

**Being the Church for Others: A critical analysis of
John W. de Gruchy's contextual ecclesiology of engagement**

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Abstract

Being the Church for Others: A critical analysis of John W. de Gruchy's contextual ecclesiology of engagement

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This thesis examines the contextual theology of John W. de Gruchy whose critique of the Dutch Reformed Church's (DRC) iteration of a Reformed theology in support of apartheid, provided a theological *cantus firmus* for the church struggle against apartheid. There are two questions that guide this thesis. The first question I ask is, 'Why, in 1986, did the Dutch Reformed Church recant its pro-apartheid stance which it had maintained, both officially and unofficially for one hundred and thirty-nine years?' The second question concerns John W. de Gruchy in his capacity as a leading theologian in the Christian church and as a representative of the Reformed tradition in South Africa. I ask, 'What was his role in the dismantling of the social experiment called apartheid?'

Drawing upon de Gruchy's theological literature, written over the past fifty years, an argument is crafted suggesting that, by answering the second question, we also answer the first. To this end, a brief account of the Afrikaner rise to political and theological dominance in South Africa is provided with a view to establishing the social, political and economic context.

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While it may seem, at times, a solitary affair to the writer, the fashioning of a thesis requires the dedication and support of a community. Family and friends, faculty and librarians, patient supervisors and long-suffering editors - all have come together to produce a manuscript with the hope that it may shed a gentle light on the topic that has become both passion and sustenance for the author. My supervisor Heather Eaton has shouldered the burdens that my unruly mind brought to a project such as this. I am eternally grateful that she saw fit to provide me with a sizable intellectual field in which to run and jump, graze and ruminate, and rest, when necessary. She has guided me from concept to commas. Her keen insight into the topic and her ability to move freely from the general to the particular has made this a better thesis. Her gift of friendship is one of the more valuable benefits of this project. My son Adam provided excellent editorial support using his considerable writing skills to make this a more readable thesis. Thank you, Adam! Dominique, Daniel, and Matthew have been my favourite cheerleaders and I am very grateful they have not abandoned me as I surely seem to have abandoned them. To John de Gruchy, who showed me the beauty of the Reformed tradition, the power of justice, and helped me love the Church again. My wife, Su-jen, made time for me to write. Without her extraordinary efforts, this thesis would not have been written. Evidence of her commitment to the project is in every page. It is difficult to imagine how one's love for another can flourish amidst the pressure and changes that a doctoral thesis brings to family life but mine has. Thank you, my partner and my best friend. To the people of South Africa who continued to love in midst of personal and national crisis: Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika! (Lord, bless Africa!)

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of abbreviations and acronyms	viii
Introduction	1
The project	3
Some guiding questions	4
A few notes on method	6
Findings	7
How the thesis evolves	8
Chapter One: Situating John de Gruchy	11
Does the author's context matter?	12
Is de Gruchy's contribution relevant?	13
A biographical sketch in context	14
De Gruchy's education	15
The Christian Institute and Pro Veritate	17
The South African Council of Churches	20
The Journal of Theology for Southern Africa	23
De Gruchy's academic career	24
Contextual sensitivity: living and working in apartheid South Africa	26
De Gruchy, Barth and Bonhoeffer	27
Solidarity in a time of transition	29
De Gruchy's place in the larger narrative of the South African people	32
Chapter Conclusion	33
Chapter Two: The social, economic, political and ecclesial factors	35
1647: European presence in the Cape	35
A house without windows	37
1665: The church in the Cape	37
The Afrikaner grand narrative	40
Afrikanerdom on the rise	43
The historical narrative	43
The mind of the early settlers	45
1795 - The British are coming	47
1820 - The British have arrived	48
1838-1846: The Great Trek	49
1871	52
1872 - Responsible Government	52
The Afrikaner's loss of political innocence	55
The question of identity: standing together in the face of annihilation	57
1881-1902 annexation and the Anglo-Boer Wars	59

1910 - Union.....	63
Hertzog: swimming up two streams.....	64
1914 - World War I and the Afrikaner Rebellion	65
Why was the Afrikaner rebelling?	68
Time for change: a growing nationalism aided by a growing apathy	69
1910-1948: white politics and the struggle for the hearts and minds of the Afrikaner	71
1938: The monument, the Great Trek, and a political coup.....	73
1939: Britain's call to arms	76
1948: Afrikaner nationalism and a divided Christian church	77
Chapter Summary.....	80
Relevance to the thesis	82
 Chapter Three: The ecclesiastical foundations of an Afrikaner civil religion.....	87
The foundations of Afrikaner civil religion	87
1857: How different South African history could have been.....	89
The Synod of 1857 and separate worship	90
The Synod of 1881 and the notion of separate, but parallel, churches	92
The ideological captivity of the church.....	96
The DRC as the 'mother of apartheid'	97
The consequences of the 1857 decision	101
1935: The DRC's mission policy	102
A Constantinian shift.....	104
Afrikaner nationalism in 1974.....	105
The Synod of 1974 and separate development (apartheid).....	108
Disunity and the nascent civil religion.....	109
A divided church	112
Afrikaner civil religion.....	114
The Afrikaner nation and ancient Israel.....	117
An English-speaking civil religion?.....	120
 Chapter Four: The lacuna, the Report and the apologia.	123
John W. De Gruchy as interlocutor	124
The historical context for the Report	125
Sharpeville, Cottesloe and Soweto.....	126
Voices of protest.....	128
The Cottesloe Declaration	130
Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) - 1969	133
Human Relations and the South African Scene in Light of Scripture - 1974	134
The structure of the Report.....	137
A lacuna in the DRC's theological literature	139
Some key issues in the Report.....	141
The 'Two Solitudes' within the Reformed tradition	142

Two Reformed traditions understood in light of de Gruchy's reading of Bruggemann's Royal (Davidic) and liberation (Mosaic) trajectories	144
The Royal trajectory in South Africa	147
A theology from above.....	148
Were the English-speaking Reformed churches complicit in apartheid?	149
The lack of an alternative to apartheid theology	150
The absence of the black voice	151
Chapter Five: A Reformed critical examination of the 1974 Report.....	153
The occasion for the Report	155
The Reformed Tradition and the Scope of the Investigation	157
The Biblical Texts and Some Caveats for Their Interpretation According to the Report	158
Hermeneutical principles.....	159
The Reign of God as a Hermeneutical Principle.....	160
The Reign of God as the 'Canon within the Canon'	162
Eisegesis Verses Exegesis in the Report.....	163
The Unity of the People of God	165
A biblical warrant for separate development: Genesis 10 and the Table of Nations	168
A Critical Examination of the Report's interpretation of Genesis 10 and 11	172
A Reformed interpretation of Genesis 11 in Six Points	174
De Gruchy and the possibility of a normative reading of the biblical texts.....	178
The New Testament according to the Report.....	182
A brief summary.....	183
The Report and the sacraments	184
A brief consideration of Bonino's theological hermeneutics.....	186
Bonino	187
Chapter Six: Contra Apologia: John de Gruchy's critique	191
The DRC recants	193
A theological transformation.....	194
A critical stance toward the DRC.....	196
Doing theology in South Africa	197
In a variety of theologies, what would a first-hand theology look like?.....	200
A Reformed contextual response to apartheid theology	201
What was the task of theology in South Africa?.....	202
De Gruchy's rejection of liberal theology.....	206
De Gruchy's Response to the issues facing South Africans: toward a Reformed contextual theology	208
Speaking the language of the Reformed tradition.....	209

What was Reflective of an essential Reformed theology and what elements of apartheid theology had been ultimately shaped by the social, political and economic context?	210
The importance of Abraham Kuyper.....	212
Kuyper’s influence in South Africa	213
Kuyper in South Africa	215
Sphere sovereignty	216
The sphere of the state	217
The sphere of society.....	219
The sphere of the church	221
Liberty of conscience in the church	225
Liberty of conscience and the individual	226
Sphere sovereignty and the individual	229
Civil disobedience	231
Disobedience and the magistrates	232
The use of violence	234
De Gruchy: ‘How My Mind Has Changed’	235
Conclusion	238
Figure 1: Angelus Novus.....	238
Bibliography	243

List of abbreviations and acronyms

Afrikaner = white European of either Dutch or French descent whose first language is Afrikaans.

Afrikaans = or Cape Dutch is a language spoken by approximately 6 million South Africans or about thirteen percent of the population. It is therefore the third most popular language in the country. While Afrikaans does derive some of its vocabulary from such languages as Malay, Portuguese, some Bantu or Khoisan languages, the vast majority of the vocabulary derives directly from Dutch. Afrikaans and Dutch are mutually intelligible.

ANC = African National Congress

Asian = South African whose skin colour is lighter than that of the coloureds

Black = South African indigenous person whose skin colour is the darkest

Boer = translates literally from the Dutch as farmer.

Bywoner = white Afrikaner poor, usually a tenant farmer or labourer

CI = Christian Institute

Coloured = South African of mixed races whose skin colour is lighter than the blacks

DEIC = Dutch East India Company

DRC = The Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa

English-speaking = a small segment of the population whose origins are British. In terms of the church, the English-speaking churches are those whose roots are particular to Britain.

NGK = Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch for 'Dutch Reformed Church')

NHK = Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk (a 'whites' only splinter group of the DRC)

PAC = Pan African Congress

SACC = South African Council of Churches

The Report = *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig.*

TRC = Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Volk = The term '*volk*' was popularly used by the Afrikaner community to distinguish themselves from the other ethnic realities in South Africa. It is translated as 'people' with underlying hints of nation status.

Voortrekker = is an Afrikaans term which means 'pioneer' referring specifically to those Afrikaners who chose to join the Great Trek.

WARC = World Alliance of Reformed Churches

WCC = World Council of Churches

WCRC = World Communion of Reformed Churches (new name of the WARC)

Whites = South African whose skin colour is lighter than that of the asians and usually of European descent.

Throughout this thesis I use the term 'Indigenous' to refer to the first people who inhabited the land. In United Nations documents and in common usage, 'Indigenous' most often refers to people with a long and traditional occupation of a territory. In the case of South Africa, the term refers to the majority population who were pushed to the edges of society, disenfranchised and targeted by racist laws. This definition attempts to maintain a utility to a term that confirms the long and prior status of groups resisting colonial incursions, while distinguishing them from non-Aboriginal groups who are 'native' to a certain area. I use the more general and inclusive term Christian church to identify the larger Christian corpus of denominations and traditions. Other Christian denominations are identified by their names. Where a lowercase 'church' is used, it always refers to the Christian church in general. The term 'Reformed' or 'Reformed tradition' is used to describe the Christian tradition that rose out of the reform movement of the sixteenth century led by John Calvin. I have chosen to use the lowercase spelling of those terms white South Africans used to identify people of colour. The terms 'white', 'black', 'coloured', and 'asian' were used to distinguish the population along colour lines. The term European is capitalised as it refers to a geographic region and not necessarily a skin colour.

*If Jesus exists only for others, then the church must not seek its own self-preservation but be 'open to the world' and in solidarity with others, especially those who are oppressed and suffering.*¹

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Introduction

In the spring of 1988, my friend, an avowed pacifist, returned from an extended trip to Nicaragua. He had visited a small, Roman Catholic base community situated in the jungle in a remote area of the country. There he learned about the Christian liberation movement that had evolved over several decades. He also learned about the turning-point for that community when they became convinced that sometimes, the only thing the oppressor understands is violence. To remain pacifist in the name of Christ was to choose victimisation over liberation. My friend, the pacifist, was changed. He was no longer a pacifist and his story changed my life.

On the twenty-eighth of April, 1994 my friend Pumla² and I met for breakfast as had been our custom for most of the spring term. Pumla was a single, black, mother of two who was studying at McGill completing her Master's degree in economics. Pumla grew-up in apartheid South Africa and was in Montreal on a student's visa. That morning at breakfast I asked Pumla how she felt given the results of the election that had taken place the day before. Nelson Mandela had just been elected the first black President of the country and the African National Congress was going to form its first government having won over sixty per-cent of the seats in Parliament. Pumla answered, "I don't know what I feel because I simply have nothing to compare it to. I just want to go home." Pumla was not ambivalent about the election; she simply had no point of refer-

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 8)* (Fortress Press, 2010), 26.

2. Pumla is not her real name. I have changed it so that she will not be identified.

ence and therefore did not know how to feel. She had lived her whole life under the shadow of apartheid and had no way of knowing what freedom meant. I took for granted what she could not even imagine. Pumla belonged to the black Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa, a member of the larger Reformed community of churches in the world. The ‘mother church’, the DRC was a whites-only church. The daughter church was for blacks only. The Presbyterian Church in Canada belongs to the same community of churches. Pumla and I shared a common Christian tradition yet, in her country, we were not allowed to celebrate communion together. We would not be allowed to eat in the same restaurants, go to the same school, shop at the same stores or drink from the same water fountain. We certainly would not be able to share breakfast at a university cafeteria! Because of her, I was changed.

In June of 2007 I had completed two years of work on a Ph.D. pursuing a topic that I believed was relevant to my church but when it came time to write my dissertation, the ecclesiastical issue I had chosen to investigate had been resolved. The project collapsed. Two years later I considered starting another Ph.D. at Saint Paul University. Before beginning the process for the second time, I had the opportunity to speak with a colleague who had been involved in raising money for the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress during the 1960s and 1970s. He told me how his church organisation had raised hundreds of thousands of dollars that was then delivered to church leaders in South Africa. The money was then distributed to activist groups in an effort to bolster the ‘non-violent’ struggle for liberation. These groups, I learned, had been declared ‘terrorist organisations’ by the South African government. The church connection seemed to be strong. This conversation changed me. Later, I was introduced to the published literature of John W. de Gruchy and most interesting to me were his articles and books that were published during the church struggle in South Africa. I chose to learn about the church struggle with de Gruchy’s help and guidance.

The project

I began this project as a marginally committed, somewhat disinterested minister in a Christian denomination firmly situated within the Reformed tradition - I was even less interested in John Calvin. What could Calvin and the Reformation say to the modern church? De Gruchy seems to have encountered the same attitude in none other than James Cone, scholar and faculty member at Union Theological Seminary. De Gruchy recounted an encounter with Cone after having presented his project on John Calvin to the faculty. He wrote, “James Cone, the distinguished pioneer of ‘black theology’ in North America, remarked that what I had in mind was a waste of time. Why on earth, he asked, would anyone today want to retrieve Calvin’s legacy and the tradition associated with his name?”³ I suggest that de Gruchy sought to answer that very question through his efforts to reclaim Calvin’s legacy from the theological distortions of the DRC.

In this thesis I show how John de Gruchy’s Reformed contextual theology served as a *cantus firmus* for the church struggle against apartheid. I also show how the theological conclusions of his considered and singular approach struck at the very heart of apartheid theology making room for a broader and more substantial critique from both within and outside the nation. I also argue that his theological and pastoral work during apartheid produced a unique and robust contextual theology for South Africa that recalled the intent of the early Reformers who recognised the need for real theological reform. De Gruchy, like those who went before him, sought the return of the Christian church to its calling as the bearer of the Good News of Jesus Christ for all God’s people. In this respect I would liken de Gruchy’s efforts to those of the early Reformers who sought to reclaim a Christianity distorted by political and economic forces that all but

3. John W. de Gruchy, *Confessions of a Christian Humanist* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), Loc. 45–47, Kindle file.

stilled the Christian church's prophetic voice. De Gruchy, with great humility, would decline the comparison.

I discern in de Gruchy's literary corpus evidence of a restatement of the Reformed tradition's passion for the informed conscience that derives its freedom from the Christ who came for every person, regardless of race. I also determined if this restatement was shaped by de Gruchy's reading of liberation and black theology and whether he considered the possibility that Christ stands on the side of the oppressed and marginalised. I argue that de Gruchy was theologically well-situated to engage the DRC's theological arguments made in support of apartheid in a dialectical process. I also argue that his critical theology of engagement provided the essential theological components in the critical rethinking of the English-speaking churches' stance on apartheid. This, combined with the DRC's internal critiques, moved the DRC to reconsider its stance and eventually recant its position toward apartheid. To the best of my knowledge I stand alone in this claim and perhaps this is one of the unique contributions to the topic.

Some guiding questions

There are two specific questions that guide this thesis. I ask and seek to answer the question, 'Why, in 1986, did the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) recant its pro-apartheid stance which it had maintained, both officially and unofficially for one hundred and thirty-nine years?' The second question concerns John W. de Gruchy in his capacity as a leading theologian in the Christian church and as a representative of the Reformed tradition in South Africa. I ask, 'What was his role in the dismantling of the social experiment called apartheid?' I am arguing that de Gruchy was one of a few Reformed theologians in South Africa both willing and able to confront the DRC's theological claims on their own terms. I also argue that de Gruchy helped dismantle the DRC's historical, biblical and theological claims by first, challenging the theological justification of apartheid and by providing a contextually relevant and theologically via-

ble alternative to the distorted Reformed theology of the DRC. This alternative was widely accepted and generally respected by members of the Reformed tradition around the world. This, I argue, was de Gruchy's unparalleled contribution to the church struggle in South Africa and the analysis of which is the unique contribution of this thesis. Perhaps also unique to the current research on this topic is an examination of de Gruchy's contribution to Reformed theology in light of his experience in the church struggle. Another singular contribution to the topic is an expressed appreciation of de Gruchy's provision of an enduring contextual Reformed theological resource built on his work in the Christian Institute, the South African Council of Churches and the Journal of Theology for Southern Africa. His leadership during consultations and theological forums, both in South Africa and the world, as well as his numerous books and articles, have created a leading edge in Reformed theological research.

Two other guiding questions concern the theological justification for individual and institutional civil disobedience. First, 'How are tyrants able to rise to and maintain power within nations where the vast majority of its citizens claim Christianity as their religion and, in the case of South Africa, where the ruling political leadership claimed to be members of the Reformed tradition?' Second, 'What is the role of the Christian church during these times of national crisis?'

John Calvin was clear in his insistence that the church was bound by Romans Chapter 13 which argued that, because God has authority over all Creation and because government is part of that created order, we all must obey the authority of the government as if that authority came from God.⁴ However, Calvin also suggested that, while

4. Romans 13:1-2: "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves." (New Revised Standard Translation)

the church as institution must obey the civil authority, the tyrants who exercise authority less judiciously than they ought should beware, for God will raise-up a challenger to that authority and the tyrant will be 'replaced'. This left the door open for the individual Christian to act on her or his conscience and to disobey the tyrant when necessary.

A few notes on method

Over the past several years I have appropriated de Gruchy's theological method. I have read his published literature in chronological order to see if I could detect evidence of an evolution of his theology over his fifty-year career. It appears that de Gruchy's theology has been remarkably consistent. De Gruchy engaged his critics as partners in a dialogue with a view to improving his theological analysis of any topic or situation. When major criticisms were offered, de Gruchy would often answer the critique in an article or in the revised edition of a book. He would first, acknowledge the value of the criticism and his gratitude for it and second, he would treat the criticism with grace and care. Over the years I saw that the rough edges of youthful passion were not lost, merely softened allowing the reader greater access to the subtleties and nuances of a keen and capacious mind. De Gruchy's theological career has been spent searching for balance through dialogue with the ultimate goal of achieving a better truth than was previously possible. This was the most difficult element of his method to duplicate. It seems to require a level of humility that few are able to attain.

I confess that this work has been extraordinarily challenging, partly because of the sheer volume of literature written by de Gruchy and for which I chose to be responsible; also, partly because of the complexity and depth of his thinking. However, this project has been one of the most stimulating intellectual exercises I have ever undertaken.

I have reflected de Gruchy's method in the structure of the thesis, in the sources I used as well as the language of the text itself. De Gruchy revealed what was important

to the church struggle in the articles and books he wrote, in the lectures he gave and the appointments he accepted. I have tried to choose judiciously from a considerable body of literature revealing what I think is important to the topic. My method is also reflected in the choices I have made, in the literature I used to support my arguments and in the very topic itself. I had the benefit of some conversations with John de Gruchy having met with him in person on two occasions and corresponded on three more. These meetings proved invaluable as I was able to get a sense of the man as we spoke about his work during the apartheid years. Our conversations made this a better thesis.

I began the writing of this thesis with de Gruchy's warning to any and all who undertake the task of doing theology in context. He wrote in 1985 that "Theology is not revelation; it is a human activity subject to human limitations and sin. A pure theology unaffected by human and social filters, a theology without any historical and therefore contextual mediation, is not a possibility."⁵

Findings

The results of my research have shown that de Gruchy's theological critique had a significant impact on the outcome of the church struggle in South Africa, both in the anti-apartheid movement, as well as in the reclaiming of the Reformed tradition in South Africa. It also shows how his comprehensive critique of the Reformed theology espoused by the DRC was one of the driving forces behind the DRC's having recanted its stance toward apartheid. It was also an essential and significant factor in the dramatic changes that occurred in the Christian churches throughout South Africa. I have argued that his critique was, in part, responsible for the dismantling of an apartheid theology that sustained the official political apartheid system that was established in 1948 by the National Party.

5. John W. & Charles Villa-Vicencio de Gruchy, ed., *Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naudé* (Cape Town: D. Philip ; Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 86.

This thesis was written in support of de Gruchy's Reformed contextual theology. While others may have taken a critical approach to de Gruchy's theological approach, I chose to highlight his method by first, appropriating it and second, mirroring his method in my own thesis. I considered his theological approach to be socially significant with true historical implications, the importance of which have yet to be fully realised. I wrote this thesis constructively with the intent of showing how de Gruchy's contribution to the discourse around the role of the church in an apartheid situation had not been fully explored. There was a lacuna in the literature which this thesis fills. I also argue that de Gruchy's contextual theology is portable to other contexts which is possibly the most exciting and hopeful results of this research.

How the thesis evolves

The thesis begins with a brief biographical sketch of John W. de Gruchy, including relevant details of his ancestry, education, work and academic experience. De Gruchy's participation in certain religious and academic institutions or organisations are highlighted to illustrate what I suggest are significant contributions to the church dialogue with an apartheid regime. As well, some of the important themes in this thesis are introduced at this time.

Following is a discussion of the social, economic, political, and religious factors that contributed to the rise of an Afrikaner nation. Also examined is the claim that it was God's plan for the Afrikaner that they possess the land once occupied by indigenous people. As this theme develops, some of the shifts in the economic and political life of South Africa are examined along with a discussion on the role of religion in the development of apartheid.

Rising out of this discussion is the question of the role of the Afrikaner civil religion which developed in the decades prior to the 1948 election. This leads to an investigation of the ecclesiastical foundations of the civil religion with a view to assessing its

importance in the relationship between the Nationalist government and the Dutch Reformed Church. The argument that the English-speaking churches ‘failed’ their constituencies is also discussed in the context of de Gruchy’s criticism that the English-speaking churches were apathetic toward apartheid. He also argued that their apathy was self-serving because the *status quo* benefited the English-speaking as well as the Afrikaaner community. The history of the DRC’s shift from passive to active supporter of apartheid becomes increasingly relevant to the topic and is discussed here, in some detail.

As the investigation evolves it become evident that there is a lacuna in the published literature on apartheid South Africa. Missing in the literature is a comprehensive discussion of John de Gruchy’s role in the church struggle against apartheid. De Gruchy’s role is discussed in relation to DRC document entitled *Human Relations and the South African Scene in Light of Scripture*, published in 1974. I cite this document as an example of the DRC’s official theological position regarding apartheid.

A Reformed critical examination of the 1974 *Report* follows which highlights some key theological points made by the DRC in support of apartheid. The research revealed an unconventional interpretation of some biblical texts used by the DRC in its theological stance on apartheid. It was appropriate, therefore, to identify and discuss the implications of a conventional Reformed critique of the biblical exegesis published in the *Report*. Two recognised experts on the topic, chosen by de Gruchy, provide an alternative and what is arguably a more relevant and authentic Reformed interpretation of the key biblical texts cited by the authors of the *Report*. De Gruchy’s hermeneutical starting point is described further as it relates to his theological challenge to the DRC’s biblical justification of apartheid.

The final pages of the thesis include a discussion of John de Gruchy’s critique of the DRC’s unique expression of Reformed theology. Also discussed are some of de Gruchy’s ideas regarding a peaceful resolution to apartheid. His contextual theology is

explored against the theological backdrop which suggested that the churches had lost their prophetic voice because they had failed to develop beyond a second hand, inherited European theology that was inadequate to the critical task of addressing the nuances of apartheid theology.

Chapter One: Situating John de Gruchy

If the church fails to witness for the true Gospel of Jesus Christ it will find itself witnessing for a false gospel. If we seek to reconcile Christianity with the so-called 'South African way of life' [...] we shall find that we have allowed an idol to take the place of Christ.¹

A Message to the People of South Africa

Unless the powerful are capable of learning to respect the dignity of their victims, impassable barriers will remain, and the world will be doomed to violence, cruelty, and bitter suffering.²

Noam Chomsky

In 1857, the Dutch Reformed Church agreed to allow the white churches to establish the practice of racially based worship wherein whites and blacks were strongly encouraged to worship separately. In 1881, the church established a policy that allowed for racially based congregations to be formed. In 1974, the DRC reiterated its long held policy of separate development for the different racial groups in South Africa by publishing a position paper. The document, entitled *Human Relations and the South African Scene In The Light Of Scripture (the Report)*, provided biblical and theological warrant for what the church considered a decision that was doctrinally faithful to the historical Reformed tradition. In 1986 the DRC recanted its long-held decision to support apartheid and published this decision in its official document entitled *The story of the Dutch Reformed Church's journey with apartheid from 1960 - 1994: a testimony and a confession*. What caused the DRC to recant?

1. South African Council of Churches, "A Message to the People of South Africa," in *A Message to the People of South Africa* (Marshalltown, South Africa: SACC, 1968), [Http://www.sacc.org.za/about/celebrate16.html](http://www.sacc.org.za/about/celebrate16.html).

2. Noam Chomsky credits Jon Snow, British journalist, with this counsel. Noam Chomsky, *2013 Edward Said Memorial Lecture* (Friends House, London, 2013), [Http://www.israeli-occupation.org/2013-03-29/noam-chomsky-violence-and-dignity-reflections-on-the-middle-east-text/](http://www.israeli-occupation.org/2013-03-29/noam-chomsky-violence-and-dignity-reflections-on-the-middle-east-text/).

South African historians disagree as to the effect the Christian churches had on the development, establishment and eventual dismantling of the social experiment called apartheid. Some suggest that it was social and economic factors that contributed to the move toward a radical and absolute racial segregation of the country with the Christian church playing a secondary but ancillary role. Others contest this opinion claiming that the Christian church played a more important role in both the propagation of apartheid and its demise. I am suggesting that there is a causal link between the DRC's strong theological support of apartheid and the incredible effectiveness of the Nationalist government's policies on separate development.

I am not suggesting anything new here recognising that this has been said before in various but perhaps subtler ways. But I am suggesting, in agreement with de Gruchy, that the apathy of the English-speaking churches and their anemic attempts at engaging the injustice of apartheid, weakened further by their desire to sustain the *status quo*, allowed the DRC and the National Party to conceive and disseminate all that was necessary for a pro-segregationist civil religion to flourish. The DRC, unchallenged, was able to support the government allowing it to proceed with impunity. What is new and perhaps a unique contribution to the topic of the Reformed witness in South Africa is this study of de Gruchy's singular contribution to the church struggle against apartheid.

Does the author's context matter?

In an informal meeting between the author and de Gruchy³, he suggested that his role in the church struggle against apartheid was fulfilled in the 'background' of the debates and confrontations. After two hours of conversation, de Gruchy's humble accounting of his own participation raised the question, 'What was his contribution to the struggle?' This is the question I want to answer.

3. A private meeting between the author and John de Gruchy that took place at the 2009 American Academy of Religion's annual meeting in Montreal.

John de Gruchy was chosen as the interlocutor for this thesis because there is strong evidence, which I will discuss further, to suggest that he has been one of the most consistent and insightful interpreter of the Reformed tradition in South Africa during the theologically important years between 1973 and 1994. This is not to suggest that de Gruchy has not contributed significantly in other areas within the larger discipline of theology. In fact, I maintain that the opposite is true. However, my immediate concern is with the Christian churches' role in the advent and culmination of apartheid so I will treat those of de Gruchy's many contributions only as they directly relate to my topic. The data from his other contributions will surely provide the content for several more theses and books. Understanding de Gruchy's context should prove helpful as I seek to answer the questions raised by my experience of the Christian church as a prophetic voice called to speak, at times, on behalf of those who are voiceless. Do we need to know what the author had for breakfast? Sometimes it helps.

Is de Gruchy's contribution relevant?

Dr. Lyn Holness, a former doctoral student and de Gruchy's long-time friend, suggested in her 2003 article that

[h]ere we have someone who responded as a young man to a call to ordained ministry in the Congregational church, and who in the outworking of that call went on to become one of the South African church's most significant prophetic voices, notably in resistance to apartheid, gaining international recognition and respect in the process.⁴

Having completed a study of de Gruchy's published literature on the church struggle against apartheid, I will seek to provide evidence for my claim that he was a modern Reformer of the Christian faith. I also claim that he attempted to address dialogically the concerns raised by those who witnessed the largest member church of the Reformed tradition choose to segregate their population on the basis of the colour of one's skin. I

4. Lyn Holness, "John W. de Gruchy," *International Congregational Journal* 3, no. 1 (February 2003): 38.

maintain that de Gruchy actively promoted the unity of the Christian church while standing firm in his conviction that the theology of apartheid was based on a false understanding of the biblical texts and a misappropriation of the Reformed tradition. It is my contention that de Gruchy's career as a pastor and theologian served as an ecclesiastical and theological benchmark for the South African Reformed theological community.

I suggest that de Gruchy's journey was anchored on a hope that defied reason and which was grounded in the conviction that, if the Christian church acknowledged God's claim over all creation, then it was the church's responsibility to bear witness to that claim. Because the church failed in its witness and, because of its persistent disobedience to God, apartheid was allowed to flourish. De Gruchy, among others, argued that when the Christian church remained apathetic toward apartheid and, having chosen to do nothing to mitigate its effects, the black majority would continue to suffer. If the Christian church agreed that this was a suitable arrangement, then it need not do anything. However, if it agreed that the arrangement distorted the Gospel message of justice and equity then the churches would be compelled to take action. Following is a brief biographical sketch which aims to demonstrate why I consider de Gruchy to be the reasonable choice from among the Reformed interlocutors.

A biographical sketch in context

John Wesley de Gruchy is a South African theologian, pastor and educator. He is known for, *inter alia*, his contributions to the theological discourse around the Christian church's response to the apartheid regime that governed South Africa from 1948 to 1994. De Gruchy's ancestral roots go deeper in Europe than they do in South Africa. His heritage is important to me primarily because it is important to him. De Gruchy is able to trace his paternal ancestors as far back as the fourteenth century when they travelled from France to Jersey, one of the Channel Islands. His grandfather captained a

trading ship for many years, eventually settling in Cape Town in 1883. In that same year he married the woman who would become de Gruchy's grandmother. She had travelled from Sussex, England to start her new life in the colony. Both of de Gruchy's maternal grandparents travelled from England to settle in Port Elizabeth early in the nineteenth century. When compared to The Cradle of Humankind,⁵ where *hominin* remains have been discovered dating back three and one-half million years, de Gruchy's ancestors were relative newcomers to the area. The black population of South Africa is much older than the white and this fact informed de Gruchy's understanding of his own place in South Africa.

On March 18, 1939, six years after his only sibling Rozelle was born, de Gruchy came into the world to live in the then-small Pretoria suburb of Hatfield, South Africa. His maternal grandparents were devout Methodists and they insisted on the name John Wesley in honour of the co-founder of the Methodist tradition. John Wesley de Gruchy was nurtured in the Wesleyan tradition of the Christian church. His parents were Christians and were members of the local Congregationalist church which he attended as a child and teenager.

De Gruchy's education

De Gruchy received an education to which only the white, privileged population of South Africa were entitled. He matriculated high school in 1955 and began his undergraduate studies at Rhodes⁶ University from which he received his Bachelor of Arts, with Distinction, in 1959. Two years later he received his Bachelor of Divinity degree from Rhodes, having achieved First Class Honours. He was ordained to the min-

5. A UNESCO heritage site situated fifty kilometres outside Johannesburg, South Africa where some of the oldest *hominin* remains have been found.

6. It is somewhat ironic that one of the most articulate anti-apartheid theologians was trained, in part, at the university named after Cecil John Rhodes, the wealthy English businessperson after whom the country Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) was named and who setup the provisions for the Rhodes Scholarship. Rhodes' wealth was gained at the expense of thousands of black workers.

istry in the United Congregationalist Church in 1961, the same year he married Isobel Anita Dunstan.

While serving a congregation in Durban in 1963 de Gruchy was awarded the World Council of Churches Fellowship which enabled him to spend one year at the Chicago Theological Seminary. It was his intention to study Christianity and Hinduism with Mircea Eliade but he decided to study Christian theology with Franklin Littell⁷ who introduced him to the German *kirchencamp*. While in Chicago he began to refine his interests after reading lectures by Eberhard Bethge who was Dietrich Bonhoeffer's friend, confidant, and biographer. De Gruchy explained:

I picked these up and read them, and I said, 'Wow! This is somebody I've got to get to grips with!', because not only did I get excited by this (I'd read *The Cost of Discipleship* before but I hadn't ever seen this total picture), but in those lectures Bethge raised the question as to what Bonhoeffer might have said about the situation in South Africa. So I said 'Wow! I'm going to answer that question'!⁸

'Was Bonhoeffer relevant to South Africa?' This was more de Gruchy's question than Bethge's as Bethge saw no direct parallel between the situation in Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa. However, it was a question de Gruchy would pursue for the next forty years. As part of his scholarship, de Gruchy was invited to participate in the academic programme at the Chicago Theological Seminary. Here he was able to audit lectures given by Paul Tillich. In his thesis de Gruchy used Tillich's understanding of anxiety and the fear of change in Tillich's *Courage to Be*⁹ to reflect on the South African Christian church but de Gruchy's real interest was in Bonhoeffer and what he might have said regarding the church situation in South Africa. This growing interest in Bonhoeffer would eventually lead him to doctoral studies. The seeds of a rich theologi-

7. Franklin Littell is credited with having given birth to the discipline of Holocaust Studies in the U.S.A.

8. Rebecca Baer-Porteous, "Seeking the Dawn: A Critical Reflection Upon and Response to the Theology of John de Gruchy" (North Carolina, U.S.A.: Duke, 1998), 6.

9. Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

cal career having been sown, de Gruchy left Chicago to return to South Africa with a Master of Theology degree having graduated *Summa Cum Laude*.

Beginning in 1964, he worked for four years as a pastor in congregations in Durban and Johannesburg. In 1968 he began his doctoral studies at the University of South Africa where he set out to answer the question Bethge asked in his lectures at the University of Chicago in the early 60s: ‘What would Dietrich Bonhoeffer say about the situation in South Africa?’ Working at two jobs and raising a family, de Gruchy completed his Doctor of Divinity degree in 1972, an accomplishment framed chronologically by his first encounter with Bethge’s Chicago lectures in 1963 and Bethge’s South African lectures of 1974.¹⁰ In an interview with Rebecca Baer-Porteous, a student at Duke University in the United States, de Gruchy reflected candidly on his experience of writing the dissertation saying,

I didn’t have the luxury of working on my dissertation other than in spare time. It was quite traumatic because we had three young kids and I was also pastoring a church, so it was a terribly hectic three years. I still to this day don’t know quite how I finished it, and I always feel that I could have done better on my dissertation if I’d had the space to do it in. On the other hand, not having the space but being involved in the issues on a day to day basis helped me to work with the material in a way that otherwise I don’t think I might have.¹¹

The Christian Institute and *Pro Veritate*

He resumed his duties as pastor in 1964 working in the mid-sized United Congregationalist church in Sea View, a town just outside Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape. It was during this time that de Gruchy befriended Christiaan Frederick Beyers Naudé, a minister in the DRC and the founding director of the Christian Institute (CI).¹²

10. Eberhard Bethge, *Bonhoeffer, Exile and Martyr*, edited and with an essay by John W. de Gruchy (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

11. Baer-Porteous, “Seeking the Dawn: A Critical Reflection Upon and Response to the Theology of John de Gruchy,” 7.

12. “The Christian Institute (CI) had been formed in 1963 by Ds C F Beyers Naudé, a leading DRC clergyman who had broken with his own Church over the issue of apartheid. The CI sought to bring together black and white people of the different Churches, including the DRC, to actively engage in opposition to apartheid. Its membership was

With Naudé's encouragement, de Gruchy joined the CI in 1965 having already contributed to *Pro Veritate*,¹³ the ecclesiastical newspaper started by Naudé in 1962. *Pro Veritate* provided a public voice for those wishing to express opinions and concerns regarding apartheid, especially those anti-apartheid activists worshipping and working in the mainline Christian churches. The paper was published from 1963 until 1977 when the CI was banned having been declared an 'affected organisation' by the government. De Gruchy's name appears for the first time on the masthead of *Pro Veritate* in October of 1966 where he is listed as a member of the editorial staff. His work on *Pro Veritate* was the beginning of a long publishing career. It is possible that, at this time, he began to understand the power of the published word to effect positive change in the Christian church.

Before de Gruchy was known as a theologian, he had been an active participant in public protests and anti-apartheid demonstrations while a student at Rhodes University and subsequently as a pastor in the Congregationalist Church. He recounts two such events which illustrate his understanding of the strong connection between the Christian church and the anti-apartheid movement that began to grow in earnest during the 1960s.

based on individual persons rather than Churches or associations. It was a very active and vociferous voice for many years until it too was banned and its founder, Beyers Naudé, restricted in October 1977." (Spong, Bernard, and Cedric Mayson. *Come Celebrate!: Twenty-Five Years of the South African Council of Churches*. 148 p vols. Johannesburg, South Africa: Communications Dept. of the South African Council of Churches, 1993, p. 12.)

13. *Pro Veritate* was the official publication of the Christian Institute from its inception in 1963 under the directorship of Beyers Naudé. On October 19, 1977 the CI was declared an 'affected organisation' along with seventeen other anti-apartheid organisations. Also on this day banning orders were issued to Beyers Naudé and Donald Woods, two prominent whites who had publicly supported Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). Justice Minister Jimmy Kruger placed bans on all movements affiliated with the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) along with the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) and Black People's Convention (BPC). Other banned organisations included the AASECA, the Black Parents Association, the Black Women's Federation, the Border Youth Organisation, the Eastern Province Youth Organisation, the Medupe Writers' Association, the Natal Youth Organisation, the Transvaal Youth Organisation, the Union of Black Journalists, and the Western Cape Youth Organisation.

One of these events was an anti-apartheid protest in the City Hall where he saw his own minister, Basil Brown, sitting on the stage. De Gruchy recalled this event forty-seven years later in his book *Confessions of a Christian Humanist* where he remembered that

[t]his made a considerable impression on me. But it was at Rhodes University that political sensitivities were sharpened. [...] I recall the first anti-apartheid protest march in which Isobel and I participated, along High Street in Grahamstown in 1959. Hewson, one of the most saintly people I have ever met (a true model of holiness) was among its leaders. Early the next year, on 21 March, the Sharpeville massacre sent shock waves around the country. That was a critical turning point for me as it was for many others, but few in the evangelical-fundamentalist camp seemed to take much notice. Indeed, evangelical-fundamentalists in South Africa refused to get involved in opposing apartheid, and many of them openly or tacitly supported it. Ideologically, they had identified themselves as right-wing supporters of the *status quo*.¹⁴

Protests and demonstrations provided a means of expressing the anger and frustration felt by those who lived under the deadening weight of apartheid's legislation but they did not provide much opportunity for theological dialogue, at least not the kind de Gruchy envisioned. He was convinced that the clergy in the mainline churches were lacking in theological depth. He was also convinced that, if there were a proper means of engaging in dialogue, the church struggle against apartheid could be more effective. *Pro Veritate* provided de Gruchy with a sense of the possibilities of theological engagement but he knew that this was not the newspaper's primary purpose. He also knew that there was no adequate forum in South Africa where theologians could grapple with the pressing issues of the time. One such pressing issue was the conflict between certain Christian churches and the apartheid state which evolved into a situation where two formidable institutions became locked in a battle for truth and the imaginations of the people they claimed to serve. How did one talk about this with other theologians and church members?

14. John W. de Gruchy, *Confessions of a Christian Humanist* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 74.

Pro Veritate was a newspaper focussing on news from the churches and about the churches in South Africa. It also provided a means by which news about critical issues regarding the church struggle against apartheid could be brought to the foreground and disseminated efficiently and inexpensively. It gave a public voice to the private longings and hopes of the lay and clergy who were associated with the CI but it was not the academic journal de Gruchy believed was necessary for the intellectual debate to flourish in South Africa. For the time being, he would find a theological and ecclesiastical path to walk with the South African Council of Churches.

The South African Council of Churches

The South African Council of Churches' (SACC) subdued and unassuming entry onto the ecclesio-political playing field gave little hint as to its future role in the anti-apartheid movement. As Bernard Spong wrote in his history of the SACC, it was a 'quiet birth'. It came into being without a fanfare of trumpets or any special form of celebration. The event is simply recorded in the minutes of the seventeenth biennial meeting of the Christian Council of South Africa, held in the Observatory Congregational church in Cape Town on May 29, 1968. Spong commented on the event and includes the text of the minutes to bring attention to the contrast between the simplicity of the motion and the magnitude of the SACC's influence in the church struggle. Spong wrote:

Name of the Council: It was agreed that the name of the Council should be changed to The South African Council of churches. [my italics] It is the shortest sentence in the four pages of minutes. [...] Yet this simple change of name, followed by item 7 on the agenda that took the delegates through a long series of constitutional phrases, was a dramatic act that was to change the face of ecumenical co-operation, witness, and service in South Africa. It was as important to the churches of South Africa as the later establishment of the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism was to the world church.¹⁵

15. Bernard Spong and Cedric Mayson, *Come Celebrate!: Twenty-Five Years of the South African Council of Churches* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Communications Department of the South African Council of Churches, 1993), 2.

These were humble beginnings for an organization that enjoyed the leadership of people like Manas Buthelezi, Desmond Mpilo Tutu and Beyers Naudé and it would go on to be a unifying and powerful force against apartheid.

The year 1968 and the birth of the SACC¹⁶ marks the beginning of new level of commitment on behalf of the participating churches in the struggle against apartheid. With its first publication, '*A Message to the People of South Africa*', it declared itself to be a Christian voice speaking on behalf of the victims of apartheid, both black and white. The document received a mixed reaction from the participating churches in the SACC. Some of the churches felt that the *Message* went too far while others felt it did not go far enough. It was paragraphs like the following that caught the attention of the Nationalist Party as it seemed highly critical of the Party's claim that God had somehow ordained apartheid and their way of life. The authors of the *A Message* thought differently and said so.

Christ is the master and critic of all of us and of all our groups. He is the judge of the church also. If the church fails to witness for the true Gospel of Jesus Christ it will find itself witnessing for a false gospel. If we seek to reconcile Christianity with the so-called "South African way of life" (or any other way of life) we shall find that we have allowed an idol to take the place of Christ.¹⁷

From inauspicious beginnings a champion of the people rose to meet the challenge of apartheid.

In the same year de Gruchy moved with Isobel and their three young children to Johannesburg, leaving his congregational work to serve as the SACC's first Director of Studies and Communications. He served concurrently as the Secretary of the Church Unity Commission where he explored the possibility of unification between the Bantu Presbyterian Church, the Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglican), the Meth-

16. The Christian Council of Churches, the successor to the General Missionary Conference and predecessor to the SACC, was formed on Wednesday, June 12, 1936 at the Trinity Methodist Church in Bloemfontein and was renamed in 1968.

17. South African Council of Churches, "A Message to the People of South Africa".

odist Church of South Africa, the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, the Tsonga Presbyterian Church, and the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa.

It is worth remarking, for the sake of emphasis, on the growing importance of the SACC's new-found role as church advocate in the struggle against apartheid. While it may be difficult to measure de Gruchy's influence on the burgeoning Council, it may be useful to consider the fact that he participated in the SACC at the highest level during the important first years following its inception. He was present in the organisation as the new constitution with a clear mission statement was crafted and entrenched. It was during this time that the SACC's message was clearly articulated and it fell to de Gruchy to disseminate this message to its member congregations.

As the SACC's first Director of Studies and Communications, de Gruchy was responsible for publicising *A Message to the People of South Africa* to the member churches. De Gruchy was not a member of the drafting group¹⁸ of *A Message* but he was a signatory and he was later asked to co-author a book about *A Message* which was published in 1968.¹⁹ With the publication of *A Message*, the SACC had declared the 'South African way of life,' or apartheid, to be a false Gospel. It may seem strange that the church would confront apartheid on theological grounds as the term apartheid does not hold any theological meaning. However, it may be useful to remember that apartheid was a social and political system based on an Afrikaner self-understanding, along with a

18. De Gruchy wrote in a personal communication: "I was involved in the process at various conferences, but I was not part of the drafting group. At the time I was a pastor in Durban and the drafting group (Theological Commission of the SACC) was based in Johannesburg. The main drafters were Dr. Ben Engelbrecht, a Dutch Reformed theologian, and Fr. John Davies, Anglican chaplain at the University of the Witwatersrand who later became a bishop in England. There were about ten people in the group. I was, however, at the Conference on "False Gospels" which was held in Johannesburg shortly before I started work at the SACC, and I was one of the signatories of the Message at that Conference." (personal communication from John de Gruchy, February 9, 2011)

19. Cf. J.W. de Gruchy and W.B. de Villiers, eds., *The Message in Perspective: A Book About "A Message to the People of South Africa"* (Transvaal, South Africa: South African Council of Churches, 1968).

perception of the black majority that was allegedly based on the Christian biblical texts and theological tenets that had become popular in some parts of Europe.²⁰ .

The SACC's inaugural publication revealed the theological direction it would follow for the next twenty-seven years of its involvement in the church struggle. For de Gruchy and the churches that gathered under the new banner, it was a new way of engaging the Nationalist regime and apartheid. De Gruchy had committed himself to the struggle against apartheid in his time as a theology student and pastor; now the SACC presented a larger forum within which to explore theological possibilities for making inroads into the debate and critique of the Republic's²¹ racist policies. His experience in the church and in the SACC suggested the need for proper theological discourse around the issue of the Christian churches' role in the struggle against apartheid.

The Journal of Theology for Southern Africa

In 1972, while still working for the SACC and having just completed his doctorate in theology at the University of South Africa, de Gruchy began to focus his attention on the need for a proper journal of theology for the southern African region. He described the birth of the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa (JTSA)* in the following way:

The JTSA, which first appeared in December 1972, incorporated the Lutheran journal *Credo* and the journal *Ministry*, published in Lesotho, but soon took on an identity of its own as a leading theological journal in the region. In an attempt to gain authors and subscribers, I travelled around the country and further afield, eventually visiting the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town.²²

It was clear from the outset that the *JTSA* was to be a forum within which theologians, lay and ordained, could engage each other in contextual theological issues of importance

20. . Cf. John W. de Gruchy, "Bonhoeffer, Calvinism and Christian Civil Disobedience in South Africa," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34, no. 3 (1981): 245–62 Ibid., 245–62.

21. On May 31, 1961 South Africa declared itself to be a republic, independent and outside the commonwealth. C.R. Swart, the former Governor-General, was sworn in as the first President of the Republic of South Africa.

22. John W. de Gruchy, *Confessions of a Christian Humanist*, 55.

for the region of southern Africa. De Gruchy explained in the *Introduction* to the very first issue:

The Editorial Board is committed to getting at the truth from a biblical perspective as the most important way of becoming theologically relevant and creative. In this way alone can we serve the mission to which the church is called. Moreover, we believe that true theology is never divorced from reality, which means that even though the context does not provide the criteria for theology, no theology of any biblical worth can be unrelated to the environment in which it is developed. It is a journal of THEOLOGY for SOUTHERN AFRICA.²³

The *JTSA* replaced two existing journals, *CREDO* and *Ministry*, both of which published contextually relevant material from Lesotho and South Africa's contiguous neighbours hence the term 'Southern' in the title. The new mission and format of the journal attracted theologians from around the world as well as southern Africa. The *JTSA* would provide the literary forum de Gruchy needed in order to engage colleagues in the issues of the day, both in the academy and the ministry.

De Gruchy undertook a promotional trip to introduce the new journal to some of the universities in South Africa. In the course of his trip he encountered John Cumpsty, then Head of the Religion Department at the University of Cape Town. De Gruchy recounts a conversation he had with Cumpsty that was ostensibly about the new *JTSA*. He writes: "[...] Cumpsty expressed interest in my earlier studies on Hinduism and invited me to teach on a one-year contract. This took me by surprise. I was not planning to leave the SACC, but I did have a sense of calling to teach theology."²⁴

De Gruchy's academic career

Holness, in her 2003 tribute to de Gruchy, reflected on his journey thus far having suggested that

23. John W. de Gruchy, "Introduction to the Journal of Theology for Southern Africa as the Successor to Credo and Ministry," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 1, no. D (1972): 2–3.

24. John W. de Gruchy, *Confessions of a Christian Humanist*, 55.

[...] from the beginning his ministry incorporated a sense of the role the church had played and ought to play in the unfolding of events in South Africa. De Gruchy has never abandoned or moved beyond his calling to the ministry, nor his involvement in the church. It was in the 1960s, at the start of three turbulent decades in the sociopolitical life of South Africa, that he became convinced that good theology was essential if the churches were correctly to understand and exercise their role in society. Thus was born de Gruchy's desire to teach theology — not to replace the ministry in his life but as a way to exercise his calling to it. 'It is,' writes de Gruchy, 'the failure of ministers to think theologically and to deepen their theological insight in doing their work [that] seems to me to be one of the reasons for the failure of many churches to meet the challenges of apartheid'.²⁵

Shortly after his fortuitous encounter with Cumpsty at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 1973, de Gruchy began teaching in the Religion Department at UCT. He moved his family from Johannesburg to Cape Town where he took up his duties at the university as a contract lecturer. It was a bold move considering it was a one-year contract. One year turned into thirty and he accepted UCT's mandatory retirement at the age of sixty-five in the year 2003.

De Gruchy has provided leadership for research in South Africa for nearly fifty years. He has served as Director of the Research Institute on Christianity in South Africa (RICSA)²⁶ established in 1991. He also served as Director of the CSD research unit RESCU : Religion and Social Change Unit, since its formation in 1993. The University Research Committee of UCT welcomed him as a major contributor from 1990-2000 and he administered the Committee as its Deputy-Chair from 1996-1997. De Gruchy has served more recently as Chair of the Faculty of Humanities Research Committee from 2000-2003, and has been part of the Emerging Researchers' Programme at UCT from 2003 to the present. He has authored, co-authored, edited, or contributed chapters to over forty books, many of which deal with the church struggle in South

25. Holness, "John W. de Gruchy," 38.

26. RICSA is recognised by the University of Cape Town's University Research Committee as a research institute.

Africa. The list of chapters in books fills four full pages while his journal articles fill another three. One Master of Theology thesis and five Ph.D. theses have been written with his name in the title. Over one hundred theses cite his work or make reference to him.

Contextual sensitivity: living and working in apartheid South Africa

De Gruchy entered the theological debate in the 1960s at the same time the participating churches in the SACC began to explore new ways of working together to combat state-sponsored apartheid. Like most South Africans, de Gruchy was influenced and his theology shaped, to some extent, by apartheid. His contributions to theological research, particularly in the areas of Bonhoeffer Studies and Reformed Theology, are recognised internationally but South Africa is where he served as pastor and educator.

It is for this reason that Bonhoeffer's work, especially that which treated the theological foundations of the Confessing church in Germany, resonated so strongly with him. He found in Bonhoeffer a theologian of considerable skill and compassion who chose to work within the Christian church as the place where God and God's people meet. For de Gruchy, Bonhoeffer was a kindred spirit in his struggle to discern God's will for the church within the context of national crisis. In a letter to his friend Bethge, Bonhoeffer asserts that, "[t]he church stands, not at the point where human powers fail, at the boundaries, but in the center of the village."²⁷ This quote expresses the importance of the theological context in Bonhoeffer's, and subsequently, de Gruchy's theological method. It is a reminder that theology is done where we nurture and are nurtured in community. Theology ought not to be relegated to the realm of mystery where humanity can no longer answer its own questions. Bonhoeffer is suggesting that the church is not the provider of answers to the questions for which we have no mortal reply; God is not a

27. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Translated from the German *Widerstand und Ergebung* (Touchstone; Updated edition, 1997), 367.

convenient *Deus ex Machina* lifting us out of the world but the One who throws us back into the world where God's self-revelation intersects with humanity living in the heat of the moment.

De Gruchy, Barth and Bonhoeffer

The similarities between de Gruchy's situation in South Africa and Bonhoeffer's in Germany are not lost on the reader of de Gruchy's work but they must not be over-emphasised. When de Gruchy read Bethge's lectures on Bonhoeffer, the question: 'What would Bonhoeffer say about apartheid?' helped shape de Gruchy's exploration of the church's proper theological response to apartheid. As de Gruchy wrestled with this question, his insights and conclusions helped the SACC formulate and hold a biblically sound, theological stance against apartheid, thereby avoiding the pitfall of becoming just another consumable item in the marketplace of political ideas that were available in South Africa at the time. It helped the Christian church claim its place in South Africa and speak against apartheid from an alternate perspective. Bernard Spong says this about de Gruchy's contributions in his book entitled *Come Celebrate* written on the occasion of the SACC's twenty-fifth anniversary:

[...] at the 1981 National Conference, Dr. John de Gruchy was to point to the need for the supporters of the liberation movement in the church to ensure that they relied on God's word and sought God's Spirit or face the danger of "becoming indistinguishable from any other political movement." It was this kind of constant reminder that helped the Council maintain that necessary balance, the "wary path between", in personal and social Gospel. A balance that none would claim to have been complete throughout all its work and witness, but a balance that has provided the vision for what the Council should be about and the blueprint in its planning.²⁸

De Gruchy is also a recognised Barth scholar. In 2000 he was awarded the prestigious Karl Barth prize.²⁹ In the July, 2000 issue of the *JTSA*, Beyers Naudé wrote in a

28. Spong and Mayson, *Come Celebrate!: Twenty-Five Years of the South African Council of Churches*, 82–83.

29. The Karl Barth prize is an international award given each year to one scholar whose contribution to the study of the work of Barth has achieved a level of excellence worthy of recognition by experts in the field.

brief tribute to de Gruchy that “No other person in South Africa deserves the Karl Barth Prize more than Prof. John de Gruchy.”³⁰ Naudé’s tribute to de Gruchy echoed the sentiment of many Barth scholars. Lyn Holness recorded the event in this way:

Marking the centenary of Karl Barth in 1986, the prize was created in order to ‘honour outstanding works on the Theological Declaration of Barmen and the tradition created by it’. The jury reached its decision in favour of John de Gruchy in recognition of his vision in the transmission of this tradition, ‘as well as of the theological impetus of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth in the ecclesiastical and social contexts of South Africa’. The citation continues: ‘Through his Reformed theology John W. de Gruchy has contributed with prophetic impulses to the overcoming of apartheid mentality as well as to the democratisation of South African society and the renewal of his church, thus playing an outstanding role for a culture of international and intercontinental theological exchanges.’³¹

The citation begins, “Through his Reformed theology [...]” This suggested that the jury recognised de Gruchy’s unique contribution to the reclamation of the Reformed tradition in South Africa. Barth was the pastor who became a theologian while Bonhoeffer was the theologian who became a pastor. This move from the university to the congregation placed Bonhoeffer in the midst of the faithful community struggling to find answers to the political questions of the day, questions that seemed to all but defy reasonable enquiry.

De Gruchy remains both theologian and pastor and has done so throughout his entire career. His theology is grounded in the experience of the church, and of God’s people seeking the face of God in the other. His theological method pivots on the question: ‘Who is Jesus Christ, for us, in this place and at this time?’ It seeks to be a living critical engagement of events in a dynamic context rather than a snapshot, a static moment in time, frozen and immobile, ready for dispassionate examination. He worked alongside others in formulating a proper theological response to what some perceived as a heretical use of the Christian religion to support an oppressive political ideology.

30. Christiaan Frederick Beyers Naudé, “Karl Barth Prize,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* no. 107 (1 July 2000): 1.

31. Holness, “John W. de Gruchy,” 41–42.

Solidarity in a time of transition

The beginning of the transition to democracy in South Africa was much anticipated as rumours circulated of private talks between Nelson Mandela, still in prison, and Frederik Willem de Klerk, then Prime Minister of the Republic of South Africa; this as early as 1989. As the reality of a democracy grew in the public mind, de Gruchy's thoughts turned from the struggle to the reconstruction of his country, reminiscent of Bonhoeffer having recognised the importance of remaining in solidarity with those unable to escape Nazism and who would eventually give shape to the new Germany. I am reminded of Bonhoeffer having travelled to New York just before war broke-out in 1939. While studying at Union Theological Seminary he received a letter from Karl Barth in which Barth suggested he return to Germany as that was where he was needed most. Bonhoeffer decided to return to Germany despite the possibility of a faculty position at Union Theological Seminary and despite the fact that teaching opportunities in Germany were disappearing quickly, at least for Bonhoeffer. In a letter to Reinhold Niebuhr he wrote:

I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people³²

Bonhoeffer did return to Germany and continued as an outspoken critic of Nazi social policies. He was imprisoned in April of 1943 and hung by the Nazis two weeks before the Allies liberated Berlin in 1945. Bonhoeffer identified with the Christian people of Germany and that was where he needed to do theology.

The question of identity has been part of South African social consciousness from the first time European sailors set foot in the Cape. Apartheid was the most pervasive and systematic attempt at defining identity in the history of the country and it was a

32. Eberhard Bethge, Mosbacher [translated by Eric], and et al., *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 655.

theme that underpinned the theology that was done in South Africa. Beginning in 1948, the largely Afrikaner government took great pains to construct a national identity that would situate the white minority population firmly in the roots of the nation. The question of identity was no less important for the English-speaking population of South Africa. The term English-speaking refers to a small segment of the population whose origins are British. In terms of the church, the English-speaking churches are those whose roots are particular to Britain. De Gruchy explained:

A final consideration regarding the title ‘English-speaking churches’ is its exclusive character. It should include the Baptists, but it generally does not, especially after the Baptist Union withdrew from the South African Council of churches. It could include some of the Pentecostal churches, but their distinct character and lack of involvement in ecumenical groups and social issues excluded them. [...] In some respects, Catholics and Lutherans have been in the vanguard of Christian witness and action in South Africa. Yet, because they are not of British origin, we cannot properly refer to them as ‘English-speaking’.³³

The English-speaking South Africans were a minority within the minority white population. It was difficult to find belonging within either the black majority or the larger white minority that supported apartheid.

De Gruchy chose to stay in South Africa when many of those who were able to leave the country did so. He had quickly risen to prominence in the academic world and he would have had opportunities for employment outside South Africa. In a passage from his book *Confessions of a Christian Humanist*, he did suggest that leaving had been a possibility:

I, like many of my peers, never felt as our parents did that we belonged in some way to Britain, but were equally uncertain about belonging to apartheid South Africa. For that reason, and out of a fear for the future, many left to build their homes elsewhere. Those who could go but stayed, again like myself, and not least those who became conscientious objectors, did so because we had a sense of loyalty to South Africa in a much broader sense, and longed for the day when we could be proud of our country as other people were of theirs.³⁴

33. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 86.

34. John W. de Gruchy, *Confessions of a Christian Humanist*, 191.

There were others in de Gruchy's life who, at the time, realised that it would not be easy for an outspoken critic of apartheid to work with any real freedom in South Africa. In a 'Letter from Renate Bethge,'³⁵ published in the *festschrift* in honour of de Gruchy, she recalled that

[w]ith our experience of the NS-time³⁶ in Germany we were afraid of how your government [sic] would develop and what that could mean for you. But you would not in the least think of leaving South Africa, though there would not have been any difficulty for you to get work in the USA or England or anywhere else.³⁷

There were enough academic opportunities outside South Africa for a theologian as capable as de Gruchy but he was, first and foremost, a South African. His call to serve the people of God in South Africa was a compelling impetus for his doing theology in the first place. The church community was where he found God active in the world and nowhere more so than in South Africa. Like Bonhoeffer, de Gruchy chose to contribute to his country from within while looking forward to the time when he could be proud to call himself South African.

Another exemplar of solidarity in this time of crisis was Beyers Naudé who also chose to stay in South Africa and work from within for the liberation of a nation. De Gruchy recalls that

Naudé could so easily have left South Africa. The honour he did not receive at home was his for the taking in Europe and North America. Some people simply had to go into exile. Naudé understood this and supported them in their choice.

35. Renate Bethge was the niece of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the wife of Eberhard Bethge, friend and confidant of Bonhoeffer. The Bethges visited South Africa in 1974 at John de Gruchy's invitation. There Bethge delivered a series of lectures which were then published as *Bonhoeffer, Exile and Martyr*, edited and with an essay by John W. de Gruchy.

36. The period between 1933 and 1945 when Hitler's National Socialist Party was in power in Germany.

37. Lyn Holness and Ralf K. Wüstenberg, eds., *Theology in Dialogue: The Impact of the Arts, Humanities, and Science on Contemporary Religious Thought: Essays in Honor of John W. de Gruchy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Claremont, Republic of South Africa: David Philip Publishers, 2002), x.

But that was not his decision. He believed that as a Christian he had to remain with his people - and by that he meant not just the Afrikaner community and Dutch Reformed Church, but the people of South Africa as a whole. In fact, it was Naudé's willingness to express solidarity with those who were oppressed, and to do so in a remarkably un-paternalistic way, which ultimately enabled him to contribute so significantly to the liberation of whites. In the process he was able to break open the narrow patriotism of ethnic loyalty and help create the inclusive patriotism of a new South Africa in the making.³⁸

De Gruchy's experience, along with those of Bonhoeffer and Naudé, speak of how a supportive yet critical patriotism, guided by the ethics of the Reign of God, could shed a revealing light on tyranny when it would rather hide in the dark.

De Gruchy's place in the larger narrative of the South African people

De Gruchy described belonging as locating oneself within a larger, corporate narrative that knits together one's own fragmented story with similar fragments of those with whom you share a nation.³⁹ One such fragment is the story of black South Africans paying the cost of white privilege. De Gruchy lived in just such a privileged environment of the white European community. The question 'What is my nation?' was not easily answered. The question 'Who is my nation?' was more easily answered by white South Africans than by black, coloured, or asian South Africans. The expression 'non-whites,' used to describe the black, coloured, and asian segments of the population was in use in South Africa until recently. When a group is described only in the negative it becomes difficult to assert a positive or historical place in the nation. It is as if the group has no history or land which they may call their own. De Gruchy was aware of the privilege of being able to trace his ancestry when so many South Africans could not. He recognised that it was a privilege to know where he came from and that there "[...] were many others who came to Cape Town as slaves in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, wrenched from the soil, families and communities in which they had been nurtured in East Africa and the Dutch East Indies."⁴⁰

38. John W. de Gruchy, *Confessions of a Christian Humanist*, 189.

While de Gruchy may have lived the majority of his life as a privileged white person, he was keenly aware that his privilege came at a cost. Nelson Mandela, for example, was not so privileged. While de Gruchy was completing high school and preparing himself for university, Nelson Mandela, along with one hundred and fifty-five other African National Congress activists, was arrested under laws entrenched in the civil code that were relevant for black men and women, only. Again, a particular segment of the nation was identified by laws that applied to that segment alone. It is a way of segregating a population within a nation by describing who they are not, to the point of annihilation. De Gruchy was one of the few privileged white South Africans who both voiced his concerns and acted upon them. He had decided early on that the cost of white privilege was simply too high.

Chapter Conclusion

My starting point in any discussion of de Gruchy's theology is what I perceive to be his understanding of God's reconciling work through Christ, as made manifest by the Christian community that worships, preaches and celebrates the sacraments together. I maintain that, for de Gruchy, Christology and ecclesiology are done together for they seem to be inseparable. The Christian church is the institution that exists for others. Bonhoeffer wrote from prison that '*[t]he Church is the Church only when it exists for others...not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others*'⁴¹ and de Gruchy would agree. But the church acts, not as refuge for the oppressed and marginalised in society, but as their advocate. De Gruchy developed and shaped his ecclesiology within this context. He rejects the idea that theology could provide a strategic process of compromise and he

39. Cf. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*.

40. John W. de Gruchy, *Confessions of a Christian Humanist*, 10.

41. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 8)*, 382.

affirms instead the church's duty to provide a critical and prophetic appraisal of the relationship between church and state, illuminated by biblical texts and guided by the principles and priorities of the Reign of God as made manifest in the church. This idea will be treated throughout this thesis as I consider it to be one of the cornerstones of de Gruchy's theology.

Chapter Two: The social, economic, political and ecclesial factors that contributed to the rise of an Afrikaner nation

Their struggle against imperialism, an alien culture, liberalism, and interfering missionaries was about to begin, and it would not end until it had produced an Afrikaner Nationalism equal to the task of subduing the land and reshaping society.

John W. de Gruchy

In the following chapter I will discuss how and why the Afrikaner in South Africa came to political dominance in what was ostensibly the British controlled colony of South Africa. I will trace the DRC's parallel ascent to power which, I will argue, was the result of its close relationship to the National Party. My interest is in the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the role of the Christian church from 1647 to 1948 when the National Party, a conservative, Christian, hyper-nationalist political party, gained a majority in the South African Parliament. John W. de Gruchy will continue as the interlocutor representing the English-speaking Reformed tradition in South Africa.

1647: European presence in the Cape

The chronological point of departure for this brief account of the Afrikaner¹ rise to political and social dominance in South Africa is the year 1647. In that year, the first European settlement, established more by chance than intent, began in the southernmost region of the African continent. When one of the Dutch East India Company's (the

1. The term Afrikaner refers to an ethnic and cultural sub-grouping of people, usually of Dutch and French origin, that came to South Africa originally as employees of the Dutch East India Company. The term 'Boer', translated in English as 'farmer' is often used interchangeable with the term 'Afrikaner.' The term Afrikaner is more suggestive of the movement toward a more refined national identity. It is also a more inclusive term that included all Afrikaans-speaking people and not just the farmer. After all, the first European settlers in the Cape were not farmers but Dutch merchant sailors working for one of the largest corporations in the world, the Dutch East India Company. The more inclusive term Afrikaner will be used throughout this thesis as it embodies the aspirations of the early settlers and later ideologues who sought a separate identity in a separate nation-within-a-nation.

Company) ships went aground in what is now known as Table Bay² in the Cape region of South Africa, the commander of the accompanying fleet ordered some of the crew to remain behind until the following year when the fleet would return. A fort of sand and salvaged timber was built and the first European settlement was established in the Cape. Leonard Thompson, the Charles J. Stillé Professor of History at Yale University, wrote that in 1620,

[...] the English government ignored a suggestion of an English ship's captain that it should annex the Cape. In 1649, however, Dutchmen who had wintered in Table Bay after losing their ship proposed that the Dutch East India Company should occupy the place. Three years later, Jan van Riebeeck arrived there as the commander of an expedition of eighty company employees. The directors had instructed him to build a fort and supply the Dutch fleets with fruit, vegetables, and meat.³

Out of these rather inauspicious beginnings arose a people who struggled for the next three hundred years to find their place in this strange and adopted land. Historically they were the coloniser who had been colonised and they were the intrepid settlers who had been conquered. In 1948 and at the end of three hundred years of struggle for identity, while the rest of Africa was liberating itself from white European rule, the Afrikaner people were able to hold fast to the social ideals from a previous time. This rather small, white minority was able to overcome all obstacles and, through social engineering and fear, through a powerful grand narrative and mythos, were able to subdue and dominate a much larger black population. It seems that they were able to do so with the help of

2. Table Bay is part of the Cape peninsula which stretches south to the Cape of Good Hope. Robben island, the infamous prison island where Nelson Mandela spent twenty-seven years, is found in Table Bay.

3. Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven [Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), 32.

the sympathetic voice of the DRC and the apathetic English-speaking⁴ Christian churches.

A house without windows

It appears that the social ideals that anchored Afrikaner resistance against the sweeping political and social changes happening elsewhere in Africa were partly based on a theological claim. The claim was that God had called the Afrikaner nation into being, to live separately from the ‘others’ and to thrive independently. It appears that, from the historical and ecclesiastical literature surveyed for this thesis, apartheid, which found its fullest expression in South Africa from 1948 to 1994, had been a lived social reality for the Afrikaner community from the very beginning of its life on the Cape. Official apartheid, or separate development as it was called by its architects, was the culmination of three hundred years of Afrikaner experience in South Africa. This brief historical survey of the changes to the South African political and social landscape is an attempt to understand why the Afrikaner people chose to live in almost total isolation from their immediate neighbours. They also chose to live in isolation from the larger world until British hegemony and the overwhelming numbers of Indigenous blacks made living in isolation nearly impossible. Until that time, it appears that the Afrikaner people were content, perhaps even driven, to live apart from all others. It was as if they chose to live in a house without windows, with only mirrors on the walls that reflected their own self-glorious images.

1665: The church in the Cape

The role of the Christian church in South African social policies has been a topic of some interest for both Indigenous and international scholars and students. Apartheid

4. The term ‘English-speaking’ refers to South Africans of European origin whose first language is English. The English-speaking churches are those churches wherein English is the language of worship and whose roots are British. The English-speaking churches in South Africa are not exclusively white rather they comprise a black, coloured and Asian majority.

South Africa has garnered some international attention during the past forty years, thereby stimulating more historical and theological research in several key areas. One such area was the early beginnings of apartheid and the role of the Christian church in the shaping of South African society. Research has revealed some interesting, sometimes compelling information. For example, the Company employed Dutch crews and it was company policy that only professing members of the DRC⁵ were hired. Gerrit Schutte, Professor of History at the Free University in Amsterdam, recovered from the Company's archives from southern Africa the fact that the "[...] Dutch United East India Company would only allow entry to the Cape of Good Hope to members of the Reformed Church until far into the eighteenth century. As a result, almost all Afrikaners belong to one of the three rather similar Afrikaner Churches."⁶ This was probably an effort to exclude Roman Catholics from its enterprise but it also provided for the spread of Calvinism into South Africa. The first DRC was established in 1665 and was the only real Christian presence in South Africa for the following one hundred and fifty years. Other European Christian churches eventually established congregations in South Africa and were instrumental in the evangelisation and enculturation of the black majority. While it was not the sole intent of the Company to further the Holy commonwealth of Christian nations, it has been suggested that its employees were a religious lot who took every advantage to promulgate their religious beliefs, wherever the opportunity arose, but this should not be overstated.

Comparisons have even been made between the early Dutch Reformed settlers of seventeenth century South Africa with the Puritans who arrived on the eastern shore of

5. The Dutch Reformed Church is the largest of the Afrikaans churches with white, Afrikaans speaking worshipping communities.

6. Gerrit J. Schutte, "The Netherlands, Cradle of Apartheid?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 10, no. 4 (1987): 392. doi:10.1080/01419870.1987.9993579.

New England in the first decades of the seventeenth century. John de Gruchy, in his book 'Liberating Reformed Theology,' asserted that

[...] the Dutch and French settlers at the Cape were adherents of the Reformed Church brought up on the Bible and the Heidelberg Catechism, the doctrinal standard of most immigrant European Reformed communities in their various colonies. But to regard them as ardent, well-informed Calvinists like the Puritans in New England, committed to the establishment of a holy commonwealth and the evangelization of the heathen, would be a serious exaggeration. Many were nominal in their membership of the church, as was true of their peers in Holland itself. By far the majority were petty officials, artisans, and farmers struggling to establish themselves on foreign terrain, often at the expense of the indigenous San and Khoi, rather than people theologically informed and committed to a holy cause.⁷

Michael Hughey, an American sociologist who has written extensively on race relations in the United States and South Africa, suggested that the first Dutch settlement in South Africa (1652) was intended merely as an re-provisioning outpost for the Dutch East India Company's ships as they rounded the Cape of Good Hope. Hughey also referred to A.J. Templin's book '*Ideology on a frontier: the theological foundation of Afrikaner nationalism, 1652-1910*' where he maintained that

[...] while their motives, purposes, and self-image were less religious than those of the Puritans, the Cape settlers, nonetheless, also saw their expedition as an opportunity for 'the furtherance of our Reformed Christian religion,' so that 'God's holy Name may be magnified.'⁸

David Bosch, a minister in the DRC, Professor of Missiology at the University of South Africa and a contemporary of both de Gruchy and Hughey, warned against too close a comparison between the early Dutch settlers and the Puritans of seventeenth century England. He wrote in 1986 that

7. John W. de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans ; Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1991), 6–7.

8. Michael Hughey, "Chosen Peoples, Chosen Races: Religion and the Structure of Race Relations in the United States and South Africa," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 1, no. 1 (1987): 42.

[...] it is becoming ever clearer that the parallel with the Puritans has little, if any, substance to it. In New England no fewer than 130 university graduates, 92 of them ministers, were among the Puritans arriving before 1640. This factor together with others ensured vigorous theological and intellectual activities in seventeenth century Massachusetts and Connecticut, something that was totally absent in the contemporary Cape Colony, which started as a refreshment post for ships bound for the East Indies, where relatively little intellectual activity was in evidence, where the rudimentary ministrations of the few early clergymen left no recognizable theological impact, and where the farmers in the outlying districts lived largely in almost total isolation from the already limited intellectual and social activities at the Cape itself.⁹

This rather dim view of the religious and intellectual life of the early Dutch settlers suggested that the Christian church, at that time, was not particularly influential in their lives but we must not confuse the paucity of intellectual ferment with a lack of influence. If no discernible theological impact could be detected, and this is by no means a given, then it merely suggests that the Dutch settlers had maintained a kind of religious and theological *status quo*. It will be argued in Chapter Four that this theological *status quo* became a source of religious pride in the Afrikaner and served to promulgate an apartheid theology that was relatively unspoiled by outside theological influences. It will also be suggested that the Afrikaner's social and intellectual isolation eased the way for the adoption of an Afrikaner grand narrative that captured the imagination of most Afrikaners. This led to a hyper-nationalism that prepared the way for the Afrikaner to dominate South African politics during the last half of the twentieth century.

The Afrikaner grand narrative¹⁰

There were several historical events which were eventually incorporated into an Afrikaner grand narrative. It can be said that the particular way in which these events

9. David J. Bosch, "Afrikaner Civil Religion and the Current South African Crisis," *Colloquium* 20, no. 2 (1988): 13.

10. The term 'grand narrative' was coined by French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard in his book entitled *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* published in 1979. It refers to the idea that, in the religious memory and stories of the world's people, there are common theological or religious elements that form a more comprehensive and enduring narrative that is common to all.

were recounted through the political rhetoric of some of the more nationalistic political entities helped shape the Afrikaner identity. The twentieth century Afrikaner identity, which becomes a fundamental element in the success of the post-1948 apartheid movement, was woven from the narrative threads of heroic stories told by skilful politicians and clergy and disseminated by sympathetic journalists and newspaper publishers. The South African historian and retired Professor of Political Studies at the University of Cape Town, Hermann Giliomee, asserted that

[t]he principal cultural entrepreneurs were the journalists and writers who, in newspapers and journals such as *Die Brandwag* and *Die Huisgenoot*, presented Afrikaner history as a heroic epic and tried to redefine almost every aspect of everyday life in Afrikaner terms.¹¹

They strove to instil in the minds of the *volk*,¹² stories that would redeem Afrikaner history and mitigate the sting of British hegemony and cultural imperialism, especially following the Second English-Boer War¹³ in 1902.

However, the conditions needed to be just right for a collective Afrikaner nationalist sentiment to gel. The major military victories or defeats, alongside events such as the Great Trek and Blood River¹⁴, helped create an Afrikaner consciousness but it was

11. Leroy Vail, ed., “The Beginnings of Afrikaner Ethnic Consciousness, 1850–1915,” in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, Hermann Giliomee, Perspectives on Southern Africa (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 48.

12. The term ‘*volk*’ was popularly used by the Afrikaner community to distinguish themselves from the other ethnic realities in South Africa. It is translated as ‘people’ with underlying hints of nation status.

13. The term ‘Boer,’ translates literally as farmer.

14. The events at Blood River were celebrated as an example of how the Afrikaner had been blessed by God and that surely this was a sign, as for Israel, of God’s preference for God’s chosen people. De Gruchy noted that “Calvin would have fully understood the piety that led the Trekkers to make their vow to God. Who would not, given their circumstances. But Calvin would have had great difficulty in regarding it as a covenant in the biblical sense, whether this was how the Trekkers understood it or only the way it was later interpreted within Afrikaner Calvinism. Not only would he have disapproved of the contractual nature of the covenant, which meant that a bargain was struck with god, he would also have disapproved of the identification of the Trekkers with Israel or the church. To them the covenant made national preservation the focal point rather than God’s grace and justice for all. In turn, this inevitably led to the conviction that the Afri-

not enough to stimulate the Afrikaner into any kind of active political engagement nor was it enough to create the kind of nationalism that brought the National Party to power in 1948. Economic factors played a major role in transforming the Afrikaans-speaking¹⁵ population into a formidable political force that was able to develop, promote, and apply a distinct ethnic political ideology to an election platform and win a majority in the 1948 election. The Christian church also played a significant role in the 1948 National Party victory. This point has been made often by de Gruchy and is a central idea in his critique of the Christian church in South Africa. In a moment of reflection on his own experience of the historical church and the ambiguity of its claim that the providential reign of God within human history remained a cardinal conviction of Christian faith, de Gruchy warned that

Christians sensitive to the problems are well aware of the dangers of a triumphalist ‘grand narrative’ that is used to dominate and control others, not least by the colonial churches. So it is important to affirm that God’s reign in human history should not be confused with any ideology or political programme, including those of the church.¹⁶

kaner nation as it came to be was an elect people, chosen by God to exercise rule and authority in southern Africa.” (John W. de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate*, 266) The Afrikaners’ appropriation of the idea of divine entitlement and its power to persuade ought not to be underestimated, especially during those turbulent years when they were recovering a sense of national identity along with the hope that it would unify a troubled nation and carry it into the future with moral impunity. For the average Afrikaner, the covenant was neither myth nor construct. It was legend with all the historical validity it required to make it a powerful and unifying force. The church played an important role in this presumption of divine entitlement.

15. Afrikaans or Cape Dutch is a language spoken by approximately six million South Africans or about thirteen percent of the population. It is therefore the third most popular language in the country. While Afrikaans does derive some of its vocabulary from such languages as Malay, Portuguese, some Bantu or Khoisan languages, the vast majority of the vocabulary derives directly from Dutch. Afrikaans and Dutch are mutually intelligible.

16. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, loc. 62 Kindle Edition

The problem was that the Christian church did indeed become ideologically captive and apartheid became confused with God's reign in South Africa. The Afrikaner grand narrative was designed and constructed by politicians with a particular agenda. The DRC, along with other Christian churches, aligned themselves with the apartheid ideology, thereby forfeiting their right to speak on behalf of those who suffered most from the effects of separate development.

Afrikanerdom on the rise

My account of the rise of Afrikaner nationalism begins with an historical survey and analysis of the political and economic factors that helped shape the Afrikaner identity. I will also attempt to discern those factors which seem to have firmed the Afrikaner community's resolve to survive in the face of the threat of assimilation by the British or of annihilation by the black, Indigenous population. From rather humble and pastoral beginnings, the Afrikaans-speaking community rose to prominence in the political and economic life of South Africa. I will concern myself with the historical narrative as this might prove helpful as I try to grasp hold of the elusive 'reason' behind the hyper-nationalism of the turbulent decades of the twentieth century.

The historical narrative

Before this alleged 'awakening' took place there were those Dutch settlers whose humbler beginnings made it possible for a strong European foothold on the continent. The eurocentric histories of South Africa usually began with an account of the arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck in the Cape on April 6, 1652. Little scholarly attention, if any, was given to the Indigenous peoples present at the time of the arrival of the Company's first ships, and yet it was against the backdrop of a strained and violent relationship with the Indigenous blacks that the Dutch established their presence. The Dutch and the Indigenous blacks were not good neighbours. Their relationship was marked by

negotiations conducted in bad faith, the stealing of cattle, the struggle for grazing land and the constant reminder of the Dutch settlers' numerical inferiority.

This notwithstanding, life in the Cape, for the first one hundred and fifty years after the Dutch first settled, were filled with less racial strife than the following one hundred and fifty. In the early years of the Dutch Cape settlement, relationships between the white Europeans and the blacks were marked by petty wars and struggles but racial segregation, while clearly part of Cape society, was not as important an issue as it would become in the mid-twentieth century. J.P. Brit, in an article in which he referenced Hermann Giliomee, noted that

[a] racial ideology therefore did not take root during the first 150 years at the Cape. Racial prejudice nevertheless occurred, and as the author [Giliomee] shows, the perception of the indigenous Khoikhoi by the Dutch was all but flattering. Yet mixed marriages were common, although these gradually decreased because of the reduced social status of white men who married coloured women.¹⁷

Gwendolen , the Canadian political scientist and South African Scholar, while Professor of Political Science at Smith College in 1957, suggested that

[t]oday it is not difficult to find in South Africa many of the same urges and traits of earlier days: the attachment to the land; the racial superiority of Europeans long in contact with primitive people of color; the tendency of the whites to take the law into their own hands, especially when dealing with non-Europeans. But in place of the relatively simple society of the eighteenth century, modern South Africa possesses a racial complexity which is greater than that found in any other country. Moreover, its racial diversity is matched by widely differing cultural backgrounds and ways of life.¹⁸

This extraordinary racial diversity would be touted by the National Party of the 1930s and 1940s as one of the main reasons for implementing apartheid. The architects of apartheid would eventually make the argument in the 1960s that, since the many

17. J.P. Brit, "An Afrikaner History For All Times? Hermann Giliomee's *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*," *Kleio* 36, no. 1 (2004): 52–53. doi:10.1080/00232080485380031.

18. Gwendolen M. Carter, *Politics of Inequality: South Africa Since 1948 (2d Ed.)* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959), 17.

racess and cultures would not be able to maintain their distinctive qualities in a cultural melting pot, the only way to guarantee survival was to insulate themselves from each other and any outside influences. This could be accomplished through segregation of the races which would allow each race to develop and flourish, in its own way and at its own pace. But the twentieth-century ideological construct of the absolute segregation of the races did not necessarily belong to 17th and 18th century South Africa.

The mind of the early settlers

Historians have reminded us that the early Dutch settlers were primarily pastoral farmers who raised large families with the expectation that their sons would find enough land to raise their own herds of cattle. The white population in the Cape grew rapidly. One history of South Africa identified a possible source of conflict between the Europeans and the Indigenous Xhosa in that they were both

[...] dependent for their survival on sufficient grazing, and by the 1830s it was clear that the eastern frontier region was becoming over-populated - and not only by Xhosa and British demands for land but also by the Boers themselves. The farmers married young - and spawned large families, the sons expecting to become their own bosses on a workable share of good grazing land. The result was a rapid increase in the white population of the region with little or no increase in the amount of land available for settlement.¹⁹

The pressures exerted by the economic forces at work in the Cape would eventually compel the Dutch settlers to reconsider their place in the increasingly complex society that was taking shape. What had hitherto been an informal social arrangement between the Indigenous blacks and the Dutch settlers was becoming more defined and thus, more restrictive. Social stratification began when the economy became more developed. Historian Leonard Thompson commented on the changes that occurred early in the life of the young colony where he recalled the history of the Company's fleets that

19. Reader's Digest, *Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story* (Cape Town: Reader's Digest Association South Africa, 1988), 110.

[...] were being efficiently revictualled with fresh water, wine, beef, mutton, bread, fruit, and vegetables. But the colony had also become a far more complex society than the mere refreshment station that the directors of the Dutch East India Company had envisaged in 1652, and it had developed a wholly unforeseen dynamic. The growing town on Table Bay was a miniature Batavia ‘a seawardlooking community, a caravanserai on the periphery of the global spice trade,’ where diverse religions, languages, and peoples jostled, and life focused on the outside world. The greatest events were the arrivals of the fleets, bringing news from Europe or Asia and a period of brisk trade.²⁰

The only real contact with the outside world was through the Company. The Europeans of the Cape Colony were dependent on the Company for guns and powder which they used to hunt animals, and to subdue the Indigenous blacks. The Company administered the Cape Colony in the way a large, multinational company would. It was one of the first to sell public stock and its executives knew they needed to make a profit. They were, after all, accountable to their stockholders.

The need for wider profit margins meant that the Dutch settler could no longer count on the Company to support its new colony without the expectation of something in return. It was not long before the Dutch farmer began to resent the Company’s administration as it did not always make decisions in favour of the European. The Company administered the Colony for its best interests and its self-interest did not always coincide with the interests of the settler farmer. Thompson supports this claim where he argues that the resulting tensions

[...] between company interests and settler interests were only slightly ameliorated by marriages between officials and burghers’ daughters. They came to a head again in the last quarter of the century, when the Netherlands had lost its economic supremacy to France and Britain and the Dutch East India Company, on the verge of bankruptcy, was in no position to satisfy the demands of the Cape burghers.²¹

20. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 39.

21. *Ibid.*, 42.

Seemingly, this would not be a problem for long. By 1789, the Company, which had financed the early settlement in the Cape, was itself in financial difficulty. Bad management, Napoleon's invasion of the Netherlands, four Anglo-Dutch wars, the misfortune of having lost several trading ships and finally, the arrival of the British just three years earlier proved to be too much for the weakened company.

1795 - The British are coming

The British arrived in the Cape in 1795 and by then the Company was on its last legs. Two years later, on March 5th, the Cape was declared a British colony. On the 23rd of May of that same year, Lord Macartney arrived and was installed as the first British Governor. Moving forward it can be said that, throughout the nineteenth century, there had been a steady erosion of whatever political or economic power the early Dutch settlers possessed. Except for a brief period of time between the years 1803 and 1806, the British ruled the Cape both politically and economically. It was only when Responsible Government was established in 1872 that things began to change slightly in favour of the Afrikaner farmer and business owner. Nonetheless, many years and much suffering would be endured before Responsible Government took hold in the Colony.

The Afrikaner continued to feel the pinch of the numerically superior blacks on one side and British hegemony on the other. The British maintained the Dutch district administrative system for a period of time until the district administrators were gradually replaced by British lawyers who had been trained overseas and continued in their loyalty to the British crown. This further limited the Dutch farmers' freedom and the burgers and large landowners began to struggle under this new administration. Thompson reminds us that, under the British regime,

[...] the autonomy that the farmers had enjoyed under the Dutch East India Company was ending. Whereas the company's colonial state had been extremely weak beyond the vicinity of Cape Town and Stellenbosch, the British gradually asserted control over the entire colony, and in so doing emphasized British culture and institutions. From 1811 on, judges of the colonial court went annually

on circuit to the various district headquarter to hear criminal as well as civil cases.²²

1820 - The British have arrived

The influx of British settlers beginning in the 1820s further increased the relentless pressure on the Dutch settlers and farmers. They were strongly encouraged by circumstance to either integrate into what was quickly becoming a British colony or find another means of protecting their religion, language, and culture. By the 1830s the language of the government, courts, and education was English which, until forty years prior, had been considered a ‘foreign’ language. Things had changed quickly and dramatically for the Afrikaner living in the Cape. Since its arrival in the Cape, the DRC had exerted little influence in local politics. The Company’s demise made the DRC vulnerable as it had provided financial support for the church since its arrival. With the arrival of the British in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the DRC became even more vulnerable as it had all but lost its means of remaining solvent. The British were able to put another nail in the Afrikaner’s political and social coffin by making its support of the DRC conditional. Thompson recalls that the

[...] government continued to support the DRC but asserted supervision over it. Moreover, although English was a foreign language for the Afrikaner population, by the 1830s it alone was authorized for use in government offices, law courts, and public schools.²³

The Afrikaner community was in for a further shock to its underdeveloped social, political and economic infrastructure. De Gruchy suggested that the Afrikaners

[...] were probably a little overawed, even though they had arrived to possess the land 150 years before; they were certainly apprehensive, if not of the English-speaking settlers themselves, then of the British authorities and the policies they would adopt. They had every reason to be. Rumours of English liberalism were sufficient cause for concern. Moreover, they were increasingly unhappy about the missionaries who emanated from London, and who seemed to embody such

22. Ibid., 68.

23. Ibid.

liberalism in religious guise. Their struggle against imperialism, an alien culture, liberalism, and interfering missionaries was about to begin, and it would not end until it had produced an Afrikaner Nationalism equal to the task of subduing the land and reshaping society.²⁴

It was at this time, perhaps more than any other, that the Afrikaner community felt their culture, religion - their very way of life slipping away, ultimately threatened by an imperialist 'other' that was fully capable of assimilating them. The Indigenous blacks posed a numerical threat but the radical cultural differences meant that there was no real risk of assimilation into the many and various tribal cultures in the Cape. It was the British who posed the greatest risk to the Afrikaner.

1838-1846: The Great Trek

After the arrival of the British and before the establishment of Responsible Government,²⁵ a small group of Afrikaners began what became popularly known as the Great Trek. In the more sympathetically written annals of Afrikaner history, the Great Trek was described as the pivotal moment when the Afrikaner people 'awoke' to God's calling them 'into being' as a separate and chosen nation within South Africa. This was a theological interpretation, unique to the Afrikaner, of an event that was precipitated by the encroachment of the rapidly growing British population and its control over the Cape economy along with the ongoing threat of annihilation by the Cape black. Both Giliomee²⁶ and André du Toit²⁷ argued that the Great Trek, contrary to popular belief and rhetoric, was inspired by economic hardship rather than a collective understanding

24. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, loc. 361.

25. Responsible Government is a political concept. It concerns a government which is accountable to the people within a political system and where officials are elected from the general population. Elected representatives, along with being accountable to those who elected them, are accountable to a democratic institution rather than a monarch.

26. Cf. Giliomee, Hermann. *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*. Reconsiderations in Southern African History. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press ; Cape Town, South Africa: Tafelberg, 2009.

27. Cf. du Toit, André. "No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology." *American Historical Review* 88, no. 4 (October 1983): 920–52.

of having been called by God into the interior of South Africa. However, this did not weaken the strength of the myth and this theological take on the events would be cultivated by the DRC and would later be invoked in support of the Afrikaner appropriation of what they considered to be their manifest destiny. The architects of apartheid would also use the story of the Great Trek in the promulgation of the Afrikaner grand narrative which would eventually help the Afrikaner rise to dominance in the country.

In the mean time, a small band of disenchanted Dutch settlers decided to move away from the Cape Colony in 1835 to search-out new land they could call their own as the colony itself was quickly running out of this precious commodity. The British and Xhosa populations were growing, as was the Afrikaner, but if the Afrikaner's pastoral way of life was to continue, they would need much more land than was available in the Eastern Cape. One Albany magistrate summed-up the problem by suggesting that "the early marriages contracted by the people, the consequent rapid increase in population, their disinclination to procure any other mode of subsistence than that which is obtained by the possession of land, the degradation which is attached to servitude made the trek inevitable."²⁸

The narrative of the Great Trek²⁹ became an effective political tool during the decades leading up to the 1948 election. The National Party built on the popular interpretation of the Great Trek as God's providential favouring of the Afrikaner nation claiming that it exemplified the independent and self-sufficient nature of the Afrikaner and his special relationship to God. It also embodied the idea that the Afrikaner was predestined to be self-governing, and accountable only to God. The Nationalists promoted a 'purified' Afrikanerdom which would glorify the God-ordained Afrikaner state. Carter commented suggesting that

28. Reader's Digest, *Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*, 110.

29. The Great Trek began in the Eastern Cape in 1835 and ended with the creation of settlements in the northeastern area of South Africa in 1846.

[t]he most significant aspect of this ‘purified’ nationalism was the vigor with which it was promoted in every aspect of life, encouraging a new withdrawal of the Afrikaner people from the community as a whole. Afrikaner Boy Scouts seceded to form their own organization; Afrikaner student groups did likewise. In 1938, a country-wide commemoration of the Great Trek turned into an exclusively Afrikaner pageant. Out of it sprang the Ossewa Brandwag (the ox-wagon guard), a cultural organization which roused the widest, most fervent Afrikaner nationalist sentiment in generations.³⁰

A national narrative was needed to capture the imagination of the Afrikaner people and propel them into the future and their destiny; at least that is what the Nationalist leadership argued. Astute politicians and political architects of the National Party used the stories of the Great Trek as a way of consciously impressing upon the people the idea of an Afrikaner manifest destiny. De Gruchy points to the role of the church in the Great Trek. He notes that the Trek happened despite the refusal of the DRC clergy to participate. The Trekkers were ministered to but usually by devout lay preachers and preachers from traditions other than their own. He notes also how the Trek came to be understood in terms of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and that this happened without the help of traditional theological thinking on the matter. De Gruchy asserts that the theological interpreters

[...] of the events that were to shape Afrikaner tradition indelibly were not trained by Dutch or Scottish faculties of Calvinist theology, but by their own experience and their reading of the sacred book. As they journeyed, the pages came alive with meaning and relevance. The exodus of the people of Israel and their testing in the wilderness were happening again. Any obstacle along the way to the promised land had to be overcome, by sheer grit and by the gun. Any doubt of divine providence was not only unthinkable, but blasphemy, a harbinger of disaster. The church at the Cape was no longer relevant, but the saga of Israel in the holy book was.³¹

30. Carter, *Politics of Inequality: South Africa Since 1948 (2d Ed.)*, 32.

31. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, loc. 489–94 (Kindle Edition)

1871

The seeds of Afrikaner nationalism had been sown as early as 1871 but would fully bloom only in 1948. The Orange Free State, with its new diamond-funded prosperity, was able to commission its own ‘history’ to add to the burgeoning and popular grand narrative that had become such an effective political tool in the Afrikaner’s arsenal. Giliomee noted that the new state

[...] was able to set aside funds for commissioning a Dutchman, H.J. Hofstede, to write a history of the Free State. This book aimed to stir and ‘uplift national feelings’, by telling of the ‘trials and tribulations’ of the forefathers and the numerous grievances of the Afrikaners. This was not so much ‘the product of an awakening’ of a national feeling’ as a deliberate attempt by the government to cultivate such a feeling for the sake of state building.³²

Giliomee was referring to the new Orange government that established itself immediately after receiving ‘permission’ from the British governor to do so. Ironically the ‘Free State,’ with its newly minted history, would be annexed by the British just six years later.

The promise of tremendous wealth gleaned from the gold and diamond mines of the Transvaal and Orange Free State seemed to be too much to resist. The British colonial forces would be brought to bear on the Afrikaner, once again, forcing the Afrikaner leadership deeper and deeper into its commitment to see a free and independent Afrikaner nation. Perhaps what this history has shown is that the Afrikaner leadership was thinking in terms of nationhood which would not necessarily include the British or the black majority. It was an exclusive nationalism which would eventually partition the country, both racially and geographically.

1872 - Responsible Government

It appears that the Afrikaner community remained relatively uninvolved politically until the advent of Responsible Government in 1872. This is not to say that indi-

32. Vail, “The Beginnings of Afrikaner Ethnic Consciousness, 1850–1915,” 29.

vidual Afrikaners, especially merchants with special interests, were not politically astute or involved. The burghers or large landowners were interested in how effective the new British administrators would be in settling outstanding land claims. However, the community's habit of political disinterest and social isolation suggested that the Afrikaner, as an ethnic group, were not convinced that participating in the political process would bring any real benefits to what was already an established way of life. Giliomee supported this conclusion arguing that

[...] the largely urbanised English-speakers in the colony continued to dominate commerce, the small manufacturing sector, the civil service and Parliament. Prior to the 1870s this was reflected in colonial politics as well. Between 1850 and 1870 only a third of the parliamentary representatives were Afrikaners although this section by 1870 amounted to 150,000 or roughly two-thirds of the white population. At constituency level great political apathy characterised the Afrikaners. In 1869 a canvasser found that nine-tenths of the young farmers under the age of 26 in his division had not troubled to register as voters. 'Onze' Jan Hofmeyr, major spokesman for the wine farmers as editor of *De Zuid Afrikaan* and subsequently as Member of Parliament for Stellenbosch and leader of the Afrikaner Bond, remarked about the pre-1870 days: 'The Dutch were very apathetic as to their political privileges; even if they registered and voted, they simply did so for their English shopkeeper or agent, or for someone recommended by them'.³³

The preconditions for the rise of Afrikaner nationalism were not met simply through the ongoing pressures created by British cultural and political hegemony. There were also material considerations that brought the different Afrikaner classes together to protect and promote Afrikaner self-interests. The discovery of gold and diamonds in the north-eastern territories of the country encouraged the Afrikaner to engage in the racially mixed environment of the new mining communities. It also made the dream of a separate nation with Afrikaner leadership in place, unfettered by British colonial inter-

33. Hermann Giliomee, "Western Cape Farmers and the Beginnings of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1870–1915," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14, no. 1 (1987): 40. doi:10.1080/03057078708708159.

ests, a more distant hope. The economy was growing rapidly and Thompson suggested that the Afrikaner did not always benefit:

After 1870, the rate of change in many parts of Southern Africa accelerated dramatically under the impact of both external and internal forces. The peak of British imperialism coincided with the identification and exploitation of prolific deposits of diamonds and gold in the Southern African interior.³⁴

The arena of big business, labour disputes, profits, and world markets was a different way of life when compared to the Afrikaner farm life. Farm life was marked by an inclination toward being insulated from foreign influences that could alter, in any way, the distinctive spirit of Afrikaner culture and community. Brit recalled a different time when the Afrikaner was more pastorally minded. He has reminded us that Cape life

[...] in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seems to have been fairly relaxed, with the white burgher population interested primarily in stock farming. They fully accepted their new fatherland, and were apparently content, to the point of being self-complacent. Intellectual growth was simply not a high priority. It was from this society that the Afrikaner had evolved by the end of the eighteenth century.³⁵

Life on the Cape was changing. If the Afrikaner was politically apathetic before the 1870s, the same could not be said for the period following the establishment of Responsible Government. With Responsible Government came increased state revenue, increased political interest and new economic possibilities for the more urban Afrikaner. Giliomee's research has shown how important it was for South Africans to have control over their own economy. He noted the following:

While there had been little to contest in the 1850s and 1860s, the struggle for control over the state's resources became a serious matter in the 1870s. Despite the prolonged slump of the 1860s the value of exports (including diamonds) between 1854 and 1874 increased eight times, that of imports three times and the revenue five times. Between 1870 and 1881 government revenue rose from £668,240 to £3,009,970; total expenditure from £795,695 to £5,472,263, imports

34. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 110.

35. Brit, "An Afrikaner History For All Times? Hermann Giliomee's *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*," 53.

from £2,352,043 to £9,227,171 and exports from £2,569,499 to £8,396,908, while the national debt rose from £1,106,458 to £12,500,000.³⁶

This, combined with the economic struggles of the wheat and wine farmers, encouraged the Afrikaner to think in a new way and consider the state as a business partner. The struggle for control of these new state revenues involved the Afrikaner more deeply in the Cape economy. Perhaps more importantly, acquiring access to these sources of revenue would demand political power. Without political influence, the Afrikaner could not lobby for higher tariffs on imported wheat nor could he demand a better price for his wine. Since the state was now controlling trade and tariffs and, since the government was led by the British, the Afrikaner apparently had little choice but to become politically engaged in the Cape if he wished to acquire a share of the wealth. Giliomee suggested that “these three forces — growing state revenue, the relative lack of economic progress of the wine and wheat farmers, and the advent of Responsible Government dissolved the Afrikaner political apathy in the Western Cape.”³⁷

The Afrikaner’s loss of political innocence

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the nationalist leadership within the Afrikaner community grew ever mindful of the need for a distinct Afrikaner identity that could withstand the British push toward assimilation. This identity was being shaped by external forces, some of which defined the Afrikaner in terms of what he was not. This community self-awareness raised questions in the population as to whether the British representatives in the post-1872 administration of the Cape could adequately stand for Afrikaner interests. While it was still early in the political life of the nationalists, signs of a one-party, Afrikaner representation began to show in the waning years of the century. This seemed to become more obvious following the two English-Boer wars as well

36. Giliomee, “Western Cape Farmers and the Beginnings of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1870–1915,” 41.

37. *Ibid.*, 42.

as around the time of union in 1910 but was still present during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Carter contrasted the then existing political concerns of the French Canadian with the Afrikaner suggesting that

[...] even before union had been achieved, two factors had operated to create an exclusive Afrikaner nationalism; their self-consciousness created in the effort to free themselves from British influence in the late nineteenth century, and their belief that a party represents a whole people, and exists to defend that people's traditions. This is a belief which finds no parallel in French Canada, for example, where the solid support for a single party has arisen out of the feeling of need to protect contractual and minority rights.³⁸

There occurred a phenomenon in the Christian church that was partially the result of the Afrikaner's growing struggle for cultural identity. The DRC had embarked on the development of a contextual theology that was, for all intents and purposes, a direct response to the newly gained Afrikaner political power following the establishment of Responsible Government. De Gruchy noted that this, along with other factors

[...] prepared the way for the support which the NGK [DRC] gave to the rise of Afrikaner Christian-Nationalism, to the moral justification of the ideology of apartheid, and to the contemporary *status confessionis* and theological conflict. It is a tragedy for all, not least the NGK, that the most powerful contextual theology which developed within its ranks and in South Africa at large, gave its support to apartheid, and that this ideology was equated with Calvinism.³⁹

Until the alleged dawning of ethnic consciousness, the largest existential concern facing the Afrikaner was not the black majority but the British. British hegemony threatened to erode the cultural distinctives that the Afrikaner tried so hard to protect. Dean Allen, a lecturer at Stellenbosch University, reflected a common assumption in an article on the politics of 'white' sport in South Africa arguing that

38. Carter, *Politics of Inequality: South Africa Since 1948 (2d Ed.)*, 27–28 It is interesting to note that the French-Canadian in Quebec voted for a nationalist party that claimed to represent the special ethnic interests of the French-speaking Quebecer. This happened at both the provincial and federal levels of government beginning in 1976 with the Parti Québécois' first majority in the provincial legislature.

39. John W. De Gruchy, "Theologies in Conflict: The South African Debate," *Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naude*, Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm B Eerdmans, (1985): 90–91.

[w]hen Britain attempted to incorporate all the territories of Southern Africa into a federal system in the 1870s, it was simply assumed that Afrikaners would assimilate into the British way of life. But British imperialism and hegemony alienated the Afrikaner intelligentsia in the Cape.⁴⁰

The threat from the blacks was more tangible and could usually be mitigated with guns and black servitude. The British threat was more insidious because the South African economy depended on British businesses and the Afrikaner depended on the economy for their own success.

The question of identity: standing together in the face of annihilation

Giliomee suggested that the Afrikaner's hitherto loose association with each other, based primarily on language and a shared religion, began to tighten as the English-speaking community garnered more and more of the industrial and economic advantages, especially in the Cape. These gains were often at the expense of the Afrikaners who struggled to maintain an economic foothold in the Cape and even more so in the remote areas settled by the *voortrekkers*.⁴¹ Giliomee argued that the impetus for a coalescing national identity among the Afrikaner people came primarily from economic constraints. Also, the attempt to maintain racial purity, linguistic integrity, and cultural unity, while important, were not enough to bring the Afrikaner together as a nation.⁴²

40. Dean Allen, "'The Race for Supremacy': The Politics of 'White' Sport in South Africa, 1870–1910," *Sports in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics* 14, no. 6 (2011): 744. doi:[10.1080/17430437.2011.587289](https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2011.587289).

41. Voortrekker is an Afrikaans term which means 'pioneer' referring specifically to those Afrikaners who chose to join the Great Trek.

42. See, *inter alia*, D. Johnston, 'The Churches and Apartheid in South Africa' in Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, eds., *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, 1994, pp. 177-207. André du Toit, "No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology," by David Livingstone 1813–1873 and Abraham Kuyper 1837–1920, *American Historical Review* 88, no. 4, October, 1983. Leroy Vail, ed., "The Beginnings of Afrikaner Ethnic Consciousness, 1850–1915," in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* Hermann Giliomee; Perspectives on Southern Africa; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

Giliomee argued that

[...] the construction of an Afrikaner political ethnicity must be sought in broad economic and social processes and not merely in the realm of cultural innovations. At the heart of such economic and social changes lay the attempts first to define the group of Afrikaans-speakers exclusively and then mobilize them for political and economic goals.⁴³

In order to define this group of Afrikaners, the political leadership would have needed to articulate the distinctive qualities or characteristics of the Afrikaner people. Attempts were made by contrasting the Afrikaner people with their British and Indigenous neighbours, but the early years in the Cape witnessed a diverse community with inter-racial relationships that included mixed marriages. There was also a growing coloured⁴⁴ population that belonged to neither colour group and, as a consequence, were more difficult to place in the quickly changing and evolving population. However, the Afrikaners shared a common language, culture and religion that was somewhat unique in South Africa and they were able to separate themselves from the larger community. This notwithstanding, it would not be enough to mobilise them toward the political and economic goals envisioned by the burghers and business owners. Giliomee commented further by suggesting that while

[...] the Dutch-Afrikaners did possess by 1850 certain common cultural traits in the form of generally endogamous marriage patterns, membership of the Dutch Reformed or Lutheran churches, and a common language (or variants of it), it was difficult to find any self-conscious sense of ethnic unity among them. Indeed, from the 1850s the already existing cleavages within the group began to intensify which would make the putting together of an ethnic coalition for political purposes an extremely difficult task.⁴⁵

If Giliomee was correct in his assessment of the situation, then something like a religious epiphany would have been necessary to achieve their goal. He noted that there

43. Vail, "The Beginnings of Afrikaner Ethnic Consciousness, 1850–1915," 46.

44. The term coloured refers to people of mixed racial origins, primarily black and white.

45. *Ibid.*, 23.

were only ten DRC congregations in the Cape by the year 1870.⁴⁶ The church had grown but was still quite small. The earnest dialogue between the Church of the Province in South Africa and the Dutch Reformed Church held some promise for the beleaguered Afrikaner, if only for a short while. Despite the ecclesiastical divisions and the resulting lack of Christian unity, the DRC was able to play an important role in the Afrikaner's transition from passive to active political player in the management of the Cape. This was achieved through the church having provided religious and theological support for the idea that the Afrikaner people shared a singular relationship with God exemplified by God's providential preference for the Afrikaner during the Great Trek and at Blood River.

This theme would be revisited often by the architects of apartheid. The rise of Afrikanerdom was in its infancy but the newly minted Afrikaner self-awareness, a renewed interest in the politics of the country, and a firmer grasp of the concept of business would move the Afrikaner from subsistence farming to full member of the growing economy. The Afrikaner community would travel an uneasy road for the next eighty years or so, and, if they were to survive as a 'people' they would need a way of maintaining solidarity.

1881-1902 annexation and the Anglo-Boer Wars⁴⁷

Perhaps a compelling reason to stand together as a 'nation' was the memory of the Afrikaner commandos having failed to defend the Transvaal from annexation by the British in 1881. The first Anglo-Boer war ended badly for the Afrikaner and the British alike. The tenuous armistice granted the Boer in the Transvaal and Orange Free State certain economic freedoms, while the British controlled the relations between the rest of

46. Ibid., 25.

47. The first Anglo-Boer war began in 1881 and ended in 1882. The second war began in 1899 and ended in 1902.

Africa and Europe. British economic interests seemed to be satisfied, at least for the time being.

The Afrikaner defeat at the hands of the British forces in 1902 left them struggling, once again, to find their place in their adopted country. After the Second Anglo-Boer war, the Afrikaner community suffered tremendous economic hardship and they carried this burden through the period of unification that culminated in the 1910 Act of union. The British had successfully annexed the then-extant ‘free’ Afrikaner states into a workable union of four major geographic regions of the country.⁴⁸ The union of South Africa was firmly in British hands and the Afrikaner saw few, if any benefits.

The two Anglo-Boer wars exacted a toll from the Afrikaner community. The second of these wars proved also to be devastating to the Afrikaner identity. The British Lord Kitchener’s scorched earth policies and the concentration camps struck at the very heart of Afrikaner identity. The land was sacred, having been ‘given’ to the Afrikaner by God. In the mind of the defeated Afrikaner, Kitchener’s butchery of the land was horrific and second only to his butchery of the Afrikaner family. Kitchener had ordered the vast crop fields cultivated by the Afrikaner to be burned to the ground, which often included the Afrikaner’s farm buildings and livestock. The concentration camps were really death camps filled with women and children who were systematically starved in an attempt to weaken the resolve of the Afrikaner commandos fighting in the war.

Hughey noted that an estimated

[...] 26,000 women and children died in British concentration camps during the Second Anglo-Boer War. Most were the family members of Boer soldiers, incarcerated in an attempt to pressure the Boers into surrendering. Disease, food and medical shortages, and inadequate protection from the elements were responsible for most of the deaths.⁴⁹

48. Cf. Carter, Gwendolen M. “Union of South Africa: Politics of White Supremacy.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 298 (1955): 142–50.

49. Hughey, “Chosen Peoples, Chosen Races: Religion and the Structure of Race Relations in the United States and South Africa,” 44.

Both the assault on the land and the demoralising success of the concentration camps had their desired effect. The Afrikaner people were defeated. Added to the shame of this double sacrilege, the imperialist pressure applied by Lord Milner attempted to fully anglicise South Africa, thereby threatening the very survival of the Afrikaner culture and language. Thompson highlighted the fact that the British victory would not be complete until Milner got his way. He notes that on May 31st, 1902,

[...] what became known as the Peace of Vereeniging was signed in Pretoria, after its terms had been accepted, fifty-four to six, by representatives of the commandos at Vereeniging in the southern Transvaal. As high commissioner, Milner had the major say in drafting the terms. He was determined to translate the military victory into durable British supremacy throughout Southern Africa. He planned to rule the former republics autocratically, without popular participation, until he had denationalized the Afrikaners and swamped them with British settlers. When that was done, and not before then, it would be safe and expedient to introduce representative institutions. Finally, he planned that the anglicized former republics should join the Cape Colony and Natal in a selfgoverning dominion that would be a source of economic as well as political strength to Great Britain?⁵⁰

There was little sympathy for the Afrikaners and their misery. Milner was apparently quite certain that the Afrikaner needed to be assimilated into proper British culture before the threat to British interests could be considered neutralised. Bosch also comments on the set back to the Afrikaner struggle for identity. Once again they were facing cultural annihilation

[w]hen, immediately after the war, Lord Milner embarked on a vigorous policy of anglicization and forthwith banned the use of the Dutch language from all schools, this was regarded as a total onslaught in the extreme. After having lost their political freedom on the battlefield, Afrikaners were now to lose their identity as well, through the schools. In this, the Afrikaner's darkest hour, it was above all the Afrikaans churches that rallied to the people's aid. Church and people became virtually indistinguishable.⁵¹

50. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 143.

51. Bosch, "Afrikaner Civil Religion and the Current South African Crisis," 15.

Personal debt and a growing dependence on foreign markets added to the economic strain of having lost a war. Economic and market forces were moving South Africa into international trade. The English-speaking community moved relatively easily in the world of commerce speaking the *lingua franca* of business and sharing the same general approach to economics as did the Americans and Europeans. The Afrikaners moved less easily in this world. They were not likely to sacrifice independence for the inter-dependence demanded by international trade and the Afrikaner progress toward absolute separation of the races tended to isolate them further.

The defeat at the hands of the British at the end of the Second English-Boer War in 1902 seemed to fly in the face of the Afrikaner understanding of God's providential act in which God allegedly chose the Afrikaner people for a special status among the many in South Africa. De Gruchy commented on the Afrikaner interpretation of their history in light of the biblical understanding of God's providential action in the world. He suggested that a people who suffered defeat needed a mythos, a way to interpret their history which would enable them

[...] to discover significance in what has happened to them. The continuity of the Afrikaner demanded such a world-view which would provide coherence to their shattered hopes. Such a mythos was not difficult to construct, especially for a people with such a strong belief in providence and an existential awareness of the plight of ancient Israel as it sought liberation from the Egyptian yoke. So it is not surprising that Afrikaner history, like that of other nations, took on a sacred character. This was especially true of history since the Great Trek. While such 'holy history', with its vivid use of Old Testament motifs, was not official Dutch Reformed theology, it was certainly fundamental to Afrikaner self-understanding.⁵²

De Gruchy maintained that the Afrikaner churches played a key role in nurturing the mythos and that the Afrikaner drew strength and spiritual sustenance from it through the church. He suggested that it was as if their history was a sacred history, rife with bibli-

52. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, loc.607–11.

cal symbols. The Great Trek was like the exodus from Egypt and the Afrikaner victory over the blacks was reminiscent of Israel's victory over the Philistines with the Battle of Blood River standing as its symbol. They imagined their entry into the Orange Free State and the Transvaal as their arrival in the promised land. The defeat at the hands of the British in 1902 may have been interpreted as God's judgement and God's calling God's people to return to the covenant sealed at Blood River. De Gruchy remarked that "[t]heir struggle was not over. They still had that eschatological vision which anticipated once again the rebirth of a republic in which the Afrikaner would be the free and undisputed ruler under the providence of the Almighty."⁵³ Further to this, de Gruchy claimed that the Afrikaner churches were vitally important in this struggle for identity and they also provided a theological foundation on which this new nationalism could stand and eventually flourish.

1910 - Union

The political ideology of Afrikaner nationalism became more clearly defined during the 1910 Act of union. The Act brought together the two extant British colonies (Natal and the Cape) and the two former Boer states (the Transvaal and the Orange Free State), to create a single state under a sovereign British parliamentary system. Milner's idea of what needed to happen in South Africa was singular and unshakable. Professor Ockert Geysler wrote in a recent article that,

Milner's highest priority was the consolidation of the British Empire. He was of the opinion that 'South Africa is [...] the weakest link in the imperial chain [...].' He was determined to put it straight in order to secure the stability and the unity of the Empire even if it should mean to 'crush Afrikanerdom'. At the same time Milner was well aware of 'the tremendous responsibility which rests upon the man, who is called upon to try and preserve it from snapping [...].' Milner was an outspoken and convinced imperialist. Crafford claims that his 'appointment to the high position in South Africa was a calamitous one. He came to South Africa fully resolved to 'crush Afrikanerdom.' Nor did he scruple to say so.⁵⁴

53. Ibid., loc. 619–21.

Hertzog: swimming up two streams

Despite Milner's commitment to the absolute assimilation of the Afrikaner into what was now British South Africa, concessions were made regarding Afrikaner culture. Barry Hertzog, Attorney-General of the Orange Free State, joined forces with President M.T. Steyn, to insist that Dutch be considered alongside English as one of two official languages of the new Union. Hertzog had been successful in piloting a similar bill through the Parliament of the Orange Free State just prior to Britain's annexation of the State. Thompson wrote that, in the convention leading-up to the Act of Union in 1910,

[...] Hertzog and ex-president M.T. Steyn made it clear that they would have no truck with unification unless the constitution included a strong safeguard for the Dutch language. The language clause, and the clause protecting the Cape nonracial franchise, were the two rigid elements in the constitution. Neither could be amended without the approval of two thirds of both houses of Parliament sitting together.⁵⁵

It appears that the importance of language in this debate ought not to be underestimated. Giliomee made the point that: "Afrikaans as a language was not merely a tool the 'petty bourgeoisie' could exploit to cement this 'class alliance'. It was the symbol of the identity of the Afrikaner people, the tool with which we could domesticate universal knowledge and express it in a particular manner."⁵⁶

Carter noted that Afrikaner nationalism had already begun to be more clearly expressed as the political means to do so became more available to the Afrikaner. In 1912, Hertzog broke from the ranks, left the Union cabinet under Botha and Smuts, and three years later formed the National Party. With the benefit of hindsight, Hertzog may appear to have been a moderate nationalist even though his break with Smuts and Botha

54. O. Geysler, "Jan Smuts and Alfred Milner," *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 90, no. 360 (2001): 416.

55. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 151.

56. Hermann Giliomee, "Rediscovering and Re-Imagining the Afrikaners in a New South Africa: Autobiographical Notes on Writing an Uncommon Biography," *Itinerario* 27, no. 3-4 (2008): 24.

was a move toward a more conservative nationalism. This was seen as dangerous and unnecessarily divisive to many in the Union cabinet. A ‘purified’ version of the National party, under the leadership of Daniel François Malan,⁵⁷ would win the 1948 election with a platform promise of raising the Afrikaans language to its rightful place in Parliament and establish it as *the* official language of the nation. Hertzog either did not see the need to exclude the British or perhaps he never dared to dream Malan’s dream. Carter noted further that

Hertzog, whose Nationalists governed the Union from 1924 to 1932, was dedicated to the so-called ‘two streams’ policy, that is, to developing the Afrikaners (the modern descendents of the original Dutch, German, and French settlers), who were still predominantly farmers or urban workers, to the place where they could be on equal terms with English-speaking South Africans, whose lesser numbers were more than counterbalanced by their more prosperous economic status.⁵⁸

The political power in South Africa may have begun to shift toward Afrikaner rule but the real power continued to rest in the economic and financial implements of the country, and they continued to be wielded by the British.

1914 - World War I and the Afrikaner Rebellion

The advent of World War I brought into sharp relief the ideological rift between Smuts’ cooperative and conciliatory stance toward the British and Hertzog’s ‘two streams’⁵⁹ but highly nationalistic stance. Smuts and Botha had acceded to Britain’s request to join the British in declaring war on Germany. Also, the South African colony

57. D. F. Malan was leader of the National Party in the Cape Province since the inception of the party in 1915. Cf. Giliomee, “Rediscovering and Re-Imagining the Afrikaners in a New South Africa: Autobiographical Notes on Writing an Uncommon Biography,” 13.

58. Gwendolen M. Carter, “Union of South Africa: Politics of White Supremacy,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 298 (1955): 142.

59. [Hertzog’s] political principles, as first stated in his speeches in 1912, were “South Africa First” (even before the British Empire) and the “Two Streams Policy,” under which each part of the white South African nation—i.e., the British and the Afrikaner (Dutch)—would be free from domination by the other. (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/263933/JBM-Hertzog>: accessed Aug. 21, 2014)

was expected to wage war on its neighbour to the northwest, Germany's protectorate, South West Africa. Thompson suggested that it was the combination of two events that brought the Afrikaner to the point of rebellion: first, the Afrikaner's experience of having been dragged into a war on behalf of Britain and second, the subsequent call to wage war on a protectorate of the German people, for whom the Afrikaner certainly had more sympathy than for the British. He remarked that

[t]heir decision prompted a number of Afrikaners in the former republics, who had hoped to use Britain's distractions as an opportunity to regain their independence, to raise an armed rebellion. The government quickly and firmly suppressed the uprising [...].⁶⁰

Despite a close examination of the various histories published on the topic it remains difficult to ascertain the real motivation behind the 1914 Rebellion. Nearly 12,000 Afrikaners took part in the rebellion and they seemed to represent a general feeling of resentment toward British rule in the then-recently annexed Orange Free State and the Transvaal. In her compelling article on the topic, Sandra Swart agreed that

[t]oday, nine decades later, there is still little consensus over interpretations of the Rebellion. It was an uprising by some 11 400 Boer men, about one per cent of the white population, at the outbreak of the First World War, ostensibly against the government's decision to go into the war on Britain's behalf. It has been interpreted variously as opposition to the government's proposed expedition to German South West Africa, as a demonstration of bitterness over General Hertzog's exclusion from Louis Botha's cabinet, and as a desire for the return of republican government. In general, the uprising has largely been understood as a manifestation of embryonic Afrikaner nationalism, by both the liberal and Afrikaner nationalist historiographical traditions. More recently, revisionists have elucidated an economic motivation.⁶¹

60. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 159.

61. Sandra Swart, "The 'Five Shilling Rebellion': Rural White Male Anxiety and the 1914 Boer Rebellion," *South African Historical Journal* 56, no. 1 (2006): 90. doi:10.1080/02582470609464966.

Swart did not suggest who the revisionists were but Giliomee has argued in several instances⁶² that the economic stress experienced by the Afrikaner, especially following the Second Anglo-Boer War, was a powerful political motivator.

Swart argued that the poor white share-croppers' fear of being out-farmed by black tenant farmers in the Orange Free State and the southern Transvaal contributed to the 1914 Rebellion. These fears were cleverly refashioned by politicians to raise the spectre of a black uprising that would challenge white rule in the provinces. Because black farmers were prepared to employ every able-bodied member of the household to till and weed the soil, they out performed their white counterparts. The *bywoner*⁶³ patriarchs were reluctant to employ their wives and children in the fields. Swart referred to the British industrial expansion in the area as the work of the capitalising state that was more interested in the financial bottom line than maintaining racial purity and white dominance. Further to this she wrote:

Both symbolic and material concerns were articulated by populist leaders, who used them to disguise fissures in white society, and to motivate people to rebel against the capitalising state which, reacting to the new needs of the mercantile and mining sector, would not control black labour in older ways. This contributes to our understanding of the geographic specificity of the Rebellion, and helps to explain the class of person who got involved. Thus, it could be said that the Rebellion was, at least, partly about trying to retain what it meant to be a white man in a changing world.⁶⁴

62. Cf. Giliomee, Hermann. "Western Cape Farmers and the Beginnings of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1870–1915." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14, no. 1 (1987): 38–63; Giliomee, Hermann. *The History in Our Politics*. Inaugural Lecture, no. 126. Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1986; Toit, André du, and Hermann Giliomee. *Afrikaner Political Thought: Analysis and Documents. Vol. 1, 1780–1850*. Cape Town: David Philip Press, 1983; Vail, Leroy, ed. "The Beginnings of Afrikaner Ethnic Consciousness, 1850–1915." In *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, Hermann Giliomee. Perspectives on Southern Africa, 22–50. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

63. The Afrikaans term *bywoner*, translated literally, means 'sojourner.' In reality, the term referred to those poor white Afrikaners who were landless and relied on casual labour or a tenant farming position to survive.

64. *Ibid.*, 102.

Needless to say that this was a tumultuous time for the South African nation. The Rebellion may have been caused by any number of factors but one thing can be said with near certainty: the Afrikaner was moving toward independence.

Why was the Afrikaner rebelling?

The 1914 Rebellion may have been about different things for different people. If you were a member of the new Boer landed gentry, the Rebellion may have been understood as a reaction to the continuing threat of British mining interests in the region. If you were a *bywoner*, you may have grasped at the lone straw offered by local politicians who saw the Rebellion as an opportunity to reassert white privilege in the crumbling social structures of unofficial apartheid. The reasons for the Rebellion are seemingly as plentiful as there were groups that had a stake in its outcome. Kent Fedorowich, reader in British Imperial and Commonwealth History, Department of History at the University of the West of England in Bristol wrote recently that

[t]he reasons for the outbreak of the Afrikaner Rebellion or ‘armed protest’ of 1914- 15 are many as they are varied. For many Afrikaners the rebellion was a defining moment in the development of a vigorous nationalism. It symbolised an attempt to preserve a fast disappearing way of life that was being subsumed by the modernising forces of capitalism, industrialisation and urbanisation. For many of the 12 000 or so rebels concentrated largely in the impoverished areas of the southwestern Transvaal and north-eastern Orange Free State, the rebellion was an opportunity to defend traditional values, and above all, preserve the old patriarchal order best epitomised by the commando system. Undeniably, it was also a golden opportunity to at last sever the British connection and wipe away the humiliation of the 1902 Treaty⁶⁵ of Vereeniging.⁶⁶

What all these interpretations share in common is the sense that the time had come for the Afrikaner people to fight for their language, identity and place in South Africa. The alternatives were to be assimilated by the British or be overrun by the black majority

65. The Treaty of Vereeniging, signed in May of 1902, officially ended the Second Anglo-Boer war.

66. Kent Fedorowich, “Sleeping with the Lion? The Loyal Afrikaner and the South African Rebellion of 1914–15,” *South African Historical Journal* 49, no. 1 (2003): 72. doi:10.1080/02582470308671448.

who also felt that it was to time to reassert *their* identity as the founding people of South Africa. Fedorowich emphasised this point having suggested that the 1914 Rebellion was

[...] a struggle for power between traditionalists and modernisers for the soul of Afrikanerdom. Hence the terms ‘rebellion’, ‘revolt’ or ‘armed protest’ are inadequate to explain what happened in South Africa during the first months of the Great War.⁶⁷

Time for change: a growing nationalism aided by a growing apathy

Afrikaner nationalism was beginning to take hold in the imaginations of both *bywoner* and burgher alike. Henceforth, the Afrikaner elite would take advantage of every opportunity to establish linguistic and cultural bulwarks against British hegemony. They seemed to also take advantage of opportunities to gain a foothold in the political life of an increasingly apathetic British ruling class. These opportunities presented themselves both during and following the 1914 Rebellion. Bill Nasson, Professor of History at Stellenbosch University in South Africa, claimed that

[a]n increasingly resonant nationalism was unquestionably a critical factor in the 1914 Afrikaner Rebellion. [...] Thus, at this level, August 1914 and the September advance on GSWA [*German South West Africa*] provided the essential ‘signal [...] for an Afrikaner rebellion against the dominant role of British imperialism in South Africa’s political economy.’ [...] By the 1910s, deepening class differentiation, wasting drought, and intensifying levels of regional and local agrarian landlessness had thrown up a despairing, debt-ridden substratum of marginal, poor white farmers and *bywoners*. They had little love for a Union government short on sweeteners. For this mass of poor burghers, armed rebellion therefore had intrinsic appeal - to acquire booty, and to secure possible title to land as a hedge against encroaching urban proletarianization.⁶⁸

Afrikaner nationalism, thus far, had yet to gel as a singular and representative political idea. The average Afrikaner miner or farmer had not yet identified the threat to his language rights or cultural heritage as possible contributing factors in his potential demise. His religion was safe and intact as the DRC was quick to align itself with the

67. Ibid.

68. Bill Nasson, “War Opinion in South Africa, 1914,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 23, no. 2 (1995): 264.

rising Afrikaner power brokers. However, the average person would need to hear a strong, clear and committed political voice that could issue the call to fight for their rights and perhaps their very survival as a distinct people.

The politicians who had assumed the mantle of leadership on behalf of the Afrikaner would need some powerful tools to communicate their message. As mentioned earlier, the newspaper owners and clergy had tremendous power as they were the few who had direct access to the South Africa whites. In the mid-1950s, Gwendolyn Carter completed a comprehensive analysis of the political sympathies of the many newspapers that circulated in the urban centres. In her book *Politics of Inequality*,⁶⁹ and article *Union of South Africa: Politics of White Supremacy*⁷⁰ she demonstrates a correlation between voting results and the politics of both the church and the newspapers in the various polling regions of the country. Both the church and the newspapers would become important allies in the Afrikaner struggle for political recognition in South Africa.

There was another political phenomenon that occurred at the same time as the increase in the political awareness of the Afrikaner community. The English-speaking community had enjoyed power, prestige and privilege since their arrival in the Cape in 1795, but wealth had gradually made the community politically indifferent. As the Afrikaner struggled to claim its place among the English-speakers, the much smaller British population were taking their status for granted. It is difficult to discern the beginnings of English-speaking apathy toward the changes that were happening around them. Around the time of Union it appeared to become more evident in the politics of the country and in the Christian churches. De Gruchy argued that a *laissez-faire* approach to life among the English-speakers, along with its concomitant apathy and cynicism, were indicators for the Afrikaner nationalist that the British had slipped into a degenerate liberalism, the

69. Carter, *Politics of Inequality: South Africa Since 1948 (2d Ed.)*.

70. Carter, "Union of South Africa: Politics of White Supremacy."

enemy of any and all good Afrikaner Calvinists! De Gruchy remarked that this, among other factors, contributed to the communication gap between the two major white communities in South Africa.

Around 1910 about two-thirds of the white population were English-speakers. The English-speaking community was at the peak of its power. De Gruchy noted that the community

[...] dominated the civil service, controlled finance and industry, had a firm grip on education, commanded the major cities, and was part of a larger empire that ruled the world. Yet, it should be remembered that the English could never govern South Africa alone. Their political power depended on unity with those Afrikaners who, like Jan Smuts, sought to bridge the gap between the white sections of the population. Thus, while the English could dominate much of Parliament, they were always in need of Afrikaner support.⁷¹

The Christian churches appeared to be more aligned with their respective cultural communities and were seemingly indifferent to the large black population that remained on the sidelines as they waited for the outcome of the battle between the economic titans in South Africa.

1910-1948: white politics and the struggle for the hearts and minds of the Afrikaner

In the three decades leading up to the 1948 election, the South African political arena was populated with debate and disagreement concerning the relationship between the Afrikaner community, which was growing in prosperity and power,⁷² and the English-speaking community who had become somewhat complacent about their wealth and power. The ‘racial question’ did not concern the relationship between black and white as much as it was a question reserved for the strained and contentious marriage of necessity between the Afrikaner and the English-speaking minorities. Thompson noted

71. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, loc. 677–79. Kindle Edition.

72. “By 1948, as a result of industrial growth, pervasive color bars, and state aid, white poverty was being phased out and individual Afrikaners were getting a foothold in top positions throughout the economy.” Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 155.

that “[w]hen whites talked about “the racial question,” they were referring to the ethnic cleavage between Afrikaners and English-speaking South Africans.”⁷³ The black population mattered where cheap labour was concerned but drew little attention from the white politicians during an election. Since the black segment of society was disenfranchised and would remain so until the first truly democratic election in 1994, neither the Afrikaner nor the English-speaking politician needed to curry political favour with the blacks. South African politics from 1910 to 1948 concerned the white minority population, and questions of race referred to the struggle between the dominant English-speaking minority white population and the marginalised Afrikaner majority white population.

The crush of British political and economic domination was already keenly felt by the time of the Act of Union of 1910. The Act really only served to bring the plight of the Afrikaner into sharp relief. Reactions to this possible final nail in the Afrikaner’s political coffin were varied, but out of Afrikaner despair rose the National Party with its emphasis on Afrikaner language and cultural rights. In 1915, just five years following Union, Barry Hertzog, the former minister of justice in Louis Botha’s South African Party, formed the National Party. Hertzog had openly disagreed with Botha’s ‘one stream policy’ which favoured reconciliation with the British after the Afrikaner defeat in the Second English-Boer War. Hertzog criticised Botha’s stance publicly causing Botha to remove Hertzog from cabinet late in 1912. Hertzog promoted a ‘two stream policy’ favouring a policy of mutual respect and guarantees that one would not dominate the other. Hertzog also pushed for equal representation of Afrikaans in schools and the public service. Professor Tilman Dederling, Professor of History at the University of South Africa, commented that “[t]he policies of the leader of the opposition National Party, J.B.M. Hertzog, were shaped by an emphasis on the rights of the Afrikaners in the

73. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 157.

face of what he saw as the overwhelming political and cultural influence of the British Empire in South Africa.”⁷⁴ Hertzog’s ‘two streams’ policy formed the main plank of his political platform in the following federal election. In the election of 1915, the National Party garnered only twenty-seven of a possible one hundred and thirty seats⁷⁵ but in 1921 was able to capture forty-five seats. It appears that Hertzog had found a way to persuade the Afrikaner who was looking to restore his dignity despite his British master who reminded him daily of his shame.

By 1924, Hertzog and his Nationalists were able to defeat the pro-British South African Party in the election and they formed a government of which Hertzog would remain Prime Minister until 1934. In 1934, Hertzog took the majority of his National Party to join forces with members of his former party, the South African Party, to form the United Party. This new party was able to defeat the seriously weakened National Party in the 1938 election, winning one hundred and eleven of the one hundred and fifty seats.⁷⁶ Hertzog’s United party was still a nationalist party but it was beginning to lose its edge. While it was relentless in its fight for Afrikaner language and cultural rights, it was losing its appeal to the average Afrikaner. Hertzog was not going far enough in his policies. A more aggressive nationalist by the name of Daniel François Malan refused to join the new United Party, choosing to keep the National Party alive and renamed it the Purified Nationalist Party. This was not the last South Africa would hear from this new hyper-nationalist party.

1938: The monument, the Great Trek, and a political coup

The year 1938 marked the centennial anniversary of the beginning of the Great Trek. For most Afrikaners, the Great Trek symbolised the resilience, fierce indepen-

74. Tilman Dederig, “‘Avenge the Lusitania’: The Anti-German Riots in South Africa in 1915,” *Immigrants & Minorities* 31, no. 3 (2013): 276.

75. Carter, *Politics of Inequality: South Africa Since 1948 (2d Ed.)*, 148.

76. *Ibid.*, 449.

dence, and faithfulness of the stalwart Afrikaner who would not be bowed by British imperialism. They were praised and glorified by the keepers of the *voortrekker* legacy. The Purified National Party, still under Malan's leadership, was able to capture control of the centennial celebrations and the imaginations of those Afrikaners who were looking for the kind of leadership which could secure their political and economic future.

Thompson recalled that the celebrations

[...] culminated in a ceremony laying the foundation stone of a monument to the voortrekkers on a hill outside Pretoria. There, orators painted the voortrekkers in heroic hues, giving them the qualities necessary to promote the nationalist cause. They were profoundly religious. They were adamantly opposed to the mixing of the races. They stood for Afrikaner solidarity in the face of alien Western influences. 'God,' said Reverend T. F. Dreyer, 'has willed that we must be a separate, independent people.'⁷⁷

There is considerable debate in the contemporary discourse concerning the Great Trek narrative and its influence on the rise of Afrikaner nationalism. Giliomee points to D. L. Moodie's assessment of the 1938 celebration of the Great Trek noting that he "[...] later projected these celebrations as a catalytic event in the nationalist mobilisation of the Afrikaners. I disagree. I think it played a much less important role than the controversy surrounding South Africa's decision in 1939 to enter the Second World War."⁷⁸

In this instance, Moodie was referring to F.A. van Jaarsveld's pamphlets, written in 1959, in which van Jaarsveld exploited the narrative to suggest that the Great Trek was evidence of God having saved the *voortrekkers* from the native threat and delivered them into the promised land.⁷⁹ He was not suggesting that secular history adopt the religious myth of the Great Trek as fact. Moodie was careful to make his observations with

77. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 162.

78. Giliomee, "Rediscovering and Re-Imagining the Afrikaners in a New South Africa: Autobiographical Notes on Writing an Uncommon Biography," 12.

79. See note 4 on page 2 of T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*, Perspectives on Southern Africa (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

the caveat that he was writing in the context of Afrikaner sacred history. As the Afrikaner rose to political prominence, he also rose to religious prominence. His church, the DRC, was instrumental in developing a grand narrative that included a sacred history that placed the Afrikaner nation in a unique relationship with God. The rise from Boer to boardroom and from subsistence farmer to burgher was described in terms of God's providential plan for God's chosen people, the Afrikaner. The theological debate would become more poignant as the Afrikaner church and the Afrikaner government cooperated to create a propaganda campaign the contemporary likes of which have only been seen in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

It seemed that the struggle against apartheid would take place on two fronts, the political and the theological. De Gruchy reflected on the paucity of able theologians who could confront the theology of apartheid that developed alongside its political counterpart. In the 1979 edition of his book *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, de Gruchy wrote about his own context but I suggest that the quote below could just as easily have been written about the decades leading-up to the 1948 election:

English-speaking South Africa has produced notable poets and writers, historians and social scientists, and leaders in many other disciplines and fields, but there were very few who had the ability and charisma to provide the theological insight and leadership that was adequate for the struggle against apartheid. It seems that authors such as Olive Schreiner, Alan Paton, and Nadine Gordimer engaged in far more profound reflection on the historical experience and challenges than all the churches and theologians put together.⁸⁰

The Christian church had not only remained silent about the increasing abuse of white privilege and the marginalisation of the black majority but it had capitulated to some of its membership who demanded that blacks and whites worship separately. The rise of Afrikaner nationalism had almost reached its peak. In a few short years, Britain's seem-

80. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, loc. 1392–95.

ingly unassailable dynasty in South Africa would give way to its replacement, Afrikanerdom.

1939: Britain's call to arms

Hertzog's new government would soon encounter difficulties. The question would be raised whether South Africa should join Britain in her declaration of war on Germany. Smuts, both hero and general during the Second English-Boer War, pushed the party to join the British while Hertzog chose a more neutral position. Thompson noted that

[w]hen Britain declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, the United party split. A passionate debate ensued in the South African Parliament. Hertzog's people were for strict neutrality, Smuts's for joining Britain. When the vote was taken, Smuts's motion for a South African declaration of war against Germany was carried by 80 votes to 67.⁸¹

This was a disappointment for Hertzog as the vote went against his 'two streams' policy that promoted the independence of each of the two ethnic groups among the whites. Hertzog resigned as Prime Minister leaving Smuts to succeed him as the head of government. Hertzog returned to a newly-mended relationship with D.F. Malan and the Purified National Party of South Africa. However, the divisions caused by the vigorous debate over entry into the war effort and the continuing debates over the need for a preferred white labour force in the mines were too much, and Hertzog left politics for good in 1941, defeated and disenchanted. He died a year later but his dream of a strong and dominant Afrikaner presence in the political and economic landscape of South Africa did not.

With the departure of Hertzog from the ranks of the Purified National Party, Malan was left to capitalise on the unpopular decision to join Britain in a war that left a foul taste in the mouths of the Afrikaner people. Malan was able to glean sixteen of the

81. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 162.

twenty-two seats that the United Party lost in the 1943 election. Five years later it would increase that number to seventy, allowing the Purified National Party, now called simply the 'National Party of South Africa' to form a government which it would maintain, without interruption, for the next forty-six years.

Hertzog's departure also left the door open to the hyper-nationalism of Malan. In the new Purified National Party, the Afrikaner found a clear statement of Afrikaner identity. Malan's articulation of Afrikanerdom and its manifest destiny took on a religious dimension that would raise the eyebrows of some religious leaders, and the ire of others. The religious dimension grew into a full-fledged theological justification for the Afrikaner rise to dominance in South Africa. The theological framework within which an apartheid theology was developed was the same as that which was used to claim that apartheid was a heresy. John de Gruchy, the interlocutor of this thesis, would challenge this religious self-understanding, producing a contextual theological response to what he claimed was a distortion of the Reformed tradition. This discussion is developed more fully in a Chapter Four.

1948: Afrikaner nationalism and a divided Christian church

In the 1934 election the National Party won twenty-seven seats. Four years later they won forty-three and in 1948, for the first time in fifteen years, they won a majority with seventy seats. That majority would be enlarged to ninety-four in the following election in 1953.

In the 1948 election, Malan's National Party ran on a platform of change, not apartheid. As Giliomee explained, apartheid was just one of the many planks in their political platform and was perhaps less important than others, although this perspective ran contrary to popular opinion. Giliomee suggested that "[t]he fateful aspect of the 1948 election was that everyone thought that apartheid, not Afrikaner nationalism or anti-war sentiments, had secured the [National Party] victory. But in the election apart-

heid was only one plank.”⁸² Other important planks included greater independence and freedom from the ties to Britain, the communitarian notion that the rich and the state should care for the poor, greater economic independence through the incorporation of Afrikaner companies and industry, greater use and protection of Afrikaans and Afrikaner culture and finally, the absolute separation of blacks and whites through white domination and discrimination. These nationalist planks were reminiscent of the political rhetoric heard at rallies sponsored by underdog parties trying to assert a national identity that may or may not have existed beyond the politicians’ podium. There were more republican planks than anything else in the National Party’s 1948 election campaign and the ‘apartheid’ plank was simply one of several.⁸³

At the time of the 1948 election, the official apartheid policies were not yet fully developed. The voters may have had understood the principle of apartness or separate development but they could only have suspected the full implications of the nascent policy. Greater wealth, independence, and a higher profile for Afrikaners were probably more important in the campaign than apartheid which was, for the most part, a lived reality for most of South Africa - blacks serving whites. Also, it seems that religion was never very far removed from the politics of South Africa. The National Party was a self-proclaimed Christian party and made no apologies. Perhaps for this reason more than others the Christian churches were able to address the government in the language of the church.

I suggest that one of the most striking features of the Christian churches’ confrontation with the apartheid government was the content of the criticism coming from

82. Giliomee, “Rediscovering and Re-Imagining the Afrikaners in a New South Africa: Autobiographical Notes on Writing an Uncommon Biography,” 13.

83. Cf. Giliomee, Hermann. “Rediscovering and Re-Imagining the Afrikaners in a New South Africa: Autobiographical Notes on Writing an Uncommon Biography.” *Itinerario* 27, no. 3–4 (2008): 9–48; Carter, Gwendolen M. “Union of South Africa: Politics of White Supremacy.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 298 (1955): 142–50

the churches, which was directed toward government policies. The critique often contained theological or religious language. It was presented in the form of Christian prayer and the petitions frequently appealed to the biblical texts or Christian ethics. De Gruchy cites several examples in the context of a discussion of the Christian churches' reaction to the election results of 1948, and the intensity with which the new political leaders of the country spoke about separate development:

In September 1948, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of South Africa criticized proposed legislation aimed at depriving Africans of their limited Parliamentary representation as a retrograde step contrary to the claims of Christian responsibility. 'Our earnest prayer', the General Assembly said, 'is that white South Africa may be saved from the contempt in the eyes of the world which such action is bound to produce.' [...] the Congregational Assembly, which stated: 'It is our sincere conviction that the Government's policy of 'apartheid' has no sanction in the New Testament Scriptures [...] The bishops [Church of the Province] identified themselves fully with the resolutions of the Lambeth Conference earlier that year [1948] which declared 'that discrimination between men on the grounds of race alone is inconsistent with the principles of the Christian religion'. The South African bishops then stated that human rights are not extraneous to Christianity but rooted in Christian anthropology.⁸⁴

For de Gruchy and other South African theologians, it was not unusual to appeal to the political leaders on the basis of a shared faith. In contrast, it is hardly imaginable that a Canadian church member or theologian could appeal to their political leaders by citing passages from the biblical texts or by appealing to a shared Christian ethics. They may critique certain policies based on their personal faith but it is not difficult to imagine the outcome of the discussion if they were to use theological or religious language while doing so. A Christian theological critique would simply not be relevant to the Canadian population as a whole and it would most likely be dismissed as a fringe argument. However, during the apartheid era in South Africa, this is precisely what happened. Since it was only the enfranchised population that could make a difference politically and, since close to eighty-five percent of the enfranchised claimed Christianity as their religion, it

84. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, loc. 885–91.

then stood to reason that one could appeal to the government on the basis of a shared religion.

However, the Christian church was divided. The members of the DRC voted for the Afrikaner's future and the members of the English-speaking churches voted for the *status quo*. Carter noted in her book *The Politics of Inequality* that the country was also divided along cultural lines. The English-speaking population voted for the United Party, which was seen as more liberal and progressive, while the Afrikaner voted for the National Party.⁸⁵ Giliomee quips "I once asked the mother of a friend what it meant to be a 'Sap' (an Afrikaner supporter of the United Party). 'n Sleg soort Afrikaner ('A bad kind of Afrikaner') was her curt reply."⁸⁶ One thing was for certain; South Africa had elected a strongly nationalist government, albeit by a slim margin.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have tried to show how British political and economic domination gave way to an Afrikaner nationalism that actively sought to engage the disaffected, the poor, and the culturally isolated Dutch colonial community in South Africa. The Afrikaner rose to prominence, partly out of the fear of cultural hegemony by the English-speaking whites, and partly through a desire to create a nation in their own image; a nation that could be a safe place in which to pursue their God-given destiny. After all, the first paragraph of the National Party's Programme of Principles states that: "The Party acknowledges the sovereignty and guidance of God in the destiny of countries and seeks the development of our nation's life along Christian national lines, with due regard to the individual's freedom of conscience and religion."⁸⁷

85. See appendix 'Chart 1' in Carter, *Politics of Inequality: South Africa Since 1948 (2d Ed.)*, 448–49.

86. Giliomee, "Rediscovering and Re-Imagining the Afrikaners in a New South Africa: Autobiographical Notes on Writing an Uncommon Biography," 13.

87. Carter, *Politics of Inequality: South Africa Since 1948 (2d Ed.)*, 472.

The white, English-speaking electorate was smaller than its Afrikaner counterpart. In previous elections, the political parties representing British interests, especially the economic ones, could count on the cooperation of wealthy Afrikaner landowners and business people. They shared a common goal with the English-speaking business owners, which was to maximise profits and minimise costs. Labour costs were fairly constant as there seemed to be a never-ending supply of cheap black labour available to white industrialists. Black labour could not vote and therefore did not warrant consideration. However, the *bywoner* and the poor white Afrikaner did have a vote and did warrant consideration. By the time the 1948 election came around, it was too late for the United Party to try and appease white labour. Their previous preferential treatment of the English-speaking community had all but alienated the Afrikaner electorate. The National Party had already established itself, once again, as the peoples' party and poor white labour voted for their own.

It can be argued that the National Party could not have gained a majority in Parliament without the help of the English-speaking community. It appears that the *laissez-faire* attitude of the white, English-speakers was an essential element in the successful rise of Afrikaner nationalism. While English-speaking people appeared more liberal, especially when it concerned the rights of blacks, it must be remembered that they too benefited from cheap black labour. The English-speakers publicly criticised the National Party for promising to institutionalise racism and weave it into the very fabric of the constitution. Afrikaner intellectuals and politicians considered this criticism to be disingenuous, as the English-speaking community could no more maintain the economic *status quo* without cheap labour than the newly elected National Party could. Giliomee made the point by arguing that most of the members of

[...] the English-speaking intelligentsia, and particularly historians, social scientists, journalists and church leaders never made their peace with Afrikaner dominance of the white politics. Their opposition to apartheid and to Afrikaner political dominance was often indistinguishable. David Yudelman, a perceptive

English-speaking South African historian, criticised South African ‘Anglophones’ for the distorted picture of the Afrikaners that they disseminated to the world. The English-speakers were, he remarked, not significantly more liberal than the Afrikaners on race questions, yet they tended to present the Afrikaner as ‘the villain, the fanatic, who created or at least perfected institutionalised racial discrimination’, while whites of British extraction supposedly only passively accepted segregation and apartheid. The latter, were, he added, quite prepared ‘to use apartheid as a pretext for indirectly expressing their culturally chauvinistic distaste for the Afrikaners, while continuing to enjoy the benefits of white supremacy.’⁸⁸

The theme of shared responsibility in the face of segregation and the mutual accountability of both the English-speaking and Afrikaner communities was an essential component of de Gruchy’s contextual theology. It is one of the unique features of his theology that I will explore it more fully in Chapters Four through Six.

Relevance to the thesis

The focus of this thesis is the Reformed contextual theology of John W. de Gruchy which he developed during the time the Christian church in South Africa was critically engaged in the struggle against apartheid. I maintain that de Gruchy returned to the theological roots of his Reformed tradition to rediscover, for the Christian church in South Africa, God’s call to be the church in his time and in his place. A large part of de Gruchy’s theological work during this time appears to have been focussed on liberating the Reformed witness in South Africa from the ideological captivity of a society which had rendered the white South African church incapable of critically assessing its own work. In many instances, de Gruchy expressed his concern that the white church had lost its prophetic voice. My hypothesis may be partially stated by suggesting that de Gruchy was uniquely situated and qualified to dismantle the theological arguments made by the DRC in support of apartheid and that his contributions became essential

88. Giliomee, “Rediscovering and Re-Imagining the Afrikaners in a New South Africa: Autobiographical Notes on Writing an Uncommon Biography,” 11.

components in the critical machinery that moved the DRC to reconsider its stance and eventually recant its position *vis-à-vis* apartheid.

The DRC had developed a contextual theology that supported apartheid and the marriage of apartheid theology with apartheid political and social policies had created a situation which had rendered the church captive, unable to see beyond its own needs and concerns. De Gruchy wrote in 1975 arguing that [...] *during the past twenty-five years, a serious threat to Christian faith has been the apparent alliance between Christianity and Afrikaner nationalism. This alliance is still strong and is fostered and defended by some theologians, it also provides the ideological basis for Separate Development.*⁸⁹

The DRC was the church of the Afrikaner, to the exclusion of others, and it developed a particular theology that was relatively untouched by the contemporaneous theological movements in Europe, Africa, and South America, let alone those taking place at home. However, it did choose to engage the political theology of the Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper's political theology seemed to lend its support to the apartheid policies of the National Party and the legislation that ensued following the Party's assumption of power in 1948. An element of de Gruchy's critique was to challenge the DRC's interpretation of Kuyper's theology and the DRC's adaptation of their neo-Kuyperianism in support of the apartheid social construct. More will be said about Kuyper in Chapter Six.

The theology of the DRC developed within the context of the Afrikaner's rise to political dominance in South Africa. These two civil phenomena, the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid theology, developed in tandem with the DRC having provided theological support for the Nationalists' plan for the absolute segregation of the races. De Gruchy asked whether the theological product, namely apartheid theology, was

89. John W. de Gruchy, "Transcendence and the Ideological Captivity of the Church: Some South African Reflections on the Hartford Appeal for Theological Affirmation," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* no 13, no. D (1975): 33.

indeed a prophetic theology that related the principles of the Reign of God to all the people of South Africa, or was it the projection of the political needs of the Afrikaner and the Nationalist regime?

As the narrative of Afrikaner nationalism unfolded, it revealed a deep longing for an unfettered and more parochial way of life that seemed, at least to their British compatriots, anachronistic and unenlightened. It was a way of life that rejected the liberalism of a post-enlightenment Europe and stood in contrast to the ‘heathen’ way of life of the black natives. The Afrikaner community and its way of life depended, not on social and political integration, but on its ability to culturally isolate and protect itself from outside influences. André du Toit remarked that

The emphasis here is ‘negative,’ on the prolonged cultural isolation and, indeed, insulation. In the course of the eighteenth century, while the rest of the Western world was profoundly affected by the secular and universalistic ethos of the Enlightenment, swept by the rising liberal and democratic tide of the ‘Atlantic Revolution,’ and finally transformed by the vast social changes attendant on the Industrial Revolution, Trekboer⁹⁰ society took shape in the vast open spaces of the Cape interior quite removed from all of these influences. From this lack of contact with modern developments follows an essentially negative conclusion: ‘Afrikaner culture was not significantly influenced by the rationalism and naturalism of the Enlightenment nor by modern liberalism.’⁹¹

Nor were its theological proclivities. Giliomee suggested that “. . . the Afrikaners were a unique people whose strength lay in isolation with freedom to practise apartheid with respect to both the English and the Africans.”⁹² If the Afrikaner was politically and culturally conservative, his theology was even more so. The DRC’s theological isolation

90. The term *Trekboer*, which is synonymous with the term *voortrekker*, refers to the early Dutch settlers who felt compelled to travel to the interior of South Africa to escape the large, black majority and British hegemony. A small band of disaffected Dutch left the Cape in the mid-1830s and travelled north and east. The term ‘trek’ can mean migration and drift which adequately describes the event. The term ‘boer’ means ‘farmer’ in both Dutch and Afrikaans.

91. André Du Toit, “No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology,” *American Historical Review* 88, no. 4 (October 1983): 923–24.

92. Vail, “The Beginnings of Afrikaner Ethnic Consciousness, 1850–1915,” 48.

from the other Reformed churches in South Africa enabled a unique interpretation of Calvin's theology which would form the backbone of Afrikaner society and identity. Brian Du Toit, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Florida, Gainesville, commented on Afrikaner identity noting that

Afrikaner consciousness and identification have a tradition of very clear ethnic roots. Derived from a common ancestral stock that gives biological, historical, and linguistic characteristics to their identity, Afrikaners also share a Protestant religion tradition, with a major theme of Calvinistic predestination and being in South Africa due to divine providence. While opposing parties may provide for their support, the sentiment of favouring Afrikaners and whites – in that order – is shared by all.⁹³

Bosch disagreed and argued that the Afrikaner had a rather loose relationship with his Calvinist roots. At best, he suggested, Calvinism may have informed the clergy's sense of mission to the white Dutch settlers in the early days of the Cape Colony, but Bosch maintains that it would stretch the religious imagination to conclude that Calvinism was the driving religious idea in the formation of the Afrikaner identity. In support of this argument, contrary to Du Toit, he says that until

[...] approximately 1870, that is, more than two centuries after the founding of the Dutch settlement at the Cape, there is no direct evidence of the Afrikaners themselves appealing to their Calvinist beliefs as explanation or justification for their peculiar way of life.⁹⁴

Further in his article Bosch concluded by saying that

[...] in very broad outline, my argument so far has been that Afrikaners during the first two centuries of settlement in Southern Africa were, on the whole, Calvinists only in name, had no sense of a manifest destiny, but were, by and large, unsophisticated folk who reacted to the challenges of their context in an ad hoc manner and by means of a very literalist interpretation of the Bible.⁹⁵

93. Brian M. Du Toit, "The Far Right in Current South African Politics," *Of the Journal of Modern African Studies* 29, no. 4 (December 1991): 627.

94. Bosch, "Afrikaner Civil Religion and the Current South African Crisis," 13.

95. *Ibid.*, 14.

This religious and ethnic identity also informed the Afrikaner grand narrative that would eventually be crafted into a national religious myth, and subsequently a national civil religion. The Afrikaner civil religion flourished unchallenged by any alternative either from the English-speaking community of churches or the black churches that continued to struggle for their own voice. The rise of Afrikaner nationalism was paralleled by a theological movement that divided the Christian church and pitted Christian against Christian. It gave birth to powerful religious organisations that made friends of former opponents and disciples of leaders. The following chapter treats the phenomenon of a South African civil religion that grew out of the white Christian church's active and passive support for the Nationalist's racist apartheid policies.

Chapter Three: The ecclesiastical foundations of an Afrikaner civil religion

How different the history of South Africa could have been if the DRC had in 1857 taken a decision not to allow any separation within the church.

Nico Smith

The foundations of Afrikaner civil religion

In his book *The Rise of Afrikanerdom*, T. Dunbar Moodie, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology and Sociology at the Hobart and William Smith Colleges, described the advent of apartheid as the product of an effort by Afrikaner nationalists to impose, on the whole of South Africa, the idea of parallel cultures, developing separately but within one nation and for the betterment of both. Apartheid was designed to protect the white Afrikaner minority from the black masses but equally as important was the perceived need to insulate the Afrikaner community from British cultural and economic hegemony. In 1975, Moodie argued that, given the class position

[...] and vested interests of the Afrikaner elite that supports separate development on moral grounds, the theory may be simply interpreted as an opiate for sensitive consciences. For some of this elite, such rationalization is obviously true. For the rest, however, hypocrisy is too superficial an explanation. Indeed, from the corresponding English-speaking South African elite who have equally vested interests in the *status quo* comes whatever meaningful liberal opposition to racism that continues to exist in white South Africa. Class interest alone does not account for the extent to which the principle of separate development is rooted in the Afrikaner's own struggle for ethnic apartheid from the English in South Africa.¹

Moodie seems to have suggested that the ‘principle’ of apartheid was located in the Afrikaner’s desire to impose an ethnic, non-racial pluralism on *both* the black and white South African. This implies the parallel cultures would develop and flourish equally. I have found little evidence to support this claim and even Moodie recognised that, in reality, this ‘rationalisation’ may have been simply a way of soothing the both-

1. Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*, x-xi.

ered conscience of those who were not quite convinced of the moral integrity of such a philosophical position. The apartheid policies and concomitant laws that severely limited the rights and freedoms of the black population would hardly have been acceptable if applied to the white English-speakers as well. Nonetheless, the rationale behind the idea of parallel cultures seemed to be inherently flawed as the architects of apartheid were compelled to 'sell' apartheid to the general white population. As I have already remarked, the Christian churches were quite vocal in their disapproving comments on the new policies, at least immediately following the election. However, over time, outrage dimmed to passive compliance with the new laws. The fact that there were protests at all signified, for the National Party and its particular iteration of parallel cultures, that the road ahead would be difficult.

The idea of parallel cultures appears to have been in the minds of the Afrikaner political and social leadership, not so much during the development of the laws that enforced apartheid but during the small window of opportunity the newly-won election provided. It seems that, shortly following the 1948 election, the National Party was able to promote their apartheid strategy having relied largely on the well established social patterns to make their case for a nature-engendered cause for their strategy. The National Party presented apartheid as the solution to the South African problems. For this chapter, I am proceeding on the assumption that the civil religion that had been cultivated for several decades leading up to the 1948 election, provided a quasi-religious, pseudo-Christian justification for apartheid. I am also working with the assumption that the civil religion was actively supported by the DRC, the largest white Christian church in South Africa and passively tolerated by the English-speaking churches. These assumptions are supported by, among others, John de Gruchy whose published literature on this topic is one of the primary resources for my discussion on this topic. It is the role

of the churches in the evolution of an Afrikaner civil religion and its relationship to the generation and sustenance of an apartheid state that is the topic of this chapter.

1857: How different South African history could have been

The idea of a segregated population based on race was not the invention of the National Party nor was it limited to the Dutch settlers who eventually self-identified as Afrikaner. South African society, in the early days of the Cape settlement, experienced segregation but perhaps not to the extent that was evident in the last half of the twentieth century. It had an impact on the Christian church in South Africa, and historians and theologians conducting research in this area generally agree that segregation of the population on the basis of colour officially began when the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) agreed to allow its members to segregate their worship services along racial lines. It can be argued that the DRC, beginning in 1857, allowed its social and political context to shape ecclesiastical policies that would have previously been anathema. What had begun as a concession to ‘weaker members’ (whites) eventually became the official policy of the DRC, leading eventually to its unreserved support of the separation of the races. The authors of the SPRO-CAS² document entitled *Towards Social Change* recounted the history of the watershed event in 1857 when “[...] separate altars, which led to the establishment of separate churches on the basis of racial classification and language, was initially allowed ‘as a concession to prejudice and weakness’ and was con-

2. The Study Project of Christianity in Apartheid Society (SPRO-CAS), was established in 1969 to explore the possibilities and problems of creating a social order in South Africa based on the ‘integrated thrusts of love and association’ as an alternative to the apartheid society. The Project’s work developed in two phases. SPRO-CAS I attempted an analysis of the South African situation, mainly in a series of ‘commissions’, while SPRO-CAS II tried to formulate strategies for producing change. Alf. Stadler, “Anxious Radicals: SPROCAS and the Apartheid Society,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1 (October 1975): 102. http://resolver.scholarsportal.info/resolve/03057070/v02i0001/102_arsatas.

firmed by the Synod of 1857 ‘as a result of the weakness of some.’³ De Gruchy was highly critical of this way of doing theology. In several articles written over a period of many years, he would challenge what he considered a theology that had become ideologically captive to the prevailing political ideas within the Christian churches’ context. De Gruchy claimed that it was the Christian church’s calling to bear witness to the Reign of God and to confront oppressive policy and law-makers with the Gospel. Any church that served the politics of its context could not necessarily serve God as well. Too often the politics of a government and the Reign of God were at odds rather than in sync.

The English-speaking counterparts within the Reformed tradition experienced the same unrest as the members of the DRC. Separate worship took place in the Congregationalist and Presbyterian churches throughout the country, but their relationship with apartheid and the Nationalist government was more ambiguous. On the other hand, the DRC shared a very close relationship with the civil authorities and would eventually provide theological justification for the apartheid policies of the civil government.⁴

The Synod of 1857 and separate worship

It has been suggested by some within the theological discussions around the role of the Christian church in apartheid that the idea of separate development, while ostensibly a political idea, began with the DRC’s official sanctioning of separate worship at its 1857 Synod. During the Synod it appears that there was no real attempt to justify the segregation of the church into colour groups. In fact, the DRC restated its commitment

3. Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society. Political Commission., *Towards Social Change*. General Editor: Peter Randall. -, SPROCAS. Occasional Publication, no. 6 (Johannesburg: SPROCAS, 1971), 84.

4. See The DRC’s document *Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974* (Cape Town: Dutch Reformed Church Publishers, 1976).

to the principles of the Gospel which denied the possibility of a divided church. Nonetheless, segregation was a lived reality in South Africa and had been since the first white colonists arrived in the Cape, but it had not reached the status of official doctrine or policy in the church until 1881.

Prior to this, the Synod of 1857 reluctantly allowed for separate worship and communion services. The reason cited was for the purposes of creating peace and harmony among the white congregational members and there was no real attempt at providing theological justification for this move toward official segregation. The DRC seems to have run aground on its own success. Its successful mission work among the blacks had necessitated policies that would protect the integrity of the whites-only community. The theological justification for apartheid seems to have been a fairly recent phenomenon, having begun in the early 1930s concomitant with the rise of Afrikaner consciousness. The DRC's decisions in favour of racial harmony and the 'weakness of some' were not transformative decisions but ones made in response to internal pressures and demands. Apartheid would eventually become a plank in the National Party's political platform during the 1948 election campaign, but the idea of a constitutionally mandated separation of the races seems to have had humbler beginnings.

Ironically, the reason given for the acquiescence of the 1857 Synod appears to be the least theological of all the reasons given for separate worship but it is perhaps the most honest, for it is likely rooted in the lived reality of the church at that time. Neville Richardson,⁵ in his article entitled *Apartheid, Heresy and the Church in South Africa*, reminded us that the DRC was not always structured in this way. Prior to the 1857 deci-

5. Neville Richardson is a retired Methodist minister who served as the head of the School of Theology at the University of KwaZulu Natal before taking on the role of the Director of the Methodist Church of South Africa's Education for Mission and Ministry Unit. He also played a key role in the establishment of the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary in Pietermaritzburg.

sion, the idea of holding separate worship services in which communion was served was considered beyond what the biblical texts taught. Richardson recalls that, in 1829,

[...] the suggestion that racially separate communion services be held was firmly rejected ‘according to the teaching of Scripture and the spirit of Christianity.’ In 1834 the principle of the essential unity of all members especially in their simultaneous presence at the communion table was endorsed as ‘an unalterable axiom.’ The year 1857 was a fateful turning point. The NGK synod recognized the Scriptural desirability of racially integrated worship, but reluctantly allowed racially separated places of worship ‘because of the weakness of some.’ In 1881 the first of three separate ‘daughter-church’ structures was established — the Sendingkerk (Mission church) for ‘Coloured’ (mixed-race) members of the NGK. By the time the National Party government with its apartheid policy came into power in 1948, racial separateness within the NGK had become the axiom.⁶

De Gruchy recognised the same potential for further division in the Christian church, a division that seems to have been exacerbated by a growing civil religion that supplanted the theological wisdom that was still available to the DRC leadership in the late nineteenth century. The consequences would be significant and long lasting.

De Gruchy raised the question as to the real value of allowing worship practices that clearly contradicted the biblical text. He remarked that separate worship within the DRC,

[...] reluctantly accepted by some, had enormous ramifications for the church. While it facilitated the growth of indigenous congregations, it divided the church along racial lines in a way that was recognized even then as theologically unsound. It is debatable that what was gained by this development was of greater value for the church than what was lost.⁷

The Synod of 1881 and the notion of separate, but parallel, churches

Richardson noted that, during the Synod of 1881, the DRC established the first of its parallel churches. It was agreed during the Synod meeting that parallel churches

6. Neville Richardson, “Apartheid, Heresy and the Church in South Africa,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14, no. 1 (1986): 5. <https://login.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0000960723&site=ehost-live>.

7. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, loc. 352–54.

would better allow for a proper and more effective evangelisation if members of the same racial community proselytised their own. The churches were established to care for the coloured, blacks (Africans), and Asian members who, it was claimed, would be more successful on their own, separate from the culturally foreign whites. The DRC argued that by allowing separate worship, the Gospel could be preached more authentically as the whites and blacks shared very little in terms of culture and history. Ironically the first ‘daughter church’ of the DRC was not for blacks but for coloureds (individuals of mixed race) in the Western Cape. De Gruchy suggested that the decision taken at the Synod was questionable “for the separation did not begin initially among black African converts, with their very different Nguni or Sotho cultures and languages, but in the western Cape, where settler and Coloured communities shared much in common.”⁸

While at the University of Birmingham and developing its Centre for New Religious Movements, Harold Turner argued in an article that the DRC’s support of apartheid was a more recent phenomenon and thus had shallow roots in South Africa. He suggested that the decision taken at the DRC’s General Synod in 1857 was not for the sake of white integrity rather it served to promote a more effective evangelism. He argued that

[t]he origins of DRC support for apartheid are sometimes traced back to 1857 when the church decided on separate worship for whites and blacks. But this decision had nothing to do with Calvinism and little to do with racism. It was a pragmatic decision made in the interests of more effective evangelism.⁹

Turner seems to have made a valid point, however I must bring to the foreground of my discussion the negative effects of the white, Afrikaner’s growing isolation and poverty in the face of British imperialist interests. The increasing economic disparity

8. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 8.

9. Harold W. Turner, “Afrikaner Church Needs ‘Critical Solidarity’,” *Christian Century* 104, no. 22 (Jl 1987): 645.

among the white population and the sense that the very survival of the Afrikaner culture was at stake may have provided the main impetus for the rise of Afrikanerdom. The decision to permit separate worship for whites and black was in keeping with the DRC's vision for the evangelisation of the blacks but white self-preservation was almost certainly an important consideration in the decision. The reasoning behind the decision would be revealed more fully in the apartheid policies and laws that followed the 1948 election however, the 1857 Synod did decide to accommodate the 'weakness of some' (whites) in the mixed congregations of the DRC, thus providing for parallel worship but separate buildings.

There appears to have been limited theological justification for this change in policy as it was acknowledged by the church that separate worship was contrary to the Gospel. Another argument suggested that separate worship was the precursor to separate development or apartheid, and was a political strategy that helped promote a racist agenda. Professor Nukhet Sandal, the Director of the War & Peace Studies Program at the University of Ohio, remarked on the effectiveness of using biblical references and theological justification as a means of marketing the segregationist message. She argued that the apartheid system of racial segregation was inspired by the policies of the DRC. She also asserted that the DRC's influence was felt early-on in the Afrikaner's rise to social and political dominance in South Africa. She wrote that, in 1857,

[...] it was a synod of [the] DRC that had introduced separate services along racial lines and this policy had been represented as 'the will of God' by using various textual references from the Bible pointing to the differences among people. Almost all these racist policies were legitimated by references to the sacred texts and stories, thereby making their 'marketing' to the public much easier than secular ideologies. The tower of Babel story (Genesis 11:1–9) became a 'cardinal tenet of Apartheid theology' – it was normal for people to be treated differently because they *were* different and the difference in treatment was the

divine will. Apartheid quickly became the prevalent mode of life in South Africa, unquestioned by the majority of domestic institutions.¹⁰

Sandal was correct in noting that the Synod of 1857 introduced and ratified policy regarding separate or parallel worship, but most scholars consulted on this matter suggested that the DRC was unable to reconcile the biblical texts with their decision to allow separate worship. Sandal seems to have conflated history, having suggested that biblical and theological justification for segregation was provided as early as the Synod of 1857. I have already remarked that theological justification came much later and was provided as a response by the DRC in 1974 to the growing pressure by, among others, the South African Council of Churches (SACC). The SACC levelled harsh criticism at the DRC for its lack of biblical warrant and justification for its ecclesiastical stance regarding apartheid. It was then that the DRC responded with a statement which included the Tower of Babel¹¹ narrative as an explanation for the ‘disunity’ of God’s people. This appeared officially in 1974, not in 1857. Sandal also suggested that the DRC “had a prior record of vigorously pursuing segregationist policies.”¹²

It has been noted that the Synod of 1857 was reluctant to allow separate worship and capitulated because of the ‘weakness of some.’ It was only in 1881 that the annual Synod meeting of the DRC granted its permission to form the first ‘coloured’ congregation. However, they did so without providing theological justification, aware that this too worked against the unity of the church. This was not a church vigorously pursuing

10. Nukhet Ahu Sandal, “Religious Actors as Epistemic Communities in Conflict Transformation: The Cases of South Africa and Northern Ireland,” *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 03 (July 2011): 938. doi:doi:10.1017/S0260210510001592.

11. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkeverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 15ff.

12. Sandal, “Religious Actors as Epistemic Communities in Conflict Transformation: The Cases of South Africa and Northern Ireland,” 938.

segregation but a church reluctantly giving-in to the theologically weaker members of its constituency. Once again, Sandal seems to have read back into history the events of the late twentieth century. From the research conducted on this topic, it appears that the longer the post-1948 apartheid policies had been in place, the more the DRC felt theological justification was necessary to bolster support. Until 1974, the civil religion that steadily grew in complexity and potency seemed able to maintain the phantasm of religious respectability within South African society, at least for those who were enjoying the *status quo*. It was only during the early 1970s that the DRC felt compelled to account for its stance.

The ideological captivity of the church

While the 1857 DRC Synodical decision was, in itself, a turning point, the 1881 Synodical decision seems to have created a point in history to which it would have been difficult to return. Once apartheid had been accepted as normative in the church, there would be no way to recover unless the church could corporately confess its error, recant and then remedy the mistake; in other words, accept a *status confessionis*.¹³ It appears that the church had become ideologically captive to the idea of apartheid. De Gruchy wrote in response to the publication of the Hartford Appeal¹⁴ that

13. Robert McAfee Brown, in 1984, described the *status confessionis* in the context of the advent of the Barmen Declaration. He wrote, ‘They call the kind of time that brought forth the Barmen Declaration a status confessionis, a ‘confessional situation,’ in which the church, in order to be true to itself and its message, must distinguish as clearly as possible between truth and error. There are many times, particularly if public policy is concerned, when Christians may disagree. But there are some issues so fateful that no dissimulation or compromise is possible. The signatories of the Barmen Declaration clearly felt that they were living in a time when no one and no church could any longer say, ‘We affirm both Christ and Hitler.’ They had to proclaim, in effect, ‘The discussion about supporting Hitler is now closed. We have rendered our verdict. There is no longer a basis for negotiation.’ Either/or, not both/and.’ Robert McAfee Brown, “1984: Orwell and Barmen,” *The Christian Century* 101, no. August 22 (1984): 770.

14. Peter L.[et al.] Berger, “The Hartford Appeal for Theological Affirmation,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 13 (D 1975): 24–27.

[b]ecause Christian faith exists in and for the world, the Appeal accepts the necessity for Christianity to be integrally related to the cultures within which it exists, but it protests against the captivity of faith to the world-view of any and every culture, contemporary or ancient. Christianity should exist in a state of tension with the world confronting, and being confronted by its ideologies.¹⁵

For de Gruchy and the authors of the Hartford Appeal, the need for a renewing movement in the church, a contemporary Reformation, was a matter of faith and, perhaps a matter of necessity, at least in the Christian church. It did not seem as if this was a crisis of renewal, as the church had no need to renew for its own sake. De Gruchy argued that the Christian churches' failure to deny apartheid a foothold in the church and, by extension, the nation, created a crisis and that this "[...] crisis facing much of the contemporary Church is a crisis of faith, and therefore renewal requires at least what few seem to have, theological conviction".¹⁶

De Gruchy's having advocated a contemporary renewal in the Christian church in South Africa was not a call to restoration but a recognition of the need for the church to reform its ways and restate the Gospel message of justice and equality, for its time and for its place in the world.

The DRC as the 'mother of apartheid'

The prominent anti-apartheid activist, theologian, ex-member of the Broederbond¹⁷ and former *dominee* of the DRC, Nico Smith, argued that the DRC's

15. John W. de Gruchy, "Transcendence and the Ideological Captivity of the Church: Some South African Reflections on the Hartford Appeal for Theological Affirmation," 32.

16. *Ibid.*, 29.

17. The Broederbond was a group of Afrikaner intellectuals, bound together in a secret society, who "[...] believed that the Afrikaner nation was specifically put in this land by God to fulfil a particular calling as a nation, and that the maintenance of Afrikaner identity was essential to this task, and therefore part of the will of God. Profoundly influenced by German idealism and what Moodie calls 'neoFichteanism', this new generation of thinkers and political visionaries was able to stir the hopes and direct the steps of their people - first, in overthrowing the British yoke, and second, in developing an ideology that enabled them to meet the growing threat of the black races." John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, loc. 648–52.

influence was not only felt early-on but was the catalyst for the development of apartheid policies. Smith was not suggesting that the DRC's influence rose out of a well-considered, theological response to racial tensions in the mid-1800s. He argued that the close relationship between the Afrikaans-speaking people and the DRC made it difficult to distinguish between the language of the people and the language of the church. He also recalled the 1857 decision by the DRC to be a watershed moment and saw in the event the first indication of such a fusion between the church and the people. He argued that it was the people's voice

[...] that influenced the church to take a decision that eventually had disastrous consequences for the church and the people of South Africa. The DRC can therefore to some extent be said to be the main instigator of the concept of separation between peoples of colour in South Africa and may rightly be called 'the mother of apartheid', by deciding to follow the will of its white members who were demanding that people of colour not be accommodated in the church. Instead of guiding its members to change their attitudes, the Synod took the church into a deformation of the essential character of the church. How different the history of South Africa could have been if the DRC had in 1857 taken a decision not to allow any separation within the church.¹⁸

The 'language of the people' to which Smith referred seems to have found its way into the laws that governed the ownership of property and those pertaining to mobility rights that were passed between 1856 and 1937. The intent of the laws was to remove blacks from white areas and make it illegal for blacks to own land outside of the reserve areas.¹⁹ It may be helpful to remember that the hyper-nationalist National Party

18. Wolfram Weisse and Carel Anthonissen, eds., "A Church as the Captive of an Ideology. *The Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika* in the Clutches of a Secret Organisation - the Afrikaner Broederbond," in *Maintaining Apartheid or Promoting Change?: The Role of the Dutch Reformed Church in a Phase of Increasing Conflict in South Africa*, Nico Smith, Religion and Society in Transition, vol. 5 (Munster Waxmann c, 2004), 70.

19. Following is a list of laws passed between 1913 and 1937 which sought to restrict the movement of the black population in South Africa.

1913 19 June, Black Land Act No 27: Prohibited blacks from owning or renting land outside designated reserves (approximately 7 per cent of land in the country). Commenced: 19 June 1913.

gained a majority in Parliament only in 1948. Before that time, as I have already discussed in Chapter Two, the government changed hands several times between the pro-British parties and the more conservative nationalist parties led by men like Hertzog. Between 1856 and 1937, many English-speaking South Africans served in Parliament and were therefore complicit in the making of the oppressive laws that targeted the black population. It can be said, with a reasonable amount of certainty, that most of these men would have claimed Christianity as their religion.

If Smith was correct in his assessment of the church situation in 1857 then, by capitulating to the will of the people, the DRC may have silenced its prophetic voice by

1923, Native (Black) Urban Areas Act No 21: Made each local authority responsible for the blacks in its area. 'Native advisory boards' regulated influx control and removed 'surplus' people, i.e. those who were not employed in the area. The country was divided into prescribed (urban) and non-prescribed areas, movement between the two being strictly controlled. Muriel Horrell, *Legislation and Race Relations*. (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1978), 2–3.

1927 1 September, Black (Native) Administration Act No 38: Section 5(1)(b) provided that 'whenever he deemed it expedient in the public interest, the minister might, without prior notice to any persons concerned, order any tribe, portion thereof, or individual black person, to move from one place to another within the Republic of South Africa'. *Ibid.*, 204. Section 29(1) prohibited the fomenting of feelings of hostility between blacks and whites. Amended by s 4 of the Black Laws Further Amendment Act No 79 of 1957. This was extended to all racial groups in terms of s 1 of the 1974 Second General Law Amendment Act (see below). 'All the reported cases concern charges of inciting hostility among blacks towards the white section of the community' rather than cases of whites who cause feelings of racial hostility by racially abusive comments. John Dugard, *Human Rights and the South African Legal Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), 178. Used extensively to carry out forced removals. Later amended by the 1973 Bantu (Black) Laws Amendment Act.

1936 10 July, Representation of Blacks Act No 12: Removed black voters in the Cape from the common roll and placed them on a separate roll. *Ibid.*, 90. Blacks throughout the Union were then represented by four white senators.

1936 31 August, Development Trust and Land Act No 18: expanded the reserves to a total of 13, 6 per cent of the land in South Africa and authorised the Department of Bantu Administration and Development to eliminate 'black spots' (black-owned land surrounded by white-owned land) Horrell, *Legislation and Race Relations.*, 203. The South African Development Trust (SADT) was established and could, in terms of the Act, acquire land in each of the provinces for black settlement (RRS 1991/92: 381).

1937, Black (Native) Laws Amendment Act No 46: Prohibited acquisition of land in urban areas by blacks from non-blacks except with the Governor-General's consent. *Ibid.*, 3.

blending it with those voices active in the civil religion. However, this is not the same as instigating a course of action or authoring policy and, up until 1948, the authors of policy were from both the English-speaking and Afrikaner communities. Since the DRC was an exclusively Afrikaner church it cannot be held solely responsible as ‘the mother of apartheid’ because it was the English-speaking and Afrikaner law-makers who built the legal infrastructure for apartheid. The popular ethical axiom “[t]he only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.”²⁰ was most appropriate for the Christian churches’ stance in a post-1948 South Africa. It was also fitting for the law-makers who began building an apartheid state in the 1850s. How different would South Africa be today if the DRC had indeed refused to allow separate worship? Smith raised that very question about the Christian churches’ influence in the making of an apartheid state.

As I have noted in the previous chapter, some historians and theologians argued that the churches’ influence was minimal and that social, economic and political influences were responsible for apartheid. Smith implied that the apartheid social experiment between 1948 and 1994 would have been less successful, perhaps impossible, without the passive or, in the case of the DRC, the active support of the Christian church.

My hypothesis for this thesis suggests that the Christian churches played a significant role in the evolution and establishment of apartheid. It also suggests that de Gruchy’s unique Reformed critique of apartheid theology was a major catalyst in the church struggle against apartheid, and aided in the dismantling of its theological support. I also argue that the Afrikaner civil religion, built on the mythos of the Afrikaner’s special relationship with God, held the idea of apartheid just beyond the reach of popular reproach.

20. The Irish philosopher Edmund Burke is alleged to have penned the phrase

The consequences of the 1857 decision

For the next one hundred and thirty-seven years South Africa would watch as the results of the DRC's 1857 decision manifested in an Afrikaner civil religion as well as the culture of the church. The principle of Christian unity it so boldly affirmed in the past was eventually replaced by something less theologically restrictive and more culturally and socially expedient. The quote from Richardson's article is worth repeating:

In 1829 the suggestion that racially separate communion services be held was firmly rejected 'according to the teaching of Scripture and the spirit of Christianity.' In 1834 the principle of the essential unity of all members especially in their simultaneous presence at the communion table was endorsed as 'an unalterable axiom.'²¹

It was as if the DRC had entered a time of theological unrest by having allowed the principles of the Gospel to be mitigated by apartheid ideology. The DRC and the English-speaking churches would eventually be called-upon to provide justification for their passive stance toward apartheid but until 1935, the churches had been quietly complicit in the rise of Afrikanerdom and its racist policies. However, the DRC would shift from a passive theological stance to one that openly supported apartheid and the Nationalist regime. Smith recalls that from 1857 to 1935,

[...] separation in the DRC was understood to be nothing more than 'a pragmatic solution to troublesome cultural, language and behavioral differences'. But the decision of 1857, whatever good intentions the synod might have had, had put the DRC on a path that would lead directly towards an ideological theological understanding of apartheid. This came about in 1935 when the DRC accepted a new mission policy in which the idea of multiple nations instead of one united South African nation was introduced, it was said, from a biblical point of view. Racially defined nationalism was thus formulated in ecclesiastical terms.²²

21. Richardson, "Apartheid, Heresy and the Church in South Africa," 5.

22. Weisse and Anthonissen, "A Church as the Captive of an Ideology. *The Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika* in the Clutches of a Secret Organisation - the Afrikaner Broederbond," 71.

This ‘ideological theological understanding of apartheid’ would prove to be a vital component in an Afrikaner civil religion.

At its Synod meeting of 1857, the DRC agreed to allow congregations to conduct racially separate worship services within the same congregation. Out of this meeting came the impetus to develop the Missionary movement which was to evangelise and establish black, coloured and Asian congregations in a daughter-mother relationship with the DRC maintaining its status as the ‘mother church’. In 1881 the first Dutch Reformed Mission church was formed for ‘coloureds.’ De Gruchy recalls the two-fold self-understanding that was part of the DRC’s ethos during this time and suggested that,

[d]espite the fact that this development went against earlier synodical decisions that segregation in the church was contrary to the Word of God, it was rationalized on grounds of missiology and practical necessity. Missiologically it was argued that people were best evangelized and best worship God in their own language and cultural setting, a position reinforced by German Lutheran missiology and somewhat akin to the church-growth philosophy of our own time. Practically, it was done in response to the interests of the white community and was nothing less than a capitulation to colonial interests and pressure. Thus the foundation was laid for apartheid in the church and its subsequent theological justification. It was precisely this legitimation that was later rejected by the Dutch Reform Mission church and others as a heresy.²³

However, the 1857 decision to allow separate worship, along with the 1881 decision to allow for separate congregations, set the tone for the 1935 mission policy that established the ‘mother’ to ‘daughter’ relationship between the DRC and its black mission churches.

1935: The DRC’s mission policy

The new mission policy adopted in 1935 refined the DRC’s racial policies but prior to this decision were years of compromise and racially-specific adjustments that had been made to meet the needs of some of the members of the congregations. Until

23. De Gruchy was referring to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches meeting in Ottawa in 1982 that declared apartheid to be a heresy. Cf. John W. de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate*, 24.

1935, the DRC had managed to maintain, relatively unchallenged, its standing within the Reformed community of churches. However, a slow erosion of Reformed theological principles in favour of a more convenient and, some would argue, necessary alignment with social and political movements at the time, allowed for a widening gap between the DRC and the other Reformed churches in South Africa. Giliomee shed some light on the existing social structures that nurtured the decision to conceive and adopt the new mission policy at the same time as the social and economic gap between blacks and whites was widening. He argued that it was a trend that began in the 1830s to segregate coloured members of the DRC that

[...] found expression in the establishment of separate coloured congregations and culminated in the founding of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1881. Schools were segregated in 1893. No statutory residential segregation existed, but the great majority of coloured people lived together in the poorest sections of the towns. The main Afrikaner political movement did not formally exclude coloured members but did reject applications at branch level.²⁴

Segregation had become a *de facto* social policy in South Africa. The Christian church, rather than persist in its call to work for the unity of all God's people and to care for the poor and marginalised in society, had effectively abdicated its role as social conscience. It was as if the church had made a collective decision to work in sympathy with the larger Afrikaner movement toward self-imposed isolation. De Gruchy argued that the DRC had become captive to a political ideology. Its theology would be woven together with the narrative threads of epic battles, heroic treks and the long-suffering of the Afrikaner '*volk*' into the tapestry of the Afrikaner Nation. This Afrikaner nation would be the dominant nation in the new collective of nations called South Africa. The Afrikaner church and the state had become mutually dependent and mutually supportive. The members of the DRC were now officially segregated in much the same way the nation

24. Vail, "The Beginnings of Afrikaner Ethnic Consciousness, 1850–1915," 35.

was. Multiple ‘nations’ within the nation was an accepted reality. Soon the members of the National Party, the vast majority of whom also enjoyed membership in the DRC, would take the political reins of the nation in 1948.

As South Africa devolved into a state of nations within a nation, so too did the church devolve into a church of many churches. De Gruchy acknowledged this very thing when he asked,

[w]ould the church not have been more faithful and thus eventually more relevant if it had attempted to provide a bridge between people rather than serve as an instrument whereby social and racial differences were legitimized? However understandable from a cultural and evangelistic perspective, it was an example of social pressure and pragmatism, custom and culture, rather than theology and scripture, determining the life of the church.²⁵

A Constantinian shift

The DRC had capitulated and its leadership provided justification for aligning the church with the National Party’s agenda, albeit tacitly. Lee Camp, Professor of Theology at Libscomb University, wrote in an article entitled *The Cross in Christendom: Constantinianism and the Doctrine of the Atonement*, that there has been a fundamental reversal in the church’s ecclesiology and eschatology. He cites John Howard Yoder’s treatment of the argument that there has been a Constantinian shift²⁶ in contemporary society. Yoder suggested that the civil government had become the institution that currently bore historical movement. He was writing in an American context, but the points he made seem to be readily applicable to post-1935 South Africa in which the National Party bore the history of the *volk* into the future. Reflecting Yoder’s position, Camp suggested that before Constantine,

25. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 9.

26. This refers to the alleged ‘Donation of Constantine,’ the document purporting to record the Roman emperor Constantine the Great’s bestowal of vast territory and spiritual and temporal power on Pope Sylvester I (reigned 314–335) and his successors. It denotes the hand and glove phenomenon of the relationship of church and state. It is considered the antithesis of the idea of the separation of church and state.

[...] one knew as a fact of everyday experience that there was a believing Christian community, but one had to ‘take it on faith’ that God was governing history. After Constantine, one had to believe without seeing that there was a community of believers, within the larger nominally Christian mass, but one knew for a fact that God was in control of history. In fact, the civil government becomes ‘the main bearer of historical movement.’ Whereas once it was the community of faith with leadership dispersed within the community, it is now the civil ruler who is the key bearer of history. In the wake of these reversals, the ethical shifts proved profound. The empire now called on the church to guide and approve the deeds of the emperor, deeds of which the early church would have disapproved.²⁷

Eschatology became an outworking of the events of history; not God’s history, but the civil government’s history which was blessed by the church *after the fact*. Camp seems to have captured in Yoder a description that could have been made about an Afrikaner civil religion that coalesced during the 1930s and 1940s. Yoder argued that the Christian church, working in its post-Constantinian role, had experienced a role reversal where it shifted its focus from civil critic to civil servant. In a South African context, much more would be possible for the Afrikaner nation because God’s presence and blessing was now implicit in the civil authorities’ bearing of history. In terms of Afrikaner nationalism, if God had called the *volk* as a chosen people, like Israel before them, then God’s history must unfold in and through the life of the Afrikaner nation thereby replacing the church as the place where God’s plan for humanity is best understood. The Constantinian shift appeared to be complete.

Afrikaner nationalism in 1974

It may be helpful to provide a brief account of an example of the state of Afrikaner nationalism at the time the *DRC Report* was published. At its annual meeting in

27. Lee C. Camp, “The Cross in Christendom: Constantinianism and the Doctrine of the Atonement, or, Understanding Jesus’ Cross When ‘Everybody’s Doing It’,” *Restoration Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (1998): 93.

Hammanskraal²⁸ in 1974 the SACC adopted a controversial resolution on conscientious objection, especially as it concerned the South African Border War with Angola. The authors of the resolution did not mince their words. In the preamble it stated that South Africa was then-presently (1974) a “[...] fundamentally unjust and discriminatory society and that this injustice and discrimination constitutes the primary, institutionalized violence which has provoked the counter violence of the terrorists or freedom fighters.”²⁹

To the SACC, conscientious objection was an appropriate response because the South African military had become an instrument of an oppressive and violent apartheid government. De Gruchy wrote: “Since South Africa’s military forces help to defend the status quo, the SACC therefore resolved to call upon the churches to reconsider their position vis-à-vis the taking up of arms to defend the country, the seconding of chaplains to the military, and a variety of related issues.”³⁰ Part of the debate centred on the issue of chaplains within the armed forces engaged in what was largely considered an illegal war. Could chaplains, ordained and sustained by denominations which stand opposed to the military incursion into Angola, continue to administer pastoral care to South African soldiers alone while ignoring prisoners of war? Could soldiers, conscientiously opposed to apartheid, carry-out the policies of an apartheid government by use of force against an unarmed Black South African population? One of the questions debated was whether ministering to opposing soldiers was treasonous. But this was not the point de Gruchy was trying to make. He was arguing that there was a link between govern-

28. Cf. for a fuller discussion on the issue and importance of conscientious objection in South Africa see John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 134–43.

29. John W. de Gruchy, “The Relationship Between the State and Some Churches in South Africa, 1968–1975,” *Journal of Church and State* 19, no. 3 (Fall 1977): 450.

30. *Ibid.*

ment and state that rises-out of the unique make-up of apartheid society and government.

Because government policy is so fundamental to the existence of the state as presently defined in its Constitution, some would argue that to defend South Africa is virtually the same as defending apartheid.”³¹

The policies of the Nationalist government had become the policies of the Republic of South Africa so it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between government and state. This is why de Gruchy was able to say there was a sense in which one equated government with the state.

The Christian church needed to contend with the objection that to defend South Africa, either militarily or politically, was in essence a defence of racist and discriminatory policies and practices; in other words, apartheid. The following schematic might serve to outline de Gruchy’s understanding of the links between government and state, church and state, and church and government in South Africa between 1968 and 1975.

1. Government policy is essential and fundamental to the state’s existence. The Nationalist party had been in power since 1948 and without a potent opposition party to debate and temper the racist policies of the Nationalist party the government and state were seen as one and the same.
2. To defend the state was to defend apartheid. Because the policies of the long-ruling Nationalist party were the only political reality for nearly thirty years de Gruchy perhaps expressed what many South Africans felt at the time.
3. Because the vast majority of Nationalist party members were also Afrikaners, opposing the Nationalist party was seen as anti-Afrikaner.
4. Since the Nationalist party was overwhelmingly Afrikaner and since the overwhelming majority of Afrikaners belonged to the DRC, when opposition to government policies came from the English-speaking churches, this was seen as an attack on the DRC. This social syllogism was important to

31. Ibid., 442.

the understanding of South African politics. If the majority of Nationalist party members were Afrikaner and if the majority of Afrikaners were members of the DRC then the majority of Nationalist party members were also members of the DRC. By syllogistic correlation, if you are anti-DRC you are anti-Afrikaner and if you are anti-Afrikaner you are unpatriotically anti-South African. Perhaps this makes it is easier to see how conscientious objection, especially when proposed and advocated by the largely English-speaking SACC, could have been seen as an attack on the DRC.

The Synod of 1974 and separate development (apartheid)

In 1974 the General Synod of the DRC produced an ecclesiastical report entitled *Human Relations and the South African Scene in Light of Scripture*³² (the *Report*) in which it described the church's role in the political life of the country. The *Report* included the claim that "the church has always been intimately involved in the constitutional development of our country," and that it was "since the 1930's [sic] the Church has continually expressed itself on the Christian implications of 'apartheid,' 'separate development,' 'autogenous development' or whatever form the political thinking of the people of the country has assumed from time to time."³³

National and international pressure to strike down apartheid was growing, and it appears that the DRC was feeling that pressure. Official segregation in the DRC had become a reality, but the question rising out of Synods and ecclesiastical forums was how to justify the segregation of DRC congregations that were otherwise compelled by the Gospel to work toward unity in worship and service of God. The 1974 *Report* was

32. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974.*

33. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974, 5.*

an attempt at answering the question by providing the theological justification for the DRC's support of separate development. Also, along with the articulation of the biblical warrant³⁴ for separate congregations and the identification of the Afrikaner *volk* with ancient Israel, the DRC was able to support the National Party and contribute toward a more fully developed and robust Afrikaner civil religion. This particular theological self-awareness would eventually be worked into the doctrinal corpus of the DRC and woven into the very fabric of an Afrikaner civil religion. Peaceful separation of blacks and whites was possible, as long as everyone subscribed to the tenets of a theology that claimed it was God's will that black and whites live separately. The authors of the *Report* identified the question in a different way asking

[...] whether the Scriptures also give us a normative indication of the way in which the human race differentiated into a variety of races, peoples and nations. It is therefore a question of whether the diversity of peoples accords with the will of God and whether it was God's intention, from the outset, to differentiate the human race in this way. If this question is answered in the affirmative, we already have an indication that we should judge and evaluate the existence of various races and peoples as a positive premise.³⁵

As mentioned above, this theological construct would later be challenged by the DRC's black daughter church which declared apartheid to be heresy.³⁶

Disunity and the nascent civil religion

Opposition to apartheid was always present and it had come to be expressed in different ways by the various Christian churches in South Africa. Often, at least within

34. See Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkererehoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 7–28.

35. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkererehoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 14.

36. Cf. John W. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, ed., *Apartheid is a Heresy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983).

the Reformed tradition, individual congregations within the denominations were free to express their concerns in whichever way they chose. There was no real unified stance among the churches but the SACC served as a focal point for ecclesiastical resistance and opposition to apartheid. De Gruchy noted that the churches of the SACC “provide a living example or model of a community in which black and contradict the policy, intention, and spirit of apartheid.”³⁷ Blacks and whites worked together in open defiance of the state’s discriminatory race laws but the disunity of the Christian church continued to hinder opposition. There was a general consensus among the member churches of the SACC and among the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). This was made clear in Ottawa in 1982 when the WARC declared apartheid to be an heresy.

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches - Ottawa, 1982

The SACC, the WARC, along with some of South Africa’s leading theologians,³⁸ would declare the doctrine of apartheid, and its theological *raison d’être*, heretical. In 1981, then-President of the SACC Bishop Peter Storey proclaimed that the “false god [of apartheid and minority rule] is failing.”³⁹ Less than one year later, at its 1982 meeting in Ottawa, the WARC suspended the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (DRC in the Republic of South Africa) and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk (the NHK is a s-only splinter of the DRC) from its communion with the following resolution:

4. Therefore, the general council, reluctantly and painfully, is compelled to suspend the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (in the Republic of South Africa) and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika from the privileges of membership in World Alliance of Reformed Church . . . until such time as the World Alliance of Reformed Church executive committee has determined that these two

37. John W. de Gruchy, “The Relationship Between the State and Some Churches in South Africa, 1968–1975,” 453.

38. See de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid is a Heresy*.

39. Spong and Mayson, *Come Celebrate!: Twenty-Five Years of the South African Council of Churches*, 84.

churches in their utterances and practice have given evidence of a change of heart. They will be warmly restored to the full privileges of membership when the following changes have taken place:

- a. Black Christians are no longer excluded from church services, especially from holy communion;
- b. Concrete support in word and deed is given to those who suffer under the system of apartheid ("separate development").
- c. Unequivocal synod resolutions are made which reject apartheid and commit the church to dismantling this system in both church and politics.

The general council pays respect to those within the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (in the Republic of South Africa) and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Africa who have raised their voices and are fighting against apartheid; the general council further urges member churches to pray that these efforts bearing witness to Christ, who frees and unites, may prevail within their churches.⁴⁰

Even with unequivocal statements from organisations like the WARC⁴¹ the role of the church in apartheid South Africa, with the exception of the DRC and NHK, remained somewhat ambiguous. The WARC's 1970 declaration regarding separate worship within churches went largely unheeded until the events at the 1982 meeting in Ottawa. Lennart Henriksson, Senior lecturer at the Teologiska högskolan in Stockholm commented that

[...] the resolution regarding *Racism in South Africa* that was taken at the general council, [the] World Alliance of Reformed Church confessed to not having done any follow-up on the strong wording at the general council which already in 1970 had declared that a 'church that by doctrine and/or practice affirms segregation of peoples (e.g. racial segregation) as a law for its life cannot be regarded as an authentic member of the Body of Christ.'⁴²

40. World Alliance of Reformed Churches, "Resolution on Racism" (Ottawa, Canada: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1982), 1–3.

41. On February 1, 2006 the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council joined to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The Council consists of approximately 230 denominations in 108 countries with 80 million members.

42. Lennart Henriksson, "Many Good Words - Little Action? The World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the 'South Africa Question', 1960–1990," in *Reformed Churches in South Africa and the Struggle for Justice: Remembering 1960–1990*, in *Reformed Churches in South Africa and the Struggle for Justice: Remembering 1960–1990*, eds. Mary Anne Platjies-Van Huffel, Robert Vosloo (African Sun MeDia, 2013), 359.

When the stipulations contained in the WARC's minutes of the 1982 General Assembly are read in light of the English-speaking Reformed churches' actual practices, they too are indicted along with the DRC, for none of the churches possessed a laudable record regarding their stand against apartheid. The English-speaking Reformed churches of South Africa may have adopted an official anti-apartheid stance, but too often it was only a stance. By the time of the 1982 meeting of the WARC, it appears that the political, social, and religious institutions in South Africa had created the ideal conditions for the doctrine of separate development within an Afrikaner civil religion to take hold. There was no longer any meaningful separation of powers in South Africa. The DRC actively supported the state's apartheid policies and the English-speaking churches were too passive in their resistance to effect change. The Pentecostal, along with the Baptist and other conservative churches, withdrew from the debate. The Roman Catholic Church worked in the same direction as the SACC but independently from it and this lack of ecumenical cooperation had a negative impact on the churches' opposition to apartheid. The disunity of the church prevented a real alternative to the Afrikaner civil religion from developing.

The WARC had taken a stand in opposition to the DRC's position regarding apartheid. The English-speaking churches had, for the most part, spoken against racial separation but seemed to be slow to make any unequivocal or unified statements about where the churches ultimately stood. Theologians and clerics sought clarity while the Christian churches struggled for identity in the face of division and strife. The DRC, on the other hand, was more certain about its support of the minority leadership of the National Party and faced no such crisis of identity.

A divided church

Division was not new to the Christian church. The Great Schism of 1054 divided the church into the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox churches. The Reforma-

tion of the sixteenth century further segmented the church. South Africa inherited a divided European church, and any move toward unity seemed to be further thwarted by apartheid. De Gruchy, in commenting on the history of division in the Christian church, lamented the fact that,

[w]hile it is painfully true that the divisions which separated Christians from one another in Europe were transplanted into South Africa, it is equally true, and more painful, that these confessional divisions have been exacerbated by separation along racial, cultural and ethnic lines. These issues, normally regarded as non-theological, must now be seen as equally confessional, because they have to do with the truth of the Gospel as much as those that, for example, traditionally separate Catholics from Calvinists. [...] If the churches seriously begin to confess Jesus Christ as Lord in South Africa in terms that relate to the critical issues of our society, that is, the real issues which divide them, they will begin to discover their unity in a new way. [...] There is a confessing movement in South Africa, and one which includes Christians from virtually all denominations who regard apartheid as a heresy and who strive for true justice and peace.”⁴³

The ‘confessing movement’ to which de Gruchy referred was the *status confessionis* which was forming around the issue of church-sponsored apartheid. What were once non-theological issues were now being thrust upon the churches and were considered among those theological matters which concerned the Gospel message of equality and unity.

De Gruchy’s concern was that the lack of a properly articulated theology, one that was able to challenge the theology of apartheid had created a situation in which the Christian church needed to confess its having rejected God’s rule of justice. De Gruchy’s assumption was that the Christian church, by seeking guidance from within a worshipping and contextually-relevant community, informed by the preaching of the biblical texts and celebrating the sacraments, would understand more fully God’s call to bear witness to God’s Reign of justice and grace. But the church had become divided

43. John W. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, ed., “Towards a Confessing Church: The Implications of a Heresy,” in *Apartheid is a Heresy*, John W. de Gruchy (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983), 80.

over the issue of apartheid. Anything that divided the Christian church's loyalty to the lordship of Jesus Christ, suggested de Gruchy, constituted a *status confessionis*. Dr. Lukas Vischer, working with the WARC, offered the following as a working definition for the 1982 General Council held in Ottawa: "to say that something constitutes a *status confessionis* means that our confession of Jesus Christ as Lord would be jeopardized if we admitted differing views on this issue."⁴⁴ De Gruchy was also concerned that the church, in its willingness to divide along political lines, had usurped the will of God for the church. Apartheid society meant an apartheid church. According to de Gruchy, nothing could be farther from the idea of the Reign of God.

Apartheid had become part of the social landscape and the systematic separation of black, coloureds, asians, and whites was now official policy in the DRC. It appeared that the Nationalist government would need to maintain a hold on the political imagination of the country in the face of national and international criticism. Perhaps one of the ways to do this was nurture the nascent civil religion that would make it easier to accept minority rule as God's plan for South Africa. A civil religion could also maintain the appearance of justice, allowing the English-speaking community to stave-off a critical examination of rather questionable social and economic structures that always favoured whites over black.

Afrikaner civil religion

In his seminal article entitled *Civil Religion in America*,⁴⁵ the American sociologist Robert Bellah accounted for the manifestation of a civil religion as a phenomenon within a given society which could, through the considered use of the symbols and ritu-

44. World Alliance of Reformed Churches, "Proceedings of the 1982 General Council" (Ottawa, Canada: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1982), Minutes of the Wednesday, August 25 1982 sederunt.

45. Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 96, no. No. 1 (Winter 1967): 1–21.

als of the dominant religion, contribute to a collective understanding and agreement on what constituted appropriate civil behaviour. This is similar to the ‘dogmas’⁴⁶ of which Rousseau wrote that served as moderating social mores guiding the behaviour of one toward the other, the ultimate goal being a peaceful and orderly community of like-minded individuals who tolerate rather than proselytise. Bellah attempted to demonstrate how a ‘civil religion’ was a religion or religious dimension of society that “has its own seriousness and integrity and requires the same care in understanding that any other religion does.”⁴⁷

Civil religion, for Bellah, was a collection of beliefs, symbols and rituals that institutionally organise a particular nation. An example of how civil religion in America functioned was John F. Kennedy’s 1960 speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association in which he said,

I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute; where no Catholic prelate would tell the President -- should he be Catholic -- how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote; where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference, and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him, or the people who might elect him. I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish; where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source; where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials, and where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all.⁴⁸

Bellah used the example of America in which the civil religion was not Christian but it was, in every sense of the word, a religion. It was never meant to supplant Chris-

46. Cf. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social*, bibliographie et chronologie par Bruno Bernardi (Paris: Flammarion, 2001).

47. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” 1.

48. John F. Kennedy, “Address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association” (Rice Hotel, Houston, 1960).

tianity as the dominant religion of the nation and it was never intended to be a state religion. Bellah suggested that there was an implicit

[...] but quite clear division of function between the civil religion and Christianity. Under the doctrine of religious liberty, an exceptionally wide sphere of personal piety and voluntary social action was left to the churches. But the churches were neither to control the state nor to be controlled by it. The national magistrate, whatever his private religious views, operates under the rubrics of the civil religion as long as he is in his official capacity, as we have already seen in the case of Kennedy. This accommodation was undoubtedly the product of a particular historical moment and of a cultural background dominated by Protestantism of several varieties and by the Enlightenment, but it has survived despite subsequent changes in the cultural and religious climate.⁴⁹

In contrast, François Malan, President of South Africa in 1948, was adamant about the Christian church's role in the government of the people of South Africa and was quoted as saying,

Our history is the greatest masterpiece of the centuries. We hold this nationhood as our due for it was given to us by the Architect of the universe. [His] aim was the formation of a new nation among the nations of the world.... The last hundred years have witnessed a miracle behind which must lie a divine plan. Indeed, the history of the Afrikaner reveals a will and a determination which makes one feel that Afrikanerdom is not the work of men but the creation of God.⁵⁰

Malan was unequivocal in his belief that God's providence was responsible for the National Party's electoral victory in 1948. It seems that for Malan, this was the culmination of the long march of the Afrikaner *volk*, arising from the ignominious history of defeat at the hands of the British and moving inexorably toward absolute political power in 1948. For Malan and others in the DRC-dominated National Party, the church played an integral role in the forming of the new government and its program to establish apartheid as the guiding principle for all its subsequent laws. Giliomee noted that it was also in the aftermath of the

49. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," 8–9.

50. Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*, 1.

[...] Rebellion [the Five Shilling⁵¹ or Maritz rebellion of 1914] that the most powerful of the churches, the DRC, really began to rally behind the ethnic movement and ideology. At a special conference of DRC clergy in 1915 the church did not censure the rebels (as the government would have wanted). Instead it accepted Malan's view that the church had a distinct calling with respect to the 'Dutch-speaking' population group and consequently had the duty to be 'national' and maintain 'national interests'.⁵²

The National Party was able to harness the one hundred and fifty-three years⁵³ of Afrikaner anger and frustration and shape it into a nationalist sacred history, propped-up by religious symbols gleaned from biblical stories of the liberation of God's chosen people.

The Afrikaner nation and ancient Israel

The things we say during serious moments, such as the inauguration of the President of the United States or the installation of the President South Africa, are indicative of the values we share as a society. While these values may not be explicit, they do contribute to a sense of privilege in a universe that, it is implied, is governed by something other than mere humanity. In the manifestation of a civil religion, there is a sense that something wholly other, untainted by human folly, has ordained the present political and social structures of a society. Bellah concluded his article on American civil religion by saying that

[b]ehind the civil religion at every point lie Biblical archetypes: Exodus, Chosen People, Promised Land, New Jerusalem, Sacrificial Death and Rebirth. But it is also genuinely American and genuinely new. It has its own prophets and its own martyrs, its own sacred events and sacred places, its own solemn rituals and symbols. It is concerned that America be a society as perfectly in accord with the will of God as men can make it, and a light to all the nations.⁵⁴

51. See Swart, "The 'Five Shilling Rebellion': Rural White Male Anxiety and the 1914 Boer Rebellion."

52. Vail, "The Beginnings of Afrikaner Ethnic Consciousness, 1850–1915," 49.

53. The Dutch lost the colony to the British in 1795 in the battle of Muizenberg.

54. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," 18.

The architects of apartheid would have had no difficulty agreeing with Bellah's conclusions. But civil religion is just that - civil. It is a religion that rises out of the community, the *civitas*. If and when it invokes the name of God it does so to employ God's otherness as a type of *deus ex machina* which could provide an explanation and justification for the entrenched values of a dominant society. The civil religions of America and South Africa shared some similarities. Both employed biblical archetypes and both appealed to a social conscience; both operated with the understanding that God had been active in the formation of a nation and both understood themselves to be a type of Israel, chosen by God for a special purpose. Once again Bellah made the connection between Israel as archetype of God's salvific intent and the American nation that also enjoyed a special status with God. He noted that

[h]ere the analogy has much less to do with natural law than with ancient Israel; the equation of America with Israel in the idea of the 'American Israel' is not infrequent. What was implicit in the words of Washington already quoted becomes explicit in Jefferson's second inaugural when he said: 'I shall need, too, the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our fathers, as Israel of old, from their native land and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessaries and comforts of life.' Europe is Egypt; America, the promised land. God has led his people to establish a new sort of social order that shall be a light unto all the nations.⁵⁵

The proponents of Afrikaner civil religion also likened the suffering and subsequent liberation of the Afrikaner people to the wilderness journey of the ancient Israelites as described in the book of Exodus. This was especially apparent in the myth of the *Voortrekkers* who, the stories tell us, travelled from oppression to the Promised Land. The oppressor Britain was the Afrikaner's Egypt and the final destination, the Transvaal, was the Promised Land. Du Toit argued that the early Afrikaners had taken a crucial step toward the identification of their own history

55. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," 7.

[...] with that of Israel in the Old Testament. This was to view themselves, like Israel, as a Chosen People with a divine mission. Indeed, many writers held that this notion provided much of the motivation for, and the self-understanding of, such a crucial historical event as the Great Trek. As F. A. van Jaarsveld phrased it, ‘The British administration had stood in the shoes of Pharaoh and oppressed them in Egypt—a country that they had to forsake to seek freedom. And so the exodus to the Promised Land was undertaken. The Voortrekkers and their descendants in their new home (Israel) felt that they were waging a struggle for survival against ‘Pharaoh’ and ‘the black Canaanites.’⁵⁶

The Afrikaner nation was never conceived by its religious and political leaders as a light to all nations. If American civil religion suggested that America’s destiny was to be a nation bringing light to the world, South African civil religion was an expression of the uniqueness of the Afrikaner people, a call to the *volk* to form a distinct and separate nation unto themselves and themselves alone. I am arguing that the civil religion in South Africa was not a unifying force intended to gather Europeans and Indigenous people into one nation under God. It was not a subtle moral backdrop against which the individual citizens of a society were to measure their service to the community and their acquiescence to a larger, secular moral code. Civil religion was no longer the moral framework for a society within which all citizens were expected to persist and thrive. In the case of apartheid South Africa, it appears to have become an instrument of separation and segregation, a tool in the belt of the builders of apartheid. By most accounts that I have studied, Afrikaner civil religion was never intended to bring together a nation but to divide it into distinct groups based, not on religion, but on skin colour. Moodie made the argument that “[m]aintenance of this separation came to be a sacred duty. In the light of God’s intention to create another republic, everything which emphasized Afrikaner uniqueness—their language, their Calvinist faith, their customs and conven-

56. André Du Toit, “No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology,” 925.

tions, their very dress—took on sacred significance.”⁵⁷ While civil religion may have bolstered the American self-identification as a ‘light for all nations,’ there was no such self-awareness in the maturing Afrikaner nation; in fact, the opposite may be said.

An English-speaking civil religion?

De Gruchy reminds us that the advent of Afrikaner civil religion was almost predictable. He argued that

[...] British Imperialism, which must surely be held largely responsible for Afrikaner Nationalism and its ‘civil religion’, could never have been sustained in South Africa or elsewhere without the conviction that it was ordained and blessed by God. Thus, the basic, ingredient necessary for a South African English ‘civil religion’, a sense of sacred history and divine calling, were on hand if South African history had unfolded in such a way as to enable the English-speaking community to espouse and use it in an ideological way. But history did not allow it, allowing us to conclude [...] without much fear for contradiction, that there is no such thing as an English ‘civil religion’ in South Africa.⁵⁸

De Gruchy raised the question of the possibility of or even need for an English-speaking civil religion. He seems to have been alone in suggesting that an English-speaking civil religion was possible. De Gruchy was not suggesting that an English-speaking civil religion would be any more appropriate than the one made possible by the DRC and the National Party. However, he did identify the importance of the *lack* of an English-speaking civil religion in order to highlight the English-speaking churches’ meagre response to the ecclesiastical challenge of apartheid. De Gruchy pointed to the fact that the English settlers in America came from Puritan stock and settled in America two centuries earlier than the British immigrants to South Africa but that they came from different Englands. The American settlers were Calvinists with a strong sense of their mission to make real the Reign of God in the new world. De Gruchy wrote:

57. Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*, 15.

58. John W. de Gruchy, “English-Speaking South Africans and Civil Religion,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 19, no. Je (1977): 49.

They had a theocratic social vision and world-view, and while it is true that later American ‘civil religion’ is the product of a fusion between elements of Puritanism and the Enlightenment, the Anglo-Saxon Americans have never lost their Puritans sense of being able to shape history in partnership with divine Providence. In this respect, their closest counterparts in South Africa, as W. A. de Klerk has shown, are the Afrikaner [and not the British].⁵⁹

The English who settled in South Africa did not hold the same ideals of the American Puritans. It was the Afrikaner who possessed the sense of Providential purpose and who would make real the Reign of God in South Africa. The weakness of the English-speaking churches’ theological position toward apartheid had a two-fold, negative effect. One, it hindered a unified, resolute and critical attack on the civil religion and two, it prevented the English-speaking churches from establishing their own alternative to a civil religion, thus failing the English-speaking constituents and the blacks they, by default, were asked to represent. De Gruchy lamented:

But the weaknesses are disastrous. They allow us to be blown about by every ideological wind, and prevent us from real commitment to social values and concerns. It is at this point that we wish to suggest as strongly as possible that the English-speaking Churches have failed their constituency, whether or Black.⁶⁰

Bellah, in commenting on the indiscernible character of civil religion in America, suggested that “few have realized that there actually exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion in America.”⁶¹ This could not be said for the civil religion in South Africa. There was nothing subtle about the relationship between the Afrikaner Reformed churches and the government during early years of the apartheid regime. There was no real attempt to separate religion from politics, unless it served the Nationalist government’s purposes to do so. As I hope to show in subsequent chapters, tensions arose between the churches

59. Ibid., 46.

60. Ibid., 49.

61. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” 1.

and the state when the SACC and its member churches became more and more critical of government apartheid policies. Government leaders and functionaries took umbrage with the SACC's critical stance and called for the churches to concern themselves with pastoral matters and leave the politics for the politicians. It may prove useful to be reminded that the post-1948 government was comprised of over eighty per-cent Afrikaners of whom virtually all were members of the DRC. The apartheid government and the DRC worked hand-in-glove for many years as the government continued to look to the Afrikaner Reformed churches to provide theological justification for the absolute separation of the races in South Africa.

It appears that the promotion of apartheid by the Afrikaner Reformed churches and the passivity of the English-speaking Reformed churches contributed to the entrenchment a pro-apartheid civil religion. The challenge for the English-speaking churches, and those who opposed apartheid on theological grounds, was the need to articulate a proper, contextual theology that would challenge the civil religion of the apartheid regime. Referring to the theological vacuum created by the English-speaking churches, and writing under the rubric 'The Theological Failure of the English-speaking Churches,' de Gruchy argued that this

[...] laissez-faire attitude towards theology is totally impotent against Afrikaner 'civil religion'; it is incapable of responding relevantly to the challenge of Black Theology, which has arisen largely from within the English-speaking Churches, and it is inadequate to the social crises through which our nation is presently going.⁶²

What was necessary was a critique of the DRC's Reformed theology that had been gradually shaped by the social, political and economic needs of the Afrikaner people as they struggled to isolate themselves from the Indigenous blacks and to break the British chains that bound them.

62. John W. de Gruchy, "English-Speaking South Africans and Civil Religion," 49.

Chapter Four: The lacuna, the *Report* and the *apologia*.

It was the few prophetic voices within the church, frequently derided for being too 'political', who tried to raise the awareness of Christians to the reality of what was going on and to the ethical dilemma into which this thrust us. John de Gruchy's voice was among these.

Lyn Holness

The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) published their theological statement *Human Relations and the South African Scene in Light of Scripture* (the *Report*) in 1974 with the intent of first, providing a theological warrant for apartheid and second, inviting the other churches in South Africa to engage in dialogue. In the following chapter I will attempt to analyse the DRC's theological warrant by engaging the contextual Reformed theology of our interlocutor, John de Gruchy. This will include identifying the theological assumptions that were constituent elements of the Afrikaner civil religion in South Africa and which have been essential to the writing of the *Report*. It may also be helpful to identify some of the theological influences that helped shape the final text of the document which is arguably representative of the distinctive spirit of the Afrikaner churches during the 1970s and 1980s.

De Gruchy was one of a few theologians who accepted the DRC's invitation to dialogue. Theological dialogue was an intrinsic part of de Gruchy's method and this included especially those with whom he disagreed. Even after twenty-years of dialogue with theologians and clerics of the DRC in which he tried to anchor the debate in the principles of the Reformation, he never lost hope that church unity could be realised in his lifetime. The *Report* seems to have encapsulated the theological thinking of the DRC during one of the most turbulent times in the history of the church in South Africa. It is

considered, therefore, to be a source for apartheid theology¹ and is considered by some² to be representative of an ecclesiology that governed church-state relations in the DRC for nearly four decades.

John W. De Gruchy as interlocutor

De Gruchy, among others, was recognised for having provided an incisive and relevant critical evaluation of the DRC's ecclesiology and its relationship to the Nationalist government. The critique came from within the Reformed tradition itself and he spoke, sometimes on behalf of his tradition and sometimes on behalf of ecumenical organisations like the Christian Institute (CI) and the South African Council of Churches (SACC) - sometimes his voice was as 'one crying in the wilderness'. De Gruchy was seen as prophetic voice calling Christians to account for their passivity and their complicity in the face of apartheid atrocities. Lyn Holness, de Gruchy's friend and colleague, wrote in a biographical essay that

1. A useful definition of apartheid theology was provided by J.A. Loubser in his article entitled *Apartheid Theology: a "Contextual Theology" Gone Wrong?* where he suggested that apartheid and its concomitant theology may be defined as "a utopian, totalitarian system intending the unilateral separation of the black and white races in South Africa. Apartheid theology is therefore the theological system developed to support this system, with its roots going back to the early stages of South African colonialism." Johannes A. Loubser, "Apartheid Theology: A 'Contextual' Theology Gone Wrong?" *Journal of Church and State* 38, no. 2 (1996): 322.

2. Cf. Baai, G. S. "The Religious Identity of the Church and Its Social and Political Mission in South Africa: 1948–1984 - a Historical and Theological Analysis." University of Durham (United Kingdom), 1988; de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, John W., ed. *Apartheid is a Heresy*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983; Richardson, Neville. "Apartheid, Heresy and the Church in South Africa." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14, no. 1 (1986): 1–21; de Gruchy, John W. "Christians in Conflict: The Social Reality of the South African Church." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 51, no. Je (1985): 16–26; de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, John W., ed. "Towards a Confessing Church: The Implications of a Heresy." In *Apartheid is a Heresy*, John W. de Gruchy. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983; De Gruchy, John W. "The Relationship Between the State and Some Churches in South Africa, 1968–1975." *Journal of Church and State* 19, no. 3 (Fall 1977): 437–56; Truth and Reconciliation Commission. "Faith Communities Report." East London, South Africa, 1997.

[m]ost whites lived through those [apartheid] years ignorant, often wilfully so, of what was happening. It was the few prophetic voices within the church, frequently derided for being too ‘political’, who tried to raise the awareness of Christians to the reality of what was going on and to the ethical dilemma into which this thrust us. John de Gruchy's voice was among these.³

His theological challenge to the DRC's claim that it adhered to the principles of the Reformed tradition appears to have been unique to the body of literature published in relation to the DRC's *Report*. Unlike other critical work, de Gruchy addressed the *Report*'s particular use of Abraham Kuyper's political theology and the DRC's use of John Calvin's theology. He was also able to interpret the DRC's theology of mission that had been tailored for the black majority in South Africa. Added to this de Gruchy's familiarity with the pietist theology of Andrew Murray, whose influence was felt throughout the DRC and NHK, and I have touched on many of the major theological influences that helped shape DRC ecclesiology. De Gruchy may provide valuable insights into the DRC's articulation of apartheid theology as found in the *Report*.

The historical context for the *Report*

The *Report* is historically and culturally located in the turbulent 1970s with deep roots in the 1960s. In order to understand the *Report*'s context, it may be helpful to explore its location more fully. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the Afrikaner population became increasingly isolated during the one hundred and fifty years of an uneasy relationship with the British beginning with the British capture of the Cape in 1795. The electoral victory in 1948 may have brought the Afrikaner National Party to power but it also affirmed the Afrikaner people's experience of isolation moving it to seek support from within their own community, almost to the exclusion of all others. A civil religion bolstered by a pseudo-Kuyperian notion of social order and a uniquely adapted neo-Calvinism was already in place and provided a point of focus for the Afrikaners. Added

3. Holness, “John W. de Gruchy,” 46.

to this the Boer Trekker narrative of a latter day Israel (the Afrikaner) brought out of captivity under British dominance (Egypt) and one could expect the strengthening of the bond between the Afrikaner's political and ecclesiastical arms, namely the National Party and the DRC respectively.

The historical roots of the *Report* can be traced through the several stages of its evolution until its final iteration in 1974. It began in the DRC with the advent of a permanent commission to study race relations appointed by the DRC Synod in 1961.⁴ The commission then reported to the 1965 Synod and this report, "became the vehicle which transported the call from the Cottesloe Consultation from synod to synod and kept the discussion about race and relations between races in the Dutch Reformed Church on the agenda."⁵ Subsequent reports, based on the original 1961 report, were submitted in 1966 and 1969 and culminated in the appointment of a permanent commission by the 1970 General Synod of the DRC. The 1974 *Report* entitled *Human Relations and the South African Scene in Light of Scripture* was the published product of the process.

Sharpeville, Cottesloe and Soweto

The massacre at Sharpeville⁶ on March 21, 1960, the Cottesloe Consultation that

4. Cf. Johan M. Van der Merwe, "The Dutch Reformed Church from Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture to Church and Society: The Struggle Goes On," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 39, no. 1 (2013).http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1017-04992013000100010&lng=en&tlng=en.

5. Van der Merwe, "The Dutch Reformed Church from Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture to Church and Society: The Struggle Goes On," 2.

6. On March 21, 1960 in the town of Sharpeville police opened fire on the unarmed crowd killing 69 and wounding 186. In the Western Cape, police open fire killing two people. The Pan African Congress (PAC) retaliates by calling a work stoppage that lasts for two weeks. Ninety-five percent of the work force goes on strike. PAC youth take control of the Cape Town townships of Langa and Nyanga, setting up roadblocks and distributing food. Thirty thousand residents of the Black townships of Cape Town march on Caledon Square, led by Philip Kgosana, but the march is thwarted when Kgosana is tricked into calling it off on the promise of top level negotiations. The state calls in the military and the marines, the townships are cordoned off and the situation is brought under government control. A state of emergency is declared, thousands are arrested

followed Sharpeville in late 1960, and the uprising in Soweto⁷ on June 16, 1976 seem to have been watershed events⁸ in the church struggle against apartheid. It was evident from news reports from South Africa that the Sharpeville Massacre elicited strong reactions, both nationally and internationally. It can be argued that these three events, perhaps more than any others, moved the South African churches from the comfort of the *status quo* and stimulated a closer examination of their relationship to the National Party and its apartheid policies. This can be said of the English-speaking churches but it can also be said of the DRC for it was during this time that the *Report* was published and a permanent commission was formed DRC to examine race relations. In an insightful essay chronicling the DRC's evolving apartheid theology following Cottesloe, Johan van der Merwe suggested that Cottesloe

[...] was a call to the Dutch Reformed Church that could not be ignored [which] was first realised by the Cape Synod of the Church. During the 1961 synod, the circuit of Cape Town requested the synod to appoint a permanent commission

throughout the country and ten days later the African National Congress and PAC are declared 'affected' organisations and are banned. Albert Luthuli, head of the ANC, Robert Sobukwe, head of the PAC and Nelson Mandela were arrested.

7. On June 16, 1976, in the Black township of Soweto, an estimated twenty thousand high school students demonstrate against the enforced use of Afrikaans in the schools. Student anger and grievances against Bantu education exploded. Police opened fire on marching students, killing thirteen-year old Hector Petersen and at least three others. This began an uprising that spread to other parts of the country leaving over 1,000 dead, most of whom were killed by the police. The Internal Security Amendment Act, which replaced the Suppression of Communism Act, gave the Minister of Justice enhanced powers to declare organisations unlawful, to prohibit publications, to prohibit attendance at gatherings, to restrict persons to certain areas and to detain persons and witnesses in custody.

8. Cf. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid is a Heresy*, 62–63; de Gruchy, John W. "From Cottesloe to Rustenburg and Beyond: The Rustenburg Conference in Historical Perspective." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* No 74 Mr 1991 74, no. Mr (1991): 21–34; de Gruchy, John W. "Political Landmarks and the Response of Churches in South Africa, 1936–1994." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 118, no. Mr (2004): 3–26.

for the study of race relations. The appointment of this commission was the first important step in formulating an answer.⁹

Ministers and church leaders began to see the Nationalist government in a new light and the DRC's pro-apartheid stance faced more severe challenges from some of its own clergy and theologians. The DRC would see this challenge grow in the years following the Cottesloe Consultation. Documents such as the 'Reformed Day Witness' of 1980 and the 'Open Letter' published on June 9, 1982 appear to have provided evidence of a growing dissension within the DRC leadership. One such leader was Beyers Naudé who was shocked by the Sharpeville massacre, causing him to rethink his and the DRC's support of apartheid.¹⁰ As a leading member of the DRC clergy and a former moderator of the General Synod, he soon became a symbol of the internal church protest that gave birth to the Christian Institute in 1963 and the South African Council of Churches in 1968.

Voices of protest

From its inception the Christian Institute, through the journal *Pro Veritate*, became a voice of protest catching the attention of the DRC leadership. In 1963, shortly after the founding of the Christian Institute, Naudé was asked to choose between the Christian Institute and his position as minister in the DRC. He chose to leave the church he had served his entire career to continue his work in the Institute guiding it for nearly fourteen years until he was eventually banned¹¹ by the government in 1977. Naudé's principled departure from the DRC seems to have served as a model for some of the young theologians and ministers coming up through the seminary ranks, both in the

9. Van der Merwe, "The Dutch Reformed Church from Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture to Church and Society: The Struggle Goes On," 2.

10. Christiaan Frederick Beyers Naudé, "My Seven Lean Years," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 51 (1985).

11. Cf. Naudé, "My Seven Lean Years."

DRC and the English-speaking Reformed churches. It was also a sign that the churches were being challenged to rethink their stance on apartheid.

De Gruchy was a student at Rhodes University when the Sharpeville massacre made headlines around the world. It was not long after that he met Beyers Naudé, and in 1966 de Gruchy's name appears on the masthead of *Pro Veritate* for the first time. From the beginnings of this newly organised ecclesiastical protest de Gruchy was present and active. Shortly after having experienced the birth of the Christian Institute he was 'drafted' by the new SACC while he was working as a pastor in Durban. These institutions became instruments of anti-apartheid protest, and de Gruchy had been ideally situated to gain first hand experience of the growing church struggle against apartheid.

The events at Sharpeville seem to have dampened the hope of those searching for a peaceful and satisfying solution to the problems created by apartheid. Some of the church leaders and theologians were discouraged by the events while others were shaken from their ambivalence toward apartheid. The events appear to have helped usher-in a new era of protests in South Africa. De Gruchy commented on his experience recalling that

[m]any blacks fled the country to participate in anti-apartheid exile movements in Europe and North America. Others went underground. s, too, left the country out of fear for the future, and foreign investments in South Africa suffered severely. morale reached an all-time low. Perhaps never before, and not again until the Soweto protests in 1976, were those struggling for justice and reconciliation in South Africa in such despair.¹²

The Sharpeville massacre may have stimulated more unrest and protests in the black churches and in the streets but this unrest had negative consequences. Following the unrest, many new and punitive laws targeting the black population were written into the civil code, once again raising the stakes for the black majority. The result was fewer

12. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, Loc. 985.

freedoms, more economic hardship and greater social stress for the already beleaguered Indigenous blacks. Perhaps one of the more unjust pieces of legislation, passed into law in June of 1961, was the Indemnity Act No. 61. It reads as follows:

With retrospective effect from 21 March 1960. This Act indemnifies the government, its officers and all other persons acting under their authority in respect of acts done, orders given or information provided in good faith for the prevention or suppression of internal disorder, the maintenance or restoration of good order, public safety or essential services, or the preservation of life or property in any part of the Republic.¹³

This law had the effect of removing any accountability for the police officer's actions on March 21, 1960. The protests, rather than improving the black majority's situation, had made it clear that the government's position was becoming more entrenched in favour of rights and privileges.

The Cottesloe Declaration

Considering the scope of the unrest it seems reasonable to assume that the churches experienced their own difficulties during this time and were not insulated from the growing unrest. The World Council of Churches (WCC) responded by suggesting that a consultation take place with their South African ecclesiastical partners. To that end, ten delegates from each of the eight participating churches met with representatives of the WCC in December of 1960, nine months following the Sharpeville massacre. It may be useful to consider de Gruchy's account of the events of the Cottesloe Consultation. He remarked that "Cottesloe brought together the South African member Churches of the World Council of Churches in order to consult on the role of the Church in South Africa following the tragedy of Sharpeville."¹⁴ De Gruchy further suggested that the DRC, having provided much of the background material for the consultation had agreed, along with the seven other churches, to sign the recommendations rising out of the

13. Horrell, *Legislation and Race Relations*, 450.

14. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid is a Heresy*, xvii.

meeting. He noted that much of the preparatory documentation was “drafted by NGK theologians, indicating important changes within the thinking of some NGK circles.”¹⁵ Some of the recommendations were highly critical of apartheid and one recommendation called for the franchise for ‘non-s’ living in areas.¹⁶ Having read the recommendations it is not difficult to imagine that they would have caused much grief and embarrassment for the government had they been acted upon.

Once the consultation concluded the participants saw fit to publish the results of what had been private meetings. Some of the best minds of the churches had met to discuss and it was expected but not guaranteed that the churches would accept the recommendations. De Gruchy suggested that the response was dramatic and remarked that it

[...] came in the first instance, not from the synods, but from Prime Minister Verwoerd himself. He expressed his personal grave displeasure with the actions of the NGK delegation. [...] In due course, the Cape and Transvaal Synods fell into line, thereby rejecting the role played by their own elected and distinguished representatives.¹⁷

The DRC and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk (NHK) delegates affixed their signatures to the Declaration but insisted that two appendices be included in the text. This had the effect of severely weakening their own support for the resolutions. The DRC’s disclaimer focussed on Resolution fifteen with the delegates confirming that:

[...] a policy of differentiation can be defended from the Christian point of view, that it provides the only realistic solution to the problems of race relations and is therefore in the best interests of the various population groups. We do not con-

15. Ibid.

16. The Cottesloe Declaration of 1961 was provocative in that it called for the enfranchisement of ‘non-whites’ living in white areas. The resolution reads as follows: “15. It is our conviction that the right to own land wherever he is domiciled, and to participate in the government of his country, is part of the dignity of the adult man, and for this reason a policy which permanently denies to Non-White people the right of collaboration in the government of the country of which they are citizens cannot be justified.” World Council of Churches, “World Council of Churches’ Consultation with Member-Churches in South Africa Cottesloe, Johannesburg, 7–14 December, 1960,” *The Ecumenical Review* 13, no. 2 (January 1961): 246.

17. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, loc. 1043.

sider the resolutions adopted by the Consultation as in principle incompatible with the above statement.¹⁸

The NHK's response to the resolutions was less conciliatory in tone and seems to have identified the NHK as an ally of the government in its efforts, thus negating some of the positive steps it had taken to work for unity with the other churches. The delegates were adamant about separate development as the 'only solution' to the racial problems, and were compelled to "reject integration in any form, as a solution of the problem. The agreement that has been reached contains such far-reaching declarations that we cannot subscribe to it. We can therefore not identify ourselves with it."¹⁹ The Afrikaner Reformed churches were becoming increasingly isolated, both within South Africa and in the WCC.

The Cottesloe resolutions brought about a decision by the DRC and the NHK to leave the WCC after the Consultation had failed to convince either the South African government or the Afrikaner Reformed churches to reject apartheid. As one reviews the news media coverage and the various reports generated by the English-speaking, and Afrikaner churches following the Cottesloe Consultation, it can be argued that Cottesloe made explicit the symbiotic relationship between the Afrikaner churches and the apartheid government. The then-Prime Minister Verwoerd compelled the DRC's Cottesloe delegation to repudiate the Consultation's findings and recommendations. In a book dedicated to recounting the events leading up to majority rule in South Africa, June Goodwin and Ben Schiff wrote in their book, *Heart of Whiteness* (a play on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*):

Naudé and his Dutch Reformed Church colleagues supported the declaration but argued that it did not contradict the government's apartheid policy, hoping that

18. World Council of Churches, "World Council of Churches' Consultation with Member-Churches in South Africa Cottesloe, Johannesburg, 7–14 December, 1960," 248.

19. *Ibid.*, 249.

that tactic would prevent outright rejection of the declaration by their church synods. Prime Minister Verwoerd went ballistic. He knew that if the declaration were adopted by synods of the Dutch Reformed churches, apartheid was doomed. Rousing the dominees [ministers] to denounce Cottesloe, Verwoerd portrayed it as coercion of the Afrikaners from the outside. The faithful scuttled for cover.²⁰

But not all the faithful scuttled for cover. There were still leaders within the membership of the DRC and the NHK who were prepared to carry-on the struggle.

Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) - 1969

Nine years after Sharpeville and Cottesloe, the WCC established its PCR²¹ which was seen by many in the Afrikaner community as a provocative and powerful repudiation apartheid. In their published history of the SACC, authors Bernard Spong and Cedric Mayson recall this time when in

[...] 1970 [the PCR was launched in 1969] the WCC decided to establish a Special Fund under the Programme to Combat Racism from which financial support would be given to struggles against racism in the world, including the South African Liberation Movements. The SACC knew nothing of it beforehand, but Prime Minister BJ Vorster thought them responsible and immediately told the churches to 'cut it out.' It was a crucial event in church history forcing churches to consider their attitude towards the State, and towards evil institutions.²²

The PCR began to play a highly visible and controversial role in the international debate around the minority rule in South Africa, that began in earnest after Sharpeville and continued through the 1970s and into the 1980s. It also elicited a strong response from the South African government which was predisposed to the opinion that the WCC was a provocateur organisation. The Nationalists believed that the WCC delegates had interfered in the politics of the South African state with the publication of the 1961 Cottesloe

20. June Goodwin & Ben Schiff, *Heart of Whiteness: Afrikaners Face Black Rule in the New South Africa* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 200.

21. The World Council of Churches Programme to Combat Racism was launched in 1969 directly following the WCC's meeting in Uppsala, Sweden.

22. Spong and Mayson, *Come Celebrate!: Twenty-Five Years of the South African Council of Churches*, 79.

Declaration. It may be helpful to consider insights made by Irving Hexham, a Canadian anthropologist who studied the impact of apartheid on South African society. Hexham commented on the impact of the Cottesloe report suggesting that it

[...] was almost successful, and the report is remarkable for the extent of agreement reached between Nationalist and non-Nationalist theologians. Still, the Cottesloe Consultation ultimately failed, and the Nationalists turned against the World Council of Churches and all associated with them for their hostility to apartheid.²³

The PCR seemed to have confirmed what the DRC suspected - that the tide of international indifference toward apartheid had turned and apartheid was then seen as something to defeat rather than ignore. The WCC ensured that the PCR was equipped with enough funds to finance organisations committed to the WCC's methods of procuring just outcomes in political conflicts. Spong and Mayson suggested that the

[...] WCC was adamant that its contribution to liberation organisations was for humanitarian purposes within its constitutional aims and policies on the basis of the Gospel. But, whether it was spent on bombs or bandages, these organisations were fighting to overthrow their governments and this was the crux of the matter.²⁴

Human Relations and the South African Scene in Light of Scripture - 1974

It has been argued that the Sharpeville Massacre and the subsequent political fallout created a climate of mistrust and anxiety in South Africa. The Cottesloe Consultation, primarily a church event, had political implications as well. During these troubled times the DRC was in the unusual position of having its loyalty to and close relationship with the dominant political party severely tested. International condemnation of apartheid grew in tandem with its burgeoning collection of laws and the DRC's sanc-

23. Irving Hexham, "Christianity and Apartheid: An Introductory Bibliography," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 32 (1980): 43.

24. Spong and Mayson, *Come Celebrate!: Twenty-Five Years of the South African Council of Churches*, 79.

tioning of racist policies began to encounter serious challenges. In the introduction to his article, van der Merwe maintained that history

[...] will show that the latter part of the 20th century in South Africa will always be remembered as a time of intense struggle. While this struggle for justice was mainly political, the church was not excluded from it. This statement is supported by John de Gruchy's groundbreaking work: *The Church Struggle in South Africa*.²⁵

Further in the article he supported the claim that the Afrikaner churches were recognisably pro-apartheid. He wrote:

While this struggle was in full swing, with many churches partaking in it, the Afrikaans-speaking churches were rightfully seen as supporters of the policy of apartheid; not struggling against apartheid, but doing their utmost to support the policy on biblical grounds.²⁶

Van der Merwe was referring to the evolution of the 1974 *Report*. It can be argued that the DRC chose to respond to the mounting criticism by authoring an *apologia* in defence of their controversial support of separate development.

In order to gain a better sense of the DRC's theological position in relation to the South African government's apartheid policies during the early 1970s, it may be helpful to examine more closely some key ideas in the *Report*. The document may be relevant to this discussion because of its context, the theological justification of apartheid, its having been written in the form of an *apologia* and, perhaps more importantly, its invitation to dialogue.

In the introduction, the authors of the *Report* seem to indicate that there was a sense among the leadership of the DRC that their church had been misunderstood and that it was time for some clarity, both within the DRC itself and for its ecumenical partners. The authors presented the document in "[...] the hope that it may contribute to a

25. Van der Merwe, "The Dutch Reformed Church from Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture to Church and Society: The Struggle Goes On," 2.

26. *Ibid.*, 4.

better understanding of the Dutch Reformed Church and serve as a profitable basis for discussion in the Church as well as for discussion with other Churches and Christians within and beyond the borders of our country.²⁷ The *Report* appears to be a theological *apologia* justifying apartheid or, in the language of the document, ‘separate’ or ‘parallel’ development²⁸. This is relevant to the discussion because it raises the question, ‘Why did the DRC feel compelled to produce a theological statement in support of what was a political and social experiment designed to separate whites from blacks, asians and coloureds’?

Judging by the response to the *Report*, it was dismissed out-of-hand, rather it was recognised as a legitimate attempt at formulating a Reformed theological framework for the social experiment called apartheid. Theologians like John de Gruchy, Charles Villa-Vicencio, Douglas Bax, David Bosch and Desmond Tutu responded by publishing a book entitled *Apartheid is a Heresy*.²⁹ Each chapter in the book challenged a particular aspect of apartheid theology with the authors concluding that apartheid was a heresy. So close was the association of the DRC with the National Party that the line between the social experiment called apartheid and the DRC’s theological *apologia* seems to have been blurred to the point that titles like *Apartheid is a Heresy* seemed reasonable and apt. The lack of distinction between apartheid and the DRC’s theological support of it may serve as an example of just how bound the DRC and the government

27. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 6.

28. For example, see Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 31.

29. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid is a Heresy*.

were at times. This close association must have made it difficult for organisations like the SACC and the CI to discern its responsibilities regarding the DRC.

The churches appeared to have struggled to find their voice in the face of the decision made by the largest and most powerful church in the country to divide itself along colour lines. In the ‘Foreword’ to de Gruchy’s book *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, then Bishop Desmond Tutu seems to have expressed the intent of those engaged in the church struggle against this type of division when he said that the “[...] struggle of the church in South Africa was fundamentally how to bring about a more just society where differences of race, colour and culture were seen to be irrelevant and without theological significance.”³⁰

As mentioned above, the *Report* evolved into its final iteration in 1974. In some respects, its antecedents were coterminous with the events of Sharpeville. The document was published in 1974 having been written over thirteen years during which time the Sharpeville massacre and its aftermath had its impact on South Africa. It may stretch the imagination to suggest that the events at Soweto were the direct consequence of the government’s handling of the Sharpeville Massacre. However, what can be said with more confidence is that the DRC decided to publish an *apologia* during what can be considered one of the most chaotic times in South Africa, and was certainly a response to the growing critical climate. It was then that a clear, unequivocal ecclesiastical voice was needed. The DRC sought to provide that voice.

The structure of the *Report*

The *Report* was published in Afrikaans in 1974 with the English translation published in 1976. It was organised in five chapters and began, in good Reformed theological fashion, with a biblical warrant for the DRC’s support of separate congregations and

30. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, ix.

separate political and social development. The biblical warrant was an expository treatise that seems to seamlessly link the disclaimers in the Cottesloe Declaration to the *Report* as if fourteen years had not changed the situation in South Africa in the least. The second chapter contains a discussion on the task of the church and its responsibilities within the unique political situation in South Africa. It was provided as an explanation of the DRC's understanding of the church's relationship to God (verticalism) and to the community (horizontalism). Chapter Two also included an interpretation of the theology of revolution (liberation theology). Chapter Three sought to answer some of the criticisms levelled at it by the WCC, the SACC, the CI, and others. In this chapter, the DRC rejected the WCC's call for universal suffrage and equity. The authors of the *Report* defined social justice in terms of its relationship to personal piety. Chapter Four recounted the DRC's successful mission work and suggested that the model for separate worship and separate congregations, instituted in the DRC in 1857 and 1881, was reflected in the political and institutional structures of the time. Chapter Five provided a biblical and social analysis of the state of mixed marriages³¹ in South Africa in which the authors sought to show how miscegenation was contrary to the will of God. Such marriages, the *Report* claimed, "would eventually destroy the God-given diversity and identity [and] would render such a marriage undesirable and impermissible."³²

31. Marriage between a white male and a racially or ethnically different woman was illegal in South Africa. In 1949, less than six months after the National Party was elected, a law was passed to this effect. In 1957 a law was passed making it illegal for a white person to have sexual intercourse with a black person. Cf. July 8, 1949: The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act No 55 prohibited marriages between whites and members of other racial groups Horrell, *Legislation and Race Relations.*, 19. Cf. April 12, 1957 The Sexual Offences Act (Immorality Act) No 23 (s 16) made it an offence for a white person to have intercourse with a black person or to commit any 'immoral or indecent act'. Dugard, *Human Rights and the South African Legal Order*, 69.

32. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 99.

A lacuna in the DRC's theological literature

Until 1974, apartheid theology appears to have been articulated more through the DRC's ecclesiastical practices than through its theologians. Various committee and commission reports had been produced and distributed within the DRC synods and congregations as well as official newsletters but there seems to have been a lacuna in the theological literature of the DRC. Whatever theological literature had been published by the DRC was usually only available in Afrikaans and was likely intended for members of the DRC alone. By comparison, journals like *Pro Veritate*, the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa (JTSA)* and the documents produced by the CI and SACC contributed to the discourse around apartheid with several journals publishing in both English and Afrikaans. Spong and Mayson made a telling comment when they recalled that for "a decade after Sharpeville the Churches had been putting racism under the spotlight and could find no theological rationale for this world wide evil."³³

The lacuna in the literature seems to have been filled by the *Report* which provided a more concrete starting point for a discussion on the role of the Reformed church in an apartheid state. The *Report* also served as an official ecclesiastical source for the DRC's theology of apartheid that had hitherto been difficult to identify. Hexham seems to confirm this as he suggested that,

[c]learly, this is one of the most important documents available for a discussion of contemporary attitudes among Christians in South Africa. [...] Thus by its pronouncements this report strongly commits Afrikaner Christians to supporting the policies of the Nationalist Government."³⁴

Prior to 1974 the DRC had accommodated some of its more socially conservative members by first, allowing racially separate worship and second, by allowing for

33. Spong and Mayson, *Come Celebrate!: Twenty-Five Years of the South African Council of Churches*, 79.

34. Hexham, "Christianity and Apartheid: An Introductory Bibliography," 44.

racially separate churches and denominations. The authors of the *Report* recounted the history of the successful establishment of the first ‘non-’ congregations attributing that success to the missionary work undertaken by the DRC. Through these missionary efforts,

[...] separate, but not exclusive, congregations were established for Coloureds. With only a few exceptions, up to the year 1881, there were no separate congregations for Coloureds in the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. In that year a start was made with the organisation of Coloured congregations into a separate synod.³⁵

It is important to remember that this successful missionary effort was preceded by the general practice of separate worship and separate communion. Before the 1857 General Synod, the practice of “... separate altars, which led to the establishment of separate churches on the basis of racial classification and language, was initially allowed ‘as a concession to prejudice and weakness’ and was confirmed by the Synod of 1857 ‘as a result of the weakness of some’.”³⁶

The 1857 and 1881 Synodical decisions were not necessarily radical as the DRC’s previous practice in worship and governance seems to have already set the tone and was a reflection of the then-current social practices. Social practice appears to have determined ecclesiastical doctrine. It had been the practice of separate worship that divided the DRC into ‘mother’ and ‘daughter’ churches³⁷ and it was essentially the reflected image of social practice that maintained the divisions among the Reformed

35. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkeroverhouding in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 78.

36. Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society. Political Commission., *Towards Social Change. General Editor: Peter Randall.* -, 84.

37. Cf. Du Toit, André. “No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology.” *American Historical Review* 88, no. 4 (October 1983): 920–52.

churches. In an article in which de Gruchy discussed the importance of doctrine and the distinction between doctrine and the practice of the church, he noted that:

[...] the discovery has been made that often it is practice and not doctrine which really divides, or it divides as much as doctrine. Even if we grant the integral relationship between doctrine and the so-called non-theological factors behind disunity, it remains true that practical factors are amongst the most powerful enemies of the unity of the Church.”³⁸

Some key issues in the *Report*

Following is an attempt at identifying some of the key theological issues in the DRC’s response to the growing international and national criticism of apartheid. The criticism perhaps most relevant to the discussion came from Christian organisations including the SACC, the WCC and the WARC. While the church struggle against apartheid had international importance, the focus of this study is primarily on the churches within the Reformed tradition. It is from within the circuits and general synods of the Reformed churches in South Africa that the most intimate and pertinent critical voices were heard. Criticism is more easily tolerated from a family member because it presumes a special and unique relationship as well as a deeper understanding of the issues. Writing in 1991 and on the very cusp of fundamental political change in South Africa, de Gruchy wrote as a Reformed theologian while noting the urgent need for a critical Reformed theology that

[...] not only prophetically addresses the power structures of the world, but with equal commitment uncovers those elements of alienation and false consciousness at work within the tradition itself. This can only be done as Reformed theology engages in the struggle for justice on the side of society’s victims.³⁹

As early as 1974, de Gruchy made a similar appeal for a contextual, relevant and liberating Reformed theology that could address what he saw as the distortions of apartheid

38. John W. de Gruchy, “The Role of Doctrine in the Church,” *Reformed World* 34, no. 6 (June 1977): 254.

39. John W. de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate*, 41.

theology articulated in the language of the Reformed tradition -- a kind of apartheid wolf in a Reformed sheep's clothing.

The 'Two Solitudes'⁴⁰ within the Reformed tradition

The Afrikaner grand narrative spoke of a nation that, beginning with the arrival of the first Europeans, was subdivided into discrete 'nations' according to skin colour. The narrative also told the story of the smaller population which was itself divided. Rather than skin colour determining one's 'nationality,' it was language and culture. The language spoken at home and in church seemed to provide the Afrikaner people with a common identity. However, it was not always a convenient identity because it placed the Afrikaner several steps down on the social and economic ladder. The Afrikaner identity often determined one's economic success, where one lived and with whom one associated. The divisions in society were also reflected in the church. It is true that Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Presbyterians, United Congregationalists, Pentecostal, Baptists and Methodists worshipped separately, as was the case in the rest of the world. But the two major expressions of the Reformed tradition in South Africa were also isolated from each other despite their common roots. Also, the Afrikaner churches worshipped separately according to skin colour and this was not always true of the English-speaking churches in South Africa.

The Lutheran, Presbyterian, United Congregational⁴¹ and Dutch Reformed Church all claimed their roots in the Reformation that took place in Europe in the sixteenth-century. Even though the Presbyterians, United Congregationalists and the

40. The term 'two solitudes' was made popular by Hugh MacLennan in his book by the same name. It tells the story of the struggle for identity of a young man born to a French-Canadian father and an Irish immigrant mother. The two solitudes refers to the mutual cultural isolation of the French and English in Canada.

41. The United Congregational Church in South Africa began with the first missionaries of the London Missionary Society in 1799. Well known missionaries of the LMS were Dr. John Philip and Dr. Stanley Livingstone.

DRC were tied more closely by their shared Calvinist origins, they too worshipped separately. The denominations within the Reformed tradition⁴² were divided along linguistic and cultural lines as well, even though they shared a common church polity and governance model. Of those churches which self-identified as being members of the Reformed tradition, only one had an explicit policy of separate worship and separate congregations for black and and this appears to have set them apart. Unlike the DRC, the English-speaking churches were often black churches with a minority membership. Within the Reformed tradition in South Africa it was only the DRC that maintained an exclusively membership.⁴³

The DRC established separate congregations for blacks, whites and coloureds and it can be argued that the apartheid ideology had become more clearly reflected in the DRC congregations than in the English-speaking Reformed churches. While some English-speaking churches supported integrated worship and congregations, the DRC did not. In some cases the English-speaking churches had *de facto* separate worship but the desire for separate churches or worship had never been formalised and entrenched in their official policy. The English-speaking Reformed churches and the DRC seem to have assumed two different trajectories leading to very different ways of establishing congregations. The contrast in approaches was illustrated by de Gruchy's having referred to the missiologist Gustav Warneck "[...] who taught that the gospel should not be proclaimed to humankind in general, but to each nation and group in ways appropri-

42. Presently, the following denominations in South Africa are members of the World Communion of Reformed Churches: Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)/Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK), Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA)/(NGKA), Dutch Reformed Church of Africa/Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NHKA), Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa, Peoples Church of Africa/Volkskerk van Afrika, Presbyterian Church of Africa, Reformed Church in Southern Africa, United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa/ Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk in Suider Afrika, Volkskerk van Afrika

43. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, Loc. 186.

ate to their culture.”⁴⁴ This principle of culturally contextual evangelisation was reflected throughout the *Report* and was the preferred mission practice of the DRC. The Reformed witness in South Africa was deeply divided and one source of the division was the DRC’s ecclesiastical apartheid which prevented blacks and whites from worshipping and celebrating the sacraments together. The DRC and the English-speaking churches had become two solitudes. It may be helpful to think of this deep division in terms of the theological characteristics of each trajectory.

Two Reformed traditions understood in light of de Gruchy’s reading of Bruggemann’s Royal (Davidic) and liberation (Mosaic) trajectories

It may prove useful to bring to this discussion Walter Bruggemann’s essay entitled *Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel* wherein he described two circles of tradition in Israelite texts concerning covenant: the Mosaic and the Davidic. De Gruchy seems to have read this article with the church struggle in mind and he has shown how Bruggemann’s two categories were apt descriptions of the two, distinct manifestations of the Reformed tradition in South Africa. We note at the outset how Brueggemann characterised the Mosaic and the Davidic trajectories or traditions. He suggested that

[...] the Mosaic tradition tends to be a movement of protest which is situated among the disinherited and which articulates its theological vision in terms of a God who decisively intrudes, even against seemingly impenetrable institutions and orderings. On the other hand, the Davidic tradition tends to be a movement of consolidation which is situated among the established and secure and which articulates its theological vision in terms of a God who faithfully abides and sustains on behalf of the present ordering.⁴⁵

44. Ibid., Loc. 346.

45. Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsley, eds., “Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel,” in *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics*, Walter Bruggemann, The Bible & Liberation Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books ; London: SPCK, 1993), 202.

At first glance, it does not appear obvious which theological tendency, the DRC or the English-speaking Reformed churches, could be associated with which of 's trajectories. De Gruchy proposed that both trajectories had their proper theologians and prophets who were engaged as spokespersons for God in the religious and political life of the Israelites. In his book entitled *Theology and Ministry in Context and Crisis*, de Gruchy wrote:

In the Davidic tradition, or the Royal trajectory, the prophets are supportive of the monarchy and urban privileged classes, the religious hierarchy and cultus and, especially in post-exilic Israel they are also nationalists committed to the purity of Judaism. The theology of these prophets is expressed in the 'myth of unity', their interest is that of creation and the continuity of institutions, and their 'preferred mode of perception is that of universal comprehensiveness'. In the Mosaic tradition, or what Brueggemann refers to as the 'liberation trajectory', the focus is on God's justice and righteousness, a concern for the poor and the peasants and, therefore, a commitment to social transformation and the establishment of an egalitarian society. Their 'preferred mode of perception is that of historical specificity', their language is historically concrete and focuses on stories of liberation.⁴⁶

I have discerned in de Gruchy's articulation of the traditions, the idea that the theologians and prophets within the Royal trajectory supported the existing ecclesiastical and political structures based on the assumption that God had blessed them. However, the theological disposition within the Mosaic trajectory seems to have been established based on the community's experience of God having liberated the marginalised and oppressed, often from these very same structures built on the principles of the Royal trajectory. The Mosaic prophets and theologians were seemingly more concerned with the politically and economically disenfranchised than with supporting the existing political structures.

46. John W. de Gruchy, *Theology and Ministry in Context and Crisis: A South African Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 63.

It may prove useful to consider, as an example of those adherents of the Davidic tradition or Royal trajectory, those Christian churches that supported the apartheid regime, either through a passive acceptance of or an active affirmation of the political and social conditions of apartheid. Along the same lines, it may help to consider the Mosaic tradition or liberation trajectory as having been represented by churches whose less than sympathetic encounters with the conditions of apartheid branded them as dissident and revolutionary. This dissident behaviour in the churches ranged from the defiant to the highly critical. De Gruchy reminded us that any tradition's expression of truth is, by its very nature, only partial and therefore incomplete.⁴⁷

The Reformed English-speaking churches and the DRC had become two solitudes within a single tradition and in a nation that celebrated Christian unity as a founding principle.⁴⁸ They represented very different theological views on race relations, the role of the church in society and the unity of the Christian church. De Gruchy's articulation of the Royal and liberation trajectories in the South African context may serve as organising concepts for this section. They describe, in general terms, the theological pre-dispositions of the two major representative ecclesiologies within the Reformed tradition in South Africa. They may also help in describing the different self-understandings the South African churches developed during the struggle against apartheid.

47. Cf. John W. de Gruchy, *Theology and Ministry in Context and Crisis: A South African Perspective*, 151–52.

48. De Gruchy writes: "Whatever problems we may have with statistics there can be no question that in South Africa they support the claim that the country is a Christian one. ... According to the 1980 Government census 77% of all South Africans identify themselves as Christians and members of some church denomination." John W. de Gruchy, "Christians in Conflict: The Social Reality of the South African Church," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 51, no. Je (1985): 18.

The Royal trajectory in South Africa

Using de Gruchy's reading of Bruggemann's categories, it may be argued that the DRC, in many ways, embodied the theological and political principles of what has been described as the Davidic tradition or the Royal trajectory. It has been argued that ecclesiastical support for the National Party had been part of the DRC's ethos since the Party's inception in 1912.⁴⁹ By the time the National Party had become a political force in the early 1940s, the ties between it and the church had become much more firmly established.

However, it can be argued, although not as convincingly, that the National Party, along with the DRC's support, formed a sort of liberation movement with a mandate to free the Afrikaner people from British domination, very much in keeping with what has been described as the Mosaic tradition. The Afrikaner civil religion maintained the perception of an economically oppressed and socially marginalised Afrikaner community that was in need of liberation from British hegemony and black numerical superiority. This perception notwithstanding, the post-1948 the union of the National Party and the DRC began to resemble a movement rising out of the Royal tradition. The platform on which the National Party stood was an expression of the desire to establish the Afrikaner people as a strong economic and political presence and it remained committed to this task during the Party's tenure. The effect was the consolidation of the relationship between the DRC and the National Party as the Afrikaner civil religion was increasingly reflected in the political rhetoric of the Nationalists as the Party prepared to take power. The transition from a liberation movement to a Davidic nation had little impact on the

49. Cf. Moodie, T. Dunbar. *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*. Perspectives on Southern Africa. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975; Du Toit, André. "No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology." *American Historical Review* 88, no. 4 (October 1983): 920–52; de Gruchy, John W. *The Church Struggle in South Africa*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.

English-speaking community. Once again it was the black majority that suffered the consequences of English-speaking apathy and Afrikaner nationalism.

A theology from above

When the National Party began to establish itself in the political arena, especially during and immediately following the 1984 election, the DRC's support seems to have been provided primarily through its members who served as representatives in the South African Parliament. Evidence provided by the *Report* has suggested that nearly thirty years later, the DRC had become openly committed to the Nationalist policies and was able to show its support publicly rather than just through the members and ministers of Parliament. This is what de Gruchy described as a 'theology from above'. He identified within the history of Christianity times when Christian theology has been used to sanctify the power of the state. He argued that this was one reason why

[...] so-called 'theologies from above' have become suspect by those Christians engaged in the struggle for social justice and liberation. They are too often theologies of alienation which produce a false consciousness both amongst those with power and the powerless. In fact, such theologies reflect the ideology of those in power, those who rule from above, and thereby reinforce structures of domination. They are the theologies of the court theologians and prophets which serves the interests of the state and the cultus. They are theologies of uncritical patriotism, theologies which are not committed to hearing the living Word of the Lord today in our present crisis and context.⁵⁰

I have tried to identify the conditions under which the DRC was able to provide justification for their participation in the development of an apartheid state. The DRC clergy were the 'court theologians and prophets' serving the interests of the state and the civil religion and their theology was articulated in the language of the ideology of those in power.

50. John W. de Gruchy, *Theology and Ministry in Context and Crisis: A South African Perspective*, 65.

Were the English-speaking Reformed churches complicit in apartheid?

What de Gruchy has identified as a manifestation of the Davidic tradition in South Africa might include more than just the DRC. South African theologian Neville Richardson warned that,

[i]f the impression given so far is that the Afrikaans churches are the only ones affected, then that impression must be corrected. Most of the English-speaking churches have made official statements against apartheid. Some are making continued vigorous efforts to rid themselves of racist influence. But the very need for these efforts indicates that apartheid as a way of life has crept into their administrative structures and into their worship and practice at congregational level.⁵¹

De Gruchy echoed the sentiment suggesting that the English-speaking churches that chose to say or do nothing to mitigate the impact of apartheid were complicit in their silence. They too were ‘prophets supportive of the monarchy and urban privileged classes’ and, perhaps more importantly, they did not see the need to articulate an alternative to the theology of apartheid. In an article published less than one year after the English translation of the *Report* was published, de Gruchy voiced his concern saying that

[...] the individualism, secularism, socio-political apathy, and the general inability to become enthusiastic about or committed to public issues, which is characteristic of large segments of the English-speaking community, can be related to the lack of an adequate biblical theology amongst whites in the so-called English-speaking Churches.⁵²

In light of de Gruchy’s claim that there was a ‘lack of an adequate biblical theology’ it can be argued that the primarily clergy and leadership of the English-speaking churches, along with the DRC, failed to rise to the challenge presented by apartheid theology. I am reminded that de Gruchy’s critique was levelled at the English-speaking churches after the release of the *Report*. The clergy and theologians were asked to take responsibility

51. Richardson, “Apartheid, Heresy and the Church in South Africa,” 5.

52. John W. de Gruchy, “English-Speaking South Africans and Civil Religion,” 45–46.

for their lack of attention to the South African civil religion that had filled the void left by the lack of proper theological response to apartheid theology.

The lack of an alternative to apartheid theology

The literature published on the topic of the church and apartheid has shown that theological debates about apartheid were taking place in the congregations, at annual meetings of churches and church organisations, at national-level ecumenical conferences, and in the faculty lounges of the universities. All of these seemingly contributed to the complexity of the problem and it must have been difficult for churches to articulate a clear theological position that could compete with the well promoted Afrikaner civil religion. Also contributing to the problem were the decisions made at meetings by the ecclesiastical leadership, which did not always sit well with the membership. Too often these decisions made at a provincial or national level were ignored by the local congregations.

Writing shortly after the advent of the *Report*, de Gruchy noted that a

[...] major dilemma of the English-speaking churches was the chasm that existed between the prophetic utterances of the church courts and the attitudes and actions of local congregations and members. In writing about the Anglicans shortly after Cottesloe, Hinchliff remarked: 'It is probably true to say that when members of the government accuse the bishops and clergy of the Province of interfering in politics, many of the laity silently agree with the accusation and wish that their own consciences and the secular authorities might both be allowed to rest in peace.'⁵³

De Gruchy highlighted the fact that there was often a gap between the ecclesiological ideal and the lived experience of congregations trying to make sense of their faith in the midst of a national crisis. Ministers and pastors in the churches faced their own crisis.

De Gruchy commented further in a book written in 1987 revealing how little things had changed since 1974:

53. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, Loc. 1349.

The gap between prophetic synodical resolutions and the interests of members of the congregation severely taxed the resources of the ministry as pastors defended and applied the stand taken by their churches. Many of those who agreed with the resolutions, and there were those who did not, avoided the issues in order to keep the peace.⁵⁴

It appears that the theological gap was filled by the DRC's unique interpretation of some of the principles of the Reformed tradition. It was this iteration of the Reformed tradition that undergirded the apartheid agenda that fostered an understanding that separate development was God's plan for South Africa, at least according to the dominant church, and the dominant political ideology. Apartheid had become the default ideology and theology as it encountered no real opposition, either from the community or the churches within which leadership was exercised.

The absence of the black voice

It has been noted above that during the 1970s it was primarily the leadership in the Reformed churches who had any real voice in the church-state dialogue. Once again we are reminded that the black voice from within the Reformed tradition simply did not count as it was not connected to any real power outside the homelands.⁵⁵ When, on rare occasion that the black protest was heard, every attempt was made by the government to silence it. A story is recounted by de Gruchy of an encounter between then-Minister of Justice P.C. Pelser and Alan Boesak, a black Reformed Minister. Apparently, in a speech given by Pelser, he attacked Boesak for having advocated civil disobedience. Pelser argued that, as a minister in the Reformed church, Boesak had no right to mix church with politics. Boesak responded by declaring: "I am of the opinion that I have done nothing more than place myself fairly and squarely within the Reformed tradition."⁵⁶ Rising out of this account of the events is the suggestion that the militant

54. John W. de Gruchy, *Theology and Ministry in Context and Crisis: A South African Perspective*, 33.

55. Geographic areas designated as 'blacks only'.

and prophetic black Reformed theology that grew out of the South African Reformed tradition was an appropriate response to the apathy of the churches which were unable to adequately give voice to black concerns. Boesak's response in calling for civil disobedience in the face of the government oppression invoked a more conventional interpretation of the liberating principles of Calvinism.

My understanding of de Gruchy's reading of Bruggemann's two trajectories, which described the churches' stance on apartheid, seems to show that the DRC actively pursued the Royal trajectory. It cannot be argued with any conviction that the Reformed English-speaking churches had chosen to follow the liberation trajectory. Evidence has shown that, as de Gruchy and others have noted, the English-speaking churches were slow to engage the DRC's apartheid theology. De Gruchy maintained throughout his career that there was a need for a proper biblical theological response to apartheid theology and, until this was available, apartheid theology would be sustainable. Apartheid theology was sustained, in part, through the English-speaking churches' apathy and by an exuberant and unfettered promotion of an Afrikaner civil religion.

56. *Ibid.*, 41.

Chapter Five: A Reformed critical examination of the 1974 *Report* and some key theological points made in support of apartheid

Theological conflict is, in fact, inevitable in those societies where the struggle for justice, power and reconciliation not only requires transcendent legitimation, but where the will of God also remains a matter of conviction, of life, death and hope. Hence the inevitable and inseparable relationship between faith, theology and politics.

John W. de Gruchy

In this chapter, with John de Gruchy as our interlocutor, I will attempt to analyse and critique the *Report's* claim that God's plan for humanity, as outlined in the biblical texts, was for all cultural and linguistic groups to live in the unity of the Holy Spirit but also as distinct 'nations' on earth. The *Report* came under close scrutiny after its publication in 1974 with most of the subsequent criticism levelled at its claims that the biblical call for the spiritual unity of God's people did not imply a cultural or social unity. The distinct 'nations' could all celebrate the salvific act of God through Jesus Christ as an eschatological reality. However, the *Report's* authors argued that key texts in the Christian bible revealed God's will that the 'nations' disperse and establish themselves separately from the other 'nations'. This understanding of the biblical imperative was challenged by Douglas Bax and Willem Vorster. De Gruchy invited both Bax and Vorster to provide chapters in his book *Apartheid is a Heresy*, co-edited by de Gruchy's colleague Charles Villa-Vicencio. The scholarly biblical-critical work provided by Bax and Vorster supplemented de Gruchy's critique and have proven to be an invaluable source for this thesis.

A close reading of the 1974 *Report* revealed, at least on the surface, that the unity of humanity and the equality of the races were not disputed by the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRC). In several statements found in the *Report*, the church affirms the unity of all humanity through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, separate development did take place in South Africa becoming an official pol-

icy of the government in 1948. It may be helpful to remember that the vast majority of the members of Parliament, at that time, were Christian with the majority of those Christians claiming membership in the DRC. It has been argued that the decision taken by the 1857 General Synod of the DRC in favour of allowing blacks and whites to conduct separate worship services, was the result of pressure from the community to restrict all social intercourse between the races. The 1881 decision to allow for separate congregations for the various races was further evidence of how social and economic pressures could be perceived as having guided church policies.

The 1960 and 1974 reports published by the DRC, with the purpose of disseminating church policy pertaining to race relations, are yet further evidence of ecclesiastical polity and doctrine being shaped by government policies. The question asked by so many of the Christian theologians and clergy engaged in the church struggle against apartheid was, 'When did the church lose its prophetic, critical witness and become a tool in the hands of the architects of apartheid?' I found it troublesome to read in certain paragraphs of the *Report* the claim that the idea of the unity and equality of the races was not disputed by the DRC. I will attempt to bring some light to the *Report's* claims that it provided a Reformed interpretation of the biblical texts used to justify separate development. I also hope to shed some light on the DRC's understanding of the unity of the people of God and the distinction between unity as a spiritual reality, and unity as a lived experience.

At stake was the sustenance of official apartheid. At stake also was the credibility of the DRC and its standing in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and its observer status with the South African Council of Churches (SACC). The DRC would have needed to convince the member churches of these national and international ecclesiastical associations that it could theologically support political apartheid while remaining faithful to the Gospel and the prin-

ciples of the Reformed tradition. To this end, the authors of the *Report* attempted to justify their position using certain biblical texts. This chapter will seek to discern the biblical-theological arguments developed by the DRC and contained within the 1974 *Report*.

The occasion for the *Report*

It was noted in Chapter Two of this thesis that the beginnings of church-sanctioned, segregated worship began in the middle of the nineteenth century with the practice of separation gradually developing into its lasting form during the apartheid period.¹ It was only in 1974 that the General Synod of the DRC accepted the theological justification of apartheid as a constituent component of the church's doctrinal corpus.² It can be argued that the occasion for the DRC's *Report* was the church leadership's experience of a growing criticism of apartheid and its concomitant theology. It will be argued that it was the critical stance of some national and international church organisations as well as the criticism of theologians and clergy that compelled the DRC to produce an *apologia* in defence of its theological and ecclesiastical support of the government's apartheid policies.

Russel Botman, professor of theology at Stellenbosch University in South Africa, offered a different perspective on the occasion of the *Report*. In an article published in 2004, he suggested that the *Report*

1. General Synods of the DRC in 1857 and 1881.

2. In order for a theological proposition to become doctrine within Reformed polity, the proposition is first subjected to rigorous theological scrutiny. It begins on the floor of the church's annual meeting wherein debate on the issue takes place following a prescribed format and rules for debate. Once the debate has been completed to the satisfaction of the participating members, the resulting theological proposition is then referred to the doctrine committee of the church. From there the statement is often sent back to the congregations for discussion. Once discussion has taken place at the congregational level, comments and recommendations are sent back to the doctrine committee for its review and subsequent presentation to the next annual meeting for further discussion and debate.

[...] was the result of a theological conflict in the DRC between the young theologians who followed Karl Barth's dialectical theology and the senior theologians who followed Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch theologian, in his neo-Calvinist theology. The senior theologians regarded Barth as suspect because they disagreed with his views on Scripture and regarded his views on the authority and inspiration of Scripture as less than orthodox. This long-standing struggle between the Barthians and the Kuyperians centred on the issue of creation theology as the grand narrative for the self-identity of the DRC.³

While Kuyperian theory did inform the *Report*, as de Gruchy has shown, the authors never mentioned Kuyper and Barth was referred to only once. Whatever evidence there was of either Kuyper or Barth was hidden in the authors' assumptions. Botman was arguing that the occasion for the *Report* was an internal struggle between the Barthians and the Kuyperians within the DRC. This is an interesting point but it does not seem to account for the nearly fifteen-year-old history of the *Report's* evolution. The invitation in the Introduction to the *Report* suggests, along with the evidence from the *Report* itself, that the occasion for the *Report* was more political than theological.

Some of the criticism came from within the Reformed churches, both internationally and at home. Negative reactions were heard from the liberal and the conservative elements in the Christian church. To the question, 'How could the DRC justify its support of apartheid?', the more liberal critics claimed "this document was no answer at all."⁴ Some of the more conservative presbyteries (*classis*)⁵ of the DRC claimed that the

3. Wolfram Weisse and Carel Anthonissen, eds., "Belhar and the White Dutch Reformed Church: CHANGES IN THE DRC 1974 - 1990," in *Maintaining Apartheid or Promoting Change?: The Role of the Dutch Reformed Church in a Phase of Increasing Conflict in South Africa*, Russel Botman, Religion and Society in Transition, vol. 5 (Munster Waxmann c, 2004), 124.

4. Van der Merwe, "The Dutch Reformed Church from Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture to Church and Society: The Struggle Goes On," 3.

5. A *classis* is a group of churches within a geographical area. It has the authority to deal with matters that concern its churches in common and its decisions are binding on the churches in its region. A minister and an elder (and in some cases a deacon) from each congregation are delegated to attend each *classis* meeting.

Report had not gone far enough in terms of its stance on mixed marriages and common worship. The complaint was that the *Report* seemed to vacillate on the question of whether blacks and whites could find any common ground where they could mix socially.⁶ The Reformed Church (Gereformeerde Kerken) in the Netherlands “reacted by denouncing the document. One of the major points of critique was the fact that the document sanctioned the political policy of separate development and gave it a biblical foundation.”⁷ This criticism would be echoed by South African theologians including John de Gruchy, Willem Vorster and Douglas Bax to name just a few.⁸

The Reformed tradition and the scope of the investigation

Because the authors of the *Report* claimed that “[t]he Dutch Reformed Church is a direct continuation of the Reformed religion of the first colonists who came to South Africa in 1652.”⁹ and because, at the time of writing, the DRC was a member in good standing of the WARC, it may be useful to limit this investigation to the relevant critical literature published within the Reformed tradition.

As a member of the Reformed tradition, the DRC would have understood the importance of supporting their theological claims using the biblical text. The authors of

6. Cf. Johan M. Van der Merwe, “Ras, Volk en Nasie en Kerk en Samelewing as Beleidstukke Van die Ned Geref Kerk: ‘N Kerkhistoriese Studie. Unpublished DD.” (South Africa: University of Pretoria, 1990), 130–36.<http://upetd.up.ac.za/thesis/available/etd-11272012-153142/>.

7. Van der Merwe, “Ras, Volk en Nasie en Kerk en Samelewing as Beleidstukke Van die Ned Geref Kerk: ‘N Kerkhistoriese Studie. Unpublished DD,” 167.

8. Cf. Chapters 8 and 9 of de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid is a Heresy*.

9. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 5.

the *Report* would have been guided by the doctrine of *sola scriptura*,¹⁰ which was one of the founding doctrines and hermeneutical principles of the Reformed tradition. It was the doctrine of *sola scriptura* which required that the biblical texts inform every aspect of the work of the church. In the opening paragraphs of the *Report*, the authors affirmed the importance of the doctrine having claimed that “[i]n its consideration of relations between races and peoples, the Church of Jesus Christ must accept the Word of God as premise and norm.”¹¹ It follows, therefore, that the first chapter of the DRC’s *apologia* contain an examination and exposition of several scriptural passages offered in support of the idea of separate development.

The biblical texts and some caveats for their interpretation according to the *Report*

At the outset, the authors of the *Report* sought to provide the reader with basic interpretive principles by which to read the biblical texts. In an instance of sublime irony, the authors of the *Report* suggested that a serious warning

[...] must be issued against a marked tendency which has always existed, namely to link-up an understanding of the Bible with current tradition. The danger then exists of the Scriptures being interpreted according to what the ‘historical situation’ prescribes and therefore mostly on a selective basis.¹²

The irony is found in the criticism¹³ levelled at the *Report* for having tended toward the

10. In his recent book on John Calvin, de Gruchy recalls the reformers’ decisive shift from “the centrality of the Mass as spectacle evoking devotion to the centrality of the ‘preaching of the Word’ in the congregational liturgy. The Word of God revealed in Scripture alone was the fountain of truth containing the good news of salvation.” John W. de Gruchy, *John Calvin: Christian Humanist & Evangelical Reformer* (Wellington: Lux Verbi, 2009), Loc. 2291.

11. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 7.

12. *Ibid.*, 10.

13. Cf. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, John W., ed. “The Bible and Apartheid 2.” In *Apartheid is a Heresy*, Douglas Bax. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983; de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, John W., ed. “The Bible and Apartheid 1.” In *Apartheid is a Heresy*, Willem Vorster. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983.

very error it warns against. Willem Vorster, a DRC minister, theologian and then Director of the Institute for Theological Research at the University of South Africa, writing in 1982, suggested that it was difficult

[...] to understand the logic of the ‘hermeneutic approach’ of the report (par. 5) when it says: ‘A serious warning must be issued [...].’ It is exactly on this score that the report is self-contradictory. Clearly the ‘historical situation’ out of which the report grew is taken as a grid through which the Bible is read. It is this grid that provides the hermeneutical key for a selective reading of the Bible. There is no *objective* reading of the Bible. Many Christians would subscribe to this particular way of using the Bible but this does not make a selective use of the Bible valid.¹⁴

Hermeneutical principles

Under the rubric ‘Scriptural Data,’ the authors of the *Report* suggested that, in order to produce a normative reading of the biblical texts, they “must be interpreted in accordance with recognised, reformed [sic], scientific, hermeneutic principles in keeping with its actual intentions.”¹⁵ Unfortunately, the authors did not identify what constituted a recognised principle, suggesting that the interpretive method used may have been accepted by the authors as self-evident. Vorster suggested that “[i]t is unfortunate that this principle is not explained in the report. Terms like ‘Reformed’, scientific’, ‘hermeneutic principles’ can refer to many different things today, even in so-called Reformed circles.”¹⁶ The assumption was that there exists a self-evident, and therefore normative, reading of the biblical texts so that whenever the biblical narrative was invoked as a normative standard for race relations, believers in the ‘Scriptures’ would agree that

14. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid is a Heresy*, 97.

15. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 11.

16. John W. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, ed., “The Bible and Apartheid 1,” in *Apartheid is a Heresy*, Willem Vorster (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983), 100.

[...] scriptural data is used by the Church to determine its standpoint and attitude in respect of the problem of relations between races and peoples. In this respect we do not expect the Church to differ essentially from politicians, lawyers or sociologists who believe in the Scriptures, but its language and emphasis will nevertheless differ, i.e. in accordance with the nature and limits of its prophetic preaching.¹⁷

Nowhere in the *Report* do the authors explain their reasons for the assumption that the biblical texts contain normative principles for all aspects of life. Vorster noted that the “relevance of the Bible for matters of race relations in South Africa is taken for granted by the NGK [DRC]. [...] the basic assumption remains: the Bible has in principle something to say about race relations in a plural society.”¹⁸

Vorster’s comment recalled the caveat in the *Report* which warned that “the danger then exists of the Scriptures being interpreted according to what the ‘historical situation’ prescribes and therefore mostly on a selective basis.”¹⁹ This, argued Vorster, was precisely the problem with the hermeneutical principles of the *Report* itself - the ‘historical situation,’ rather than the relevant and current context, provided the interpretive key. The text was seen through the lens of an existing social order and political construct.

The Reign of God as a hermeneutical principle

It has been noted that the doctrine of *sola scriptura*²⁰ is one of the pillars of the Reformed tradition. The authors of the *Report* understood the necessity of providing biblical warrant for the DRC’s justification of apartheid. It has been argued that a funda-

17. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 11.

18. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid is a Heresy*, 95.

19. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 10.

20. Cf. note #10 on page 158.

mental error in the *Report* is its claim to have exegeted a model for social interaction from the biblical texts and that, if one was a believer in Jesus Christ, the meaning of the texts would be self-evident. However, the biblical texts “must be interpreted in accordance with recognised, reformed [sic], scientific, hermeneutic principles in keeping with its actual intentions.”²¹ The interpretation of the biblical texts, argued de Gruchy, could not be reduced to a science, just as theology itself could not be considered, in the strictest sense, a science. Theology, as a discipline, was done within the worshipping community of the church that engaged in the study and reflection upon the biblical texts, always in a particular context. De Gruchy noted that theology was historically and

[...] essentially, divine wisdom or insight, and, as such, a gift of the Holy Spirit. This is an important reminder that long before theology became a scientific discipline and therefore, as we shall see, a human construction based on reason and dialectic, theology was understood as a form of spirituality in and through which the living Word of God was known and communicated. This understanding of theology remains of fundamental importance today in ‘doing theology’, and nothing I shall say in what follows should detract from it.²²

De Gruchy saw a place for the science of interpretation but also acknowledged its limitations. One such limitation was expressed by Leander Keck who, until recently, taught at the Yale Divinity School. In an article cited by de Gruchy, Keck claimed that ‘valuable as the study of hermeneutics is in clarifying what has happened when a text has been interpreted, I cannot rid myself of the suspicion that better hermeneutics does not necessarily lead to better interpretation, but the reverse.’²³ De Gruchy affirmed Keck’s assertion that there appears to be a ‘self-evidentness’ about the biblical texts when one discovers that they have been placed firmly between the text and the real,

21. Ibid., 11.

22. John W. de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio, eds., “The Nature, Necessity and Task of Theology,” in *Doing Theology in Context: South African Perspectives*, John W. De Gruchy, Theology and Praxis, vol. 1 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books ; Cape Town: D. Philip, 1994), 5.

23. John W. de Gruchy, *Theology and Ministry in Context and Crisis: A South African Perspective*, 143.

lived experience, “neither of which can be surrendered but must be squared [...] or when he or she discerns a significant reality through the text.”²⁴ Both de Gruchy and Keck were concerned with the possibility of modern hermeneutical theory becoming an end in itself. De Gruchy offered the caveat suggesting that, “[r]ather than exposing the meaning of the text, allowing it to exercise its transformative power, it overlays it with impenetrable theory.”²⁵

The Reign of God as the ‘canon within the canon’

De Gruchy’s alternative to the exegetical uncertainties that arose from the *Report* was to provide a theological account of the Reformed tradition’s doctrine of *sola scriptura* in an effort to re-establish it as *the* hermeneutical principle. De Gruchy saw the Reformers’ insistence on the principle of a ‘canon within a canon’²⁶ as a remedy for the errors produced by an interpretation of the biblical texts that relied, not on the texts themselves, but on an external principle foreign to the biblical context. In a discussion on the idea of Christ as the liberating Word, an idea fundamental to most liberation theologies, de Gruchy noted that the doctrine of *sola scriptura* “[...] does not only mean that the Bible alone is our authority. It also means that the Bible ultimately supplies us with the clue to its own interpretation.”²⁷ He also suggested that a Reformed key to understanding the biblical texts was the doctrine of justification by faith but noted that Calvin himself recognised the fact that the doctrine was inadequate to the task of providing a ‘canon within the canon’. “The main reason for this inadequacy,” wrote de

24. Ibid., 144.

25. Ibid.

26. The idea of a canon within the canon suggests that some parts of the biblical texts, more than others, become important for the individual reader. Luther suggested that Jesus Christ was the canon within the canon and was the key to interpretation. Luther called for a ‘simple reading’ of the texts with Christ’s proclamation, life and ministry being the measure of the texts value.

27. John W. de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate*, 83.

Gruchy, “is that it is primarily personal [it reflected the concerns of the reformer rather than the ‘Gospel’][...] Hence, for Calvin and the Reformed tradition the "canon within the canon" became the reign of God in Jesus Christ, and this meant that both the evangelical and the prophetic were crucial for understanding Scripture.²⁸

In Christ (as the canon within the canon), the Word²⁹ of prophetic justice and liberating grace were united. In the Reformed tradition, Christ becomes the one liberating Word; he is the liberating ‘canon within the canon’. The biblical texts bear witness to him and he is the one through whom we read them. This idea of Christ as the ‘canon within the canon’ was essential to de Gruchy’s contextual theology. The Reign of God as the interpretive key provided for the liberation of the biblical texts from the confines of personal meaning.

Eisegesis verses exegesis in the *Report*

Racial separation had become normative in South Africa. It can be argued that the civil religion in South Africa, with the aid of stringent apartheid policies, assumed a prescriptive reading of the biblical texts and reflected the general sense that it was normal that there be no social interaction between colour groups. This concern was expressed by the Rev. Dr. Douglas Bax, minister of Rondebosch United Church in Cape Town, and former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa. Bax is a noted Calvin scholar, and the author of *A Different Gospel: A Critique of the Theology behind Apartheid* (1979). Bax, who seems to have raised the question as to whether these texts cited in the *Report* were interpreted eisegetically or exigetically, wrote in 1983 that

28. Ibid.

29. “Like Luther before him, however, Barth clearly saw that we cannot simply equate Scripture and the Word of God, that Scripture bears witness to the Word, and that therefore in a profound sense Scripture not only interprets itself but also liberates itself.” John W. de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate*, 82.

[t]his is *eisegesis* [...] *not exegesis*: it reads into the text what is just not there. Contrary to the Report's argument about what it sees as 'implicit' in this text, calling mankind to increase and fill the earth by no means necessarily presupposed ethnic diversity, let alone keeping the *ethnoi* (peoples or *volke*) and their different cultures apart.³⁰

Bax suggested further that the *Report* argued from what *was* to what *ought to be* and that this argument was "based on natural revelation and natural law rather than Scripture. As members of a Reformed Church, therefore, these scholars needed to find some sort of Scriptural support for it."³¹

Bax appears to have echoed Karl Barth's concerns regarding the place of the biblical texts in doing theology. He suggested that the starting point for all theological investigation is not what *we* say about God but what *God* says about God. "Our starting point" says Barth, "in that first part of the doctrine of God was neither an axiom of reason nor a datum of experience."³² Barth made the case by reflecting upon the nature of God and the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. Barth suggested that we have access to what God says about Godself, God's self-testimony, only through the Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture is understandable because it has been given a form which is human in kind. The caveat is that we are not to confuse the text of Holy Scripture with the actual nature of God. The knowledge and reality of God are understood by us only through Scripture, which is a record of the human witness of the prophets and apostles, those who were witnesses to the divine revelatory act. This we understand, suggested Barth, is our only means of determining what it is that God says about Godself. To consider God having revealed Godself in the social and political structures of the apartheid construct would

30. John W. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, ed., "The Bible and Apartheid 2," in *Apartheid is a Heresy*, Douglas Bax (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983), 114.

31. *Ibid.*, 116.

32. Karl Barth, editors G. W. Bromiley, and T. F. Torrance. Part 1 / by Karl Barth. [Die Kirchliche Dogmatik. English], *Church Dogmatics. Vol. 2, The Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh Clark, 1957), 3.

be considered anathema in the Reformed tradition. This fact alone would have been reason enough to challenge the hermeneutical method employed in the *Report*.

The unity of the people of God

The *Report* contains several references to the theme of the unity of God's people. Historically, the political rhetoric of the Nationalist Party, especially just prior to the 1948 election, was rife with expressions of the unity of the Afrikaner *volk* whose self-understanding, it was suggested,³³ cast them as God's chosen people, like the Israel of the Hebrew Scriptures, called to form a nation separate and dominant in South Africa. The theme of unity occurs often in the DRC's official reports³⁴ on human relations and, in each case, the reports emphasise the unity of all people which is achieved through an abstract, spiritual and eternal purpose rather than in and through a substantial, sacramental and social unity of the people of God. In several instances,³⁵ the authors of the *Report* defer to the idea of a spiritual communion which defined the limits of the cultural groups' relationship with each other. It also favoured the personal relationship with God while down-playing any corporate relationship implied in the biblical texts. In the language of the *Report*, the unity of the people referred to a 'vertical' relationship rather than a 'horizontal' one.

In an article written in 1993, during the time of South Africa's transition to democratic rule, de Gruchy had the opportunity to reflect on the advent of a 'prophetic theology' that seems to have been a reaction to the inadequacies of a 'state theology' that legitimised the apartheid policies of the Nationalist regime. The 'prophetic theology,' as developed and advocated by de Gruchy, avoided the errors of the 'church theology' that arose out of the liberal English-speaking churches that stood against apartheid, more in

33. Cf. André Du Toit, "No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology".

34. See especially pages 37, 39, 48, 49, 51, 52, 82, 84 ...

35. See pages 77, 84 & 85.

principle than in practice. De Gruchy described this prophetic theology, exemplified by the Kairos Document of 1986, as “a theology of critical engagement which recognises the ‘signs of the times’ and the demand which this makes upon the life and witness of the Church.”³⁶ One of the theological issues that faced de Gruchy was the persistence of a fundamentalist interpretation of the biblical texts which led to an understanding of the Reign of God in terms of a vertical relationship with God. Therefore, the unity of the people of God, according to the authors of the *Report*, may best be understood as a spiritual mandate rather than a worldly one. However, Reformed theology sees the relationship horizontally, the Christian church being for others or it is nothing, at all.

In section thirty of the *Report*, the authors described the ideal church of Christ in terms of a ‘*pluriformity related to the diversity of peoples*.’³⁷ This meant the ideal was realised in the diversity of churches within the DRC; its s-only congregations and its black and coloured daughter churches, revealing God’s plan for humanity to live separately, drawn together in sub-groups by a common language and culture. As I hope to show in Chapter Six, this was considered by de Gruchy to have been a distortion of Kuyper’s notion of pluriformity which Kuyper himself described as a “fleeting and temporary state of affairs for humanity”.³⁸ The *Report* posited the idea that God’s plan for the races was revealed in the lived social and political reality of the South African people which, it was argued, was supported by select texts from the book of Genesis, Chapters 10 and 11. More will be said on the interpretation of Genesis in a subsequent section of this chapter.

36. John W. De Gruchy, “Theology in Transition in South Africa,” *Modern Theology* 9 No 2 Ap 1993 9, no. 2 (April 1993): 205.

37. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 47.

38. Cf. Weisse and Anthonissen, “Belhar and the White Dutch Reformed Church: CHANGES IN THE DRC 1974 - 1990,” 126.

One of the issues at stake was the matter of closed or racially unique churches. It has been stated by the DRC that it never intended that their churches be closed to other cultural groups or individuals and, that as long as their presence did not disturb the peace, they would be welcome. The authors of the *Report* seem to have drawn a theological parallel between the installation and development of the native homelands (nations) and the churches by suggesting that, just as one nation must not prevent membership in another nation, so too must the church receive members from other nations unless

[...] such a transfer of membership should disturb the order and peace of both church and people [...] to such an extent that the kingdom of God is no longer served, that the fellowship of believers and their ability to serve should suffer and the nation or nations concerned should find it difficult or impossible to give full expression to their national identity — in these circumstances a temporary arrangement against the transfer of membership cannot be condemned since it would enhance the well-being of the churches concerned.³⁹

It may appear to the reader of the various DRC reports on race relations that there was a dialectical struggle between the earlier interpretation of the biblical texts concerning unity and the subsequent interpretations. The more recent treatments of the biblical texts seem to have relegated the lived unity of God's people to a fixed point in history with the texts having little or no relevance to South Africans since the 'historical' events of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11. It was only in 1966⁴⁰ that biblical texts were employed in any significant way to support the idea of God having 'commanded' the people to become diverse and live separately. As history shows, the idea of separate development preceded the 1966 report and had been a constituent part of South African

39. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 47.

40. A report adopted by its General Synod in 1966. This was published under the title *Studie Stukke oor Rasse Aangeleenthede*, and in English as *Human Relations in South Africa*.

society since the arrival of Europeans in the 17th century. This suggests, as Bax has noted, that the idea was based on natural revelation and natural law rather than Scripture.⁴¹ Botman acknowledged the claim that the *Report* was “[...] an attempt by the church to listen anew to ‘what the Word of God had to say on race relations in a plural society’. Theologically, however, their understanding was determined more by the additional source of a natural theology.”⁴²

The *Report* makes use of the terms ‘national identity’, ‘nation’, or ‘national membership’ to reference individual sub-groups within the existing multiplicity of ‘nations’ that constituted South Africa. The notion of many nations within a nation appears throughout the *Report* and the idea of separate development seems to have been based on, according to the authors of the *Report*, a normative reading of the biblical text.⁴³ This theme of separate development is present throughout the document⁴⁴ and is the social condition to which the authors’ theological proofs and biblical warrants were directed. The DRC, having claimed its subscription to the Reformed tradition, seemed to have understood the exigencies of the tradition and produced a contextual account of several biblical texts which they considered essential to the *apologia*.

A biblical warrant for separate development: Genesis 10 and the Table of Nations

Two particular biblical texts were used to make the argument that God’s ultimate plan for humanity was for it to live in discrete nations within the primary unity given by

41. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, “The Bible and Apartheid 1,” 116.

42. Weisse and Anthonissen, “Belhar and the White Dutch Reformed Church: CHANGES IN THE DRC 1974 - 1990,” 124.

43. “Hereby we profess the conviction that the Holy Scriptures contains the principles normative for all spheres of life, therefore also for relations between peoples and races, and that the Church of Jesus Christ must unconditionally and obediently bow to these principles.” Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 7.

44. Cf. sections 8-27 especially.

Noah and his progeny. Genesis 10, known as the Table of Nations and Genesis 11, commonly called the Tower of Babel narrative, along with some subsidiary texts, provided the biblical warrant for the separate development of the ‘nations’ in South Africa.

According to those authors of the *Report* who were responsible for the exegesis of Genesis 10, the unity of all people, while an important theme in Genesis, is overshadowed by what they understood as God’s command to multiply and fill the earth. Bax summarised one of the more difficult sections of the *Report* and offered his reading by suggesting that because

[...] the Report identifies the diversity of *volk* and races so much with diversity of culture, it calls this command ‘the cultural injunction’. That this was God’s command, given to man at the time of his creation and repeated to Noah and his sons (Gen. 9:1,7), shows how fundamentally it is meant to condition mankind’s existence. Thus ‘ethnic diversity is in its very origin in accordance with the will of God for this dispensation,’ and must be ‘incorporated in our ideas on relations between races and peoples.’⁴⁵

The argument is that it was implicit in creation that humanity was to live in diversity according to their cultural, linguistic and, colour groups which were referred to as ‘nations’ in both the political rhetoric of the National Party and the *Report*.⁴⁶

The unity of the people of God, as descendants of Noah, and the equality of the races was affirmed but the *Report* maintained that the table of nations (Genesis 10:1-32) was not descriptive of the unity of humanity rather it was a description of God’s desire

45. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, “The Bible and Apartheid 2,” 114.

46. The HR Report is helpful in distinguishing between the terms ‘race’ and ‘peoples’ where the ‘difference between the characteristics of races and peoples is chiefly that in the former case the characteristics are hereditary and cannot be adopted or discarded at will by the individual, while in the latter case the characteristics can be relinquished at will and the individual can therefore exchange one national community for another’. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*

for many nations, implicit in creation, which foreshadowed the events at the tower of Babel. The DRC maintained that the ‘Scriptures’

[...] teach and uphold the essential unity of mankind and the primordial relatedness and fundamental equality of all peoples. The ‘genealogical table of peoples’ of Gen. 10 uniquely emphasises the unity of mankind. It was not the intention to present the genealogical register of a certain nation; the intention was to indicate how all the nations are descended from Noah.⁴⁷

The authors seem to have argued that Genesis 10 presupposed the confusion of tongues emphasised in Genesis 11 and that a unity of language was the principle reason for God having scattered the nations. The *Report*’s exegetes argued further that the antediluvian people of God so valued the unity of language and community that their desire to be together prevented them from being scattered around the earth.⁴⁸ In their desire for absolute unity, the people of God were living contrary to God’s will.

This unique interpretation of the Genesis narratives was one of the major building blocks of Afrikaner civil religion and gave some of the impetus for the claims made the Nationalist as they sought to promote separate development during the 1970s and 1980s. For the authors of the *Report*, the tower of Babel became both a symbol of liberation and of obedience to God. The implication was that, because the DRC considered this to be a normative reading of the biblical texts, the faithful Afrikaners would see its truth and feel ecclesiastically and theologically supported in their quest for absolute separation of the races.

47. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 13.

48. Cf. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 15.

Genesis 11: the tower of Babel

The *Report*'s section on Scripture maintained that the story of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), along with the Pentecost narrative (Acts 2:1-12), both of which concern language and the scattering of the nations, provided proof of God's will that humanity should live and develop separately. This is what the document referred to as the 'cultural injunction' in which the 'Scriptures'

[...] also teach and uphold the ethnic diversity of the human race. Ethnic diversity does not have a polyphylogenetic origin. Whether or not the process started with Babel, or whether it was already implicit in the fact of Creation and the cultural injunction (Genesis 1 : 28), makes no essential difference to the conclusion that ethnic diversity is in its very origin in accordance with the will of God for this dispensation.⁴⁹

Further, the unity engendered by the experience of a common progenitor, namely Noah, "[...] does not, in fact, obliterate language, cultural and racial differences, but transcends them - and that is why the policy of separate development retains its relational validity, even in this new situation."⁵⁰

The authors of the *Report* insisted that the unity of humanity was the result of sin⁵¹ and that the building of the tower and the unified effort it required of the builders was a sinful act - an act contrary to God's will for humanity as exemplified in Creation. The *Report* further suggested that God created many nations and that to unify these nations would go against the created order. The unity of the people of God was of a first-order whereas the diversity of the people of God, having been scattered about the face of the

49. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 14.

50. *Ibid.*, 19.

51. Cf. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 21.

earth, was a second-order dispensation. “Ethnic diversity,” the authors conclude, “is in its very origins in accordance with the will of God for this dispensation.”⁵² The authors of the *Report* presupposed that “diversity was implicit in the fact of Creation (Acts 17:26).”⁵³ For example, referring once again to the Babel narrative in Genesis 11, they argued that “[...] up to that moment in time the “unity” had been artificial and clearly in conflict with the intention that mankind should be spread across the face of the earth.”⁵⁴ Moreover,

[...] the question arises as to whether Genesis 11:1-9 can serve as a Scriptural basis for a policy of autogenous development? Our answer is a qualified yes. The diversity of races and peoples to which the confusion of tongues contributed is an aspect of reality which God obviously intended for this dispensation. To deny this fact is to side with the tower builders. Therefore a policy which in broad terms (as distinct from its concrete implementation) bears this reality in mind, is Biblically realistic in the good sense of the word. We must not forget that Gen. 11 also tells us of man's attempt to establish a (forced) unity of the human race.⁵⁵

In summary, the *Report* supported the claim that God’s creation plan was for the many races or nations to be spread upon the face of the earth and that they were meant to live and thrive separately.

A critical examination of the *Report*’s interpretation of Genesis 10 and 11

It has been suggested that one of the major weaknesses of this section of the *Report* was the authors’ attempt to read back into the text the lived reality of the South African people. It may be helpful to consider three points relevant to this discussion that have been highlighted in an article by Douglas Bax. He contended that the *Report*

52. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 14.

53. *Ibid.*, 17.

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*, 18.

really attempts to argue from what *is* to what *ought to be*, i.e. from the observed fact of diverse *volk* and races in mankind to the conclusion that God must will that we maintain this diversity by keeping the races separate. This argument, however, is based on natural revelation and natural law rather than Scripture. As members of a Reformed Church, therefore, these scholars needed to find some sort of Scriptural support for it.⁵⁶

Coincidentally, argued Bax, the authors failed to make their point as they merely cited the several biblical texts in which a reference was made to the ‘many nations’. Bax argued that the authors were “driven to read the ‘ought’ back into God’s ‘command’ when He created man. As it is not there in any explicit way, however, they had somehow to deduce that it is ‘implicit.’”⁵⁷

In his second point, Bax suggested that the hermeneutical method employed in the Report was, at best, confusing. Bax cited the *Report*’s 1966 predecessor showing how the authors tried to argue that “from the beginning ‘diversity and pluriformity were present within [...] mankind’ as well as among the plants and animals.” The argument implied that diversity was part of God’s plan for humanity as “[...] two human sexes were created and ‘the woman differed physically from the man.’”⁵⁸ The 1974 *Report* seems to have abandoned this parallel structure which would have been an argument more in favour of unity rather than diversity, as it can be argued that the differences between man and woman provide for intimate unity. However, a particular hermeneutical ‘holdover’ seems to have been present from the 1966 document where, Bax suggested, the *Report* “seems to have retained from this abandoned argument the idea that this differentiation must be somehow ‘implicit’ in the story of the creation of mankind.”⁵⁹ It is the several instances of an ‘implicit’ understanding brought to the bib-

56. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, “The Bible and Apartheid 2,” 116.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*, 116–17.

59. *Ibid.*, 117.

lical texts that caused concern among the *Report*'s critics including de Gruchy, Vorster and Bax.

The third point raised by Bax treated the argument in favour of diversity in which Genesis 11, the story of the tower of Babel, is cited. The authors provided, as proof of God's having chosen diversity over unity for the nations, a non-traditional interpretation of the Tower narrative which became a sort of biblical benchmark for a theology of separate development. Bax noted that "[n]ot only in the 1975 [sic] *Report* but throughout the whole tradition of this NGK [DRC] theology of race relations this has been in effect the cardinal text."⁶⁰ Bax concluded his critique of the *Report*'s section on the scriptural data employed in support separate development with six, more traditional and then-current, interpretive cruxes. It may be helpful to explore more fully Bax's six points, which may be considered representative of a more traditional, certainly less controversial, Reformed interpretation of Genesis 11.

A Reformed interpretation of Genesis 11 in six points

First, Bax makes the point that, contrary to the exegesis provided in the *Report*, the biblical text as narrative described humanity in terms of an ideal, living as a unity, undivided and without conflict. It was not God's will that humanity live divided, separate and in conflict with God or with each other. The *Report* maintained that God was reasserting what God had originally willed for humanity in Genesis 1:28.⁶¹ Bax proposed a Reformed and more nuanced interpretation suggesting that the builders of the Tower in the Babel narrative "have misused this unity and their cultural prowess, and have sought their security in their own group identity, culture and power of achievement, instead of in God alone."⁶² Therefore, it can be understood that Genesis 1:28 and

60. Ibid.

61. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Genesis 1:28 NRSV)

Genesis 11 are not continuous but discontinuous. The former details God creating order out of chaos while the latter recounts God's defeating humanity's hubris by scattering them and foiling their plan to gain independence from God.

Second, the *Report* locates humanity's sin in Genesis 11:1 rather than in 11:4. Bax noted that "the Report quite misses the point that the story itself presupposes the linguistic unity of men as a prior, given cultural fact (11:1)."⁶³ Further, the state of linguistic unity was something all humanity enjoyed *before* they built the tower. It was not something they achieved by their own doing but something they *lost* after their defiant demonstration of hubris. In this light it appears that the Babel narrative does precisely the opposite of what the authors of the *Report* were trying to assert. Rather than God rewarding humanity for its efforts to secure a unique, cultural identity from the threat of dissolution or assimilation, God punished the tower builders. Bax cited the example of the Afrikaner people who sought security in a linguistically and culturally homogenous 'nation' in his argument for why

the cultural *angst* that typically has motivated nationalism in modern history parallels the *angst* of the tower-builders so much; why Dr Malan's attempt to cast the history of the Afrikaner *volk* as 'the highest work of art of the Architect of the centuries' so much parallels the tower-builders' ambition.⁶⁴

Third, the *Report's* assertion that the "differentiation of humanity into various language groups and 'nations' was extended further to give rise to race differences is not, in fact, mentioned in the Scriptures in so many words, but is nevertheless confirmed by the facts of history"⁶⁵ is problematic. By its own disclaimer, it assumes two things

62. Ibid., 120–21.

63. Ibid., 121.

64. Ibid.

65. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 16–17.

which, Bax argued, are fallacious. In the first place, the authors' claims derive from a particular and unique reading of Afrikaner history, not the biblical texts. In the second place, the identification of language with race is a logical leap that is very difficult to justify. As Bax rightly points-out, the terms 'language' and 'race' cannot simply be used interchangeably. Most reasonable scholars would agree that language is not determined by race. Race is a biological category, not a cultural or linguistic one. Furthermore, the so called 'facts of history,' argued Bax,

[...] certainly do not show that mankind has been or can be divided into separate national states that each comprise natural units made up of homogeneous linguistic or racial groups. This is an entirely fictitious idea invented by the Romantic movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it gives rise to the delusions of nationalism, racialism and tribalism.⁶⁶

At this juncture in the *Reports'* biblical textual proofs, it is apparent that the principle of *sola scriptura* had been abandoned in favour of a cultural interpretation of language development and race that was based on what appears to be a narrow reading of the history of the Afrikaner people. In a later section of the *Report*, the Genesis texts were used to argue against inter-racial marriage but no such application of the biblical texts was made regarding marriages between different language groups. Bax commented further by suggesting that it "would be hard to think of a more illogical perversion of the text of Scripture."⁶⁷

Fourth, the *Report* arguably confused providence and ethics. Bax suggested that if God reprimanded or punished humanity in the course of God's providential concern for the well-being of humanity, it does not necessarily follow that humanity would feel compelled to act as God has acted. For example, if Genesis 11 was a particular religious community's account of how God humbled humanity by confusing their common

66. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, "The Bible and Apartheid 2," 122.

67. *Ibid.*, 123.

speech, then it follows that “with particular regard to Gen. 11 it would oppose members of any one group learning the language of any other group, on the grounds that for them to do so would be to frustrate the alienation that God had willed in His providence.”⁶⁸

Bax was recalling the *Report's* interpretation of the Babel narrative to suggest that God alienated the Tower builders from each other by creating many languages thus forcing the unique linguistic groups to form separate ‘nations’ to thrive separately. This interpretation was both formative and foundational to the theology of apartheid. Also, in doing Reformed theological ethics, it is difficult to justify moving from a particular and highly contextualised ethical principle to an abstract and thus more generalised principle, despite our understanding of or agreement with the Kantian categorical imperative. In Bax’s words, “‘ought’ can never in principle be derived from ‘is’.”⁶⁹

Fifth, if the Babel narrative in Genesis 11 is read as the culmination of God’s continual response to humanity’s sinfulness, i.e. their dependence on *die eie* (one’s own) rather than on God, then Genesis 12:1-3, the brief pericope that directly follows the Babel narrative in Genesis 11, could be considered the beginning of salvation history. The call of Abram by God to leave *die eie*, suggested Bax, was a call to abandon the security of culture and kin and to depend solely on God. In keeping with established Reformed principles, Bax made his point by suggesting that God intervenes once again and says to Abram,

[...] leave all these things (all that the tower-builders counted on when they set out to make a name for themselves), and *I* will make your name great. Moreover in doing this Abram becomes the paradigm of all people who trust in God alone in their pilgrimage through the world and are saved by grace alone.⁷⁰

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

Sixth, in what may be considered a Reformed understanding of God's salvation plan for humanity, Bax suggested that there exists a preponderance of evidence in the biblical texts to show that God's response to sin was a plan for the unity of all people based on "the grace of God, for since mankind's separation into different nations such unity can no longer be based on man's cultural achievements and pride."⁷¹

The importance of the biblical texts as a source for doing theology in the Reformed tradition cannot be over-emphasised. However, as demonstrated by the discourse on the biblical foundations of apartheid, there appears to have been a wide range of possible interpretations of the key texts employed by the DRC in their support of the theology of apartheid. The DRC's hermeneutical approach provided one understanding of the Babel narrative, while Bax and others provided what may be considered a more representative interpretation of the text within the Reformed tradition. The interpretations of Genesis 11 provided by the *Report* and Douglas Bax are different enough to be considered as having stood in opposition to each other. This raised the question of what constituted an acceptable hermeneutical method that could facilitate a meaningful and accurate interpretation of the biblical texts.

De Gruchy and the possibility of a normative reading of the biblical texts

It appears that there were at least two false assumptions at play in the *Report's* discourse around the interpretation of the texts. The first assumption was that the meaning of the biblical text was obvious or self-evident and corresponded, to a large extent, with the lived reality of South African society. This assumption was present in the *Report* and was also found in the political rhetoric of the time. The second assumption is noted by de Gruchy in an article he wrote following the National Conference of Churches in South Africa held in Rustenburg, South Africa in 1990. He suggested that

71. Ibid., 124.

“[a] second false assumption is that we as Christians share a common vision of what God demands of us at this time; that we agree on the nature of Christian witness; and that we are willing in some way to share in the task required of us.”⁷²

It appears that the meaning of the biblical texts was neither self-evident or commonly agreed upon. Also, in reading the history and theology of the church struggle against apartheid, it appears that Christians in South Africa did not share a common understanding of God’s will for them. De Gruchy identified this conflict in the South African Christian church as, “theologically speaking, a hermeneutical struggle. A struggle about the meaning of the gospel within our particular historical context.”

But de Gruchy did suggest that there was a possibility for a normative reading of the biblical texts that was dependent on the willingness of theologians to acknowledge the fact that all theology is indeed, contextual. In 1985, he wrote that, if we remain aware that

[...] there is no pure theology unaffected by the pre-understanding of theologians and their place and role within their historical and social environment, we may be able to resist the temptation to absolutise uncritically any particular theology, and to welcome the enriching possibilities of theological morality. At the same time, if we acknowledged the normative witness to Jesus Christ in Scripture in the struggle to discern the truth and expose falsehood in our historical situation, then we have a common basis, upon which we can deal with the issues. The different ways in which theology sets about these tasks (that is, theological method and hermeneutics) is one reason for the plurality of theologies. At a more fundamental level it is part of the theological conflict with which we are concerned.⁷³

The theologian, suggested de Gruchy, is compelled by the complexity of the issues at hand to discern a context, a political agenda, a sociological influence or an anthropolog-

72. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Situation and Christian Witness in South Africa* (Rustenburg, South Africa: Rustenburg Conference; National Conference of Churches in South Africa, 1990), 9, [Http://www.aluka.org/action/showMetadata?doi=10.5555/AL.SFF.DOCUMENT.ydlwcc2142](http://www.aluka.org/action/showMetadata?doi=10.5555/AL.SFF.DOCUMENT.ydlwcc2142).

73. John W. & Charles Villa-Vicencio de Gruchy, *Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naudé*, 86–87.

ical starting point for theological enterprises; especially in times of conflict or crisis. He argued that theology can become an all-consuming concern during times of ideological conflict in which groups struggle to affirm and assert their interests as they wrestle for power and ultimately, their future.

For it is in such situations that ultimate concerns, demands, fears and expectations, are directly related to ultimate claims, norms and values. Theological conflict is nothing other than the clash between worldviews or ideologies and their related interests, but with reference to the transcendent or the knowledge of God's purpose. Theological conflict is, in fact, inevitable in those societies where the struggle for justice, power and reconciliation not only requires transcendent legitimation, but where the will of God also remains a matter of conviction, of life, death and hope. Hence the inevitable and inseparable relationship between faith, theology and politics.⁷⁴

We are reminded that it was important that the DRC provide transcendent legitimation for their support of apartheid. The occasion of the *Report* was to foster ecumenical ecclesiastical dialogue with a view to a broader and public acceptance of the DRC's theological support of apartheid. In this respect the DRC was less concerned with justice and reconciliation and more concerned with maintaining the *status quo* in favour of s-only power. In some sense, this was a matter of life or death for the minority because the ever-present threat of a black uprising and potential claim to power was very much part of the civil religion and collective social consciousness in Afrikaner South Africa. The Afrikaner rise to power was predicated on the idea that God had provided for the Afrikaners during their struggle for liberation from the social and economic yoke of the British imperialists. Their manifest destiny was realised in their coming to political dominance in 1948 and the establishment of official apartheid. The Afrikaner feared that what they were able to achieve, with God's help, in the face of English oppression, the black might also be able to achieve. Providing theological and biblical legitimation for

74. Ibid., 87–88.

apartheid policies would further entrench the idea of superiority in the minds of the oppressed black majority.

De Gruchy's experience of the ecumenical debate in South Africa led him to observe that the theological conflict was nothing more, but nothing less, than the encounter of world-views or ideologies. If he was correct then it may be implied that, should all the ideologies and world-views within the debate be cast to the margins of meaning, a single theological position or truth would rise to the surface. This is probably a gross over-simplification of de Gruchy's argument but the results of this process of marginalisation would produce a normative reading of 'Scripture'. De Gruchy pointed to a discussion of this very idea in the chapter written by Vorster which I quoted above. The implication in Vorster's chapter was that if we are able to identify and claim our individual world-views and ideologies, then we would find unity in our appreciation of the Gospel message. Denominational differences, translated from a European to a South African setting, while important, breakdown in the face of the struggle to establish Christ's sovereignty over all aspects of South African society - especially when confronted by the heresy of apartheid.

De Gruchy presented the possibility of what this meant for the South African churches. Issues that would have normally been considered non-theological needed to be understood as being equally confessional. Factors such as race, culture and ethnicity had as much to do with the Gospel as those that separated Catholics from Calvinists. The DRC had raised the matter of race and culture to the level of theological imperative and the die had been cast. That is why the 1982 meeting of the WARC in Ottawa was able to affix to South African apartheid, ostensibly a political movement, the label of heresy. Nothing in the apartheid debate was beyond the theological realm. The role of the churches in the struggle against apartheid had now been redefined by the context rather than by the confessions inherited from Europe. De Gruchy noted that

[i]n seeking to express the unity of the Church in South Africa it is therefore clearly inadequate to try and resolve the inherited confessional differences without at the same time, and even more urgently, attending to the contextual confessional issues. If the Churches seriously begin to confess Jesus Christ as Lord in South Africa in terms that relate to the critical issues of our society, that is, the real issues which divide them, they will begin to discover their unity in a new way.... There is a confessing movement in South Africa, and one which includes Christians from virtually all denominations who regard apartheid as a heresy and who strive for true justice and peace.⁷⁵

For De Gruchy, there was always the hope that the Gospel of Christ could transcend denominational lines and that if the churches confessed both their corporate sin and the head-ship of Christ for all Christians, then theological conflict would give way to the prophetic voice of the church that would condemn any oppression of God's people. A normative reading of the biblical texts, for de Gruchy, was possible but perhaps not easy to achieve.

The New Testament according to the *Report*

An examination of the section of the *Report* that dealt with selected passages from the New Testament revealed the same hermeneutical method used in the interpretation of the Genesis 10 and 11 texts. The New Testament texts were also interpreted in light of the themes of unity and diversity. The authors seem to have explored the New Testament data, focussing on passages that allegedly supported the idea that God's call for the unity God's people was a call to a spiritual unity that transcended worldly concerns. The authors suggested that "[t]he human race is bound together by a common descent [Noah], the fall of man, the universal offer of grace and the eschatological destination."⁷⁶ Once again, there was no mention of a material unity of God's people within South Africa. On the contrary, the authors seem to have argued that the New Tes-

75. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid is a Heresy*, 80.

76. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 30.

tament spoke of the unity of all people in Christ but in no way implied they should live and thrive together. The authors suggested that to

[...] read into these passages a mandate for social integration between peoples would be to abuse them. It is obviously the purpose of these verses to emphasise the all-prevailing importance of the new unity in Christ but not to deny the existence of individual and diverse communities.⁷⁷

Given the fact that South Africa was comprised of diverse ‘nations,’ and once again appearing to have argued from what *was* to what *ought to be*, the authors concluded that

[...] the New Testament allows for the possibility that a given country may decide to regulate its inter-people relationships on the basis of separate development - considering its own peculiar circumstances, with due respect for the basic norms which the Bible prescribes for the regulation of social relations and after careful consideration of all possible solutions offered.⁷⁸

The *Report* included several examples or proofs gleaned from the New Testament texts that were said to have supported the claim that God’s ultimate political plan for humanity was for distinct cultural, linguistic and colour groups to live separately.

Vorster summarised the textual debate concluding that

[i]t is clear that the report is based on the assumption that a selective use of Scripture can substantiate a particular political policy and in that way make the Bible relevant. The basic framework consists of a few selected proof texts. D. S. Bax is most probably correct in his assertion, ‘Although the report refers to a large number of texts (nearly 50), its case is really built on only a few texts. These are the same texts to which the NGK for years has traditionally appealed in support of apartheid: Gen. 1; Gen. 11; Dt. 32:6; Ac. 2: 5-13 and Ac. 17:26. All of them are basically misinterpreted.’

A brief summary

I have examined two Reformed interpretations of what has been considered the cornerstone text in the *Report*’s argument, namely Genesis 11. The *Report* maintained that God’s will for humanity was to live in groups based on a common culture, language and colour. Bax and others argued that the biblical texts described God’s will for

77. Ibid., 33.

78. Ibid., 32.

humanity in terms of unity in diversity. As for the *Report*, there was nothing significantly different in the way in which the Old and New Testament texts were interpreted.

The same hermeneutical method was used for each of the fifty passages cited and the same conclusions were reached by the authors for everyone of the texts provided in support of separate development. While the method of interpretation may have been consistent throughout the *Report*, the conclusions at which the authors arrived were seldom in agreement with the other biblical scholars consulted during the writing of this chapter. The theologians and biblical exegetes cited in the *Report* provided evidence to support the *Report's* claims but there were very few consulted. On the other hand, there were several authors who provided a generally consistent and homogenous alternative Reformed reading of the Genesis passages. The scope of this investigation was limited to sources within the Reformed tradition as the DRC had laid claim to its membership in the tradition with a further claim that it adhered to Reformed theological and exegetical principles. Based on the evidence it can be concluded that the biblical texts do not support separate development.

The *Report* and the sacraments

The Reformed tradition recognises two sacraments as having biblical warrant and they are baptism and the Lord's supper or communion. Baptism is mentioned only twice in the *Report*, and communion or the Lord's supper is never mentioned. This I consider to one of the major weaknesses of the document as the unwillingness of the DRC to sanction a shared communion (between blacks and s) was a source of great stress and division in the Reformed church in South Africa. Having avoided any discussion of the Lord's Supper in the *Report* could only have been interpreted as a desire for the *status quo*.

One striking example of how divided the DRC had become was provided by the 1982 debate and subsequent resolutions of the WARC resulting in the declaration that

apartheid was a heresy. The debate at the 1982 meeting in Ottawa⁷⁹ was sparked, in part, by a protest by members of the black contingent of the South African DRC's daughter church who argued that it would be disingenuous to partake of the Lord's Supper with their brothers and sisters of the South African DRC ('s only) when they were not permitted to do so in their home country. It is worth quoting the Declaration in its entirety:

Dear sisters and brothers,

There are some South Africans who have participated with pain up to this point in the service, and who now feel constrained not to take part in the Lord's supper, which is the essence of Christian fellowship (Mt 5.23-24). The reasons for this refusal are threefold.

1. In our country, by custom and by church decision which are defended theologically, black people are not permitted to partake of the Lord's supper in the NGK and the NHK.

2. The theological heresy which undergirds apartheid racism finds its origin in separate communion. Our refusal to participate is a choice for righteousness and a refusal to reinforce the Christian roots of our oppression. These churches, which are members of WARC, have consistently refused to have genuine reconciliation with us black Christians, through a confrontation with the evil of apartheid and by participating in the search for justice and peace and true humanity. To share communion with those who represent this disobedience to the gospel would mean eating and drinking judgement upon ourselves. 'For if he does not recognise the meaning of the Lord's body when he eats the bread and drinks from the cup, he brings judgement upon himself as he eats and drinks.' (1 Cor 11.29).

3. Our refusal to participate anticipates the day of our freedom when we shall all - black and - drink from one cup and eat from one loaf.⁸⁰

The 1974 *Report* predates the WARC meeting in Ottawa and we can see evidence of the DRC's thinking on shared communion. When communion was mentioned in the *Report* it referred to either the communion of saints, a term that refers to the corpus of believers (Christians) or 'spiritual communion', a term used to emphasise the spiritual unity of God's people as opposed to a material and substantial unity. According to the *Report*, unity was intended as an expression of a common belief or faith and never intended to

79. For a fuller discussion on this debate see Chapter Four, p.108ff.

80. Concerning their abstention from holy communion at the opening worship service, August 17 1982. World Alliance of Reformed Churches, "Proceedings of the 1982 General Council."

be an embodied, lived reality for the church. It may be said that the *Report* was consistent in its understanding of the unity of God's people as evidenced in the following paragraph in the section on Church and Missionary Work:

Spiritual communion is primarily the communion between God and the believing worshipper through the Word and Spirit of God. The spiritual fellowship of believers is based on and flows from this. But the manner in which God speaks to his children through his Word and Spirit will to a certain degree depend upon the national identity of the person or people concerned. Language and culture play a significant role in this communion. By the very nature of things, each ethnic group must practise its religion within the context of its own language and culture.⁸¹

The DRC would later recant and declare an 'open table', but during the period under investigation in this thesis, the practice of separate communion that began as a concession to the weaker members of the DRC in 1857, continued until the last breaths of official apartheid were heard.

A brief consideration of Bonino's theological hermeneutics

It appears that biblical hermeneutics, as influenced by South American liberation theologians and black theologians from South Africa, suggested a possible way out of an impasse. The impasse seems to have been created by two, very different 'western' Reformed interpretations of the biblical texts concerning the unity and diversity of humanity. We have seen how the DRC used Genesis 10 and 11 to argue in favour of the idea that God's will for humanity was for the various linguistic and cultural groups to live and thrive separately. That separate development came to mean the separation of peoples according to *race* seems to have been down-played by the authors of the *Report* and made incidental to the main thrust of the argument. The English-speaking community was not subjected to the apartheid laws that targeted the black, asian and coloured

81. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 85.

segments of the population. An alternative reading of the Genesis passages was provided by Douglas Bax which may be considered more representative of the Reformed tradition in South Africa. The hermeneutical method employed by the authors of the had been called into question by scholars like Vorster, Bax, de Gruchy and, it may be argued, indirectly by liberation theologians like Miguez Bonino. One of the questions before South African Reformed theologians was, “given that all were working within the Reformed tradition, could agreement on the meaning of these texts have been possible, given the widely varying assumptions, social and economic contexts?”

Bonino

This question gains importance as consideration is given to the theological exigencies of the Reformed tradition. One such demand, for those doing theology within a Reformed framework, is that theology is done using the biblical texts as both primary source and final authority. To attempt to answer this question it may be helpful to consider the work of Rebecca Chopp, an American scholar and educator who closely examined the hermeneutics of Argentinian liberation theologian José Miguez Bonino in her book on liberation and political theologies. The quote that follows contains what seems to be a concise description of Bonino’s major concerns when exegetical and theological work is done without regard for context, including class, culture, tradition and social function. Chopp addressed this concern and finds some precision in Bonino’s comments:

For Miguez Bonino there is no value-free statement in hermeneutics, no purely abstract or scientific proof of the correctness of one way of life. Rather, every interpretation involves, at least implicitly, some indication of how it is to be a human subject in the world—knowledge reflects and guides praxis, praxis constitutes and is formed by knowledge. The hermeneutics of theology are not abstract descriptions of situations; theology reflects on that in which it participates. Since theology elaborates, by its systematic content and its participation in history, a way of being in the world, it cannot abstract itself from the *polis*, the realm of human decision-making and community. Interpretation theory is, for Miguez

Bonino, a reflective theory, and thus interpreters must be conscious of their class, their culture, their tradition, and their functions in society.⁸²

A caveat rising out of Bonino's concerns is that a failure to acknowledge one's social and economic context may invalidate any attempt to abstract meaning, (of the biblical texts), gleaned from within that highly particularised context, to a much wider, perhaps even universal context. In some respects, this is what Bax warned against when he suggested that we cannot argue from what *was* to what *ought to be*. It is important to be aware of one's context but it is equally important that theology not be context-driven.

De Gruchy identified a concern regarding Bonino's use of Marxist analysis in his theological hermeneutics. De Gruchy suggested that the analysis would itself be bound by Marxist ideology, regardless of the care taken to avoid such errors in doing theology. Ideology is often understood in the pejorative sense of the term and "[t]he problem of ideology remains central to the discussion," argued de Gruchy. He suggested further that

Miguez Bonino, of course, does not regard Marxism in Latin America as this kind of ideology though he sees dangers that it could become precisely this. So perhaps what needs to be said is really re-iterating what he himself says, for our criticism is that when theology is used to support, justify, or becomes a function of the system, then it has surrendered its prophetic and critical function which is fundamental to its nature.⁸³

De Gruchy's argument was that the Christian faith supports its own world-view. If it were to align itself with Marxism, or any ideology, it would lose that which makes it distinctive and unique. De Gruchy maintained that "[...] the problem is a real one, if in principle one accepts that Christian faith has always related to the context in which it lives by using the thought-forms of that particular culture."⁸⁴

82. Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 84.

83. John W. de Gruchy, "Miguez Bonino on Latin American Liberation Theology," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 22, no. 1 (1978): 66.

84. *Ibid.*

Was it possible for the South African churches to avoid relating too closely to the apartheid context? Elsewhere it was noted that de Gruchy argued that the lack of a properly articulated biblical theology in the English-speaking churches allowed for an ecclesiastical inertia to build until the churches were unable to mount an adequate theological critique of apartheid theology.⁸⁵ De Gruchy also suggested that the theological stance taken by the DRC supported an overtly unjust political system that marginalised a segment of the population based on skin colour and could not be justified biblically or theologically. In an article written in 1983, just one year following the 1982 WARC decision to declare apartheid a heresy, de Gruchy argued strongly that

Christianity can no longer be used to justify unjust policies; apartheid is theologically untenable and therefore morally bankrupt. We must say so once and for all. This is not an academic issue, but one of great practical significance. It is fundamental to the struggle against apartheid because it destroys any claim that it has a Christian basis.⁸⁶

Could the hermeneutical impasse created by two, seemingly opposed, Reformed responses to apartheid, be overcome? This was essentially the question de Gruchy sought to answer when he returned to South Africa from his time at the Chicago Theological Seminary in 1964.

In an interview with then-doctoral student Rebecca Baer-Porteus and, as part of her doctoral dissertation on the theology of John de Gruchy, she recorded de Gruchy in a conversation about the lectures given in Chicago by Bonhoeffer's friend and biographer, Eberhard Bethge. De Gruchy was recorded as saying that "[...] in those lectures Bethge raised the question as to what Bonhoeffer might have said about the situation in

85. John W. de Gruchy, "English-Speaking South Africans and Civil Religion," 45–46.
86. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, "Towards a Confessing Church: The Implications of a Heresy," 85.

South Africa. So I said, I'm going to answer that question!"⁸⁷ During the course of his academic and pastoral careers, de Gruchy continued to refine his answer to the important questions raised by the theological debate concerning apartheid. Therefore, it may prove fruitful to examine his response to the seeming theological impasse created by two interpretations of the biblical texts which were further complicated by two competing understandings of Reformed ecclesiology.⁸⁸

It has been argued that it was, in part, the critical stance of some national and international church organisations as well as the criticism of theologians and clergy that compelled the DRC to publish an *apologia* in defence of its theological and ecclesiastical support of the government's apartheid policies. In the following chapter, it will be argued that the continuing pressure from theologians working within the SACC, the CI and various English-speaking churches, along with the critical stance of a few DRC theologians, compelled the DRC to withdraw its support of apartheid. I maintain that John de Gruchy made an invaluable contribution to the dismantling of apartheid theology and that he was a prophetic voice when others fell silent.

87. Baer-Porteous, "Seeking the Dawn: A Critical Reflection Upon and Response to the Theology of John de Gruchy," 6.

88. It has been argued that the *laissez-faire* attitude of the English-speaking Reformed churches and the DRC's theological support of apartheid were symptoms of an inadequate biblical theology. Cf. de Gruchy, John W. "The Relationship Between the State and Some Churches in South Africa, 1968–1975." *Journal of Church and State* 19, no. no. 3 (Fall 1977): 437–56; de Gruchy, John W. "Afrikaans and English Speaking Churches: Some Reflections." *Reformed World* 33, no. 1 (1974): 17–23; de Gruchy, John W. *The Church Struggle in South Africa*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.

Chapter Six: *Contra Apologia*: John de Gruchy's critique of the DRC's unique expression of Reformed theology

*The inevitability of a new reformation is open to question, what it might mean is debatable, but few church leaders or committed members would deny the urgent need for it.*¹

John W. de Gruchy

The situation thus far

It may prove useful to summarise what I have done thus far by recalling the statement made by Alan Boesak which appeared in several public contexts during the early 1980s. First, it is important to understand that rarely was a black voice heard over the din made by the dominant minority. Second, the argument was novel in its directness, suggesting that the DRC was responsible for the National Party's apartheid policies and, that the responsibility began long before the 1948 election. In the book *Apartheid is a Heresy*, Boesak, a DRC minister in the black daughter church, commented on a speech given by D.P. Botha, a minister in the 'mother' Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, in an address to the South African Council of Churches in 1980. He said that

Botha showed conclusively that the present policy of apartheid [1983] is essentially the missionary policy of the Dutch Reformed Churches and that these churches not only provided a theological justification for this policy, but also worked out, in considerable detail, the policy itself.²

This possibility has been described in Chapter Three of this thesis and, the connection Boesak made between apartheid and the DRC churches was a powerful indictment of not just the DRC, but of all the Reformed churches in South Africa, including the English-speaking churches that claimed no responsibility for official apartheid.

1. John W. de Gruchy, "Transcendence and the Ideological Captivity of the Church: Some South African Reflections on the Hartford Appeal for Theological Affirmation," 28.

2. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid is a Heresy*, 6.

Boesak's was also a strong voice coming from within the black church; a rare occurrence unless the clergy were willing to make it heard. Boesak comments further by saying that from 1932 onwards, these churches

[...] sent delegation upon delegation to the government to get proposals for racial legislation accepted. It is these Churches that worked hard to devise practical policies of apartheid that could be implemented by the government, while at the same time formulating a theological construction to justify the policy plans. It was these plans that the Churches finally presented to the National Party in 1947—which accepted them as a programme that became a winner at the polls in 1948.³

Boesak noted that, in a 1948 issue of the *Kerkbode*⁴, the proud assertion was made claiming that, '[a]s a Church, I have always worked purposefully for the separation of the races. In this regard apartheid can rightfully be called a Church policy.'⁵ Again, Boesak cites Botha who said,

The role of organizations like the FAK and the Broederbond fade into insignificance compared with the overwhelming role of the Church [the DRC] in preparing the Afrikaner to accept and vote for a socio-political programme that would revolutionize South African life.⁶

Boesak went on to suggest that the apartheid policy developed by the DRC had become a pseudo-Gospel which, in turn, became a key doctrine of the Afrikaner civil religion. Boesak's scathing criticism of the Reformed churches in South Africa was not necessarily shared by all the churches but there were reflections of it in many corners of the church. He noted that in 1983, the Reformed churches had not yet repented of their stance on apartheid and that despite

[...] all the open human suffering, the violence necessary to maintain the system, the damage done to the Church of Jesus Christ, apartheid still has their support. Our Reformed Churches are divided on the basis of race and colour, a situation

3. Ibid.

4. The official newspaper of the DRC.

5. Cf. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid is a Heresy*, 6.

6. de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid is a Heresy*, 6.

that is defended as a truthful expression of the will of God and a true interpretation of the Reformed understanding of the Church.⁷

It was precisely this interpretation that de Gruchy sought to correct, and it is this theological correction to which I now turn. Following is an attempt at discerning and, analysing de Gruchy's contribution to the restoration of a proper Reformed theology in South Africa.

The DRC recants

There seem to have been two currents of thought on the origins of Afrikanerdom and official apartheid. One current suggested that economic, social and, political factors contributed to the rise of the Afrikaner nation and its apartheid policies. Another current of thought accounted for the strong influence of the Afrikaner Reformed churches suggesting that the Christian church was both actively and, passively supportive of apartheid and its racist and oppressive laws. I have cited experts in both areas who supported either current. De Gruchy's theological method would bring the two currents together in dialogue with the intent of synthesising a more complete and complex truth. However, one thing remained certain; apartheid was supported by the Christian churches and, the Reformed tradition had been invoked to provide theological justification for its policies. I am suggesting that if apartheid was to be dismantled, it would have been necessary for the Christian church to have been involved at a very high level.

It has been argued that the acceptance of separate worship by the 1857 Synod was a watershed moment in the church's history. From 1857 to 1986, the DRC supported apartheid through its members' participation in the Nationalist's political agenda, their participation in oppressive political, social and, legal constructs, and through their passive stance regarding the economic policies that favoured the minority. The Afrika-

7. Ibid.

ner would eventually come to dominate South African politics and religious culture, creating the necessary climate for a flourishing civil religion that provided the moral rudder for the apartheid experiment.

The decision by the DRC to recant its earlier theological position regarding apartheid is of special interest. The committee tasked with the formulation of a response to the political and ecclesiastical changes taking place in South Africa reported to the DRC's 1986 General Synod. The *Report* contained an acknowledgement of the church's participation in apartheid and, apologised for any harm that was done. It also recognised the harmful effects the supportive role the church played in the political transformation of South Africa in the 1930s and 1940s. It may be helpful to recall that the DRC began publishing theological position papers on racial relations as early as 1960. After several iterations of its statement on racial relations, a definitive statement was published 1972, which I have referred to as the *Report*. The one-hundred-page *Report* detailed the church's unequivocal support for apartheid and, provided theological and biblical warrant for its stance.

A theological transformation

From the early 1960s to the late 1980s, the DRC underwent a theological transformation which compelled the church to rethink its position regarding apartheid. I have argued that the decision taken at the General Synod of 1857, in which the church decided to allow separate worship based on skin colour, created conditions favourable to growing the apartheid movement into full maturity. One hundred and, thirty years later, the DRC's new position was stated clearly in the document entitled *The story of the Dutch Reformed Church's journey with apartheid from 1960 - 1994: a testimony and, a confession*. It described how the DRC 'moved away from certain views' expressed in the *Report* of 1974:

Concerning apartheid, the following was resolved:

Following the reflection that has taken place through the years in church periodicals, conferences, committees and synods concerning the policy which has become known as apartheid, the conviction has gradually grown that a forced separation and division of peoples cannot be considered a Biblical imperative. The attempt to justify such an injunction as derived from the Bible must be recognised as an error and be rejected.

The Dutch Reformed Church is convinced that the application of apartheid as a political and social system by which human dignity is adversely affected, and whereby one particular group is detrimentally suppressed by another, cannot be accepted on Christian-ethical grounds because it contravenes the very essence of neighbourly love and righteousness and inevitably the human dignity of all involved.

The suffering of people for whom the church has concern must, however, not be attributed solely to the system of apartheid but to a variety of factors such as economic, social and political realities in which persons of different communities have not been accepted by one another. To the extent that the church and its members are involved in this, it confesses its participation with humility and sorrow.⁸

This statement may have appeared a less than enthusiastic recantation of the church's former supportive role of apartheid, but it did include a rejection of the biblical warrant for separate development. As mentioned previously, providing biblical warrant for any theological or doctrinal statement is one of the central tenets of the Reformed tradition. I suggest that the critical exegesis provided by de Gruchy, Vorster, and Bax revealed how the *Report's* authors' biblical hermeneutics lacked internal integrity, proper exegesis and had conformed itself theologically to the Afrikaner civil religion.

Also noteworthy is the church's acknowledgment of the impact the church periodicals, conferences, committees and synods had on the decision to recant. De Gruchy was one of the few English-speaking theologians who continued in dialogue with his colleagues in the DRC. He was part of many of the conferences where DRC clergy

8. General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, *The Story of the Dutch Reformed Church's Journey with Apartheid from 1960 - 1994: A Testimony and a Confession* (South Africa: Dutch Reformed Church, 1997), Sec. 4.17.1.

were speaking or debating, he contributed to periodicals in an attempt to keep the dialogue alive and his published articles on key events in the Christian church influenced both the English-speaking and the Afrikaans theologians of the day. Despite his efforts, the strained relationship between Afrikaner and English-speaker became all the more strained as the DRC became more and more isolated from its sister churches.⁹

Why did the DRC recant its position regarding apartheid? An account has previously been provided of the DRC's status in the world ecclesiastical community. Its status was discussed in terms of the critique levelled at it for its support of apartheid. This critique came from several sources, both within the theological debate in South Africa as well as from outside ecclesiastical sources.¹⁰

A critical stance toward the DRC

One such source was the Christian Institute (CI). It was formed in 1963 with the intention of creating a published literary forum for theologians and clergy, within which they could reflect on the Christian churches' response to apartheid. The South African Council of Churches (SACC), the successor to the Christian Council of Churches, entered the debate shortly after it was constituted when it published '*A Message to the People of South Africa*', in which the Christian church was criticised for its apathy toward those suffering under the banner of separate development. The World Council of Churches (WCC) established its Programme to Combat Racism in 1969 with South Africa in mind. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) described apartheid in theological terms when it declared it to be a heresy. In 1972, a literary forum for theologians, lay, and, clergy was established with the intent of opening-up the theologi-

9. We recall the tenuous relationship between the DRC and the SACC, the defrocking of Beyers Naudé, the establishment of the CI, the WCC's Programme to Combat Racism; all of these contributed to an atmosphere of distrust and animosity.

10. The critical arguments can be found in the published minutes and articles from the several organisations that rose in prominence during the church struggle against apartheid. For example; the CI, SACC, WARC, WCC and the JTSA.

cal debate for all in southern Africa. The *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* promised to publish articles relevant for South Africa which would eventually include black theologians writing on black theology. This was innovative and somewhat risky, as virtually all the theological publications in South Africa, at that time, were dominated by the DRC and published only in Afrikaans. Philippe Denis, in his brief account of the history of the *JTSA*, noted that de Gruchy became acutely

[...] aware of how difficult it was for South African theologians to publish academic work in English. There was no space for them. In English-speaking universities the faculties of divinity — as theology was called at the time — mostly employed expatriates who published their work in their home countries. The work of these theologians had little relationship to the South African context.¹¹

Having a theological journal published in English made a substantial difference in the debate. The DRC had come under tremendous pressure from many sources, but I maintain that it was the ecclesiastical pressure which was most keenly felt. The politicians could claim that the nation was sovereign and that no other nation could impinge on that sovereignty. However, no such claim of sovereignty could be made by the DRC. The sovereignty of the Christian church depended on Christ, not the nation.

Doing theology in South Africa

Much of the published material produced by Christian theologians and critics of apartheid focussed their attention on apartheid as a political system informed by the Christian church and they called for political change in a rigid system. At times the theological arguments resembled a theology based on the South American ecclesiastical liberation movement with its emphasis on social justice and equity. De Gruchy, on the other hand, turned his attention to the consideration of apartheid as an expression of the Christian church within the Reformed tradition. This meant doing theology by confront-

11. Philippe Denis, "The Journal of Theology for Southern Africa and the Emergence of Contextual Theology in South Africa," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 146 (Jl 2013): 8–9.

ing the theology of apartheid using a shared appreciation for the sovereignty of God, a language steeped in the Reformed tradition, and a common doctrinal lexicon. Rather than confronting a recalcitrant government that recognised the authority of God only when it served its purposes, de Gruchy addressed the Reformed theology that had been invoked in support of apartheid.

De Gruchy expressed his concern over the lack of means and opportunity for doing theology in a South African context. This lack seems to have led him to seek-out members of the Christian community who were engaged in the ‘doing’ of theology, especially those who could articulate theology in a politically and socially unstable context. His education had provided the basics he needed to satisfy his vocation as a congregational pastor, but little more. His vocation as a South African in the all-but-silent voice of the English-speaking churches prompted him to consider a more flexible and resilient theological method; it seemed to be an appropriate way of moving from the ‘study’ of, to the ‘doing’ of theology. He recalled that, early in his career, theology

[...] was essential in order to minister to the needs of the congregation, but a second hand theology was not of great use. When I simply regurgitated "textbook" answers I immediately became aware that I was sounding and acting like one of Job's ‘comforters’ — good, sound, traditional teaching, but bad theology. Somehow I had to learn how to move from the study of theology to doing it within the context in which I found myself.¹²

Once again we recall the turning-point when he decided to answer Bethge's question, ‘What would Bonhoeffer say about apartheid South Africa?’ At the time it appeared that very few, if any theologians in South Africa were able to guide him in his search for a suitable theology for the South African situation. In an article written in 1977, de Gruchy described his anxiety over the fact that the English-speaking churches

12. de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, “The Nature, Necessity and Task of Theology,” 2.

had yet to duplicate what the DRC had done in terms of producing a viable civil religion.

English-speaking South Africa has produced a number of notable poets and writers, historians and social scientists, but few philosophers of history and no theologians of great merit who have reflected at length and in depth on the South African situation.¹³

The church was called to enter the drama of life. De Gruchy's complaint was that no theologian in South Africa had been able to do what Jonathan Edwards or Reinhold Niebuhr had done in America. No one had been able to relate the Christian faith to the individual's experience of the ironies of history so that the Christian faith became inextricably linked to one's historical situation. This, according to de Gruchy, is the biblical pattern. The impotence of the English-speaking churches against the Afrikaner 'civil religion' was largely due to the fact that the churches had been living off a borrowed theology or theologies. The churches had tended to blow with the wind. But this was not about the subtleties of theological argument or lack thereof; this article discussed the English-speaking churches' failure to have any real impact on Afrikaner nationalism. The English-speaking churches had not been able to address the challenges of an Afrikaner 'civil religion', or black theology which had arisen ironically out of the English-speaking churches. In short, the theology of the English-speaking churches was inadequate to the task of dealing with the social crisis that raged in South Africa. De Gruchy suggested that it was "a 'theology' which allows individualism, apathy, cynicism, secularism and self-centeredness, as distinct from a truly evangelical, Pietism to run rife."¹⁴

13. John W. de Gruchy, "English-Speaking South Africans and Civil Religion," 49.

14. *Ibid.*, 50–51.

In a variety of theologies, what would a first-hand theology look like?

I have remarked on de Gruchy's concern over the lack of an adequate English-speaking theology. A variety of theologies existed in the English-speaking and black communities. Some theologians had tried to maintain the theological traditions of their forbearers who arrived from European countries as settlers in South Africa. Others embraced the theology of liberation which had begun to flourish in the 1950s in South America, led by people like Juan Luis Segundo of Uruguay, Gustavo Gutiérrez of Peru, and Leonardo Boff of Brazil. Liberation theology had been somewhat effective in re-imagining God for some South Africans, but it tended to miss the mark when employed as a means of critiquing the claims made by the DRC. The black majority was expressing its theology in terms of the communities' struggle but the black voice was still silenced by those in power. Theologian Itumeleng Mosala provided a Marxist reading of the biblical texts arguing that some of the black theologians working in South Africa continued to be enslaved to the biblical hermeneutical assumptions of the very theology they criticized and sought to replace.¹⁵ For de Gruchy, all seemed to be lacking.

In his own Reformed tradition, de Gruchy experienced a 'second hand theology,' inherited from European sources that was far removed from his own circumstances and even less relevant for the oppressed, black majority. In order to 'do theology in context,' de Gruchy needed to develop a means of addressing the immediate concerns of both whites and blacks who had become trapped in a theology of apartheid that favoured the *status quo*, and that did not conceive God as loving both blacks and whites equally.

In part, the theological means was developed in an attempt to answer the question, 'What should a Reformed theology look like in South Africa?' As mentioned earlier, de

15. Cf. Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1989), especially chapter one.

Gruchy's contact with Bonhoeffer's theology began with his reading of *Discipleship*¹⁶ but his interest grew with his introduction to Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer's friend and biographer. Bethge asked the question, 'What would Bonhoeffer have said about the situation in South Africa?' and de Gruchy sought to answer that question, in context.¹⁷ Also mentioned earlier was the suggestion that de Gruchy's theology, while grounded in the Reformed theology of Europe, became a Reformed theology that was relevant and prophetic in the context of apartheid South Africa. This is not to suggest that his theology was so contextualised that it was not useful in other contexts. De Gruchy has lectured widely in Asia and Europe as well as in North America and has contributed to each of these contexts.

A Reformed contextual response to apartheid theology

In the following section I will attempt to provide an account of de Gruchy's comprehensive Reformed response to apartheid theology. I suggest that his response was unique in the ecclesiastical debate around separate development and that he provided a 'first hand' theology which empowered the church struggle against apartheid. First, it was unique in that it addressed the claims of the DRC from within its own tradition and second, it provided an alternative reading of Kuyper and Calvin and third, it challenged the DRC's claim that it provided a normative reading of the biblical texts.

16. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, with some revision by Irmgard Booth. Translated from the German *Nachfolge* first published 1937 by Chr. Kaiser Verlag Munchen by R.H. Fuller (New York: Macmillan, 1959).

17. It may be worthwhile noting that de Gruchy conceived doing theology contextually very early in his career. His doctoral thesis gives indication that he was thinking his theology contextually as he addressed the question of the role of the church in society. While de Gruchy was thinking more about the theological context within which Barth and Bonhoeffer were working, it was not long after writing his dissertation that he would use the term 'contextual' to describe the manner in which he understood God, both from within his tradition and within his social context. The first published instance of the term contextual I found is in his article: de Gruchy, John W. "Reflections on Dialogue Between the Afrikaans and English-Speaking Churches." *N.G.K. Teologiese Tydskrif* 15 (March 1974): 120–28.

I suggest that through his continuing dialogue with the DRC and the other Reformed churches in South Africa, de Gruchy had developed a first-hand, contextual Reformed theology which helped the member churches of the SACC reject the Reformed theology of the DRC and to declare apartheid a heresy. Also, through the media of *Pro Veritate*, the *JTSA* as well as through academic lectureships, publications, his pastoral work in the United Congregationalist Church, and university professorships, de Gruchy was able to disseminate his unique theological understanding of the situation in South Africa. This appeared to have engendered support for the struggle against apartheid in some European and American churches. De Gruchy's work both supported and helped shape the response from the WARC as well as the WCC. It appears that de Gruchy's theological approach was played an important role in the DRC's eventual withdrawal of support for apartheid. It can also be argued that, without the DRC's support, political apartheid could not have been sustained.

What was the task of theology in South Africa?

De Gruchy described the task of theology in terms of the knowledge of God understood as a conversation between what one brings of the Christian faith to a particular context and how that faith is shaped. In an essay written in honour of Beyers Naudé, he acknowledged that

[...] theology invariably means the knowledge of God in relation to a particular tradition within a given historical context, and is always both a way of relating Christian faith to social reality and a product of that relationship. [...] For this reason the fundamental task of theology is to reflect on how God's self-disclosure has been discerned in those situations to which Scripture bears witness in relation to the issues facing us in our present context and our response to them.¹⁸

18. John W. & Charles Villa-Vicencio de Gruchy, *Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naudé*, 86.

Theology as the knowledge of God

It may be useful to enlarge on this rather dense but rich quote from de Gruchy as it highlights three key elements of his contextual theology. First, de Gruchy describes theology as the knowledge of God as it relates to a historically contextual tradition. The doctrine of the knowledge of God is considered to be an important and unique contribution to the Reformation. De Gruchy notes that

Calvin insisted that knowledge of God was dependent not on any assumptions and experience we might bring to Scripture, but upon the Word alone addressing us, awakening and confirming faith in us, and enabling us to discern the will of God for us. Hence we have the hermeneutical principle that the Bible interprets itself when believers earnestly search the Scriptures, open to the guidance of the Spirit.¹⁹

Calvin understood this to mean that the "inner testimony of the Spirit" was the means by which we can know God. Reading the biblical texts ecclesially and collectively provides for the Word's self-authentication in our experience and obedience. The knowledge of God, therefore, is not personal but corporate. God's will for the community is discerned through the collective reading and interpretation of the biblical texts and then acted-upon by the community of faith in which it is read. This understanding of the way in which we come to know God, argues de Gruchy, means we must affirm

[...] with the Bible and liberation theology, that 'knowing the truth' requires 'doing it.' [...] For Calvin as for Augustine before him and Gutiérrez after him, what the Scots Confession calls 'the rule of love' is the ultimate principle of biblical interpretation because it is the ultimate expression of our faith response to God's liberating grace.²⁰

Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge of God suggests also that we cannot have true knowledge of God without knowing ourselves. De Gruchy notes that

19. John W. de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate*, 52.

20. *Ibid.*, 90.

[f]rom the first edition of his Institutes in 1536 until the last edition thirty-three years later, Calvin begins by saying that “nearly the whole of sacred doctrine” (1536) or “nearly all the wisdom we possess” (1559) “consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”²¹

This is consistent with the idea of the corporate nature of the knowledge of God. The knowledge of God is therefore relational. De Gruchy affirmed Calvin’s understanding of the *imago Dei* as a key building block of his ethics. He suggested that this was the “[...] doctrine which brings together not only our knowledge of God and of ourselves but also our relationship to others. We are to relate to other people on the basis of our all having been made in the ‘image of God.’”²²

Despite some arguments to the contrary, Calvin insisted that humanity was made in God’s image and that this image endured, even after the fall. Human life retains its dignity because it continues to mirror God’s image. De Gruchy quotes A.L. Farris’ article entitled ‘*The Antecedents of a Theology of Liberation in the Calvinistic Heritage*’ in which he says, “[o]ur neighbor bears the image of God; to use him, abuse him, or misuse him is to do violence to the person of God who images himself in every human soul, the Fall notwithstanding.”²³

Theology as a way of relating faith to a particular reality

Second, theology is a way of relating faith to a particular reality. This second proposition follows the first in its insistence that faith is experienced, not as an absolute condition, but as a temporary and tenuous reality grounded in the lived experience of a community of faith. De Gruchy’s contextual theology, while not strictly a liberation theology, shares many of its core principles. His theology is, in some respects, an attempt to transport the theological enterprise of the Reformation into the South African

21. Ibid., 92.

22. Ibid., 135.

23. Ibid.

context. In an article published in 1975, he conveys to the reader his sense of the urgent need for ecclesiastical reform. Short of calling for a *status confessionis*, he suggested that “[t]he inevitability of a new reformation is open to question, what it might mean is debatable, but few church leaders or committed members would deny the urgent need for it.²⁴ After all, the Reformed tradition was essentially a liberation movement in which the early Reformers sought to liberate theology from its limited role of supporting ecclesiastical infrastructure.

Rebecca Chopp’s expertise may be helpful in describing de Gruchy’s proposition which states that ‘theology is a way of relating faith to a particular reality’. She described this idea in terms of how Latin American liberation theology is located in a particular reality. De Gruchy relied upon the idea, at times, to situate his own contextual theology. He also agreed with liberation theology’s insistence that we understand the theological task corporately rather than individually.

For Chopp, liberation theology rises out of the corporate church experience but methodologically, it comes second to the experience of faith working itself out in community. She notes that in liberation theology, “[...] faith is experienced and understood as a praxis; theology is, quite simply stated, reflection on this praxis.”²⁵ Chopp seems to have echoed the same point de Gruchy made eight years earlier in an article in which he contrasted his South African contextual theology with Latin American liberation theology, exemplified by theologians like Miguez Bonino. He wrote that “[t]heology, for Miguez Bonino, arises out of reflection on the praxis of the Church in an historical situation from a biblical perspective. This is the origin of the Latin American theology of

24. John W. de Gruchy, “Transcendence and the Ideological Captivity of the Church: Some South African Reflections on the Hartford Appeal for Theological Affirmation,” 28.

25. Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies*, 26.

liberation.”²⁶ Chopp suggested that, for Bonino, “[...] there is no possibility of invoking or availing oneself of a norm outside of praxis itself. ... Theology must be constantly self-critical, acknowledging its own participation in history and attempting to position itself in its own social location.”²⁷ Theology, notes de Gruchy, is praxiological in that it is ‘always both a way of relating Christian faith to social reality and a product of that relationship’.

De Gruchy’s rejection of liberal theology

John F. Kennedy’s unequivocal statement concerning the relationship between church and state, while certainly not typical of American presidents, exemplified the liberal tradition’s insistence on a limited public role for the church in the matter of American politics.²⁸ In contrast, D. F. Malan’s bold statement regarding God’s providence placed church and state in a divinely ordained relationship forged in the churches of the DRC.²⁹ Both the theology of liberation and de Gruchy’s contextual theology reject liberal theology’s building block which affirms the separation of church and state as a liberating, but ideal, first principle.³⁰ The problem for de Gruchy was that

26. John W. de Gruchy, “Revolutionary Theology Comes of Age,” 63.

27. Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies*, 26.

28. Kennedy’s campaign speech in 1960 included these words: “I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute; where no Catholic prelate would tell the President -- should he be Catholic -- how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote” Kennedy, “Address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association.”

29. François Malan, President of South Africa in 1948, was adamant about the God’s role in the government of the people of South Africa. He is quoted as saying, “[o]ur history is the greatest masterpiece of the centuries. We hold this nationhood as our due for it was given to us by the Architect of the universe. Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*, 1.

30. Jerry Dawson notes that Schleiermacher, often referred to as the ‘father of liberal theology,’ was often politically involved in the affairs of his native Prussia which “... often causes one to overlook the fact that he was in 1818, as he had been for many years, one of the strongest and most outspoken critics of the relationship of the Prussian government to the Lutheran and Reformed Church in Prussia. Careful analysis of his

liberal theology divided the world in two: a world of economics and politics and a private world where religion lives.

One of the consequences for the church was the loss of its prophetic and critical voice. The liberal tradition relegated the work of the church to that of saving souls and little else. Another consequence for the church was the emphasis on the individual and individualism. Liberation theologians rejected this emphasis insisting on the corporate nature of God's revelation to humanity. One of the fundamental principles of liberation theology is that the poor are the teachers; not as individuals, but as a collective. While liberal theology may support the notion of the poor individual desiring to have what the rich have, liberation theology argues in favour of an equal distribution of material wealth rather than suggesting ways to increase the opportunities for the poor to become rich. This notion of the poor as 'wealthy people in waiting' was shared by the authors' of the *Report* and by the minority in general.

The fundamental task of theology is to reflect on how God's self-disclosure has been discerned in those situations to which Scripture bears witness in relation to the issues facing us in our present context.

Third, de Gruchy proposed that theology is a way of relating God's self-revelation, as found in the biblical narrative, to our own context with a view to formulating an appropriate theological response to our own situation. This is what the Reformers tried to do when they reacted to the weaknesses of the church and its inability to interpret the Gospel in context. De Gruchy recalled the vision the early Reformers had for the church and he saw a parallel between the Reformation of the early 1500s and the inadequacies of the English-speaking Christian churches, particularly in their

sermons, pamphlets, letters, and books reveals the fact that he was a vigorous critic of a close relationship between church and state...." Jerry F. Dawson, "Friedrich Schleiermacher and the Separation of Church and State," review of, *Journal of Church and State* 7, no. 2 (1965): 215.

inability to address the needs of real people looking for real security in their faith. The Scholastic theologians and, the scholars of the high Middle Ages seemed to have been of little use in the average churchgoers' struggle to find meaning and fulfilment as part of their faith journey, and it would be a short step to take to arrive at the conclusion that the South African Christian church had fallen victim to the temptations of Scholasticism.

The Reformation was, in part, a theological movement away from the prescriptive methods of the church. The Reformers were interested in a church that could respond to its members who were struggling to understand how and when God was present in their lives. In a review of an article by Serene Jones, president of Union Theological Seminary, de Gruchy commented on her observations regarding Calvin's skill as a rhetorician, noting that,

[f]or Calvin, of course, Scripture as the witness to God's revelation was the fount of such wisdom. So theology had to do with interpreting that Word for the sake of the community of faith for which he was responsible. It was precisely in pursuing this task that Calvin made use of his training and skills as a rhetorician. [...] Calvin's aim was rather to persuade, convince, empower, and confront his hearers with the truth of the gospel as he understood it in relation to their respective needs and positions regarding the reformation of the faith and the church.³¹

The biblical texts were to be interpreted in community and for the sake of the community, not simply for the sake of maintaining an ecclesial structure that may or may not be providing for the spiritual needs of the whole community.

De Gruchy's Response to the issues facing South Africans: toward a Reformed contextual theology

I am arguing that de Gruchy's method of 'doing theology' in context provided a theological platform on which the case against apartheid theology was made. I am also

31. John W. de Gruchy, Calvin and the rhetoric of piety, *Modern Theology* 13, no. 2 (April 1997): 272.

suggesting that de Gruchy recognised the need to address the concerns raised by apartheid theology in the language of the Reformed tradition. A Reformed critique of, and alternative to, apartheid theology was called for if the church struggle was going to be in any way effective. Any confrontation with apartheid theology needed to be done being fully aware of the theological nuances of the Reformed tradition.

An effective critique of the contextual theology of apartheid would need to do more than merely suggest an alternative contextual theology to replace it. De Gruchy thought it necessary to distinguish between what was truly reflective of an essential Reformed theology, and what elements of apartheid theology had been shaped by the social, political, and economic context. This would require a considered Reformed critique of the DRC's appropriation of Abraham Kuyper's stance on the church and state, a reiteration of John Calvin's ecclesiology with regards to the those who govern unjustly, and the timely necessity of Christian civil disobedience.

Finally, de Gruchy also realised that an alternative to apartheid theology would need to be developed within South Africa, by South Africans, for all South Africans. This would surely need to include black theology and its critique of the existing power structures that empowered only the s. Also, a contextual theology developed, partly in opposition to apartheid, would need to be tested in a post-apartheid context. A question I will attempt to answer in the conclusion of the thesis rises out of this discussion: 'Can de Gruchy's contextual theological method be ported to another context?'

Speaking the language of the Reformed tradition

One of the unique features of de Gruchy's critical approach to apartheid theology was his ability to speak directly to the DRC's claim that its theological justification of apartheid was developed within a Reformed framework based on Calvin's sixteenth-century reforms. De Gruchy's having enlisted Calvin's reforms, Barth's biblical hermeneutics and his critique of liberal theology, as well as Bonhoeffer's Reign of God theol-

ogy, was predicated on a desire to understand apartheid theology; its origins, its maintenance in the face of regional and international criticism. It also provided an opportunity to engage its proponents in dialogue with a view to bringing the churches together to find a remedy for apartheid.

He was critical of the *laissez-faire* attitude of the Reformed English-speaking churches that had created an atmosphere of benign acceptance of apartheid. As most of the clergy in the English-speaking churches were , a benign attitude served them well as it maintained the *status quo*. It appears that the only reason to challenge the DRC's support of apartheid was to liberate the blacks from the oppression they experienced, even in their own churches. Few besides de Gruchy understood that, by empowering the black population, the population would experience liberation as both blacks and whites suffered from the division caused by apartheid. This would have been especially important to those who worshipped in the English-speaking churches in which blacks were a majority, but whose membership afforded them no voice other than through their minister. If clergy and theologians did not speak on behalf of the oppressed, who would?

What was Reflective of an essential Reformed theology and what elements of apartheid theology had been ultimately shaped by the social, political and economic context?

In the following section I will seek to analyse the theology that sought to justify apartheid, and de Gruchy's method of liberating what he argued was a misappropriated Reformed theology. He suggested that this theology was more reflective of the social and cultural context of South Africa than it was the result of a deliberate and conscientious reflection on the biblical texts of the Christian church. It was also a destructive, rather than constructive, approach to ecumenical discussions. He lamented a missed opportunity for the Christian churches in South Africa to enter into dialogue asking the question:

Would the church not have been more faithful and thus eventually more relevant if it had attempted to provide a bridge between people rather than serve as an instrument whereby social and racial differences were legitimized? However understandable from a cultural and evangelistic perspective, it was an example of social pressure and pragmatism, custom and culture, rather than theology and scripture, determining the life of the church.³²

To situate this part of the discussion it might be prudent to remember that it was, if not Calvin himself, then most certainly the DRC's pseudo-Calvinism that was held responsible for apartheid. Bishop Trevor Huddleston, in a much publicised statement, said what was on the minds of many of the leaders of the English-speaking churches just ten years after the National Party was elected to govern:

The truth is that the Calvinistic doctrines upon which the faith of the Afrikaner is nourished contain within themselves—like all heresies and deviations from catholic truth—exaggerations so distorting and powerful that it is very hard indeed to recognise the Christian faith they are supposed to enshrine. Here, in this fantastic notion of the immutability of race, is present in a different form the predestination idea: the concept of an elect people of God, characteristic above all of John Calvin.³³

Huddleston's popular perception of nineteenth-century South African Calvinism has been sufficiently challenged by historians, sociologists and theologians³⁴ and it has not survived their scrutiny. However, Huddleston's searing comments serve to illustrate the depth to which the Reformed witness had plunged in the years following the institution of official apartheid.

It was partly this atmosphere of anger and distrust that compelled de Gruchy to make every effort to recover the Reformed tradition in South Africa. For those outside the tradition who had little experience of the internal struggles of the South African Reformed witness, the subtleties and nuances of this internal strife would have been

32. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 9.

33. Trevor Huddleston, Bp., *Naught for Your Comfort* (London: Collins, 1957), 50.

34. See chapter three of this thesis.

nearly invisible or meaningless. Huddleston’s comments served to illustrate the fact. He, like most, was unaware of the fundamental difference between what the DRC espoused theologically and what de Gruchy was eventually able to recover. The English-speaking churches, the Reformed churches included, were mostly silent on the matter of apartheid and when they did speak it was to claim that the DRC was wrong without providing a properly argued theological alternative. De Gruchy has remarked on several occasions how it was possible that the theologians were simply not equipped to refute apartheid, at least not theologically.

Part of de Gruchy’s effort to recover the Reformed tradition included a critique of the DRC’s use of the pseudo-Calvinist political theories of Abraham Kuyper. He commented on the importance of Kuyper to South African politics having suggested that “[...] from about 1870 the impact of the resurgence of hyper-Calvinism in Holland was felt in South Africa. It is this tradition, as represented by Abraham Kuyper in particular, which has had a profound influence on the political development of South Africa and the Calvinist involvement in it.”³⁵

The importance of Abraham Kuyper

It has already been established that the DRC, along with the National Party, adapted Kuyper’s theories to help justify apartheid both politically and theologically.³⁶ Reading de Gruchy’s published literature on Kuyper’s theology may provide a helpful and contrasting account of Kuyper’s influence in the politics of apartheid. The *Report*’s account of Kuyper was cast in the language of separate development to which Kuyper’s

35. John W. de Gruchy, “Bonhoeffer, Calvinism and Christian Civil Disobedience in South Africa,” 248–49.

36. Cf. John W. de Gruchy, “Bonhoeffer, Calvinism and Christian Civil Disobedience in South Africa”; André Du Toit, “No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology”; Irving Hexham, “Christian Politics According to Abraham Kuyper,” *Crux* 19, no. 1 (1983): 2–7; George Harinck, “Abraham Kuyper, South Africa, and Apartheid,” *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 23, no. 2 (2002): 184–87.

theology and political theories had been adapted. Kuyper's theories had become entrenched in the consciousness of the Afrikaner people and were integrated into the civil religion of the time and therefore not easily discerned, unless one knew what to look for. It was also de Gruchy's contention that "[...] while Kuyper's theology has profoundly influenced Dutch Reformed thinking and action in South Africa in the direction of apartheid and Separate Development, it has also been gravely distorted in the process."³⁷ It is this distortion that de Gruchy sought to correct.

Kuyper's influence in South Africa

Kuyper's theology figured prominently in the theological support given by the DRC and the *Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika*,³⁸ especially during the formative decades of the rise of Afrikaner consciousness culminating in the 1948 general election. The Afrikaner Reformed churches appropriated Kuyper largely through the intellectual work of H.G. Stoker, a Christian philosopher and a contemporary of de Gruchy's. Stoker retired from teaching at Potchefstroom University three years before de Gruchy took-up his full-time teaching duties at the University of Cape Town, and de Gruchy acknowledges Stoker's contribution to the DRC's theology of separate development:

The key interpreter of Kuyper along these lines in South Africa was the philosopher H. G. Stoker for whom, says Moodie 'the People (volk) was a separate sphere with its own structure and purpose, grounded in the ordinances of God's creation.'³⁹

37. John W. de Gruchy, "Bonhoeffer, Calvinism and Christian Civil Disobedience in South Africa," 249.

38. The *Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika* is a member of the Reformed group of churches in South Africa and is theologically and politically very similar to the Dutch Reformed church in South Africa although more conservative.

39. John W. de Gruchy, "Bonhoeffer, Calvinism and Christian Civil Disobedience in South Africa," 257.

The question of Kuyper's influence is posed most clearly in the debate around the theological warrant for an Afrikaner nation, allegedly called into being by God for the purposes of fulfilling the manifest destiny of the Afrikaner people. De Gruchy raised the question himself having suggested that the DRC was not theologically faithful to Kuyper's ideas. He argued that it was evident that the DRC had been influenced by 'a great deal more than the authentic teaching of John Calvin' and that it

[...] was also profoundly influenced by the neo-Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper.... Kuyper's idea of separate spheres of sovereignty embedded in creation corresponded well with the Lutheran doctrine of the 'orders of creation' as expounded by German missionary science and embodied in NGK policy. Together they have had considerable influence on South African social history. Indeed, it helps explain why at a later date the NGK could give its support to the Nationalist policy of separate development as being in accord with the will of God. It was this theological position that provided the religious ground for the policy. But it was a position somewhat removed from the theology propounded by the reformer of Geneva.⁴⁰

However, Kuyper's influence would not have been felt in South Africa before his mature political thought had worked its way into the Dutch political landscape. For example, the decision taken at the 1857 Synod of the DRC allowing for separate, ethnically-based worship, was made without Kuyper's theology having exerted any influence. He would have been just twenty at the time. Nonetheless, it can be argued that the decision to allow ethnically-based congregations to form in 1881 was bolstered by the growing influence of Kuyper's neo-Calvinism. This new iteration of Calvin by Kuyper, subsequently re-interpreted by Stoker and the DRC, provided for the notion of God-ordained, separate and unique 'nations' all seeking to flourish, however differently, in the light of the Gospel.

40. John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 9–10.

Kuyper's influence was more keenly felt in the second and third decade of the twentieth century when Afrikaner nationalism was beginning to peak in potency through the efforts of the National Party's leaders and social architects. Durand noted that,

[h]istorically speaking, Kuyperian theology was introduced to the South African scene in the second and especially in the third decade of the twentieth century when Afrikanerdom was in a sense looking for a theology that was not only Reformed and orthodox but also able to accommodate a fast-growing nationalism characterised by an aversion to English domination and a fear of eventual black domination. Kuyperian theology seemed to fit or was *made* to fit this need.⁴¹

The impact of Kuyper's political theology would be felt moving forward toward the election of 1948.

Kuyper in South Africa

Kuyper's political theory is of special interest to us as the National Party gave credit, although indirectly, to Kuyper for its political platform and its policies concerning separate development. Kuyper's articulation of a model for social and political interaction was especially important as I considered the role played by the DRC in the propagation of support for apartheid. The relationship between Kuyper and South Africa was tentative but at the height of his political career and power, he was known to have used the example of the Afrikaner Boers' resistance to British hegemony to encourage the people of the Netherlands during a time of rising German power in the east and the established world power of Britain in the west. George Harinck, a historian working in the area of Protestant church history noted that, for Kuyper,

[...] the Boers functioned as an anchor of hope to the Dutch: in the Boer opposition to the British in Africa the Dutch recognized their will to survive in Europe. Kuyper was at the head of this nationwide pro-Boer movement. Petitions were offered to the British government, and streets and squares were named after famous Boer generals. But sympathy for the Boers vanished as suddenly as it had

41. John W. & Charles Villa-Vicencio de Gruchy, ed., "Afrikaner Piety and Dissent," in *Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naudé*, Jaap Durand (Cape Town: D. Philip ; Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 40.

risen, When the Boers lost the war in 1902 the Dutch forgot about them, Kuyper included.⁴²

Kuyper was supportive of Boer efforts prior to the Second British-Boer War as he saw in the Dutch Afrikaner the possibility of a future nation built on Calvinist principles. Kuyper, although quite influential in the Netherlands, was perhaps more so in South Africa⁴³, at least in terms of political theory.⁴⁴ Kuyper's neo-Calvinism, interpreted through the lens of an Afrikaner manifest destiny, provided the point of departure for the new Afrikaner struggle against the encroachment of British imperialism, communism, humanism, liberalism and, of course, the Indigenous blacks. "But the end product," noted de Gruchy, "was an Afrikaner civil religion which has too often been mistaken for Calvinism"⁴⁵ and which provided justification for Afrikanerdom's right to survive as a nation called into being by God.

Sphere sovereignty

Kuyper's Christian political theory was based primarily on the idea of sphere sovereignty, in which the rights and responsibilities of the various sectors of society and their institutions were entrenched by divine mandate. He identified three foundational realms of sovereignty, or spheres, and, like Calvin before him, argued that God has dominion over all aspects of the world. From this principle of divine sovereignty he deduced three necessary spheres. They are briefly described below with a view toward providing insight into how Kuyperian theory provided a political theology for the

42. Harinck, "Abraham Kuyper, South Africa, and Apartheid," 185.

43. François Malan, the leader of the National Party when it came to power in 1948 and Prime Minister from 1948 to 1954, studied in the Netherlands and it was there that he came in contact with Kuyper's neo-Calvinist political theories. With Malan's help, the National Party incorporated a version of Kuyper's neo-Calvinism into the national narrative which, in turn, became part of the Afrikaner civil religion during the apartheid period.

44. Cf. Harinck, "Abraham Kuyper, South Africa, and Apartheid".

45. John W. de Gruchy, "Bonhoeffer, Calvinism and Christian Civil Disobedience in South Africa," 256.

National Party's apartheid policies. It will also show where de Gruchy was able to identify Kuyper's influence that had become entrenched and all but invisible in the civil religion. In much the same way, apartheid theology was difficult to identify and refute because it had become part of the Afrikaner consciousness and accepted as truth. Any critique of the civil religion was tantamount to a criticism of the Afrikaner people themselves. De Gruchy had set himself the task of offering a corrective for the Afrikaner 'faith' and recovering the Reformed theology on which it was ostensibly based. The pseudo-Kuyperianism of apartheid theology needed to be addressed from a Reformed point of view, and with a more than passing acquaintance of Calvin if any progress was to be made against apartheid theology.

The sphere of the state

As part of his sphere theology Kuyper suggested that the State was a necessary political entity because postlapsarian humanity was incapable of living in unity as they had before they were banished from the garden of Eden. Now living in a state of sin and unable to withstand evil, the nation had become essential because it replaced the prelapsarian family that provided unity for humanity. Irving Hexham, a Canadian church historian who wrote his doctoral thesis on Afrikaner Calvinism, has suggested that both Calvin and Kuyper maintained that "[s]in has, in the realm of politics, broken down the direct government of God, and therefore the exercise of authority, for the purpose of government has subsequently been invested in men, as a mechanical remedy."⁴⁶ De Gruchy agreed noting that for Kuyper, "the State is God's remedy for human disorder which has resulted from the Fall. Through his 'common grace' God exercises his authority for justice and order directly through the State, that is, through the government

46. Hexham, "Christian Politics According to Abraham Kuyper," 4.

elected for this purpose.”⁴⁷ The State and its politics were a result of sin and would not exist had humanity been able to reject evil. Kuyper asserted that

[...] all true conception of the nature of the State and of the assumption of authority by the magistrate, but on the other hand also of the right and duty of the people to defend liberty, depend on what Calvinism has here placed in the foreground, as the primordial truth, -- that *God has instituted the magistrates, by reason of sin.*⁴⁸

It appears that the authors of the DRC’s *Report* built their argument on the premise that God was concerned with individual rather than corporate sin and concluded, quite contrary to Kuyper and Calvin, that their State of South Africa, like ancient Israel, was called into being by God as a *reward* for the Afrikaner’s long-suffering. The Afrikaner state, rather than being the result of sin, was the result of God having recognized the suffering of God’s chosen people. However, Hexham noted that, according to Kuyper, humanity

[...] is organically related by blood so that one humanity exists throughout all time. But because of sin and the Fall, Man’s original unity has been fractured, and political life has become a necessity. Had there been no Fall, there would have been no need for the establishment of the structures of the State.⁴⁹

Because the authors of the *Report* appealed to Noah as the progenitor of humanity, and⁵⁰not Adam, there was no need to reconcile the fall narrative and its account of humanity’s loss of unity. Rather than understanding the State as being the result of God accommodating humanity’s sinfulness, it had become, for the architects of apartheid, humanity’s crowning achievement that flourished under the benevolent authority of

47. John W. de Gruchy, “Bonhoeffer, Calvinism and Christian Civil Disobedience in South Africa,” 251–52.

48. Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism: Being the Six “Stone” Lectures Given at Princeton Theological Seminary, U.S.A.*, with introductory chapter by Henry Beets (London Sovereign Grace Union [1932, 1899), Lec. 3, p.4.

49. Hexham, “Christian Politics According to Abraham Kuyper,” 4.

50. John W. de Gruchy, “Bonhoeffer, Calvinism and Christian Civil Disobedience in South Africa,” 251–52.

God. This case was an example of why de Gruchy saw the need to restate Kuyper's theories in the South African context.

The implications of this novel understanding of the State being divinely ordained as a reward for the Afrikaner's 'faithfulness' worked its way into the politics of the dominant National Party, the political arm of the Afrikaner and their church, the DRC.

The sphere of society

Unlike the sphere of government and politics, the social sphere, according to Kuyper, works as the antithesis of the state. It is not the product of sin rather it is the social expression of the blood relationships found in family. Unlike the state, which functions mechanically and exerts its authority 'over' people and tries to implicate itself in the social life of the people, society is organic and eschews state authority. De Gruchy noted that

[...] in order to maintain justice, the State must maintain the boundary-lines between the spheres and defend individuals and the weak against the power of others. It is precisely this antithesis between the State and Society which leads 'in Calvinism to the generation of constitutional law' and so guarantees civil liberty. Kuyper does not seek the abolition of social tension, but he uses it creatively to prevent the absolutism of any sphere.⁵¹

Within the sphere of society, Kuyper included the communal sphere which orders groupings of people in communal relationships. Hexham noted that Kuyper's communal sphere, like others included under the banner of the sphere of society, "has its own pattern of development and individual laws over which God reigns and the State has no power to alter."⁵² This articulation of Kuyper's theory was represented in the *Report* in section 49.2 which stated, in part, that state sponsored institutions, including the military, may be employed to stem the ubiquitous influence of sin. Mutual respect is key to the proper maintenance of the balance of power both within and between the various

51. *Ibid.*, 253.

52. Hexham, "Christian Politics According to Abraham Kuyper," 5.

independent spheres of life. This rule or governance model, tempered by the love and the desire for justice in every sphere, “[...] should be sufficient to preserve the State from revolutionary chaos and political absolutism and tyranny.”⁵³ Unlike Kuyper, the authors of the *Report* did not envision the State as the necessary consequence of humanity’s rejection of God’s direct government, nor did they imagine the lived reality of the unity of God’s people as a divine imperative. They suggested that the State was not to be ‘blamed’ for the abuses caused by social spheres; “[b]ecause the state alone does not regulate the internal activities of all institutions of society, it cannot be held solely responsible for all abuses resulting from a given political system.”⁵⁴

For Kuyper, it was important that the social spheres remain free from government intervention as they, of necessity, involved a special authority which became the highest authority in these individual spheres. The sovereignty of God was the highest authority in the individual social sphere “[...] in order that it may be sharply and decidedly expressed that these different developments of social life have nothing above themselves but God, and that the State cannot intrude here, and has nothing to command in their domain.”⁵⁵ This did not mean that the individual spheres existed without any accountability to the larger society. In Kuyper’s political theory, “each sphere has an obligation to render whatever dues necessary for the maintenance of the overall unity of society as protected by the State.”⁵⁶ In this the authors of the *Report* were aligned with

53. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 70.

54. Ibid.

55. Kuyper, *Calvinism: Being the Six “Stone” Lectures Given at Princeton Theological Seminary, U.S.A*, Lec. 3 p.16.

56. Hexham, “Christian Politics According to Abraham Kuyper,” 5.

Kuyper. It was how this understanding of Kuyper was implemented in the politics of the country that came under intense scrutiny and criticism by de Gruchy.

De Gruchy pointed to the fact that South African Kuyperian Calvinism was wedded to the German view of the State as a ‘benevolent’ organising political entity for its citizens, despite Kuyper’s antipathy toward such a view. De Gruchy suggested that

[...] this marriage was not performed by theologians but by the political philosophers and leaders of Afrikanerdom in the 1930’s. Dr Nico Diedrichs, one of the leading proponents of this view, and a later President of the Republic, declared in a speech of that period: ‘Only through his consecration to, his love for and his service to the nation can man come to the versatile and harmonious development of his human existence. Only in the nation as the most total, most inclusive human community can man realise himself to the full. The nation is the fulfillment of the individual life.’⁵⁷

For de Gruchy, the consequences were clear; service to God and service to the nation had become the same thing.

The sphere of the church

The *Report* stated that “the church is the sphere where salvation may be joyously celebrated, where God desires to be praised and glorified.”⁵⁸ The authors of the *Report* seem to have understood Kuyperian theory in light of a more pietist ecclesiology which emphasised an intimate, private, and personal relationship with God. The *Report* reveals no real sense of a corporate relationship shared in solidarity with others like that envisioned by both Kuyper and Calvin. The authors were also highly critical of the more aggressive tendencies of the newly formed SACC that was taking social and political positions the DRC and the National Party that were deemed something beyond the churches’ authority. The *Report* claimed that

57. John W. de Gruchy, “Bonhoeffer, Calvinism and Christian Civil Disobedience in South Africa,” 257–58.

58. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 58.

[i]t is not by functionalizing the church into an organisation for social reform or into a political pressure group, but rather by reliving the reconciliation and solidarity with God that genuine solidarity with and service to the world is guaranteed.⁵⁹

For Kuyper and Calvin, there were times when the authority of the church was to be subordinated to the authority of the State which, in its own sphere, was to rule over the people for mutual benefit and the unity of the nation. At other times, the church was compelled to remind the government of its origins, namely the sinfulness of the people who rejected God's direct authority and government, "[t]hus they ought to combine their efforts, the one being not an impediment but a help to the other."⁶⁰ The authors of the *Report* perhaps recognised this ambiguity rising out of Kuyper's desire for cooperation. They offered their own corrective having suggested, in the section entitled the 'Task of the Church,' that

[...] it is not part of the church's calling to dictate to the authorities for instance, exactly how they should regulate the intercourse and relationships between the various groups in a multinational or multiracial situation, precisely because the Bible does not provide a clear indication on the nature of the structures by which the mutual relationships should be regulated.⁶¹

These were the passive limits of the churches' authority, set by the State, and based, not on the biblical texts but rather because of the *lack* of biblical data related to the ethics of a multi-national and multi-racial society. It also served the purposes of the dominant culture to affirm the absence of biblical data when the data may have in fact revealed an ethical imperative that challenged the *status quo*. This was more than a passive support

59. Ibid.

60. Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, A new translation by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), Bk. 4, Ch. 11, Sec. 3.

61. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 69–70.

of the National Party's agenda of absolute separation of the races, and reflected the essential *modus operandi* of the Afrikaner prophets and theologians within the model de Gruchy referred to as the Davidic tradition.

There was no provision in Kuyper's political theory for the separate development of stronger national groups at the expense of the weaker ones, and de Gruchy argued that the jingoism of Afrikaner nationalism ran contrary to the theology of both Calvin and Kuyper. The DRC's reading of Kuyper suggested that God had chosen separate development as a manifestation of the created order. De Gruchy's interpretation of Kuyper concluded that Kuyperian neo-Calvinism, as it treated the establishment of nations under God's rule, could even transcend nationalism altogether and had very little to do with Calvin's understanding of the created order. De Gruchy wrote:

Kuyper certainly spoke of God as creating separate nations, each with its own identity, but he never regarded *die volk* as a 'sovereign sphere.' Indeed, he even regarded Calvinism as a means whereby nationalism could be transcended!⁶²

The articulation of a sphere theology was Kuyper's attempt at establishing a militant, evangelistic Calvinism in Holland, suggested David Bosch, a DRC theologian and missiologist writing in 1988. Sphere theology was not intended as a justification for the isolation of a nation within a nation, but was meant to isolate and, one could argue, purify the faith for the purposes of the church's mission to the world. However, the Afrikaner interpretation of Kuyper's phrase 'strength in isolation' was inward looking and defensive, not outward looking and embracing. Bosch noted that

[...] Kuyper's ideals were adapted to local circumstances. As they blended with the existing socio-political realities they underwent some significant mutations. The very survival of Afrikanerdom was at stake during those years. Thus the slogan, 'In isolation lies our strength' was not understood, as it was in Holland, in terms of isolation-for-mission, but in terms of isolation-for-survival. For the first time in South African history one now encountered sustained theological (or ideo-

62. John W. de Gruchy, "Bonhoeffer, Calvinism and Christian Civil Disobedience in South Africa," 257.

logical) arguments according to which Afrikaners should neither fraternize with foreigners nor break down the walls of racial separation instituted by God; like Israel, the Afrikaner's salvation lay in racial purity and separate schools and churches.⁶³

Within the context of the civil religion, the Afrikaner church had produced a theology of origins based on a rationalised interpretation of both Calvin and Kuyper. Bosch suggested that the idea of a chosen people was an abstraction of Calvin's doctrine of election developed to fit the needs of a threatened people. It was a theology produced for the purpose of justifying the Afrikaner *volk's* purity, at any cost. Kuyper's theology was shaped to meet the needs of a desperate minority caught between a persistent British imperialism and the threat from the black majority. What at first glance appeared to be the DRC's contextual approach to theology was, in reality, a theology cast within, and ultimately shaped by, the civil society. The structures of the government began to look very much like the structures of the church. The policies regarding racially segregated congregations mirrored a society built on absolute apartheid. The authors of the SPRO-CAS document entitled *Apartheid in the Church* wrote the following insightful paragraph regarding the ecclesiastical structures that had silenced the churches' prophetic voice:

Thus the problem of structure lies deeper than organisation. It is a matter of faith and obedience - for structures can be heretical if they prevent the Church from being the Church in the world. Structures can in fact reinforce the political, social and cultural values of society even when these are alien to Christian faith - whereas they should challenge such values and give concrete expression to an alternative way of life. In common with the Church in many parts of the world today, the Church in South Africa is in a period of structural crisis, even though the crisis may be unacknowledged. Indeed this lack of acknowledgement is a very serious aspect of the crisis. An essential mark of the true Church is its willingness and ability to examine itself to see whether or not it is being faithful to

63. Bosch, "Afrikaner Civil Religion and the Current South African Crisis," 17.

the Gospel, for the Church cannot be the Church unless it is always in process of reformation (Matt. 5:13; I Peter 4:17; II Corinthians 13:5).⁶⁴

The churches' liberty to speak-out against oppressive civil and religious structures was being quashed by the very structures they had actively or passively supported.

Liberty of conscience in the church

Another pillar of the Reformation was the idea of the liberty of conscience. It implied that the ideal for any society was for a free church within a free society, unencumbered by the demands of the civil authority. There are two parts to Calvin's conception of the liberty of conscience. First, as Kuyper points-out, the role of the government is to cause the Christian church to respect the individual's liberty of conscience. Second, the government must give way to the Sovereign Conscience. De Gruchy expressed this same idea by suggesting that, "for Kuyper, the Sovereignty of God implies the liberty of conscience. Indeed, conscience, he maintained, can 'never be subject to man but always and ever to God Almighty.'"⁶⁵ Humanity may enjoy liberty of conscience when it comes to matters of doctrine or teachings of the church that cannot be biblically substantiated but it is *never* free from God's authority over humanity. At the same time, Calvin's emphasis on the importance of the right of the individual conscience to assert itself under the Sovereignty of God cannot be overstated. De Gruchy took this notion one step further arguing, with Kuyper and Calvin, that 'the struggle for liberty is not only declared permissible, but it is made a duty for each individual in his own sphere'.⁶⁶

The word 'conscience' appears only three times in the *Report* and it was used just once with the same meaning as in de Gruchy's context - the term 'liberty of conscience'

64. Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society. Political Commission., *Apartheid and the Church*. General Editor: Peter Randall. -, SPROCAS. Occasional Publication (Johannesburg: SPROCAS, 1972), 69.

65. John W. de Gruchy, "Bonhoeffer, Calvinism and Christian Civil Disobedience in South Africa," 255.

66. Ibid.

was never used. The term conscience occurred in a list of human rights of which ‘man’ can avail ‘himself’, as long as the individual right does not conflict with the collective right established by the civil authority.⁶⁷ I am reminded of the fact that the authors of the *Report* conceived of the Afrikaner nation as the highest authority, as it had ostensibly been established by God as a reward for the faithfulness of the Afrikaner people. One needed only appeal to the civil authority to understand God’s will for the South African nation. I have already argued that there was considerable opposition to this theological notion. Historically, Kuyper rejected the idea outright and Calvin was unequivocal: liberty of conscience could never be subject to human endeavour or hubris; it could only be subject to God. Perhaps the decision to disobey the civil authority rested on whether one’s conscience was informed by God or the civil authority.

Liberty of conscience and the individual

By way of corollary, the question of how one exercised liberty of conscience could be expressed in terms of how one understood the civil authority. For the architects of apartheid and its concomitant civil religion, to submit to the civil authority meant to submit to the State believing it to be a manifestation of God’s grace. Unlike Calvin, the authors held firmer to a conception of the State that was more akin to that of the German Idealists who suggested that the best course of action for the individual was to surrender one’s individuality to the norms and customs of the State. In an Afrikaner South Africa, the State was allegedly established by God in much the same way Israel had been chosen to be God’s people. The State was invested with the authority of God and was responsible for the moral health of those who lived under its benevolent rule. Because of

67. Cf. Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa). Algemene Sinode., *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture: Official Translation of the Report Ras, Volk en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig Van die Skrif: Approved and Accepted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, October 1974*, 71.

this unique relationship, the State was the arbiter of God's justice and was to be obeyed, as one would obey God.

The Afrikaner civil religion seems to have embodied this conception of a civil authority. The authors of the *Report* considered this understanding of authority to be in keeping with Calvin's exposition on Romans 13:1-7.⁶⁸ It might be helpful to hear from directly from Calvin on this matter:

For though individual laws do not reach the conscience, yet we are bound by the general command of God, which enjoins us to submit to magistrates. And this is the point on which Paul's discussion turns--viz. that magistrates are to be honoured, because they are ordained of God (Rom. 13:1). Meanwhile, he does not at all teach that the laws enacted by them reach to the internal government of the soul, since he everywhere proclaims that the worship of God, and the spiritual rule of living righteously, are superior to all the decrees of men. Another thing also worthy of observation, and depending on what has been already said, is, that human laws, whether enacted by magistrates or by the Church, are necessary to be observed (I speak of such as are just and good), but do not therefore in themselves bind the conscience, because the whole necessity of observing them respects the general end, and consists not in the things commanded.⁶⁹

The way in which the DRC understood and applied Calvin's idea of the liberty of conscience fundamentally divided the Reformed witness in South Africa. It was also one of the reasons the decision was taken by some religious leaders to advocate civil disobedience in the face of this distortion.⁷⁰

68. Romans 13:1-7: Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. ... (New Revised Standard Version, Oxford University Press)

69. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Ch. 10, Sec 5.

70. In a much publicised address to the 1979 National Conference of the SACC, Dr Allan Boesak, a theologian of the black Dutch Reformed Mission Church, challenged the Church in South Africa to engage in acts of civil disobedience against apartheid laws: The church must initiate and support meaningful pressure on the system as a non-violent way of bringing about change. The church must initiate and support programs of civil disobedience on a massive scale, and challenge especially white Christians on this issue. John W. de Gruchy, "Bonhoeffer, Calvinism and Christian Civil Disobedience in South Africa," 245.

De Gruchy wrote a provocative article about the church and civil disobedience in 1981 during one of the most difficult times in South Africa and at the height of the debate on conscientious objection⁷¹ in South Africa. The article provided theological justification for civil disobedience based on his study of Calvin's idea of liberty of conscience. To further clarify his understanding of Calvin he turned to Bonhoeffer. Sometimes, remarked de Gruchy, this Lutheran theologian was more Reformed than he was Lutheran. He recalled Bonhoeffer's discussion on the conscience and its freedom in and through Christ, but before which

‘[t]he call of conscience in natural man’ he [Bonhoeffer] wrote, ‘is the attempt on the part of the ego to justify itself in its knowledge of good and evil before God, before men and before itself, and to secure its own continuance in this self-justification.’ For Bonhoeffer, conscience needs to be set free in Jesus Christ. Only when this happens does the freedom of conscience become a freedom for others and not a means of self-justification or even of perverted obedience. This must always be kept in mind when we speak of the Sovereignty of God and the liberty of conscience. The sundering of the Sovereignty of God from the humanity of God in Jesus Christ can lead, and often has led to a fanaticism which, in the name of conscience has destroyed and dehumanised.⁷²

Conceiving the idea of the liberty of conscience in this way provided for the freedom achieved in and through the liberating act of Jesus Christ, but this liberty came with responsibilities. It implied that the individual Christian had a responsibility to oppose and transform any State which prevented its citizens from first, acknowledging the sovereignty of God in all matters of conscience and second, obeying their conscience under God. However, the authors of the *Report* maintained that the church would be working

71. In 1974, the SACC adopted its controversial ‘Resolution on Conscientious Objection’ at its National Conference. The Preamble to that ‘Resolution’ called on the member Churches of the SACC to consider whether or not Christians could in good conscience defend an unjust situation through participation in the military. Cf. John W. de Gruchy, “Bonhoeffer, Calvinism and Christian Civil Disobedience in South Africa,” 245–46.

72. John W. de Gruchy, “Bonhoeffer, Calvinism and Christian Civil Disobedience in South Africa,” 255.

outside its authority were it to dictate how the government should regulate the relationship between the nation and the nations-within-the-nation. After all, the *Report* noted, the biblical texts did not speak to this particular situation.

Sphere sovereignty and the individual

Respect for the sovereignty of each sphere, in this case the political and the ecclesiastical, was necessary to the good working of society. Kuyper was clear on this point but the DRC took this to mean that the church could not encroach on the sovereignty of the State. De Gruchy argued that this is not what Calvin meant by ‘liberty of conscience’ and, for that matter, neither did Kuyper. As mentioned previously, de Gruchy commented that, as far as the DRC was concerned, service to God and service the South African State was, in essence, the same thing. Obeying one’s conscience as a faithful member of Christ’s church really meant obeying the State without dissent. De Gruchy offered a corrective alternative arguing that

[n]othing could be further removed from Kuyper’s understanding of the Sovereignty of God and the ‘sovereign spheres’, and certainly nothing could be more alien to Calvin. The further tragedy is, however, that because according to Kuyper the Church must not interfere in the State, and because within Afrikanerdom there is such a direct connexion between the Church and the *volk*, the Church’s prophetic voice is rendered almost silent. And the possibility of Christian civil disobedience is ruled out.⁷³

While the church could not dictate to the State in its capacity as church, Calvin stated that the individual member of the church was able, even compelled to involve themselves in the business of the State; especially when the State was behaving contrary to the will of God.

De Gruchy’s discussion of Kuyper and Calvin regarding the Christian church’s capacity to involve itself in the politics of the nation has already been noted. They agreed that, if the church wanted to witness to the state, it could only do so through its

73. *Ibid.*, 258.

individual members and not as the institution. A logical extension of this would mean that the decision to create a political party was always an option for the individual Christian. However, Kuyper's position does not reflect

Calvin's conviction that the Church as Church must witness to the State. This prophetic task is acknowledged by the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, and certainly from a Reformed perspective, a Church which is not free to speak prophetically to the State is not free no matter what a country's Constitution may declare.⁷⁴

The prophetic ministry of the Christian church was seen by the South African government as interference in politics and politics was the exclusive domain of the State. However, when the DRC supported the government, this was not interference!

I previously argued that the DRC had a tremendous influence on the social and political policies of the National Party. The DRC made no effort to stay out of the political arena and when there was occasion to speak prophetically to the government, the church retreated, claiming that it must stay within its own sphere. It may be possible to draw a parallel between the political stance of the Lutheran church during the Nazi regime and the situation in South Africa, although too close a comparison will reveal some important differences. The differences notwithstanding, the DRC and the National Party interpreted Kuyper's teaching on the relationship between church and state in light of his 'sphere sovereignty' theory in much the same way the Lutheran church and the National Socialist Party in Germany interpreted Luther's doctrine of the 'two kingdoms'.⁷⁵ Both Kuyper and Luther were cited in support of the efforts on behalf of the governments to reject any criticism coming from the church.

74. *Ibid.*, 253.

75. *Ibid.*, 253–54.

Civil disobedience

Thus far I have stressed how the DRC's stance was based primarily on an eisegetical reading in the context of the Reformed tradition viewed through the lens of a pseudo-Kuyperian neo-Calvinism. De Gruchy suggested that the Afrikaner minority distorted Kuyper's political views to legitimate Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid. In support of his effort to reclaim Calvin and Kuyper from the distortions of the DRC, he pointed to another, "largely forgotten Kuyper that challenges the way in which Calvinism has too often been understood and used in South Africa."⁷⁶ The forgotten Kuyper, in this case, was not explored by the DRC as it appears to have supported any effort to liberate the Reformed tradition from the bonds of politics and social structures. De Gruchy was referring to the idea of civil disobedience. It was also key to de Gruchy's way of 'doing theology.' It recalled Calvin's theological intent within the liberation movement of the sixteenth century known as the Reformation. It also recalled Bonhoeffer's critique of the Evangelical church's support of the National Socialist's German nationalism.

In agreement with John Rawls' widely accepted definition of civil disobedience, de Gruchy suggested that Christian civil disobedience was a "public, non-violent, conscientious yet political act contrary to law" that rises out of a conscience informed by the Gospel, formed by Jesus Christ and which has accepted responsibility for "the neighbour".⁷⁷ Furthermore, the purpose of a Christian civil disobedience is to bear witness to both the state and society and to change unjust laws. De Gruchy suggested that, according to Calvin, Christian discipleship included, among other concerns, a commitment to justice that could involve resistance to injustice in the form of civil disobedience. When the State no longer served God's purpose of justice and order, the church was compelled to witness to the State. In the South African context, civil disobedience

76. *Ibid.*, 258.

77. *Ibid.*, 259.

“is a protest against racist laws in the name of law; it is a protest against the way law is denied even in the name of the law. Nothing could be more Calvinist than that [...]”⁷⁸

Disobedience and the magistrates

Calvin described the role of the magistrates as that which was to ‘keep good and proper order in the community’. Calvin had read the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans, especially Chapter 13, to mean that the magistrate had authority over the members of the community, having been placed in the role by God. Having authority over the community and having responsibility for its good and orderly operation, the magistrates had “a corporate responsibility in determining when and how resistance was to be engaged upon.”⁷⁹ With the advent of constitutional democracies, de Gruchy maintained, the role of the magistrate faded away. In the case of South Africa, where the government represented only a small minority of the people, or the Third Reich and the U.S.S.R., where the government had absolute control, there was no magistrate to mediate justice. Without the magistrate, de Gruchy suggested, a Calvinist approach would conclude that “just as it is the Church’s task to witness to the State, so it is the Church’s responsibility to decide when certain laws are unjust and need to be disobeyed.”⁸⁰

John Rawls, according to de Gruchy, qualified his comments on civil disobedience by acknowledging the fact that such activity assumes a just society. In other words, if the society in which civil disobedience is to be exercised is intolerant, an alternative to this action may be the wiser choice. Contrary to what the National Party and the DRC concluded, the Calvinist way to avoid a violent uprising or revolution was not submission to the State. The way to avoid violence was to create a political environment in which all citizens could come together and petition the government, if necessary, and

78. Ibid., 260.

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid.

call it to account for its unjust laws and practices; without fear of reprisal! This is what the SACC was seeking during the most difficult times of the church struggle against apartheid.

De Gruchy remarked how, with very few exceptions, the South African churches condemned racism, with some having clearly stated they believed the government to be unjust and un-Christian. It was this conviction that the government was unjust and un-Christian, despite its claims, that moved some of the churches to respond by supporting the Christians' right to disobey. De Gruchy held this same conviction along with the belief that an honest, thorough examination and application of a recovered and restated Reformed theology would allow the Christian church to properly bear witness to the government. He was not naive believing that the churches could single-handedly remove the social and political instruments that had kept the races separate for over three hundred years. He was hopeful that the Christian churches could appeal to the individual conscience and effect real change in a society that needed to move beyond the *status quo*. In a brief editorial published in 1976, just a few months following the June 16th act of civil disobedience in Soweto, de Gruchy foreshadowed his commitment to develop a contextual theology able to respond to the injustice of apartheid. He wrote:

Our times demand of us an adequate theology. Our historical situation is such that it is beginning to produce considerable theological reflection. We wish to encourage this urgently, but we also do not wish to suggest that this will meet the crises of our time. It is only a contribution to the incredible task the Church and the nation faces. Perhaps amidst all our theologising we should also remember what Luther said of the true theologian: 'Living, but no, rather dying and being damned, constitutes the theologian, but not understanding, reading and speculation.' An overstatement, but a necessary judgment by a theologian on other theologians at a time of national crisis.⁸¹

81. John W. de Gruchy, "Theology After Soweto," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa No 16 S 1976* 16 (September 1976): 3–4.

Would this adequate theology include the sanctioning of the use of violence to overthrow an unjust government? Civil disobedience in an unjust society carried with it tremendous risks and South Africa, during the last half of the twentieth century, was not a safe place for dissidents of any kind, or black.

The use of violence

This raises the question, ‘Can a Christian within the Reformed tradition support the use of violence against an unjust government?’ This was a question that stayed with de Gruchy for many years.⁸² He supported the Calvinist proposition that condoned the Christian’s resistance to the tyrant. In the section of Calvin’s ‘Institutes of the Christian Religion’ on obedience and authority, Calvin asserted that God ‘restrains the fury of tyrants’ in two ways; “either by raising up from among their own subjects open avengers, who rid the people of their tyranny, or by employing for that purpose the rage of men whose thoughts and contrivances are totally different, thus overturning one tyranny by means of another.”⁸³ There have been many instances where theologians within the Reformed tradition supported the Christian’s right to resist an oppressive and unjust government. De Gruchy reminds us that

Abraham Kuyper himself spoke positively about the ‘Calvinistic Revolutions’ in Holland, in England and in the United States. They were necessary to restore law. Bonhoeffer was not outside the Reformed tradition when he joined the conspiracy against Hitler. But let the final comment come from the Dutch Reformed Church, which, along, with the other Afrikaans Reformed Churches in South Africa, responded to the Afrikaner Rebellion in 1914 as follows: ‘No one may revolt against lawful authority other than for carefully considered and well-grounded reasons based on the Word of God and a conscience enlightened by the Word of God.’ The corollary is clear.⁸⁴

82. Rebecca Baer-Porteous dedicated a significant portion of her research on de Gruchy to this very question. Baer-Porteous, “Seeking the Dawn: A Critical Reflection Upon and Response to the Theology of John de Gruchy.”

83. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 100 Aphorism, Book 4, no. 99.

84. John W. de Gruchy, “Bonhoeffer, Calvinism and Christian Civil Disobedience in South Africa,” 262.

The 1914 Rebellion to which de Gruchy referred was the Afrikaner's well-timed but ill-fated uprising stimulated by British pressure to assimilate the Afrikaner into British society. The DRC supported the armed rebellion saying that God was on the side of the Afrikaner searching for relief and liberation from the cruel British yoke. The DRC's theological justification for the 1914 Rebellion was deemed wholly appropriate while, ironically, any criticism of the Nationalist government, from either the Christian churches or political organisations, was dealt with swiftly and harshly.

De Gruchy: 'How My Mind Has Changed'

In a remarkably candid article, de Gruchy described his 'change of mind' regarding the Christian's use of violence as a means of civil disobedience. Like my friend who travelled to Nicaragua to stay in a Roman Catholic base camp, de Gruchy was an avowed pacifist. In the article, de Gruchy recalled his experience of having been considerably influenced by John Howard Yoder's book, *The Politics of Jesus* in which Yoder describes Jesus' pacifist's approach to the political exigencies of his time. De Gruchy remarked that it was largely "[...] because of this that I found it difficult to see how the churches in South Africa could give their support to the armed struggle and the use of violence to oppose apartheid. Later I changed my mind on this issue."⁸⁵ Some years later de Gruchy would come to terms with the increasing violence that was necessary for the apartheid regime to maintain 'peace' in the country. During the difficult 1980s, he was able to reconsider his theological position regarding violence having distanced himself from "Yoder's position [of] 'absolute pacifism,' for by the mid-eighties I was convinced that there are sometimes situations where violence might be justified as the lesser of two evils."⁸⁶

85. John W. de Gruchy, "How My Mind Has Changed," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 111, no. N (2001): 32.

86. *Ibid.*

After the Soweto Uprising in 1976, the Nationalist regime's efforts to eradicate the anti-apartheid movement became increasingly violent. This increasing and punitive violence, along with the influence of liberation theology, contributed to de Gruchy's change of mind. Another important influence was de Gruchy's "growing interest in retrieving the Reformed tradition and coming to a better understanding of Calvin. Calvin concludes his Institutes with one of the most powerful theological statements on the need to resist tyrants. It was partly because of this that I felt able to put my name to the Kairos Document in 1985".⁸⁷

From the outset, de Gruchy's criticism of the English-speaking churches was that they offered no civil religion of their own to compete with the Afrikaner civil religion. The English-speaking churches were almost unanimous in their condemnation of apartheid but were prepared to offer very little in the way of alternatives. After all, apartheid benefited the entire white population, not just the members of the DRC. Another concern was the painful division experienced by the Reformed churches. Every iteration of the Reformed tradition, whether it was the Presbyterians or the United Congregationalists - each felt the strain of being out of sync with their sister church, the DRC. The DRC itself was divided along colour lines, to such a degree that they did not even celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

Above all, de Gruchy sought the unity of the Christian church. He understood the many divisions in the church to be the result of human pride and sinfulness, a persistent resistance to the will of God for the church. De Gruchy rejected the idea that the divided church was God's plan for humanity so each division within the church could thrive among its 'own.' De Gruchy argued that any theological justification for division in the church could not be based on a proper understanding of the Reformed Tradition. De

87. *Ibid.*, 33.

Gruchy also critiqued the myth that South Africa was a Christian country. The political rhetoric from Nationalist politicians often included bold claims that South Africa was a Christian nation and its very existence was God's plan for its people. De Gruchy writes:

Can any state really claim to be Christian, and if so, on what grounds? Can a state which has spawned the heresy of apartheid, thrived on such dehumanizing policies as migratory labour, developed such horrendous security legislation as detention and solitary confinement without trial, and engendered such racial and class bitterness and strife, claim to be Christian? Indeed, South Africa is presently in a state of serious internal strife which some regard as tantamount to a civil war in which Christians are in conflict with one another. Such conflict makes a mockery of the gospel of reconciliation and the unity of the church let alone the claim that South Africa is a Christian state.⁸⁸

88. John W. de Gruchy, "Christians in Conflict: The Social Reality of the South African Church," 17.

Conclusion

Theologians are part of their context; their understanding is shaped by their culture and position within both church and society. Thus theology invariably means the knowledge of God in relation to a particular tradition within a given historical context, and is always both a way of relating Christian faith to social reality and a product of that relationship. But a genuinely Christian theology should struggle to transcend selfish interest and ideological captivity, in the service of those interests consonant with and demanded by the kingdom of God. For this reason the fundamental task of theology is to reflect on how God's self-disclosure has been discerned in those situations to which Scripture bears witness in relation to the issues facing us in our present context and our response to them.

John W. de Gruchy

Figure 1: Angelus Novus



¹ In an essay entitled 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin wrote about Paul Klee's 1920 painting *Angelus Novus* in which he saw Klee's anticipation of God's judgement on humanity. In a compelling paragraph, Benjamin described the painting that

[...] shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth hangs open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned

toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage hurling it before his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such vio-

1. The figure on this page is an electronic copy of Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus*, painted in 1920. The painting was owned by Walter Benjamin and now resides in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

lence the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.²

Benjamin wrote these words in 1940, just before he was captured while trying to escape the Nazis and, with the expectation that he would be repatriated to Hitler's Germany, he committed suicide at his first opportunity. We all deal with despair in different ways.

When I first saw Klee's painting, the angel, and the focal point of the picture, appeared static, contained within a mottled frame of deep browns, fading to tan as the eye approached the centre of the scene. In the centre floats the angel with her wings lifted, as if warning the viewer to stop and come no closer. I did not see a storm blowing from Paradise as Benjamin did. I sensed a gentle reminder that all was not well in the world and that it was veiled by the light in which the angel floated. I had a feeling that I had the choice of proceeding toward the angel, or not. To proceed would be to embrace whatever danger burned behind the angel. It would mean that I would be accountable for the chaos and destruction from which the brilliant heat rose. But I had a choice. I merely needed to avert my eyes and whatever human despair that cried-out from beyond the angel's wings would disappear. Benjamin could not avert his eyes. He tried to look away because he knew what chaos and despair burned behind the angel - it was Nazi Germany. Benjamin chose to heed the angel's warning and flee. Unfortunately, Benjamin fled to his death.

John de Gruchy grew-up in the context of the chaos and despair of apartheid South Africa. De Gruchy chose not to avert his eyes from the racial strife that undergirded South African society. In 1948, when he was just nine-years-old, he witnessed a change in his neighbourhood which saw a racially mixed community rapidly become an exclusively white suburb. In the space of a few years, de Gruchy's Indian neighbours

2. Walter Benjamin, 1892–1940, *Illuminations* (New York: New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970, c1968., 1970).

had all moved away, outside the now-designated white's-only areas. This was the beginning of his awareness of the storm that was sweeping the country. The storm was not symbolised by an angel with raised wings, warning of the dangers that lurked beyond. It was represented by the newly elected National Party and its stark promise of total apartheid. De Gruchy did not look away and he did not heed the angel's warning. Instead, he chose to step beyond the intense light behind the angel to see the face of despair in the people who had been declared 'less than human' by a government that was supposed to ensure their well-being and a church that seemed to have turned a blind-eye to their suffering.

Benjamin opined, "This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage hurling it before his feet." De Gruchy, like a few others, was able to turn his gaze to the future without having to objectify the past. He recognised the catastrophe called apartheid but chose to look to the future where despair gave way to hope. He had the opportunity to leave South Africa but chose to stay and participate in the struggle. He, like Bonhoeffer before him, believed that he would not be able to participate fully in the rebuilding of South Africa if he chose to leave when the church needed him most. And, like Bonhoeffer, de Gruchy believed that the political storm that was brewing was due to a temporary breach of human conscience in the face of atrocity. It appears that both theology and conscience failed the South African people but de Gruchy believed that God's love for humanity would ultimately prevail. This is one of de Gruchy's lasting contributions to the church struggle in South Africa. Hope was the starting point for his theological method and, despite the many defeats and disappointments, he entered each dialogue with the expectation of a good outcome, one that would reflect God's will for humanity in South Africa, all of humanity.

The struggle against apartheid demanded a particular and relevant theological method that neither pandered to the social and political exigencies of the day or became so abstract to be almost meaningless in the context. De Gruchy's literary corpus reveals a dialectical method that generated positive expectations with each dialogical encounter. They were expectations that insisted on theological relevance and contextuality. De Gruchy's theological method was a way of overcoming the formal dualism of some of the contextual theologies that were beginning to have greater impact on the South African church community beginning in the 1960s. It was also a way of overcoming the monistic reductionism of the DRC's ecclesial stance toward apartheid. De Gruchy encountered a formal dualism in some of the expressions of fundamentalist theology that subscribed to an 'either/or' mentality and a 'it is either all true or none of it is true' approach to the interpretation of the biblical texts. Formal dualism regards the opposites in the dialectical encounter as mutually exclusive arguments. However, de Gruchy saw the importance of focussing on both arguments at the same time with a view to transcending the opposite through a creative leap of the imagination as it seeks a higher and more comprehensive or enlightened possibility. His method brought into the light previously hidden commonalities and integral relationships which a dualistic understanding kept apart and distinct. He actively sought-out dialogue partners in the search for a deeper, more meaningful understanding of his context.

For de Gruchy, theological method included 'doing theology' which meant that theology was something one did outside of the classroom. It was a means of "examining the way in which Christian thought and action have developed and been expressed by others both in our own time and throughout Christian history."³ De Gruchy suggested that studying theology was a useful endeavour "only insofar as it enables us to do theology today with better insight and greater faithfulness to the gospel."⁴ Part of his

3. de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, "The Nature, Necessity and Task of Theology," 2.

method was a willingness to say just what the gospel was, for himself and his context. He also argued that a normative reading of the biblical texts was possible.⁵ This, along with the dialectical structure of his approach to theological discourse, is one of de Gruchy's major contributions to the church struggle against apartheid and, I suggest, a lasting contribution to the domain of contextual theology.

The Reformed tradition in South Africa was represented mainly by two groups: the Dutch Reformed Church that promoted a unique interpretation of the tradition that supported apartheid, and the English-speaking Reformed churches that, through its debilitating apathy, also supported apartheid. De Gruchy spent many years mining the depths of the tradition to try and recover what he knew must be there: a living, viable theological response to some fundamental errors promulgated by the established church. His research on Barth and Bonhoeffer, Calvin and Kuyper allowed him to formulate a damning critique of the apartheid theology which supported the Nationalist regime in South Africa. His research produced many books and articles and also brought him to several countries through lectureships and visiting professorships.

The results of de Gruchy's efforts to establish a recovered Reformed tradition in South Africa resonated deeply with me. I discovered in his research a new way of thinking about the Reformed tradition in Canada. It was at this point that I imagined his method to be portable to my context. It was rooted in the biblical texts, faithful to the early Reformers efforts to restore the church, rather than create a new one, and flexible and fluid enough to embrace the Canadian church struggle for relevance. The completion of this thesis signals the beginning of a new project for me. I hope to take what I have learned from this project and especially what I have appropriated of John W. de Gruchy's work, and use it as we shape our own Reformed response to the contemporary needs of the Canadian church.

4. Ibid., 3.

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