

‘THE WEAKNESS OF SOME’: THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH AND WHITE SUPREMACY

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Abstract

The complex rise of segregation in Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) of South Africa and the fumbling efforts of the church to deal with its members' prejudices represent a major challenge to historians. The key factor, often overlooked in the literature, is the influence of slavery that was both pervasive and pernicious. Among the Afrikaners it produced at the same time a strong egalitarian ethos, particularly in the interior, and a fierce rejection of gelykstelling or social levelling between them and slaves, ex-slaves and servants. The segregation of parishes made possible a more concerted DRC missionary effort. Along with segregated schools, laid, it laid the foundation of the segregation and apartheid orders, and provided the material basis of the Afrikaner nationalists' "civil religion" of the twentieth century.

Introduction

We live in a time when, as Roy Foster (1999), a leading Irish historian, observes “apology is easier than explaining.” He urges historians to remind their public that “the continuums and inheritances of history are matters of complex descent.” This article revisits key moments in the history of the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa and also offers critique of the scholarship, mainly by non-theologians, on the issues of race, nationalism and what Moodie (1975) calls the Afrikaners’ civil religion.

These issues are sometimes discussed with reference to the history of Nazi Germany where a *völkisch* theology dominated the Protestant churches and prepared the way for the advent of Hitler. This article argues that the *volkskerk* tradition in the DRC was substantially different and that there is no real evidence that Nazism significantly influenced DF Malan and the other members of the Afrikaner nationalist intelligentsia of the Western Cape, who were the main authors of the apartheid ideology.

The article also puts forward the view that the most fruitful comparison is that between the Afrikaner churches in South Africa and the Protestant churches in the American South. The views of white Southerners in the USA were remarkably similar to those the Afrikaners probably held in the 1940s and 1950s (we lack polls of racial attitudes in South Africa before the early 1970s). Not until the end of the 1950s did white South African racial views begin to diverge markedly from those in Europe, which at this point was divesting itself of its colonies, and from the USA, where enforcement by the federal government of racial integration had gathered pace. American views are presented in the table and the paragraph below (Hyman and Sheatsley, 1964; Schwartz 1967).

Table 1:
Percentage of American whites approving integration

<i>Issue</i>	1942	1956	1963
<i>Public school integration</i>			
Southern whites	2	14	30
National whites	40	61	75
<i>Public Transport</i>			
Southern whites	4	27	51
National whites	44	60	78
<i>Residential areas</i>			
Southern whites	12	38	51
National whites	35	51	64

In 1946, 21 per cent of Southern whites assessed the intelligence of blacks as equal to that of whites, against 42 per cent for whites on a nationwide basis, but ten years later 57 per cent of Southern whites and 77 per cent of whites nationwide considered black intelligence as equal to that of whites. When Eben Dönges, Minister for the Interior in South Africa, introduced a law banning all marriages between whites and non-whites he justified it by pointing to what he said was the practice in the US, e.g. thirty American states with similar laws; fifteen with a marriage officer to administer them (Carter 1958:78).

This article argues that the lack of support among both Southerners and Afrikaners for desegregation (or “integration” in the terms of the table) was primarily a manifestation of the long-term effects of what the greatest historian of race relations in the American South, C Vann Woodward (1971), calls: Protestant slavery.

Comparing the Afrikaners and their church

There is a wonderful passage in an essay by Woodward (1971: 47-77) in which he analysed the contrast between Protestant slavery in North America (and one can add slavery in the Cape of Good Hope) and Catholic slavery in Latin America. In Protestant slavery in the American colonies, and subsequently in the United States, the church did not intercede on behalf of the slaves and it opposed the abrupt abolition of slavery. The elected colonial assemblies denied blacks elementary human rights. North American white women, with their much stronger social position in the family than their Latin American counterparts, prevented their husbands from bringing the offspring of illicit liaisons with slave women into the family and church. For a century after the abolition of slavery in the USA blacks lived as a despised and ostracised caste in a segregated world. What seemed to make things worse was the hypocrisy of whites. The USA, after all, was supposed to be founded on the equality of all men.

Catholic slavery in Brazil seemed so much more humane. The masters often brought the mulatto offspring of their illicit relationships with slaves into the church and their family.

The church embraced the slaves and offered them the blessings of the sacraments in a common church. The Crown passed laws that protected them, and their marriage and family. By the mid-twentieth-century Brazil was a society based on the ideology of racial equality and assimilation.

This stark contrast had a peculiar effect on a United States wracked during the 1960s by guilt over urban black riots and over Vietnam. Scholarly books argued that Catholic-based societies offered proof that race relations could be different, that more civilised policies could prevail, that Protestant America had taken the wrong turn shortly after settling in a new continent, and that perhaps race conflict and prejudice were unhappy national peculiarities. Serious scholars of slavery like Woodward knew that this was a wrong conclusion: Latin American slavery was in many ways far harsher than Protestant slavery, the protection offered by state and church little more than an illusion and the racial democracy of Brazil in many ways a charade.

A Southerner himself, Woodward ends on a whimsical note: Perhaps it would have been better if Englishmen had not settled in North America and transplanted English institutions. He added: "Perhaps it would have been better, for that matter, never to have broken with Rome, never to have quarrelled with the monarchy, never to have established those autonomous colonial assemblies, and never to have married such women as they did. But, then, that would have been somebody else's history and not our own" (Woodward 1971: 77).

One could write paraphrase for the Afrikaners: Perhaps it would have been better if Protestants from northwestern Europe had not settled here at the Cape, and had not lived for the first 150 years under the rule of a company that imported slaves and saw little profit in missions. Perhaps it would have been better if these colonists had not developed an inflated notion of their status as *burghers* and as "born Christians", had not married the strong women they did and had not attended a church like the Dutch Reformed Church, which in 1857 condoned segregated worship if the "the weakness of some" necessitated it. But that would then have been someone else's history and not our own. To accept our history as our own and not wish for a different one that is the first principle in any revision of the history of the DRC, which seems urgently required.

The first rule of writing history is never to impose on the past the moral precepts of today. Some choices and options that are available today were absent in the past. The fact that in both the Cape Colony and the American South the church took root in a slave society severely restricted the church's options. Slavery pervaded the entire ethos of society. From the time of Antiquity the slave's deference and servility determined the master's honour, dignity and manhood (Patterson 1991). Slaveholders in the American South interpreted their revolutionary heritage of freedom to mean the right to white supremacy, self-governance and to hold human property. The Northern states disagreed. Not for nothing did Abraham Lincoln remark. "We all declare for liberty, but in using the same word, we do not all mean the same thing." For the North it included the freedom to sell one's labour and to move about freely; for the South it meant to "to do as one pleases with other men and the product of other men's labour" (Wyatt-Brown 1997).

At the Cape slaveholding was much more widespread than in most European colonies with half the whites owning at least one slave by the mid-eighteenth century. Here, too, the slaveholders defended the almost total control they wielded over slaves as a pivotal part of their liberty, dignity and honour. Here, too, whites collectively defended the symbolic distinctions that underpinned the gulf between freemen and slaves.

President Tito of Yugoslavia once said to his people: "You could have democracy or you could have brotherhood and unity, but you cannot have both" (Ignatieff 1995). It is quite unlikely that the DRC would have been able to make the remarkable contribution to the missionary effort in South Africa since the 1850s had it not taken special measures to accommodate converts from outside the ranks of the white community. To paraphrase Tito: the DRC in the 1850s could have opted for prolonging the status quo of a single church with a smattering of black faces, or it could have embarked on extensive mission work, but it unlikely that it could do both. Perhaps the greatest mistake scholars make in studying societies with intractable political problems is to believe that the good things always go together.

White racism and white egalitarianism

In the literature there is still a failure to come to grips with the real nature of racism. Far too often it is ascribed to mere greed or selfishness or to defective thought processes, something that sound theology or enlightened education would have remedied. This article takes a different approach by emphasising the class structure in society, hopefully without lapsing into the materialist reductionism that characterises the cruder forms of Marxism.

In the hierarchical Catholic-based societies race was simply yet another form of inequality. The ruling elites here invariably used class or cultural ethnocentrism as the main defence of exclusivity and privilege. It was because Protestant whites were so much more egalitarian in their own ranks than Catholic-based societies that they so desperately sought a doctrine to justify racial discrimination. As Noel (1972:164) remarks: "In the absence of notions of equality, brotherhood and justice members of one group can exploit members of other groups with few qualms and no compulsion to construct a unique justifying rationale... Hence, far from preventing racism, an egalitarian creed is a requisite for the emergence of such an ideology."

The racism of white Southerners and Afrikaner Protestants was indeed closely linked to the emergence of a pronounced egalitarianism among whites in the case of both peoples. In South Africa white egalitarianism had developed over time. The administration of the Cape of Good Hope under the rule of the Dutch East India Company was based on status distinctions of which that between *burghers* and Company servants, and *burghers* and slaves were the most important. Within European society the higher officials of the Company and the wealthy *burghers* had more status and power, but the further the *burghers* moved into the interior the less these distinctions within the white community counted. Early in the nineteenth century a traveller remarked: "Every man is a burgher by rank and a farmer by occupation and there is no one so poor that he would not consider himself degraded by becoming the dependent of another" (Thompson 1827: 324).

Although the minister and a few wealthy families tended to dominate election to the church councils, the DRC in the rural areas, together with the commando system, contributed to the development of a genuinely egalitarian church by the end of the nineteenth century. John X Merriman wrote. "I am more sure than ever that in their democratic church lies the salt of the Afrikaner character. Many things they lack – imagination, education, energy – but faith they certainly have and that keeps them strong and sound" (Scholtz 1978: 282-83).

The egalitarian character of the DRC and the Afrikaner community made it much more susceptible to a racist ideology. This perspective should make one wary of attaching too much importance to theological doctrine as a variable in explaining racism. In both the American South and the Cape Colony the key variable was slavery. In both societies the

churches condoned slavery as being decreed by God. In all denominations, with the exception of the Quakers in America, there was, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, what a historian of the American South calls “a coolness towards the conversion of blacks”. One of the main reasons was the “egalitarian implications of Christian fellowship” and the resultant fear that slaves would be much more difficult to discipline if they were Christians” (Smith 1972: 11). Those parishes that did admit blacks seated them at the back of the church to highlight their inferiority.

During the nineteenth century the slave owners in the USA came round to the view that Christian slaves were to be preferred because they were in fact more obedient. The churches in the American South accepted blacks but still seated them at the back. With few exceptions the churches both in the South and the North opposed the drive to abolish slavery because it would cause discord in the church. After the abolition of slavery in 1864 blacks left the church in droves and formed their own churches. There was little resistance to this among the white clergy. Even the Catholic bishops, convened in a plenary council in 1866, recommended that, wherever possible, separate churches had to be built for Negro Catholics (Smith 1972: 248).

In the Cape the attempts by the DRC ministers MC Vos and HR van Lier to persuade slaveholders to have their slaves baptised made little headway. As a result of the resolution of the Synod of Dordt of 1618-19 and some ambiguous government proclamations slaveholders had concluded that they would be compelled to free baptised slaves. They believed that Christianity narrowed the gap between master and slave and that to have a slave baptised was detrimental to investment. As elsewhere, masters at the Cape followed the market and they were well aware that slaves who were not baptised were more marketable (Shell 1994: 342). In the nineteenth century the DRC played no significant role in the debate over slavery. It was largely unprepared for the post-slavery era, which dawned in December 1838, when large numbers of freed people were looking for a spiritual home.

The main reason was that the church had to be mindful of the key concern of its members, namely preventing *gelykstelling*, or social levelling, which was the flip side of white egalitarianism. Opposition to *gelykstelling*, which dominated white politics from the end of the seventeenth century to the final decades of the twentieth century, was not the same as the rejection of equality. Under both Company and British rule the *burghers* knew that formally all people, whether they were white or black, slave or free, were equal before the law. Although the *burghers* resented it, they knew that servants had a right to lay a complaint against the master.

Opposition to *gelykstelling* manifested itself in response to any action that violated the social conventions that underpinned the status and class hierarchy. The Company's status hierarchy, which informally was carried over to the British period, *burghers* with property enjoyed high status outside the ranks of government, those without property somewhat less and a white *knecht* and a free black considerably less. Even lower down were Khoisan servants, while slaves were at the very bottom of the social ladder. They were in fact condemned to a form of social death, a stigma often carried over to their descendants.

The stock-farmers in the interior brought with them the slave owners' obsession with maintaining status distinctions and extended this to their Khoikhoi servants and later also to Xhosa labourers. They expressed outrage about *gelykstelling* – “being being put on an equal footing with servants or slaves”, as they called it when servants or slaves or their immediate descendants violated the symbols of status and honour in society – the front benches in church, election to church or political office, the front ranks of a funeral

procession, or proposing marriage to a member of a “respectable” *burgher* family (Giliomee 2003: 88-129).

On the frontier the opposition to *gelykstelling* could even include preventing the Khoikhoi from becoming literate or receiving the Christian sacraments. In 1801 the missionaries Johannes van der Kemp and James Read began to offer instruction in religion and literary skills to about a thousand Khoikhoi who had converged on the town of Graaff-Reinet at a time of great instability on the frontier. This caused outrage among those *burghers* who had rebelled against government authority. According to Van der Kemp, the rebels declared that the government “protected the Hottentots and Caffrees (sic) and were instructed by us [the missionaries] in reading, writing and religion, and thereby put upon an equal footing with the Christians especially that they were admitted to the church of Graaff-Reinet.” A group of rebels demanded that the Khoikhoi be barred from the church: “the seats should be washed, the pavement broken up, and the pulpit be covered with black cloth as a demonstration of mourning.” (*Transactions*, 1804:481-83) Van der Kemp was undeterred: “The Hottentots should be perfectly free, upon an equal footing in every respect with the colonists and by no sort of compulsion brought under a necessity to enter their service, but have a piece of ground given them by Government as their own” (*Transactions* 1804, 490-1).

Although colour and status largely coincided, discrimination was not purely a matter of colour. During the 1790s there was a distinct category of “Baptized Bastards” in the Graaff-Reinet census rolls. As confirmed Christians their children were baptised in the Graaff-Reinet church, probably in a separate ceremony. During the 1830s, when the government indentured white servants brought from Britain with western Cape farmers, the latter refused to take them along to church (Muller 1974: 207).

The British rulers were no social revolutionaries. They abolished burgher status, but permitted many of the obligations and privileges associated with it to survive. They were firmer than the VOC in insisting that the Khoikhoi had recourse to the courts and the right to own land, but, in practice, these rights amounted to little since most Khoikhoi were not Christians and as such could not swear an oath. Without an oath their evidence counted for less. So, too, almost no Khoikhoi owned land. Although there was no formal colour discrimination, all the richer people were white and almost all the very poor people were black or “coloured”.

The leadership of the Church of the Province and other mainstream English-language churches tended to support liberalism, and while there was a reluctance to interfere with the local “social customs”, the Synod of the Church of the Province declared itself as early as 1924 for “the inclusion of all races in the one Church of Christ.” In his discussion of the English church tradition in South Africa De Gruchy (1979: 35-37) emphasises the influence of Empire and the English civil religion. The fact that some of these churches drew part of its clergy and some of the funding for missionary work from abroad was undoubtedly also instrumental in promoting the liberal influence.

But De Gruchy does not mention the most important factor, namely the absence of the pernicious influence of slavery within the church. The British settlers of 1820 were not allowed to own slaves and very few members of the English churches were slaveholders. Consequently the English churches, unlike the churches in which Afrikaner slaveholders and their counterparts in the American South worshipped, did not have to make the fatal compromises between slavery and the Christian faith, and between the norms of slaveholders and the egalitarian thrust of the New Testament.

Against this background some of the pivotal events in the DRC's history can be revisited.

'The weakness of some': The 1857 decision to condone segregated worship

For much of the nineteenth century the question of how baptized slaves and other people who were not "born Christians" could be incorporated into the established churches of the Cape Colony was unresolved. The Zuid-Afrikaansche Zending Genootschap (ZAZG), the major local missionary society, instructed large numbers of slaves in the catechism, but few were confirmed in the Reformed or Lutheran congregations. All over the colony missionary societies organised their followers into separate parishes. In 1819 Dr John Philip, superintendent of the London Missionary Society (LMS) stations in South Africa, advised the ZAZG to organize its converts into a separate parish, as the LMS had decided to do, and offered to assist the society in every way should it decide to adopt such a policy.

The directors agreed to accept Philip's offer. Many years later, in 1851, two ZAZG directors submitted a document stating that they had supported the 1819 decision but only with major qualifications. It was unwise, they declared, to found separate congregations; instead "all illiterates and heathen [should] be instructed and be prepared to become members of established Protestant churches" (Giliomee 2003 a: 100).

But the pattern had been set. By 1824, when the Reformed Church convened its first colonial synod, it passed regulations for its own missionary work and also ordained L. Marquardt as its first missionary. He had strict instructions to administer the sacraments only to heathens he had gathered together in a separate congregation. Although the DRC was not hostile to the missionary work, it wanted to bring missionary work done by its members under its own control, particularly since they dominated the ranks of the ZAZG and its affiliated local bodies. But the ZAZG and its associates did not want to be absorbed by the DRC, which would mean sacrificing their autonomy and parting with those members who were Lutherans.

The policy of the Reformed Church at the Cape was firm: the church was open to all who had been baptized and Communion had to be served to all those who were confirmed, regardless of whether they were free or slaves. Yet while open, the Reformed Church showed no enthusiasm for bringing large numbers of non-European converts into the congregation.

This was the state of play by 1850. Nicolaas Hofmeyr and the two Murray brothers, Andrew and John, had just returned to South Africa from their theological studies in the Netherlands. They were full of evangelic fervour for missionary work as an inescapable obligation of the church. Hofmeyr, who had a high regard for Van der Kemp and his work, found the DRC's poor record on missionary work an embarrassment.

Using the pseudonym IT, he addressed the issue of missionary work in a series of articles in 1853 and 1854 in the official church journal, *De Gereformeerde Kerkbode*. (The use of pseudonyms was customary in the journal). He did not want to bring about *gelykstelling* by disturbing the differences in rank or "station" in the social hierarchy that had developed under slavery. Writing from the depth of his Evangelical convictions, he had as his priority the need to bring the Gospel to souls who otherwise would be lost.

Hofmeyr investigated three possible options for the Reformed Church's missionary activities. First he rejected a policy of *afscheiding*, which would later be known as "segregation", the practice of setting up completely separate mission stations or "congregations" for coloured Christians. In his view that tended to destroy the bond between whites and coloureds and also the influence of the church in society. Second, he

rejected as unsuitable the “fusion” of white and coloured Christians by identical treatment. Coloured people, he said, had a lower level of development; the Gospel must be brought to them in a simple way. It was important that coloured Christians understood their place in the status hierarchy and did not confuse religious and social privileges. Hofmeyr quoted the experience of a minister who admitted into his parish many coloureds, who promptly forgot their “station” or estate in life.

Hofmeyr declared himself in favour of a third or “middle way” as a means of overcoming the barriers to missionary work and the fear of *gelykstelling*. Every parish would have a minister and a missionary, and both a church and a separate *gesticht* or chapel. While separate like a mother and her daughter, they would be intimately bound together. The minister would conduct the service in the church, which coloured members would always attend, and the missionary would use the *gesticht* for religious instruction, tailored to the needs of the coloured Christians. In the *gesticht* the minister would perform all baptism and confirmation ceremonies and administer Holy Communion (Hofmeyr 1853).

Hofmeyr quoted no biblical sources or authorities on mission policy in support of his position, but pointed instead to two successful models in Cape Town. One was St Stephens, a parish of mainly ex-slaves in Cape Town, who shared a minister with a white Lutheran parish nearby; the other was the Presbyterian Church, which housed white and coloured parish meetings in the same church but at separate times. Hofmeyr was a practical man and wanted a “serviceable” policy.

No article in the *Gereformeerde Kerkbode* during this period favoured *afscheiding* or segregation. The debate came to a head at the Cape Synod of 1857. The item on the agenda caused some disputes. In the town of Ceres in the Western Cape there was a conflict between an elder who wished to establish a *gesticht* to bring the Gospel to coloured people, mostly ex slaves, and a church minister, who argued that this was in conflict with a 1829 Synod decision that stressed the unity of the church. Andrew Murray, senior, minister in Graaff-Reinet was particularly aware of a dispute in the parish of Stockenstrom on the eastern frontier where there was a small white minority in a largely Khoikhoi congregation. The former wished to receive the Holy Communion separately.

Significantly, also at this synod, a special commission for mission work reported that the time was not ripe for a co-ordinated effort to extend missionary work. In response, the synod appointed a new committee, composed of Hofmeyr, the Murray brothers, and P.K. Albertyn. It promptly informed the synod that, with the necessary zeal, progress would indeed be possible. A formula was needed and this was what Hofmeyr’s scheme would provide.

In the synod debate on the issue whether to permit segregated facilities, several participants called for a reaffirmation of the church’s policy of non-discrimination. Hofmeyr, one of the last two speakers, insisted that there was a more important issue than addressing prejudice. That issue was to identify the most effective way for the church to promote the Christianisation of the heathen. According to newspaper reports, after he spoke the debate took a new turn.

In the end the synod accepted a compromise resolution, proposed by Andrew Murray, senior, who was a prominent evangelical and mission enthusiast. The resolution declared that it was “desirable and according to the Scriptures to absorb members from the heathen population in existing congregations” wherever this was possible. However, in cases where “the weakness of some” hindered spreading the Gospel, the Synod agreed that people might enjoy their Christian privileges in a separate building (Kriel, 1963: 54-59). This resolution sanctioned separate facilities but not segregated parishes, and it was not in conflict with

what other Protestant churches were doing at the time. The church had no intention of drawing a rigid colour line. Indeed the same Synod decided to accept the St Stephens parish of ex-slaves as a full member.

As David Botha (n.d.) pointed out more than a century later, the 1857 decision introduced Hofmeyr's "middle way." However, the resolution was poorly formulated and the inclusion of the phrase "the weakness of some" a fatal mistake. It soon became clear that it would be used to sanction racist practices. In Botha's words, the "pious intentions of honest idealists" were no match for the "callousness of the sinful."

The account of Johan Botha (1981: 16-18) shows how in the parish of Swartland (Malmesbury) lay members, of whom some undoubtedly were descendants of slaves, waged a struggle to be treated as equals in the church. In response the church effectively prohibited coloured members from receiving sacraments in the "big church". It was now expected of them to use the "small church" (*gesticht*). The "may enjoy" of the 1857 resolution had become "have to enjoy".

Only a few ministers realised in the immediate aftermath of the 1857 Synod what a fateful step it was. One who did was the Rev. Huet, a recent immigrant from the Netherlands and a rather eccentric man, based in Natal. Here he had worked among the Voortrekkers and their children, who in the preceding twenty years experienced the traumas of massacres and armed clashes between white and black. In this situation of racial polarisation he had found it virtually impossible to have a black person confirmed and accepted in the church.

In the aftermath of the 1857 Synod Huet (1860a: 28-53) analysed the objections he had encountered to the presence of non-whites in the church. One was a biblical justification for the exclusion of "Basters." Another was a form of biological racism, which propagated keeping brown and black people separate because they represented a different human species marked by their colour and hair. It asserted that brown and black Christians stood on a much lower level of "civilization" and often understood only the simplest of services.. Yet another was the argument that people who were not Europeans formed a separate "nation", who, like the French or the Dutch, should form their own church. (This line of argument surfaced again in the twentieth century in the development of the apartheid ideology.)

Huet himself did not object to separate church buildings or *gestichten*, as they were called, if they could accommodate the special needs of people who were not white, but he believed that the synod had erred. It had focused on white prejudice and had elevated the "weakness of some" almost to the level of principle, thereby extending a blanket permission to "the powerful and the proud" to exclude the truly weak and vulnerable – the very persons about whom the church ought to be most solicitous. As he put it, the rejection of *gelykstelling* – "that terrible, secret word viewed by so many as the greatest of evils" – had been carried into the realm of ecclesiastical organization. Huet (1860b) sensed that the church would have to take a much stronger stand against racial prejudice if it did not want to be overwhelmed by it.

Hofmeyr was from the settled western part of the Cape Colony and in many ways naïve in his idealism. But it would be wrong to blame the sponsors of the 1857 decision to condone segregation in the DRC. The entrenchment of segregation was a process, an insidious process some would say. If the DRC leaders had a failing it was to turn their eyes away from the social consequences of their decisions. They were well aware that those who worshipped in the "small church" or the *gesticht* were the poor without the means to establish financially viable parishes. During the 1870s the DRC synod seriously considered

absorbing several parishes of coloured people that had been founded by the Rhenish Missionary Society (RMS). Financial considerations, not racial objections, were decisive: the DRC wanted to take over only those parishes that were financially viable and the RMS rejected this. But if the plan had gone ahead the church, at least at the level of its synod may well have entered the next century as a multi-racial body (Botha, n.d.).

In the establishment of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1881 many of the same paradoxes were present as in the 1857 Synod decision to condone segregation. Once again it was not reactionaries who were behind the move. One of them was a DRC missionary Jacobus Pauw, who urged the DRC either to adopt all mission congregations fully or establish a separate church for them. The person most opposed to any form of segregation in the church was the Rev Philip Faure of the Wynberg parish, which was the most integrated of all DRC congregations.

In 1880 the DRC Synod decided to make it possible for its mission parishes to join into a segregated new order. In 1881 five congregations, including one stemming from Faure's Wynberg Congregation, formed the first Synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. Faure had not protested against the Synod's decision but also did not force coloured members to leave. None of those who left had publicly complained of discrimination. They clearly believed that their own parish would give them greater scope. No one at this stage could anticipate that the DRC would later so be miserly and authoritarian in its control of the Mission Church that relationships in the DRC "family" would be severely strained. Segregation in this case produced strife rather than the other way round.

Elon (1997:26) cites the political philosopher Hannah Arendt, who remarked that evil does not have depth but is extensive: it does not so much grow from premises and principles but spreads like a fungus. It is very difficult to stop because those in the positions of power and influence rarely have the capacity to think from the point of view of another person or its own sister church (Van der Merwe 2002).

The Afrikaners' 'civil religion'

There can hardly be any doubt that religion and nationalism were the main ideological forces that impacted on the Afrikaners during the twentieth century. The two were interrelated. Without the nationalism it is unlikely that the DRC would have remained as rigidly segregated as it was until the final decades of the century; without the DRC's endorsement of the apartheid policy it would never have assumed its extreme form.

The exact relationship between this religion and this nationalism is still to be analysed properly. Some scholars see the civil religion-- the fusion, in other words, of religion and nationalism-- as a form of idolatry. But it is necessary to maintain a sense of perspective. Robert Bellah, on whose description of American civil religion Moodie drew, remarked in 1977: "I am convinced that every nation and every people come to some form of religious understanding whether the critics like it or not" (cited by Botha 1984:149). The main danger lies in making the Christian faith simply an adjunct of the civil religion and of the nationalism.

Moodie (1975: ix-x) believes that the exponents of the civil religion and DF Malan, the unrivalled leader of the Afrikaner nationalist movement between 1933 and 1954, were guilty of a "Christian heresy" in claiming that the Afrikaner people were the object of God's saving activity. Moodie clearly misunderstood a key element in the civil religion. I have found no record of Malan or any prominent leader calling on God to save the Afrikaner *people* from damnation in the religious sense of the word. But there are many speeches in which a prayer was said for the Afrikaners to be saved politically.

In Moodie's interpretation the Afrikaners' civil religion was a fusion of Kuyperian theology and a "neo-Fichtean" nationalism committed to history, language, "blood" and "land". Added to this mixture were also the *volkskerk* idea, espoused by DF Malan, and Scottish evangelicalism. He sees the *volkskerk* idea as a twentieth century phenomenon that expressed itself in a commitment to the spiritual and material well-being of the Afrikaners, with a special emphasis on the rehabilitation of the Afrikaner poor and the language movement.

But the conception of the *volkskerk* as a twentieth century phenomenon is wrong. As Theron (1988) and Durand (2002) point out, it goes back much further – to Scottish Puritanism and to reformed pietism in the Netherlands during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At the Cape the Company government reinforced it by insisting that the church had to promote the Reformed religion and the Dutch language. When Britain tried to anglicise the Cape in the nineteenth century those political and church leaders who resisted the attempt warned that the loss of the Dutch language would also lead to a loss of the Reformed faith.

During the second half of the nineteenth century the *volkskerk* tradition was undermined somewhat by the Evangelical tendency. However, when DF Malan, along with others, revived the *volkskerk* idea during the Rebellion of 1914-15, he did not turn to Abraham Kuyper but to the early Cape roots. The church, he said, was "the means by which God guided and forged our people and our church is still the guarantee of our nationality" (*Ons Land*, 6 July 1915).

The idea of a chosen people, which is an intimate part of so many nationalisms, also came up in the course of Afrikaner history. When precisely is a contentious issue. O'Brien (1986:2-3) makes a useful distinction between nationalism as an ideology, which is only two centuries old and took root first in revolutionary France and then Germany, and nationalism as a "collective emotional force". Appearing first in the Hebrew Bible, the latter was indistinguishable from religion: God chose a particular people and gave them a particular land. In almost all cases of a strong nationalism in the latter sense of O'Brien's distinction there is a tendency to equate the experience of the nation with that of the Jews.

The first people at the Cape who saw their fate as similar to that of the Jews were some Voortrekkers, who left the colony in the 1830s and settled in the deeper interior. Andrew Murray, who became a DRC minister in Bloemfontein in 1849, noted that some trekkers (he appeared to refer to a party of Doppers) did not distinguish clearly "between the relations of Israel and their own to the savages with whom they saw themselves surrounded ... They thought that in going forth to conquer them they were extending Christianity" (Du Plessis 1919: 416; Van Jaarsveld 1961).

Du Toit (1983) attacked what he calls the myth of the Calvinist origins of Afrikaner nationalism. He took issue with the interpretation of some scholars that a seventeenth century "primitive Calvinism" remained stuck among the Afrikaners for more than two centuries, prompting them to see themselves as a chosen and covenanted people with a mission to subjugate blacks as hewers of wood and drawers of water. Du Toit argues that during the 1960s Hendrik Verwoerd used a modernized version of the myth to project apartheid as the divine mission of the Afrikaners. In rejecting the myth Du Toit puts forward the view that the Voortrekkers and the Afrikaners in general did not see themselves as a chosen people with a divine mission before Paul Kruger started to expound this idea in the 1880s, and that it was only after the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) that a significant group of people, with the intellectuals of Potchefstroom in the vanguard, incorporated the

idea of a chosen people into their religious and political thought (Hexham 1981; Du Toit 1983, Botha 1984).

This is not a minor issue. If the Afrikaners only late in their history merged their religion with their nationalism one could agree with Du Toit (1983: 952) that “Afrikaner nationalism is less the product of its unique cultural roots than the ideological labours of modernising elite” (a reference to the nationalists under the leadership of DF Malan and later Hendrik Verwoerd).

One can agree with Du Toit and Botha in much what they say. It is quite wrong to think that the opposition to *gelykstelling* or the belief that the Afrikaners formed a chosen people can be directly traced to the Calvinist doctrine of the Elect. The opposition to *gelykstelling* had its roots in the Company’s policy of status groups in a slave society and certain bureaucratic process that originated in the Company’s possessions in the Far East. This made it possible for members of inferior status groups to be put on an equal footing with their superiors. The idea of a chosen people was common a nationalist doctrine regardless of whether the adherents were Calvinist or Catholic.

But Du Toit goes too far in dismissing the possibility that some Afrikaners at an early stage considered themselves a chosen and covenanted people. From the early days of the Cape Colony the variant of Calvinism that held sway had at its very core the idea of an omnipotent, sovereign God who intervened directly in the lives of individuals and communities. A covenant theology was reinforced by the sacrament of baptism. The doctrine underpinning baptism held that there was continuity between God’s covenant with the Jews and the one He had with Christians. Accordingly, children of European parents at the Cape were considered “born Christians” and as such deemed saved in the womb, which was symbolised by baptising the child as an infant. It also symbolised the covenant God had with a particular body of people and their descendants (Gerstner 1991).

The children of slaves or servants could be baptised in infancy provided the head of the household or the Company itself (in the case of its own slaves) pledged to bring up the child in the Christian faith. But in the absence of any patrons the baptism theology of external regeneration, were applied to slaves and Khoisan. It promised that God would save the child later in life provided that they could show some knowledge of the Reformed doctrines and proved that their life had been exemplary (Gerstner 1991). Often this test was stringently applied with the result that few slaves and servants were baptised. “Born Christians” with a covenant with God and the (white) burgher population became largely synonymous.

We have at least one contemporary source which points to the existence of the idea of a chosen people prior to the departure of the Voortrekkers from the colony in the 1830s and 1840s. In his reminiscences of the year 1858 WW Collins (1907), who lived in Bloemfontein, referred to the *Doppers* as a “peculiar sect”, evidently obsessed with “Jehova’s wonderful manifestation to his ancient people in ... the Old Testament.” “They [the *Doppers*] seem to be possessed with the idea that they too are a Divinely favoured people in the same sense that Israel was, and have been signally endowed by the Almighty with sufficient intuitive knowledge and understanding to undertake any mental or other duties.”

If Collins’ reference to the idea of a chosen people had indeed come down “from father to son”, as he phrased it, it means that at least some *Doppers* had developed the notion in the northeastern region of the Cape Colony where most of them lived before they emigrated. In the case of Paul Kruger, the most famous of all *Doppers*, this idea was probably strengthened by the trials and tribulations of the Great Trek, which he

accompanied as a young boy. He was instrumental in the decision of the Transvaal *burghers* in 1880 to renew the commemoration of the vow made prior to the Battle of Blood River of 1838.

A sense of mission was neither widespread nor well articulated among the Voortrekkers. Even among the *Doppers* there were differences about the nature of their mission – to conquer the land, or to do missionary work, or live by an almost literal understanding of the Bible? Paul Kruger certainly did not subscribe to the heresy that all black people were inferior and eternally doomed. Although Afrikaner nationalism as an ideology developed only in the twentieth century, there was more than enough cultural material with roots in the previous centuries that it could use. The idea of a chosen people was one of them.

O'Brien (1988:41-42) distinguishes three kinds of "holy nationalisms". The most extreme case is that of a "deified nation". The position of the leader is sacrosanct and there is no entity or law or ethic superior to the nation. Nazi Germany is an obvious example of a nation idolising itself. Then there is in O'Brien's terms a "holy nation", which "is still under God, even if basking in his permanent favour."

Finally there is a third category, that of a "chosen people", which contains within itself "not only national pride, but also humility, anguish, fear and guilt". God may bless his people, but he may also punish them and withdraw his protective hand from them. That was the way in which Paul Kruger used the term. DF Malan (n.d.) rejected the idea that the Afrikaners considered themselves as a uniquely chosen people. He wrote that "in his personal fate, as in that of his people, the Afrikaner sees the hand of God...But that he claims this as his exclusive right and thus raises his people above others as God's special favourite is a false and slanderous allegation".

In a collection of sermons delivered at memorial services in the aftermath of Hendrik Verwoerd's assassination in 1966 there is no trace of a holy nationalism of O'Brien's first two categories or even of a belief in the Afrikaners as a uniquely chosen people enjoying the special grace of God. Like Kruger, several of the Afrikaner clergy expressed the belief that God had taken the *volksleier* away because the people had sinned or fallen short and had to be taught a lesson. (Hattingh 1967). Using the apartheid paradigm in the official memorial service, Gericke (1967:19) saw in the death a message "not only for ourselves, for our own people, but also for other people."

Neo-Calvinist ideas developed by Abraham Kuyper began to wield influence in the church from the mid-1930s. Kuyper emphasised the diversity of peoples, the "creation ordinances" and the separate social spheres of life (church, state family, etc. each of which was sovereign in its own sphere. Unlike "simple evangelism" and the *volkskerk* tradition, and their concern with missions and the saving of souls, the Kuyperians in South Africa emphasised the need for a new *Weltanschauung* in the church and politics. God and the principles derived from his Word had to be placed at the centre of life and the world.

Hexham (1981) argues that the neo-Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper, propounded after the Anglo-Boer War by theologians and other academics from Potchefstroom, was the main ideological influence on the Afrikaner nationalist movement of the twentieth century and the apartheid policy. However, it defies all logic that the small *Dopper* church and the Potchefstroom intelligentsia in their relative isolation could wield such a major influence. The most that can be said is that some of neo-Calvinist phrases appeared in the first programme of principles of the National Party founded by Genl. JBM Hertzog in 1914. Hertzog, however, was close to being agnostic, often deploring the use of what he called God as an election agent. Christian-Nationalism, often the code word for Potchefstroom's

neo-Calvinism, was little more than a shibboleth politically for both Hertzog and DF Malan. By contrast it was a proper theory of education.

Moodie (1975: 57) believes that Kuyper's neo-Calvinism became the dominant theology in the Afrikaans churches, but influence is always difficult to measure. Kuyper undoubtedly influenced many academics in Potchefstroom and the theology of the Reformed church, but even here the work of some leading theologians carry few traces of Kuyper (Van Wyk 1991: 39-53). In the DRC Kuyper's emphasis of diversity at the expense of unity was indeed influential, but it would be better to talk of a balance between what Loubser (1987: 58) called ideological and practical approaches or to put it differently Kuyperian influences on the one hand and evangelical, pietistic and the volkskerk traditions on the other.

An effort should be made to distinguish between what were originally Kuyper's thoughts and what were Afrikaner nationalist elaborations or what Kuyper had borrowed from others. Among South African Kuyperians there was a strong tendency to speak of the volk or nation as one of the "creation ordinances" but Kuyper had never done so. And as Schutte (1987) remarked, Kuyper was above all concerned with the self-isolation of a religious group on the basis of specific world-view and distinctive beliefs. Afrikaner nationalists, by contrast, sought the mobilisation on an ethnic basis. They tried to bring together Afrikaners in ethnic institutions regardless of their religious beliefs and world-views

At a congress held in 1944 JD du Toit, a Potchefstroom Kuyperian and professor of Theology, presented one of the first published theological defenses of apartheid. He argued that racial differences were part of the creation ordinances and that God dispersed the builders of the Tower of Babel, who wished to create a single nation, by causing them to speak in mutually incomprehensible languages. For him the lesson was twofold. Those whom God had joined together had to remain united; those whom God had separated had to remain apart, and there could be no *gelykstelling* or *verbastering* – no social levelling or bastardisation (Du Toit 1944).

Two central ideas of Du Toit in this lecture were not originally Calvinist ideas. The idea of *gelykstelling*, as we indicated above, originated in the status distinctions of the Company. Following Kuyper, Du Toit traced the different nations back to the Tower of Babel. But this idea formed part of the main body of Western segregationist thought and was probably first formulated within the context of slavery. In his work on racial views in early America, Winthrop Jordan (1976: 245, 538) mentions two books, one published in 1778 in Edinburgh and the other in 1812 in Philadelphia, both of which linked the Tower of Babel to God's plan to settle different nations in different regions. Although theologically a liberal, DF Malan also clung to this outdated interpretation of the Tower of Babel.

Moodie does not argue that the Cape DRC was Kuyperian and correctly points out that Stellenbosch graduates were more attracted to the *volkskerk* position. (Moodie: 1975: 71). Moodie's is nevertheless of the view that the decisive influences shaping both Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid in the 1930s and 1940s were the neo-Calvinist thought coupled with "neo-Fichtean" nationalism and the Afrikaner Broederbond as the main disseminator of these ideas.

But Moodie and several other writers overrates the Broederbond's influence in the making of apartheid. At a 1947 Broederbond conference basic disagreements about key aspects of the racial policy surfaced. Speakers resigned themselves to the fact that Africans would remain part of the white socio-economic system for a long time. After the meeting Bond secretary Ivan Lombard called the proceedings "depressing", because no solutions

had been suggested for the numerous problems that were identified. The Bond as a body agreed with, and supported, apartheid, but it did not develop and formulate it. A survival plan grafted as an operational ideology onto Afrikaner nationalism would produce much greater unity. But by 1948 the *Broeders* had no such plan (Stals, 1998:203-08).

I have argued elsewhere that the main influences of the church on the NP in its construction of the apartheid ideology were the *volkskerk* tradition, the idea of self-governing and self-financing mission churches, and the endorsement by all churches of segregated schools. I have also argued that the centre of political influence in the Afrikaner nationalist movement after 1933-34 were the western Cape nationalist intelligentsia, who considered the work of their Potchefstroom counterparts with some bemusement (Giliomee 2003 a: 444-79). The influence of *Die Burger*, under the editorship of Albert Geyer, nationally far outstripped that of any Afrikaans publication. After 1933-34 The Cape National Party dominated the federal NP. As leader of both parties DF Malan enjoyed unrivalled authority. He rejected the idea of sovereignty in spheres, preferring instead to think in terms of the historically evolved *volk* as the primary unit. According to DF Malan, jnr. (1965), who was himself a minister in the DRC, his father disliked abstract speculation and was "not enthusiastic" about Abraham Kuyper's emphasis on doctrine and confession. Apartheid's architects were politicians, journalists, businessmen and academics in Cape Town and Stellenbosch who, with the exception of Malan, were resolutely secular people.

Malan became a member of the Afrikaner Broederbond in 1933, but there is no evidence that it influenced his decisions and thinking. His closest advisers were fellow-politicians Paul Sauer and Frans Erasmus (secretary of the Cape NP), Willie Hofmeyr, chairman of both Nasionale Pers and Sanlam, and Albert Geyer, editor of *Die Burger*, none of whom belonged to the Broederbond. It is quite implausible that Malan, in developing his political philosophy after Fusion in 1933-34 would suddenly embrace the view of the Broederbond, an organisation based mainly in Johannesburg and Potchefstroom, of which he had just become a member, and of academics steeped in neo-Calvinism, a dogma which he specifically rejected.

A figure that had made his mark in Stellenbosch before leaving for Johannesburg in 1937 was Hendrik Verwoerd. Like so many of his colleagues in the south he was not attracted by the German academic world and by Nazi thinking. In a visit to the USA in the mid-1920s he was exposed to the new pre-occupation in academic circles with social engineering. Verwoerd's thinking soon ran along social engineering lines but he was never a racist in the way in which the word was commonly used until the 1970s, that is a belief meaning genetic or biological inferiority. His lecture notes and memoranda at the University of Stellenbosch stressed that there were no biological differences between the big racial groups (or for that matter between Europeans and Africans), and since there were no differences "this was not really a factor in the development of a higher social civilisation by the Caucasian race" (Millar, 1992:650). Unlike the historian WM Macmillan, who recommended integrating the reserves into the economic and social system to resolve poverty, Verwoerd paid virtually no attention to structures of segregation in the impoverishment of blacks. His focus was on individuals, and how, despite adverse conditions, each could be rehabilitated. But the condition was that no black advancement could occur at the expense of whites. It could only take place serving "their own people" in the reserves and the townships.

An ethnic missions policy and an ethnic racial policy

Apartheid as policy was not the product of Kuyperian ideas applied to the racial problem or a manifestation of the Afrikaners' civil religion. It was rather a response to some practical problems confronting both Malan's NP and the Afrikaans churches by the mid-1930s. The first was to find a political policy towards Africans in the wake of the removal of Cape Africans from the common voters' roll and accelerating African urbanisation. The second was widespread Afrikaner poverty (the so-called poor white problem) and the spread of racially mixed slums where many of the poor were living. The third was finding a justification for removing coloured people from the common roll and from racially integrated suburbs. In the case of the DRC there was the pressing need to address a situation, where, inside the borders of South Africa, it was lagging ever further behind other churches in mission work among Africans.

The NP, committed to mobilising the Afrikaners separately in many social spheres, were attracted to the ideas circulating in Protestant churches, particularly in mission circles and missions conferences, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Gustav Warneck and some other German missiologists advocated missions that strengthened the *volksgees* or national spirit. The French missionary Edouard Jacottet in 1907 called for a form of Christianity that needed to become "thoroughly African and present itself to Africans in such a form that they will be able to understand it and to accept it as something of their own" (De Gruchy, 1907: 15).

By the 1920s the DRC was engaged in little mission activity among Africans inside the borders of South Africa, except in the Orange Free State where a separate DRC with its own synod was founded in 1865. By the turn of the twentieth century there were two areas in particular where the DRC was far behind the other main churches. One was in ordaining black ministers. By 1911 English South African churches had 341 missionaries in the country and 171 ordained blacks; the DRC had 225 missionaries and only one ordained black (Elphick 1999a;1999b).

The other area was in the provision of education to black and coloured children. In the decade after the end of the First World War there was a surge in the African demand for education. By 1920 education in South Africa was fully segregated. With the help of state subsidies, church or missions schools provided almost all the education for black and coloured children. Most black education was in the hands of the Roman Catholic and the Anglican Church. From the 1920s the English churches, both local and foreign, steadily moved towards the ideal of a common society and promoted it through an education that stressed Westernisation and a good command of the English language.

A major reason why the DRC lagged behind was political. As in the case of Cape slavery there was a strong white perception that better educated blacks would demand to be put on an equal social and political footing with whites (Elphick1999a). If the DRC was to expand into this area it needed a formula similar to the one of 1857.

In 1921 Professor Johannes du Plessis edited a volume with contributions from ten leading figures in the DRC missionary circles who tried to defend the DRC against the charge of DDT Jabavu, an influential black academic, that it was "an anti-native church." The book admitted that the record of the church with respect to black South Africans was not bright, but pointed out that the DRC was the only large church in the country that had to rely exclusively on local funding for missionary work. While the writers regarded segregation as a "most excellent theory" Elphick (1999b) points out that they were "more aware of the ambiguities, contradictions and pitfalls of segregation than many English-speaking theorists."

As Elphick remarks, Du Plessis developed the intellectual framework for the idea that the DRC was fundamentally a missionary church with a broad social responsibility, and that the church should help shape the social policies of South Africa. While Du Plessis was still a dominant figure there was little chance that the church would embrace a form of political segregation with discrimination and exclusion its main thrust. He could see the need for residential segregation and for segregated voting. At the same time he was firm in his view that whites and blacks had a common stake in the country and that blacks could not be debarred from any trade for which they had the necessary skill. Morals and character would determine the political future, not numbers (Du Plessis 1926).

Yet as a mission strategist Du Plessis was an ambiguous figure. His major work "*Wie sal gaan? Sending in Teorie en Praktyk*", appeared in 1932. Like mission strategists in many other Protestant denominations, he stressed the need to found churches that over time would come to be self-supporting and self-governing. Many of his formulations would find expression and even be repeated verbally in future DRC missions policy documents that proposed apartheid (Bosch 1986).

Within the DRC a conservative reaction had made itself felt by the end of the 1920s. It was related to the advance of two black movements. The first was Ethiopianism, a proto-nationalist movement that founded independent churches for those frustrated with the fact that all the main Christian churches were loath to advance Africans quickly in church offices and were unsympathetic towards African national aspirations. The other was the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union. It mainly concentrated on the urban proletariat, but in some Free State districts it tried to recruit farm workers to the dismay of farmers. A study noted that by the end of the 1920s "the [Kroonstad] district was seething with rumors of pending unrest" (Bradford 1987:4).

The first printed record of the term "apartheid", used in its modern sense, dates back to 1929¹. It must be understood in the above context. In addressing a conference of the Free State DRC on the "native question", held in the town of Kroonstad, the Rev. Jan Christoffel du Plessis (no relation to the professor) said: "In the fundamental idea of our missionary work and not in racial prejudice one must seek an explanation for the spirit of apartheid that has always characterized our [the DRC's] conduct." He rejected a mission's policy that offered blacks no "independent national future."

By "apartheid" Du Plessis meant that the Gospel had to be taught in a way that strengthened the African "character, nature and nationality" and uplifted Africans "on their own terrain, separate and apart." Du Plessis wanted a missions policy for Africans that concentrated on the "*selfsyn*"— being oneself. Implicit in this was the view that only by identifying with one's ethnic community one could be authentically oneself. Du Plessis envisaged the development of autonomous, self-governing black churches as a counter to English missionaries, who in his view persuaded converts to copy "Western civilization and religion."

Du Plessis could hardly deny that the policy he proposed favoured a racially exclusive DRC. But he saw no problem with that: it was all a question of marrying two different objectives: a "sound" mission policy coupled with a policy that allowed Afrikaners to worship separately. The latter was necessary to "ensure the survival of a handful of [Afrikaner] people cut off from their national ties in Europe" (Du Plessis 1929: 22-25, Louw, 1964: 49). Nearly fifty years later a leading figure in the DRC expressed the policy of the church in almost identical terms. Geldenhuys (1982:34) remarked that the church

1. An earlier, eccentric use of the term apartheid is recorded in Hexham (1981: 188).

was faced with the question: "How can we maintain our own people's identity without doing damage to the cause of spreading the Gospel among non-whites?" His reply was: "The answer came out of our missions policy."

At the Kroonstad meeting delegates expressed alarm over the spread of Ethiopianism, which was shared by other speakers. One asked: "Who is today the best friend of the white man in the land?" He gave this answer: "The native who received his education from the DRC. He is the greatest opponent of political agitators" (NGK in die OVS 1929: 34-35). For DRC mission strategists, like Du Plessis and JG (Valie) Strydom, missions secretary of the DRC in the Free State (no relation to the later Prime Minister), mission strategy and political strategy had become intertwined. In his preface to the proceedings of the Kroonstad conference Strydom (1929) stated: "By providing to the native the right kind of Evangelisation and the right kind of learning the danger of assimilation will be removed." This was the kernel of the apartheid idea.

The Kroonstad conference decided to draft a mission policy and submit it to the synod of the Free State DRC in 1931. At this synod meeting the church policy rejected *gelykstelling*, or racial levelling, but affirmed that Africans possessed a soul of equal value in the eyes of God. To justify its rejection of *gelykstelling*, the church proposed that blacks develop "on their own terrain, separate and apart" (Lombard 1985: 308-13).

At a meeting in 1935 of the Federal Council of the DRC a common missions policy was formulated. The church was firm that "education must not be denationalised", but must be based on the group's national culture, giving a prominent place to its language, history and customs. It called for Africans and coloured people to be assisted in developing "into self-respecting Christian nations." Two aspects were new. For the first time coloureds were brought into the scheme as a separate nation. And the church put the stress on the equal worth of all "self-respecting nations", while, before 1935, it had emphasized the equal worth of all individuals before God (Kinghorn, 1986: 86-89).

Thus DRC ministers and missionary strategists were first in the field to formulate an apartheid ideology and to implement it.² Afrikaner nationalism, apartheid and missions policy was becoming a trinity that had separateness as its fundamental principle.

Although a secular justification for apartheid was already in place by 1947, DF Malan preferred to refer to the example DRC and other churches had set. In 1947 he remarked to a delegation of Afrikaans churches: "It was not the state but the church who took the lead with apartheid. The state followed the principle laid down by the church in the field of education for the native, the coloured and the Asian. The result? Friction was eliminated. The Boer church surpasses the other churches in missionary activity. It is the result of apartheid" (Giliomee 2003a : 460). It was indeed the 1857 decision of the DRC condoning segregated worship that had set the Afrikaners on this road.

By the second half of the 1930s the United Party government was moving towards segregated suburbs for people who were not white, but some church ministers also wanted the state to go further and proclaim whites-only suburbs, which often meant that non-whites had to be forcibly resettled. In 1942 GBA Gerdener, Professor of Theology in Stellenbosch became chairman of the Federal Mission Council (FMC) of the DRC. Policy towards missions and pseudo-scientific race theory soon became intertwined. In 1942, when the FMC petitioned the government to introduce urban segregation, it inserted in its submission a memorandum by a biologist, HB Fantham. It maintained that the coloured offspring of

2. A different interpretation that stresses the work of secular scholars in the drafting of the apartheid plan is by Dubow (1995: 246-83).

white-black intermixture displayed negative social and mental characteristics. In a 1943 meeting between an FMC delegation and Prime Minister Smuts, the delegation requested a ban on racially mixed marriages. Smuts rejected this, declaring that "the line between white and coloured people in many instances could not be drawn" (Giliomee 1989:47).

In 1944 Gerdener, through the FMC, joined with the *Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge* to organise a *volkskongres*, or people's congress, on racial policy, which drew on both theologians and secular academics for speakers. The Reformed churches and the full array of nationalist organisations participated. Several proposals for a racial policy were made. They included the prohibition of blood mixture, establishing full control over a "white South Africa" and extending a policy of urban residential segregation (what DF Malan called group areas apartheid) to the reserves. Here black "nations" would administer themselves and cultivate a feeling of pride in their own tribe or *volk*. It was here that JD du Toit (1944) presented one of the first Biblical justifications of apartheid.

Even Hendrik Verwoerd, who rarely used anything but secular arguments, seemed to be enthralled by the idea that apartheid could be divinely inspired. He wrote that Afrikaners' survival struggle against millions of non-whites would become more difficult. However, the Afrikaners would prevail if they clung to a single idea: "it was in accordance with God's will that different races and *volke* exist." (*Die Transvaler*, 16 February 1947).

In 1948 the Synod of the Transvaal DRC accepted a report that took as its starting point the 1935 missions policy and used the Tower of Babel and the Old Testament history of Israel as justifications for apartheid. There was still no agreement that the coloured people constituted a *volk*, which made the Cape DRC initially reluctant to use this justification. Increasingly, however, policy towards coloured people was formulated in virtually the same terms as those used for blacks. A FMC memorandum of 1947 declared that God had ordained separate *volke* and races, giving each a *nasiegevoel* or feelings of nationality and *volksiel*, or national soul. It recognised the coloureds as one of the races that had to develop separately and on its own terrain, while whites had to help them to become useful citizens (Kingham: 1986:92).

Missions policy remained intertwined with racial policy and the Afrikaners' quest for political survival. In 1947 the Afrikaner Broederbond initiated a discussion of the question whether the DRC was wise to expend such large resources on missionary efforts outside the country. The meeting, which Gerdener along with other church leaders attended, decided to concentrate on missionary work within the South African borders, particularly in the cities. White missionaries had to be replaced by black office bearers and black churches had to be helped to develop into autonomous churches. Eiselen proposed that the state take over black schools, on which it spent £4,000,000 every year, mainly as contributions to the salaries for the church schools (Stals 1998:234-36).

In 1959, two years after his retirement, Gerdener still stressed the fundamental importance of missionary work in the struggle to win the hearts and minds of the black majority. He was pleased to quote the response of MC de Wet Nel, Minister for Native Affairs in the Verwoerd cabinet, to the question what one's greatest contribution to the welfare of South Africa could be. "Become missionary", was Nel's reply (Gerdener 1959:127).

As Bosch (1961:35) pointed out, this was no different from the defunct policy of the European colonial powers of using missions to realize their political objectives. The fact also was that the DRC's resources were much too limited to disseminate its message. It founded nine new separate black churches between 1932 and 1968. In 1951 there were 297 382 Africans who were members of African churches in the DRC family out of a total

African population in South Africa of eight and a half million people. The DRC now embraced only 3,2 per cent of Africans against 45,3 per cent of Africans and 30,6 per cent of coloured, (Badenhorst 1956:89). By 1970 there were one-and-a-half million African, coloured and Indian DRC members in different DRC “daughter” churches out of a total non-white population of nearly 18 000 000 people.

The quest for ‘absolute and total’ apartheid

Church ministers and theologians were much less inclined than secular academics or politicians to express themselves in crude racist terms. For them there could be no question of a hierarchy of souls, churches, or cultures. They groped for a bigger idea that could motivate people (and themselves) and ease their consciences. At the same time Afrikaner nationalism, apartheid and missions policy by the early 1940s was becoming a trinity that had separateness as its fundamental principle.

In 1940 the Rev William Nicol of Johannesburg gave a much-discussed sermon in which he stated that while he laboured for the separate survival of the Afrikaner people, he would rather see the Afrikaners swamped by other peoples if they tried to survive without God and His justice. But how was the demand for justice to be met? Nicol proposed that “self-determination had to be granted to the non-white races on every terrain of life”. Since no limits could be put on the development of blacks there had to be a complete *afskieding* or segregation, as a solution that combined the Christian demand for justice with “the need to give to our posterity a future as a European race”. It was, however, not a plea for partition but for the development of the existing reserves (*Die Transvaler* 12 June 1940; Steyn 1998: 293; Cronjé et al 1947: 21-22. 39).

The church leader who made the greatest contribution towards formulating a form of apartheid that went beyond narrow Afrikaner survival concerns was G.B.A. Gerdener. Professor of Missiology at the University of Stellenbosch, Gerdener was a church leader with extraordinary influence in Afrikaner missions’ circles, the Broederbond and among secular academics working on a new approach to the racial problem. Gerdener’s father and father-in-law were both Rhenish missionaries, while he himself was one of the founders of the DRC mission church in the Transvaal and of the mission journal *Op die Horison*, which he edited (Vander Watt 1990).

He combined several strands in the church’s thinking about apartheid. Apartheid, he wrote in *Op die Horison*, “required a Christian and generous political approach”. It was not based on race or colour alone but on colour “paired... with language, tradition and life-style”. It did not imply a social hierarchy but a “relationship of equals in separate terrains”. He did not go along with Biblical justifications of apartheid and would soon deplore the use of the word, but to him *eiesoortige ontwikkeling* (autochthonous development) was the only policy that met the demands of Christian trusteeship, benefited the missionary project and made it possible for all races to make a unique contribution. It also countered “a process of bastardisation”, which he thought vital for Afrikaner survival (Gerdener 1947, 1951,1959; Van der Watt 1990:292).

In the early 1940s secular academics and journalists began to take part in the debate on a racial policy that represented a distinctly Afrikaner approach. Three Stellenbosch scholars, PJ Coertze (a lecturer in Anthropology), FJ Language (“Native Administration”) and BIC van Eeden (Bantu Languages) wrote the first book (it was more an extended pamphlet) that propagated a policy called apartheid in social science language. It proposed a policy of “absolute and total segregation”. Blacks had to be steadily withdrawn from the white economy and transferred to the territories where they “belonged”, with white labour

taking their place. Only those "absolutely necessary" were permitted to remain. The study also advocated the regeneration of traditional institutions in the reserves where Africans could administer themselves, preserve their customs and restore discipline together with all "that was healthy in the *volkseie*" (Coertze, Language and Van Eeden 1943).

The authors' acknowledgement in the preface of Gerdener's influence highlights the marriage of the ideas of mission strategists and secular nationalists. But after Gerdener (1943) had read the book he sounded a note of caution in his journal. He found the authors too dogmatic and almost authoritarian. The Afrikaners could not hope to solve the racial problem all on their own, staking everything on Afrikaner unity and a resolute Afrikaner nationalist government imposing apartheid despite all obstacles. Time and again Gerdener stressed that the time of white paternalists and submissive servants had gone. He envisaged a solution that called for heavy sacrifices on the part of white taxpayers to establish viable black "homelands" (Elphick 1999b).

Gerdener endorsed segregated residential areas for coloured people as well as blacks, but he differed from most other Nationalists in urging that coloured people must not be compelled to move to these townships. He seemed to think that residential segregation could be implemented fairly. At a 1945 conference of the DRC Sendingkerk (for coloureds) he demanded that coloured townships had to be "one hundred per cent with respect to privileges and facilities" (Gerdener 1951: 102).

In 1945 the NP accepted apartheid as its official racial policy and in 1947 DF Malan appointed his confidant Paul Sauer to head a party commission to turn apartheid into a comprehensive racial policy. Also on the Commission were three NP parliamentarians (one from each northern province) and Gerdener as the only non-politician. His presence symbolised the fusion of mission policy and apartheid. This report has been extensively discussed (Posel 1997: 58-60) and it need not detain us here. It is only necessary to stress that in rejecting "equal rights and opportunities for all regardless of colour within a single state structure", the report used terminology very similar to the thinking in mission and church circles: "It was decreed by God that diverse races and *volke* should survive and grow naturally as part of a Divine plan".

The Sauer report incorporated a section on mission policy, which almost certainly was drafted by Gerdener: "The Gospel had to be taught to all *volke* and population groups as part of the calling of the Christian church", and the aim of mission work was "self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating churches". These were terms straight from the missiological writings of Protestant missionaries in the first decade or two of the century. The report recommended a strict Christian-National education for blacks according to their ethnic nature, aptitude and background that would make it possible "to cultivate Bantu-worthy [sic] citizens." Werner Eiselen would soon be put in charge of administering such a policy (Sauer, 1947: 13).

The church leaders did not see themselves as engaging in a reckless ideological project that ran against the prevailing white consensus. An article written in all probability by Valie Strydom (1948) of the Free State in the immediate aftermath of the 1948 election, observed that never was there more hatred and bitterness between whites and blacks. This, he declared, was not the result of apartheid but the racial mixing that was occurring the towns and cities. Apartheid was meant to end that friction. The church leaders believed that the necessary funds would be made available for their idealistic conception of the policy.

They were fooling themselves. It was an illusion that any government would have the resources to build coloured townships that were "hundred per cent", to use Gerdener's words. Neither was it able to provide "the best social, welfare and community services for

natives in the reserves”, as the Sauer report of 1947 (Sauer report, 1947: 9) recommended. Gerdener had all along insisted that the white taxpayers would have to be prepared to pay a heavy price to make apartheid succeed.

Only a few churchmen voiced a note of caution. Ben Marais (1947: 76-79) warned that “true apartheid” of the kind propagated by Gerdener would come “at an enormously high price”. It would face opposition from “ninety per cent of those who today are supporters of segregation or apartheid.” Like Bennie Keet, Marais objected to the attempt to find any justification for apartheid in the Scriptures. But both accepted it as a practical policy provided, as Marais (1948: 1596) phrased it, that the policy be implemented with “a sense of Christian responsibility and not selfishly”. In a political system completely dominated by whites it soon became clear that it would be all but impossible to satisfy that proviso.

After the surprising NP victory in the 1948 election Gerdener became the driving force in the attempt to push for apartheid as a policy whose thrust was territorial separation rather than discrimination. In 1950 he organized a church conference on the racial issue which was attended by representatives of the “mother” and all “sister” (black and colored) churches in the DRC family, as well as of the Gereformeerde and Hervormde churches. Just before the conference, Gerdener (1950: 1-5) published an article that conveyed a sense of his own unease over apartheid. He confessed that he had never liked the word, which had become “a shibboleth of sinister intentions, misunderstanding and irresponsible talk.” It suggested a static situation but in actual fact apartheid was intended to mean something dynamic. He formulated the Reformed Church’s position as follows: “If the contribution of every racial group in this, our common fatherland, is to be guaranteed, the way of separation and not of integration is the correct one.”

At the conference the Afrikaner church leaders called for “total separation” and the elimination of Africans from “white industrial life.” The conference did not specify a territorial base for the plan, but both the church leaders and secular academics advocated a policy of different homelands for the major African ethnic groups. Their argument was that since whites would rebuff black demands for equality in the common area, they would do better to build institutions in their own autonomous states.

In 1950, with the NP government two years in power, the unrealistic optimism of Gerdener and some other church leaders received a rude shock. Prime Minister DF Malan rejected their call for “total apartheid.” He was, as his son (Malan n.d.) pointed out, never interested in the scheme of separate black “homelands”, only in “group areas apartheid”. To the church leaders Malan replied: “If one could attain total territorial apartheid, if it were practicable, everybody would admit that it would be an ideal state of affairs ... but that is not the policy of our party ... and it is nowhere to be found in our official declaration of policy.” The next year he repeated his position in even blunter terms: “The Afrikaans churches” policy of total separation is not the policy of the Nationalist Party.” (*House of Assembly Debates* 1950: cols 4141-42). The government’s negative response to total separation came as a great disappointment to the apartheid theorists, though they took heart from the fact that the government, in 1950, had appointed a commission to investigate ways of increasing the human carrying capacity of the reserves. It was to be headed by Professor FR Tomlinson, an acknowledged expert in agricultural economics.

The church leaders who supported apartheid wanted a policy that guaranteed Afrikaner survival but which did not commit any injustice against blacks and coloured people. They believed they found such a policy in apartheid. As the historian Richard Elphick (1999b) remarks, the church leaders were enthralled by their utopian vision and would continue to justify the unjustifiable, thus easing the way for the politicians.

The Dynamics of Apartheid

The NP election victory of 1948 was not won by apartheid but by a broad Afrikaner nationalist programme in which apartheid was merely one plank (Giliomee 2003a: 455-6; Brits 1994). In the 1950s and early 1960s a popular nationalism, striving to attain Afrikaner emancipation from domination by British imperial interests and local English-speakers, provided the dynamism of Afrikaner political life. With the establishment in 1961 of a republic outside the British Commonwealth much of the dynamism was dissipated. Apartheid, which previously was only the operational policy of Afrikaner nationalism, now became the NP's chief rationale.

To retain its support it became increasingly important for the NP that the church leadership, forming an intimate part of the nationalist movement endorse apartheid and that the Afrikaners in general continue to see apartheid as prerequisite for their political survival. The NP leadership was successful beyond their wildest dreams despite criticism from some Afrikaner theologians. In 2001 the Institute for Reconciliation and Justice, founded to continue the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, encountered surprising responses when people were asked to react to this statement: "There were certainly some abuses under the old apartheid system, but the ideas behind apartheid were basically good". About 40 per cent of entire population – 40 per cent of coloured people and 65 per cent of the Afrikaners agreed³ Below are the responses in full:

Table 2:

Responses to the question whether the basic idea of apartheid was good

	<i>True</i>	<i>Not true</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
<i>All South Africans</i>	39	55	7
Afrikaners	65	29	5
White English	36	60	5
Xhosa-speaking	18	73	9
Zulu-speaking	25	65	10

Why did the twins of nationalism and apartheid gain such a tight grip on the Afrikaners and the Afrikaner churches in particular? I wish to suggest two answers, which have not been underplayed in the literature. The first is material. Tables 3 and 4 highlights the fact that the Afrikaner community was remarkably free from serious income inequalities. In 1946, 90 per cent of the Afrikaners were bunched in the income category of R0-R 6 000. If white egalitarianism and white racism go hand in hand, as the theory cited above suggests, one would expect very strong support for apartheid as an ideology that masked a racist programme.

3. The source of the data is a survey conducted and published by the Cape Town-based Institute for Reconciliation and Justice (www.ijr.org.za). This survey was undertaken at the end of 2000 and the beginning of 2001 and involved 3 727 interviews. The interviews were conducted in the language of choice of the respondent.

Table 3:
Distribution (percentages) of Afrikaner income groups in selected years (1980 incomes)

<i>Income category</i>	<i>Afrikaner income earners (people with no income excluded)</i>			<i>Total Afrikaners</i>		
	<i>1946</i>	<i>1960</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>1946</i>	<i>1960</i>	<i>1980</i>
R 0-6000	89,1	61,9	51,4	93,9	85,3	76,8
R 6000-12000	9,1	33,7	36,2	5,1	13,0	17,3
R 12000-18000	1,3	1,8	8,3	0,7	0,7	4,0

Source: T.J Steenekamp (1989:193)

Another material reason for the growing NP support and indirectly for apartheid that became the party's main plank in the 1950s was the broad-based nature of the Afrikaners' economic advance since 1948. Between 1946 and 1960 a large middle-income group emerged among Afrikaners, who helped to blur the divide between the small very rich stratum and the poorest Afrikaners. Table 3 shows that the proportion of Afrikaners earning between R6 000 and R12 000 increased nearly four times from 9 per cent to 33 per cent. The apartheid system helped to ensure near-full employment among Afrikaners and whites as a whole.

The income inequality in the Afrikaner group was relatively small as measured by the Gini-coefficient (a measurement of the inequality between the lowest and highest income groups that takes 1 for complete equality and 0 for complete inequality). A rate of 40 for Afrikaner males in 1960 and 44 for the Afrikaner population was not large if one takes into account that it is 0,37 for the population of developed countries in Europe and 0,58 for the present South Africa population (Table 4). For Afrikaners the inequality rate remained constant between 1946 and 1980 and for male income earners it even slightly improved. It took more than 30 years before a visible layer of rich Afrikaners developed with 8 per cent earning more than R12, 000. The remarkable political solidarity of Afrikaners between 1948 and 1976 probably had less to do with support for apartheid than with the fact that all Afrikaner income groups benefited from NP rule.

Table 4:
Gini-coefficients for Afrikaner income earners for selected years

<i>Income earners</i>	<i>1946</i>	<i>1960</i>	<i>1980</i>
Total	0,464	0,441	0,446
Male	0,443	0,398	0,404

Source, Steenekamp (1989: p.208)

Apartheid also enjoyed such durable support because it was such a two-faced policy. A commission headed by Henry Fagan, in the so-called Fagan report published just before the 1948 election concluded that the economic integration of the races had proceeded so far that complete segregation was impossible. Fagan (1959: 25, 42-44) was sceptical of the homelands policy but added that "it could not be stressed enough" that the proponents of this scheme did not mean to commit any injustice towards blacks. It was only from the early 1980s, when the homelands policy had utterly collapsed, that the church leaders began to reconsider apartheid.

The ambiguity of apartheid

One could end with a note on the ambiguity of history. Apartheid carried the seeds of its own destruction. In terms of the DRC's missions policy the churches it founded would become self-governing and independent institutions with the implication that they would become independent and as such as speak on an equal footing with the "mother church" about the true Biblical message for South Africa. In 1982 the coloured and black "sister" DRC churches, particularly the *Sendingkerk*, wielded sufficient influence to have the (white) DRC suspended from the World Alliance of Reformed Church. It was the international affiliation to which the DRC attached greatest value. Reformed Churches in the USA and in Europe now all rejected apartheid as heretical.

Also in 1982 the *Sendingkerk* drafted the Belhar Confession, which called on the DRC to confess its guilt for providing the moral and theological foundation for apartheid.

It is noteworthy that the Belhar Confession was accepted about five years after the coloured minister had become a majority. It dealt a crushing blow to apartheid theology. It is difficult to envisage the Catholic Church in Brazil to being rocked to a similar degree by a theological message from those excluded from power.

Table 5:

Coloured and white ministers in the Dutch Reformed Sendingkerk (Mission Church)

	<i>Coloured</i>	<i>White</i>
1937	1	62
1946	3	79
1958	11	127
1966	43	122
1970	62	127
1974	90	105
1978	104	98
1982	116	89
1986	134	90

Source: Communication David Botha--H Giliomee 18 September 2002

By the mid 1970s apartheid as an ideology was beginning to collapse in many areas. Its historiographical foundations had been swept away by the flood of publications by historians, sociologists and anthropologists which challenged the Nationalist interpretation that had found its way into many school texts. It was now quite unfashionable to argue that the land belonged to the whites who had planted civilization.⁴ The apartheid view that integration in the workplace or residential areas would trigger major clashes proved to be wrong, although the lack of violence was largely due to the way in which a still reasonably strong state controlled change. Another view that became discredited was that of an incipient inter-tribal war in the African community. Clashes that did take place occurred more along generational or political lines than ethnic lines. The steady Westernization of urban blacks made the call to preserve "white civilization" look increasingly threadbare.

The support the Afrikaans churches gave to apartheid was always indispensable for the NP's ideological cohesion. Polls taken since the early 1970s showed that what counted for

4. JM du Preez, *Africana Afrikaner* (Alberton: Liberatus, 1983).

Afrikaners was the maintenance of public order and security through a policy sanctioned by the church or in line with privately held moral and religious principles. "To lead an upright and moral life" was rated first in rank ordering of nine issues in polls taken in 1974 and 1977 (Schlemmer 1999:184; Schlemmer 2001). This emphasis remained constant. In 2001 nearly 90 per cent of Afrikaners (against 40 per cent of English-speakers) indicated that they considered religion as more important than politics or money.

But the ideology of apartheid would retain its hold on perhaps most Afrikaners if the church continued to endorse the basic idea that God had willed the existence of Afrikaners and indeed all nations. As late as 1974 the Dutch Reformed Church synod reaffirmed the stale story of Babel as a parable of God's creation of distinct peoples. On the basis of this it justified apartheid and rejected non-racial membership for the DRC as an unacceptable erosion of the church's ethnic identity. When the government itself wanted to withdraw from parts of apartheid the DRC was unable to help it. In the early 1980s it refused to support Botha when he wanted to abolish the Immorality Act and the Mixed Marriages Act. But the church was becoming isolated. Very few other peoples had made the happy discovery that God had willed their existence.

The DRC finally broke with apartheid at its 1986 and 1990 synods. In 1986 it declared that the church was open to anyone regardless of colour. It formally decided to base its view of racial policy on the New Testament, in which "the idea of race plays no part whatsoever." The church had made a major about turn, but for some critics of the church this was insufficient: they wanted the church to state that it had acted out of malign and sinful intent in helping to design apartheid in the 1930s and 1940s. The 1986 and 1990 synods refused to make any declaration along such lines, and explicitly stated that some of those who promoted apartheid also had good intentions. However, it admitted that the church had erred by allowing forced separation to be seen as biblically justified, and by not pointing out this error at a much earlier stage. The great majority of the population, the church declared, had experienced apartheid as a system of oppression and discrimination that violated their human dignity. Such a system clashed with the Bible, and was sinful and a major error (NGK, 1986,1990; Jonker 1998).

For more than three centuries there has been a very close connection between the DRC and the Afrikaner community. For most of the time the church put most of its energy into preserving the unity of the church and the bonds with the community despite the existence of obnoxious institutions like slavery and apartheid. Any frontal attack on these institutions would have split the church right through the middle. As a result the church failed to develop a Except for the forty years after end of the Second World War there were in the official statements of the church very little Reformed theology in evidence; everything was geared towards retaining the unity of the church as the bedrock of Afrikaner nationalist unity. Without a coherent theology the church risks losing its rationale for a large proportion of its membership once power relations in society change fundamentally.

In *Devils*, Dostoevsky's novel first published in 1871, the character Shatov says something that is wonderfully applicable to those who belonged to the DRC less because it they were believers than because it was the semi-official church of the Afrikaner nationalist movement.

The goal of every national movement... is solely the search for God, for their God, for their very own God and belief in Him as the only true God...It is a sign of the decay of nations when they begin to have gods in common. When the gods actually become common to nations they die, as does all faith in them, together with the nations themselves... Every nation has its own conception, and its own particular good and evil.

When these conceptions become common to many nations, the nations begin to die and the very distinction between good and evil begins to fade away and disappear' (Dostoevsky, 1871, 1992:264).

The significance of the decisions of the DRC Synod in 1986 and 1990 was that they left the Afrikaners without their own national god or their own distinctive conception of good and evil. (Akenson 1992) But while this removed an albatross from the DRC's neck it also created the major crises of identity and relevance with which the church struggles today.

Christian 'realism' and the way forward for the DRC

What is the way forward? In my researches for this paper I was surprised to come across scores of dissertations on the DRC history in which the chief source of inspiration is a theologian or philosopher from the continent of Europe, but I have seen none so far who takes seriously the work of Reinhold Niebuhr, the leading and most original Protestant writer on what one could call applied Christianity in the USA during the twentieth century.

Niebuhr grasped the fundamental truth that the church can actually do damage in being too idealistic about the resolution of conflicts in society and by being too ignorant about how political power and people in power actually operate. Some of the most influential American scholars, including the major liberal historians Vann Woodward and Arthur Schlesinger, jr., the hugely influential diplomat and analyst of the Cold War George Kennan, and the leading political scientist Samuel Huntington, consider Niebuhr as their spiritual godfather.

Travelling through Germany during the 1930s, Niebuhr sadly concluded that the followers of Karl Barth looked for the salvation "above the area of history" because they lived in an "old nation" that had suffered repeated defeats. He wanted America and the church to discover its identity to come to terms with its peculiar history. As a young nation America had developed delusions of innocence and virtue, which it carried over to adulthood at which point it bred the perils of overweening power and overweening virtue (Stone 1972; Fox 1986; Brown 1992).

Niebuhr wrote in times of great uncertainty: the Depression of the 1930s when he briefly became a Marxist, World War Two and the Cold War. He saw himself as a Christian realist rather than a Christian idealist, arguing that a vision of pending catastrophe was more realistic than the view held by liberal idealists that there was a kind of necessary underlying harmony in the world, a sort of invisible hand making for good. For liberals progress was possible if people pursued their true interests rationally and scientifically. They considered all conflicts to be due to misconception of interest due to a false religion, prejudice and superstition.

Niebuhr did not believe that social evils were wholly the result of ignorance, or doctrinal error, or environmental circumstances; rather they were rooted in the conflict between man's collective behaviour and the moral ideals of an individual life. Niebuhr as a Christian realist urged Christians not to be content with advocating moderation and telling all parties not to stand too firmly on any particular principle.

Niebuhr's key insight was that man as an individual may treat a member of another group in a civil way, but as part of a nation, or an ethnic or racial group or a class he is a different animal. He tends to insist on tough methods to advance the cause of his nation, ethnic group or class, he believes in the righteousness of its cause and will yield only if sufficient power is raised against it. Any idea that the power struggle could somehow be somehow be finessed and that people will listen to appeals to "reason" or the "broader principles of cooperation" will fall on stony ground until the power balance tilts.

In the early 1930s he observed that the “white race in America will not admit the Negro to equal rights if it is not forced to do so”. He advocated the non-violent strategy that Martin Luther King thirty years later adopted (Niebuhr, 1934:xi-xxv, 253). When King’s campaign triggered violent resistance he noted frankly: “We Protestants might begin the new chapter in our national life by contritely confessing that evangelical Christianity has failed to contribute significantly to the solution of the gravest social issue and evil that our nation has confronted since slavery” (Brown 1992:110).

Niebuhr did not think that an aggressive defence of a national group or a country was wrong. He favoured an activist role for the Church, because one could not assume that communism would become more democratic or that Nazism would be defeated. He supported the USA in Cold War but strongly opposed the war in Vietnam. He considered as sinful any association of partial or finite national interests with the objective of God. He took as a model the prophet Amos, who showed that Israel’s special mission gave it no special security in history. For Amos the very idea that Israel enjoyed special divine favour represented the corruption of pride for which Israel must be punished.

He did not deny the possibility that a nation could formulate a legitimate national mission. His quest to recover an authentic American mission attracted even Martin Luther King. But Niebuhr rejected the idea that any nation could expect favoured treatment from God or connect their mission to the “destiny of history”. For him history is characterized by irony rather than progress. It is the supreme irony of history that man so often defines security in such a way that the more he pursues this the more insecure he becomes.

As a lay member of a DRC parish in Stellenbosch it seems to me as if there is a strong tendency in the church to solve its crisis of relevance in a post-apartheid order by simply reverting to the apolitical evangelicalism of the Cape church in the late nineteenth century. Apart from religious orthodoxy, Evangelicalism stressed a “vital religion of the heart”, of which the central elements were conversion, the Atonement, and the winning of souls for the Kingdom of God. Evangelicals tended largely to shy away from political or social activism or from a close alliance with a social movement or party. They spelled out broad Christian principles as they saw them, but rarely made their meaning concrete for political life.

Two points can be made about this. Apartheid did not come about because Kuyper’s neo-Calvinism was intellectually so attractive but because Evangelicalism was politically so ineffective. Prior to the Anglo-Boer War did not concretise the applied political meaning of Christianity and was unprepared for the heady mixture of a *volkskerk* and an ethnic missions policy. The second point is that today the DRC is poorly equipped to compete against the charismatic churches in the market of pietism and religious revivalism.

To me the most important contribution the DRC can make is to spread the message, rooted in its own historic experience, that being too close to power is dangerous, as it undoubtedly was for the DRC in the apartheid period. But there is an equally great danger in avoiding to engage with those in power about the issues of justice and freedom.

The greatest danger in all our history is unchecked political power. In the apartheid era there was a government whose arrogance was born in the knowledge that it had no reason to fear being displaced at the polling booth. Today it is the same, and although the present one is slightly more constrained by a constitution there is no real balance of power. The political leadership can ignore appeals from the churches about Aids, pornography, Zimbabwe or mass poverty. The legitimate black drive for racial justice has become a headlong rush to empower the black elite.

The poor are helpless not only because they are untrained but because they are not allowed to sell their labour at a price below that set by the unions or the government. They

are helpless because they are not represented in the corporate triangle of big business, unions and government where decisions are made with a view to their respective interests.

In addressing the Afrikaner Bond in 1999 President Mbeki (1999) said:

One of the biggest problems facing our people today is that of poverty. Our duty is not only poverty alleviation, but also how to end this poverty, how to create an enabling environment for all our people to work, eat, learn and live their lives to the full. ... The Afrikaners have vast experience in these areas; and we challenge everyone today to come into partnership with government in making this programme a success.

What the church needs to tell government that there must be a balance: between the unionised worker and his employer but also between the protecting the employed and offering opportunities to the unemployed, between affirmative action and between offering all people in the country, regardless of their colour, a fair chance to find work and be promoted in both public and private sector. The church needs to tell government that it cannot try to attract skilled people abroad while some of its own members are jobless or do menial work only because they are too white and have to atone for the sins of apartheid even if they had no part in that.

The church must also intervene with government, the education departments and universities adopt policies that undermine the ability of Afrikaans to survive as a public language. If Afrikaans becomes marginalized across the country the DRC will face a serious problem to reproduce itself from this generation to a next one.

There is a vocal section in our Afrikaans public life who dislikes such talk. They do not want any mobilization of Afrikaner economic or cultural interests because it smacks too much of apartheid or because it distracts from the more pressing problems they believe the majority faces. They do not want any conflict or any pressure to articulate specific collective interests. If any conflict arises they want the constitution to solve it. They can be called "constitution optimists."

In developing his creed of political realism Niebuhr had little time for the idealists in the church whose approach to politics was to deprecate all conflict, to discourage people from mobilisation and to continue to preach brotherly love. For him justice depends on some balance of power. Without it even the most loving relationships may degenerate into unjust relations, with love becoming the screen that hides injustice.

The DRC has little option but tear down the screen that hides injustice and to organize, along with other sectors of civil society, when its own principles or its members' economic or cultural interests are affected and try to speak its truth to government. In doing so there is much in its history that it can draw. In fact more than is the case in any other church, history *happened* to the DRC— the "weakness of some" that has become the organizing principle of the church, the seduction of an ideology that promised to safeguard survival at the expense of others, the sterling role it played in the rehabilitation of the Afrikaner poor, the corruption of power and a too close relationship with the powers that be and finally the fall from the pinnacles of power and experiencing first hand the truth that he who wants to cling to all power will end up with none of it.

In the humble situation that the church finds itself today there is no better advice than that given by the Chilean author and human rights activist Ariel Dorfman (1997) in talking about the white-black power struggle when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was in session. "Shame cannot be the centre of growth and a new life. Both sides need the cleansing process of looking at the past, letting it become a fundamental part of their understanding and then moving onwards with hope."

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