"Good mission policy is good state policy in South Africa": The influence of the Tomlinson Report on racial separation in church and state at the dawn of apartheid

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Abstract

The author studies the development of the single, multiracial Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) into a "family" of 10 racially separated churches, especially in the light of the findings of the Tomlinson Report, published in 1955. The Commission wanted to bring the relationship between mission policy and state policy in South Africa (SA) into line with (and indeed under control of) the apartheid policy of the National Party. The author concludes that the DRC instituted the first racially separated church in 1881 on the basis of the practical situation whereby black and white members had grown into separate congregations as a result of the 1857 decision. In the 1940s and 1950s an ideological-theological justification started developing based on German missiological thinking as articulated especially by Keysser and Gutmann. The author finds that the Tomlinson Commission based their findings and recommendations on a mistaken view of African Christianity in South Africa at that time. The findings of the Tomlinson Report did, however, seem to confirm the ideological development taking place, thus strengthening the hand of those wishing to introduce a theological justification for racially separated churches *ex post facto*. As a result serious damage was done to the credibility of the Church and Christian mission in South Africa.

Introduction

The Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa traces its origins to European colonisation (by the Dutch) in 1652. The Dutch colonists consciously transplanted their version of the Reformed faith to the new colony (indeed, it was considered a motive for colonising). For the first 229 years of its existence (until 1881) what would later become the "family of Dutch Reformed

churches"[1] in SA had only one member. Newborn white members of the church as well as newly converted black (mainly coloured) members of the church all became members of the one Dutch Reformed Church of SA. Yet when the youngest "daughter" of the DRC, the Evangelical Reformed Church in Africa (ERCA, today part of the Uniting Reformed Church), was constituted in July 1975 in faraway Orumana in the northwestern extremity of Namibia (a mere 94 years later), this family had 10 members in SA and Namibia: a "mother" and 9 "daughters". These 10 churches were separated from each other solely along racial, ethnic and, in some cases, such as ERCA in Namibia, geographical lines. They all recognised the final authority of Scripture, they pledged allegiance to the same three Reformed Confessions of Faith, and they employed the same church polity and used the same liturgy − in Reformed theology and church polity elements of unity among churches. How did this extraordinary multiplication come about in such a relatively short period of time?

As the DRC was a Dutch transplant, in terms of its Reformed understanding of the nature of the church and relations between various churches, it was initially under the maternal supervision of its Dutch Reformed mother, specifically its Classis (Presbytery) of Amsterdam. The idea of racial separation in church membership was completely foreign to Reformed ecclesiology at the time, so it was self-evident that indigenous converts in the new colony would become members of the one, undivided Dutch Reformed Church. However, as Smith (1980) points out over and over again, there was a problem right from the start. The white colonists found any physical contact with indigenous people very difficult (if not repugnant). In this regard it is important to keep in mind that the settlers had arrived at the Cape with ready-formed stereotypes of black people, and while these should probably not be termed racist, they certainly were strongly ethnocentric, with no doubt about the superiority of white, civilised and Christian Europeans over black, uncivilised and pagan indigenes (Saayman 2007:20-21; Keegan 1996). In the church this revealed itself especially at Holy Communion. This was so because, in line with Reformed policy and practice at the time, all communicants drank from the same cup. The colonists found this nearly impossible. Therefore, as soon as an autonomous Cape Synod was constituted, the third meeting of that synod in 1829 was approached with the question whether it would be acceptable for white and black members to celebrate Communion separately (the question was not whether white and black could form separate churches). Although synod clearly indicated that racial separation around the Communion table was not acceptable, the question was raised in some form or another at every following synod, thereby illustrating that multiracial practice in the DRC was proving to be a problem in the colonial context (cf. Saayman 2007:34-37 for a fuller discussion). Until 1857, synod stuck to its ruling that racial separation was unacceptable. The synod of 1857 introduced

a new dimension, though. Although it confirmed the Scriptural and doctrinal teaching that racial separation was unacceptable in the church of Christ, synod provided a way out in practice. Where, as a result of "the weakness of some" (a reference to the abhorrence of close physical contact of most white members), the extension of the Kingdom would be hindered by joint celebrations, synod decided that black DRC members could celebrate Communion in a separate building (Saayman 2007:34-37). As Smith (1980:82-83) points out, it is impossible to interpret this concession as the foreshadowing of a policy of separate churches; this was a decision to enable congregations to gather separately for their Communion services, nothing more. The Reformed teaching and tradition of racial unity in the church was still self-evident. And yet a brief 24 years later, and without taking any synodical decision to the contrary, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) for coloured members was constituted on the advice of the missionaries and the Interior Mission Commission (Binnelandse Sendingkommissie) of the church (Smith 1980:84). The first racially separated "daughter church" of the DRC thus came into being in an attempt to improve coordination in mission within the Cape and in recognition of the reality that the separate celebration of the sacraments had grown for all practical purposes into parallel racially separated congregations in many locations (Smith 1980:85). Another very important observation which must be made is that all black converts, i.e. coloured as well as black African, became members of the new mission church.

What happened in the Cape became the blueprint also for Dutch Reformed churches in the Free State, Transvaal and Natal.[2] None of these synods had any extended theological debates about unity and diversity, etc. The practical consequence of the mission policy applied in all the various DRC synods was that racially separated congregations came into existence. In most cases it was the synodical mission commissions which took the final decision to constitute a racially separated synod (generally also called DR Mission Church in the Free State, Transvaal and Natal). The first slight diversion from the pattern came with the constitution of the Dutch Reformed Bantu Church in SA (in the Cape Province) in 1951. Until the 1920s the DRC in the Cape had not undertaken any specific, organised mission work among Africans. The mission work was mainly concentrated on coloured people (who lived in far greater numbers in the southwestern Cape than Africans), but it was not closed to African participation, so there were indeed African converts who became members of the DRMC. In 1924, however, the Cape Synod of the DRC decided to start concentrated, organised mission work among "natives" (Africans), especially in the Transkei area (Smith 1980:102). So we have this uniform development in DRC church planting in all the regional synods until the 1950s: as a result of the consistent racially separated church practice and mission work, racially separated mission

churches (which accommodated both coloured and African converts) came into being. It is important to note that from 1881 until 1951 no ethnic differentiation was made in the DR Mission Churches in the various provinces between coloured and African members. Even in the inland provinces (Free State, Transvaal and Natal), where there were more African than coloured members in the DR Mission Churches, coloured and African members belonged to the same church. Ethnic differentiation came into being only when the (white) Cape Synod decided to start work in the Transkei, leading to the formation of the DR Bantu Church in 1951 (discussed below). Between 1881 and 1951, therefore, separate DR Mission Churches were formed along practical and geographical lines, separating white DRC members from their black counterparts. Ethnicity did not enter the picture at all.

In the mid-fifties things began to change, though, in the sense that separation was introduced at synodical, church political level between coloured and African members and churches. I argue that this was indeed part of a wider change in DRC mission which was largely spurred on by the findings and recommendations of the Tomlinson Report (Saayman 2007:69–78). It is to my grounds for this argument that I now wish to turn my attention.

The Tomlinson Commission and its report

In 1948 the National Party (NP), under the previous Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) minister, Dr DF Malan, rather unexpectedly won the all-white general elections in South Africa. Afrikaners made up the bulk of NP membership, and, as the DRC was the ecclesiastical home of these same Afrikaners, there was a strong symbiosis between church and political party. The mainstay of the NP platform was its policy of total racial separation, called apartheid.[3] At this stage apartheid was largely a collection of political slogans,[4] with no clear policy framework and little indication of how it could be applied in practice. If the apartheid policy were to succeed, it would indeed require social engineering on a grand scale to refine and institutionalise the well-established practice of racial separation in SA. Although racial segregation had been practised in South Africa from the first years of colonisation (cf. Keegan 1996), no colonial authority or political party had ever propagated total separation of races in all spheres of life, and no one had indicated how this might be carried out in practice. The DRC had indeed before 1948 sent various delegations to the United Party government under General Smuts to ask for the institution of total racial segregation (Adonis 1982:81–82). Government responded that they had no objection to such segregation but that it was simply impossible to execute, especially from an economic point of view (Mervis 1972:68). When the NP won the election in 1948 exactly on

this platform, therefore, they had to move quickly to establish the policy framework. The NP had won the majority of seats in Parliament but had not won an overall majority of votes cast. Strong resistance to their policy was therefore a dangerous reality. For this reason various commissions of enquiry were instituted in the early 1950s to study how total racial separation (especially also total geographical separation) could be accomplished.

In 1950 the Federal Mission Council of the DRC,[5] meeting in Bloemfontein, passed a resolution calling on the newly elected NP government to appoint a commission of enquiry to investigate all aspects of "native life", as well as the socioeconomic development of the proposed "Bantu areas" within the Union of South Africa (envisaged as future homelands for various ethnic groups to implement the ideal of geographical separation). Partly as a result of this request, the government appointed the Commission for the Socio-economic Development of the Bantu Areas within the Union of South Africa, under the chairmanship of Prof Tomlinson of the University of Pretoria.[6] The findings and recommendations of the Tomlinson Commission would have significant implications for South Africa and all its people in the next 40 years, providing the foundation and cornerstone of the policy of territorial apartheid, "independent" homelands, separate residential areas, forced removals, etc. It is my contention that the findings and recommendations of the Commission also had very significant implications for Dutch Reformed mission, especially inside but also outside of South Africa (Saayman 2007:69–99). The very fact that the Commission was appointed partly at the request of the DRC already implied that it would be taken seriously by the church and could be expected to have significant influence. Indeed, I argue (Saayman 2007:69–99) that the Tomlinson Commission inspired an influential new wave of missionary enthusiasm in the DRC. In this article I wish to extend my argument by studying church and mission in South Africa circa 1954, at the dawn of apartheid, as seen through the eyes of the Tomlinson Commission. I will argue that this specific view of mission and church played an important role in inspiring missionary enthusiasm and formulating missionary policy and practice, and may therefore have had important implications for state, church and mission which are still with us today.

A brief overview of the work of the Tomlinson Commission and the picture it sketched of mission and church in South Africa circa 1954

The Commission went to great lengths to try and present as "factual" a report as possible. With regard to mission and church, they studied census figures on church membership and numbers of adherents of various faiths, among other things. They also studied the records of the Department of Native Affairs − responsible for official registration of churches (which enabled the desirable goals of owning property, conducting weddings, etc) and therefore

providing a good source of ecclesiastical statistics − as well as calling for written and oral submissions from interested churches and mission organisations. The Commission initiated its own research but also invited and received numerous written and oral submissions. It can be argued, therefore, that the Tomlinson Report indeed presented the first reliable general overview of church and mission in SA after three centuries of colonialism and mission. The nature of the data recorded and the way in which it was presented provide a very interesting picture of how the new government and its appointees viewed the past and future relationship between state and mission in SA. As such, it provides better understanding of 46 crucial years (1948–1994) in the history of church and mission in SA. It may therefore also help us to make the necessary course corrections in a completely new post-1994 era.

The Commission provided a very detailed analysis of church membership in SA (Tomlinson Verslag 1955:21–23). It identified three main groupings of churches: (i) South African-oriented churches which are (a) of white descent ("herkoms") and (b) of Bantu descent; (ii) foreign-oriented Protestant churches ("mixed" churches); and (iii) the Roman Catholic Church.[7] The Commission pointed out that the majority of Christians in SA were black (a fact which would have been somewhat startling to most white members of the DRC at that time, as most black people were still regarded as "objects" of mission), but also that the biggest mission field in SA was still among the Bantu. The Commission further established that the majority (57.5%) of the churches and mission organisations active in SA desired to establish multiracial churches. This might have been the result of the fact that the (theoretically) multiracial Roman Catholic and English-language churches had throughout SA history revealed a stronger drive to extend themselves within South Africa than the so-called "Dutch" (Afrikaans) churches. The Commission concluded that South African Christians could successfully complete the Christianisation of SA (thus implying that overseas missionaries were no longer needed in SA). It also concluded that the church in SA held the key to the Christianisation of Africa as a whole. This was so because SA formed a buffer between East and West, between democracy and communism. This was highlighted as a special challenge to South African churches.

Some relevant conclusions of the Tomlinson Commission

On the basis of this "factual" picture it had sketched, the Commission came to the following specific conclusions regarding the interaction between state, church and mission, and the desirability of racial and ethnic separation:

1 With regard to the picture of church and mission in SA circa 1954 according to the findings of the Tomlinson Commission, it is notable

that two differentials in particular are emphasised for policy purposes: that between "South African-oriented" churches and missions and "foreign-oriented" churches and missions; and that between Protestant churches and missions, and their Roman Catholic counterparts. It is further interesting that there is no distinction between the "South African-oriented" Roman Catholics and their foreign counterparts. Although it is technically correct that the Roman Catholic church in SA was still completely under Roman control, the same was true for many Presbyterians, Congregationals and others still theoretically under the control of their "mother" bodies in foreign countries. The Commission clearly spelled out its bias in favour of South African missionaries being able to "finish the job" (e.g. Tomlinson Verslag 1955:56). The Commission maintained this bias for two reasons: because there were enough South African Christians to provide the necessary missionary force; and because the continued inflow of foreign missionaries would mean that large numbers of South African Christians were under (undesirable) foreign control.[8] The Commission did not spell out its bias in favour of Protestant churches and missions quite so blatantly, but it is nevertheless implied in various instances. Its comment on the number of (white) missionaries able to speak indigenous South African black languages (Tomlinson Verslag 1955:57), for example, is one such instance. The Commission clearly viewed in a negative light the fact that Roman Catholics were better equipped to speak these languages than the Protestants, as this gave Catholics an advantage in communicating with black people.

2 One reason why the difference between South African-oriented churches and foreign-oriented churches is emphasised lies in the important difference in approach to church formation. The Commission found that foreign-dominated churches (both Protestant and Catholic) wished to established what was then called "mixed" (or multiracial) churches (Tomlinson Verslag 1955:22). The Commission therefore came to the important conclusion that if apartheid were to succeed, it (racial separation) had to be reflected in racially separated churches as well; one could not have social apartheid but ecclesiastical integration. The existing situation therefore had to be turned around, which meant that South African-oriented (read: white) churches and missions had to be encouraged to play a much more dominant role in mission in SA. This called for much greater awareness among South African-oriented churches of the scope of the unfinished task, as well as the reality that South African-oriented churches actually had adequate resources to complete the task. All that was needed was stronger mission motivation.[9]

3 Throughout the Report it is clear that the commissioners had a very positive appreciation of the role Christian mission could play in establishing a workable policy of apartheid in SA. Indeed, one can say that the Commission was convinced that the proper and adequate development of the Bantu areas could not take place without the intimate involvement of Christian missionaries. This perspective was stated thus (Tomlinson Verslag 1955:161; my translation and emphasis):

> The churches and the state are not in an antithetical relationship in South Africa. On the contrary, they are members of the same team. They are dependent on each other, especially as far as the spiritual and temporal wellbeing of the Bantu is concerned. *Good mission policy is good state policy in South Africa*. It forms the basis of a good race policy.

It is small wonder, then, that in the conclusions of the Report it is actually quite difficult to differentiate the obligation and role of church and state in establishing and maintaining good race relations, good citizenship, acceptance by black South Africans of the guardianship of whites, etc. The Commission therefore concluded that mission had a very important role to play in opening the way for development and the acceptance of the institution of the policy of apartheid. This implied that white Christians had to be made more aware of the link between patriotism and mission, and the government had to be made aware of its responsibility of funding medical and special education facilities provided by Christian missions.

4 The Commission concluded with a very favourable picture of black South African Christianity. In chapter 40 of the Report, dealing with ecclesiastical development, the Commission sketched what can only be termed a very rosy picture of the influence church and mission have had on the black population of SA (Tomlinson Verslag:155–156). The Commission concluded that the "Christian Religion" (not the churches or the Christian gospel) was indeed "a miraculous force" which had "deeply influenced" the lives of "the Bantu" to the extent that "a complete turn-around" had taken place in their lives which "could not be explained in terms of natural science" (Tomlinson Verslag 1955:155; my translation. This final statement was then the general definition of a real miracle). The Commission found evidence for this turnaround in "the Bantus'" physical lives (greater cleanliness, more "proper" clothing), their intellectual and moral lives, their home and family lives, and in the tribal and political life. Since the churches

were unanimous in their evidence that mission work in SA had been much more than simply worthwhile, the Commission concluded as follows (Tomlinson Verslag 1955:155; my translation):

> The only safeguard for European civilization in South Africa is an intensified effort to evangelise the non-Christian. We cannot hope to preserve a high Christian way of life, if we allow alongside it a widespread paganism or an equally widespread low standard of belief and practice claiming remote kinship with Christianity.

If mission had played such an obvious beneficial role in the past, it was to be expected that the Commission would conclude that more of the same was necessary. All that was required was that the state should take more forceful control of mission schools, hospitals, and so forth (ensuring the "right" policy was followed, providing funding); that South African whites should be forcefully called upon to realise that mission was not only a religious vocation but also a patriotic duty; and that there should be greater synergy between church and state in terms of their motivation and goal, which were basically synonymous (Tomlinson Verslag 1955:156–157 − "good mission policy is good state policy").

What had been the general DRC mission policy until then, especially in relation to the formation of "daughter churches"?

Autonomous and indigenous younger churches

The basic church planting policy followed by the DRC since 1881 can be accommodated under the rubric of autonomous indigenous churches. This concept of planting autonomous and indigenous younger churches as fruit of mission work was neither South African nor Dutch Reformed in origin. Two pioneers who played a very strong role in the theoretical and theological development of the concepts were the Anglican Henry Venn and the American Congregationalist Rufus Anderson (Kritzinger, Meiring & Saayman 1994:7–8). Both of them were mission secretaries of their respective denominations by the middle of the nineteenth century and they developed the well-known "three selfs formula", according to which the older churches, through their mission, were supposed to plant self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating younger churches on the "mission field". This idea was adopted by more or less all Protestant mission churches and mission societies from Europe and North America. In the specific case of the DRC in SA, however, this thinking was strongly complemented by the later (early twentieth century) thinking of German missiologists. The Anglo-

American understanding of indigeneity and autonomy emphasised administrative and organisational categories (perhaps to be expected of a policy proposed by two mission secretaries). The main emphasis was on moving on as soon as possible to the "regions beyond" (which is why Venn described the process as "the euthanasia of mission"). An auxiliary consideration was strongly emphasised by Roland Allen: the example of Paul's mission described in Acts (Allen 1927). The German understanding, on the other hand, emphasised culture and national identity ("Volkstum"). Before the First World War, German mission leaders had already emphasised the national element (Hoekendijk sa:110). This tendency was strengthened by events during and after the War. With the growth of the desire for self-determination among colonial peoples it became even more obvious that mission had to respect national disposition. Reaction to Western (white) domination expressed itself more clearly in racial and especially nationalistic terms. As Hoekendijk (sa:113–115) puts it, a fourth "self" was added to Venn and Anderson's three: *self-determination*. Autonomy and indigeneity could no longer simply be expressed in administrative and organisational terms; *autogeneity* (Afrikaans "eiesoortigheid", German "Eigenartigkeit") had to be taken very seriously.

Two practising missionaries played a dominant role in the development of this concept in practical terms: Christian Keysser (in Papua New Guinea) and Bruno Gutmann (in Tanzania). They had a strong influence on the study of missiology in the DRC in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Chronologically Gutmann came first, expounding his theory in *Gemeinde-Aufbau aus dem Evangelium* (Church planting in terms of the Gospel − Gutmann 1925). Gutmann argued that we encounter God in the present in the original primordial structures he created for every people (tribe) "in the beginning". In the Gospel Christ unfolds perfectly what God had given in embryonic form in ethnic-specific creation ordinances (cf. Hoekendijk sa:135). Mission therefore had to ascertain (with the help of ethnology, social anthropology, etc) what these primordial ties of blood, land and peer/age groups were, because in them were embodied the vital organs of the people ("Volksorganen"). The task of the missionary was to strengthen these, not to destroy them by introducing Western civilisation and its modernistic concepts. Keysser accepted the validity of Gutmann's approach and called German missionaries to study and implement his foundational concept that the organs and the national identity ("Volksart") had to be christianised (Hoekendijk sa:174). Keysser did just that in his church in Papua New Guinea and developed his "people's pedagogical mission method" ("volkspedagogiese sendingmetode"). At the centre of Keysser's theology stands his conviction that tribe and church are one (Saayman 1993:111). Therefore no church can be built on the basis of individual conversions; a communal (tribal) decision has to be taken to accept Christ, and then the organs and

structures of the tribe should preferably become the organs and structures of the church.

Both Gutmann and Keysser had significant influence in the study and practice of mission and missiology in SA. The very first DRC theological student from Stellenbosch to complete a doctorate in missiology was WA Krige, who completed his thesis under the supervision of the great JH Bavinck at the Free University in Amsterdam in 1954. His thesis topic was: *Die probleem van eiesoortige kerkvorming by Christian Keysser* (The problem of autogenic church formation according to Christian Keysser), and it was published in Holland by T Wever (Krige 1954). Gutmann was the topic of the doctoral study of another DRC student, P Kamfer, in the very next year (Kamfer 1955). The fact that the first two doctoral students in missiology chose nearly simultaneously to do their doctoral studies on topics so centrally concerned with autogenic church formation surely indicates that it was a lively topic of study and discussion at the time. This is confirmed by Krige's choice for the topics of his doctoral "statements".[10] One main thrust of Krige's argument as expressed in his statements is a refutation of the DRC policy of racially separated churches (Saayman 1993:111). And it was clear that the main justification for racially separated churches was no longer the historical, practical unfolding of DRC mission involvement − now ethnicity, tribalism and national character (volksaard) were clearly central to the argument. Indeed, as Bosch (1984:14) points out, "by the 1940s and 1950s virtually all Afrikaner intellectuals [not only missiologists] subscribed to apartheid as an ideology firmly underpinned with a theological rationale". Why and how had this shift come about?

The Tomlinson Report and the justification for racial separation

The shift had already begun revealing itself before the publication of the Report in 1955. As I have pointed out above, after the constitution of the DR Mission Church in the Cape in 1881, both coloured and African converts of the DRC mission work were baptised into membership of the Mission Church. In 1910 the second DR Mission Church was constituted in the Free State. As the black population of the Free State was mainly African, the members of this church must have been mainly African. This was followed by the DR Mission Church in the Transvaal (also overwhelmingly African) in 1932. The Cape and Free State synods of the Mission Church held a joint conference for their moderatures in 1929. They proposed the formation of an Advisory Council for Mission Churches, which proposal was accepted by the respective mother churches. The Transvaal Mission Church joined this council upon its own formation in 1932. For some reason the Cape Mission Church decided in 1950 to withdraw from the council. In 1951 the DR Bantu Church in SA was constituted by the Cape Synod to accommodate the grow-

ing number of African converts from the rural areas and the Transkei. At this stage, concludes Smith (1980:104–105), the formation of a separate Bantu church was still the spontaneous response to the practical developments − in line with developments since 1857. The Bantu members were concentrated in the Transkei and used Xhosa and not Afrikaans in their services, so it made sense to constitute a separate church for them.

The withdrawal of the DR Mission Church left the Advisory Council with mainly African churches as members, and in 1955 the various white DRC synods decided to form the Federal Council of Dutch Reformed Mission Churches (to which both coloured and African synods belonged − cf. Crafford 1982:563). There thus seemed to be centrifugal as well as centripetal forces at work in the various DR Mission Churches (mainly constituted on a non-ethnic and non-tribal basis at this stage) in the early 1950s. The new Mission Churches which were coming into being were mainly African (simply organised on a provincial basis), while the existing (Cape) Coloured Mission Church was beginning to consider an existence on its own. Whatever the case might have been, there does not (yet) seem to have been strong pressure to organise on the basis of ethnicity, although the pressure was building. Bosch (1984:28) concludes that the exclusivist Afrikaner (ethnic) mobilisation started in the 1930s, on the basis that had already been laid by SJ du Toit early in the twentieth century.[11] This early foundation was laid especially on impulses generated by Reformed evangelicalism and the Dutch Calvinist Revival under Groen van Prinsterer (Bosch 1984:25–29), later reinforced by Kuyperian Christian nationalism. Deist (1990:129) clearly indicates the combination of urbanisation, poverty and unemployment which enabled Kuyperian Christian nationalism to flourish in this situation and set the stage for Afrikaner ethnocentricity. It received a vitalising impulse from German neo-Fichtean romantic nationalism, which were introduced into the Afrikaner community by outstanding young students such as NJ Diederichs, PJ Meyer, HF Verwoerd and others who studied in Germany during the 1930s (Bosch 1984:29). They introduced especially the Fichtean idea of "the organic unity of language, culture, and political self-determination" (Bosch 1984:29). As one of them, Diederichs, would later formulate it, "a person is first of all a member of the nation" (Bosch 1984:30). For this reason, "Service to my nation is service to God, for love of my nation is part of my love to God" (Bosch 1984:30).

Into this context the Tomlinson Report was introduced, which would prove to have far-reaching consequences for DRC mission work (cf. Saayman 2007:69–99; Saayman 2008). The Tomlinson Commission was the first to replace the term "native" for indigenous African people with the more ethnically charged term "Bantu" (Tomlinson Verslag 1955:1–2). The African ("Bantu") society of South Africa, concluded the Report, consisted of four distinct cultural/ethnic units: the Nguni, Sotho–Tswana, Venda and

Shangaan–Tsonga (Tomlinson Verslag 1955:1). The important elements which determined one's national (ethnic) identity were culture and language (cf. Saayman 2008:12–13; Ashforth 1990:161). Whether African people were born in one of the core areas of the four groups or in a "white" city, and whether or not urban African people still felt or had ever felt any affinity for such a core area, they could claim a national identity only in terms of language and culture which bound them to a specific ethnic group and its core area. The Tomlinson Report was not simply some dry and dusty government research report destined to gather dust and nothing more. It was rather the determined response of the newly elected National Party government to prove that their apartheid policy was not simply some airy-fairy ideological construct but rather both a hard-nosed and an idealistic political programme which could once and for all solve South Africa's central political problem: the "Native question" (Saayman 2008:1–2). In this conviction they were strongly supported by the DRC, whose request to government indeed contributed to the appointment of the Commission (Saayman 2008:5). It was no surprise, therefore, that the publication of the Report immediately reflected itself in the DRC debate on mission policy (cf. Saayman 2008:13–15 for examples). My contention is that the debate and eventual decisions on the creation of ethnically based, racially separated autogenous churches was one area in which the Tomlinson Report had significant influence.

In 1957 the Council of Dutch Reformed Churches (Raad van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke) issued a policy statement to confirm and emphasise the importance of the formation and development of autonomous, autogenous churches in order to evangelise the indigenous South African people (Van der Walt 1963:443). The formation of such churches, concluded the Council, was what Scripture required. No mention was made of the established policy of constituting separate churches on the basis of historical practice. An important shift had taken place. Van der Walt (1963:466) concludes that the main principle of the formation of autogenous churches had now been established (and had indeed been the leading principle since 1881): the existence of a national character (volksaard) and national identity (volkseie). Indeed, Council considered identity and intimacy based on natural relationship and collective culture to be important determinants in the visible revelation of the Church of Christ (Durand 1961:120).[12]

I cannot agree with Van der Walt that it had been a seamless progression since 1881 (cf. also Smith 1980 for a similar objection). Early separation in the church was the practical result of the social and racial institution of Afrikaner life. As Smith (1980:312) points out, until the end of the nineteenth century there had indeed been little evidence of any theological motivation for racial separation in the DRC. It was only later in the twentieth century that the DRC started providing theological justification

for racially separated churches. Indeed, Van Schalkwyk (in Deist 1990:136) could describe the process thus in 1952:

> Under the present circumstances we are strong proponents of the policy of apartheid … Apartheid has become part of our view of life. To scientifically justify such a view − and we need such justification − we are now looking for a scientific basis for our arguments in favour of the policy of apartheid.[13]

It is my contention that for the first half of the twentieth century the generally accepted missiological thinking on autonomous indigenous younger churches, as expressed especially in Anglo-American missiology (with its emphasis on administrative and organisational categories), was considered adequate. By the mid-1950s, though, the justification had adopted a clear ethno-theological nature (Smith 1984:312). It seems quite clear to me, therefore, that an important shift in theological thinking about the continued as well as the future existence of separate churches had taken place. This would be confirmed by developments subsequent to the formation of the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa in 1963. Originally the synod consisted of the various provincial DR Mission Church synods (in other words, with separation simply along practical and geographical lines). This soon started to change. In 1966 the Cape Synod of the DRCA was divided through the secession of the Regional Synod of Phororo (the Northern Cape). It had already been reported to the Cape Synod in 1953 that the mission work in the Northern Cape was progressing well, but that because of ethnic considerations (the converts were mainly Tswana speaking) the converts should rather be incorporated into the DR Mission Church in the Western Transvaal (also Tswana speaking). At the time nothing was done about this suggestion. When the Cape Synod of the DRCA decided in 1963 to recommend the secession of the Northern Cape, the justification was that "the Tswana form a discrete ethnic group and are treated as such by the state" (Smith 1984:117; my translation). For the first time ethnicity becomes the principle for separation − and my contention is that this is to a large degree a direct result of the findings and recommendations of the Tomlinson Report and the significant influence it had on DRC mission. The motivation for my conclusion is as follows:

1 As Hoekendijk (sa) indicates, it was especially after the Second World War that the German thinking on the importance of race and ethnicity gained wider acceptance in mission and missiological circles. This happened also in South Africa, as is evidenced in the topics of the first two missiological doctoral theses by DRC students (Krige 1954; Kamfer 1955). It is especially Krige's thesis that reflects the contro-

versy around the debate on autogenous (racially separated) younger churches in the DRC (as I have pointed out above). By the mid-1950s, therefore, ethnicity (as reflected in language, culture, national character, etc) had not yet been generally accepted as the founding principle for racially separated mission churches in the DRC. The decision about the secession of the Regional Synod of Phororo in 1966, as well as the doctoral thesis of Van der Walt (1963), indicates that early in the 1960s the debate had been settled, and the role of ethnicity had been accepted. I am convinced that the Tomlinson Report played an important role in this development.

2 A meeting on the "Native Question" convened by the Federal Mission Council in Bloemfontein in 1950 called on the newly elected NP government (with which the DRC existed in close symbiosis − cf. Saayman 2008:5–6) to institute a commission of enquiry into aspects of Bantu life such as the socioeconomic development of the Bantu reserves. This was one important reason for the Malan government to appoint the Tomlinson Commission. It could be expected that the DRC would take seriously the findings and recommendations of a commission partly appointed as a result of a request by synod.

3 One of the important findings of the Commission was the choice of the term "Bantu" rather than "Native" for African people in SA. One of the fundamental suppositions of this choice was that African ("Bantu") society consisted of distinct cultural (ethnic) units (Tomlinson Verslag 1955:1). Ashforth (1990:155) interprets the consequences of this choice as follows:

> The correct way of addressing the reconstructed "Bantu Question" in this version, then, required recognizing the diversity of "Bantu" cultures and speaking of these cultures as distinct identities with essential characteristics and distinct potentials.

African people in SA should henceforth not be identified simply in terms of the geographical area where they happened to live, but rather in terms of the innate human characteristics of language and culture which determined one's national identity and being (redolent of Gutmann's "primordial ordinances"). The practical expediency of organising its African churches along provincial lines was inadequate in terms of this newer ethnological thinking on the solution of the "Bantu question". Churches racially separated along ethno-theological lines represented the way to go in future. Both national citizenship (belonging to a nation) as well as church membership would in future be culturally (racially and ethnically) determined. The interest in

"Bantu cultures" as defining characteristics of autonomous and autogenous younger churches was already present in DRC missiological thinking. This was especially the result of German missiology. Yet the affirmation of this line of thinking in the Tomlinson Report as fundamental to the final and just solution of the "Native question" (Ashforth 1990:167) undoubtedly contributed significantly to the outcome of the debate in the DRC. In terms of the argument in Krige's thesis to which I referred above, the debate was still raging in 1954. After the publication of the Report in 1955 the outcome was settled in favour of racially separated churches also as the *theologically* correct solution (cf. Van der Walt 1963).

4 There is a sense in which one can argue that the Tomlinson Report provided the capstone for the evolution of racist practice and thinking present in the (evolving) Afrikaner community and DRC since 1652. What started out as the practical everyday consequence of an inclination the Dutch colonists brought with them from Europe had now evolved into acceptance of the ethnical structuring of church membership as final solution. The church had an essential share in the development of this thinking, and it could be expected that the DRC would eventually feel obliged to develop the ethno-theology required to justify racial separation in its churches.

Implications

I think it is necessary now to spell out in more detail the theological and ecclesiological implications of the Tomlinson Report for church formation in the DRC, since I believe that these implications illustrate instances in which "good state policy" determined (supposedly) "good mission policy".

1 The strong emphasis on "differentials" in church and mission (SA-born over against foreign; Protestant over against Roman Catholic) revealed a serious lack of appreciation for the value of *catholicity* and *unity* in mission and church (two of the essential characteristics of the church according to the Apostolic Confession of Faith). Indeed, the "differentials" were sometimes emphasised to such a degree that the relationship came to border on the adversarial, with directives that foreign missionaries should no longer be utilised in mission in SA. The background to this sentiment was clearly the feeling that foreign missionaries did not understand and appreciate the "unique" cultural and race relations in SA (the absolute separation required in terms of apartheid). As a result, foreigners promoted all kinds of social as well as ecclesiastical interracial meetings, which was not "our way" in SA. For this reason, also, foreigners could not understand the good inten-

tions of the apartheid policy, and did not promote apartheid in their mission ministry and social lives. Their preference for and insistence on multiracial churches, so the Report implied, could lead only to misfortune. In strongly emphasising that foreign mission assistance was not needed, the Report further showed no appreciation for the well-known New Testament truth that it is the *unity* of Christ's followers that would convince the world that he was indeed the Messiah (John 17:20–21) and that Christians can only know the full extent of God's love in Christ together with *all* God's people (Ephes 3:17–19). It seems that the separatist (schismatic?) tendency expressed in apartheid, which rested to a large extent on the philosophy expressed by the Dutch theologian, Groen van Prinsterer ("In isolation lies our strength"), here found expression also in relation to the Christian church. It is even more interesting when one calls into mind that about seven years later the DRC would withdraw from the World Council of Churches (WCC), introducing a long period of nearly total ecumenical isolation of the Afrikaans Reformed churches.

2 The Tomlinson Commission advised the South African churches against following international advice and example in church formation. This was the case, argued the Commission, because international churches wanted to establish multiracial churches and ignore issues of culture and ethnicity. This was quite unsuitable for SA, stated the Commission with great conviction. Here, racially exclusive churches (with culture and language the decisive factors) were what was needed. This conclusion is interesting in its ambivalence. By the early 1950s the leading concept in missionary church formation in SA was still Venn and Anderson's concept of the "three selfs": a missionary church should be self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating. Church formation was thus defined mainly in administrative terms. In theological-ecclesiological terms, therefore, missionaries and missiologists expected that the church in the "mission field" would not differ markedly from the church "at home". Only a very few pioneers (Keysser and Gutmann among them) were advocating following an approach dominated by the situation in the "mission field", starting the process of church formation *ex nihilo* as it were. In this sense, propagating a more "contextual" (at that stage still an unknown term) approach to church formation, completely indigenous to South Africa, was therefore actually quite innovative. On the other hand, though, this approach was most probably not inspired by any innovative or contextual aspirations (as it was expected that new Reformed churches should accept the sixteenth-century Reformed confessions and creeds, for instance), but rather by mistrust (of strangers) and isolationism (as indicated in the previous section). The fact that such an influential

group of churches as the Afrikaans Reformed churches so purposefully isolated themselves from ecumenical influences therefore eventually contributed to the unfolding tragedy in SA. *Bad* mission policy thus fed on and strengthened *bad* state policy by excluding the beneficial ideological correction which could have been contributed by the catholic, ecumenical church.

3 There is no doubt that church and state should complement each other and act in a reciprocal manner in development issues. This should not ultimately lead to them blending with each other, though. This was more or less what the Tomlinson Report expected: that churches and mission societies would be funded by government in providing education, health services, and so on in order that they could obediently contribute to fulfilling the grand apartheid ideals and government policy. Therefore the Commission, consciously or unconsciously, expected that church and mission should sacrifice their own development agendas and buy into the state agenda lock, stock and barrel. The glaring reality that church and state had (or should have had) completely different *motivations* for getting involved in development issues seemed to have fallen by the wayside in the euphoria about the "discovery" that "good mission policy was good state policy in SA". The ideal that the Tomlinson Commission cherished for the relationship between church and state was the discredited concept of "Christendom", the sad and rotten fruit of incest between the Constantinian church and state, grown to full fruition in the entanglement between mission and colonialism. There is perhaps no more vivid illustration of the truth of the old saying, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions" than this state of affairs. For there is little doubt that the vision of the Tomlinson Commission was inspired *also* by good intentions and an undeniable dimension of idealism (Saayman 2008:12). Eventually, though, as a result of the incestuous relationship, the DRC and its mission would come to be regarded as nothing more than the NP at prayer (Saayman 2007:98). In this way the DRC came to be regarded by many outside observers as complicit in the unfolding tragedy of apartheid, part of the problem and not part of its solution.

4 The picture of black Christianity in South Africa painted by the Tomlinson Commission proved ultimately to be "too good to be true". It was viewed through such utopian and heavily coloured ideological lenses that what was described was reality as the commissioners (inspired by the projected apartheid utopia) *wished it to be* − not reality as it indeed *was*. The majority of Christians in SA were indeed black − an enormously positive reality. And Christianity had indeed had an enormous influence on the life and being of black Christians in

SA. But black Christianity in SA was very different from what the commissioners chose to see. The Commission came to a very positive conclusion about black moral and religious life, and found the basis for all these positive characteristics exclusively in the influence of Christianity (Tomlinson Verslag 1955:155). The Commission had obviously accepted the old ethnocentric colonialist misconception that before the arrival of white colonists and missionaries the indigenous Africans had had no real concept of faith (only superstition), no real charitable impulse (only self-interest), no real desire to improve living conditions (only fatalistic acceptance of the status quo). This failure to recognise what was really good and true in black humanity, the pre-conception that only whites always and in all circumstances would know what was good for black people, and the consequent inability to share future planning with black South Africans, would come back to haunt white South Africa. But perhaps even more dangerous was the completely mistaken evaluation of the influence of Christianity in issues of governance. The Commission concluded that Christianity had made Africans more law-abiding and made the "Christian captains" more progressive and more willing to cooperate with the state (Tomlinson Verslag 1955:155). The main danger here was two-fold. The traditional authority structure built around the captains had been badly eroded by three centuries of colonialism. The spiritual and moral authority of the captains had been eroded by the alienation of land, the destruction of traditional belief systems, and the deposing of "troublesome" captains at the Europeans' whim. Some of these captains lauded by the Commission may indeed have been imposed on the black community by white authority precisely because they were already under white manipulative control. So the joyful conclusion that "Christian captains" cooperated more readily was a huge over-simplification of a complex problem. African Christians who were evaluated as "law-abiding" by the Commission may indeed have been considered as sellouts by the rest of the community (as would happen in the 1980s), so the fact that they were "Christians" was actually not such an unmixed blessing. In any case, the main problem lay with the nature of the recommendation based on this assumption. The recommendation was basically that since evangelisation of black people was the only safeguard for European civilisation in South Africa, the churches had to be consciously engaged in the envisaged development programme. And the envisaged programme was inspired by apartheid − so it was indeed the Constantinian entanglement in its most blatant embodiment. The consequence of what was proposed here on a completely utopian basis was well captured in 1958 in the words of one of

the cabinet ministers of the first apartheid government, Mr D de Wet Nel (quoted in Bosch 1984:20–21), who said:

> An aspect … which is one of the main reasons why many people [read: whites] are still cold and indifferent to mission work is its political significance … If the Afrikaans churches succeed in bringing the Blacks over into a Protestant-Christian context, South Africa will have a hope for the future. If this does not happen, our policy, our programme of legislation and all our plans will be doomed to failure … Our sons and daughters should realise that mission work offers the most wonderful opportunity to serve God, but also the most glorious opportunity to serve the fatherland.

It is in a sense unfair to emphasise here only the commissioners' mistaken assumptions. Such assumptions were actually widespread in white South African society. Many white South Africans were convinced that they "knew the Africans", making the same mistake as the Commission by basing their subsequent assumptions on realities as they were experienced by white South Africans, not on realities as they were actually experienced by black South Africans. A longtime missionary, Stian van der Merwe, was therefore correct when he diagnosed the problem as being based on whites living in a fantasy country of their own creation, a piece of Europe which can best be called "a White Wonderland" (Van der Merwe 1989:60–65; cf. also Steyn 2001:156–157). The commissioners were therefore in reality reflecting an utopian view of church and mission in South Africa shared by many, if not most, white South Africans.

Conclusions

It seems to me that church and state took decisions based on the findings and recommendations of the Tomlinson Report which might have had long-term theological consequences. In my view theologians and church leaders need to be very aware of these in this era when a totally new pattern of church–state interrelationship has been introduced by the post-1994 democratic transformation.

1 The catholicity and unity of the Christian church are affirmed as essential characteristics of the church not only in the oldest Christian creeds; church history also confirms their importance. The history of church and mission, in their entanglement with state policy in South Africa during the apartheid years, unfortunately denied these essential

characteristics of the church (Saayman 1984:123–124). Racism is still with us, despite the demise of apartheid. And the uneven distribution of wealth has created (at least) two "economies" in our country, further threatening catholicity and unity. The conditions in South African society which propagated this disjunction between catholicity and unity therefore did not miraculously disappear as a result of the democratic transition. Consequently the issue still needs vigilant attention. Is the continued existence of racially separated churches (whether in terms of policy decisions or preferred modes of existence), as well as the existence of very poor and extremely rich churches in South Africa, not a continuation of this deplorable state of affairs today? Can South African Christians honestly claim to belong to the "one, holy and catholic Church of Christ in South Africa"? And what are the implications of the answers to these questions to President Mbeki's "two nations" theory and the growing chasm between haves and have-nots (with the Gini coefficient higher than it has ever been)?[14]

2 The state attempted to interfere (albeit in what was considered a "benign" way) with church formation (ecclesiology) through the Tomlinson Report. The ecclesiological problem has been the most serious missiological problem worldwide since at least the 1930s (cf. Saayman 1984:123). In contemporary South Africa we are apparently content with a continuation of the European ecclesiological patterns we inherited. Should we not question the adequacy of this ecclesiology far more vigorously? (cf. Saayman 2000).

3 One can argue that the relationship between church and state has been problematic throughout the ages, especially since the age of Constantine. The complexity was compounded by the entanglement of mission and colonialism. And in the case of South Africa, the post-Tomlinson point of departure that "good mission policy is good state policy" multiplied the problems exponentially. This should serve as a permanent warning to South African churches that church and mission policy and state policy can only coexist coincidentally. Any pressure from the side of the state to bring mission and church policy into line with or under the control of state policy must be regarded with suspicion. And the theological authenticity of any call by Christians, church leaders or churches to correlate mission policy with state policy is hugely debatable. The possibility that a "State theology" could take root and grow again, similar to the one which eventually grew out of this proposal (brilliantly identified by *The Kairos Document* Institute for Contextual Theology 1986), is unfortunately an ever-present reality in church–state relations.

4 Christian mission has always been and should always remain nothing but an invitation by the Holy Spirit to human beings to participate in God's comprehensive mission to bring about ***his*** *shalom*. Mission should never become a patriotic duty as the Tomlinson Commission tried to portray it as being. It is certain that the damage done to the *missio Dei* in South Africa as a result of this misunderstanding cannot be computed yet. We need a high degree of vigilance to ensure that this misunderstanding is not again actively or passively propagated ("through sins of commission or omission"). On the other hand, the secularisation of the post-1994 state and fear for the mistakes made in the old dispensation should not close our eyes to the reality that interventions by Christian communities (such as the Institute for Contextual Theology and the South African Council of Churches) could be and were of significant benefit. Have they retired from the field of contestation prematurely, perhaps?

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Endnotes

1 I use quotation marks for controversial terms such as "family of churches", "mother" church, and "daughter" churches for the first time to indicate that I am aware that these are contested terms and that I am uncomfortable in using them, Yet they were widely used in churches in general and the DRC in particular until three decades ago. For the sake of understandable communication I therefore use them still in this article dealing with historical developments.

2 At that stage the DRC existed as four provincial synods; a united national general synod had not yet been formed.

3 It is interesting to note that the first printed record of the term "apartheid" in the sense in which it became known as the guiding political policy of the NP is to be found in the report of a Free State DRC mission conference in 1929 (Giliomee 2003:454).

4 A well-known slogan of that election was Dr Malan's injunction: "Bly blank, my volk!" (Stay white, my people!).

5 At that time the four provincial synods of the DRC had not yet been reunited in one countrywide general synod. Every provincial synod therefore planned and carried out its own mission policy, while they met in the Federal Mission Council for more coordinated cooperation and planning.

6 I have described the background to the appointment of the Commission more fully in Saayman 2007. The method, findings and recommendations of the Commission were published in 1955 (Tomlinson Verslag 1955).

7 The Commission remarked that there were very few churches of Asian descent, but remained completely silent on the coloured people – they were probably supposed to form part of the group of churches of white descent. At this stage whites and coloureds were still linked together in some areas, for example in the Cape Province, where coloured voters were still on the voters' roll with white voters.

8 Control over mission societies and churches had been an important matter since the early days of colonialism. Most colonial authorities (not only in South Africa) did not really desire the presence of foreign missionaries who could cause them problems. And since the late nineteenth century, with the rise of indigenous African churches in SA, the issue of control had become even more important. Indigenous churches represented the one domain where Africans could freely express their needs and desires, as well as their opposition to white rule. Government therefore desired to have as much control over all churches as possible.

9 This also indicates that the NP government was not too worried about the "multi-racialism" of the "South African-oriented" English-speaking churches in SA. Government probably thought that they would be able to contain the phenomenon of racial mixing in these churches through legislation. The reality of the incipient racial separation of living areas also meant that "multi-racial" churches would always be the exception rather than the rule.

10 It was the Dutch academic custom at the time that the candidate had to summarise the main points of his/her arguments in a number of statements to be defended at the public academic defence of the thesis.

11 I fully agree with Bosch's analysis − see Saayman 2008:3–4.

12 Note the obvious similarities with the Tomlinson Report.

13 Van Schalkwyk actually wrote this in an attempt to make his colleagues realise to what extent the apartheid context was determining their theological thinking. His main argument was that for precisely the same contextual reasons a later generation of Afrikaner theologians might come to an opposite conclusion about the so-called "Biblical justification" of apartheid − prophetic words indeed!

14 The Gini coefficient, an instrument to measure the gap between rich and poor, was standing at 0.72 at the end of 2006 (Bond 2008:30). The best in terms of the coefficient is 0.0, and the worst is 1.0. Not even in the heyday of apartheid was the Gini coefficient so high in SA − the highest in the world.