M. Laubscher

Dr. M. Laubscher, Department of Practical and Missional Theology, University of the Free State.
E-mail: laubscherm@ufs.ac.za
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4240-1991

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/23099089/actat.v42i2.2

ISSN: 1015-8758 (Print)

ISSN: 2309-9089 (Online)

Acta Theologica 2022
42(2):4-13

Date received:
8 November 2022

Date published:
14 December 2022

Published by the UFS
http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/at

© Creative Commons
With Attribution (CC-BY)

OPEN ACCESS

Interview with Prof. Klippies Kritzinger

J.N.J. (Klippies) Kritzinger is an emeritus professor of Missiology at the University of South Africa (Unisa). His doctoral thesis in 1988 was on Black Theology. His fields of interest include liberation theologies, interreligious encounters, and intercultural theologising. He was the Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at Unisa from 1999 to 2001, and editor of the journal Missionalia *from 1992 to 2009. He is an emeritus minister of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), which he served from 1993 to 2015. He is also involved in the Northern Theological Seminary (NTS) of the URCSA in Pretoria.*

You may perhaps wonder why another interview with a White, male, Afrikaans-speaking, and Reformed theologian. This will be an extremely simplistic and unfair reading about whom it concerns and about what is at issue. He does not deny any of these markers. On the contrary, he knows them all too well. This is indeed another kind of "Pleased to meet you", because he knows about, and is known for confess-acknowledge-and-recognise. In addition, as "another" White man, I am extremely grateful (and inquisitive) to ask him more about this.

Our conversation was held nearly a year ago, and yet it feels like yesterday.[1] What Prof. Kritzinger shares with me in this conversation is not necessarily surprising and new – his life and work bear witness to this. Other authors such as, for example, Cobus van Wyngaard, have also written considerably about this – yet there is something in this conversation that I still remember. Looking back, I recognise many of my thoughts over the past twelve months in the echo of this conversation. Kritzinger himself later acknowledged in the interview: there is often, in a momentary twinkling of the eye, an "accidental" conversation that influences one's path profoundly and for ever. Such temporary moments are sometimes timeous, and thus strangely enough have everlasting significance.

In our discussion, Kritzinger refers to a twenty-minute long (and since then a significant) discussion he, as doctoral student, had with Dr Mpho Ntoane over a cup of tea in 1986. Dr Ntoane, a South African, did anti-racism work for the World Council of Churches in Rotterdam. While listening to how Kritzinger tells him about his thesis, Ntoane suddenly asked him: "Klippies, you are writing about black theology – the struggle of a Black person who tries so hard how to be Christian in a racist society – [but] are you also trying very hard to be a White Christian in a racist society?" Kritzinger then realised that this was on his mind and in his life every day, but he had not yet mentioned this in his thesis. There and then, in an apparently brief and innocent conversation, he experienced an "epistemological conversion". "I realised that I cannot study black theology and omit my being White, because then I am not honest. I then added a chapter in the thesis on 'White responses to black theology'". Neither resistance, nor sympathy is the issue, but solidarity is, "How we as White theologians can be in solidarity with black theology must be developed by way of a liberating White theology."

Being curious to hear more about this, I ask Kritzinger about this key insight in his thoughts. He answers as follows:

1 The interview took the form of an online conversation held on 9 November 2021. The recording of the interview is available at the following addresses: laubscherm@ufs.ac.za & actatheologica@ufs.ac.za.

> "Acknowledge that we are White and what this means (in other words, what this did to us and to others) to be able to then be White in a more liberating fashion. We will not be able to do this if we simply talk with each other. Neither will we be able to be so if we only talk with Black theologians – and they do not want to talk with us all the time. This is about getting that delicate process going, in which, for instance, we do liberating white theology in Afrikaans, and our Black colleagues do liberating black theology in Zulu and Sesotho; and we all do liberating theology together in English. Not only in respect of language, but also in terms of men and women, gay and *straight*; briefly, all the cracks in our society can be addressed in this manner. Indeed, we already do so, but perhaps not deliberately and in an organised way. I think that this is what theology should do."

During the interview, phrases such as "the father of White liberating theology" come to my mind; yet I realised how misguided this may sound. I thus probed him to tell me more about his updated insights, when he realised, in the 1980s, that we have a responsibility to be not only in solidarity with black liberating theology and be educated by black conscious intellectuals to realise what is going on in this country, but also, as a White Afrikaans-speaking male theologian, to be self-critical about our identity, tradition, and community. This conversation taught me that the importance and value of black liberation theology is not simply for Black people who are suppressed, but also for White people to see their full potential humanness (with shadows and blind spots) for what it is, and for what it can be. For us, Black liberation theology is (still) a mirror in which we can see ourselves – meaning the self, each other, and others.

Besides the need for liberation from self-consciousness and self-reproach/hate of being a prisoner in (a dominating and suffocating) White Afrikaner identity, I deduce that he will also in time learn that neither utter denial and escape therefrom nor the mere acceptance of take-it-or-leave-it can be the desired path. It stands to reason that the alternative is not to translate/continue our whiteness in apparently rescuing Black people, because this is most certainly not what is implied by this solidarity with Black liberation. On the contrary, for Whites, Black liberation is, unfortunately in the least, about their apparent white involvement in the matter, but much rather about whether they can indeed translate and imagine their solidarity in alternative (liberating and healing) ways of being white. Put differently, Black liberation does not require the Whites to liberate the Blacks (they can do this for themselves), but whether they realise that they need it just as much (if not more), and that we will be sufficiently humble and vulnerable to accept this kind of solidarity and mutual responsibility for each other. Briefly, I deduce that true liberation of the one justifies true liberation of the other – an "and-and", instead of an "if-if"

– and thus, as it runs in different directions, it necessitates various accents and nuances, as liberation for White and Black is being accomplished.

In this instance, it is perhaps good to recall another refrain that was to recur a few times in our conversation, namely a definite doubt not to want to view yourself so easily as a "liberation theologian". Put differently, be cautious about such a label for yourself, because Kritzinger still remembers far too well how the last words in his thesis refer to Gustavo Gutiérrez, who would remind him all the time that one deed in solidarity with people in need is worth more than all the books in the world. A humble and vulnerable configuration, where we definitely listen more than talk, is what is now asked of us (as people in privileged positions).

The point of this conversation is probably becoming more lucid. Although it emphasises the importance and necessity of Black (and White) liberation more strongly, it is imbedded and interwoven in a much longer – chequered – story. The remaining point is more reassuring, but our conversation starts and does not stop there. A life in theology was not always the plan. Although, as an 11-yer-old boy, he would often ride his bicycle to the neighbouring community (Aasvoëlkop) to go and listen to Uncle Bey's sermons, he lived for mathematics and science, and he wanted to be an engineer just like his older brother. He already had two years' chemical engineering behind him when, at the start of his third year, he realised that he was no longer motivated. His involvement as student in mission to the Indian community exposed him to the intellectual and spiritual challenges associated with Islam and Hinduism. Before long, as a student in engineering, he started reading the Bible with commentaries. The proverbial die was cast, and he immersed himself totally in the study of theology.

The latter statement can be quite misleading and deserves further explanation. Kritzinger is (still nowadays) everything, except shy and confused about this evangelical "mission work" of his, because, to him, it always concerned people. He studied theology not so much to be an academic (the "academics' academic" who squeezes out tons of articles a year), but rather to constantly move between people and communities; between theology/academy and different types of people and communities at grassroots level. He did not leave engineering to become an academic; he experienced an early opportunity to specialise in Semitic languages, a temptation he had to resist. He is sensitive to using theology to serve the communities of faith. Consequently, half of his time and energy went in the church, and he definitely did not think that he took the academy for a ride. On the contrary, he states: "If I had to sit up there at Unisa every day, I would have become biltong." To him, it is all about a broad understanding of real and true community.

Nowadays, Kritzinger is truly known for this praxis approach: to break down walls, build bridges, and cross boundaries. Early on in his life, he realised that he would not learn theology (only) in professors Johan Heyns and Andrie du Toit's classes, or in Germiston's *Asiatic Bazaar*, but rather in the interactive space and movements in-between. We can move and push ahead, because the kingdom does not lie in the past ("creation"); it meets us from the future in a Messianic manner. In his first year, he found Heyns' motif of the kingdom exciting and healing; in his third year – and especially now under the influence of Moltmann and Pannenberg – it was soon clear to him that our primary identity does not hide behind us and should be sought in the history of the fatherland, but is much rather to be discovered in that new community which Christ established for us and continues to come from the future into our present.

This is the sketch (and story) of a White man. Yet different connotations emerge during the conversation. We can be "after whiteness" in more than one way – shaded or plastered in white. This means, among others, that the elephant in our room is least of all necessarily a white elephant (that can be brushed aside as simply a "white noise"). Kritzinger's life still talks to me about this, and I feel obliged to further think and write about it. Neither him nor I can escape from the fact that we are recognised as White Afrikaner males; yet this "raced body" – whether it is visible or not – is also a "graced body", a "raised body", that calls for other ways of being with each other in this apparent black-and-white world in which we presently live.

Onderhoud met prof. Klippies Kritzinger

OORSPRONKLIKE ONDERHOUD IN AFRIKAANS

J.N.J. (Klippies) Kritzinger is 'n emeritus professor in Missiologie aan die Universiteit van Suid-Afrika (Unisa). Sy proefskrif in 1988 was oor Swart Teologie. Hy stel belang in bevrydingsteologieë, interreligieuse ontmoetings en interkulturele teologie-beoefening. Hy was van 1999 tot 2001 Dekaan van Unisa se Fakulteit Teologie en Godsdienswetenskap en redakteur van die vaktydskrif Missionalia *van 1992 tot 2009. Hy is 'n emerituspredikant van die Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk in Suider-Afrika (VGK), wat hy van 1994 tot 2015 gedien het. Hy is ook betrokke by die Northern Theological Seminary (NTS) van die VGK in Pretoria.*

Jy mag dalk wonder, waarom nog ‘n onderhoud met ‘n wit, manlike (Afrikaans en Gereformeerde) teoloog, en tog sal dit ‘n uiters simplistiese en onbillike lees wees van wie hier ter sprake is, sowel as wat ter sake is. Dit is nie dat hy enige van hierdie merkers ontken nie – inteendeel – hy ken dit maar alte goed. Hierdie is voorwaar ‘n ander tipe van “Aangename kennis”, want hy ken van beken-erken-en-herken, en is ook immers hiervoor bekend. Meer nog, as ‘n “ander” wit man is ek uitermatig erkentlik (én nuuskierig) om hom hieroor meer uit te vra.

Ons gesprek is al amper ‘n jaar gelede gevoer, en tog voel dit soos gister.[1] Wat Prof. Kritzinger in hierdie gesprek met my deel is nie noodwendig verrassend en nuut nie – sy lewe en werk getuig hiervan. Ander, soos byvoorbeeld Cobus van Wyngaard, het ook al beduidend hieroor geskryf – en tog gebeur daar iets in die gesprek wat my bybly. Terugskouend erken ek baie van my gedagtes van die laaste twaalf maande in die eggo van hierdie gesprek. Soos hy self later in die onderhoud erken: soms is daar ‘n momentele oomblik in “toevallige” gesprek wat ‘n mens se pad op ‘n diepgaande en blywende wyse beïnvloed. Sulke tydelike momente is soms voorwaar tydig, en daarom vreemd genoeg ook van ewigdurende belang.

’n Paar keer in ons gespek verwys Kritzinger na ‘n (en sedertdien beduidende) twintig minute lange gesprek oor ‘n koppie tee in 1986 wat hy as doktorale student met Dr Mpho Ntoane gehad het. Laasgenoemde was ‘n Suid-Afrikaner wie in Rotterdam anti-rassisme werk vir die Wêreldraad van Kerke gedoen het, en terwyl hy luister na hoe Kritzinger oor sy proefskrif vertel, stel hy meteens teenoor hom dié vraag: “Klippies, jy skryf nou oor swart teologie – daardie struggle van swartmense wie worstel en soek na hoe om Christene te wees in ’n rassistiese samelewing – [maar] is jy egter ook besig om te struggle hoe om ’n wit Christen te wees in ’n rassistiese samelewing?” Dit was, besef hy toe, inderdaad in sy kop en lewe elke dag, maar weliswaar nog nie in sy proefskrif teenwoordig nie. Net daar, in ‘n skynbaar vlugtige en onskuldige gesprek, ondergaan hy ’n “epistemologiese bekering”. “Ek het besef ek kan nie swart teologie bestudeer en my wit-wees uitlaat nie, want dan is ek nie eerlik nie. Ek het toe ’n hoofstuk bygeskryf in die proefskrif oor ‘White responses to black theology’”. Nóg weerstand, nóg simpatie, is wat gevra word, maar solidariteit – en “hoe ek/ons veral as wit teoloë in solidariteit met swart teologie kan wees, is dan deur ’n bevrydende wit teologie te ontwikkel.”

Ek is uiteraard nuuskierig om meer hiervan te hoor, en Kritzinger verder oor hierdie sentrale insig in sy denke uit te vra – waarop hy soos volg artikuleer:

1 Die onderhoud was in die vorm van ’n aanlyn-gesprek gewees wat op 09 November 2021 plaasgevind het. Die opname van die onderhoud is beskikbaar by die volgende adresse: laubscherm@ufs.ac.za & actatheologica@ufs.ac.za.

> "Erken ons is wit, en wat dit beteken (met ander woorde wat dit aan onsself gedoen het, asook aan ander), om dan op 'n meer bevrydende manier wit te kan wees. Ons gaan dit nie kan word as ons net met mekaar praat nie. Ons gaan dit ook nie kan word as ons net met swart teoloë praat nie – en hulle wil ook nie heeltyd met ons praat nie. Dit gaan hier om daardie delikate proses aan die gang te kry waarin ons bevrydende wit teologie in Afrikaans doen; en ons swart kollegas bevrydende swart teologie in Zoeloe en Sotho doen; én ons dan almal saam bevrydende teologie in Engels doen. En nie net ten opsigte van taal nie, maar ook in terme van mans en vrouens, gay en *straight*; kortom, al die krake in ons samelewing kan op hierdie manier aangespreek word. Ons doen dit eintlik alreeds, maar dalk nie doelbewus en georganiseerd nie. Ek dink dit is wat teologie behoort te doen."

Frases soos "die vader van wit bevrydende teologie" kom by my op gedurende die onderhoud, en tog besef ek ook hoe misleidend dit mag klink. Vervolgens pols ek hom verder om meer te vertel van sy versiende insigte van destyds toe hy alreeds in die 1980's besef het ons het 'n verantwoordelikheid om nie net in solidariteit met swart bevrydingsteologie te wees, en die skeermes van swart-bewussyn oor jou te laat gaan en te besef wat in hierdie land aangaan nie, maar ook om as wit Afrikaanssprekende manlike teoloog self-krities om te gaan met jou eie identiteit, tradisie, en gemeenskap. Ek leer vanuit hierdie gesprek dat die belang en waarde van swart bevrydingsteologie is nie net daar vir swartmense wie onderdruk word nie, maar ook vir witmense om hul volle potensiële menswees (met skaduwees en blinde kolle) te kan sien vir wat dit is, én ook kan wees. Swart bevrydingsteologie is (nog steeds) vir ons 'n spieël waarin ons onsself – bedoelende ook die self, mekaar en ander – kan raaksien.

Naas die behoefte om verlossing van die verleentheid en selfverwyt/haat van gevangene wees in ('n oorheersende en versmorende) wit Afrikaner identiteit, lei ek af dat hy ook mettertyd sou leer dat nóg die volslae ontkenning-en-ontvlugting daarvan die gewenste weg kan wees, nóg die blote aanvaarding van ons-is-maar-so-gemaak-en-gelaat-staan. Die alternatief is uiteraard ook nie om jou witheid weer te vertaal/kontinueer in die oënskynlike redding van swart mense nie, want dit is ten diepste nie waarop hierdie solidariteit met die saak van swart bevryding dui nie. Inteendeel: swart bevryding wentel helaas allermins vir wittes om hul oënskynlike wit-betrokkenheid by die saak, maar veel eerder of hul wel hul solidariteit kan vertaal en verbeel in alternatiewe (bevrydende en helende) maniere van wit-wees. Anders gestel: swart bevryding vra nie van wittes dat hulle eersgenoemde moet bevry nie (dit kan hulle vir hulself doen), maar weliswaar of hulle besef hulle het dit net só nodig (indien nie meer nie), en ons werklik nederig en kwesbaar genoeg sal wees om dit (die soort van solidariteit en wedersydse verantwoordelikheid

vir mekaar) te aanvaar. Kortom, lei ek af: ware bevryding van die een roep om ware bevryding van die ander – dit is ‘n én-én in plaas van óf-óf – en daarom, soos dit in verskillende rigtings slaan, roep dit om verskeie aksente en nuanses soos bevryding vir wit en swart bewerk word.

Dit is op die punt dalk ook goed om ’n ander refrein wat ‘n paar keer in ons gesprek na vore sou tree, te herroep, naamlik ‘n bepaalde huiwering om nie so (ge)maklik jouself as “bevrydingsteoloog” te wil voorhou nie. Anders gestel, wees versigtig met so ‘n benoeming van jouself, want Kritzinger onthou maar nog alte goed hoe sy laaste woorde in sy proefskrif na Gustavo Gutiérrez verwys wie hom deurgaans sou herinner dat een daad in solidariteit met mense in nood is meer werd as al die boeke in die wêreld. ‘n Nederige en kwesbare gestalte, waarin ons beslis meer luister as praat, is wat nou van ons (as mense in bevoorregte posisies) gevra word.

Die punt van hierdie gesprek raak waarskynlik al duideliker, want al tree die belang en noodsaak van swart (en wit) bevryding al sterker na vore, is dit ingebed en verweef in ‘n veel langer – geskakeerde – verhaal. Die blywende punt verbly, maar ons gesprek begin en bly nie (net) daarby nie. So ’n lewe in die teologie was immers nie altyd die plan gewees nie. Alhoewel hy as elf-jarige seuntjie dikwels met sy fiets na die buurgemeente (Aasvoëlkop) sou ry om na oom Bey se preke te gaan luister, het hy gelewe vir wiskunde en wetenskap, en wou hy nes sy ouer broer ook ’n ingenieur word. Hy het reeds twee jaar se chemiese ingenieurswese agter die blad gehad, toe hy aan die begin van sy derde jaar besef hy het sy motivering daarvoor verloor. Sy betrokkenheid as student by KJV Indiërsending het hom blootgestel aan die intellektuele en geestelike uitdagings verbonde aan Islam en Hindoeïsme. Kort voor lank het hy as ingenieurstudent begin Bybel lees met kommentare, en die spreekwoordelike koeël was deur die kerk, sodat hy homself volledig sou werp in die beoefening van die teologie.

Laasgenoemde stelling kan nogal misleidend wees, en verdien verdere kwalifikasie. Kritzinger is (vandag nog) allesbehalwe skaam en verleë oor hierdie evangeliese “sendingwerk” fase van hom, want vir hom het dit nog altyd oor mense gegaan. Hy het teologie gaan studeer om nie soseer ’n akademikus te word nie (die “academics’ academic” wat stapels artikels per jaar uitpers), maar om konstant te bly beweeg tussen mense en gemeenskappe; tussen teologie/akademie en verskillende soorte mense en gemeenskappe op voetsoolvlak. Hy het nie ingenieurswese gelos om ’n akademikus te word nie; en ‘n vroeë geleentheid om in Semitiese tale te spesialiseer, beleef hy inderdaad as ‘n versoeking wat hy moes weerstaan. Deurgaans is daar by hom die sensitiwiteit om veel eerder sy akademiese ingesteldheid en vermoëns te gebruik om geloofsgemeenskappe te bedien met teologie wat verskeie brûe kan slaan. Die helfte van sy tyd en energie

het vervolgens in die kerk ingegaan, en hy dink beslis nie dat hy daarmee die akademie verneuk het nie. Inteendeel, soos hy dit self stel: “As ek net elke dag ‘daarbo by Unisa’ moes sit, sou ek biltong geword het”. ‘n Ruim verstaan van (r)egte gemeenskap, is waaroor dit vir hom deurgaans sou gaan.

Kritzinger is vandag tereg bekend vir hierdie *praxis*-benadering waarmee hy mure sou afbreek, brûe sou bou, en grense oorsteek. Vroeg reeds was dit vir hom duidelik dat hy teologie nie (net) in professore Johan Heyns en Andrie du Toit se klasse sou leer nie, of in Germiston se *Asiatic Bazaar* nie, maar in die interaktiewe ruimte en bewegings daar tussen-in. Ons kan beweeg, al vorentoe beur, want die koninkryk lê nie ten diepste in die verlede (“skepping”) nie, maar kom vanuit die toekoms op Messiaanse wyse ons hede tegemoet. Waar hy Heyns se motief van die koninkryk nog in sy eerste jaar as opwindend en helend sou beleef, was dit in sy derde jaar gou duidelik – en nou veral onder die invloed van Moltmann en Pannenberg – dat ons primêre identiteit nog agter ons in die vaderlandsgeskiedenis skuil en daarin gesoek moet word, maar veel eerder buite ons – in daardie nuwe gemeenskap wat Christus vir ons bewerk het – wat vanuit die toekoms ons tegemoet kom.

Dit is ’n wit man wat hier geskets word (en skryf), en tog ontluik verskillende betekenismoontlikhede deur die loop van die gesprek. Daar is meer as een manier waarop ons “after whiteness” kan wees – in wit geskakeer of bepleister word – wat onder meer beteken die olifant in ons kamer is allermins noodwendig ’n wit olifant (wat as blote “white noise” afgemaak kan word). Kritzinger se lewe bly praat met my hieroor, en ek voel genoop om saam hieroor verder te bly dink en skryf. Nog hy, nog ek, kan ontkom aan die feit dat ons herken word as wit Afrikaner mans, en tog is hierdie “raced body” – of dit nou sigbaar of onsigbaar is – ook ’n “graced body”, ‘n “raised body”, wat roep na ander maniere van wees met mekaar in hierdie oënskynlike swart-en-wit wêreld waarin ons tans leef.