, Ecclesial Silence, and the Ethics of Responsibility: Re-reading Gudina Tumsa and Bonhoeffer in Post-2018 Ethiopia
11:15-11:45	Joel Mbongi Kuvuna	"Political Paternalism and Criminal Governance: Obstacles to Sub-Saharan African Development"
11:45-12:15	Jason Sexton	The Punitive Threads and Aims in the Persistence of Eugenics

Working Group B: Justice, Economy, Labour, and the Conditions of Life | Migration, poverty, enclaves, and conditions of life | HG-06A28

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
10:45-11:15	Lerato Kobe	Migration and the Politics of Poverty: A Black Theology Reflection
11:15-11:45	Hans Christoph Thapelo Lange	Ark or Apartheid? A Theological Appraisal of the 'Enclave' Phenomenon in South Africa's Present and Future
11:45-12:15	Demaine Solomons	After the Slave Lodge: Black theology, reconciliation and the afterlives of slavery in the Cape

Working Group E: Public Theology Beyond the Echo Chamber | Democratic decline, digital publics, prophecy, and public security | HG-14A28

Time	Presenter	Paper / activity
10:45-11:15	Krista Rue	Resisting Partiality Beyond the Echo Chamber: Digital Public Theology as Formation
11:15-11:45	Isaac Karkari Osei	Implications of the Proliferation of "Doom Prophecies" in the Ghanaian Public Space on National Security: Challenges and Way Forward
11:45-12:15	Ulrich Schmiedel	The Hatred of Public Theology: Doing Public Theology in Declining Democracies

Thursday, 22 October | Optional excursion day

Time	Event	Venue	Chair
All day	Cultural and theological excursions in and around Amsterdam	Off-site	Details to follow

Friday, 23 October | Optional inaugural lecture

Time	Event	Venue	Chair
15:45	Inaugural lecture of Dion A. Forster as Chair for Public Theology and Ethics	Aula, VU Amsterdam	
Afterwards	Reception	Outside the Aula, VU Amsterdam	



Sawubona: Human Connection — scan the QR code for inaugural-lecture information

Presenter affiliations, papers, and abstracts

Presenters are arranged by working group and alphabetically by surname.

Group A | Political Power, Democracy, and Conflict in a Fractured World

Chung, Songhan

Affiliation: Calvin Theological Seminary

Paper: *Distorted Ethical Authority and Political Power: Rereading Herman Bavinck on Sin and Governance*

Abstract: This paper offers a theological account of distorted political power by retrieving Herman Bavinck's doctrine of sin as "active privation" and ethical control. Although sin includes metaphysical privation and personal moral guilt, Bavinck also describes it as a parasitic distortion of covenantal governance. Sin does not create a new ontological reality; it reorients desire and authority within an existing structure of law, responsibility, and communal life.

Building on this framework, the paper argues that sin's "rule" provides a theological grammar for diagnosing contemporary pathologies of political power, including authoritarian populisms and exclusivist nationalisms. Sin operates not primarily through coercion but through ethical control: accusation, guilt, and self-justifying narratives. It binds persons and communities by distorting the function of law—detaching it from grace and turning it into a mechanism of self-grounding autonomy. In this reversal, governance rooted in covenantal trust is displaced by performance-centered systems of legitimacy and exclusion.

Bavinck's distinction between God's archetypal rule—grounded in grace and oriented toward communion—and sin's distorted control clarifies how political movements may claim to defend order while consolidating power. Because sin cannot create ultimate legitimacy, its dominion is real yet penultimate. Christ's fulfillment of the law therefore represents the ethical dismantling of distorted authority and offers theological resources for reimagining participatory and peaceable forms of political life.

Duarte, Ednardo

Affiliation: Theologische Universiteit Utrecht

Paper: *Catholic and Protestant Social Practices for Students' Faith-Seeking Embodiment*

Abstract: This paper investigates the role of social practices in Christian formation, drawing from multidisciplinary inquiries by Alasdair MacIntyre, Jean Lave, and Etienne Wenger to broaden approaches to teaching and learning. It frames the church as a community of practice, adopting a generous definition of Christian practices as communal activities that respond to God's active presence. The study contrasts David I. Smith and James K. A. Smith's Protestant work, *Teaching and Christian Practices*, with Eifler and Landy's Catholic one, *Becoming Beholders*. Both traditions move beyond solely intellectual faith, valuing embodied practices, community, and formative actions.

The main thesis posits that social practices are crucial for shaping students' identities and fostering human flourishing within traditioned communities. By integrating philosophical, sociological, and educational accounts of practice, the paper proposes a theological appropriation of these dynamics to cultivate a holistic faith that transcends privatized spiritualities. It aims to provide a practical map of learning practices that guide students toward a multidimensional Christian imagination, encompassing

how they think, feel, and act.

The paper outlines its exploration by first establishing a general background on social practices and their formative nature, introducing key scholars and their contributions. The study proceeds to classify Christian practices across five primary areas of student formation—intellectual, relational, introspective, beneficent, and formational—elucidating each area with scholarly insights. Finally, it situates these practices within both Protestant and Catholic classroom pedagogies, illustrating how they facilitate students' holistic "faith-seeking embodiment".

Esisha, Esisha Mengistu Elema

Affiliation: Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology

Paper: *Democratic Fracture, Ecclesial Silence, and the Ethics of Responsibility: Re-reading Gudina Tumsa and Bonhoeffer in Post-2018 Ethiopia*

Abstract: Post-2018 Ethiopia has witnessed an intensifying crisis of democratic aspiration marked by political polarisation, ethno-national contestation, episodic violence, and eroding civic trust. While the period initially generated hope for reform, it has since exposed deep fractures within the institutional, moral, and participatory foundations of the Ethiopian polity. In this context, the public witness of churches has been uneven, often characterised by caution or silence at moments demanding moral clarity. This paper argues that such ecclesial reticence cannot be understood merely as prudence but must be evaluated theologically in light of an ethics of responsibility. Drawing on the public theology of Gudina Tumsa and engaging it in critical conversation with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the paper re-examines the concept of responsible Christian action within contexts of democratic fracture. Gudina, known as The Bonhoeffer of Africa, developed accounts of discipleship that resisted quietism and insisted that faithfulness entails concrete, historically situated engagement with unjust or disordered political realities. Yet Gudina and Bonhoeffer's respective contexts reveal notable differences in how responsibility is discerned, embodied, and institutionalised. Rather than romanticising resistance or reducing the crisis to moral failure, this study analyses how patterns of ecclesial silence intersect with fear, ethnic fragmentation, and contested narratives of nationhood. It proposes that an ethics of responsibility, rearticulated for Ethiopia's plural and polarised setting, can contribute to a renewed democratic imagination one attentive to participation, truthfulness, and the dignity of political others. Placing an African martyr-theologian and a European resistance thinker into sustained dialogue, the paper seeks to advance contemporary public theology beyond abstract denunciation toward contextually grounded, constructive reflection on political agency in fractured democracies.

Floyd-Thomas, Juan

Affiliation: Vanderbilt University

Paper: *"Declarations of Interdependence: Rewriting America's Racial-Ethnic and Religious Future"*

Abstract: On the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States, this paper situates American public theology within a global moment marked by racial-ethnic polarization, economic exploitation, ecological precarity, and persistent violence against vulnerable communities. Rather than treating these crises as merely political or social, the paper interprets them as theological signs—revealing distorted understandings of human difference, divine vocation, and the moral shape of communal life. Such fractures, however, also create openings for public theology to cultivate moral imagination, deepen solidarities, and articulate visions of justice ordered toward the common good. The paper argues that American religious history is best understood not as a harmonious narrative of pluralism but as a contested theological field in which doctrines of providence, election, mission, and destiny have been entangled with racial hierarchies and exclusionary national myths. Reframing religious experience as a series of "declarations of interdependence," the study shows how marginalized communities have drawn upon scripture, ritual, and theological reflection to contest domination, affirm sacred dignity, and imagine

more life-giving forms of social belonging. Engaging the constructive task of public theology, the paper asks: Which theological visions of creation, sin, reconciliation, and hope sustain resistance to structures of domination? How might practices of lament, repentance, and solidarity foster civic repair? Ultimately, the project proposes that public theology can reframe American identity as a covenantal and relational project grounded in interdependence rather than hierarchy. By foregrounding the theological creativity of historically excluded communities, it advances a vision of shared life shaped by justice, mutual accountability, and the flourishing of all human creation.

Floyd-Thomas, Stacey

Affiliation: Vanderbilt University

Paper: *Selling the Shadow to Support the Substance: Womanist Theology Confronting Democratic Immorality in "These Yet to Be United States"*

Abstract: In light of the United States' 250th anniversary, this paper asks, Who have "We the People" become? Using a womanist lens and the moral framework of democratic immorality developed in *When the Good Life Goes: The US and Its 7 Deadly Sins* (2026), I argue that U.S. democracy operates in a lethal yet liminal space between shadow and substance. The shadow names entrenched racial exploitation, gender injustice, religious distortion, and economic abuse. The substance names democratic promises of shared dignity, participatory power, and collective flourishing.

The guiding metaphor, "I Sell the Shadow to Support the Substance," draws on Sojourner Truth's strategic self-representation as abolitionist and feminist. Her practice models prophetic contradiction, turning symbolic visibility into material support for justice. Canonical interventions, from Frederick Douglass's "What to the Slave Is the 4th of July?" to Maya Angelou's refrain about "these yet to be United States" and Barack Obama's call for "a more perfect union," expose the spectacle of liberty and demand truth-telling about racism, sexism, and exclusion.

This womanist ethical analysis traces how nationally enshrined sins, pride, greed, wrath, sloth, and related vices, degrade policy and public discourse, hollow moral substance, and enable faux Christian authoritarianism. Such distortions risk mutating constitutional democracy into demagoguery that narrows who counts as "we the people." Engaging public theology with intellectual rigor, moral courage, and spiritual imagination, the paper asks how scriptural, ethical, and spiritual resources can sustain resilience, hope, and justice while centering marginalized voices. I propose declarations of interdependence, rooted in bottom-up, outside-in practices of marginalized communities, as a civic and theological corrective to reclaim democracy as a shared moral and sociopolitical project.

Freme Duarte Sturzenegger, Karen

Affiliation: Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná (PUCPR), Brazil

Paper: *Democratic Hospitality versus Fortress Nationalism: A Public Theological Response to Authoritarian Populism and Anti-Immigrant Politics*

Abstract: Across Europe and Latin America, authoritarian populisms consolidate power by constructing the image of a "nation under threat" and portraying migrants as cultural, economic, and civilizational dangers. By weaponizing narratives of humiliation and dispossession, such movements redefine "the people" in exclusionary terms and promote a fortress model of national identity. While invoking democracy rhetorically, they erode its participatory, pluralistic, and rights-based foundations.

This paper argues that public theology must respond not merely through moral critique but by offering constructive normative imagination. Drawing on the theological category of hospitality—biblically grounded in the ethical responsibility to the stranger (cf. Lev 19:34; Eph 2:19)—and developed within contemporary public theology, the paper proposes "democratic hospitality" as a counter-paradigm to

fortress nationalism. Democratic hospitality does not imply naïve borderlessness; rather, it envisions political community as grounded in human dignity, shared vulnerability, and accountable institutional inclusion.

Through interdisciplinary dialogue with political theory and migration studies, the paper analyzes how anti-immigrant rhetoric functions as a mechanism of power consolidation in populist contexts, transforming migrants into symbolic threats and reinforcing majoritarian identity politics. It then articulates a theologically informed account of citizenship and nationhood that resists ethnocentric definitions of “the real people” and reclaims democracy as a space of lawful inclusion, participatory plurality, and peace-building.

By reframing hospitality as a democratic virtue rather than a private moral act, this proposal contributes to debates in public theology concerning political authority, nationhood, and the future of democracy in polarized societies.

Gorski, Philip

Affiliation: Yale University

Paper: *From Nationalism to Civilizationism: the New MAGA Intelligentsia*

Abstract: To be confirmed

Hovorun, Cyril

Affiliation: Loyola Marymount University

Paper: *Interpreting the Ukrainian war in postcolonial terms*

Abstract: Ukraine's experience with colonialism and neocolonialism mirrors global patterns in which empires exert political, economic, and cultural control over territories. The Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union practised internal colonisation of Ukraine, suppressing its autonomy in ways comparable to overseas colonial powers. Post–World War II decolonisation movements and postcolonial theories provide a framework for understanding Ukraine's ongoing efforts to protect its independence, which Russia keeps trying to destroy.

Jones Quarles, Melanie

Affiliation: Union Presbyterian Seminary

Paper: *America May Go To Hell: Revisiting Vincent Harding's "Is America Possible?" and Reimagining Democracy*

Abstract: Days before his assassination in Memphis in April 1968, where he stood alongside Black sanitation workers striking for livable wages, Martin Luther King, Jr. issued a prophetic indictment. Drawing on the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16), King declared: "If America does not use her vast resources of wealth to end poverty and make it possible for all of God's children to have the basic necessities of life, she too will go to hell." At the time, King's vision of beloved community and his fierce antiwar rhetoric had made him the most hated man in America. His posthumous transformation into a beloved national icon, one inseparable from Coretta Scott King's deliberate labor of legacy-making, exposes America's theological and political amnesia. Fifty-eight years later, King's warning has materialized. This paper revisits Black historian and political theologian Vincent Harding's urgent question, "Is America possible?," as a framework for diagnosing the present democratic crisis. Against the backdrop of surging authoritarian populism, exclusivist nationalism, and the calculated weaponization of racial and economic grievance, the paper asks: Are the democratic visions of hope America has long promised possible? And what does the Black prophetic tradition have to offer a fractured democracy teetering on the edge of its own worst impulses? The paper moves beyond Harding's conditional framing.

The question is not whether America may go to hell. For marginalized communities, from the nation's founding 250 years ago through its present failure to uphold the pursuits of life, liberty, and justice for all, America already is hell. The Black prophetic tradition does not merely critique this reality; it constitutes one of democracy's most theologically coherent and historically tested resources for reimagining democratic life from the underside of history.

Kollontai, Pauline

Affiliation: Wesley House College, Cambridge, UK

Paper: *Handmaids in Red: Religion, Populism and Gender Equality in Israel*

Abstract: Right-wing populism in Israel has grown since the late 1970s. Since 2009, it has intensified in the political sphere, supported by right and far-right Jewish religious political parties representing the Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox Jewish establishments. Populism in Israel has always been a complex interplay of political, social, and cultural/religious dynamics, with strong ethno-nationalist characteristics. Since 2022, the Netanyahu-led government has been considered the most right-wing populist religious government in Israel's history. Its populism is authoritarian, rooted in extreme nationalism, acutely anti-democratic and anti-gender equality. This paper focuses on the intricate relationship between religious and political right-wing populism in Israel since 2022 in promoting and designing a portfolio of anti-gender policies and laws. This portfolio is part of their populist aims in ensuring: Jewish continuity, the safeguarding of Jewish identity as understood within traditional Judaism and protecting the "pure people" from secular elites and those considered "non-native" in terms of their ethnicity and/or religion. All are considered essential elements in maintaining Israel as a Jewish homeland. First, the paper presents a very brief overview of the roots and "changing face" of Israeli populism. The discussion then explores very recent Jewish religious and political narratives espousing patriarchal and biased views of women and the manifestation of these through political policies and laws underway to undermine and reverse the existing level of equality in the political and public spheres for all women, irrespective of whether they are religious or secular. Finally, the discussion will focus on how Jewish women, both religious and non-religious, are currently working together to protest, challenge and curtail the political-religious agenda intended to reverse and undermine existing gender equality that has been achieved since the 1970s.

Kuvuna, Joel Mbongi

Affiliation: Université de l'Alliance au Congo, ECC

Paper: *"Political Paternalism and Criminal Governance: Obstacles to Sub-Saharan African Development"*

Abstract: To be confirmed

Langner-Pitschmann, Annette

Affiliation: Goethe University Frankfurt/Main (Germany), Catholic Theology Faculty

Paper: *Less metaphysical modesty? The discursive standards of public theology in the face of authoritarianism*

Abstract: Confronted with authoritarian positions, public theology faces a substantial imbalance of opportunities. The style of public theologians tends to be characterised by epistemic humility and restraint regarding metaphysically grounded claims to validity. Authoritarian-nationalist actors, in contrast, do not shy away from basing their narratives on absolute assertions and strong metaphysical premises. This is all the more true for positions such as neo-integralism, which explicitly link these premises to theological motives. How can public theology remain audible in this situation without falling behind its own standard of renouncing epistemic violence? How can it give its interventions space and weight without resorting to large-scale arguments of authority? My paper aims to offer a piece of the puzzle in clarifying this question. It builds on a proposal put forward by public theologian Mary Doak in her 2024 paper 'Threading the Needle: Jacques Maritain's Defence of a Christian and Liberal Democracy'. Here she discusses the

theses of Maritain (1882-1973) and examines their potential to counter (religious) authoritarian positions with a constructive approach to the connection between politics and religion. She is interested in the observation that Maritain primarily understands social pluralism not as a formal principle of liberalism, but as a material principle of Christian thought and action. In my paper I will first present and discuss Doak's contribution in detail. In a second step, based on Maritain's texts, I will analyse an implication of his proposal that is particularly relevant to my question: Insofar as Maritain's position represents a variation of neo-Thomism, it can be used to examine the question that is central to the discursive self-positioning of public theology in the face of authoritarianism: Are there ways to support one's own position with metaphysical premises without slipping into pre-modern or reactionary patterns of argumentation?

Longkumer, Moakumla

Affiliation: Independent research scholar

Paper: *Between Custom, State and Individual Rights: Public Theology and the Crisis of Democratic Representation in Ao-Naga Society*

Abstract: The changing wave of the Indian Political system, with a strong emphasis on Hindu nationalism has posed a danger to the religious minorities of the country. This changing wave has greatly affected Nagaland, one of the Christian-dominated states in India. However, the Nagas of Nagaland still live in independent villages, with their own village council of elders where their decisions are considered final and binding in all life matters. This is why Assembly elections in Nagaland differ from elections elsewhere in India, because Electoral participation in Nagaland often unfolds within the framework of collective village council decisions rather than individual political choice, thereby complicating liberal democratic assumptions about personal autonomy, conscience, and rights-based citizenship. The increasing alignment between customary institutions and state-level political actors raises concerns about democratic representation. This undermines the principles of democracy, erodes trust in local governance, and perpetuates systems of inequality and exploitation. These dynamic produces what may be described as a crisis of democratic representation: traditional structures designed to protect communal welfare become entangled with partisan power, while individuals experience diminished space for critical engagement. This study will employ a qualitative and interdisciplinary methodology grounded in contextual public theology. It combines socio-political analysis, political theory on democracy and minority rights, and theological-ethical reflection rooted in Christian social thought. Through this approach, the paper will critically evaluate the tensions between customary authority and democratic integrity. The paper proposes that democratic renewal in fractured contexts requires ethical reorientation through accountability, transparency, and participatory dialogue, which is possible through theological discernment and responsible leadership.

Marzouk, Safwat

Affiliation: Union Presbyterian Seminary

Paper: *Confronting Exclusivist Nationalism: Universalism and Peculiarity in Micah 4:1-5*

Abstract: As public theologies confront the rise of populist nationalisms, they wrestle with how to critique these exclusionary ideologies without losing a sense of belonging and how to advocate for universalist humanity without giving up on the peculiarity of culture. This tension is about creating common ground to see the humanity of the other while celebrating differences as transformative gifts to the collective. Biblical traditions from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament have been invoked in these debates to support exclusivist nationalisms or to advocate universalist tendencies that deconstruct populism. In this paper, I will argue that Micah 4:1-5, though on the surface it seems to replace human empires with a religious empire, in fact deconstructs militarized and violent hegemony. The vision challenges exclusionary versions of Israelite identity by including foreign nations in the realm of the divine. This inclusion does not come at the expense of their or Israel's peculiarity: they, Israel, and the nations, call upon the names of their gods. The centrality of Zion's urban setting is balanced by the flourishing of

agrarian life. The nations' distinct identities remain recognizable, and they may even enter into conflict, but the vision establishes boundaries to prevent them from drifting into militarized confrontation. This idealized vision is instructive for public theologies that seek to engage populist nationalism by imagining ways of belonging to a cosmopolitan humanity that nurtures peculiarity and differences.

Rosa, Wanderley

Affiliation: Faculdade Unida de Vitória

Paper: *The Reception of Karl Barth's Theology in Contemporary Brazil: A Christocentric Counterpoint to the Theology of Domination and Bolsonarism.*

Abstract: This project proposes a comparative analysis between the crisis of the German Evangelical Church under National Socialism (1933-1934) and the current convergence between Brazilian evangelical sectors and the far right (Bolsonarism). The starting point is theological estrangement: how denominations with Reformed and Pentecostal roots came to adopt slogans such as "Brazil above all, God above all," which echo "Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer" and the instrumentalization of faith by the state. The central problem lies in the rise of Dominion Theology (DT) in Brazil. Inspired by conservative American movements, DT advocates the reconstruction of society under "biblical laws" and Christian control of civil spheres, which challenges Barth's distinction between the Christian and civil communities. The research is based on the Barmen Declaration, written by Karl Barth, which states: "Jesus Christ... is the only Word of God to which we must listen." This confession rejects the idea that the Church should recognize other events or powers as divine revelation. In contemporary Brazil, the Theology of Dominion acts as a "false doctrine" — a term used in Barmen — by placing the nation and its political leader on a sacred pedestal, demanding from the faithful a loyalty that belongs only to Christ. The project will use Barth's concept of Status Confessionis to discuss whether evangelical support for authoritarianism represents a breach of the confession of faith.

Salcido, Javier

Affiliation: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Paper: *"Purge Me with Hyssop, and I Shall Be Clean": A Theological Reflection on Remigration, Purity Culture, and Affective Polarization in the Netherlands*

Abstract: Situated within public theology, this paper examines theological reasoning in contested public spaces shaped by migration debates and affective polarization. It considers how Christian actors might respond to polarization in ways that are both theologically grounded and socially engaged.

Using emotive discourse analysis, the paper examines how religious professionals engage remigration narratives on social media. It analyzes how theological language and pastoral positioning may reinforce or interrupt purity-coded imaginaries linked to affective polarization.

Remigration refers to proposals advocating the large-scale return or expulsion of immigrants and their descendants, often framed around cultural or civilizational criteria. While presented as pragmatic policy, the concept carries deeper symbolic and moral assumptions. The term has moved from fringe rhetoric to a more visible element within right-wing populist discourse. In the Netherlands, these narratives intersect with debates on migration, identity, and belonging, particularly regarding migrants from majority-Muslim backgrounds. Within this context, right-wing populism functions as a central propagator of affective polarization, sustained through what may be described as a double hate dynamic in which hostility toward perceived 'others' generates reactive hostility.

The Dutch case, shaped in part by the prominence of Geert Wilders and the PVV, provides a context for examining how populist discourse interacts with polarization. Wilders has repeatedly described Muslim migration as "the biggest problem in the Netherlands," illustrating how narratives become moralized

through themes of threat and national preservation.

The paper interprets remigration discourse through the lens of purity politics and proposes a theological response grounded in Lieven Boeve's theology of interruption.

Sexton, Jason

Affiliation: University of California, Los Angeles

Paper: *The Punitive Threads and Aims in the Persistence of Eugenics*

Abstract: This paper explores how four spheres of social discourse where eugenics persists—penal policy, religion, the computational sciences, and the biological sciences—carry punitive outlooks and aims. Largely grounded in an undergirding philosophy and logic, especially in relationship to science and coercive governmental practices, this logic entails a set of assumptions with foregone conclusions that deem others as inherently comprised of different and inferior or bad stuff, materially and morally, signaling an inherent deviance, nascent criminality, and relative irredeemability. This status in turn leaves the objectified subject ready for punishment, wherein those deemed down and out do not fit or align to the measurable standards of what might be considered normal as part of the social fabric, which in turn invokes a normative response of punishment as a means of satisfying societal angst.

Singata, Silakhe

Affiliation: University of South Africa

Paper: *Who are “the People”? Reflecting on the Theological Problem of Political Sovereignty with and Beyond Sobukwe*

Abstract: In this paper, I will make two moves: (1) I will think with Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe, and (2) I will think beyond Sobukwe. In thinking with Sobukwe, I take, as my starting point, the paradoxical situation in which some take Sobukwe as being a proponent of an exclusivist ethnic nationalism, while others take him to be inclusive and broad-minded, casting this confused reception as partly a result of the historical erasure of Sobukwe's voice that persisted during and after the 'transition' from apartheid to democracy in South Africa. I will frame the restating of Sobukwe's African nationalism as a retrieval of his voice, homing in on his distinctive understanding of anti-black racism, which centres the African both in its descriptive and prescriptive aspects. It is in the prescriptive aspects of this vision that a particular political theology comes into view. I will argue that the notion of sovereignty his thinking inhabits is a carryover of what I will identify as a compromised theology proper. To be clear, 'sovereignty' refers to something very specific in this paper – the equiprimordial elements that constitute a functional subsumption of reality that historically first emerges with the invention of the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo, and its attendant notions of divine power or sovereignty. I will then enact my thinking beyond Sobukwe at this point through a Black nihilist critique of political ontology. Thinking beyond Sobukwe here is not understood as abandoning him but rather it is critical supplementation that takes his radical intervention at the level of politics (the ontic register) and deepens it to the level of the political as such (the ontological register) so as to move beyond sovereignty in a dense opacity – the abyss in which God reigns.

Smallwood, Teresa L.

Affiliation: United Lutheran Seminary

Paper: *The Threat of white Christian Nationalism to Our Democratic Futures*

Abstract: A culture of violence permeates the American ethos where race and religion have germinated and grown. In the context of religious life, there exists a taxonomy of racialized data that are indicative of the social constructionism which causes race to stand as a marker for acceptance into the so-called “American Dream.” The problematic nature that race and religion, taken as a conceptual frame, imbibes in various rationalities inclusive of theological, socio-political, economic, and legal communions in America threaten the stability of democracy. The recent uptick in white Christian Nationalism presents lawmakers with a conundrum given its incongruence with other constitutional and legislative protections for citizens of the United States. Liberty and justice for all as stated in the country’s Pledge of Allegiance suggests a fundamental equality for all the peoples of the United States as guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution; however, the United States has largely operated as a so-called “Christian Nation.” Many have wrongly assumed that the “founding fathers” were Christian. While it is true that Christianity is not a monolith. It is also true that most of the founders were likely deistic or quasi-deist in belief—often rejecting core orthodox Christian doctrines. This fact is firmly established by Richard T. Hughes in his manuscript *Myths That America Lives By: White Supremacy and the Stories That Give Us Meaning*. Instead of an impenetrable wall of separation between church and state, uninterrogated government entanglement with certain religious entities suggests that in fact a marriage of sorts has contrastingly occurred. I will explore that “marriage” and its implications for freedom of religion for religious institutions unaffiliated with white Christian Nationalism and its progeny. Moreover, I will explore this phenomenon in terms of its threat to democracy, which undergirds the complexity of a public theology in the public sphere.

Smit, Peter-Ben

Affiliation: Universiteit Utrecht / Old Catholic Seminary & Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Paper: *Prefiguring Potential Futures: Conflicting Constructions of Time as a Site of Public Theology*

Abstract: The construction of time is of key political significance and at the same time. Time is constructed through proclamations of a new golden age, for example, or through the regular celebration of a cycle of feasts (Christian liturgical year, for instance). This paper explores the topic of the imagination of futures and their anticipatory embodiments in groups that seek to ‘prefigure’ this future. In doing so, the public theological potential of such prefigurations will be explored, with reference both to intentional communities such as Catholic Worker and to (seemingly) ordinary worshipping communities, as it is also here that the reimagination of time is found. Examples will be used both from elements of the Christian liturgical tradition and the history of Christianity, with the purpose of illustrating aspects of the logic of prefiguration. This includes revising the relationship between past, present and future and the power dynamics this involves, the relationship between body and mind (stressing embodiment), the relationship between means and end, the reversal of what is regard as central, and the role that notions such as revelation plays, while also briefly exploring the ritual dimension of prefigurative existence. The paper builds on earlier work in prefigurative politics and Christian theology from historical and exegetical perspectives and seeks to position this more in the sphere of public theology.

von Sinner, Rudolf

Affiliation: Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná (PUCPR)

Paper: *Populism and "People": Precarities and Polarizations in Political and Theological Terms*

Abstract: In light of namely the Brazilian (under Bolsonaro) and US (under Trump), contexts, two main elements pervade the argument. First, I argue that both ‘populism’ and ‘the people’ are precarious concepts that can neither easily be defined, nor easily be claimed by any representative. I hold this to be true both in political and in theological terms, empirically referring to the civil and the religious population and their construction as ‘a people’, respectively. Second, in view of a common disregard for the people, namely as plebs, I affirm the importance of participatory popular subjects as a necessary part of both the political system and Christian communities. This bibliographical and conceptual essay explores the precariousness and potentialities of the realities and concepts of populism and ‘people’ by means of a

dialogue with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, as well as through Pope Francis' theology of the people.

Ziegler, Diane

Affiliation: Fuller Theological Seminary

Paper: *Academy and Congregation Together: Building Public Capacity for Nurturing Democracy*

Abstract: Pastors and congregational leaders, as part of the public square, are uniquely positioned to nurture critical aspects of democratic societies. Yet, these leaders are often under-equipped for such work. Some pastors were trained to maintain institutions while others were trained for organizational growth; but few for public theology and ministry. And while congregational leaders are charged to lead with energy and intelligence, they are often under-equipped to serve, particularly in contexts of “divisive authoritarian populisms and exclusivist nationalisms”. The author, a Reformed pastor in the United States, proposes that enhanced collaborations between the Academy and congregations are urgently needed to equip leaders for public and ministry, and democracy-building. The paper highlights models developed by Reformed pastors ministering under authoritarian systems including: Barth’s Emergency Homiletic, Miskotte’s Biblical ABC’s, and de Gruchy’s Theology and Ministry in Context and Crisis. The author proposes that these models have powerful potential to inform democracy-building collaborations. The Academy is positioned, the author believes, to provide theological and methodological expertise, as well as communities of learning and praxis, needed by congregations for democracy-building. The paper will summarize Barth, Miskotte, and de Gruchy’s models, and propose for how these models might be engaged meaningfully today in a democracy-nurturing partnership between the Academy and congregations. The categories of “democratic system” and “democratic vision” (de Gruchy) will be used in the paper to describe and discuss democracy. A successful partnership between Academy and congregations will help to drive broad-based, community-driven, grassroots, public understandings and practices that counter the exploitation, humiliation, and marginalization of authoritarian systems in our modern day.

Group B | Justice, Economy, Labour, and the Conditions of Life

Breytenbach, Wynand Marc

Affiliation: Stellenbosch University and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Paper: *Breaking the Boereworsgordyn: How Shared Meals Transform Anxiety into Empathy as a Pathway to Racial Justice and Inclusive Ecclesiology*

Abstract: In post-1994 South Africa, the Boereworsgordyn—the invisible barrier of racial separation—continues to divide communities despite decades of societal transformation. The Dutch Reformed Church in Durbanville exemplifies this persistent divide. This paper explores how Intergroup Contact Theory, operationalized through liturgical practices of shared meals, offers a concrete pathway toward breaking these barriers and enabling racial justice and transformed conditions of life.

Drawing on an eight-week participatory intervention with eight white members of Durbanville Gemeente, this study documents how anxiety—manifested through racial comments, prejudice, and hesitation—dissolved when equal-status contact, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and institutional authority converged around shared tables. As anxiety decreased, empathy increased, enabling participants to genuinely hear others' stories and reimagine church and society as necessarily inclusive.

The research reveals that participants shifted from ecclesiological imagination marked by racial homogeneity to an imagination in which they could no longer conceive of church without Black and Coloured members. This transformation was so significant that community members subsequently invited study participants into their homes, continuing the practice of eating together.

This paper tests whether Jesus's ancient practice of table fellowship—fundamentally a justice practice oriented toward inclusive conditions of life—retains transformative power today. The findings offer reproducible practices that churches and public institutions can implement to cultivate empathy across racialized divides and build pathways toward systemic justice.

Brown, Stephen

Affiliation: University of Geneva, Institut romand de systématique et d'éthique (IRSE)

Paper: *Toward an Ecumenical Public Theology of Artificial Intelligence*

Abstract: The technological revolution, driven by exponential advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), is catalysing profound shifts across every domain of human activity. It is fundamentally reshaping how people live, work, relate to one another, and to technology itself. This is unfolding within a complex global context, marked by widening inequalities, geopolitical instability, and environmental crises. Against this background, this paper seeks to develop an ecumenical public theology of artificial intelligence. Its starting point is the fractures and vulnerabilities intensified by AI, with particular attention to the economic forces driving its development and to questions of human personhood, work, justice, social responsibility, and the common good.

It then seeks to identify the common theological ground to be found in Roman Catholic, Orthodox and ecumenical responses to AI, around issues such as power, justice, equity, participation, care for creation, how voices from the margins are heard, as well as human dignity, and what it means to be human, made in the image of God.

Finally, it will set out a framework for an ecumenical public theology that takes as its starting points matters such as theological anthropology, human responsibility, the dignity of work, ecology, global

inequalities and technological justice, militarization and autonomous weapons, and common ecumenical perspectives on AI governance.

deForest, Allison

Affiliation: United Lutheran Seminary

Paper: *Restorative Justice as a Public Theology Paradigm*

Abstract: As early as the writing of the New Testament, there is evidence of the values of the Roman Empire seeping into the values of the church. Hierarchical, patriarchal, and retributive paradigms have been a part of the church almost since its inception. Our image of God and our expectations for social and political systems, shaped by these influences, have been used to justify top-down power, violently enforced, and thus have led to multiple forms of injustice: legal, economic, and gender-based.

The primary image of God's justice evoked in Scripture, however, is restorative. For example, through the typology of Jesus as the bronze serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness, the author of the Fourth Gospel calls people to turn to back to God and enter a restorative circle of reconciliation with God and one another.

Restorative justice is an ancient practice, but it has been brought back to mind in the United States by the work of Howard Zehr. Restorative justice focuses on nonviolent group conflict resolution and prioritizes what all parties involved need over what they deserve. It is not necessarily transactional, and it doesn't favor any demographic or status group.

This paper will review restorative justice images in Scripture as well as restorative justice practices and principles, observing how they can reshape our ideas of criminal and economic justice systems and transform how we view God and God's actions in the world. Integrating restorative justice principles and practices into human systems can promote the dignity of all of God's creation and perhaps work to repair some of the great harm that the church as an institution has done.

Fretheim, Kjetil

Affiliation: MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society

Paper: *Explore and Extract: Deep Sea mining, international relations, and conditions of life*

Abstract: In a 2024 white paper, the Norwegian government presented plans for seabed mineral extraction on the Norwegian continental shelf. Initial mapping concluded that the deposits on the Norwegian seabed are significant relative to current global annual extraction rates. The plans also foresee a growing demand for minerals and metals as part of the global green transition and international efforts to achieve the goals of the Paris agreement.

Protests have been loud and clear from political parties and not least from organisations such as the World Wildlife Fund, Greenpeace and Naturvernforbundet (Friends of the Earth Norway). While they are vocal on climate change and other environmental issues, little has been heard from churches and other religious groups on this topic. Following budget negotiations in parliament in 2024 and 2025, the implementation of these extraction plans has been (temporarily?) paused until 2030.

The many critical questions regarding economic life and the material conditions that sustain human and non-human life raised by these plans and protests cannot, however, be put on hold. This paper engages with these themes from a historical, systematic, and interdisciplinary perspective by contextualising the discussion within the *longue durée* of human interaction with the oceans. More specifically, it discusses the Norwegian plans for seabed mineral extraction from the perspective of the economic order, international relations and Christian ecotheology.

The paper concludes by outlining constructive theological responses to ocean governance and deep-sea mining.

Hinson-Hasty, Elizabeth

Affiliation: Union Presbyterian Seminary

Paper: *The Theological Politics of Erasure*

Abstract: Concepts of sin, human nature, and redemption are again worthy of attention in light of the conditions created by neoliberalism and in order to cultivate a more authentic moral conscience. If those living in the most precarious circumstances are fully incorporated into moral deliberations on Christian concepts of sin, discussions would shift from a focus on self-interest, pride, hiding, and generalized notions of social sin to an emphasis on erasure.

Erasure is rooted in the fear of Otherness, the protection of resources (natural and human-made) to maintain a dominant group's access to them, and has a long history of support in Western Christian theology. In the biblical text, erasure emerges in stories of conquest and between the lines of the narrative in the untold stories of unnamed women, among others who live among the tombs as ghosts. Erasure was central to settler colonialism. In our contemporary era, erasure is being used as a strategy to create institutional and social change throughout the world and specifically in the U.S. through the financialization of markets and biased taxation policies, the devaluing of human labor, the removal of women's constitutional right to abortion, the enactment of anti-trans laws, attacks on critical race theory and D.E.I. programs, and the sanctioning of policies of mass deportation.

This paper will explore the concept of erasure as the original sin of White Western Christians, consider how misinterpretations of Calvin's theology inform erasure, and draw upon the biblical traditions to consider the importance of shame as a social virtue in response to the social conditions created by neoliberal capitalism. I will draw upon the work of John Calvin, Rachel Baard, Allan Boesak, James Cone, Kelly Brown Douglas, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Robert Vosloo, among others.

Keay, Elijah

Affiliation: Stellenbosch University

Paper: *Towards Just Ends: A Teleological Anthropology Against Capitalist Formation*

Abstract: This paper argues that theological anthropology plays a pivotal role in shaping economic life and labour in ways that are more or less conducive to justice and well-being. Capitalism, it contends, is sustained by prominent Protestant understandings of anthropology—specifically, modern conceptions of total depravity and natural goodness. Furthermore, these anthropologies reinforce capitalism's perception, cultivation, and discipline of desire. On the one hand, humans are vicious and self-seeking individuals who must be restrained from committing antisocial acts and disciplined to contribute positively to society. On the other hand, humans are portrayed as naturally self-interested and pleasure-seeking individuals who infinitely desire the finite. Thus, governance through competition, discipline, accumulation, and consumerism seems inevitable. One must mitigate individual vices and/or satisfy individual wants. Yet, capitalism does not merely observe this behavior; it actively fashions human persons in this image. Capitalism's insatiable need for economic growth requires a growing number of voracious consumers and tireless producers.

In contrast, an Augustinian-Maximian anthropology offers a different conception of humanity. It is one in which humans are oriented towards their divine End, which is also their Source, and in which they are dynamic, contingent, and therefore susceptible. They can be shaped towards God and misshaped towards self, but their infinite desire is ultimately and only for the Infinite. This anthropology reframes the

discussion, demonstrating that exploitative labor practices and consumerism are not natural but distortions that require not merely material solutions but theological ones.

Kobe, Lerato

Affiliation: University of South Africa

Paper: *Migration and the Politics of Poverty: A Black Theology Reflection*

Abstract: Despite the political gains of democracy, Africa has struggled to create social and economic structures that meaningfully transform the lives of its people, particularly the poor. In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) leadership and its approach to the decolonisation of the state have come under scrutiny, particularly in contexts of migration and poverty. Thirty years after the democratic dispensation, poor communities increasingly question the ANC's commitment to addressing the lived experiences of Black South Africans. Similarly, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), a political party grounded in Pan-Africanism and Black Consciousness draws criticism in relation to migration and poverty. Civil society movements like March and March argue that businesses exploit undocumented migrants as cheap labour rather than hiring poor South Africans at the minimum wage. Therefore, arguing that political organisation that support undocumented migrants and open borders policies are detached from the everyday struggles of the youth and the poor. Against this background, this paper seeks to analyse and understand the politics of poverty and migration in poor communities in South Africa. Drawing on Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and the liberative paradigm of Black Theology, which positions the poor as the primary interlocutors of theological reflection, I examine the assumptions the ANC and the EFF make about the Black experience post-1994. Primarily, the paper critically interrogates perspectives that are frequently taken for granted within the enduring structures of coloniality and imperialism in the Global South.

Lange, Hans Christoph Thapelo

Affiliation: Stellenbosch University, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Lutheran World Federation

Paper: *Ark or Apartheid? A Theological Appraisal of the 'Enclave' Phenomenon in South Africa's Present and Future*

Abstract: The failure of the South African state to grow the economy and provide basic services has led to the emergence of 'enclaves'—spaces where communities take over what once were functions of the state. Therefore, affording a decent life in South Africa depends disproportionately on one's economic status. Recently, the role of such enclaves for South Africa's future has entered the public discourse through 'The Common Sense' publication of political economist Dr Frans Cronje. In this paper, I outline Cronje's enclave thesis, including its six points of advice for navigating an 'enclave future'. These are consequently analysed from the perspective of the Christian doctrine of the *imago dei*—the image of God. I find that while the 'enclaves' might retain crucial labour skill and economic muscle within the country, it does lead to unjust discrepancies in basic life conditions. The contribution of the *imago dei* in this discourse challenges said injustice on the grounds of common humanity.

Maia, Filipe

Affiliation: Boston University School of Theology

Paper: *The Lost Values of Christian Nationalism: Notes on the Political Economy of Christian Nationalism*

Abstract: Contemporary Christian nationalist discourse in the United States frequently laments the loss of "Christian" or "American" values. This paper argues that such rhetoric should be read not only as cultural nostalgia but as a political-theological response to transformations in political economy. The language of value is particularly apt for this task because of its dual meaning as a moral category used to signify the worth of things and people and as the key term in economic analysis (e.g., the "value" of a commodity). I propose that claims about lost values emerge at moments when economic restructuring

produces surplus populations and new forms of precarity. Drawing on Karl Marx's analysis of labor and surplus value, I contend that capitalist regimes of value necessarily generate devalued or "worthless" lives. Using a deconstructive method inspired by Jacques Derrida, I examine how Christian nationalist appeals to moral restoration depend upon this production of worthlessness. The nation is sacralized as the site where true value is preserved, while migrants and the enemies of the Christian nation (internal and external) are cast as threats to the moral order. In short, this paper proposes that discourse on the loss of Christian and national values is a site where economic power and value is produced. By integrating Marx's critique of political economy with political theology, the paper frames Christian nationalism as an economy of value formation. This paper will hope to contribute to conversations in working group B as it integrates political economy and theological critique in the hope of better framing our collective analysis and possible responses to Christian nationalism. Understanding Christian nationalism in this way clarifies how economic crises are translated into moral crises and why any constructive theological response to conditions of precarity must interrogate the very grammar of value that renders certain lives disposable.

Martins, Yago de Castro

Affiliation: Fuller Theological Seminary

Paper: *Economics Demoralization as a Theological Problem*

Abstract: This article argues that the modern demoralization of economics should be understood not merely as an intellectual development but as a theological problem. Economics emerged from moral philosophy and theological reflection on human agency, exchange, justice, and the common good. Its progressive mathematization and secularization, however, encouraged the discipline to present itself as a value-neutral science concerned primarily with prediction, efficiency, and optimization. Drawing on Robert Nelson, Herman Dooyeweerd, Hugo Assmann and Franz Hinkelammert, D. Stephen Long, and other contributors to the dialogue between economics and theology, the article contends that this methodological transformation did not eliminate moral or theological commitments. Rather, it concealed them within economic concepts, models, and assumptions about rationality, progress, human nature, and social flourishing. Modern economics therefore continues to perform theological functions even when it denies them, sometimes operating as a substitute theology that promises order, prosperity, and liberation through economic mechanisms. The article further argues that markets depend upon moral resources, including trust, virtue, restraint, and conceptions of the common good, which economic models cannot generate by themselves. A theological recovery of economics therefore requires renewed attention to anthropology, teleology, creational order, and moral responsibility. Re-theologizing economic reason does not entail rejecting quantitative methods, but restoring economics to its proper place as a human science concerned with persons, institutions, justice, and the goods economic activity is meant to serve.

Meireis, Torsten

Affiliation: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and Berlin Institute for Public Theology

Paper: *From 'just growth' towards a growth of justice*

Abstract: When the World Council of Churches coined the concept of a 'sustainable society' as early as 1974, questions of justice derived from a liberationist view of the Gospel were on the forefront. Even though that idea was developed into a WCC programme in Nairobi 1975, the quest for a "Just, Participatory, and Sustainable Society" was abandoned in WCC circles when the World Commission on Environment and Development adopted the term of 'sustainability' to characterize its goal of 'sustainable development' which could be translated to mean 'just economic growth'. The idea of ecologically sustainable economic growth then made its way into international politics and inspired the Millennium Development Goals (2000) as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (2016), even though those for the first time also defined a development agenda for the early industrialized countries of the Global North. The economic growth imperative, however, remained central to all of those concepts and effectively

prescribed a global policy that had been central to the development paths of the European and North American countries in the aftermath of the long 19th and the short 20th century: the social imaginary of economic growth effectively helped to curb social conflict and pacify class struggles around unequal distribution, and it has been successful in state-governed capitalist societies, like China, too. However, in the age of climate crisis, the win-win-mechanism of economic growth, which made sure that even the least well off could hope for a perspective of a better life for their children, is coming to a close. The model of capitalist development and regulation characterized by the concepts of Fordism and Postfordism, which sought to pacify social conflicts through mass production, mass consumption, and mass prosperity, has reached its planetary and social limits, resulting in anxieties that are groomed by neo-nationalist and authoritarian movements effectively deflecting issues of just and equal distribution and participation. Even though Christians and their faith based organizations are by no means immune against those tendencies, they have a resource in the Gospel that urges to bring the issue of global distributive justice - especially in times of climate crisis - back on the agenda.

Mqhayisa, Siyamthanda

Affiliation: University of South Africa

Paper: *Economy & Ecology: On Public Theology in the Age of the Capitalocene!*

Abstract: This paper is situated (but not limited) at the intersections of Systematic Theology and Christian Ecotheology. It engages with the question of ecological & economical justice. This engagement will be done by revisiting the classical theological question “What Would Jesus Do (WWJD)?” This question will be assessed in light of the ongoing ecological and economic crises, which Joerg Rieger and others have dubbed as the Capitalocene. On this basis, the paper will engage with Tom Sverre Bredal-Tomren’s framework of Eco-Christology. Which attempts to re-read core Christological themes such as incarnation and soteriology in light of the ongoing ecological crises. Through engagement with this framework, the paper probes potential response(s) and further questions in light of the classical question of What would Jesus do in the face of the Capitalocene? Any discerned action that Jesus would do, would serve as a framework of what righteous anger may entail today, and guide theologians, pastors and activists to analogical solidarity, protest, and transformative action against systemic injustice and ecological harm which leads to the cry of the earth and the poor.

Murthy, Jayabalan

Affiliation: Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal Germany

Paper: *“The Land Shall Not Be Held by the Few”: Dalit Resistance, Missionary Defiance, and the Struggle Against the Mirasdar System in Tamil Nadu.*

Abstract: Land in Tamil Nadu has long been weaponised as a tool of caste domination, with the mirasdar system enforcing Dalit landlessness, bonded labour, and spatial segregation. This paper foregrounds Dalit resistance to these structures and highlights the radical, often overlooked interventions of Missionary Johannes Kabis (Leipzig Mission) and Missionary Anderson (American Board), who directly challenged dominant-caste control over land in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Drawing on mission archives, village records, and Dalit oral histories, the study argues that these missionaries became unlikely allies in a grassroots struggle for land justice, deliberately purchasing land from oppressive mirasdars and transferring ownership or tenancy rights to Dalit communities. Kabis’s establishment of Dalit Christian settlements and Anderson’s public denunciation of caste-bound agrarian exploitation were not merely acts of charity; they were acts of political defiance that disrupted the economic foundations of caste power. Dalit communities transformed these interventions into platforms for collective mobilisation, using land not only as a material resource but as a symbol of dignity, autonomy, and liberation. Biblical visions of Jubilee, land restitution, and the breaking of oppressive yokes became theological tools for resistance, reinterpreted through Dalit experience rather than missionary paternalism. This paper argues that land justice remains central to any credible Christian ethic in caste-structured societies. By centring

Dalit agency and the long history of land-based struggle, it calls for a political theology that refuses neutrality, confronts caste power directly, and aligns itself with ongoing Dalit movements demanding land, labour rights, ecological security, and the right to live fully on their own soil.

Nel, Reggie

Affiliation: Stellenbosch University

Paper: *Reading a Fractured World Through Eyes of the Belhar Confession: An African-Reformed Perspective on Surveillance Capitalism and its Consequences on Conditions of Life*

Abstract: Recent geo-political shifts did not fracture the world anew – it laid bare and deepened existing economic inequalities and the persistent reality and reorganisation of imperialism – it is wreaking havoc on the conditions of life in the Global South and sparks waves of migration. Hence, I would argue that migration, and subsequently xenophobia is the consequence of, or put differently, a symptom of this deeper cancer. In this paper, I show that it is in actual fact, this contestation over energy sources, raw materials, i.e. economic power, in order to sustain what Shoshana Zuboff calls “surveillance capitalism” (2019), that fuels the most prominent, current wars and conflicts.

At the heart of this contribution, I however ask the question, what insights can be gained from a reading of these signs of the times, through the eyes opened by an African confession, called the Belhar Confession. The Belhar Confession was drafted in 1982 in a township in Cape Town that carries its name, Belhar by the Dutch Reformed Mission church and adopted in 1986, forty years ago. I introduce the contribution of this African-Reformed confession as a voice, albeit, at the time, a cry for life in vulnerability under oppression, yet as an early expression of Public Theology, but more so, as a gift from an African church – a former mission church from the Global South, to the world. The contribution argues that the pillars of unity, reconciliation and justice are not mere intra-ecclesial, parochial theological themes for the times, but it remains key political guardrails in order also for theological higher educational institutions, and research communities at large, to make a meaningful contribution to current contestations.

Shepherd, Andrew

Affiliation: Theology Programme, University of Otago

Paper: *“You’re just another brick in the wall”: Datafication, Tech Billionaires, and the Future of Babel.*

Abstract: We live in a period of history in which the wealthiest 0.001%, consisting of 60,000 individuals, own almost 6 per cent of global financial wealth, three times more than the wealth of the lowest fifty per cent of the global population. The penchants and proclivities, desires and decisions of a few tech-billionaires shape the global economy, thereby influencing the futures of all people and the planet itself. Human experience is the base element of this emerging oligarchic attention economy. The limited cognitive focus of humanity is the resource: algorithmically extracted and processed into the tradeable commodity of data, the bricks that construct, what some contend, is a totalizing, dominating, and destructive political economy. In such a context, how is the ancient account of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) being deployed by cultural commentators and scholars as a frame for examining and evaluating the dynamics integral to this emerging reality? How, read as a text of Christian political theology, might this narrative both offer a cultural critique and suggest modes of resistance?

Solomons, Demaine

Affiliation: Stellenbosch University

Paper: *After the Slave Lodge: Black theology, reconciliation and the afterlives of slavery in the Cape*

Abstract: The Slave Lodge stands as both a historical and theological symbol of the afterlives of slavery in the Cape. Slavery was not incidental to the formation of Cape society; it established enduring

relationships between race, labour, land, space and social belonging. Although legally abolished, the world created by slavery did not simply disappear. Its social logic was reorganised through successive colonial and apartheid arrangements and remains visible in the racialised distribution of labour, geography and memory in the contemporary Cape. From a Black theological perspective, the Slave Lodge is interpreted through the experiences of those whose bodies and labour built the colonial Cape, even as their humanity was denied and their presence erased from its dominant historical narratives. The Lodge therefore represents more than a museum housing a completed past. It constitutes a theological site from which the meaning and demands of reconciliation must be reconsidered.

Vosloo, Robert

Affiliation: Stellenbosch University

Paper: *B.B. Keet's critique of apartheid theology and its public reception*

Abstract: The South African theologian B.B. (Bennie) Keet (1885-1974) received his doctoral degree from the Vrije Universiteit (VU) in Amsterdam in 1914, writing his dissertation on the theology of Ernst Troeltsch under supervision of the Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck. In 1919 he was the first graduate from the VU to be appointed as professor at the theological seminary in Stellenbosch. Keet is especially known for his critique of the theological justification of racial apartheid. This paper attends to his arguments in this regard, with special reference to his controversial book *Suid-Afrika – Waarheen?* (*Whither – South Africa?*) and the responses it evoked in church and ecumenical circles as well as in the public media and among concerned citizens in the mid-1950s. In the first part of the paper, I briefly place this book against the backdrop of some of Keet's earlier articles, speeches, and theological influences. The second part of the paper focuses on responses to *Whither – South Africa?* This includes critical reviews from his Stellenbosch colleagues as well as letters to newspapers and to him personally (drawn from archival material). The paper is especially interested in charting Keet's role and influence as a public intellectual and theologian in a time of turmoil.

Group C | Embodiment, Gender, Sexuality, and Vulnerability

Baard, Rachel

Affiliation: Union Presbyterian Seminary

Paper: *The Body is Not the Problem: an Incarnational Public Theology*

Abstract: This paper explores Christian body-talk and its relation to sexual violence through an intersectional feminist lens. In the dualistic framework that characterized historical Western patriarchy, the female/feminized body is a locus of sin that lures the otherwise “rational man” into submitting to his aggressive and libidinous impulses. Her consent is irrelevant, since she is the “temptress” whose body is seen as the source of the perpetrator’s loss of rational control. Thus a dynamic is created that allows for sexual violence in which the victim is blamed and the perpetrator is absolved. Historical theological efforts to address the sin of concupiscence (i.e., misuse of material creation, including the body) through ascetic practices perpetuates this dynamic, since the real problem is not one of the body, but of disembodiment: to the (mostly male) perpetrator, the (mostly female) victim is not a person, but a locus for the enactment of his impulses; and conversely the victim often disassociates from her body for the sake of survival. Christian sin-talk fed this dynamic with its centuries of “Eve blaming” and its perennial dabbling with gnostic dualism. Despite the dwindling public influence of Christian theology, the echoes of this harmful rhetoric remain, amplified by an emerging techno-gnosticism that is driving disembodiment and sexual violence to new heights. In response to the problem, public theology can and must delve into theology’s better insights: on the goodness of creation, on the holiness of the body through an incarnational lens, on theology’s best hamartiological insights which teach that it is not the body but in fact the denial of our created nature that is the source of sin, and on the sacramentality of the material world. In short, public theology can and must offer an incarnational emphasis that offers a robust theology of embodiment in response to the problem of disembodiment and its relation to sexual violence.

Das, Sanjana

Affiliation: University of KwaZulu-Natal, Episcopal Divinity School

Paper: *Towards a Prophetic Liberationist Theology of Embodiment: Reframing Marginalized Bodies as Sites of Resistance and Divine Encounter*

Abstract: This paper draws attention to the embodied experience of gendered violence of women in the Global South who strive to empower themselves utilizing their agency yet have to face the dominance of cis-heteropatriarchal men in positions of power and authority who control women with their ‘savior complex’ to diminish the personhood, dignity and intellect of women who labor to strive and thrive in their careers. I will center my own lived experiences of marginalization in ecclesial and ecumenical circles for bringing rights-based, feminist and decolonial knowledge of women from marginalized and poor communities from the Global South whose sexual and gendered labor to survive and thrive in a fractured world is constantly threatened by the structural and systemic violence both in the society and within the Church. Within a prophetic liberationist theology of embodiment, this paper centers gendered, sexual and socially inscribed vulnerability as a primary locus of theological reflection. It draws resources from feminist, queer and liberationist thinkers from Global South to analyze how religious traditions have both sacralized exploitative practices and sustained survivors through counter-narratives of lament, solidarity, and justice. This paper argues that embodiment is not merely an abstract concept but a condition where bodies, mind and intellect are expected to be obedient and disciplined within heteropatriarchal norms. The commodification of bodies and minds becomes sites of resistance, liberation and resurrection. The complicity of theologies that normalize gender violence, sexual abuse, enforced heteropatriarchal norms and spiritual authoritarianism will be interrogated keeping the voices of women in margins at the center.

Women's empowering and liberative roles as agents of prophetic transformation in a fractured world will be explored as bearers of divine image. An embodied theology of hope.

Dlamini, Zamantshali

Affiliation: University of the Free State

Paper: *Fractured Bodies, Fractured Spiritualities: Reimagining an African Public Pastoral Theology of Emthonjeni for Women's Healing and Resistance*

Abstract: Public Theology in South Africa has confronted racialized oppression. However, the lingering residue of colonialism continues to mark which bodies are vulnerable and whose trauma is overlooked. In various regions of the Global South, the fractured reality of marginalised bodies because of gender-based abuse and the gross bodily harm endured and survived by queer bodies is a deep wound that is not confronted. This work remains unchallenged. Women's bodies are battlefields where cultures, theological understandings, patriarchy, and silence come together. Queer bodies sustain traumatic incidents and silence in ecclesial spaces is alarming. The lack of attention in addressing this is an indication that churches still frame which body is sacred and which is vulnerable. This paper argues that gender-based abuse is not just a societal and pastoral challenge but a significant public theological crisis. Wounded bodies require a moral and a theological reflection where care is not only proclaimed but shared and witnessed. It is a theological crisis that forces us to think critically about justice, common good, and what faith communities owe to fractured societies. This paper draws inspiration from public pastoral and decolonial frameworks with a hope to reimagine public theology as healing, resistance, and redemptive solidarity from the margins. This paper uses Emthonjeni (literally translated as the well), a space and a place for embodied wellness and spiritual care which offers practical model of public theology. In this space, women who have experienced gender-based abuse are given voice to name their pain, spiritual rhythms to support their healing, and a sense of solidarity to resist cultural and ecclesial silencing. In this space, public theology is not just confined to academic essays and ecclesial statements but lives, breathes and redefine healing presence, resistance, and solidarity.

Dufault-Hunter, Erin

Affiliation: Fuller Theological Seminary

Paper: *The Cross as Sexualized Humiliation: Implications for Victims and Perpetrators*

Abstract: In his book *Dominion*, Tom Holland highlights “the disgust. . . crucifixion uniquely inspired.” Sometimes misunderstood primarily as merely physical torture, Holland shares the New Testament’s view that a major obstacle for those who might receive Jesus as Messiah and Lord was his humiliation through this overtly emasculating practice. Add his being stripped naked before hundreds of soldiers, and, as David Tombs has argued, you have a distasteful and unpalatable series of events as the climax of the putative “good news” for humankind. The antipathy many of us continue to feel about the sexualized violence intrinsic to Christ’s saving act clues us into a possible revolution in how we approach victims of sexual violence as well as perpetrators of such assault. The Human One “despises the shame of the cross” (Heb. 12:2) and, in the resurrection, extends an invitation to victims to find release from any recrimination or humiliation that burdens them. Simultaneously, Christ’s humiliation deflects onto perpetrators, who only move toward freedom by embracing the shame of their own actions.

Kobo, Fundiswa

Affiliation: University of South Africa

Paper: *A Womanist Reflection on Black Women's Embodied Vulnerability in a Fragmented World*

Abstract: This paper extends a womanist theological reflection on Black women's embodied vulnerability within a socially, politically, and ecclesially fragmented world by returning to a foundational claim from my doctoral work: Black African women's bodies matter—as sites of knowledge, memory, struggle, and moral

vision. Too often, these bodies become surveilled sites and contested texts, disciplined by masculinised theological imaginaries that police sexuality and morality while claiming spiritual authority. The paper argues that public theology must risk a loss of epistemological certainty to open new political and theological possibilities. It contends that the securities of whiteness and androcentrism must be relinquished if theology is to hear what Black women's bodies disclose. Tracing how Christian traditions have construed the feminine as a threat to patriarchal order, it shows how violence, spiritualisation, and moral regulation function to keep women "in place," ensuring that broken bodies sustain ecclesial and social stability.

At the same time, the paper centres epistemic and spiritual resources forged within Black women's communities, practices of survival, dignity, and theological imagination amid hyper (in)visibility. Attentive to differences between white and Black women's embodiment, the analysis resists universalising frames. Read through a womanist lens, vulnerability is a contested terrain where harm and hope converge, calling for a reconfigured public theology grounded in listening, epistemic unlearning, and the everyday theologies Black women live.

McIntosh, Esther

Affiliation: York St John University

Paper: *Critiquing Notions of 'Safe Space' and 'Vulnerability': Trans Voices Reflecting on Faith and Higher Education in England*

Abstract: Universities provide environments where gender variant identities can be explored and binary constructions challenged. Yet, the lived experiences of trans and non-binary young people in higher education represent a gap in research and knowledge, especially in relation to faith. Chaplains on campus have a duty to follow the equality, diversity and inclusivity policies of universities, but this may be in tension with the teaching at less inclusive churches. Chaplains and trans and non-binary students of faith, therefore, have unique insights to offer regarding the negotiation of their Christian faith and gender variance. By listening to chaplains and trans and non-binary staff and students at Anglican Foundation Universities in England, we found a need to critique the notion of safe space and the cis-construction of trans and non-binary people as uniquely vulnerable. In particular, we question whether protection and vulnerability discourses are paternalistic and result in undermining the agency and positive visibility of trans and non-binary people. This paper draws on interviews with trans and non-binary people to explore experiences of chaplaincies and campus spaces that bring together religious and gendered identities.

Müller van Velden, Nina

Affiliation: University of the Free State

Paper: *The violent debate on women's ordination, yet again: A case-study from the Reformed, Afrikaans-speaking context of South Africa*

Abstract: Despite strides towards equal access to and empowering experiences of women in professional work settings over the past few decades in many parts of the world, the Christian church continues to struggle with full acceptance and recognition of women for ordination. Reformed church denominations in South Africa are no exception. In recent weeks, the Reformed Church of South Africa (Gereformeerde Kerk van Suid-Afrika, GKSA) – one of the three predominantly Afrikaans-speaking churches in South Africa – decided at its national synodical meeting to settle its debate on the matter after many years by setting an ultimatum to those congregations that would continue to ordain women as elders and ministers: an option now no longer open to them, unless they are to leave the denomination. Their decision has been met with sharp criticism from within and outside the denomination – also from its "suster churches" (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Suider-Afrika, NGKSA, as well as the Nederduits Hervormde Kerk van Afrika, NHKA, who do allow women to serve in all offices), as well as in the public domain of Afrikaans media. This decision comes at a time when there is an ongoing debate on what

Afrikaner identity is against the history of apartheid in South Africa, and the recent “refugee option” offered to Afrikaans-speaking South Africans due to crime and violence in the country, by the USA. This paper seeks to interrogate the violent debate on women’s ordination in Afrikaans-speaking, South African Reformed church settings in the public domain by referring to selected recent responses in the Afrikaans media. I will do so from a feminist-critical position, emphasizing the intertwining and persistent impact of patriarchy, racism, and heteronormative Christian ideologies in this debate, particularly in Afrikaans, white communities in South Africa: a toxic religious cocktail which continues to feed gender-based and sexual violence in the country.

Ngcobo, Seipati

Affiliation: University of South Africa

Paper: *Embodied stillness as resistance in the purple movement's fight against gender based violence in South Africa (A Theological perspective).*

Abstract: South Africa is notorious for its high rates of gender based violence in the world. On 21 November 2025, ahead of the G20 Summit that took place in the country, an advocacy group called Women For Change called South African citizens to observe fifteen minutes of stillness in protest against the scourge of GBV. As part of this stillness, people supporting the movement were to withdraw from their labour and financial spending, and literally occupy spaces, laying on the floor in stillness at the same time across the country. Using a womanist framework, this paper argues that that embodied stillness is not a synonym for passive suffering, it is a sacred moment of theological re-imagination that re-enacts the embodied silence of Christ on the cross. As Jesus hung on the cross with a bruised and bashed body, while taking on the state of the silent lamb slain, victims and survivors of GBV were among those who exercised their power of embodying stillness with their abused bodies, yet subverting that embodied stillness as their power in pursuing women's inherent dignity, liberation, healing and wholeness of life. This was a moment of theological re-imagination that exposes patriarchal structures within church and society that sacrifice women's bodies to GBV, and enable its rigidity in South Africa. Equal to its public advocacy in resisting GBV and standing in solidarity with victims and survivors of GBV, the embodied stillness within the purple movement exposed communal life-denying practices such as silence, ignorance and denial that often perpetuate GBV. Thus, the article argues that embodied stillness is a necessary spiritual resource that raises public consciousness of GBV, and insists that collective embodied stillness can restore inherent embodied dignity of women in South Africa and beyond.

Soendker Nicholson, Trista

Affiliation: Phillips Theological Seminary and Wesley House, Cambridge

Paper: *Faithful Resistance: An Ongoing Call to Organize for Women's Rights*

Abstract: Women’s rights are being diminished and continue to be under threat by the second Trump Administration. The female victims of Epstein’s crimes continue to cry out for their voices to be heard, women’s voting rights are under attack in proposed legislation, reproductive rights continue to be threatened in addition to the ongoing threats to women by Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Throughout the history of the United States, women have engaged in actions of faithful resistance to fight similar injustices and oppressions. Methodist women played important roles in enacting lasting change throughout the United States. Shaped by the Wesleyan movement, they learned how to fight civil oppression. Sojourner Truth, Anna Howard Shaw, and Frances Willard were not only suffragettes, but were also known as advocates for more inclusive rights of women, children and laborers. They shared their stories, challenged existing narratives and reinterpreted Biblical passages that had been used to justify injustices.

These women shaped not only the Methodist Church, but also the United States. Faithful resistance is

needed as there has been a systematic deconstruction of women's rights again in the United States. During this time of crisis, organization is needed to fight injustices. A robust public witness is needed to advocate for rights once again. This paper will explore past learnings and achievements in order to empower a new generation of Methodist women to claim our past to navigate the crises of today.

Thyssen, Ashwin

Affiliation: Stellenbosch University

Paper: *Violence and Voyeurism: Exploring the Possibilities of Queering Public Theology*

Abstract: "Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality" (Cruising Utopia, 2009). In queering—an intentional act performed by minoritised individuals and communities—new and transformative possibilities are imagined for the world. Given how harm and violence mark the lives of LGBTI+ people, public theology should therefore make a concerted effort to explore the horizon of an alternative for gender and sexual minorities. This paper, then, sets out to contribute to the conversation on public theology's coalitional praxis. For Pearson ('The Quest for Coalitional Praxis', 2017), public theology requires that the voices of minorities be heard. Critically engaging important discourses within the discipline of public theology, Esther McIntosh affirms the need for listening to marginal voices. Doing so, she argues, opens a "conversation about who God is and how that relates to contemporary issues and the every-day struggles of human persons ('I Met God, She's Black', 2017). Drawing insights from queer theory and queer theology, this paper argues for the intentional queering of public theology – thereby (re-)imagining its future(s). Stated differently, using a queer interpretive lens, public theology is engaged as a helpful religious aid for addressing the realities of violence faced by LGBTI+ people. As such, the paper suggests public theologians should move beyond mere voyeurism—the practice of deriving pleasure from observing others—to intentional queer worldmaking. Making this shift, the enterprise of public theology would more faithfully be accountable to marginal communities that sustain its exercise. Critiquing the construction of the 'public' as heteronormative, Berlant and Warner argue for queer counterpublics that may provide new and different possibilities for society ('Sex in Public', 1998). Public theology, I argue, would benefit greatly from listening to the soft moans that emerge in queer counterpublics of faith, pointing to public theology's futures.

Tombs, David

Affiliation: University of Otago

Paper: *Using Torture Reports to Read Crucifixion: Vulnerability, Sexual Identity, and Punitive Sexualised Violence*

Abstract: Recent work has critically interrogated the forced stripping and naked exposure of Jesus associated with crucifixion and identified this as a form of sexualised violence (Trainor 2014, 2021, Greenough 2021, Lefebvre 2021, Reaves et al 2021, Tombs 1999, 2023, 2025, 2026 [forthcoming]). In addition to the direct textual evidence of forced stripping in the text, there is extensive contextual evidence (ancient and modern) that illuminates the punitive intentions of the stripping and raises questions on the possibility of further sexualised abuses against Jesus. These additional abuses might be hinted at in the sub-text. This paper (1) discusses insights from contemporary torture reports for understanding public silences surrounding punitive sexualised violence; (2) examines how these silences might shape the context, text, and sub-text for punitive sexualised violence in Gospel accounts of crucifixion; (3) explores the pastoral and theological relevance of sexual harm against Jesus for practical work on safeguarding and recent theological reflection on sexual harm (Kim and Shaw, 2024; Bingham Musick 2026).

Van Der Riet, Ryno Louis

Affiliation: Stellenbosch University

Paper: *Prayer, Queer Embodiment, and Public Theology in South Africa*

Abstract: Public theology in South Africa has long demonstrated that prayer performs decisive public functions. Prayer once sacralised apartheid, yet it also sustained resistance and nurtured visions of justice. In this context, public theologians have shown that prayer assists Christians in envisioning a transformed society, enables courageous critique when that vision is betrayed, and forms moral transformation that prompts concrete action and faithful waiting. Today, within African anti-gender movements, queer bodies are again contested in prayer and public theology. Conversion practices, crystallised in slogans such as “pray the gay away,” reveal how prayer can be weaponised into spiritualised violence, disciplining sexual and gendered embodiment in the name of pastoral care. Recent ecclesial developments also underscore that liturgy and justice are inseparable. Draft prayers debated by the Anglican Church of Southern Africa concerning same-sex unions (alongside the “Prayers of Love and Faith” in the Church of England) demonstrate that prayer is a theological focal point where belonging is negotiated and embodied. This paper discusses these and other contextual examples of how embodiment has been used in public theologies to examine how religion sustains exploitative practices while also offering resources for healing, by focusing on prayer as a site where embodied vulnerability is interpreted, intensified, or redeemed.

van der Walt, Charlene

Affiliation: ACT Church of Sweden and University of KwaZulu Natal

Paper: *What does it feel like to be a problem? From Violence to Belonging when Cruising Utopia with José Esteban Muñoz*

Abstract: Marginalized groups are often framed as “problems” within dominant cultural narratives and normative systems. Queer lives, in particular, come to embody what exceeds or unsettles an heteropatriarchal order. In a present moment marked by renewed efforts to solidify the normative, queer existence is frequently constrained by heteronormativity, capitalism, and systemic inequality. Drawing on José Esteban Muñoz’s account of queerness as a horizon of hope, a utopian “not yet here,” his contribution explores the future-oriented potential of queer being. Two story-landscapes are read alongside one another as reflective surfaces in a process of “cruising utopia.” First, Genesis 37 revisits Joseph, the colorful and problematic dreamer whose difference provokes surveillance, exclusion, and violence. Building on queer readings of Joseph within Genesis scholarship, the narrative becomes a lens for tracing the systemic mechanisms that police normativity while also attending to the generative force of dreaming otherwise. Joseph is placed in conversation with Dylan, the 21-year-old construction worker in Luke Gilford’s 2023 film *National Anthem*. The film portrays a queer rodeo community gathered at the House of Splendor, a chosen family of riders across sexual and gender identities. Though located in a rural landscape, the House functions as a city-like space: dense with encounter, belonging, and improvisational social life where difference is actively sustained. Its very existence gestures toward possibility. Through this spatial imagination, the article argues that alternative “cities” of care emerging at the margins of dominant orders can kindle hope precisely where sameness is rigidly enforced. Queerness, as Muñoz suggests, is not only critique of the present but rehearsal of a more just world.

Wee, Kjersti

Affiliation: VID Stavanger Norway

Paper: *The Silenced Voices: The Bible, Power and Ordinary Malagasy Women*

Abstract: In several African contexts, the degraded view of women is tied to the effects of colonialism and patriarchy, as well as the negative portrayal of women by Western missionaries through a male-centered interpretation of the Bible. This paper examines how power structures reveal oppressive elements in biblical interpretations, utilizing African feminist hermeneutics. It draws on empirical material collected through interviews with ordinary Malagasy women. The findings indicate that participants expressed concern that both church and society have normalized domestic violence. Although women

are valued as mothers, they are often expected to submit to their husbands, even in abusive situations, with the Bible frequently cited to support these views and silence women. For these women, the Bible holds deep significance and is regarded as the unchangeable Word of God. By acknowledging the influence of power structures on interpretations, biblical texts can potentially serve as a source of liberation.

Group D | Land, soil and water: Healing fractures, making home

Brett, Adam DJ

Affiliation: United Lutheran Seminary

Paper: *Healing the Sacred: Land, Water, and the Work of Restoring Relational Worlds*

Abstract: This paper explores the restoration of Onondaga Lake as a case study in how Indigenous land-based knowledge, ceremony, and public scholarship contribute to healing ecological and relational fractures created by settler colonialism. For the Haudenosaunee, Onondaga Lake is not merely a body of water but a sacred relative—the birthplace of the Great Law of Peace and a site that continues to anchor governance, cultural practice, and responsibilities to future generations. Yet the lake also became one of the most polluted waterways in North America, a transformation that reflects the broader displacement of Indigenous ecological systems and the commodification of land and water under colonial industrial regimes. Drawing on collaborative research conducted with Haudenosaunee knowledge keepers, environmental scientists, and public humanities practitioners, this project examines how storytelling, ceremony, and community-centered media practices function as methods of ecological restoration and social repair. The work emerges from the development of an eight-episode narrative podcast series that documents restoration efforts, community ceremonies, and Indigenous ecological knowledge while situating these efforts within broader conversations about environmental justice, sovereignty, and democratic futures. Through interviews, soundscape recordings, and participatory community review processes grounded in Two Row Wampum principles of relational accountability, the project models an approach to scholarship that prioritizes consent, reciprocity, and Indigenous governance over knowledge production. By centering Indigenous leadership and public storytelling, this project demonstrates how scholarship, ceremony, and media can help communities make home again in landscapes marked by environmental trauma, offering a model for global conversations about land, soil, and water justice.

de Beer, Stephan

Affiliation: University of Pretoria

Paper: *Alienation, reclamation and healing: Overcoming urban apathy through community-led stewarding of land, soil and water in the City of Tshwane*

Abstract: In this paper I draw from the wells of community-led initiatives to overcome alienation from land, soil and water, in the City of Tshwane. Through initiatives to heal and revive the Hennops River, as well as Phomolong and Salvokop, local communities become agents of resistance and change, despite governmental neglect, which faith communities can learn from.

I consider examples of neighbouring communities to the ones I focus on, indicating how a failure of reclamation and healing, could have devastating consequences - in terms of social, economic, ecological and physical well-being. The paper reflects on how apathy is countered by urban pathos from below, offering potential for constructive city-making.

Luckritz Marquis, Christine

Affiliation: Union Presbyterian Seminary

Paper: *“Come and take comfort in my shade” (Judges 9:15)?: Trees as Sites of Rootedness, Refuge, Resistance, and Rot in the Christian Tradition*

Abstract: Trees are powerful and terrifying members of our shared planet. They serve as landmarks in orienting ourselves but in mass, as in a forest, represent a dark and shadowy space in which we fear becoming lost. Within our modern cities with perpetual shade issues, the “tree gap” marks the boundaries

between wealthy and impoverished neighborhoods. The inability to find refuge from the weather under the canopy of a tree presses the movement of human bodies in a neighborhood. In this way, the lack of rootedness of trees within the landscape is mirrored in the instability often found in the human community. Given this societal ill and our larger ecological crisis, how might the Christian tradition's relationship to trees and the shade they offer speak into this moment? From multiple references in the Hebrew Bible to the New Testament, trees have represented the power and righteousness of the monotheistic movements of Judaism and Christianity. Simultaneously, trees appear in Scripture as markers of temptation, danger, and idolatry. Moreover, the tradition has sometimes blurred the boundaries between humans and trees, subjecting trees to the same violence meted out against fellow humans (e.g. Deut 20:19 "Are the trees people, that you should besiege them?") This paper explores how an ambivalent relationship to trees and the shade they offer within Christian history – from scriptural imagery to early Christian hagiographies that incorporate trees – informs our own moment's troubling relationship to situating ourselves ecologically. How can we reimagine the particular intimacy between humans and tree as hope for framing Christian public theology of inhabitation?

Maggang, Elia Maggang

Affiliation: Universitas Kristen Artha Wacana, Indonesia

Paper: *Jesus, the Way of Water: An Archipelagic Public Christology*

Abstract: A deep planetary fracture threatening the common life of God's creation is the separation between land and sea communities. The land-centered emphasis in Christian theology, shaped largely by Western, colonial, and continental modes of thinking, has contributed to a rupture in planetary life, disrupting inland communities' relationship with the sea. Land is often understood as static and isolated territory rather than as a mediator of planetary life. Consequently, the flow of agricultural chemicals and plastic waste from inland areas through rivers and other waterways into the sea, degrading marine ecosystems and threatening both sea creatures and land communities that depend on them, has come to be taken for granted. To address this crisis, I propose a public theology grounded in the Indonesian archipelagic everyday life, in which land and sea, together with their inhabitants, are understood as an inseparable and dynamic unity. In this worldview, land functions as a mediating body, a terrain through which water flows toward the sea. Bringing this archipelagic imagination into dialogue with Sallie McFague's theology of the body of God, Niels H. Gregersen's Deep Incarnation, and Mery Kolimon's Indonesia indigenous theology of land, I reflect on John 14:6 to develop the concept of Jesus as the Way of Water. Within this framework, Jesus may be imagined as the life-giving terrain through which salvific waters flow. The fracture of Jesus' wounded body mirrors the planetary fracture but does not perpetuate rupture. Rather, Jesus' body becomes a site of healing and transformative flow. Such an archipelagic public Christology heightens Christian awareness of inland water systems and calls believers to ensure that what flows into the sea is not destructive, but life-giving.

Meylahn, Johann

Affiliation: EHS-Dresden

Paper: *The Commodification of Home: Dwelling, Displacement, and the Son of Man*

Abstract: From the very beginning, the Genesis narrative positions dwelling as an essential human characteristic. The call to subdue the earth and rule its creatures is a mandate to transform the raw material of the world into a habitable home. On the surface, humanity has spectacularly achieved this, building a global civilisation that has tamed nature. Yet, this very success has birthed a profound fracture. Do we truly dwell in this world we have subdued, or have we become alienated from the life-giving soil that sustains us? This paper will explore this fracture by examining how finance capitalism has colonised and commodified the very essence of home. In recent decades, housing has been transformed from a human necessity into a primary vehicle for capital accumulation. This has created a new class of displaced persons: not only the traditionally homeless, but the working poor—families who, despite full

employment, find dwelling an impossibility. When the essential human task of making a home is destroyed by market forces, a new form of alienation emerges. Forced from the land, many seek refuge in the digital world, fleeing the material earth for a simulated community. What does dwelling mean in an age of digital escape and physical precarity? This paper will ponder these questions from a philosophical and constructive theological perspective, moving beyond simple moral imperatives. It will contrast our struggle for a secure foothold on the earth with the figure of the Son of Man, who had "no place to lay his head." His example poses a radical question: Is dwelling on earth a God-given calling, or is our fixation on a terrestrial home a form of worldliness, an idolatry of place? In a world where even home is a commodity, this reflection asks whether we have ever ceased worshipping the idols of the world, and what it might mean to be in the world, but not of it.

Patton, Chenijan

Affiliation: Senate of Serampore College (University)

Paper: *Land as Sanctuary and Sacred Identity for Tribal Communities in North East India: An Indigenous Perspective*

Abstract: Land is sacred in tribal societies as it defines their identity, culture, and way of life. It is linked with their ancestral reverence, worldviews, and cosmology, and binds individuals together as a community. For the tribal-indigenous people of North East India, it is the land that owns them and gives them their identity. Here, the dimensions of salvation and liberation of all sorts are intertwined with land, and they cease to exist as a community in the absence of land. In the tribal worldview, land/creation is the foundation for understanding people's culture, identity, personhood, religion, and ethos. Tribals identify themselves within the community, where the communitarian spirit takes care of the social behaviour of the individual through its ethical morals. Also, the tribal ethical code acts as the yardstick for maintaining the religious, social, political, and economic aspects of the community while sustaining a land-centric civilization. The advent of globalization, neo-colonialism, and the market economy poses a challenge to the tribal community, owing to its profit-oriented ideology and market ethics that seem to differ from tribal worldviews and human development. It has led to a shift in land dynamics and ideology owing to profit and capitalist orientations, which often pose a threat to the land-based tribal culture and civilization. The paper seeks to draw a theology of land from an indigenous perspective while drawing resources from tribal people's epistemology, heritage, knowledge, and the shades of tribal traditions. Tribal people in the North Eastern part of India have wrestled with the ills of imperialism and colonization, politically and theologically, for years, and hence it becomes important to decolonize hinges of colonialism while articulating theology from an indigenous perspective.

Tupu, Charles Uesile

Affiliation: United Theological College

Paper: *Faaola Fanua: A Samoan Public Theology of Taking Care of Customary Land (Fanua faa-le-aganuu)*

Abstract: The public issue at stake is one of customary land and the merits of the Land Titles Registration Act 2008. Should the title of customary land be transferred to individual title, or should it remain within the preserve of the extended aiga and thus protect the access of such lands for future generations? Lying behind this choice are contested understandings to do with economic development and the pressure brought to bear on the Samoan government and economy by external forces like the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and the Australian government. The reaction to the LTRA 2008 has led to political protest, the emergence of new political parties, and an alarming constitutional crisis. This presentation stands within an emerging body of research into a public theology in the Samoan context. It depends upon the cultural metaphor of silagātoga as it explores the pressure being brought to bear on customary land. It proceeds upon the basis of the need for a public theology that sits within a redemption- rather than creation-centred theology. It assumes the need for a more prophetic

understanding of faith and a Christopraxis that flows from a re-reading of the conventional understanding of Jesus Christ as “saviour of the world”—the fa’aola fanua.

Weider, Jonathan

Affiliation: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Research Centre for Public Theology, University of Bamberg

Paper: *Putting down roots in your native soil – critical reflections on a politically effective metaphor of coming home*

Abstract: One metaphor that is deeply rooted in human language and thought, is the metaphor of human beings as plants (Kovecses). Human beings grow and flourish and they build roots, in the places they call home. In an era of migration, this vital metaphor, by which identity is simultaneously tied to the native soil, makes obvious some fundamental fractures and raises the question about the relationship between identity and the soil.

In this paper I want to focus on the disruptive moment of being cut off of these very roots and the difficulties to put down roots again, especially when returning to a place, that has been home for ancestors – returning home. I am referring mainly to people in a German context, and linking this to populist parties that are trying to reach out to these people.

In the interests of public theology, I explore the problem of uprooting and being denied to put down roots as a fracture area, that requires healing. I argue, that this painful experience should not be answered with the promise of static rootedness, but rather with fertile counter images, who literally thrive on uprooting from their native soil.

Christian tradition has such images to offer, albeit provocative ones (e.g. Joh 12:24). If these images were to have an impact, they could change the way people live together on common ground.

Zeferino, Jefferson

Affiliation: Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas, Brazil (PUC-Campinas)

Paper: *Public Theology and Space: Land Conflicts, Land Ecumenism, and Lutheran Engagement in Brazil (1970s–1980s)*

Abstract: Contemporary issues such as migration, territorial wars, forced displacement, and climate change possess a marked spatial dimension. Focusing on the 1970s and 1980s, this paper examines land as a theme of public theology through the lens of spatiality. It explores the theological and pastoral developments arising from the experience of Vítor Westhelle, a Lutheran theologian who assumed a leadership role within the Pastoral Land Commission (Comissão Pastoral da Terra, CPT) in the interior of Paraná, southern Brazil. His pastoral work with landless rural workers in the 1980s challenged theological motifs insufficiently attentive to inequality and to the ethos generated by the political, economic, and social dominance of the latifundium. The study also considers other Lutheran leaders involved in land conflicts during this period, including Kirinus, Fuchs, and Schwantes. Their engagement is interpreted as an expression of land ecumenism, understood as Christian cooperation across ecclesial boundaries in struggles for land and agrarian justice. The paper examines the ambiguities of religion by considering the tensions between faith and domination and between faith and resistance in liminal contexts. Engaging Lefebvre’s theory of the production of space and Westhelle’s latitudinal eschatology, it argues that land is central to the relationship between religion and public life in Brazil. Finally, the paper problematizes processes of exclusion and the “place of the other,” while drawing on Westhelle’s emphasis on the concreteness of eschatology to explore the possibility of hope amid displacement, violence, and injustice.

Zuiderveen, Cody

Affiliation: Theologische Universiteit Utrecht

Paper: *Common Concern for our Common Home: Abraham Kuyper's Contribution to Theo-Political Environmentalism*

Abstract: According to the UN, “Every person, in every country in every continent will be impacted in some shape or form by climate change. There is a climate cataclysm looming, and we are underprepared for what this could mean.” This stinging indictment from global experts beg for an urgent response. Garbage is accumulating rapidly, energy is consumed in increasing amounts each year, and air pollution is killing plants and animals around the world. Steven Bouma-Prediger summarizes the environmental crisis, noting that “exploding population growth, increasing hunger, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, water scarcity and impurity, land degradation, accumulating waste, [etc.] – such is the long litany of ecological woe. The state of our home planet is not good” (*For the Beauty of the Earth*, 54). The world is waiting for a response.

This paper seeks to draw from the theological insights of Abraham Kuyper to equip Christians with theo-political tools to shape a faithful response to current environmental crises, while exploring some of the possible implications for contemporary political-environmental questions. Does Kuyper have anything to offer in the conversation surrounding modern environmental challenges? In which ways might he harm contemporary efforts? Theologically speaking, what should inform Christian political action as it relates to the environment? Are Christians responsible for a public response, or are they only held accountable for select private practices?

Abraham Kuyper offers a series of principles that contribute meaningfully to the conversation. Sphere sovereignty, labeled elsewhere as differentiated responsibility, and structural pluralism provide a framework to explore and understand principles of property rights, justice, beauty, production, and wealth. After outlining sphere sovereignty and structural pluralism, each principle will be examined in turn and offered as guidance for engaging contemporary discourse around environmental justice.

Group E | Public Theology Beyond the Echo Chamber: Communication, Culture, and Critique

Akatukunda, Emmanuel

Affiliation: Centre for Faith and Community, University of Pretoria/Kampala Evangelical School of Theology

Paper: *The City as Theological Classroom: Participatory Methods in Urban Theology*

Abstract: Rapid urbanisation across Africa has generated complex social, economic, and cultural transformations, yet theological reflection and ministerial formation have often lagged behind these urban realities. This has resulted in patterns of theological disengagement from everyday public life. Using urban Africa—and Kampala in particular—as a methodological lens, this paper argues that constructivist action research, operationalized through the pastoral circle, provides a robust framework for dialogical and contextually grounded public theology. Such an approach enables critically engaged, praxis-based theological reflection within rapidly urbanising environments marked by informality, inequality, and religious vitality. The city is treated not merely as an object of theological application but as a pedagogical and epistemic site in which theological knowledge is co-produced, especially through marginal and subaltern voices.

The paper advances three claims. First, urban contexts should be approached as sources of theological insight, not simply locations of ministerial deployment. Accountable public theology must therefore be rooted in lived urban experience. Second, lament is proposed as an essential yet underdeveloped mode of public theological discourse. It enables the truthful naming of suffering and structural injustice while sustaining hope. Third, models of theological education significantly shape the public intelligibility of theology. Classroom-centered and theory-dominant approaches tend toward insulated discourse, whereas praxis-oriented and context-embedded formation cultivates publicly accessible theological communication. The study contributes a contextually grounded methodological proposal for public theology in contested urban publics.

Cho, Anna

Affiliation: Stellenbosch University

Paper: *Vulnerable Speech in a Fractured Public Sphere: A Speech Act Theological Account of Public Responsibility*

Abstract: This paper presents public theology as a theological practice that assumes responsibility in fractured public contexts without evading exposure and risk. It argues that public theological speech is inherently performative, shaping social realities in ways that exceed speaker intention and ethical control. Drawing on speech act theory, the paper develops the concept of vulnerable speech to describe how responsible public witness necessarily entails openness to misrecognition, contestation, and unintended consequences. Rather than treating vulnerability as a deficiency or failure of public theology, it reconceptualizes it as a constitutive condition of truthful and responsible public engagement. Public responsibility, on this account, is not grounded in mastery of outcomes or moral certainty, but in a willingness to remain exposed to transformation.

Engaging Jürgen Habermas's public sphere theory, Judith Butler's account of performativity, and contemporary debates on polarization, algorithmic mediation, and digital publics, the paper offers a theological account of communication beyond control-oriented and instrumental models of public engagement. It proposes a non-instrumental model of public theology in which responsibility is understood as risk-bearing fidelity within digitally mediated and affectively charged public life.

The paper makes three contributions: (1) a speech-act theological account of vulnerable public speech; (2) a reconceptualization of responsibility beyond outcome control; and (3) a non-instrumental model of public theology that rethinks public witness in polarized and fragmented public spheres. In doing so, it argues that responsible public theology is possible only where speech risks itself in sustained exposure to difference rather than retreating into protective insulation.

den Hertog, Niels

Affiliation: Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn (Theological University Apeldoorn)

Paper: *Public Theology for a Hypernervous Society*

Abstract: I would like to discuss reports that have been published in the Netherlands in recent years on the mental health of young people in particular. One of these reports characterises Western European society as hyper-nervous. In the Netherlands, more and more young people are dropping out of school, are depressed and lonely and requests for euthanasia are increasing rapidly.

The researchers point to various factors: declining community involvement, increasing loneliness, fear of the future (climate, changing world order) and an increasing sense of meaninglessness. They claim neoliberalism, which has transferred many responsibilities to the market and has naturally given society a strong meritocratic character, is part of the problem. Several writers (Mark Fisher, Grace Blakeley) point to this problem.

My question as a public theologian would be: what do the sources of the Christian faith have to offer here? In further identifying factors that may cause the current situation in the first place, but I would also want to think about the question what justification by faith, without works (i.e.: without merit), could mean in such a context? Of course I should consider the question if the Christian faith is partly responsible for the emergence of this situation (Weber thesis)? That would not be a great part of this paper though.

Goings, Devon

Affiliation: Theologische Universiteit Utrecht

Paper: *Embodied Users: AI, Education, and Formation*

Abstract: It seems clear that the rise of social media has consequentially placed users in their own echo chambers. The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) allows us the opportunity to think intentionally about how we can use technology in a way that broadens our view and engagement of our neighbor. This presentation will seek to explore the foundations of a Reformed philosophy of education and put them into conversation with how AI use is forming students. The presentation is particularly interested in whether AI use is moving students beyond their echo chamber tribe, or whether AI use is further isolating students. The presentation will then seek to show how a Reformed philosophy of education might help educators think about intentional formation to move beyond our tribes.

Grosfeld, Kristoff Reese

Affiliation: Princeton Theological Seminary

Paper: *Obedience as Listening: Barth, Balthasar, and Public Theology in a Fractured World*

Abstract: This paper advances a methodological proposal for public theology amid digitally mediated, transnational, and politically polarized publics. As populist rhetoric reshapes public discourse in the United States and theological language circulates across social media, migration networks, and postsecular spaces, public theology must attend not only to what it says but to how it listens. I propose obedience as a method of public theology—understood not as passive submission but as disciplined theological listening. In its theological sense (*ob-audire*), obedience names attentiveness to God's address and to the vulnerable voices through whom that address becomes publicly intelligible. Situated

as a Filipino American scholar who immigrated to the U.S. at the age of six, I approach public theology from communities formed by migration, racialization, and transnational belonging. In Asian American churches responding to anti-Asian violence (especially during the pandemic), immigrant congregations navigating digital surveillance, and Christian communities resisting nationalist co-option of faith, theology emerges within contested publics where justice and survival are at stake. These sites expose how fractures in the public are intensified by diversity in postsecular societies and why theological literacy matters in moments of controversy. Drawing on Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar, I retrieve the concept of form (Gestalt) to argue that doctrine—especially the doctrine of providence—forms communities into patterns of listening obedience. This formative listening reshapes communication, culture, and critique: before theology intervenes in public debate, it learns to hear those rendered disposable within it. By reframing obedience as a communicative and critical practice, this paper offers a method of public theology oriented toward justice and the common good, grounded in vulnerable voices, and capable of faithful witness in a fractured world.

Jenista, Meg

Affiliation: Fuller Theological Seminary

Paper: *Preaching as Public Theology: shaping the socio-political imagination*

Abstract: In June 2025, the Center for Public Justice launched its first peer learning cohort: Preaching Reformed Fellowship. In this cohort, 17 US-based pastors have engaged readings, podcasts, webinars, provided sermon feedback to one another, reflected on their own practice, the needs of their congregations, the spiritual resilience of their own faith practices, especially vis a vi the exigencies of this fraught political moment. Their goal has been to discern ways that their preaching can better shape the socio-political imagination of God's people. This cohort ends in November 2026, while our second cohort launches in September 2026.

This paper intends to articulate what we have learned through trial (& error) about how the global church, decolonizing practices and political theology can teach pastors to hone their sermon-craft. Additionally, in this paper you will hear the hard-won wisdom of a pastor in Minneapolis, a military chaplain, a pastor advocating for a detained member of his community and others who have moved theory into pulpit practice. What we learn from their learning and example is the beginning stages of a homiletic capable of shaping lay public theologians, in other words those who dare imagine the world from the vantage point of the Kingdom of God rather than the enforced categories of political partisanship, ideological identity, hatred for enemies and fear of the stranger.

Joseph Clement, Paul Rohan

Affiliation: University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka

Paper: *"From Proclamation to Public Dialogue: Revisioning Evangelization as Dialogical Communication beyond Ecclesial Echo Chambers in Asia"*

Abstract: Christianity in Asia, largely a minority tradition, must discern its vocation within fractured public spheres marked by political polarization, populist religious nationalism, inequalities, and digitally reinforced echo chambers. Withdrawal into private spirituality or reduction to partisan political strategies cannot suffice. This paper argues that public theology provides the critical framework for revisioning evangelization as dialogical communication – enabling Christianity speaks prophetically without domination and participates inclusively without self-erasure. In this perspective, evangelization moves beyond doctrinal confinement and becomes embodied within concrete realities of poverty, exclusion, and conflict. It emerges as public witness integrating proclamation and praxis, sacramentality and justice, ecclesial identity and social responsibility. This paper reconfigures the 'new evangelization' from monological kerygma to dialogical public engagement. It pursues three objectives: to analyze ecclesial echo chambers; to develop methodological innovations; and to retrieve missionary synodality – drawing

on Catholic missiology. Drawing also on Habermas's 'public reason', the paper advances 'dialogical evangelization' as public-theological praxis suited to Asia. Three methodological movements structure the proposal: communication as synodal digital dialogue across transnational networks; culture as dialogical inculturation through interreligious encounter and amplification of marginalized voices such as Dalits and laborers; and critique as prophetic public reason translating doctrine into ethical engagement against commodified religion and nationalism while fostering overlapping consensus for justice and dignity. Grounded in contemporary Asian and global scholarship, the paper advances an Asia-centered methodological contribution to public theology, articulating pathways of theological literacy, public accountability, and reconciliation in fractured societies.

Kim, Sebastian

Affiliation: Fuller Theological Seminary

Paper: *The Rise of Christian Nationalism in US Politics and the Response of Public Theology*

Abstract: To be confirmed

Laubscher, Martin

Affiliation: North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Paper: *Christina Landman, the columnist as a public theologian?*

Abstract: The well-known and very influential African women theologian from South Africa, Prof Christina Landman, who just turned seventy in February 2026, is perhaps best known among Afrikaans daily newspaper readers for her monthly column of the past thirty years in *Beeld* and *Netwerk24*. The ways in which she often represented and/or differentiated herself (and others) from other voices and visions at times, reveals a lot of how to reconfigure the role of a public theologian within the media shaping a particular social imaginary. Therefore, given the fact that her work has been well received and widely studied over the years, it is indeed strange that very little critical engagement has occurred with this specific body of knowledge within her oeuvre and the larger discourse on public theology within the South African media landscape. I believe it is about time to take stock and discern the methodology and characteristic shape and ways in which she wrote the lines between the times and thus paved the way of perceiving anew this task of a public theologian as columnist. In short, there is something hidden and new to discover within this newly imagined way of her weighting and writing her words as she tries to speak into the public domain in ways that might capture the imaginations of fragmented worlds.

Osei, Isaac Karkari

Affiliation: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Kumasi

Paper: *Implications of the Proliferation of "Doom Prophecies" in the Ghanaian Public Space on National Security: Challenges and Way Forward*

Abstract: To be confirmed

Patta, Raj Bharat

Affiliation: Methodist Church in Britain

Paper: *A. Towards A Brit(ish) Public Theology of Liberation: Dalit Theological Offerings*

Abstract: This paper proposes a Brit(ish) public liberation theology as a vital response to the 21st-century multi-ethnic British landscape. Writing as an Indian (im)migrant, the author utilizes Dalit theology to provide epistemological signposts for this context. The "ish" in Brit(ish) represents the blurred identities and multiple belongings experienced by migrants in a post-Brexit society.

The theoretical framework integrates Elaine Graham's public theology, which utilizes a "bilingualism" to bridge the Church and the secular world. By adopting an "apologetics of presence" and focusing on "non-persons," the author advocates for a shift from a "theology for the poor" to a "theology of and from the poor". This is bolstered by Dalit theology's "subaltern epistemic sites," which challenge Eurocentric knowledge by "learning to listen to the voices from below". The proposal addresses two primary public crises: Anti-Hunger Theology: In response to the proliferation of food banks and systemic "precariousness," the author argues for a theology of participation and hospitality. Drawing on the Eucharist and the concept of "God as rice," this approach moves beyond charity to contest neoliberal ideologies and advocate for structural justice. Anti-Empire Theology: Addressing post-Brexit xenophobia and white nationalism, the author proposes "global citizenship" as a counter-narrative to colonial, territorial belonging. This stance uses the "broken body of Christ" as a model for global solidarity, contesting the "soteriology of the State" and white supremacy through a "subaltern liturgy" of eschatological hope. Ultimately, this theology seeks to transform the British public square into a site of welcome. By recognizing the "stranger Jesus" within marginalized communities, the paper calls for Britain to be a nation of sanctuary.

Pirner, Manfred L.

Affiliation: Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU), Research Unit for Public Religion and Education (RUPRE)

Paper: *AI-generated Religious Story-Telling as Research Field and Challenge for Public Theology*

Abstract: Soon after the death of Pope Francis on 21 April 2025, several AI-generated videos were circulated on various social media platforms that showed him ascending into heaven or having fun in heaven with Jesus, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King and even famous pop celebrities like Michael Jackson. Such videos did not only receive many millions of clicks, but internet users also obviously perceived them as a kind of virtual space for mourning and for gaining hope. An analysis of the comments on the most popular 'pope-in-heaven'-video shows that people were deeply moved and spiritually uplifted by the video, and even non-believers felt it "comforting" and "beautiful". Another type of AI-generated religious videos, that can primarily be found on TikTok, show Jesus performing (new) miracles, telling new parables or welcoming the deceased to heaven. Again, the user comments indicate that these videos impact the users' faith and spiritual life – although some of them seem rather exaggerated, ironic or even as making fun of the Jesus stories. Clearly, these new forms of AI-generated religious story-telling on public social media platforms pose new challenges for public theology. In order to assess these phenomena theologically, a thorough analysis is required that includes user reactions. For this task, references to the function and evaluation of apocryphal narratives and legends of saints can be helpful, as can the discourse about historical and contemporary religious art. However, beyond analyzing the material, public theology must also address the question of how to deal with the presence of such videos in church, educational and public media contexts. The paper will finally present some deliberations and perspectives for discussion.

Rue, Krista

Affiliation: Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Paper: *Resisting Partiality Beyond the Echo Chamber: Digital Public Theology as Formation*

Abstract: In the contemporary United States, public discourse surrounding law, race, wealth, and immigration has become increasingly polarized, with digital platforms amplifying reactive and adversarial forms of theological engagement. Public theology risks becoming either partisan commentary or abstract moralism, each reinforcing the very echo chambers it seeks to critique. This paper proposes a methodological reframing of digital public theology as a practice of moral and communal formation rather than rhetorical escalation. Drawing on Ephesians 6:12 ("our struggle is not against flesh and blood") and the biblical prohibition of partiality (Lev 19:15), I examine a case study from an ongoing digital project,

After the Law, which engages questions of differential justice in the U.S. criminal and immigration systems. Rather than positioning public theology as oppositional toward particular political actors, the project seeks to identify structural partiality while refusing dehumanization. It experiments with a mode of theological communication that names injustice while forming readers in practices of proximity, mercy, due process advocacy, and disciplined speech. Situating this approach within broader conversations in public theology and digital religion, the paper argues that communication itself must become a site of theological critique. In fractured postsecular publics shaped by populism and algorithmic amplification, the task of public theology is not only to articulate visions of justice but to cultivate communities capable of resisting hierarchy without reproducing its logic. Such work suggests that praxis is not ancillary to public theology but constitutive of its method.

Sadje, Hadje

Affiliation: University of Vienna, Austria

Paper: *Beyond the Liberal Echo Chamber: Maldonado-Torre's Combative Decoloniality as Methodological Critique for Public Theology*

Abstract: This paper argues that public theology remains confined within Nelson Maldonado-Torres's 'liberal orbit' (liberal framework, liberal mindset, and liberal political order). This is a discursive space that neutralizes radical critique through the appearance of inclusion. Drawing on his concept of "combative decoloniality," I challenge public theology to move beyond institutional mediation toward genuine engagement with our fractured world. The renewed importance of theological language in postsecular societies offers an opportunity, but it also risks framing theology as a mediating discourse that translates religious commitments for liberal audiences. This idea reflects Sylvia Wynter's concept of the liberal creed and parallels the functional rhetoric of liberal ideology criticized by Maldonado-Torres (2025). Combative decoloniality emerges from movement-based struggle rather than academic expertise (2025). It insists that decolonization and abolition are mutually constitutive, challenging not merely theological content but institutional forms themselves. Methodological reflection cannot be confined to how theologians speak publicly; it must examine the structures determining whose voices count as theological. Three interventions follow: First, public theology's focus on "common good" often operates within diversity frameworks that leave colonial structures untouched. Second, drawing on Wynter's distinction between *humanitas* (the European subject) and *anthropos* (the non-European object), I ask what it would mean to take seriously knowledge produced by those positioned as *anthropos* rather than as objects (2003). Third, the Haitian Revolution uniquely combines decolonization and abolition, highlighting the role of theology in modernity's "catastrophe" (2025). In conclusion, combative decoloniality encapsulates the reflection that arises from acknowledging that decolonization commences outside academic institutions.

Schmiedel, Ulrich

Affiliation: Lund University

Paper: *The Hatred of Public Theology: Doing Public Theology in Declining Democracies*

Abstract: Drawing on Ben Lerner's essay *The Hatred of Poetry*, this paper suggests that there are structural similarities between poetry and public theology. Tracing them back to the analytical distinction between the encounter with transcendence and the expression of the encounter with transcendence that Friedrich Schleiermacher introduced into the study of religion, poetry and public theology revolve around the conviction that another world is possible. With a little help from Lerner, the article makes the case for a public theology that finds new ways of communicating this conviction under the conditions of democratic decline that characterize contemporary public spheres in Euroamerica. To counter the polarization that is both the condition and the consequence of democratic backsliding, public theology needs to go beyond the alternative between liberal and post-liberal approaches. It can learn from poetry how to turn its lack of universality from a problem into a promise.

Tuchtfeld-Haug, Gesche

Affiliation: University of Heidelberg

Paper: *Fragmented or Shared Publics? Testimonial Epistemologies in Public Theologies*

Abstract: Theology is by no means a unifying force per se. But especially in times of fragmented and socially divided hybrid publics, the various ways of relating theological schools of thought, perceptions of reality and modes of discourse, theology had to establish throughout its history, might be helpful to rethink the epistemologies of public discourse. The paper will introduce three epistemological models of sharing reality in theology: The first model is the metaphor of translation. It highlights the need for shared hermeneutical rules and draws attention to the importance of practices and embodied forms of belief. Translation helps to see, that not only common meanings, but also common frames, shared practices, and forms of mutual intelligibility are necessary for shared publics. A second model is the concept of mutual perspective-taking developed and tested in ecumenical theology. It highlights, that a common world require us to become capable of seeing how the world looks from where another person stands. The third model of “Combinatorial theology”, developed in theological hermeneutics, argues to bring different perspectives into a productive relationship in order to arrive at a more adequate description of a shared problem. The paper presents these models and invites to discuss the potential of theological reconfiguration of public epistemology on this ground.

van der Westhuizen, Henco

Affiliation: University of the Free State

Paper: *Hoping to Think? A theological exploration of language and thinking in an age of artificial intelligence*

Abstract: This paper examines how hope and thinking belong together, drawing on Christian theology and contemporary philosophy, with special attention to the challenges raised by artificial intelligence (AI). It asks how Christian theology might describe a form of thinking shaped by hope, that is, one that aims at the flourishing of life in a technological age increasingly shaped by computational models of intelligence. The paper turns to theologies of hope to show how hope can reshape both life and thought. These theological resources are brought into dialogue with philosophical accounts of thinking, particularly those of Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt. By integrating these theological and philosophical perspectives, the paper develops a constructive account of “hopeful thinking.” It explores two connected questions - hoping to think and thinking to hope - in order to clarify how hope might open new possibilities for thought, and how thought might sustain hope, especially in the age of AI.

van Oorschot, Frederike

Affiliation: Zurich University/FEST Heidelberg

Paper: *Fragmented or Shared Publics? Testimonial Epistemologies in Public Theologies*

Abstract: Theology is by no means a unifying force per se. But especially in times of fragmented and socially divided hybrid publics, the various ways of relating theological schools of thought, perceptions of reality and modes of discourse, theology had to establish throughout its history, might be helpful to rethink the epistemologies of public discourse. The paper will introduce three epistemological models of sharing reality in theology: The first model is the metaphor of translation. It highlights the need for shared hermeneutical rules and draws attention to the importance of practices and embodied forms of belief. Translation helps to see, that not only common meanings, but also common frames, shared practices, and forms of mutual intelligibility are necessary for shared publics. A second model is the concept of mutual perspective-taking developed and tested in ecumenical theology. It highlights, that a common world require us to become capable of seeing how the world looks from where another person stands. The third model of “Combinatorial theology”, developed in theological hermeneutics, argues to bring different perspectives into a productive relationship in order to arrive at a more adequate description of a

shared problem. The paper presents these models and invites to discuss the potential of theological reconfiguration of public epistemology on this ground.

Van Wyk, Tanya

Affiliation: University of Pretoria

Paper: *Beyond diplomacy and reconciliation? On moral pluralism, echo chambers and the waning appetite or lost art of listening and talking to each other*

Abstract: Je suis Charlie / Je Suis Charlie ...Kirk. After 10 September 2025, it was apparent that solidarity could mean different things. After the assassination of the United States politician and activist, Charlie Kirk, the call to solidarity after 12 people died in an attack on the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo (2015), Je Suis Charlie, was repurposed, redirected and amended. Soon it was clear that this call to solidarity became a type of identity marker. If you were not with or for Kirk, you were against him. Being in solidarity with someone – or something – has become the drawing of battle lines in a time of echo chambers (which are often faceless) and the stage of public, social media (which is often a performance). After the Kirk-assassination, I was asked to speak to a local congregation in my area about how debates like these can take place. In the presentation and discussion, I tried to draw middle ground and show, as Christians, we should be able to listen to one another, even if we disagree. My perspective was: Everyone is Charlie. And no-one is Charlie. It was not received well. I came to the realization that the possibility of looking at both sides of an argument and going the route of diplomacy, and in theological terms, reconciliation, was maybe something that was outmoded. In this contribution, these ideas will be unpacked by considering the notion of „moral pluralism“, as presented by Darlene Fozard-Weaver, as a practical posture towards diverse moral viewpoints. In my work as lecturer at a public faculty of theology and religion, I have employed this theory to explore with students of theology how to debate and make ethical decisions. This leans on some of my previous work relating to necessary paradoxes for justice and reconciliation.

Villas Boas, Alex

Affiliation: Universidade Católica Portuguesa

Paper: *Van Gogh and the Option for the Poor Avant la Lettre: Chromatology, Institutional Critique, and Political Spirituality*

Abstract: This paper reads Vincent van Gogh as a paradigmatic case of Public Theology beyond confessional enclaves, insofar as his religious experience moves away from institutional discourse and re-emerges as an aesthetic form of social critique. Starting from the Borinage episode (1878–1879), when van Gogh lived among coal miners and embraced practices of radical solidarity, the paper interprets this trajectory as an “option for the poor avant la lettre”, preceding the Latin American formulation of the term yet converging with its ethical sensibility. It argues that the conflict between such praxis and the ecclesial logic of his time triggered a reconfiguration of theology’s locus: rather than remaining within dogmatic frameworks, theology reappears as pictorial language and as a critical hermeneutics of Christianity. The analysis mobilizes the notion of “theological chromatology” to show how, in van Gogh, colour functions as both spiritual mediation and critique, articulating Scripture, everyday life, and the denunciation of religious forms of moral governance. Through the intersection of letters and paintings with religious motifs (such as *Still Life with Bible* and *The Raising of Lazarus*), it is argued that van Gogh develops a critique of Christianity as a “religion of policing and social order”, relocating the sacred toward social suffering and the dignity of the excluded. Finally, the paper suggests that van Gogh remains relevant for post-secular societies, since he demonstrates how political spirituality can operate publicly as cultural resistance, transversal communication, and critique of theology’s self-referential tendencies, thus enabling dialogue beyond religious and political echo chambers.

Other participants

- **Jonathan Chaplin** — Centre for Faith in Public Life, Wesley House, Cambridge
- **Marco Derks** — Old Catholic Seminary, Utrecht
- **David Gushee** — Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
- **Matthew Kaemingk** — Theological University Utrecht
- **Ntandoyenkosi Mlambo** — University of South Africa
- **Ulrik Nissen** — Aarhus University
- **Andreas Telser** — University of Passau
- **Thomas Wabel** — Dietrich Bonhoeffer Centre for Public Theology, University of Bamberg