

Simone Kotva (Oslo)

Henrik Steffens on Race and Theology

A Reading of the Sámi in *Über die Lappen* (1842)

In this chapter I will discuss Henrik Steffens' thinking on race and its relationship to Steffens' theology. Steffens explains his notion of race in the *Anthropologie* (1822), one of his major works. I will be putting key ideas from the *Anthropologie* into dialogue with Steffens' lesser-known pamphlet, *Über die Lappen und Pastor N. J. C. V. Stockfleths Wirksamkeit unter diesen* [On the Lapps and Pastor N. J. C. V. Stockfleth's Work Among Them] (1842), a summary of Christian missionary work among the Sámi. In Steffens' thought, ideas of race are inspired by the Christian idea of inherited sin, yet an emphasis on salvation also pushes Steffens to adopt a distinctly spiritual, though no less racist, account of Indigenous "otherness." To parse Steffens on race and theology, I engage with the recent work of Sámi theologian Tore Johnsen, whose research shines new light on the theological roots of racism in Scandinavia. The publication of Steffens' pamphlet on the Sámi in 1842 coincided with the beginning of a period of intensified racial discrimination of Indigenous peoples in Scandinavia. Following Johnsen, I propose we read Steffens' *Über die Lappen* as an example of the intimate connection between theology and racial classifications in the nineteenth century.

Racial Theory in Steffens' Philosophy of Human Nature

Like many of his contemporaries, Henrik Steffens took a lively interest in race. In the West, racial classifications emerged from a long history of speculation on human differences. With roots in the medieval period, racial classifications began taking form at the end of the seventeenth century, with fully-fledged theories emerging

only in the nineteenth century, a significant century for the rise and popularization of racial classifications. Steffens' work was written in what Ivan Hannaford identifies as the beginning of the second formative period in the Western invention of race, 1815–1870, a time characterized by the search for historical and biological origins.¹ During this period, three overlapping hypotheses about the nature of race were prominent. The first, originated by Carl von Linnæus and developed by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, connected race to external, physiological characteristics yet “cautioned that we should not be too firm about its boundaries.”² The second, represented by Immanuel Kant's philosophy, focused on interior dispositions and saw race as the outward expression of inner traits and temperaments carried by blood and inherited by children from their parents. A third hypothesis, argued by G. F. Hegel, understood racial difference as a stage in humanity's spiritual unfolding toward a future state of higher rationality.³

Of the three hypotheses Hannaford uses to delineate racial theory during the first half of the nineteenth century, Steffens' shares most traits with Kant's concept of race, as Mark Larrimore has also explained.⁴ Like Kant, Steffens is interested in tracing the spiritual rather than the biological origins of race, although external characteristics and their unfolding are an important factor in his racial classification. Steffens' preoccupation, however, is with race as a matter of soul and, moreover, the *state* of a person's soul, something Steffens interprets in explicitly religious terms in relation to sin and salvation. Crucially, Steffens identifies humanity's prelapsarian state with a relative lack of skin coloration, speculating that white Europeans were the descendent of an originally raceless humanity. The idea that white Europeans were raceless sets Steffens' views apart from many popular racial theories of the time. Blumenbach, for instance, also thought that light-skinned people were closest to the divine archetype but inferred from this the superiority of a white (Caucasian) race – not the exemption of light-skinned peoples from the category of race. Of the many racial classifications that developed

1 Hannaford 1996, 235–276.

2 Hannaford 1996, 274.

3 Hannaford 1996, 275.

4 Larrimore 2006.

during the first half of the nineteenth century, Steffens' position thus appears remarkably ethnocentric and spiritually hierarchical, and in this sense also exceptionally racist, especially when used against the Sámi, as we will see shortly. It is natural to view this racial classification in the context of Norway's nation-building process and its romanticization of Scandinavian ethnicity, a process in which Steffens' writings – aimed at a German-speaking audience already receptive to the idea that a “pure” form of humanity could be found in the North – played an important role.⁵

Turning now to Steffens' writings on race, in the *Anthropologie* (1820–1822), Steffens understands race as the diversity of human differences – but also as the result of a fall into sin.⁶ Although not a theologian, Steffens's chair at the University of Berlin included a specialization in “religious philosophy.” Raised in a Dano-German household, Steffens was brought up by Lutheran parents and, following a religious experience during his student years, became an outspoken defender of Lutheranism.⁷ Prominent in Lutheran theology is the idea of sin and of human culpability, a theme which appears in Steffens' religious writings but also in his scientific work – most notably, the *Anthropologie*.⁸

At the dawn of humanity, argues Steffens in the *Anthropologie*, all humans were initially of the same physiological type and light skinned. They lived in a temperate region of the globe, their common origin. This common origin Steffens understands as a prelapsarian state, an Edenic state before the fall into sin. In this state, human beings had not yet diversified into races and lived in harmony with their environment, understanding themselves as part of nature and as indistinct from nature.⁹ Steffens then describes how humans began to engage in what he calls *Reflektion*, “reflection,” or *Selbsucht*, “self-interest.” Through self-interest, the Edenic state was

5 Fjågesund 2022.

6 Steffens 1822, 2: 365ff.

7 Steffens 1831, 74–76.

8 Cochlovius 1980, 43, 46.

9 In the nineteenth-century, race was used as a term to distinguish between different physical types of human ethnic groups in ways that are no longer supported by science. From this point on, I will dispense with the scare quotes around “race” and “racial.” On the history of racism in the period, see Eigen and Larrimore 2006.

lost – geographically as well as physiologically. “All peoples,” writes Steffens, “by distancing themselves from the place of their shared origin, lose spiritual capacities to the same degree that their bodily degeneration increases.”¹⁰ For Steffens, humanity’s original sin was self-interest, and race was the visible manifestation of self-interest.

Self-interest, in turn, is understood by Steffens as the outward manifestation of an internal imbalance of the humors. The four temperaments are the key to Steffens’ understanding of both race and sin.¹¹ Sin, for Steffens, results in a humoral imbalance triggered by migration from a temperate zone. In the *Anthropologie*, Steffens proposes that humanity’s common origin must have been situated in a temperate region of the globe, meaning a place where the four humors – hot/dry (choler), hot/wet (blood), cold/dry (black bile), cold/wet (phlegm) — were thought to be particularly well-balanced (for Steffens, this location lay somewhere in the Himalayas). In this state, the four humors existed in equilibrium, without one dominating the other. The “seeds” (*Keime*) of potential imbalance were present already in the first humans, though, and it is these “seeds” that, in Steffens’ thinking, began to germinate with the fall into sin.¹²

Steffens follows the commonplace idea – shared also by Immanuel Kant – that human temperaments reflect environmental conditions, and that environments, in turn, can be understood as possessing “temperaments” of their own, capable of causing humoral imbalances by encouraging the excess of one or other temper within the human body.¹³ Steffens thus cites, as a matter of course, the belief that different races correlate to the dominance of different temperaments. In the *Anthropologie*, he recognizes four major races: Mongols, North Americans, Africans and Malays. Steffens’ Mongols are melancholic because they live in places where it is cold and dry and

10 Steffens 1822, 2:411. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

11 According to classical humoral theory, a person’s disposition was the result of the interaction of four “humours” or fluids in the human body which corresponded to different dispositions or “temperaments”: melancholic (black bile), sanguine (blood), phlegmatic (phlegm) and choleric (yellow bile). External factors were considered highly significant in humoral theory. Changes in diet but also climate and environment helped to excite – or inhibit – the production of specific humours.

12 Steffens 1822, 2:415.

13 Mikkelsen 2013, 1–40.

Africans are sanguine because of their hot and wet environs; North Americans, by contrast, are phlegmatic while Malays are choleric.¹⁴ Here, sin becomes expressed not only in skin-tone but in terms of a theory of the four temperaments that was mapped onto climactic zones.

Humoral imbalance, however – the external manifestation of sin, in Steffens’ thinking – is not universal, or not quite. Steffens distinguishes the four major races from “original” and “historical” peoples respectively. The former comprise people in Peru and Mexico, Egypt, China and India, while the latter encompasses Greeks, Romans and Germans.¹⁵ For Steffens, “historical” peoples denote people with a written (as opposed to oral) history. They are the closest – both spiritually and physiologically – to the state of human beings before the fall. “Historical” people are, for Steffens, not strictly speaking a race; light-skinned people are *not* part of Steffens’ understanding of what constitutes race. Race, in the *Anthropologie*, is the exterior manifestation of sin. The result is a hierarchical division of humanity into what Steffens calls lower and higher peoples, with higher peoples being those in whom racial expression – defined in terms of deviation from a light-skinned original state – is the most underdeveloped.

Race as the Consequence of Sin

Steffens’ division into higher and lower peoples would seem to come into tension with his Lutheran theology, according to which all humans are sinners and in need of redemption. Interestingly, Steffens does *not* consider “historical” peoples to be without sin. A staunch Lutheran, Steffens believed that human beings had plunged into sin willingly and of their own accord. Yet he argues that those who are born members of an “historical” people nonetheless carry less inherited sin and inherit a sacred responsibility toward the four major races (a theme that will become important in Steffens’ text on the Sámi). Germans and other “historical” peoples (the main readership of Steffens’ work) should thus understand their relative

14 Steffens 1822, 2: 420–423.

15 Steffens 1822, 2: 400–410.

lack of race as a mandate to redeem fellow human beings through the preaching of the Gospel, rather than as a justification for oppressing “racial” peoples. Steffens implies that any member of an “historical” people who use their superiority over the four major races to dominate others commits further sin. Steffens’ theory of race, then, encompasses much more than simply pseudo-scientific biological speculation; it harnesses such speculation in the service of moralizing arguments intended to bolster Christian theology.

To understand just *how* significant theology is in Steffens’ theory of race it is useful to contrast it with Steffens’ principal source of inspiration on the matter, the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. As Mark Larrimore has shown, although both Kant and Steffens were Protestant, Steffens – in addition to being a natural philosopher – also was a devout Lutheran who wrote passionately in defense of Christian values. This interest in defending the Christian faith seems to impact Steffens’ thinking on race in distinct ways, moving it away from what Larrimore characterizes as Kant’s ultimately “pragmatic” motivations for thinking about race.¹⁶

Larrimore draws attention to the idea of the fall, which figures prominently in both Kant’s and Steffens’ ideas of race. For Kant as for Steffens, race is a physical repercussion of the fall, or rather, the fall is an allegory of perceived moral – as well as physical – degeneration leading to ethnic diversity. Faced with explaining the diversity of human physical types, Kant argues that sin awakens specific “seeds” (*Keime*), an idea that is also cited and used by Steffens in the *Anthropologie*. Over time, these “seeds” overwhelm and unbalance the individual’s humors, making them physically and morally weakened – again, an idea that is present in Steffens’ thinking. Originally, all humans were white-skinned and all were of the same physical type; the white-skinned human, for Kant as for Steffens, recalls prelapsarian humanity and is imbued with “noble” qualities that set them above members of the four major races.

Steffens adopts a view that, at first glance, is quite similar. In the *Anthropologie* Steffens too argues that “seeds” dormant within humanity are made to grow by sin. Larrimore points out, however, that Kant’s use of the Christian imagery of sin is mostly metaphorical; Kant is interested in explaining the mechanism of cause and effect

16 Larrimore 2006, 109.

that led to what was widely believed, during the nineteenth century, to be a biological fact. Larrimore stresses that Kant, however, did not consider biology and morality to be linked in any essential way. Ultimately, for Kant, the human spirit is independent of biological characteristics, racial or otherwise. For Steffens, however, the “seeds” that give rise to race are spiritual as well as biological, and thus entail moral responsibility and moral agency. For Steffens, as Larrimore notes, it is because race exists that human beings are made aware of their sinfulness and need for salvation through Jesus Christ.

This lends to Steffens’ theory of race, otherwise so similar to Kant’s, a distinctly religious, moralizing tenor mostly absent from Kant’s writings on race and the fall. Indeed, 1823 (only a year after the publication of the *Anthropologie*) saw the appearance of Steffens’ *Von der falschen Theologie und dem wahren Glauben* [Concerning False Theology and True Belief]. In this opuscle, Steffens draws attention to the universality of sin. He argues that a “false” theology encourages the virtuous to take pride in their accomplishments and dominate the weak, while a “true” theology encourages the virtuous to recognize their fundamental sinfulness and spread the Gospel.¹⁷ The tension between humanity’s sinfulness and her virtuous share is evident also in the *Anthropologie*, where it is given a racial explanation: the virtuous are those who have inherited as few racial “seeds” as possible. In his thinking on race, Steffens deliberately insists on the spiritual quality of race, and, by implication, the racialization of salvation. The result is a theological but also deeply conflicted racial theory, one in which Christian values seem undermined by the very racial theory they are meant to uphold.

Über die Lappen (1842) and the Spiritualization of Race

Rather than resolve this conflict, I would like to analyze its complexity by turning to another, much later, text by Steffens. One striking example of the conflicting role of Christian theology in Steffens’ thinking on race is to be found in a pamphlet by Steffens, published only three years before his death: *Über die Lappen und Pastor N. J. C. V. Stockfleths Wirksamkeit unter diesen* [On the Lapps and

¹⁷ Steffens 1823.

Pastor N. J. C. V. Stockfleth's Work Among Them] (1842). Niels Vibe Stockfleth was a Lutheran pastor who served in Finnmark during the 1830s. Stockfleth was also an amateur scholar and during his time in Finnmark he conducted research on Sámi languages and culture and produced translations of Christian Scripture. *Über die Lappen* is a short text, and roughly two-thirds of it consists of Steffens' arrangement of a biographical notice on Stockfleth by the Norwegian theologian Wilhelm Andreas Wexels. Steffens' contribution appears at the beginning in the form of a short, prefatory remark introducing Finnmark and the Sámi to a German readership.

In the opening pages of *Über die Lappen*, Steffens evokes the environment of Finnmark, noting its geographical location, flora and fauna. At the end of his introductory description, Steffens explains how he "felt it necessary to present this brief overview of the natural characteristics of the land before turning our attention to its original inhabitants. The influence of the land on its inhabitants is simply too great to overlook."¹⁸

We recognize this emphasis on the environment from Steffens' theory of human nature as presented, decades earlier, in the *Anthropologie*. There, Steffens' natural philosophy stressed the intimate relationship between human beings and their environments, even going so far as to claim that humans' spiritual as well as physical characteristics were inexplicable without a careful consideration of geographical region. The same principle is reflected in the introduction to *Über die Lappen*. As Steffens turns to the human inhabitants of Finnmark, both religious feeling and race are at the forefront of his mind. "Here now, in this land so described, lives a people for whom I wish to awaken the heartfelt interest of Christian readers," begins Steffens, before continuing: "Surrounded on all sides by Christian, civilized nations – Russians, Swedes, and Norwegians – there is no other Christian yet culturally isolated people so near to us that claims our Christian compassion so strongly!"¹⁹

Following immediately on this exhortation to Christian compassion is a pseudo-scientific, racial analysis of the Sámi, in which Steffens confidently assures that, "[the Sámi] form a distinct race,

18 Steffens 1842, 5.

19 Steffens 1842, 6.

entirely different from the European lineage.” Concerning the racial characteristics of the Sámi, Steffens writes that they

include small, elongated eyes, high cheekbones, a broad mouth, and a pointed chin with little or no beard. Their hair is usually dirty brown or darker. The mountain Sámi are never blond. They are lean, short, broad-shouldered, and stoutly built, with strong bones and muscles. Their hands and feet are strikingly small and short, and their voices are weak and soft. Overall, they are small in stature, usually around five feet to five feet two inches tall, and rarely as much as five feet three inches. The women are less attractive than the men. It has been observed that the Norwegian Sámi are taller than the Swedish Sámi.²⁰

Steffens then introduces a hierarchy between different Sámi groups, arguing that the Mountain Sámi present the “purest form of the race,” while the River and Sea Sámi are the result of inter-racial mixing with Norwegians and Finns.²¹ The idea of racial mixing and its consequences occupies Steffens for the next few pages, which revolve around providing racial explanations for the alienation and abuse of the Sámi by Norwegian neighbors. Steffens remarks with indignation at the foul treatment the Sámi receive by Norwegians. The Sámi “were often treated almost like animals,” they were “attacked, plundered, and killed in the most brutal ways by the Norwegians.”²² “The Norwegians,” concludes Steffens, “have always regarded the Sámi with the deepest contempt.”²³

Steffens is keen to elaborate on the injustice experienced by the Sámi at the hands of the Norwegians in Finnmark, especially when the Sámi, as he makes pains to explain, were Christianized already during the Middle Ages. Yet Steffens also notes the continuation of Indigenous ritual practices among the Sámi, exclaiming with dismay that some Sámi women still “worship stones.”²⁴ For this reason, Steffens in his pamphlet affords deepest admiration for the work of pastors like Stockfleth, and judges Sámi Christianity to be no more than skin-deep. In Steffens’ opinion, continued Christianization

20 Steffens 1842, 6. In these descriptions, Steffens cites the work of James Cowles Prichard, most likely the latter’s *On the Extinction of some Varieties of the Human Race* (1839).

21 Steffens 1842, 7.

22 Steffens 1842, 9.

23 Steffens 1842, 9.

24 Steffens 1842, 9.

among the Sámi is essential because, although “this people possess some moral virtues...these [virtues] do not spring from that deep, pure source which alone gives morality a higher value.”²⁵ The Sámi, on Steffens’ account, while unjustly treated by the Norwegians, are nonetheless removed from the “pure source” of spiritual redemption accessible to their “European” neighbors, the Norwegians.

Next, Steffens reflects that at least some of the unjust treatment of the Sámi can be explained by Sámi racial “decline.” This “decline,” in Steffens’ narrative, is the result of inter-racial mixing. Steffens proposes that the River and Sea Sámi are distinct, racially, from the Mountain Sámi. While the Mountain Sámi are “freer, prouder,” the River and Sea Sámi have “declined,” and it is this “decline” that explains their brutal treatment by the Norwegians. Even the Mountain Sámi, however, are an eyesore to the Norwegian:

Certainly, the River and Sea Sámi have declined profoundly. They seem to have given up on themselves entirely: they are servile, deceitful, and are almost always seen drunk. The Mountain Sámi are freer, prouder, and more independent; however, even they do not present themselves favorably when they appear in settlements. They are reserved, sullen, and extremely distrustful – an understandable consequence of their unjust treatment. It is well-known how dangerous spirituous beverages have become for the lower classes of Northern peoples.²⁶

At this point, Steffens shifts his attention to the moral consciousness of the Norwegian overlords. Steffens repeats his indignation at the Norwegian treatment of the Sámi, especially at Norwegian merchants who bring alcohol to the Sámi, arguing that this trade exacerbated what Steffens argues is an innate weakness for alcohol on the part of Sámi people. The Sámi are thus “exploited in the most reprehensible manner by the Norwegians, placing a burden of guilt upon this otherwise honorable people [i.e. the Norwegians] – a guilt that must be atoned for in every way and with the greatest sacrifices.”²⁷

The thought of Norwegian overlords’ guilt vis-à-vis Sámi spiritual inferiority preoccupies Steffens for the remainder of his essay in *Über die Lappen*. Yet, while Steffens’ concern drifts more and more

25 Steffens 1842, 10.

26 Steffens 1842, 10.

27 Steffens 1842, 10.

toward moral outrage at the Norwegian treatment of the Sámi, which Steffens identifies strongly with the theological language of guilt, his understanding of the Sámi as biological and spiritually inferior remains as firm as ever. If anything, Stockfleth's missionary work among the Sámi appears to confirm, in Steffens' eyes, the "lowly" state of raced peoples. He concludes his essay by praising Stockfleth's efforts and pleading for his readers' Christian sympathy, a sympathy that Steffens hopes will result in renewed acts of "atonement" on the part of the Norwegians:

The greater the guilt of the Norwegians, who not only neglected a people whose Christian education had been entrusted to them by God but also contributed to their growing ruin, the more pleasing it is to see the current acknowledgment of this guilt and the efforts to atone for it. Stockfleth is the man whose tireless and careful work, whose fervent zeal for this holy cause, and the lively support he receives from his fellow countrymen, as I am convinced, will evoke the deepest sympathy from Christian readers.²⁸

At the heart of *Über die Lappen* is a spiritualization of race made possible by a racial classification inseparable from theological ideas. Against the background of the wider philosophy of human nature sketched decades earlier in the *Anthropologie*, Steffens uses Stockfleth's mission to unfold race as a drama of spiritual salvation. This drama may be sketched briefly as follows: The Sámi, like all people, need to be saved. Yet the Sámi, because of their race – for Steffens, the external manifestation of humoral imbalance – are incapable of coming to salvation on their own. Enter the Norwegians, carrier of fewer racial "seeds" and thus closer to the "pure source" of spiritual redemption: their task is to lead the Sámi to salvation. Yet the Norwegians, because they too have become mired in sin, abuse their sacred duty to bring the Sámi to salvation. In *Über die Lappen*, Norwegian overlords are cast both as villains and as saviors – villains insofar as they abuse their "natural" power over raced peoples, and saviors insofar as they "repent" over the sins of their ancestors and neighbors. The drama culminates in the future salvation of the Sámi with the aid of the Norwegians, but also, and this is striking, of the Norwegians, who are encouraged to Christianize the Sámi as a means of atoning for past aggressions against the Sámi.

28 Steffens 1842, 11.

Theology and Racism against the Sámi in Nineteenth-Century Scandinavia

That theological ideas of personal as well as collective salvation are important in Henrik Steffens' understanding of race is made clear in the way ideas of mission are woven into his narrative of the Sámi. It is useful to examine this narrative closer by considering how it relates to the question of theology and racism in Scandinavia during the first half of the nineteenth century. The Sámi theologian Tore Johnsen has drawn attention to this question in a series of recent studies.²⁹ Although he does not address Steffens directly, Johnsen tackles many characters pivotal to Steffens' historical and theological context, among them Niels Vibe Stockfleth, the pastor at the center of Steffens' *Über die Lappen*. Johnsen identifies in Stockfleth and his contemporaries a distinct contribution to Scandinavian racism against the Sámi, one whose theological underpinnings have often been overlooked by scholars.

As Johnsen points out, while Social Darwinism became significant at the height of nineteenth-century racial theory, Christian theology played an important role earlier in the period, during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, especially in Norwegian discourse around the Sámi. Beginning in the eighteenth century, "hierarchies of race, civilization and mission," writes Johnsen, "meld together into a unified Christian conception which can be called 'the civilization model'."³⁰ According to the "civilization model," the Sámi needed to become "civilized" as part of a Christianization process that was understood narrowly in terms of Enlightenment ideals. Johnsen notes how thinking around race, at this point, became implicit in the very idea of Christianity; in eighteenth-century Scandinavia, to Christianize was to civilize, and Christianity itself was seen, increasingly, as a civilizing force that "elevates primitive [peoples] from an inferior civilization and into a superior civilization where true Christianity could be found."³¹

Significant to our reading of Steffens, Johnsen counts Pastor Stockfleth among the proponents of the "civilization model." Stock-

29 See for instance Johnsen 2022 and Johnsen 2021.

30 Johnsen 2021, 306.

31 Johnsen 2021, 308.

fleth's self-proclaimed mission amongst the Sámi was passionate but also contradictory. On the one hand, it called for a recognition of Sámi languages and culture, with Stockfleth contributing to important national debates regarding the importance of educating the Sámi in their own languages. Stockfleth took a lively interest in Sámi culture, castigated Sámi abuse at the hands of Norwegians, and called on Christian compassion for the Sámi. On the other hand, Stockfleth's motivations for incorporating Sámi-language education were to spread, in his own words, "Christian knowledge and Enlightenment, as well as culture and civilization."³² His "compassion" was patronizing, portraying the Sámi as childlike and inferior. Johnsen argues that an implicit hierarchy of race is present in this thinking, which depicts the Sámi as inferior peoples and Christians as superior. While Stockfleth does not articulate an explicit theory of race, his thinking leaves such theories open to development. It is a "constellation of theological ideas" which became profoundly influential.³³

Steffens' use of theology in his racial theory, both in the *Anthropologie* and *Über die Lappen*, can be understood as part of this constellation of theological ideas dominant at the turn of the eighteenth century, in which Christianization was identified as a civilizing force, and Christian spirituality as a way of "elevating" so-called primitive peoples. Steffens' thinking on race also reflects Stockfleth's incorporation of Christian missiology into the "civilization model." In the same way that Stockfleth espoused a patronizing attitude toward the Sámi, Steffens encouraged German readers of *Über die Lappen* to take pity on the Sámi owing to their status as raced peoples.

Reading Steffens alongside Johnsen also highlights further aspects of this constellation of theological ideas. In Steffens' *Über die Lappen*, not only is Christian salvation tied to the forces of civilization; it is inseparable from the idea of race as sin. The way Steffens imagines the Sámi and their salvation assumes the wider argument of his *Anthropologie*. In the latter, Steffens considers race a sign of sin. Steffens' "historical" peoples, such as Germans (and Norwegians), are superior, according to Steffens, because of their lack of race. In the *Anthropologie*, Steffens was not focused on Norwegians, but

32 Stockfleth, *Dagbok over mine Missionsreiser*, 92, cited in Johnsen 2021, 309.

33 Johnsen 2021, 306.

in *Über die Lappen* they take center stage in a drama that can be read against a wider backdrop of the colonial mentalities at stake in Johnsen's analysis of Stockfleth and his contemporaries. In particular, Johnsen's work casts light on the peculiar nature of Christian salvation in the "civilization model." For Steffens, Christianizing the Sámi appears to be less about spreading the Gospel and more about imposing specific Enlightenment values on Sámi culture; at the same time, Steffens maintains that the Sámi, because of their raced status, can never be fully Christian – Christianizing the Sámi is thus a process that in the end benefits only the Norwegians. By performing missions, clergy like Stockfleth are atoning for the guilt of their ancestors and neighbors who continue to abuse the Sámi and commit atrocities against Sámi communities. Christian mission is interpreted as a way of atoning for the sins of the colonizer. By spreading the Gospel, the sins of the colonizer as well – as that of the colonized – will be redeemed.

Conclusion

Steffens' thinking on race weaves the Christian idea of sin into a pseudo-scientific account of human difference that casts light on the wider role of theology in the invention of race during the nineteenth century. *Über die Lappen*, written by Steffens toward the end of his life, embodies his mature reflection on race and shows Steffens applying a theologically inflected concept of race to the Sámi in Finnmark. The purpose of this chapter has been to provide an intellectual context for the role of theology in Steffens' thinking on race, focusing on his understanding of the Sámi. Steffens can be seen to carve out a spiritualization of race and a racialization of Christian spirituality, proposing a spiritual hierarchy between Norwegians and Indigenous peoples in the European Arctic. As Sámi theologian Tore Johnsen shows, such thinking was not unusual in the nineteenth century, yet the role played by theology and theological ideas has been neglected. Steffens' work shows the importance of conducting further research on the influence of theology on racism, especially in Scandinavia. The period from 1850 to 1950 was a troubling one in the history of racism in Scandinavia. Steffens' *Über die Lappen*,

composed at the cusp of this period, stands out as an ambivalent position in need of careful and critical study.

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