



# Evangelicalism and Racial Exclusivism in Afrikaner History: An Ambiguous Relationship

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## Abstract

What was the relationship in South Africa between evangelicalism and policies of segregation and apartheid in Afrikaner reformed Christianity? This article critically engages this question in reference to the claim by David Bosch that the first internal voices of protest against apartheid came from the side of evangelicals who had been involved in crosscultural mission. This considers the background of the theory, some historical representatives of evangelicalism in South Africa, and the hybridization of evangelicalism in the lives of certain dissident Afrikaner theologians. The conclusion assesses possible ways in which the Bosch thesis may, or may not, pertain to evangelicalism more generally.

## Keywords

Afrikaner, Andrew Murray, apartheid, Beyers Naudé, evangelical, Johannes du Plessis

## Introduction

This article engages, and critically examines, the provocative theory posited by a number of South African theologians—most notably the late David Bosch—that ultimately the voices which were most critical of apartheid within Afrikanerdom were to come from the side of evangelicals with strong missionary interests. Evangelicalism itself is of course a disputed concept, with different interest groups historically laying claim to it. Rather than resolving this semantic tension, this article will further problematize the term by introducing even more ways in which it could be understood. However, at its most basic I take ‘evangelicalism’ to refer to that stream in Protestantism that stresses the importance of an inner conviction of personal salvation through Jesus Christ. The significance for this article of such a ‘new birth’ in Christ is that it typically implies that one’s Christian identity should subsequently supersede and claim priority over all other categories of belonging.

With the South African, and specifically Afrikaner, context in mind, the so-called *evangelical stream* refers, on the one hand, to the direct influence of the *Réveil*—a pietistic and revivalist 19th century movement—on certain elements of Dutch Protestantism, which was subsequently carried over into the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa. Yet it also refers to the influence of Scottish evangelicals such as the Murrays (see below), who had similarly been influenced by the *Réveil* as well as by the Holiness movement—as particularly characterised by the Keswick convention in England. This segment of evangelicalism placed a high premium on personal renewal and the inner movement of the Spirit. It tended to be experiential as opposed to doctrinal, and this was one of the main points of contention between what Bosch calls reformed evangelicalism and the emotionally restrained confessional neo-Calvinism that increasingly gained ground in early 20th century Afrikanerdom.<sup>1</sup> However, there was also an intellectual influence on evangelicalism in the DRC, particularly in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This came via the ‘Utrecht school’ as represented by the theologians Doedes and Van Oosterzee, and brought to South Africa by the founders of the theological seminary at Stellenbosch, most notably John Murray, the brother of Andrew Jr. This theological stream, although opposed to the relativizing tendencies of the 19th century liberal tradition in the Netherlands, made use of the historical-critical method in Scriptural exegesis and was by no means anti-intellectual, as was poignantly indicated by the fact that one of their last and most famous disciples in South Africa was the controversial Johannes du Plessis, who was accused of heresy due to his alleged modernism<sup>2</sup> (see below).

### Background to the Bosch Thesis

In two important and thematically overlapping articles,<sup>3</sup> David J. Bosch indicated three streams of ideological and religious influence that played decisive roles in Afrikaner identity formation. These more or less inseparably fused

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<sup>1</sup> See Murray Hermanus Coetzee, *Die “Kritiese Stem” teen Apartheidsteologie in die Ned Geref Kerk (1905-1974): ‘n Analise van die Bydraes van Ben Marais en Beyers Naudé* [The “Critical Voice” against Apartheid theology in the DRC (1905-1974): an Analysis of the Contributions of Ben Marais and Beyers Naudé] (Wellington: Bybel-Media, 2010), 172ff.

<sup>2</sup> See Coetzee, “Kritiese Stem”, 168ff.

<sup>3</sup> David J. Bosch, “The Afrikaner and South Africa,” *Theology Today* 43:2 (1986); David J. Bosch, “Afrikaner Civil Religion and the Current South African Crisis,” *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* (1986).

with their views and treatment of the native African population. The three “forces of the spirit”,<sup>4</sup> according to Bosch, were German romantic nationalism, reformed evangelicalism, and Kuypertian neo-Calvinism.

Bosch argued that all three streams were essential ingredients to the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the development of racial policies, which culminated in apartheid. However, in the same article he makes the claim that the first internal rejection of apartheid eventually came from the side of Afrikaners involved in cross-cultural mission, a group that was of course particularly influenced by the very same reformed evangelicalism, which he had indicated as one of the foundational building blocks to Afrikaner communal identity.<sup>5</sup>

Murray Coetzee, in a very thoroughly researched doctoral thesis, gives greater nuance to the historical theological context of the DRC. As significant theological streams he mentions the Utrecht stream which merged with Scottish evangelical pietism, Princeton fundamentalism, which in turn merged with Kuypertian neo-Calvinism, German national romanticism, as well as Gustav Warneck’s missiology (see below).<sup>6</sup> This is more or less in line with Bosch’s more generalised presentation of the historical context.

It would appear that there was a fault line running through at least one of Bosch’s building blocks. On the one hand reformed evangelicalism (what Coetzee refers to as the Utrecht and Scottish stream) served to help legitimate Afrikaner racial policies, while on the other, at least for some, it made those very policies seem increasingly unpalatable and contrary to the will of God.

How does one account for the paradoxical outcomes of an on the surface uncomplicated historical influence? I would like to reflect on this question. To go about answering this question one must recognize that the way evangelicalism has functioned in Afrikaner history was always in interaction with other social and political forces, some of which I shall attempt to describe in this article.

Having been firmly established in the Cape colony by Dutch ministers, who were influenced by the ‘Second Reformation’ in the Netherlands and by evangelical awakenings in Britain towards the end of the 18th century—such as H. R. van Lier and M. C. Vos—Bosch claims that such Reformed pietism was a stronger influence than classical Calvinism. The idea that early Afrikaners were in any way comparable to the well-educated Puritans who settled the North American colonies of New England is soundly rejected by Bosch in support of

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<sup>4</sup> Bosch, “The Afrikaner,” 208.

<sup>5</sup> Bosch, “The Afrikaner,” 209.

<sup>6</sup> Coetzee, “*Kritiese Stem*,” 126ff.

the work by André du Toit.<sup>7</sup> Even W. A. de Klerk—whose 1975 book *The Puritans in Africa* partly contributed to the popular mythologizing of Afrikaners as quintessentially Calvinist—elaborates on the vast differences between the educational attainments in the New England colonies where “Grammar schools taught the classics . . .”,<sup>8</sup> on the one hand, and the Cape where rural colonists tented to rely “on the Scriptures and also, if they were lucky, on an elementary textbook . . .”<sup>9</sup> The Bible was often the only book in circulation among early Afrikaner families. According to Bosch these Cape Dutch colonists were uncomplicated people with “literalist” views of scripture, and “Calvinists only in name.”<sup>10</sup>

Bosch describes how the ‘Calvinist’ label and the concept of ‘manifest destiny’ were originally identified in and attributed to the Afrikaner by outsiders such as the missionary traveller David Livingstone, who ascribed implicitly Israelite tendencies to them. Nevertheless, Livingstone was not impressed when he thought he had discovered this characteristic among Afrikaners. In his own cultural chauvinism he denied any legitimacy to an Afrikaner mirroring his own Imperial self-understanding in which British agents were being seen as the rightful bearers of ‘light’ to the ‘darkness’ of Africa.

Only in the 20th century did the Afrikaner come to claim systematic ownership to ideas of both neo-Calvinism (as espoused by the followers of Abraham Kuyper in the theology of the Afrikaans churches), and the alleged ‘chosenness’ of the Afrikaner as a nation by God.<sup>11</sup> As Bosch points out these were later developments in an Afrikaner identity formation that in various ways sought to supplant and redirect the older, yet more diffuse influences of evangelicalism. In a recent book, Richard Elphick gives an in-depth description of how the proponents of neo-Calvinism in South Africa opposed and sought to discredit evangelicalism, much to the ire of Johannes du Plessis who was “among the most persistent critics of the new movement . . .”<sup>12</sup> Most notable among the

<sup>7</sup> See Bosch, “Civil Religion,” 2ff.

<sup>8</sup> W. A. De Klerk, *The Puritans in Africa: A Story of Afrikanerdom* (London: Rex Collings, 1975), 6.

<sup>9</sup> De Klerk, *The Puritans*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Bosch, “Civil Religion,” 4.

<sup>11</sup> The identification of Israel with the Afrikaner was made explicit in a report drawn up by the University of Pretoria professor E. P. Groenewald and delivered at the 1948 Transvaal synod of the DRC, against which Ben Marais gave a very critical response. See C. J. Botha, “Ben Marais se Stryd in die Sinodes teen die ‘Bybelse Fundering van Apartheid’” in A. C. Viljoen (Ed) *Ekumene Onder die Suiderkruis* [Ecumenism Under the Southern Cross] (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1979), 25ff.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2012), 241.

proponents of early 20th century neo-Calvinism was perhaps J. D. du Toit (Totius), who wrote a “doctoral thesis on the dangers of ‘Methodism,’ or evangelicalism . . .”<sup>13</sup>

The experience of shared suffering and loss during the Anglo-Boer War years at the hands of the British Empire certainly played a role in solidifying this process of identity formation of Afrikaner self-identification with a biblical Israel benighted by hostile foreign powers and domestic tribes alike. This sentiment is exemplified in the formidable figure of Paul Kruger, president of the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* (Z.A.R.) during the war years. The important role of his speeches in what was later to become known as Afrikaner civil religion has been documented.<sup>14</sup> Central to the understanding held by Kruger and other leading figures regarding the Afrikaner’s role in Africa was “the idea of being a chosen people like the Israelites of old.”<sup>15</sup> Referring to Giliomee’s study of Afrikaner history, Saayman makes a further important observation regarding this self-understanding, which tells us something regarding how the idea of mission might have been conceived within this group. This relates to an observation by Andrew Murray Jr. (who one might call the spiritual father of Afrikaner missionary enthusiasm) regarding the Boers among whom he ministered. Murray noticed that they made no distinction “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.”<sup>16</sup>

Even if one chooses to ignore the obvious implications of violence in such an understanding of mission, it should be clear that within the *volkskerk* self-conception—which was the heir to these kinds of sentiments—mission was done perhaps less for the benefit of the other, than for strengthening the position of the communal self.<sup>17</sup> *Volkskerk*, based on German missionary ecclesiology (*Völkskirche*) as especially espoused by Gustav Warneck in the 19th century, is based on the theory that each nation or ethnic group should have its own indigenous church, which is harmonious to local culture and tradition. Initially

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<sup>13</sup> Elphick, *Equality*, 240.

<sup>14</sup> See T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

<sup>15</sup> Willem Saayman, *Being Missionary, Being Human: an overview of Dutch Reformed Mission* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2007), 38.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Saayman, *Being Missionary*, 39.

<sup>17</sup> Coetzee mentions a 1958 *Cape Argus* article by Ben Marais in which he protests against an observable tendency within the Dutch Reformed Church to view the idea of ‘white survival’ as a primary motive for mission work. See Coetzee, “*Kritiese Stem*,” 402.

intended as an enlightened and culturally sensitive strategy for cross-cultural church planting, in some contexts it became a vehicle for the promotion of racial exclusivity. In South Africa, the *volkskerk* concept became increasingly popular in the early 20th century and it tended to limit its evangelical and social concerns to the plight of the Afrikaner.<sup>18</sup>

In the *volkskerk* paradigm a subtle yet decisive shift occurred, which saw the Afrikaner centre of spiritual power move from the exclusive preserve of the Cape-based Dutch Reformed Church (N. G. Kerk), to encapsulate the Afrikaner nation more generally. This coincided with the fragmentation of the Cape based church as fully representative of Dutch reformed Christians across southern Africa into more regional synods as well as diversifying into three distinct denominations, a process which had started already since the middle of the 19th century. In the post Anglo-Boer War era the political and ideological formations of Afrikaner thinking increasingly tended to occur in the former Boer republics, which had lost the war, but perhaps ‘won the peace’ by consolidating much national and international sympathy during the later stages of the war and in the aftermath of the Treaty of Vereeniging (1902). Indeed a kind of secularization was in the process of occurring as the church lost influence to other cultural factors, and nationalism stepped in to fill the spiritual void. The influence of secularization might for example explain why poets and theologians affiliated with the numerically small Potchefstroom based Gereformeerde Kerk were able to play a decisive role in shaping the trajectory of Afrikaner nationalism and civil religion in the early to middle 20th century.<sup>19</sup>

Thus proponents of the *volkskerk* found much inspiration for theologizing and mythmaking in the lost cause of the Boer republics. An important side effect of this was that for the Afrikaner and for the Dutch Reformed Church, the Cape lost influence—culturally, geographically, and theologically—at the expense of the Transvaal and the Free State, the two former Boer republics. I shall return to some of the implications of this theme in the next section.

### Evangelical Subdivisions among Afrikaners

Bosch subdivides the historical development of the evangelical tradition among the Afrikaner into three further categories:<sup>20</sup> 1) a small revivalist,

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Moodie, *Afrikanerdom*, 69-72.

<sup>19</sup> See Moodie, *Afrikanerdom*, 60-68.

<sup>20</sup> Bosch, “The Afrikaner,” 208-209.

otherworldly group which remained a-political; 2) the more mainstream group, which especially after the Anglo-Boer War emerged in the *volkskerk*; 3) and the missionary group, which according to Bosch kept alive the ethos of the “eighteenth century awakening”, which was originally introduced by early Dutch pastors, such as the above-mentioned van Lier and Vos. From these distinctions follows what I refer to as the Bosch thesis: “In the course of time, it was out of this group that the first voices of protest against Afrikaner politics came.”<sup>21</sup>

Although I understand these subdivisions to be interesting and helpful to a degree, I also think they are potentially confusing due to the terminology employed. Particular caution must be exercised against the idea of an actual existence of three clear cut, sharply delineated groups among Afrikaner evangelicals. To the contrary, all indications are that especially the latter two categories of *volkskerk* and missionary enthusiasts became closely connected. Therefore, although the *volkskerk*—itself a direct offshoot of a budding Afrikaner nationalism in the years following the Anglo-Boer War—initially concerned itself more or less exclusively with the material and spiritual needs of the Afrikaner, the situation became more complex once apartheid and/or separate development started to gain ideological traction throughout South Africa. Now certain missionary enthusiasts who were also idealistic supporters of separate development played prominent roles within the camp of the *volkskerk*. Their missionary concern placed them in the near impossible position of needing to champion the needs and rights of African peoples, whilst simultaneously having to argue that such could best be served under systems of separate development, however contrary to existing evidence and the protesting voices of African leaders themselves.<sup>22</sup> The dominant attitude within the *volkskerk* paradigm as characterised by Durand, however, had very little appetite for cross-cultural missionary concerns: Durand refers to “a schizophrenic attitude . . . in which the *volkskerk* idea created a formidable social consciousness as far as the own Afrikaner group was concerned, but as far as the blacks were concerned the church’s calling was seen as spiritual with very little emphasis on the social side.”<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, missionary idealism regarding separate development naturally could not have had a very long shelf life historically speaking. It could persist as

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<sup>21</sup> Bosch, “The Afrikaner,” 209.

<sup>22</sup> This inner tension is well described in Elphick’s recent book in a chapter entitled “The Evangelical Invention of Apartheid.” See Elphick, *Equality*, 222-237.

<sup>23</sup> Jaap Durand, “Afrikaner piety and dissent,” in Charles Villa-Vicencio and John W. De Gruchy (eds.), *Resistance and Hope: South African essays in honour of Beyers Naudé* (Claremont: David Philip, 1985), 45.

a form of self-delusion or as part of a framework of intellectual parochialism—and it sure did so in the case of some missionaries and even missiologists (see below). Early examples of the interplay between missionary idealism, and missionary parochialism with respect to apartheid and separate development, could be seen in different regional Dutch Reformed Mission Policies produced in the 1930's. While both the Cape document (produced in 1932), and the Free State Mission Policy (1931), notably rejected racial equalization and intermixing, the subtle differences between the two were striking. The former, following the Cape evangelical tradition began with the church's responsibility in carrying out Jesus' Great Commission, while stressing the need for ecumenical cooperation. The "document stuck with the vaguely segregationist language of the 1920s but gave it little emphasis."<sup>24</sup> This was in stark contrast with the Free State Policy, which stressed "the 'duty' of 'a Christian, civilized *volk*' to spread the gospel . . ."<sup>25</sup> The Free State document in its thorough specification on how different races should relate to each other has been identified by Richard Elphick among others as an important precursor to "apartheid ideology almost two decades before a South African government would adopt it as official policy."<sup>26</sup> Generally, one could state that the theology of the Cape document represented what was typical of a traditionally church-centred understanding of mission, whereas the Free State document represented the emergent nation-centred paradigm of a *volkskerk* (see above).

It is important to note, however, that the two documents reflected the realities of their divergent social settings. Cape Dutch Reformed mission sentiment had for decades been influenced by the likes of Andrew Murray Sr. and Jr. and those associated with them, including specifically the enigmatically controversial figure of Andrew Jr.'s biographer Johannes du Plessis. In the Free State by contrast, when the Rev. J. G. Strydom, the principle driving force behind the Free State Mission Policy became the province's mission secretary in 1926, he found very little support for mission among his church members, "particularly missions within their own province, or missions that included education."<sup>27</sup> It is therefore possible that rather than intending to initiate a repressive racial policy, the Free State document reflected the only conditions under which the general membership of the Free State DRC would countenance the idea of

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Elphick, "Missions and Afrikaner Nationalism: Soundings in the Prehistory of Apartheid," in B. Stanley (ed.), *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire*, 68.

<sup>25</sup> Elphick, "Missions," 68.

<sup>26</sup> Elphick, "Missions," 67.

<sup>27</sup> Elphick, "Missions," 65.



their own involvement in something as potentially subversive of narrow *volk* interests as missionary activity.

Both the themes of church as missionary agent and *volk* as missionary agent played prominent though differently nuanced roles in shaping Dutch Reformed mission policies that were harmonious with and non-challenging to segregation policies. Over time, the evangelical idealist position, which placed the church in the centre as represented by Johannes du Plessis, and subsequently adopted by his somewhat more conservative successor as professor of missions at Stellenbosch, G. B. A. Gerdener, would become increasingly untenable in the DRC.<sup>28</sup> The parochial nationalist paradigm as represented by the Free State's J. G. Strydom would more and more occupy the mainstream of Afrikaner attitudes. The overriding group of Afrikaner evangelicals from the middle of the 20th century onwards found their home firmly in the *volkskerk*, with the missionary enthusiasts operating from underneath its wide umbrella, often in cahoots with its wider ideals of Afrikaner supremacy, and only occasionally as critical agents (more on this below).

### Andrew Murray Jr. and His Spiritual Clan

A crucial addition to the broad stream of evangelicalism during the nineteenth century was the arrival at the Cape of a number of ministers from the Free Church of Scotland who stood in the British revivalist tradition. They were recruited to serve the Dutch Reformed Church, which at the time had many vacancies due to the limited number of ministers of Dutch origin and training arriving at the Cape. The best known and most influential name emerging from this group was "Andrew Murray, Jr., whose pastoral career spanned an almost incredible sixty-nine years (1848-1917)."<sup>29</sup> His father and namesake was actually the first Rev. Murray to come from Scotland, but Andrew Jr. through his writings and preaching made the family name famous in South Africa and beyond.

Andrew Murray Jr. was educated in both his father's land of birth, Scotland, as well as the Netherlands. As a prolific author of devotional books and pamphlets he had a large international audience among the worldwide evangelical community. As a Dutch Reformed minister he started his early career in Bloemfontein in the Free State, but then moved to the Cape Colony, where he served

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<sup>28</sup> See Elphick, "Missions," 69-74.

<sup>29</sup> Bosch, "The Afrikaner," 208.

a few different congregations in Worcester, Cape Town, and eventually Wellington. His interests included Christian mysticism, and he was indirectly involved in initiating the late 19th century charismatic revivals at the Cape, starting at his congregation in Worcester, and which evidently had an interracial element to them.<sup>30</sup> Murray was an ardent advocate of Christian education, particularly the education of girls and young women, and most notable for my theme here, he was the main driving force in influencing the cross-cultural and cross-border missionary activity of the Dutch Reformed Church.

Along with other members of his family and those ministers emanating from Scotland who served in the Dutch Reformed Church, Murray had to straddle the worlds of two distinct linguistic and cultural interest groups in South Africa. The Dutch Reformed Church, especially in the Cape, consisted of both Anglicised and Dutch-leaning Afrikaners. The former tended to identify themselves with the British Empire and the latter increasingly with the cause of the frontier Boers and eventually the travails of their republics to the north. Murray and others of his ilk had the sometimes difficult task of balancing interests and occasionally choosing sides in the tumultuous relationship between these divergent groups. A few statements and incidents relating to the relationship between the different interest groups serve to illustrate Murray's own ambiguity as well as his perhaps shifting allegiance over time. One incident reported by Johannes du Plessis in his biography of Murray, concerns the British decision to abandon the Orange River Sovereignty in 1853, in which Murray served as a minister.<sup>31</sup> The decision of abandonment caused much turmoil among many of the settlers especially "missionaries and their circle,"<sup>32</sup> who apparently feared the repressive native policies that might be instituted by the creation of a second Boer state, after the establishment of the Z.A.R. in the north. Together with Dr. A. J. Frazer, Andrew Murray then accepted a nomination by the anti-independence group to travel to England as part of a delegation to protest against the abandonment of the Sovereignty. Their mission proved unsuccessful and the Boer republic of the Orange Free State was duly formed.

Murray's 1879 article, *The Church of the Transvaal*, written in the context of the first British annexation of the Z.A.R. in 1877, appeared in the *Catholic Presbyterian* and attempted to give a sympathetic introduction of Boer Christianity

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<sup>30</sup> See Leona Choy, *Andrew and Emma Murray: An Intimate Portrait of their Marriage and Ministry* (Winchester: Good Morning Publishing, 2000), 85ff.

<sup>31</sup> See J. du Plessis, *The Life of Andrew Murray of South Africa* (London: Marshall Brothers, Ltd, 1919), 146-164.

<sup>32</sup> Du Plessis, *Andrew Murray*, 153.

to a wider audience. However, it could not hide what seemed like Murray's own unease with the unsophisticated nature of their apparent self-identification with the biblical Israel in their relations with the native population. He described their attitude to mission as more akin to what he termed a German policy of "*subjection and discipline*," as opposed to an English policy of "*liberty and equality*."<sup>33</sup>

Du Plessis describes how during this period leading up to the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War, Murray became increasingly impassioned in his criticism of what he saw as unjust British incursions against the independence of the Z.A.R. Du Plessis' biography includes the full text of Murray's *Appeal to the British People*,<sup>34</sup> which was written a few days before the declaration of war. Herein Murray begins by admitting his own loyalty to British interests, and the fact that he had sometimes been "misjudged" because of this by the Boer people among whom he ministered. He continues to make a moving plea to the peace-loving nature of the Christian people of what he considers to be "the most Christian nation in the world," to "join us in one unceasing supplication" to God for peace.

The dual loyalties, to both English and Afrikaner concerns, and the complexities created by having such loyalties also affected the life and ministry of Andrew Sr. According to Schalk du Toit, Murray—having arrived at his first and only congregation of Graaff-Reinet in 1822 from Scotland via the Netherlands for language training—threw in his lot with the Afrikaner; but not in all areas, especially not in political matters.<sup>35</sup> Murray who was staunchly loyal to the British crown had no sympathy for the cause of the *Voortrekkers*, those frontier Boers who opted to move away from British territory due to certain grievances, which included opposition to British decrees on the abolition of slavery. He was also the Dutch Reformed Church moderator at the 1857 synod, where the well-known motion was adopted that separate congregations might be instituted for African converts to the church, should the acknowledged biblical mandate of accommodating them in an existing congregation not be feasible due to the 'weakness of some.'<sup>36</sup> Ironically this measure, which has

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in du Plessis, *Andrew Murray*, 417.

<sup>34</sup> See du Plessis, *Andrew Murray*, 424-426.

<sup>35</sup> Schalk du Toit, *Die Ontstaan van die Gemeente Nuwe Kerk of Graaff-Reinet: 'n Kritiese kerkhistoriese-kerkregtelike evaluering van die gebeure wat aanleiding was tot die kerkskeuring in 1927* [The Inception of the Congregation New Church of Graaff-Reinet: a Critical church historical-church polity evaluation of the events leading up to the schism in 1927] (Port Elizabeth: NMB Drukkers, 1993), 3.

<sup>36</sup> Du Toit, *Die Ontstaan*, 6

been implicated for setting the trend in the long history of racial segregation in the Dutch Reformed Church, was introduced by Murray as an unwilling compromise—perhaps conceded in order to protect the church’s missionary efforts from suffering decline due to the racial prejudice which was prevalent among the great majority of the Boers. The historical record as mentioned in Adonis indicates that Murray Sr., in spite of being moderator, belonged to a minority faction in the synod, which pleaded for racial prejudice to be fought and that the dividing wall between ‘coloured’ and white be pulled down.<sup>37</sup> However, this was different from the point of view of much of the ordinary church membership. From the side of those whites, who referred to themselves as ‘born Christians’ there was an increased unwillingness in many DRC congregations in the Cape Colony to share the communion table and worship together with Africans or ‘Coloureds.’<sup>38</sup> Although the Boers generally tended to be unsympathetic to mission, I cannot help wondering whether Murray must have felt that the compromise regarding separate congregations would allay their fears sufficiently for missionary work to continue? Nonetheless, at the time this synod’s decision was vehemently criticised by the ‘conservative’ Reverend Huet as a travesty of the gospel for essentially sub-dividing a herd of sheep, which after all belongs to one Shepherd.<sup>39</sup>

The ambiguous loyalties of the Murrays were not a peculiarity of this family, but part of the general experience of the numerous Dutch Reformed ministers who had been recruited from the Free Church of Scotland during the 19th century. Although a missionary concern was initiated by early Dutch ministers such as van Lier and Vos, it seems that the Scottish influence in the 19th century was the main factor responsible for instilling a sense of cross-cultural, trans-frontier mission among Afrikaners. Some of the early Scottish recruits had formerly been involved with the London Missionary Society at the Cape. Others, such as Murray who came directly from Scotland initially had ideals of becoming directly involved in missionary work among the native population in Africa.

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<sup>37</sup> Johannes Cornelius Adonis, *Die Afgebreekte Skeidsmuur Weer Opgebou: Die verstregeling van die sendingbeleid van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika met die praktyk en ideologie van die Apartheid in historiese perspektief* [The Torn-down Separation Wall Reconstructed: The intertwinement of the mission policy of the DRC in South Africa with the practice and ideology of Apartheid in historical perspective] (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1982), 55

<sup>38</sup> See Chris Loff, “The History of a Heresy,” in John de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio (eds), *Apartheid is a Heresy* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1983), 10-23.

<sup>39</sup> See Adonis, *Afgebreekte*, 56-57.

The influence of Dutch and Dutch trained ministers on the other hand came to be associated with both traditions of liberalism and neo-Calvinism.<sup>40</sup> According to Schalk du Toit, there was a tendency in the popular press to conflate, although incorrectly, the concepts of liberal and nationalistic into a unity, whereas 'orthodox', or evangelical, came to be associated with pro-British sentiments. The Murrays found themselves firmly placed in the latter category, which was by implication seen as anti-nationalistic.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, it is at this point important to mention that Coetzee describes how by the time of the du Plessis heresy trial (see below), an important shift had occurred regarding the semantics of orthodoxy ('*regsinnig*'). At the time of the founding of the seminary in Stellenbosch in 1858, *regsinnig* referred to a critical-realist point of view as represented by the Utrecht stream, but in the early decades of the 20th century under Kuyperean influence *regsinnig* came to represent a conservative confessional position, and the Utrecht stream was identified with modernism.<sup>42</sup>

This issue regarding the divided loyalties of the Murrays—and per implication perhaps that segment in the church which had strong missionary interests—makes one wonder if it partly explains the Bosch thesis regarding missionary enthusiasts as eventual apartheid opponents. If this group, also in later years, had somehow remained resistant to nationalistic impulses, they and those associated with them would of course have been less likely to become fully caught up in all the ideals of Afrikanerdom. Certainly, mainstream Afrikaners thought of them as being different. For example this group is referred to by Giliomee as 'Koningin Victoria se Afrikaners' (Queen Victoria's Afrikaners).<sup>43</sup> Significant of the mainstream attitude to them is the following assertion by Beyers Naudé regarding the views of his staunchly nationalistic mother: "I think she was at times deeply prejudiced against [the British], as well as against the [NGK] ministers like the Murrays and others who were seen to be much more liberal English than Afrikaans, because they were from a Scots background, although they were serving the NGK".<sup>44</sup> One could assume that 'liberal' in this quotation refers to social and not theological liberalism.

However, in spite of the ambiguities and complexities of their divided loyalties, it is clear that the Murrays could not disentangle themselves from their

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<sup>40</sup> See Moodie, *Afrikanerdom*, 57ff.

<sup>41</sup> Du Toit, *Die Ontstaan*, 7.

<sup>42</sup> Coetzee, "Kritiese Stem," 170.

<sup>43</sup> See Hermann Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners: 'n Biografie* [The Afrikaners: a Biography] (Kapaastad: Tafelberg, 2004), 154-186.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Colleen Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith* (Claremont: David Philip, 2005), 19.

social context, and specifically not from the needs and aspirations of their church members, the Afrikaner people. Their stance ended up being a compromised evangelicalism and it set the tone for much of evangelicalism's position vis-à-vis apartheid in the 20th century, which generally speaking remained uncritical of the status quo.

### Murray Pietists as Opponents of Apartheid?

Bosch's assertion regarding the role of missionary enthusiasts in opposing apartheid references an essay by Jaap Durand in which the latter makes a similar claim.<sup>45</sup> It is important to note that both Bosch and Durand found themselves in this exact category of apartheid opponents who also had mission interests. Although they do not mention their own very real stories of ostracism from much of the Afrikaner religious mainstream, they might as well have done so in the process of strengthening their point. The names that are mentioned in this vein—also subsequently supported and elaborated on by Willem Saayman—include the well-known anti-apartheid clergymen, Beyers Naudé, and Ben Marais, among others who are specifically mentioned by Saayman, such as Nico Smith and David Bosch.<sup>46</sup>

The interesting thing about the idea that missionary interested evangelicals might have been on the forefront of Afrikaner rejection of apartheid is the counter-intuitive nature of the assertion. Evangelicals worldwide, especially in North America, have a well-established record of social conservatism, i.e. the very opposite of what might be expected of activists agitating for social change. In the South African context I have mentioned some of the well documented cases of Dutch Reformed mission policies complying with and even bearing the torch for the apartheid policies of the Nationalist government in the early-middle 20th century. Some Afrikaner evangelicals and missionaries, even mis-siologists, were among the most reactionary apologists of Apartheid up until the end. The name of one-time mission professor at the University of Pretoria, Carel Boshoff, who—once apartheid was abandoned at government levels—went to the extreme of founding the Afrikaner 'homeland' of Orania is only one, notably extreme, example.

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<sup>45</sup> Durand, "Afrikaner piety".

<sup>46</sup> Willem Saayman, *Die Beroerder Israels: 'n Biografiese Waardering van Nico Smith* [The Troublemaker in Israel: a Biographical Appreciation of Nico Smith] (Publifelself Uitgewers, 2009), 198.

Therefore, the group of anti-apartheid missionary enthusiasts referred to by Bosch, Durand and Saayman does not by any means represent the norm regarding the relationship of Afrikaner evangelicalism with apartheid. The normative situation for Afrikaner evangelicalism after the Nationalist election victory in 1948 was rather characterised by “the very close symbiosis between DRC and NP government in terms of ‘the native question’/race policy . . .”<sup>47</sup> In the light of this history it is easy to question whether this minority group of ‘rebel’ theologians and pastors should even be described as evangelicals at all. Personally, I do not think this should be done across the board without specific qualification of the term, as I shall indicate in the conclusion. Nevertheless, I shall argue below that there are indeed certain traits known to evangelicalism that may be discerned in the life stories of some of the most conspicuous members of this group, although in reality it may make more sense to speak here of a *hybridised* evangelicalism.

### Theological Dissent in Apartheid South Africa: A Difficult Choice

Due to legislation regarding employment and education, which over decades favoured whites at the expense of ‘non-whites’ who often found themselves relegated to the implicit but none-the-less real social category of cheap labour, it would be hard to escape the contention that the majority of white South Africans benefited materially from apartheid. Therefore the strong anti-apartheid voice was never a popular one among the white community at large. Although Afrikaners tended to belong to the more ‘conservative’ side of the white population, and English-speaking whites to the more ‘liberal’ group, the latter were often passive supporters of apartheid. They mouthed criticism of the state’s brutality while at the same time suppressing voices of strong dissent within their own ranks. The experiences of Fr. Michael Lapsley, an Anglican priest who radically sided with the oppressed, are testimonial of this. His fellow white Anglicans in South Africa were generally not very happy with him, and some even attempted to end his career prematurely.<sup>48</sup> That they were unsuccessful was mainly due to Lapsley’s own ingenuity and strength of will, aided perhaps by the international character of the Anglican Communion, which has the potential to counter parochialism in various ways.

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<sup>47</sup> Saayman, *Being Missionary*, 99.

<sup>48</sup> See Michael Lapsley with Stephen Karakashian, *Redeeming the Past: My Journey from Freedom Fighter to Healer* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2012).

For the white Afrikaner theologians and ministers on the other hand, it was a much more complicated proposition to break with the dominant paradigm. As the *volkskerk* idea effectively became such a dominant paradigm in the mid-section of the twentieth century, critical thinkers found that any kind of deviation from the national ideology carried serious repercussions. An Afrikaner civil religion had emerged which treated any criticism of a supposedly secular concern such as racial policies, as a kind of heresy. For the mainstream of Afrikanerdom the agendas of church and nation had become irrevocably intertwined and more or less indistinguishable from one another by the time the dissident theologians started to raise their voices in the 1970s.

#### *A Precursor to Afrikaner Dissent: Johannes du Plessis*

The idea that Afrikaner dissent would eventually come from the side of the mission-minded minority would nicely dovetail with an earlier example of a contrary voice as represented by the missiologist and scholar in biblical studies who in 1930 fell out of favour and as a consequence lost his position as theology professor at Stellenbosch University, Johannes du Plessis. Du Plessis was an ambiguous figure, simultaneously an evangelical and missionary statesman under the influence of Andrew Murray Jr. as well as a moderately 'modernist' theologian. His 'heresy trial' concerned the issue of historical criticism. Du Plessis was found to favour an unacceptable non-literalist and therefore heterodox approach to the reading of the bible, arguing for example that the story of Jonah and the fish should be understood as an allegory. Although du Plessis' racial views did not surface at the trial, the fact is that he spearheaded the production of a document called *The Dutch Reformed Church and the Native Problem* in 1921, which, although unapologetic about the assumed legitimacy of white rule in South Africa, distinguished itself according to the assessment of Richard Elphick as "more aware of the ambiguities, contradictions, and pitfalls of segregation than many English-speaking theorists and missionaries of the time did, and possibly more than many blacks."<sup>49</sup> Du Plessis later appeared to move to the right in his views on segregation along with the great majority of Afrikaners under the leadership of prime minister J. B. M. Hertzog, who introduced some stringent legislation curtailing the rights of Africans in the 1920s. However, du Plessis was also a driving force behind a couple of interracial Christian conferences held in 1923 and 1927 respectively; the second of which "agreed to demand some significant revisions to Hertzog's proposed

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<sup>49</sup> Elphick, "Missions," 59.



legislation.”<sup>50</sup> However, the Federal Council of the DRC rejected this conference’s resolutions, while simultaneously “losing faith in du Plessis’s policy of coalition building and advocacy on behalf of blacks.”<sup>51</sup>

Shortly hereafter, du Plessis became embroiled in the heresy trial which led to his downfall. Although he had fallen out of favour due to his supposed modernism, his conciliatory approach to racial issues could not have helped his cause in Afrikanerdom during a climate that was seeing a hardening along the lines of both theological doctrine and the doctrine of racial exclusivity. In connection with this, Saul Dubow makes the assertion that his expulsion “served to strengthen the growing influence of a neo-Calvinist, fundamentalist element within the Church. This was achieved at the expense of the tradition of evangelical pietism within the DRC which stretched back to Andrew Murray Jr. in the mid-nineteenth century.”<sup>52</sup>

The expulsion of du Plessis was certainly a hidden triumph for the *volkskerk* agenda, and a deep loss for the missionary legacy of Murray pietism.<sup>53</sup> In fact, not long after this the Dutch Reformed Church started to implement their mission policy with an explicit racial agenda. The 1935 ‘Missionary Policy’ of the federated Dutch Reformed churches “was decisively important in the process of crystallizing views on the colour issue” In this document, “The concept of nationalism was invoked for the first time in a Christian context and the burden of emphasis upon ‘man’ as an individual was shifted towards ‘man’ as part of a collective, organic unit.”<sup>54</sup>

Although Afrikaner intellectuals, including theologians, were responsible for creating the whole edifice of nationalism as well as its religious variants such as *volkskerk* or civil religion, it is interesting that the early dissenters similarly were intellectual types, but also torchbearers of the more ‘liberal’ and questioning legacy of the outcast Johannes du Plessis.

A question to be raised then is how does this intellectual, moderately modernist element square itself with the tradition of Murray pietism? Or to use the terminology employed by Coetzee (see above): Does the merger of the Utrecht

<sup>50</sup> Elphick, “Missions,” 61.

<sup>51</sup> Elphick, “Missions,” 61.

<sup>52</sup> Saul Dubow, “Afrikaner Nationalism, Apartheid and the Conceptualization of ‘Race,’” *The Journal of African History* 33:2 (1992), 214.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, A. A. Louw, *Andrew Louw van Morgenster* [Andrew Louw of Morgenster] (Kapaastad: N. G. Kerk-Uitgewers, 1965), 224; A. F. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar* [My First Ninety Years] (Kapaastad: N. G. Kerk-Uitgewers, 1958), 256; M. W. Retief, *William Murray of Nyasaland*. Translated by Mary H. Le Roux and M. M. Oberholster-Le Roux (The Lovedale Press, 1958), 172.

<sup>54</sup> Dubow, “Afrikaner Nationalism,” 217.

stream and the Scottish evangelical stream really make sense? Of course this has been a question already since the founding of the Stellenbosch seminary, as particularly represented in the figure of John Murray, Andrew Jr.'s brother.

However, the implications of this merger of spiritualities and intellectual traditions arguably remained dormant until du Plessis started to work it out theologically. The controversial nature of du Plessis' project becomes apparent when one considers the fact that most prominent among du Plessis' early detractors in the years when the latter's 'modernist' views first surfaced was not a neo-Calvinist, but the very same Andrew Murray Jr., the subject of du Plessis' sympathetic biography. In 1912, in a series of letter exchanges in the *Kerkbode*, of which du Plessis was editor, Murray opposed du Plessis' pleading for a 'new' style of preaching that would be contextually relevant and that would engage the intellect. Du Plessis asked for a preaching that seeks points of contact with the culture of the listeners.<sup>55</sup>

Evidence suggests that rather than being a new insight, du Plessis' rejection of a 'nature'/'supernature' dichotomy reaches back to his student days in Edinburgh, and even before when his opinions expressed in sermons at Stellenbosch were sometimes cause for concern among his professors and peers.<sup>56</sup> Murray, similarly found ample reasons to disagree with his biographer as indicated by their letter exchange.

This difference of opinion between Murray and du Plessis suggests by implication that if du Plessis really was heir to the pietistic evangelical tradition as asserted by various sources, then this tradition—like so much else in the South African context—was a house divided against itself. Or, to put it more gently, it was a tradition that was in the process of diverting into different streams. Du Plessis was apparently unable or unwilling to turn a blind eye to the wider context, whether this concerned intellectual developments in historical criticism, or the racial situation in South Africa. He remained idealistic that both these challenges could be positively addressed and channelled by the church. Therefore, du Plessis' brand of pietism, if indeed his spirituality could be called such, was a 'hybridised' pietism, which rather than eschewing the world sought to engage with it. This hybridised pietism also represented the epitome of the

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<sup>55</sup> See C. R. Kotzé, *Die Dwaling in Ons Kerk* [The Heresy in Our Church] (Bloemfontein: Nasionale Pers, 1932, 8-19).

<sup>56</sup> See Abraham Stefanus Erasmus, *Die Bediening van Johannes Du Plessis (1868-1935) in die Ned. Geref. Kerk, met besondere verwysing na sy teologiese denke. 'n Kerkhistoriese Studie* [The Ministry of Johannes Du Plessis (1868-1935) in the Dutch Reformed Church, with particular reference to his theological thought. A Church Historical Study] (Stellenbosch University: Unpublished Th.D. dissertation, 1986), 37ff.

merger between the Utrecht and Scottish streams, which subsequent to du Plessis would lose their formerly dominant position.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, although one might mention the influences of modernism and fundamentalism in this context, the way these influences played themselves out in the Afrikaner context was radically different from—say—the North American case. The most important contrast is that unlike in the USA where the ‘modernists’ eventually prevailed at Princeton, the ‘modernists’ lost the battle for the reformed mainstream in South Africa and the original Dutch Reformed seminary in Stellenbosch. Yet they retained the moral high ground, and interestingly, through its main representative, du Plessis, hung on to the support of some prominent missionaries and missionary enthusiasts. This development is in line historically with the above-mentioned earlier contrast between the well-educated Puritans of North America, and the barely literate ‘Calvinists’ of southern Africa. In the latter context, even after much educational uplifting had taken place, the influence of modernism would remain suppressed in Afrikaner theological circles.

#### *Apartheid Critic: Ben Marais*

Du Plessis created a legacy to be followed by a minority of Afrikaner Christian intellectuals who were not at ease with the Christian Nationalism agenda increasingly adopted by their peers. One such intellectual, who like du Plessis was also a missionary enthusiast, was Ben Marais, later professor of church history at the theological faculty of the University of Pretoria. From as early as 1940, Marais attacked the alleged biblical foundations of apartheid. His perspectives, which included an attempt at debunking many of the widely held myths of biological racism, were fully published in 1952 in his book, *Colour: Unsolved Problems of the West*.<sup>58</sup>

Marais was a student of B. B. Keet at Stellenbosch in the early 1930s, another dissenting voice over against the majority of his theological contemporaries in their attempts at biblical justifications for apartheid.<sup>59</sup> Although he was influenced by the theology of Abraham Kuyper—in contradistinction to du Plessis who wanted nothing to do with neo-Calvinism—Keet stood out in refusing to condemn Johannes du Plessis in the latter’s heresy trial. Ben Marais, however,

<sup>57</sup> See Coetzee, “*Kritiese Stem*,” 312.

<sup>58</sup> Dubow, “Afrikaner Nationalism,” 223.

<sup>59</sup> See J. C. de Beer, *Prof. B. B. Keet (1885 tot 1974): Leraar en Hoogleraar in die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* [Prof B. B. Keet (1885 to 1974): Minister and Professor in the Dutch Reformed Church] (Stellenbosch University: Unpublished Th.D. dissertation, 1992).

went further than his former teacher both in terms of apparent support for du Plessis as well as in preceding Keet in opposing the emergently dominant theological current in the church. At a time when Kuyperian theology was being hybridized by Afrikaner theologians, particularly from the Potchefstroom based Gereformeerde Kerk, to support the formation of Afrikaner Christian nationalism (“in our isolation lies our strength”), Marais as a student strongly opposed this stream of thought. He “became in the aftermath of the du Plessis struggle the leader of the students who opted for a broader evangelical approach, reflecting as they saw it the true spirit of du Plessis and the Dutch Reformed Church.”<sup>60</sup> Durand goes on to mention the fact that du Plessis was much admired by this group due to his “intense missionary involvement and ecumenical spirit.”<sup>61</sup> It is significant that Marais’ own turning point regarding the DRC’s racial stance was apparently due to his personal experience of attending an ecumenical conference and finding his church’s position exposed as at odds with the worldwide church at the World Mission and Evangelism Conference at Tambaram, India in 1938.<sup>62</sup> The personal experience of encounters with people and events in a journey of faith is an important key for understanding the dissidents’ position. Du Plessis, himself, was also a thoroughly international and ecumenical scholar. A respected contributor to the *International Review of Mission*, he had links to leading missionary figures such as John R. Mott, J. H. Oldham, and others.

Furthermore, according to the analysis of Coetzee, Marais had a deep career-long suspicion of any kind of nationalism. Theologically he prioritised ecumenism, the catholicity of the church, and the unity of humanity. According to Coetzee, Marais was influenced by both the evangelical direction of Andrew Murray and increasingly the more critical Utrecht tradition.<sup>63</sup>

#### *Radical Dissent of an Afrikaner Pastor: Beyers Naudé*

Beyers Naudé is the best-known name among the list of internal critics of Dutch Reformed and Afrikaner race policies. He started his career as a conventional minister in the *volkskerk* mode, but the 1960’s signalled a turning point. Instrumental was the 1960 ecumenical Cottesloe Consultation when 80 delegates of member churches in the World Council of Churches convened to take a stand on the national crisis recently highlighted by the infamous Sharpeville

<sup>60</sup> Durand, “Afrikaner piety,” 46.

<sup>61</sup> Durand, “Afrikaner piety,” 46.

<sup>62</sup> Durand, “Afrikaner piety,” 46.

<sup>63</sup> Coetzee, “*Kritiese Stem*,” 393.

shootings in which numerous township protesters and innocent bystanders were gunned down in the streets by the South African police. This consultation, in which Naudé participated, spoke out only tentatively against government policies, but it caused a furore among the mainstream of the Dutch Reformed church and in the pages of its official mouthpiece, *Die Kerkbode*. Naudé and other NG Kerk delegates who had agreed with all the consultation's declarations were publically repudiated, and the upshot was that the Afrikaner reformed churches resigned their membership of the WCC.<sup>64</sup> That the NG Kerk delegates initially took the ecumenically agreed upon anti-government line that they did was not surprising according to Bosch, because: "The majority of the Dutch Reformed delegates came out of the evangelical and missionary tradition. Racial segregation was, for them, a matter of expediency rather than principle."<sup>65</sup> For Naudé the post-Cottesloe years saw a period of increased disaffection and radicalisation, which would eventually lead to his being defrocked as member of the clergy and in the 1970's to his banning order received under the regulations of the national 'State of Emergency.'

Durand points to the deep evangelical and pietistic connections in Naudé's history and theological formation. From his student years at Stellenbosch, Naudé would place himself firmly in the camp of those who had earlier been supporters of the by then publicly disgraced du Plessis over against the Kuyperian opponents. Thus Naudé found himself most deeply influenced by the already mention B. B. Keet as well as G. B. A. Gerdener, professor of church history and history of missions.<sup>66</sup>

Naudé was to become married to Ilse Hedwig Weber who was the daughter of German Moravian missionaries at South Africa's oldest mission station, Genadendal. According to Ryan, during Naudé's visits to Genadendal on vacations in his student years in the 1930s, he was most impressed by the "openness of relations between white and coloured people, both in Ilse's home and in the congregation."<sup>67</sup> Apparently these experiences served as catalyst for some internal awakening of a questioning attitude regarding the legitimacy of the strict segregationist ideals in the Afrikaner community. Furthermore: "He started to develop an interest in race issues and missionary work, but it would be many years before his feelings and thoughts on these issues would

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<sup>64</sup> See Bosch, "The Afrikaner," 70.

<sup>65</sup> Bosch, "The Afrikaner," 69.

<sup>66</sup> Durand, "Afrikaner piety," 47.

<sup>67</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé*, 21.

crystallise.”<sup>68</sup> The fact that Naudé’s conservative and Afrikaner nationalist parents (his father, also a Dutch Reformed minister, was a founding member of the *Afrikaner Broederbond*) objected to his planned marriage—and even tried to dissuade him from this union with the daughter of German missionaries—might have played a role in further fanning the sparks of a rebellious spirit in formation.<sup>69</sup>

Naudé was to be deeply influenced by the anti-racist stance of Ben Marais, and the further cited positions in Marais’ book of prominent theologians such as Karl Barth who in their writings emphatically rejected theologically justified racial separations.<sup>70</sup> These and other influences such as the Cottesloe experience (mentioned above) helped Naudé to increasingly distance himself from Afrikaner nationalism and to emerge as a ‘liberal’ critic of government policies. What engendered his “second political metamorphosis” from ‘liberal’ to ‘radical’ sympathizer with the philosophy of Black Consciousness in the 1970s had perhaps less to do with texts and more with people. In this respect a colleague at the Christian Institute, Cedric Mayson, debunks a common misconception that Naudé’s ‘conversion’ regarding his “inherited attitudes to blacks” was the result of insights from a renewed reading of the bible. “That is absolute nonsense. . . . A central theme in everyone who made that change, including Beyers, was that they got to *know* black people.”<sup>71</sup> Of course this process of getting to know the racial other did not begin in the 1970s for Naudé. It was a process with a history. An assertion by David Bosch in this regard is instructive. Referring to a missionary revival in the late 1950s in the DRC and Naudé’s own interest in evangelism to black people, Bosch states that Naudé started to make contact with missionaries. “They then introduced him to their black congregations, and he was able to witness their suffering under apartheid. His typical evangelical approach created the opportunities for him to be exposed to what was happening in South Africa.”<sup>72</sup>

### *Radical Dissent of an Afrikaner Missionary: Nico Smith*

The role of interpersonal, interracial contact as catalyst for ‘conversion’, when understood as a reorientation in terms of one’s Christian self-understanding and its implications for the South African situation, also happened to at least

<sup>68</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé*, 22.

<sup>69</sup> See Ryan, *Beyers Naudé*, 28.

<sup>70</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé*, 37.

<sup>71</sup> Ryan, *Beyers Naudé*, 124.

<sup>72</sup> Bosch quoted in Ryan, *Beyers Naudé*, 49.

one other NG Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church) clergyman and erstwhile colleague of Beyers Naudé, Nico Smith. For a while, in the 1950's, the two served together at a congregation in Potchefstroom, but this was when both were still firmly entrenched in the fold of Afrikanerdom.<sup>73</sup> Similar to Naudé, however, Smith was influenced from early on by the Murray pietism,<sup>74</sup> which he had in turn learned from his father who had cut his religious teeth in the milieu of the NG Kerk in Graaff-Reinet, the original congregation of Andrew Murray Sr. and subsequently the spiritual home of the Murray clan in South Africa. There are, however, also strong indications from his own testimony that he later on, after his own second 'conversion,' rejected much of his inherited spirituality.<sup>75</sup>

It was however still a natural thing for Smith to become involved in evangelism activities during his student days at the University of Pretoria. The fact that his friends and peers included people like Carel Boshoff (see above) and David Bosch who shared similar interests and who both in later life became missiologists in academia, albeit of very different style and emphasis, might have played a role in influencing him in this direction. The evangelistic strategies employed during their student activities were of the unquestioning, tract-spreading sort. They tended to view black people across the board as unconverted heathens and therefore legitimate 'objects' of mission.<sup>76</sup>

Smith shared something else with his NGK theological student peers—a group which in addition to Boshoff and Bosch also included the names of Johan Heyns and Willie Jonker—which was support for Afrikaner nationalism. Saayman, in his biography of Smith, recounts how they all participated in frontline capacity during a political event in 1948 to welcome and honour the newly elected Prime Minister D. F. Malan, the man who would make apartheid the official government policy.<sup>77</sup> Of course, Malan himself was a former Dutch Reformed minister and a serious missionary enthusiast!

Later, Boshoff was instrumental in recruiting Smith and his physician wife Ellen to take up a missionary vocation, and thereby becoming the founders of the NGK's mission station of Tshilidzini in the Bantustan of Vendaland in 1955.<sup>78</sup> Smith initiated a number of innovations in terms of liturgy and architecture in

<sup>73</sup> See Saayman, *Beroerder Israels*, 48.

<sup>74</sup> Saayman, *Beroerder Israels*, 15.

<sup>75</sup> See Nico Smith, *Die Dood van die God van my Vaders: hoe die lewe in die township Mamelodi my Godsbeskouing verander het* [The Death of the God of my Fathers: how life in the township Mamelodi changed my God conception] (Griffel Media, 2010), 187ff.

<sup>76</sup> Saayman, *Beroerder Israels*, 33.

<sup>77</sup> Saayman, *Beroerder Israels*, 34.

<sup>78</sup> Saayman, *Beroerder Israels*, 55ff.

an attempt at the indigenization of Christianity among the Venda. The paradox of his apparently enlightened approach to mission, which included offering the services of the mission hospital as a way of Christianizing the African traditional initiation rite of male circumcision, was exposed as relying on deep nationalistic (racist) principles, for example, when on a special occasion he refused to dine together with black guests in the home of German missionary colleagues. This refusal—and the shame which its memory was eventually to cause him when he had come to different insights—had a formative impact on his own road to a second ‘conversion.’<sup>79</sup>

Like his former pastoral colleague, Naudé, Smith would eventually become completely disillusioned regarding the *volkskerk* paradigm, but this was still far in the future. After his time in Venda he would serve as NGK’s Organising Mission Secretary for Northern Transvaal, a post that was to be followed by a teaching position in missiology at Stellenbosch University. His appointment was controversial in that it was gained at the expense of better qualified candidates such as David Bosch and Jaap Durand. What he had that they did not, and which was perhaps decisive, was membership of the *Broederbond*.<sup>80</sup>

It was in the midst of the comforts of the ivory tower that Smith’s conscience was fully awakened in the early 1980s. Through projects launched in the townships together with his students (including one memorable meeting with a group of women who had been forced out of their homes in Crossroads), as well as through ecumenical contacts locally and internationally (which started already during his time as Mission Secretary), Smith would come to the point where he had to completely reject his former ideas of Afrikaner Christian nationalism and with it terminate his membership of the *Broederbond* in 1973.<sup>81</sup> It seems the final straw regarding Smith’s relationship with his *volk* was to offer his home to accommodate a black student from out of town during a conference at Stellenbosch University. Smith’s dean, Prof F. J. M. Potgieter, whose home was within sight of the Smiths’, brought up this shocking tale of interracial social mixing at a faculty meeting. He cited the potential uproar this could create among community whites as a reason for repudiating Smith.<sup>82</sup> Smith became increasingly undeterred by the racist attitudes of the Afrikaner community. This made him nearly as controversial as his missiologist predecessor at Stellenbosch from many years before, Johannes du Plessis. If anything, Smith

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<sup>79</sup> Saayman, *Beroerder Israels*, 59-60.

<sup>80</sup> Saayman, *Beroerder Israels*, 76.

<sup>81</sup> Saayman, *Beroerder Israels*, 78.

<sup>82</sup> Saayman, *Beroerder Israels*, 101.



casted an even more solitary figure in the similar fate he would share with du Plessis. Although never accused of heresy, his position at the seminary became untenable due to the breakdown in relationships. Smith decided to opt out of the system by taking the unimaginable (for most Afrikaners) decision of accepting a ministerial call to a black congregation in Mamelodi near Pretoria. From here Smith would step up his critique of the ruling regime. Eventually—together with Ellen—by making their home inside the black township, the Smiths had not only removed themselves ideologically but also physically from the *laager*.<sup>83</sup>

As was the case with Naudé, Smith underwent a theological reorientation, which followed a similar pattern of coming in the wake of an inner conviction born out of contacts with people rather than texts in the first instance. Thus for example, although Karl Barth played a significant role in Smith's life story, it was a personal contact and questions posed directly by the great theologian that had a lasting impression on Smith. Saayman does not mention any specific details regarding when and where this took place, but apparently during Smith's tenure as Mission Secretary he had occasion to undertake a study tour to Europe and there had the opportunity to have a personal meeting with Barth. Barth asked his visitor some incisive questions regarding the situation in South Africa, including the eventually unanswered: "Are you really free to preach the Gospel? Even when your family and friends do not agree with what you are preaching?" (my translation).<sup>84</sup> These and other intercultural and eventually interracial contacts would cause the memory of his past refusal to sit down at the dinner table with black people as missionary in Vendaland to come back and haunt Smith. Increasingly he came to realise that even when he was making proselytes for the NGK mission, he had not truly accepted the Venda as completely equal fellow humans, and this realisation became a cause of real shame and inspiration for making amends.<sup>85</sup>

### Rebels Assessed in the Reference to Evangelicalism

In her biography of *Andrew and Emma Murray*, Leona Choy comments on the apparently disparate nature of the interests that sustained Andrew Jr. throughout his career. She mentions some of these as follows: "Total abstinence, unity

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<sup>83</sup> Saayman, *Beroerder Israels*, 115.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in Saayman, *Beroerder Israels*, 79.

<sup>85</sup> See Saayman, *Beroerder Israels*, 82.

among Christians, faith healing, and the Afrikaaner (*sic*) interests.”<sup>86</sup> Looking at this list one could easily conclude that these were not the major emphases of the above-mentioned dissident theologians, who were in many respects more worldly in their outlook. However, if one considers only the two issues of obvious political significance for the South African context, namely church unity and Afrikaaner interests, then one does indeed arrive at central points of contention and personal struggle in the careers of the above-mentioned figures—starting already with du Plessis. Which should receive priority, the interests of the church ecumenical or the Afrikaaner *volk*? In Murray’s time this binary demand of choosing did not yet exist as starkly as it increasingly became for other figures later on in the 20th century. For Murray and others of his generation it was still possible to support both causes, but Naudé and Smith, in particular, found that solidarity with Christians across the racial divide had political implications that were perceived as damaging to Afrikaaner interests by their detractors.

Johannes Du Plessis’ troubled career already anticipated some of what would also become stumbling blocks for unconventional Afrikaaner theologians of a later era. Although not the main or only cause of his conflict with the neo-Calvinists, his ecumenical activities played a role in his marginalisation. Similarly, the convictions of later dissenters appear to have been shaped to greater or lesser degrees by ecumenical contacts with other Christians, nationally and internationally, and across racial lines.

Although evangelicalism influenced the careers of the dissident theologians to varying degrees, it would appear that their ecumenism and openness to people across various spectrums were stronger factors in actually precipitating the changes of heart that occurred in some of their lives. On the other hand, the evangelical legacy or a hybridisation thereof did perhaps play a subversive role. Coetzee claims that the influence of this peculiar evangelical reformed tradition, with roots in both Scottish evangelical pietism and the Utrecht school, had predisposed his mentioned critics to exhibit a stronger historical and hermeneutical consciousness compared to the Apartheid theologians.<sup>87</sup>

Referring back to Murray, it is notable that his brand of evangelicalism was firmly rooted in the Holiness tradition as exemplified by the Keswick Convention in England. A key feature of his life and teaching in this regard was the “two stages in the Christian life,”<sup>88</sup> wherein the concept of a second encounter with

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<sup>86</sup> Choy, *Andrew and Emma*, 225.

<sup>87</sup> Coetzee, “*Kritiese Stem*,” 549.

<sup>88</sup> Choy, *Andrew and Emma*, 163.

the Holy Spirit, more complete than upon one's initial conversion, is posited. After such a second blessing it becomes possible to live a life of fuller obedience to the will of God. This processional view of the Christian life, which is also characteristic of Methodism, was of course anathema to the neo-Calvinistic paradigm, which predominated in much of 20th century Afrikaner Christianity, where themes such as election and predestination deterministically held sway over the spirituality of the faithful. Therefore, it is striking that some of these above-described dissident theologians experienced a kind of second conversion with respect to their view of humanity, which consequently also might have transformed their view of God.<sup>89</sup> Although they could not be described as conventional evangelicals or pietists by any means, their Christian lives, especially in the cases of Naudé and Smith, did exhibit distinct stages, which coincided with radical breaks and changes of direction in life. For this reason I find it appropriate to describe their spirituality along the lines of a *hybridised* evangelicalism.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to return to the Bosch thesis by asking two basic questions. Firstly, is it correct to suggest, as Bosch did, that these Afrikaner dissenters were indeed mission enthusiasts? Secondly, is it correct to describe them as evangelicals? It is important to keep these questions separate, because by making the first question dependent on the second, as I think Bosch unwittingly did—as if all Afrikaner mission enthusiasts were also evangelicals—the issue becomes quite confused.

If one has a very broad, general view of evangelicalism then perhaps it might not raise any issue conflating the matters in such a manner. In one degree or another, especially through the contributions of the Scottish ministers at the Cape, evangelicalism did indeed influence the historical ethos of Afrikaner Christianity, and especially the missionary tradition, which in many respects became the specialized interest of the wider Murray family, descendants, and associates. The dissenters, although not direct family members of the Murrays, were in various ways involved in the missionary tradition, whether through the influence of Johannes du Plessis, or personal interests that led them in this direction, or specific career choices, such as the case of Nico Smith who became first a missionary and then a missiologist.

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<sup>89</sup> See, for example, Smith, *Die Dood*.

Truly, therefore, it is characteristic of the dissidents that they were interested in mission and ecumenism. This interest, in many ways, led them away from the narrow cocoon of Afrikaner group interests, by forcing them to consider the life situation of disenfranchised Africans. So this issue may indeed be indicated as critical in the mix of what made these people who they were and became.

As to the second question, whether they were evangelicals, I believe things are hardly as clear cut. If one keeps in mind 20th century worldwide developments with respect to the issue of mission, especially from the 1960's onwards when some of these rebels became active, it is important not to forget the international divide that occurred between 'evangelicals' and 'ecumenicals.' Although the Afrikaans churches were increasingly isolated from participation in these wider worldwide formations among Christians, the fact is that in their insistence that the gospel, and by implication Christian mission, has political implications for the way society is stratified, these dissenters displayed more affinity with the representative position of the ecumenicals rather than the evangelicals, who tended to view mission in more traditional categories of the spiritual and the individual.

Thus it would be a misrepresentation to describe these figures as evangelicals in reference to the meaning this term had acquired in the later 20th century. On the other hand, it is undeniable that they stand in the general tradition of an older evangelicalism as represented especially in the Cape by some of the figures I mentioned in this article. Indeed the dissenters' position might still be called evangelical, provided one allows for a view of an evangelicalism that is open to contextualisation and hybridisation.

Some recent trends in the USA, which has been a hotbed of 20th century evangelicalism, are instructive. Evangelicalism has for long been completely identified with the social agenda of the 'religious Right.' But recent times have seen a fragmentation among the previously rigid block of right-wing evangelicalism into something more pluralistic. Indeed, on issues as diverse as immigration and environmental concerns, some evangelical voices have been heard in support of the policies of the Democratic Party! This development, although it is too early for thorough analysis, would support my contention that evangelicalism is not as closed to contextualisation and hybridisation as might previously have been assumed.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> See Marcia Pally, "Evangelicals who have left the right," <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2013/01/15/evangelicals-who-have-left-the-right/>

The Bosch thesis really remains a point of debate. Whether or not it makes sense depends to a large extent on one's view of evangelicalism. Should we view evangelicalism from the perspective of what it has typically been, especially in the 20th century? Or should we consider it from an idealist perspective in terms of what it may possibly become? Bosch himself famously stated that he was "in the hope business"<sup>91</sup> at a time in the 1980s when things looked rather dire for South Africa. So perhaps this is also how we should consider his thesis regarding Afrikaner evangelicals as apartheid opponents. It does require a stretch of the imagination to call these people evangelicals—at least in the sense of a well-developed historical consciousness—but perhaps it would be a worthwhile stretch in the interest of hope for the future of evangelicalism.

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<sup>91</sup> Bosch, "Civil Religion," 14.