

**Before the Pool of Narcissus: The Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk's  
Journey to Confessional Orthodoxy and Isolation Through the Lense of Doctrine**

**Mieke Holkeboer  
Prof. J.W. de Gruchy  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the masters by coursework  
September 1995**

The University of Cape Town has been given  
the right to reproduce this thesis in whole  
or in part. Copyright is held by the author.

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

## Abstract

This thesis considers South Africa's Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) in its journey toward confessional orthodoxy and isolation which began already in the late nineteenth century and continued, through the apartheid era, well into the twentieth. The dates chosen roughly to frame this inquiry (1907 to 1962), however, drive equally toward a particular ecclesial unity. For in 1907, the NGK synods established, out of a desire to cooperate more closely, the Federal Council of Churches (FCC). In 1962 this drive toward ecclesial unity then culminated in the convening of the General Synod, where delegates from all the church's "mother" synods gathered in a single synod for the first time in one hundred years. So united, however, the NGK was, in its ecumenical affiliations, at an all-time low.

What were the circumstances within which this unity-in-isolation occurred? In light of the NGK's role in sanctioning and advancing apartheid, this thesis explores Afrikaans church and missionary periodicals and church documents from these years with a view to evaluating what went wrong. More specifically, however, the inquiry is driven by an interest in the complex role of doctrine in hermeneutics and the life of the church. Indeed, this thesis views doctrine as the key to understanding the NGK's journey to isolation and apartheid and asks, how did it function--in the church's ecumenical decisions, internal church matters and even its political involvement during this period? In The Nature of Doctrine<sup>1</sup> George Lindbeck offers a metaphor within which to conceive doctrine's role for a healthy church: doctrine is "grammar" for the primary language of Scripture. This thesis employs (with several critical divergences) Lindbeck's theory of doctrine in evaluating healthy and unhealthy dynamics within the NGK. The inquiry is broken into four chapters: 1) Lindbeck and the NGK; 2) Ecumenicity and the NGK; 3) Confessional Foundations; and 4) Race Relations and the NGK.

---

<sup>1</sup>Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984.

In considering the role of doctrine in the NGK's road to isolation, this thesis considers that dialectic operative in every church: between abiding identity ("good conservatism") and openness to change ("good liberalism"). Indeed, no church avoids the call to adjudicate, continually, between healthy changes which translate the core of faith into new contexts (as, for example, in the best of liberation theology) and changes which do violence to that core (as when Scripture's foundation is replaced with a foreign foundation of rationalism or philosophy). Every church is challenged to distinguish those elements essential to the dialectic from their "wilder" siblings--true liberalism from a generic and groundless openness and true conservatism from a propositionalist petrification of the church's heritage. In the NGK's attempt to conserve its substance over and against an undermining liberalism, it turned against that liberal stream which, in its critical openness, actually did conserve the ecclesial identity. It is this course that is examined.

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter One: Lindbeck and the NGK</b>	
A Postmodern Diagnosis for a Modern Church?	6
Lindbeck and the NGK: Related by a Common Foe	9
The First "Independent" South African Church	12
1862 Synod: A Liberal Win	13
Kotzé and Burger: Liberals Quelled?	15
Liberalism Spends Its Force	17
Lindbeck's Theory of Doctrine	19
<b>Chapter Two: Ecumenicity and the NGK</b>	
"Liberal" and "Conservative": Sorting Through the Labels	23
Ecumenical Watersheds in the NGK: 1907 and 1962	25
The Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES): Particular Unity, Universal Truth?	27
The World Council of Churches (WCC): Protestant Challenge or Modernist Threat?	35
Apartheid and Ecumenism: The NGK Through the Fifties	43
Cottesloe Consultation	50
Inside the NGK: Ecumenicity?	51
<b>Chapter Three: Confessional Foundations</b>	
The RES and the WCC: The Fallibility of Scriptural Foundations	57
The RES Reads "the Bible of Karl Barth"	61
Inside the NGK: the du Plessis Affair	62
The Rise of the "Oupajane"	67
Du Plessis Reads "the Bible of Karl Barth"	70
"Uitbou" v. "Hersiening": Old Facts and Unchanged Truths	72
<b>Chapter Four: Race Relations and the NGK</b>	
"Race Relations": English and Afrikaner	81
The Hertzog Bills: A Catalyst in the Politics of Mission	87
The NGK and the English-speaking Churches: A Parting of Ways	90
Inside the NGK: Missions as a "Volksaak"	92
The 1935 Mission Policy: A Rough Draft for Apartheid	95
The Kuyperian Context	97
"Afrikaner Liberalism": After du Plessis	102
The NGK Through the Fifties: The Apartheid Context	105
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>116</b>

To Prof. Lindbeck who showed me the waters;  
to John who showed me the mountain;  
and to my mother, chief sojourner and confessor.

## **Acknowledgments**

Before the reviews come back on the content of the work itself, I must nevertheless thank a number of those who helped me significantly in my preparing of it. Thanks go first to John de Gruchy who not only met with me frequently and at moment's notice, but who with wife Isobel welcomed me, in countless ways, to Cape Town and showed me much of South Africa's beauty. Thank you to Steve Martin for friendship, rigorous dialogue and helpful critique. Thanks also to many students who in sharing life experience extended my knowledge of the South African context well beyond the parameters of this thesis. And particular appreciation to the religious studies department staff for printing and other favors, as well as for many illuminating teatime conversations about love and politics, sin and grace. Finally, I would like to thank the NGK of Rondebosch for a year's communion and much love.

## Introduction

The project of this thesis is to consider the particular identity of South Africa's Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) from 1907, when its "mother" synods together established the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) out of a desire to coordinate their efforts more closely, to 1962, when these synods finally forged out of their separateness a single general synod. As these years drove toward this synodical unity within the NGK, they marked equally a road to isolation, as the church's doctrinal and political positions increasingly closed off ecumenical conversations and quelled diversity within. How did the doctrine of this Reformed church function during this period? What was the relationship, for example, between the NGK's evolving missionary policies (and the doctrines they inscribed) and the eventual triumph and implementation of the National Party's political apartheid. And inside the church, how did doctrines function during the trials of Stellenbosch professor Johannes du Plessis when, in the late twenties, he was brought before the Cape synod for disseminating false teaching and questioning the authority of Scripture?

Despite countless synodical discussions and decisions, there remains a sense in which NGK leaders through these years failed to grasp the true life and function of doctrine and sought instead to wield it as a static safeguard against change, as a means of securing a Reformed interpretation of Scripture against the winds of history and particularly of modernism. But doctrine was so domesticated only at high expense: for as the NGK called upon doctrine to "protect" its self-understanding and calling from foreign agendas, it ironically lost touch with the vital elements of this identity and therein submitted to apartheid's agenda--a grave subversion not only of the church's self-understanding, but of human being as well.

In exploring the NGK through the role of doctrine, my point of departure differs from that of many studies of this church, for it seeks to evaluate it on its own terms. While



I underscore the dialectical nature of doctrine's relationship with cultural, sociological and political factors, I am not primarily concerned with racist ideology, Afrikaner nationalism, or even the sociological effects of the Great Trek. Rather, in this dialectic, doctrinal factors are primary. All of these "secular" factors come into view in and through a doctrinal lens.

The contradiction implied in speaking of doctrine both as a lens for other dimensions of church identity and as dialectical with them raises a significant question already at the outset. To what extent is doctrine itself shaped by the historical contexts within which it appears and to which it responds? Moreover, in view of the great emphasis given to the authority and role of Scripture by the NGK, what is the relationship between doctrine and Scripture and the role of historical experience underlying the determining of each? Indeed, the NGK's own willingness to relate its hermeneutics to its political actions provides a unique opportunity for addressing this.

In The Nature of Doctrine, Lutheran theologian George Lindbeck develops a theory of doctrine for a postmodern (and, as he declares it, a postliberal) age. The thesis which follows is in some ways this theory's case study for a modern age and context. What insights might it provide for evaluating doctrinal and political matters inside the NGK? Fundamentally, Lindbeck offers a language within which to conceive the doctrinal processes of development and growth. How do doctrines carry the substantial truths of the Christian faith to each new context diachronically, as the developments of history and scholarship call for corresponding doctrinal development inside a church, and synchronically, in a church's ecumenical and interfaith relations? Lindbeck employs a linguistic metaphor to clarify doctrine's function in the Christian community. Doctrine as church grammar provides the rules within a community for "speaking" the primary language of Scripture. In its healthy and unhealthy developments it thus reveals a church's deepest logic.

The NGK, however, is more than simply a case study for Lindbeck's theory. Indeed, employing Lindbeck's paradigms is not a wholly unproblematic enterprise. The

experience of this "modern" church challenges the prognosis and prescriptions which Lindbeck sets out for his postliberal church as well. Firstly, a look at the intimacy of doctrine and Scripture in NGK hermeneutics through these years we address makes hazier the sharp distinction Lindbeck attempts to draw between the two. Secondly, insofar as Lindbeck addresses the life of church doctrine, he does so for the postmodern context, one which the NGK is only beginning to enter. Particularly in matters concerning the relationship between church and state, Lindbeck's work engages few of the complexities of church and state faced by a society where this single church, the NGK, was commonly said to be the National Party (the ruling party from 1948) at prayer. Indeed, Lindbeck's work may have much to say to the NGK now, as it is forced to process its newly relativized status in South African politics and society. Nevertheless, I have found Lindbeck's work to be fruitful--at times provocative--for exploring the NGK of these years. In chapter one I consider Lindbeck's theory more fully, with a view to considering the NGK in its light. The three major arenas in which these doctrinal issues are then explored make up the last three chapters of this work: Ecumenicity and the NGK; Confessional Foundations; and Race Relations and the NGK.

The dialectic between doctrine and politics in the history of the NGK requires one important divergence from Lindbeck at the outset. Lindbeck explores the role of doctrine intrasystematically, within the "system" of a church. Yet to gain real insight into the function of doctrine in the NGK one must finally look beyond the intrasystematic functions of doctrine as grammar to pursue its role in shaping race relations in South Africa. What, for example, is the relationship between the NGK's struggle against theological liberalism (and the role of doctrine therein) and the Afrikaners' quashing of political liberalism. It will be necessary to assess the ways in which doctrine's interface with South African politics impacted the role of doctrine inside the NGK ("grammatically"), when the churches were co-opted into aiding the Afrikaner rise to political power. For this exploration of doctrine and politics Lindbeck's intrasystematic approach does not finally take us far enough.

Describing my method of research for this project is like trying to convey, after the fact, the ingredients and procedure for something which began in a much more unmeasured manner than any recipe. "Unmeasured" has been my growing interest in the NGK and my more slowly growing proficiency in Afrikaans (I began research and language study at the same time!). Perhaps "overmeasured" was the time constraint I placed upon the inquiry, as my own further studies committed the thesis to completion inside the year. Guided by such external constraints as well as some discoveries, many early questions were transformed, others abandoned.

It was a little over a year ago that I first landed in Cape Town and started researching the correspondence between the Christian Reformed Church (CRC--my own church) and the NGK through the apartheid era. While the NGK was trying to justify apartheid on hermeneutical grounds, the CRC was attempting a similar justification and apartheid (albeit of a less grave scale) in its exclusion of women from church offices.<sup>1</sup> How was the authority of Scripture functioning in these two communities? The more I considered this question for the NGK, the more complex the church dynamics became. The significant role of doctrine in the NGK's hermeneutical and even political discussions became increasingly apparent, and thus I traded my earlier focus for a closer inquiry into doctrinal dynamics within the NGK.

Though I have studied Lindbeck previously, the thought of employing his insights for the NGK came only at the end of my research, leaving too little time and space to thoroughly compare the NGK's modern struggle against liberalism with his postmodern one. Thus, I set my parameters humbly. This thesis is not a comprehensive historical inquiry of the period in question. Neither does it explore thoroughly all political dimensions of the NGK. Rather I have tried to frame critical questions about the role doctrine played in the NGK's decisions in the years between 1907 and 1962 to better

---

<sup>1</sup>In the CRC's most recent synod (July 95), the ordination of women into the offices of deacon, elder and minister has been approved provisionally, subject to the decision of each classis.

understand why the NGK took the path it did politically and theologically. While I left my research on the CRC early on, the NGK's story is in many ways the CRC's story as well. For both churches have privileged specific doctrinal frameworks in their interpretation of Scripture and have struggled to preserve their minority theological views and cultural identities over and against universalizing liberalisms. Yet these connections move us beyond the parameters I have set and thus will have to wait. Now let us turn to the project at hand.

## Chapter One: Lindbeck and the NGK

### A Postmodern Diagnosis for a Modern Church?

"Ours," Lindbeck declares, "...is a watershed age in which the [Christian] principle no longer holds for any communion."<sup>1</sup> There is no longer a common ground for discourse, and Christianity, once dominant, must now struggle in a culture<sup>2</sup> hostile to its symbols. In a postmodern age Lindbeck declares that religion is no longer the substance of culture (as it perhaps was in the Christendom of the "Protestant era") and insists that insofar as religion (and Christianity in particular) is not the substance of postmodern culture, the agenda of the church must never be political. Rather than involving the church directly in the politics of its society, the Christian faith must attend in such an age to its own language and community. This postmodern church is thus political only indirectly, as it strives to be a community that supports Christians as they act both within its institutional boundaries and in the greater society. "The cultural mission of the church," he asserts, cannot be programmed but is, from the human perspective, an accident or by-product of the Christian community's faithfulness in attending to its own language and life which, of course, includes service to others."<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, in another passage Lindbeck's church appears to have even less missionary impulse as he declares, "Perhaps the church of the future will lead an increasingly ghettoized existence in shrinking enclaves and unfriendly societies. We simply do not know."<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Lindbeck, "Scripture, Consensus and Community," p16.

<sup>2</sup> The term "culture" used by Lindbeck is a particularly problematic one to employ in the South African context. Where he uses "culture" we understand it as roughly equivalent to "society." For our purposes we will thus favor the latter.

<sup>3</sup>Lindbeck, "The Church's Mission to a Postmodern Culture," p54.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p55.

Despite such words, Lindbeck must not be read as one indifferent to the church's role in culture. Rather, the church that Lindbeck addresses must forge its identity and actions in the plurality of postmodernism, and thus it differs significantly from the NGK in the period we are considering. The church whose self-understanding we address finds itself in the modern era, in a cultural discourse not hostile toward but in fact reliant upon Christian symbols and vocabulary. In the United States we need only look at our currency to experience the extent to which we have trusted, through the modern era, in the God of Protestantism, and need only look at the change in college and university curriculae to see the manner in which we have begun to question these earlier foundations of our society.

Locating the NGK in this milieu of modernism, we must underscore the uniqueness of the South African context. Insofar as the NGK has been shaped by (and has itself shaped) South African history, it has been part of the particular Christian discourse of missions and colonization. Indeed, well into the twentieth century this dialectic of evangelization and imperial expansion has employed Christian symbols in a number of interrelated discourses: ecclesial, missiological and ecumenical, as well as political and economic ones. From the time the English missionaries began arriving around the turn of the nineteenth century, tensions between English and Dutch,<sup>5</sup> inextricably caught in this matrix of the theological, political and economic, began to play prominently.

Of course the English and the Dutch (Afrikaner) have not been the only two agents in South African history over the last two centuries. The Islamic communities of today witness to a history of successful Muslim missionary activity, especially among slaves. Moreover, particularly after WWI Jews are a people who have factored significantly in Cape politics and economics, with many supporting the National Party in its early years. Indeed, to speak of these complexities is not yet to address those tensions which have

---

<sup>5</sup> There is much debate about when the Dutch of the Cape began to consider themselves "Afrikaners" and when the Afrikaans language came into its own. Both are, however, rather late developments in South African history. Prior to the twentieth-century we will refer to the Afrikaner as Dutch.

existed between African and European since the Dutch East India Company first arrived in the Cape in 1652.<sup>6</sup> Despite these complexities and diversities, however, the struggle for executive powers in South Africa has been waged largely between the English and the Afrikaner. Newly arrived English missionaries, particularly those of the London Missionary Society (LMS), clashed with NGK leaders from the start, in large part over the appropriation of land and of the indigenous population. Indeed, by the turn of this century, "race relations" referred to English-Afrikaner tensions over "native policy," rather than to any conflicts between African and European. In other words, despite the reality of diversity in South African society throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, its discursive foundations were not inclusive, but exclusive, determined, as is always the case, by those in power and those contending for power--European Christians or Christian Europeans, depending on whether one gives primacy to the cultural or the religious. In this respect the South African context was like other modern contexts, where "shared" symbols and vocabulary were not representative of all sectors of the society, but only those sectors with the fullest power to speak.

While the NGK for our period operated in a society dependent upon Christian symbols (a criterion which Lindbeck uses to characterize the modern era), differing politics and theologies meant that these symbols were employed very differently by the various groups. Indeed, the NGK has been determined (as has South Africa itself) much more by these divergences than by the "shared" discursive plane upon which they have been articulated. In this respect, perhaps, the NGK's experience has been more "postmodern" than "modern." And yet we must wary of either category in evaluating the unique circumstances that have shaped South Africa. To understand the role that doctrine has played in the NGK, we will have to consider, at least in broad strokes, the history of its struggle with liberalism and the church's relation to this broader "Christian" discourse of

---

<sup>6</sup> And, it could be said, already from 1488, when Portuguese Bartholomew Dias first planted a wooden cross in the soil of Cape Point and moved on.

South African politics. Nevertheless, we seek to understand the NGK's response to liberalism in the critical light of Lindbeck's work, and thus it is first to Lindbeck that we turn.

### **Lindbeck and the NGK: Related by a Common Foe**

Despite significant differences, both Lindbeck and the NGK have struggled with liberalism and have articulated understandings of church largely over and against it. Moreover, both Lindbeck and the NGK have recognized the importance of doctrine to ecclesial identity and have viewed liberalism's neglect of doctrine and Scripture as an integral part of the modern malaise. In some ways, though with meaningful differences in context, both Lindbeck's postliberal church and the NGK have responded to the milieu of liberalism by seeking isolation and a controlling of discourse. With the de-Christianization of society, Lindbeck acknowledges the increasingly "ghettoized" existence of the postliberal church and urges it to determine its self-understanding and survival over and against society's secularizing trends. Given that the language of society and that of the church are no longer shared, some, seeking for churches a relevance and relationship to greater society, have urged them to learn the new language of secularism. Lindbeck, however, exhorts the postliberal church to relearn the language of Scripture. This "is difficult," he concedes, "and at present there are no signs that the churches can do it. Forgetting rather than relearning is still the major trend. Yet if the direction were reversed, the...consequences [for society] might be considerable."<sup>7</sup> Thus while the church's survival and success lie in attending to its own language, isolation and irrelevance do not necessarily follow. Rather, Lindbeck affirms the possibility that such resistance to secular trends (themselves the heritage of liberalism) and such a focus on particular ecclesial identity will lead the church to greater relevance in the postmodern context.

---

<sup>7</sup> Lindbeck, "The Church's Mission to a Postmodern Culture," p52.



In an article entitled "An Assessment Reassessed,"<sup>8</sup> Lindbeck borrows the lens of classic liberal theologian Paul Tillich to address some of the key issues at stake in the birth and growth of Protestantism. For Tillich the life of the church depends upon a "structural interrelationship of [its] reformatory principle...and [its] catholic heritage"--that necessary dialectic between the Protestant principle (openness) and Catholic substance (identity) in which each enables the life of the other. "Catholic substance" here refers not narrowly to Roman Catholicism, but to a "strong sense of tradition and of the wider church community and its authority." (377) In this respect, Lindbeck is quick to point out, it can be found in Protestant traditions as much as in Catholic ones, and can even be located in settings of Protestant liberalism. It is that core which doctrines strive to translate for each new context, and it is as vulnerable to abuse in the face of the Reformer's *sola scriptura* as it is the face of Catholicism's apostolic succession.

When the Catholic substance is absolutized as "eternal" and prevented from engaging new contexts, Lindbeck declares, the dialectic is lost at the expense of the church's most fundamental tenets. "The catholic heritage,<sup>9</sup> in short, can become a substitute for and obstacle to God rather than the medium through which comes grace, freedom, and faith." Or, in Tillich's language, the substance can lose its porousness or transparency to the divine ground and can become instead "hardened and opaque."

---

<sup>8</sup> Lindbeck, "An Assessment Reassessed: Paul Tillich on the Reformation."

<sup>9</sup> The interchangeability with which Lindbeck uses the terms "substance" and "heritage" raises a question which we will pursue more fully at the conclusion of this thesis. Namely, despite Lindbeck's success in distinguishing theoretically between first-order foundations (substance) and the second-order "grammar" of church teaching (heritage), does he not finally confuse the Scriptural foundation with that layer of tradition in which a church's doctrines grow? In other words, while in the dialectic between substance and principle, doctrines, creeds and confessions at their birth find themselves operating as "principle," do they not later become part of the very foundation and substance upon which new layers of tradition and doctrine are then built? Is a difficulty in acknowledging this process not a Protestant problem which extends well beyond Lindbeck?

Seeking a stronghold against change, the church sometimes enlists the words and symbols of its Catholic heritage in ways foreign to the nature of that heritage. This happens when tradition or human authority is given primacy over Scripture in grounding the Christian faith. This heritage then "ceases to be a means and becomes an end in itself. The ecclesiastical system becomes tyrannical, the source of alienating and oppressive laws."<sup>10</sup>

When, on the other hand, a church seeks a foundation for its life and self-understanding solely in the Protestant principle, the dialectic is also lost. This reformatory principle fails the church, in other words, when it seeks to be constitutive rather than corrective. "To make it constitutive," Lindbeck asserts, "leads ultimately to the evisceration of Protestantism." This is, in fact, his evaluation of later Protestantism. Insofar as the principle has been privileged over the substance, "[g]radually the Catholic substance has drained away." As a result Protestantism has lost its power not only in western culture, but in its churches. Thus, faced with the choice of either imbalance, Lindbeck ultimately favors that one emphasizing Catholic substance, reasoning that

the absolutization and rigidification of the tradition at its idolatrous worst cannot prevent a few droplets of grace from seeping through, while a Protestantism emptied of the heritage cannot transmit anything at all.<sup>11</sup>

In a manner similar to the postliberal church Lindbeck describes, the NGK, throughout the period we consider, felt increasingly undermined by the rationalizing (or de-Christianizing) of South African society's discursive foundations. The NGK, like Lindbeck's postliberal church, experienced a society "hostile to its symbols" and underscored the importance of doctrine in standing over and against such a foreign foundation. Seeking to insure Scripture's normativity for those discourses it would engage, the NGK emphasized Catholic substance over Protestant principle, sometimes to the church's benefit, often at the church's expense. To better understand the NGK's struggle with liberalism in the twentieth century, we need to address certain synodical

---

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p379.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p380.

precedents laid in the second half of the nineteenth century. Particularly significant for our purposes are those doctrinal and political matters surrounding the synod of 1862. We begin with a brief historical overview of the period leading up to this synod.

### **The First "Independent" South African Church**

In 1806, about one hundred and fifty years after the Dutch first landed at the Cape, Britain took control, setting down a structure of colonial government. In 1824 the NGK, which remained the Cape's established church even after colonial rule, became the first independent church in South Africa, breaking away from its mother church in Holland to create its own synod. Despite this newfound independence from Amsterdam, however, this Cape synod of the NGK was forced to submit itself to another authority, namely, the newly established colonial government. The situation which ensued subjected the NGK synod to the approval of an Anglican governor, with all synodical decisions requiring his sanction. Indeed this arrangement was already part of the terms of Dutch surrender at the Cape.<sup>12</sup> Thus, as much as the NGK was in the majority with respect to its number of parishes, it experienced a kind of minority status for this external control.

The NGK cut ties with its mother church at an important juncture. It was a time when the Netherlands church was, under the impact of the Enlightenment, foregoing some of its stricter Calvinist theology for the more universalizing ideas of the Enlightenment. "By 1817 the ultra-Calvinist decrees of Dort were no longer binding, and rationalism had made considerable gains in the church."<sup>13</sup> Thus at a time when the status of the historical confessions was being relativized in the mother church, the NGK maintained--at least officially--the conservative position, adhering fully to the Canons of Dort. Moreover, increasingly displeased with the liberal tendencies of its mother church, in 1859 the NGK sought greater theological control by establishing its own theological seminary at

---

<sup>12</sup>De Gruchy, The Church Struggle in South Africa, p3.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p5.

Stellenbosch. Thus by the mid-nineteenth century the NGK was undergoing a unique identity crisis: theologically steering away from the Enlightenment, it was nevertheless located within a political milieu heavily influenced by Enlightenment ideas.

Around 1820, due to a shortage of NGK ministers, a directive of the colonial government began infusing the NGK with Presbyterian ministers from Scotland. While the Calvinist theology of these Scots was thought to be a close enough fit, their evangelicalism and revivalist piety introduced a significantly new stream into the NGK. Thus began tensions within the church--fruitful and unfruitful--between this evangelical enthusiasm and the earlier conservative Calvinist stream. The two streams, both sharing a high regard for the Scriptures, were able to come together against the common enemy of liberalism. Still, the conservative Calvinists' unease with the Presbyterians' British origins and evangelicalism caused some to mislabel the foreign element as "liberal," a mislabeling which has confused matters well into the twentieth century.

On the strength of Enlightenment notions of equality and freedom and under the influence of the abolitionist movement, Ordinance 50 was passed in the Cape in 1828, declaring equal under the law all free persons irrespective of color or race. The ordinance saw its logical conclusion when, in 1833, slavery was abolished. Equally logical was the significant shift this brought in English-Dutch relations, as well as in relations among the Dutch within the NGK. By 1834 a number of the Dutch, fed up with British authority and influence, began to trek north beyond British rule in search of their own republic. If theological tensions existed earlier within the NGK, now they had a political tenor, as the Cape NGK's 1837 synod officially denounced the trek and denied the trekkers any Cape clergy. Appealing to article thirty-six of the Belgic confession, synod urged its trekking members to return as subjects to what it declared a God-ordained government.

### **1862 Synod: A Liberal Win**

By the second half of the nineteenth century the NGK experienced a tension similar to that which Lindbeck names for the postliberal church between its language and the

language spoken within the discourse of South African society. Indeed, this tension became explicit in the synod of 1862 and the civil proceedings which followed it.

Theologically, the synod began a kind of "showdown" between the NGK's more orthodox Calvinists and those liberals who were rapidly gaining ground inside the church. Since the majority of synod's orthodox members were extra-colonial delegates, the liberals at the Cape reasoned that the best way to win the synodical majority was to nullify their voting power.

Thus Elder Loedolff questioned before the Cape synod the legitimacy of the extra-colonial delegates as voting members. Their admission was, he declared, in conflict with the Ordinance of 1843, a piece of Cape legislation which laid out in detail the NGK's rights and limitations as a church within colonial boundaries and under colonial control. With delegates from outside these borders participating in synodical decisions, he argued, synod challenged its subordinate status with respect to the colonial powers. Synod rejected Loedolff's objections and declared itself, by majority vote, to be legally constituted. Dissatisfied with synod's final word, however, the liberals carried their case to the civil court which judged in their favor, thus overturning synod's earlier decision. This meant that those NGK churches which existed outside the colony's limits would, prohibited from sending delegates to the Cape synod, now be forced to constitute their own synods.<sup>14</sup> Thus came the Orange Free State synod already in 1862 and the Natal synod by 1865.<sup>15,16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>Du Plessis, The Life and Times of Andrew Murray, p213.

<sup>15</sup>Strassberger, Ecumenism in South Africa, pp3-8.

<sup>16</sup>Even before the 1862 legislation compelled the Transvaal NGK to constitute its own synod, certain trekkers, seeking to distance themselves from the church's Cape affiliations, together established the Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk (NHK). The Gereformeerde Kerk (GKSA), in turn, was founded in 1859 as the result of a second schism. Dissatisfied with both the NGK and the NHK, these "Doppers" attempted to eliminate from the Reformed tradition evangelical elements brought in by the influx of Scottish ministers in the 1820s, returning to "purer" Calvinist roots.

Insofar as this civil decision put in motion the formation of separate synods, it served as a catalyst for a divide within the NGK which was only bridged--at least synodically--one hundred years later, in 1962, when all NGK delegates were united into a single general synod. While in 1962 it would be the orthodox pulling in the reins on the liberals, at this point it was the liberals in the Cape who were victorious. At the same time this liberal stream began challenging the confessions themselves. And here not even the Heidelberg Catechism<sup>17</sup> would be safe from civil scrutiny.

### **Kotzé and Burger: Liberals Quelled?**

Rev. J. J. Kotzé was the first to stand defiant before synod in objecting to certain words in the Heidelberg Catechism. It was then the custom in the Cape churches to preach on one of the Catechism's fifty-two sections each sabbath, explicating its substance and defending its doctrine on the basis of Scripture. Kotzé, rejecting the presupposition of question sixty, that man was "continually inclined to all evil," protested both against the doctrine itself and the way in which the church compelled its ministers to preach its defense. Such an understanding of human being, he insisted, "would not be fitting in the mouth of a heathen (unless he were a devil), far less in the mouth of a Christian."<sup>18</sup> When asked to retract his statement, Kotzé refused and, after a year's hiatus due to synod's involvement with other legal matters, synod found him "guilty of holding erroneous doctrine, and...[of being] unfaithful to the solemn promise passed at his legitimation."<sup>19</sup> He was thus suspended--at least officially--from his status as minister within the NGK.

The members of his congregation, however, supported him as he defied synod and resumed his ministry among them. Seeking to use the NGK's subordinate status in

<sup>17</sup> one of the three formularies to which the NGK still requires its ministers to subscribe.

<sup>18</sup>Du Plessis, The Life and Times of Andrew Murray, p215.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p218.

colonial legislation to his advantage, Kotzé, like Loedolff, then carried his case to the civil court. As plaintiff, Kotzé denied that he had assailed the church's doctrines or formularies, declaring that his words before synod had been fully tested and justified by the Word of God and other parts of the church's doctrine. Significantly, Kotzé also denied the legitimacy of synod itself as a court for testing soundness of doctrine. Rather, he argued, it was a court of appeals for sentences passed by the presbytery.

As defendant, Murray questioned the capacity and competency of the civil court in deciding "whether the words of the plaintiff were in conflict with the doctrines of the Church or no...". In other words, though in the structure of colonial politics the civil court functioned as a court of appeals for the decisions of synod, the two arenas, civil and ecclesial, engaged discourses and deliberations so divergent, that they could have nearly been credited with different languages. The civil court was not versed enough in the language of the church to function effectively as such a court of appeals. Likewise, those versed in the language of the church could not communicate their nuances well in the civil arena. Indeed, Murray hinted at this already in his opening remarks to the court, though the tensions between civil and ecclesial discourse go well beyond the difference between "rational" and "emotional" to which Murray referred. "The language which I most commonly employ," he asserted,

and the subjects which constitute my usual study, are not the language and the studies which stand connected with the administration of justice among men. The style of debate of which in my present position I must make use is directed not solely to the intellect, but chiefly to the heart and to the inward emotional nature of man...[thus] I desire to appeal to the kindly forbearance of the Court, should my language or arguments not always be in accordance with the practice of a civil tribunal.<sup>20</sup>

At the end of the proceedings, the synodical sentence suspending Kotzé was overturned, restoring his full privileges as minister. One more expression of the government's power in determining the identity of the NGK, it was, inside the church, equally "a victory for the friends of Liberalism and a flinging open of the floodgates...for

---

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p223.

the invasion of heterodoxy, unitarianism and blatant rationalism."<sup>21</sup> The Rev. T.F. Burger was the other liberal minister who at this time made press by challenging the foundations of the NGK. Already before the 1862 synod an elder had formally accused Burger of being "tainted with Rationalism" and of denying key tenets of the faith, among them the sinlessness of Christ's human nature. After further investigation, synod suspended him from his ministerial duties requiring for his return a retraction of his errors and a testimony assenting fully to the Reformed doctrines in question. Burger, like Kotzé, openly disregarded the suspension and continued his ministry in the town of Hanover. Also like Kotzé, he marched his case outside the doors of synod to the civil authorities and got the suspension of synod overturned.

Andrew Murray, again representing synod at the civil trial instigated by Burger, now took a bolder position with respect to the ecclesial-civil clash. Whereas in the Kotzé case he questioned the competency of the civil court in considering an ecclesial matter, this time he questioned the authority of any secular court in interfering with the proceedings of a spiritual one.<sup>22</sup> Of course, "spiritual court" was precisely the appellation for synod which Kotzé first disputed. Indeed, given the liberals' manipulation of colonial legislation in securing synod's majority vote, we might be dubious of this distinction as well. Still, the point had been made: whatever the mix of theology and politics in either arena, the discourses differed fundamentally from one another. Indeed, the presbyteries into which Kotzé and Burger were to be restored as voting members made this difference known when, despite the civil victories, they denied the ministers permission to rejoin their respective presbytery assemblies, arguing that they as presbyteries were under the direct authority of synod alone.

### **Liberal Movement Spends its Force:**

---

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p223.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p226.



While the civil victories of Kotzé and Burger appeared to strengthen liberalism's hold upon the NGK, synod's decisions were overturned in both cases not on theological grounds (indeed the civil discourse of the court could not engage these), but on political ones. The reversals arose, in other words, not out of any theological self-understanding articulated by synod, but over and against one. Because of this, the liberal win was short-lived--the civil verdicts only fortifying the NGK's resolve in fighting the liberalism of Cape politics and eliminating liberal elements within the church. The NGK then tightened its reins in several ways. Firstly, the board examining ministerial candidates (*thecolloquium dictum*) instituted a special inquiry testing candidates' opinions on and fidelity to the fundamental doctrines of the church. "It was thus made impossible for the unitarian and the rationalist, unless he violated the dictates of conscience and the principles of common honesty, to assent to the doctrines and subscribe to the formularies of the [NGK]." Moreover, the force of liberalism was broken as graduates began emerging from theological training at Stellenbosch. In these ways, the orthodox party was returned to its majority status in the church. Indeed, by the synod of 1870 the liberal party, seemingly so invincible in 1862, was "a shadow of its former self."<sup>23</sup>

In the cases of Kotzé and Burger, neither the synod nor the civil court can finally answer the question we now ask, namely, who was right on theological grounds--Kotzé and Burger or the synod? Were Kotzé and Burger in their disputes with the church doctrines functioning as the Protestant principle within an ecclesial discourse grounded in Catholic substance, or were they liberal in the negative sense, seeking to relativize this substance or heritage for a foreign discourse marked by rationalism or secularism? Was doctrine here being used illegitimately as a dam against the flood of liberal forces within the church or was it functioning legitimately, mediating between substance and principle? Insofar as the remaining chapters consider the NGK's struggle with liberalism in the

---

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p231.

twentieth century and the role of doctrine in framing this struggle, they will continue to pose this question. We will continue to consider the impact of politics upon the church's theological self-understanding and will view doctrine in large part as the stage upon which this played out. However, while here in the nineteenth century we see colonial politics imposing on the NGK from the outside, in the twentieth century we will see equally the role of NGK doctrine in impacting South African politics.

### **Lindbeck's Theory of Doctrine**

As we have suggested, insofar as Lindbeck attends to the language of the church, he provides us with a framework for evaluating theological developments within the NGK. His theory of doctrine speaks of the dynamic way doctrine functions in a healthy church and, equally, of the cost involved when doctrine fails to function this way. Now we turn to a critical explication of his theory that will serve us throughout the remaining chapters.

First Lindbeck provides a working definition for doctrine itself: "Church doctrines are communally authoritative teachings regarding beliefs and practices that are considered essential to the identity or welfare of the group in question."<sup>24</sup> With this definition, we will consider the category of doctrine as including the historic confessions of churches and particularly those "forms of unity" in which the NGK grounds itself. Moreover, insofar as mission policies affect the church community's beliefs and practices, their doctrinal dimensions will be considered. Having said that, we point out the complexity of ecclesial confessions and mission policies. In considering their role as doctrine we address only one of their functions, how they operate as "communally authoritative" and help to determine the identity of a given church. It is the work of a different thesis to assess the interrelations of all their dimensions in the faithful life of a church.

If the Christian Scriptures constitute a language, he declares, doctrines are like the rules of its proper speech. Like rules of grammar, doctrines are most often unnecessary

---

<sup>24</sup>Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, p74.

and sometimes confusing to native speakers. In fact, says Lindbeck, "even more than the grammar in grammar books, church doctrine is an inevitably imperfect and often misleading guide to the fundamental interconnections within a religion" or, for our purposes, within a denomination. As in rules of grammar, there are countless exceptions to doctrinal rules. Thus when applied to particular situations, they may appear inadequate. What abides for the church, then, is not a static group of doctrines, but a "deep doctrinal grammar." Like other native speakers, Christians rarely consult the rules of their grammar. Rather, they speak their language and operate within their communities as ones conditioned by its structure.<sup>25</sup>

Doctrines mislead us, however, only as we try to remove them from the context of their usefulness. They are inextricably linked to the community and language they serve. Thus, their intelligibility is always relative to the particular Christian matrix within which they develop. Equally, the particular Christian church stands unintelligible without a grasp of the doctrinal "grammar" which guides it. This is especially the case in a church such as the NGK, whose Reformed identity and conservative nature have put special burden on the role of doctrine. Thus, Christian doctrine for Lindbeck is not universal, but is rather contextual, applicable *particularly* to the Christian language. Doctrines are, Lindbeck asserts, "intrasystematic rather than ontological truth claims."<sup>26</sup> They function, in other words, as rules inside a particular system rather than as universal claims about reality.

Doctrines provide the rules for interpreting this narrative and communal framework. When disputes arise within the community, doctrine are called upon to clarify. And as much as doctrines are called to bring clarity in conflict, they are equally forged in such crises. Moreover, what Lindbeck terms "implicit, operative" doctrines become "explicit, official" ones in the face of controversy. In other words, assumptions foundational to a

---

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp81-82.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p80.

church's beliefs and practices may operate powerfully for years before being acknowledged. In the NGK, for example, it was only as its leaders sought scriptural sanction for apartheid that many of these implicit doctrines about human being and history were explicitly spelled out. This is fundamental to understanding the development of doctrine in the NGK.

"Some doctrines," he asserts, "such as those delimiting the canon and specifying the relation of Scripture and tradition, help determine the vocabulary..." In this way, he declares, doctrinal formulations may indeed contain propositional truth claims. For example, while "...the doctrine that Jesus is the Messiah..." determines Christian vocabulary in warranting the canonization of the New Testament, it is simultaneously the central Christian truth claim. Therefore, this particular doctrine is not merely regulative, but is expressive of an ontological Christian proposition. This is an important point for Lindbeck, yet he maintains that the primary function of doctrine is regulative. Doctrine serves its Christian community not as a collection of "first-order propositions," but as second-order ones. When a doctrine is not being "...construed as a norm of communal belief or practice, it is not being used as a church doctrine." Moreover, doctrines are religiously significant not for the truth they posit or the experience they express, but for their regulative function within the Christian framework. Insofar as the church is founded upon the biblical narrative, church doctrine is valuable "...[as] the grammar that informs the way the story is told and used."<sup>27</sup> Insofar as it regulates the telling and retelling of the Christian story, it provides a certain continuity through change and seeks to guide the actions and practices of changing circumstances.

Thus, doctrines do more than regulate the syntax of our theological discourse; certain doctrines, in delimiting the relation of Scripture and tradition help determine the vocabulary. Despite the primacy he grants to doctrine's regulative function, Lindbeck

---

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p81; p80.

acknowledges the complexity of doctrine's relationship to Scripture--how doctrine finds itself on two planes: the second-order regulative one and, in the propositional claims it contains, the first-order plane with Scripture.

Thus doctrine serves the Christian community by providing a paradigm for the interpretation of Scripture and a kind of deep grammatical framework within which the native Christian speakers can communicate. It functions practically as a guideline for Christian discourse, yet never separates from its story or purpose: to "maximize the Jesus Christ of the biblical narratives as the way to the one God of whom the Bible speaks."<sup>28</sup> And so, while doctrines do function regulatively, they cannot be strictly "functional." Christian churches adhere not simply to doctrinal conditions. Rather, they commit themselves to the substance which such conditions mediate and to the community which these conditions structure. All of this--doctrine's relationship with Scripture, its role in articulating a church's self-understanding, as well as some of its political dimensions--will now be evaluated with respect to the NGK. We turn first to doctrine's role in the church's ecumenical decisions of these years.

---

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p107.

## Chapter Two: Ecumenicity and the NGK

### "Liberal" and "Conservative": Sorting through the Labels

Though telling the story of apartheid is not our task directly, as we seek to understand doctrine's role in the NGK, we are in many ways asking what went wrong. Given the church's high regard for Scripture--indeed its emphatic affirmation of biblical foundations in the face of a secularizing liberalism, what led it finally to relativize Scripture for a foreign foundation of racist ideology? In the years we consider, doctrine which might have functioned as grammar was used instead to serve a different cause and function and was thus directly implicated in a move toward orthodoxy that led the NGK finally to the pool of Narcissus, condemned to engage only its own reflection. So stood the NGK in 1962, united in a single synod for the first time in one hundred years and isolated from almost all ecumenical contact.

What were the ecumenical choices made by the NGK in this period and what were their consequences inside the church, especially with regard to this trend toward orthodoxy? Furthermore, how was doctrine functioning in these ecumenical choices--both those resulting in affiliation and those leading to isolation? Examining two significant ecumenical bodies which the church did engage, namely, the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), it is our thesis that doctrine was misused and its role misunderstood. Those struggling to maintain orthodoxy inside the NGK, themselves lost track of the heritage and gospel they were trying to conserve.

Operating under what Lindbeck terms a "propositionalist" understanding of doctrines, these fundamentalists had no way to conceive an ecumenism in which churches of divergent doctrinal foundations could come together in theological discourse. "For a propositionalist," Lindbeck explains, "if a doctrine is once true, it is always true, and if it is once false, it is always false."<sup>1</sup> Thus, in the face of "thinner" or opposing doctrinal

---

investments, propositionalists within the NGK saw affiliation as surrender, a relativizing of its original position for discourses finally irreconcilable with its deepest understandings and abiding beliefs. Any other interpretation of ecumenicity was for them impossible because, according to this propositionalist view, "...there is no significant sense in which the meaning of a doctrine can change while remaining the same."<sup>2</sup> Thus doctrine was not contextual--something that could grow or develop, but was credited with some of the same static attributes as God's nature received at the hands of the scholastics: immutability, purity and timelessness.

In other words, these propositionalists lacked the tools for evaluating the development of the NGK's doctrines and traditions, and, correlatively, lacked the critical categories by which to adjudicate between a liberalism threatening to their heritage and the kind of true ecumenical relationships which would give it life. This propositionalist conception of doctrine led to propositionalist actions and decisions so that a vicious cycle of misunderstanding and misuse came into play. Moreover, in their inability to distinguish unscriptural liberalism from scripturally grounded critique (Protestant principle), the propositionalists lacked equally the categories for understanding what it might have meant to be truly conservative. In other words, there are indeed times when conserving identity legitimately requires a church to act or decide decisively against liberalism. Such was the case, it seems, at the synod of 1862, when synod moderator Andrew Murray officially suspended the ministries of Kotzé and Burger for replacing Scripture's foundation with that of rationalism. This decision, we assert, was still conservative in the healthy sense; doctrine was still functioning grammatically to ensure the integrity of the primary language of Scripture.

Yet when a church quells its liberal stream completely, it does so at its own peril. For the relationship between a certain healthy liberalism (what we have earlier called

---

<sup>1</sup>Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, p16.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p17.

"Protestant principle") and a certain conservatism<sup>3</sup> (what we have called "Catholic substance") is a life-giving dialectic within the church. Indeed, only as this dialectic is operative can a church determine the true meaning of either term. In the NGK's confusion over categories, it has mislabeled or flattened the sense of "liberal" and "conservative" and insodoing has critically endangered its own integrity. When, in what follows, we consider the NGK's ecumenical decisions, we are not judging the bodies themselves (in evaluating the NGK's withdrawal from the World Council, for example, we are not determining whether the organization itself was finally unscriptural or scriptural). Rather, we address the internal basis of the NGK's ecumenical decisions and the function of doctrine-- articulated explicitly and implicitly--within these.

#### **Ecumenical Watersheds in the NGK: 1907 and 1962**

Our story of the NGK's ecumenical endeavors begins on 3 March 1907 when the Federal Council of Dutch Reformed Churches (FCC) was established out of a desire within the NGKs to cooperate more closely.<sup>4</sup> By 1962, less than a year after the Cape and Transvaal NGKs withdrew from the WCC, the General Synod was finally established, joining the five NGK synods of the Cape, Natal, Transvaal, Orange Free State and South West Africa.<sup>5</sup> The two actions, that realizing synodical unity and that narrowing ecumenical scope, were intimately related to one another in the following way. After the famous World Council-initiated Cottesloe Consultation (to be discussed later), the NGK's Free State and Natal synods were sufficiently displeased with the WCC to declare their

---

<sup>3</sup>In our own effort to distinguish between "good" and "bad" liberalism, we shall refer to "good liberals" (those willing to engage new contexts) as the "critically open" or "missionary minded." In our attempt to keep clear the difference between "good" and "bad" conservatives, we shall refer to the latter as "propositionalists," thus reserving the word "conservative" for its healthy sense.

<sup>4</sup>O'Brien-Geldenhuys, In die Stroom Versnellings, p118.

<sup>5</sup>Strassberger, Ecumenism in South Africa, p17.



cooperation in realizing the General Synod contingent upon the Cape and Transvaal's withdrawal from the world body.<sup>6</sup> RES membership was maintained.

Thus like the NGK's orthodox party by the synod of 1870, the Natal and Free State conservatives had pulled in the reins on the liberals and had in this way taken decisive control of the church's identity. Yet what was it for these conservatives that made affiliation with the WCC, along with nearly every other ecumenical body, unacceptable and the RES acceptable? Moreover, what made the Cape and Transvaal synods finally favor this unity-in-isolation over the ecumenical life they had previously engaged? With a shared language, culture and confessional foundation, what kept the synods separate until 1962 and what now joined them? Needless to say, tensions between the liberal and orthodox streams did not cease. Indeed, in the years prior to the establishment of the General Synod much debate occurred over whether such a synod would compromise the principles of its members thereby standing only as a false unity.<sup>7</sup>

Much of the difficulty in coming together as a single synod came from the historical and political divergences to which we have referred in chapter one. Not only did 1862 mark a synodical divide, it marked an ecclesial one. For insofar as the deliberations and decisions of each synod were carried on independently of one another, distinct identities were forged. One synod could make a decision which, if brought before another synod, would have been decided quite differently. Or, to speak of ecumenical matters, one synod could choose an ecumenical affiliation to which another synod would be strongly opposed.

---

<sup>6</sup>Gous and Crafford, Een Liggaam, Baie Lede, p342; In the words of the Cape church: "Alhoewel die Sinode nie glo dat die Kerk se heil in algehele isolasie lê nie, maar dat hy steeds ekumeniese verband verbreek, besluit hy om onder die huidige omstandighede uit te tree uit die Wereldraad van Kerke" (Handelinge 1961: 55 and Algemene Sinode Handelinge 1962: 149, quoted in Gous and Crafford, p343).

<sup>7</sup>Note, already in the context of this debate, the "unity in diversity" language later used in sanctioning apartheid: "Dit was Gods wil dat sy ryke genade in die verskeidenheid tot openbaring sou kom en dat die eenheid sou gesien word in die verskeidenheid en die verskeidenheid in die eenheid." Ackermann, "Minderheidsrapport, Raad van die Kerke se twintigste vergadering," p7.

Indeed, despite the joint assemblies of the Federal Council, ecumenical affiliations varied significantly from synod to synod prior to 1962. The orthodox and liberal streams which battled for the church's identity in the second half of the nineteenth century had, by the twentieth century, developed very different understandings of ecumenicity as well.

### **The Reformed Ecumenical Synod**

The Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES) was one of the chief forums within which these different understandings were debated. When in 1949 the NGK's Cape, Orange Free State and Transvaal synods sent delegates to the RES's second assembly, they joined the most conservative Afrikaans-speaking church, the Gereformeerde Kerk (GKSA), in representing South Africa. As a founding member in 1946, the GKSA came together with the Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands (GKN) and the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) in articulating this particular Reformed ecumenicity.

In joining its sister church, the NGK not only made an ecumenical connection; as in its later withdrawal from the WCC, it here confirmed a turn toward orthodoxy which had been noted already in the NGK's synod of 1870. Indeed, earlier in the twentieth century Stellenbosch Professor Johannes du Plessis had warned of such a trend. The conservative GKSA had been nicknamed the "Dopper" church and thus du Plessis dubbed the NGK's move toward conservatism a "*verdoppering*." Though the NGK itself was not present at the RES's first meeting, we return to the first meeting's acts to explore further the nature of this "doppering." Was the establishing of the RES a conserving of the church's Catholic substance, or was it a calcification of that substance in an attempt to ward off liberalism? Was it finally ecumenical at all?

Efforts to establish the RES had begun already in 1924. At the Synod of Rustenburg in the Transvaal, it was the GKSA that first raised the possibility of an ecumenical synod. Three years later, in 1927, the Gereformeerdes sent a delegate to the GKN to convince it of the necessity of calling such a synod. The GKSA then sought contact with the CRC over the matter, and thereafter the churches began moving together

toward this goal. The economic depression prevented a joint gathering, but in 1939 the GKSA and the CRC visited the GKN's synod at Sneek to further the collaboration. Again, however, plans were thwarted. In May 1940 Germany invaded the Netherlands, leaving the Dutch church, in the midst of larger chaos, to further work out the principles the three churches had discussed together. It was unable to set an agenda; the meeting, intended for Amsterdam, did not occur. Instead, the CRC, in conversation with the GKSA, prepared to host the first Reformed ecumenical synod on American soil. The plans were approved by the GKN and the synod was convened.<sup>8</sup>

The gathering, declared "foundational and preparatory," sought to be foundational in ways it could not have imagined prior to the war. Much of what was foundational to the Reformed faith of all three churches, as well as the nations within which it found expression, had been destroyed by the war--for the Netherlands most tangibly. "It is our duty all the more," synod thus insisted, "to testify to that simple and childlike faith in the midst of the world now that the world has been shaken to its very foundations, and there is on every hand a vain search for an immovable foundation and an unassailable certainty, on which the life of society and of the individual can rest."<sup>9</sup>

Thus the agenda of this first synod was defined perhaps as much by the need for rebuilding and undergirding foundations, as by the drive to build new ecumenical ones. There was, of course, the question of how to witness to the oneness and love of Christ in a war-torn world. But the tone of the acts of this first ecumenical synod speaks perhaps more prominently of the threat within the church:

Many who deny that Jesus Christ is the Son of God come in the flesh, are openly at work in the Church of Jesus Christ at this time. All kinds of winds of doctrine are blowing round about us, and are blowing right into our homes over the air. And many Christian people are not able to distinguish between truth and error. They bend in this and that direction, and at last cry out in despair: "Well, what is truth?"<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>RES 1946 Acts.

<sup>9</sup>RES 1946 Acts, p53.

Indeed as much as these Reformed churches gathered for the sake of unity, they gathered for the sake of truth. This, as they understood it, was a significant factor distinguishing their synod from other ecumenical endeavors of the time. Truth in peril, a growth in unity meant equally the constituting of a "mighty army of God going forth in compact and serried ranks to fight the battles of the Lord against a common enemy."<sup>11</sup> Unity was strength for this purpose.

On the theological front, the RES was to have an apologetic foundation capable of combatting the attack of modern criticism as found in Barthian and other neo-Protestant movements. And finally, as the antichrist was at this point identified in the ideologies of naziism, socialism and communism, the synod's foundation was to be a force in opposition to any such false gospel.

While the idea for such a synod arose, in some sense, out of the context of a growing ecumenical consciousness of churches, its very identity was located in its distinction to this larger ecumenical movement from the start. "...[T]his new venture of ours," the acts declare, "is not part of the larger Church Union Movement that is current in our time, it is nevertheless an expression of the irrepressible urge that the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ come to greater and fuller manifestation."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, it went further to critique the unity and ecumenicity sought by the larger movement and, implicitly, to articulate its own. The movement, it explained, was placing too high a value upon external union and, busying itself to this end, it was losing "...sight of the fact that real Church union must be the expression of an inner unity, and that this unity cannot be wrought by man, but only by the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit." "There is in the present movement," it insisted, "too much of an attempt to bring to expression what does not exist, and to reap harvest for which the proper seed has not been sown." In their confidence that

---

<sup>10</sup>RES 1946 Acts, pp81-82.

<sup>11</sup>RES 1946 Acts, p82.

<sup>12</sup>RES 1946 Acts, p76.

unity could be realized across the lines of confession and tradition, liberal ecumenists presumed a more universal foundation for discourse among churches than existed. Simply put, espousers of Church unionism were--in relativizing doctrinal agreement for the sake of external church unions--seeking unity over truth, and that, synod declared, was "putting the cart before horse."<sup>13</sup>

"The unity of the Church," it insisted, "must also be a unity in the knowledge of the Son of God." Over and against liberalism's universalizing, the RES was to stand on the foundation and authority of Scripture. Truth was biblical and when churches together sought out this truth, synod held, unity would come as a gift from the Spirit. "The closer they draw to the living Christ in faith and hope...the more their unity will stand out in all its beauty in a world full of division and strife."<sup>14</sup>

Of course the substance of this synod's identity was far more than simply its divergence from other ecumenical gatherings. At this initial meeting delegates went on to question in a constructive mode all three words of the title under which they had gathered. To declare themselves a "Reformed" gathering was perhaps obvious enough. But it was a significant qualifying element as well. For seminal to the assembly was the idea that "all those Churches which are truly Reformed, that is, all those Churches *which possess the purest interpretation of the Word of God* and are earnest in seeking to live in accord with that Word, should manifest their unity...in some outward way."<sup>15</sup> The discourse of the RES was to be grounded not simply in Scripture. What united its churches was the hermeneutic with which they approached the Bible. It seems, then, that the RES held out for at least one universal, namely, that such a thing as Scripture's "purest interpretation"

---

<sup>13</sup>RES 1946 Acts, p78.

<sup>14</sup>RES 1946 Acts, p79.

<sup>15</sup>RES 1946 Acts, p33.

could exist. From the start, then, "Reformed" was the "truth" in the dialectic between truth and unity.

Declaring themselves to be a "synod" was more problematic, as their constitution was not in line with the term's formal definition. These three churches could not make up a synod in the formal sense since they did not together form an organic unity (they did not become a "super-denomination"). Thus the authority of decisions made by the RES was not binding to the individual churches in the way decisions of their own synods would be, but was influential only in a moral and consultative capacity.

Without a doubt, however, most discussed was the term "ecumenical." Indeed as delegates questioned the appropriateness of the appellation, they began to clarify the nature and purpose of the assembly itself.

Ecumenical is a word with a very broad meaning. It means catholic, universal. We may say that we believe a holy ecumenical Church. So at first sight we may be disposed to question the propriety of using the word ecumenical in describing an assembly of three Churches which together constitute only a small fraction of the body of Christ. However, just because we speak of an Ecumenical Convent of Reformed Churches, we deem it permissible to let the word ecumenical stand.<sup>16</sup>

In the face of those ecumenists who sought to gather disparate beliefs under one Christian banner, the delegates of this first RES held that the ecumenical cooperation they sought in fact required a great degree of unity--in confession and church polity--among participating churches from the start. To what extent this gathering was "ecumenical" and not merely "international" was--even then--far from clear.

By synod's end, the churches declared formally the *basis*<sup>17</sup> for their assembly. Significantly, it was the shared confessional foundations ("forms of unity") with which they had begun, namely, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. In other words, the foundation laid for the ecumenical gathering was the same formally as that of the respective churches. In light of this desire to "canonize" or secure

---

<sup>16</sup>RES 1946 Acts, p32.

<sup>17</sup>For full quotation of the testimony see p57.

for this ecumenical discourse these particular confessions, how ecumenical (catholic, universal) can we finally consider this Reformed band of churches to be?

Earlier we asked whether the RES in its confessional foundation was conserving the church's Catholic substance or fortifying its troops against a liberal onslaught. If what we are really seeking is the purpose of the RES's particular ecumenicity, synod itself states at least one design clearly. In such an affiliation the churches could "warn one another against the wiles of Satan and the evil world...[and could] open one another's eyes for the pitfalls and dangers which surround[ed] them."<sup>18</sup> Thus as much as a desire to manifest a unity in Christ brought the churches together, their unity served another purpose as well. Because they began with shared confessional foundations, synod's consultations and decisions held a doctrinal authority for each member church that decisions of a more inclusive body could not have held. When, three years later, the NGK joined these RES churches, it was a move like many in the NGK's history--directed simultaneously toward unity within a particular Reformed discourse and isolation from a larger un-Reformed one in which--from its perspective--an insidious and wily liberalism was holding sway.

At its first assembly each church brought to synod a tentative agendum of its own and all three were published in the synod's acts. Regarding issues to be addressed there was much agreement. Under the heading of doctrine were such issues as eschatology, evolution, and matters of church and state. The GKSA in particular urged a fresh consideration of the relationship between church and state as laid out in the Belgic Confession (a.36). Moreover, even at this early stage the question of race relations appeared on the South African agendum: "our attitude re: race questions especially as pertaining to the Jewish and the colored races." Later, however, for reasons not clear from the acts themselves, the delegate speaking for South Africa requested that the race question,

---

<sup>18</sup>RES 1946 Acts, p29.

along with another issue (concerning the church's attitude toward war), be deleted from the GKSA agendum.<sup>19</sup>

Most salient on all three agenda, however, was the matter of the authority and inspiration of Scripture. Acknowledging a modern crisis with regard to scriptural authority, synod declared in its basis or testimony that it not only accepted "the entire Holy Scripture as the authoritative and infallible word of God, but also that in forsaking this foundation of the Word the deepest cause is to be found for the decline of modern life..." Addressing this threat to biblical infallibility, the GKSA in particular called for a Reformed witness over against such "modern ecclesiastical and religious trends as Modernism, Methodism [and] Barthianism."<sup>20</sup> Laying out such a testimony, however, was only foundational in the sense of articulating a commitment to struggle together in discerning, fallibly, the word of God for any given situation. In other words, *that* the Bible was authoritative for the Christian interpretation of history and the world was one thing; determining, hermeneutically, the dynamic and complex nature of this authority was another.

From the perspective of the RES, we recall, its Reformed identity was to secure the success of this enterprise. To be Reformed was to "possess the purest interpretation of the Word of God," and to be ecumenically Reformed was to unite in the heritage of this shared possession. Scripture's infallibility guaranteed by God, the integrity of scriptural authority was ensured by the interpretive framework of the Reformed confessions. If, however, as Lindbeck asserts, doctrine's true function lies in regulating the primary language of Scripture, here doctrine does not appear to be operating in such a dynamic way. With purity valued over context, Scripture was not so much a language spoken, as something static, to be encountered through the doctrinal lens of the confessions.

---

<sup>19</sup>RES 1946 Acts, p15; p19.

<sup>20</sup>RES 1946 Acts, p18; p14.



We will discuss the role of these confessions (and their relationship to Scripture) in the RES discourse itself more extensively in chapter three. For now, however, we are concerned with the impact of this confessional foundation on the RES's ecumenical endeavor. Did such doctrinal investment serve the ecumenical process or hinder it? Given the language (and militaristic metaphors) with which the RES mission was articulated, its confessional foundation appears, at least in these early years, to have been less the grammar for engaging Scripture than a safeguard controlling the discourse itself and, significantly, who was invited.

By the RES's 1949 assembly in Amsterdam, the NGK's Cape, Orange Free State and Transvaal<sup>21</sup> synods had joined its ranks. As pleasing as this move was to the church's orthodox propositionalists, there were significant political reasons for this more narrow ecumenicity as well. Starting in the late thirties, the NGK's theological orthodoxy began to take on an increasingly political tenor. For reasons that will become clearer in chapters three and four, the NGK's orthodox were increasingly tantamount to the National Party's conservatives under the branding "Kuyperian neo-Calvinists." In this milieu the NGK sought to garner international support equally for its struggle against the liberalism of South African politics, particularly with regard to policies of race relations.

But how exactly did the NGK propositionalists envision the RES's doctrinal foundation undergirding their struggle against liberalism? How indeed did they see this Reformed discourse supporting their increasingly racist agenda? By the early eighties it would become clear to the dominant voice of apartheid that even this narrow ecumenism could not serve its agenda.<sup>22</sup> For now, however, increasingly seeking theological and

---

<sup>21</sup>Because in 1885 the Transvaal (then South African Republic) NGK merged with the Republic's NHK, the NGK Transvaal is referred in the 1949 acts as the Nederduitse Gereformeerde of Hervormde Kerk. However, the NHK remained a separate entity as well, supported by those who opposed the merger (Gous and Crafford, Een Liggaam, Baie Lede, p302).

<sup>22</sup>When, under the influence of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), the RES adopted its 1982 declaration and declared with the world that apartheid

scriptural support for their political aims, it was easier for the propositionalists to manipulate this "purest interpretation" than a more dynamic and contextual hermeneutic.

This is not to say that all those within the NGK who joined the RES understood things this way. "Conversation" took place (within the RES and without) between the propositionalists and those more missionary minded with a high regard for Scripture, with different understandings of the hermeneutical and theological role of the confessions. Indeed, subtle constructors of apartheid, politicians and church leaders, took advantage of those ambiguous terms and phrases ("authority of Scripture" or "modern crisis," for example, and later even "apartheid") within which significant differences in meaning and belief could dwell. But this is a separate point. For now we only underscore the way in which propositionalists and truer (healthier) conservatives sometimes found themselves, in mists of misunderstanding, supporting similar doctrinal positions and ecumenical affiliations.

#### **The World Council of Churches: Protestant Challenge or Modernist Threat?**

Just a year prior to this second RES assembly, in 1948 (the same year the National Party came into power in South Africa), Amsterdam convened the first assembly of another ecumenical body, the World Council of Churches (WCC), with the Transvaal NGK as one of its founding members.<sup>23</sup> Embodying, in the voices of Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Emil Brunner and others, the liberal (neo-orthodox) ecumenicity and modernism about which the RES of 1946 had warned,<sup>24</sup> the World Council raised the question of affiliations within

---

is a sin, the NGK responded by temporarily withholding its fiscal membership responsibilities from the RES (1984-86). Discussion with REC (RES) General Secretary Dr. Richard van Houten.

<sup>23</sup>The NHK was also a participant at the WCC's first assembly. And though the Gereformeerde Kerk (GKSA) did not have a delegate at the assembly, it did send a Mr. D. Kempff as an official observer (The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches: The Official Report, p261). Thus in one way or another, all three Afrikaans-speaking churches were orienting themselves toward this first assembly at least with curiosity.

<sup>24</sup>Adding to the liberal tone of the WCC First Assembly was the presence of both women and lay persons. Indeed, their respective roles in the church was a significant matter on the assembly's agenda. See The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches: The Official Report.

the NGK. Did simultaneous membership in two such fundamentally different ecumenical organizations not threaten the church's integrity? Indeed, this tension must have been particularly acute within the Transvaal NGK, the one synod which at this point held membership in both organizations.

While from the outside we might view the World Council and the RES as two ends of an ecumenical continuum, how did they appear from inside the NGK? Could they function successfully within the discourse of its Federal Council, for example, as Catholic substance and Protestant principle, or were they in fundamental opposition to one another, creating a kind of "split personality" within the church? The question, asked differently by the different synods of the NGK, was whether the two ecumenicities were based in the same primary language of Scripture (with looser and tighter grammars), or whether the WCC was, in its basic formula,<sup>25</sup> so lacking in grammar that it replaced the church's language and heritage with babble.

The debate played out in Afrikaans periodicals of the time. Responding to a "pro-World Council" argument in the GKSA's Die Gereformeerde Vaandel (Dec. 1950) by a Prof. J. H. Bavinck (GKN), Rev. F. A. Kock of Bloemfontein (Orange Free State NGK) penned an article in opposition. While Prof. Bavinck had admitted that not all the member churches maintained fully the basic formula under which the World Council gathered, he defended the council's scriptural basis. This did not satisfy Rev. Kock who returned:

...'dat by die vergaderinge van die Wereldraad die Bybel steeds op tafe<sup>s</sup>l sê nog nie veel nie omdat ons nog nie weet watter Bybel dit is wat daar of tafel is nie. In hierdie verband moet dit my van die hart: die Bybel van Karl Barth, die Bybel van die Moderniste en die Bybel van die Reformasie en Calvyn is per slot van sake nie dieselfde Bybel nie.<sup>26</sup>

What then, we might well ask, is Kock's understanding of "the Bible of Calvin and the Reformation"? Kock here has hinted at what we have earlier suggested, namely, that the

<sup>25</sup>"The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour."

<sup>26</sup>Die Gereformeerde Vaandel (Feb. 1951), p37.

foundation shared by the RES and the NGK was not Scripture alone, but their own particular interpretation of it as laid out in the forms of unity. For Kock and others, what was finally objectionable about the WCC was not that it was unscriptural, but that it was *undoctrinal* --a direct confession that it was the framework (doctrinal or modern) through which the Bible was read that would determine what book one was actually reading.

If, for those propositionalists (largely, it seems, from the Free State and Natal synods) who opposed affiliation with the World Council, the matter was not about Scripture but about doctrine, then *what* about doctrine? What understanding of doctrine does Kock's declaration reveal? If we listen closely, Kock does not object to the WCC for replacing Scripture with a foreign foundation (the mark of an unhealthy liberalism). Rather, he critiques the particular foundation or lens the WCC chooses. The propositionalists' alternative to the Bible of Karl Barth or modernism, it seems, are the historic Reformed confessions; as Scripture's "purest interpretation," these become the lens that precedes Scripture itself. Contained within his critique of the WCC, in other words, is the seed of a hermeneutical confusion as dangerous as any other. The primacy of Scripture and the second-order status of doctrine have been reversed so that Scripture is no longer the primary language, and doctrine, no longer its grammar.<sup>27</sup>

In its report to the 1949 Synod, the RES's committee on ecumenicity laid out its main objections to the WCC. First of all, it declared that the WCC's "basic formula,"

---

<sup>27</sup>Significantly we find this same reversal in the 1857 synod by which some date the beginning of apartheid. A decision about worship, and particularly the celebration of the eucharist (thus one with as many theological implications as practical ones), was explicitly declared unscriptural and this evaluation codified into the synodical books. In other words, here a doctrine ("communally authoritative teaching") was laid down which overrode without ambiguity that which synod understood to be scriptural: "The Synod considers it *desirable and scriptural* that our members from the Heathen be received and absorbed into the existing congregations *wherever possible*; but where this measure, as a result of the weakness of some, impedes the furtherance of the cause of Christ among the Heathen, the congregation from the Heathen, already founded or still to be founded, shall enjoy its Christian privileges in a separate building or institution." The Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa and the Problem of Race Relations, approved by Synodical Commission of the DRC in the Transvaal (NHK), my ital., p6.

though phrased in the words of the Apostle's Creed, was seemingly not taken seriously by leading figures within the organization. Moreover, the Council both presumed and aimed for a "...a spiritual unity and in so doing it underestimate[d] the problem of liberalism in the church." "The danger is not imaginary," it continued, "that the levelling and blurring of confessional truths in the participating churches is in this way greatly promoted..."<sup>28</sup> Whether the WCC took proper account of liberalism's dangers or not, the RES (and the NGK as one its churches) of leveling confession was based on a propositionalist understanding.

Ironically, however, the last objection to WCC underscored the way in which the formula was relativized by the historical and political context within which the words were spoken. "It is a well-known fact," declared the RES in 1953, "that, *as a consequence of the theological development during the last century*, the basic formula is not absolutely unequivocal." This emphasis upon the role of historical and political context in determining meaning is interesting indeed since this is precisely what went underemphasized in the RES's own confessional foundation as "purest interpretation." After much discussion and a number of proposed amendments the RES's first assembly decided with regard to the World Council "to advise the churches not to join this organization in the present stage."<sup>29</sup>

By the World Council's second gathering (Evanston 1954) the NGK's Cape Synod had joined its ranks, heightening the tensions between those propositionalists opposing the WCC and those liberals (particularly now the Cape and Transvaal synods) who could reconcile their doctrinal investment with the Council's broad ecumenism.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the Cape Synod's decision to join the world body was in direct opposition to the position

---

<sup>28</sup>RES Acts 1949, p66.

<sup>29</sup>RES Acts 1953, p54, my ital; p35.

<sup>30</sup>Gous and Crafford, Een Liggaam, Baie Lede, p332.

articulated by the RES 1953 Synod.<sup>31</sup> The Transvaal NGK, represented on the WCC's Central Committee since 1948, formally approved the Cape's membership application.

Accompanying the Cape's application for membership were some of the same hesitations expressed within the RES, but given a distinctly different tone by its decision to affiliate and, therein, its undermining of the RES's consultative authority and clear decision on the matter. Specifically, the stipulations it set for its membership were the following: a) that the WCC be regarded as a community of conversation (*gespreksgemeenskap*); b) that the Cape NGK need not identify with all the decisions of the WCC or the declarations of its leading figures and c) that the basic formula "Jesus Christ as God and Savior" be interpreted in a trinitarian way.<sup>32</sup> Revealing a grammatical understanding of doctrine, these stipulations were clear on two significant points. Firstly, the Cape NGK distinguished between the World Council's ecumenical discourse and identity and more intimate ecclesial ones. Because of the inclusivity of the Council's discourse, affiliation did not require the level of identification and shared doctrine required by one's church. Secondly, the NGK made it clear that it would bring to the Council's discussions its own trinitarian grammar. On these qualifiers the Cape NGK--at least officially--deemed WCC membership both desirable and compatible with its RES affiliation.

Earlier we have said that for the propositionalists doctrine stopped functioning as grammar and became instead a static safeguard. What now might we say about the Cape synod as new member of the WCC and defiant member of the RES? First of all we suggest that in this Cape church doctrine was still functioning as grammar for the primary language of Scripture. It was able to see its way to WCC affiliation because, unlike the

---

<sup>31</sup>"Synod advises the member Churches of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod not to join the World Council of Churches as now constituted...[and] requests those Reformed Churches which are already members of the World Council of Churches to reconsider their position in light of the foregoing" (RES Acts 1953, p18).

<sup>32</sup>Gous and Crafford, *Een Liggaam, Baie Lede*, p333.

propositionalists, it did not reverse the priorities of doctrine and Scripture. Because it understood doctrine as grammar and not as a primary language or a fortress wall, it could enter into conversation with those holding significantly different doctrinal tenets and confessions without feeling as if their own were endangered. For the Cape NGK, in other words, the World Council spoke not a confusion of languages, but a number of different grammars. The second thing we suggest is that its membership stipulations reveal its own unease about a liberalism of generic openness. Thus, its willingness to engage the WCC discourse speaks not of a carelessness with respect to Scripture, but the greatest care. It would wait with critical openness to see whether Scripture was operating as the Council's primary language.

Ben Marais, the Transvaal NGK's 1950 delegate to the WCC's Central Committee meeting in Toronto, expressed this critical openness in an amendment proposed for the RES's 1953 ecumenicity report:

Aware of unmistakable dangers involved in an all-embracing inter-church organisation like the W.C.C., and aware of modernistic influences still tolerated in the circles of the W.C.C., the Reformed Ecumenical Synod must refrain from advising member churches to join the W.C.C. at present, but as there is no conflict between the basis of the W.C.C. in her only legitimate interpretation and the doctrinal basis of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod...the [RES] refrains from passing judgement on such member churches...and as it still remains the obligation of the [RES] towards the churches linked to the W.C.C., the [RES] decides to continue efforts to raise its objections with the W.C.C.<sup>33</sup>

What Marais here endorsed is not the WCC's legitimacy as a scripturally driven body--in fact, his hesitation suggests a wariness, but rather the RES's (and the NGK's) responsibility to continue to engage the WCC's challenge. He recognized that the church closes itself off at its own peril and that a certain liberalism (namely, one of critical openness) is an integral part of a church's dialectic of self-understanding.

That the WCC readily accepted the particulars of the Cape's application was no comfort to the propositionalist opposition who saw this as another example of the WCC's liberal "anything goes" membership policy. In fact, Rev. F. N. van Niekerk of the Natal

---

<sup>33</sup>RES Acts 1953, p15.

NGK criticized the Cape church sharply in a letter submitted to Die Gereformeerde Vaandel (Jun. 1954). The question, he asserted, was not whether the Cape NGK would be able to interpret the WCC's basic formula in a way that might satisfy its Reformed foundations. The question was rather one of the *company* the Cape NGK would now be keeping-- among them those denying the infallibility of Scripture and the divinity of Christ. Prof. van Niekerk's position came clearly into view in his citation of Psalm one, verse one with reference to the World Council: "Blessed is the man [or the church] that walketh *not* in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."<sup>34</sup> Once again, what was threatening to the propositionalist about the World Council's discourse was not its foundations, but within it, the different interpretations (grammars) to which one would be exposed. Indeed to walk in this council of the ungodly was to remove the guard protecting one's own tenuous ecclesial identity and therein to endanger one's own ecclesial foundations.

The Cape synod had declared the World Council a medium through which to further the scope of its Reformed witness. But to this Prof. van Niekerk inquired: What positive witness would be possible when the formula's subclause permits each church to interpret the formula as it wishes? And what positive witness, he pressed further, is possible in an organization whose basis willfully leaves out the normativity of Scripture? Witnessing without the word of God? he asked. It was clear from the way in which the Cape church entered that it could not be a wholehearted member of the Council. Indeed Prof. van Niekerk wondered why the World Council would want for itself such a hesitant member. No political party would accept such a tentative association.<sup>35</sup> Thus what we have viewed as a critical openness integral to a healthy tension of identity and openness

---

<sup>34</sup>My italics and interpolations.

<sup>35</sup>Die Gereformeerde Vaandel (Jun. 1954), p49.



was for van Niekerk the opposite: a waffling that betrayed ecclesial (and more particularly Reformed) identity.

Thus by the early fifties the two streams that had been running through the NGK since at least the nineteenth century were increasingly incompatible. Moreover, these streams were increasingly dividing along synodical lines, with the Transvaal and the Cape carrying the liberal stream and the Natal and Free State synods, the propositionalist. Discussions about another world body, the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC), were a site within which this growing distance was revealed. Established in 1948 with the sole aim of opposing the work of the WCC, the ICCC was supported by the RES majority.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, at the RES's 1953 assembly, the ICCC's American founder, Dr. Carl McIntire, was not only welcomed as an observer but was invited to lead the gathering in prayer.<sup>37</sup> In sanctioning the ICCC, the RES was thus able to reject the World Council doubly. Holding the ICCC banner in South Africa were particularly the orthodox van Niekerk (Natal) and the Rev. P.Z. Coetzee of the Orange Free State.

But once again a voice from the Transvaal NGK had a view different from the RES majority. Reporting on the different ecumenical movements in 1952, the Transvaal's Prof. E.P. Groenewald (who would by 1958 become president of the RES)<sup>38</sup> understood the nature of the ICCC quite differently. Describing it, first of all, as it described itself, he declared it an organization constituted by the belief that only those who could together confess a respect for the main truths of Scripture could come together in a unified

---

<sup>36</sup>"to expose, to offset, and to undo as much as possible the destructive work of the World Council," ICCC pamphlet quoted in Gous and Crafford, Een Liggaam, Baie Lede, p333.

<sup>37</sup>RES Acts 1953, p23.

<sup>38</sup>In matters of race relations Prof. Groenewald was less an advocate of unity. Together with the Rev. W. Nicol and G. Cronje he coauthored in 1947 Regverdige Rasse Apartheid (Just Racial Apartheid) which according to Patrick Furlong "read like a prepatory study for the Nationalist platform in 1948" (Furlong, Between Crown and Swastika, p226).

movement. He then contrasted it with the World Council. The WCC, he explained, strives toward truth and unity; the ICCC toward truth if need be at the cost of unity. Groenewald then questioned the adequacy of such an ecumenicity as the ICCC's.<sup>39</sup>

### **Apartheid and Ecumenism: The NGK Through the Fifties**

Despite the diversity of views amongst the NGK synods over race relations and the more liberal brands of ecumenicity, the fifties was a decade in which they joined together in hosting a number of ecumenical conferences under the umbrella of the Federal Mission Council (FMC). As with the RES, however, the FMC defined itself from start over and against efforts at broader ecumenicity. Indeed, it arose specifically out of the NGK's unsuccessful attempt at relating within the more inclusive Christian Council of South Africa (CCSA).<sup>40</sup>

Particularly, it was a visit in 1934 from then chairman of the International Mission Council Dr. John R. Mott that paved the way for the establishing of the Christian Council in 1936. It began with a view not primarily to improving race relations within the churches, but to coordinating missionary activities amongst the various Protestant churches and societies. The Council focused its concern upon, among other things, "the problem of evangelizing and Christianizing the people of South Africa," and "the spiritual and general welfare of the non-European races."<sup>41</sup> At the FCC's 1935 assembly membership in the proposed council was discussed and it was finally recommended to the various NGK synods, provided the council's constitution accorded well with the NGK's recently passed mission policy (1935). The following year the Cape Synod equivocated about membership and took no decision. This, in turn, led to the FCC's 1937 recommendation that the NGKs refrain from joining the Council, suggesting instead that the federated NGKs agree to work

---

<sup>39</sup>Gous and Crafford, Een Liggaam, Baie Lede, p333.

<sup>40</sup> to be reestablished in 1968 as the South African Council of Churches (Ryan, Beyers Naude, p121).

<sup>41</sup>Strassberger, Ecumenism in South Africa, Appendix B, p268.

together with the Council on the basis of their own recently formulated mission policy (1935). While the Cape, Free State and Natal synods decided not to join the Council, the Transvaal Synod joined, sending the Rev. W. Nicol and the Rev. Reyneke as representatives to its first gathering. At that first gathering Rev. Nicol was in fact chosen as the Council's first president and its first general secretary, Rev. J.M. du Toit, was also an ordained minister of the NGK.<sup>42</sup>

The Rev. Nicol, however, initially enthusiastic about the establishment of the Council, turned increasingly pessimistic over two major issues: the fact that the Afrikaans language was unacceptably marginalized in Council work and that the NGK differed too much in its race relations to afford the cooperation. Thus Nicol eventually made it known that the difference in attitudes regarding the relationship between black and white was the primary reason the NGK could not affiliate with the Council.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, speaking before the missionary study circle of the Student Christian Organization at the University of Potchefstroom, Nicol attempted to explain the more fundamental differences which led to the NGK's split from the CCSA.

The last reason for the failure is the deepest of all: our conflicting views on the right relations between White and Black. the English-speaking missionary, especially one born overseas, wishes to see as little difference as possible between the White man and the Native. He does not hesitate to welcome the civilized Native to his dining-table. In many cases the Native finds lodging for the night as an honoured guest among such White people. For us, on the other hand, the thought that we should use the same bathrooms and bathroom conveniences as even the most highly civilized Native is revolting. These principles run through all our conduct.<sup>44</sup>

The turning point in the relationship occurred on December 11, 1940, when it was noted by the CCSA's executive committee that the Cape Synod of the NGK had formally declined affiliation. The Transvaal Synod, the only NGK synod that had ever affiliated, on

---

<sup>42</sup>Crafford and Gous, Een Liggaam, Baie Lede , p322.

<sup>43</sup>Gerdener, Recent Developments in the South African Mission Field, p162.

<sup>44</sup>quoted in Shepherd and Grant, "The Christian Council of South Africa," p261.

recommendation of its commission on mission, formally withdrew its membership from the Council only in 1944.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, its hesitations with and distancing from the Council had already begun in 1940. As a consequence of this action, the NGK cut off another conversation as well: for other than allowing NGK observers to attend some of its gatherings, the International Mission Council, who received its delegates by national bodies (such as the CCSA) was not able to include the NGKs in its assemblies.<sup>46</sup>

This, however, marked an important ecumenical beginning. Rev. Nicol suggested that a federal mission council be formed out of the four federated NGKs, the mission churches in the Cape, Transvaal and Free State, as well as four German societies.<sup>47</sup> On 18 April 1942, at a conference held in Bloemfontein, the Federal Mission Council constitution was formally ratified.

At the same time, however, the FMC was concerned with ecumenical relations (though not at the expense of principles). Along with nine synods of Reformed tradition, the FMC's 1950 Bloemfontein Congress was attended by observers from the ecumenical CCSA as well the WCC. The discussion over racial policy had thus become explicitly political and scriptural. Among the resolutions was

...the conviction that the basic principles of distinctive development...can be adduced from the Word of God...[Thus] the Federal Council is requested to solicit the help of the Government in devising the necessary ways and means to develop a spirit of mutual trust and respect between the European and the Bantu in the country.<sup>48</sup>

Thus while the conference "introduced a decade during which there was to be much more inter-denominational contact between the churches within the Christian Council of South Africa and the Dutch Reformed Churches than during the previous decade" it at the same

<sup>45</sup> Crafford and Gous, Een Liggaam, Baie Lede, pp322-23.

<sup>46</sup>Gerdener, Recent Developments in the South African Mission Field, p176.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid. p162.

<sup>48</sup>The Racial Issue in South Africa: Being Findings on the Native Problem, pp5-6.

time served to further articulate the NGK's apartheid stand for "distinctive development."<sup>49</sup> Whatever the ecumenicity, it is nevertheless significant to note that not one black was present among six hundred delegates at this discussion on race relations.<sup>50</sup>

With ecumenical cooperation in view the FMC convened in November 1953 another conference, this time in Pretoria, to "explore the possibility of finding a common approach by...the Afrikaans and English churches, to the problem of our attitude towards the coloured peoples of our country." The conference was significant for providing, among other things, the first significant contact between the NGK and the CCSA since the NGK withdrew from the Council in 1941.<sup>51</sup> Twenty-seven churches and missionary societies were represented and fifteen papers were collected for publication addressing a range of issues such as mission, the calling of the European in multiracial South Africa, fundamental Christian principles, and the roles of the white and the nonwhite in their application.<sup>52</sup> While ultimately the conference failed to take up the theological dimensions of this "colour feeling," the desire was nevertheless expressed for closer cooperation between the churches and plans were begun for an interracial conference of church leaders for the following year.<sup>53</sup>

The 1954 conference convened by the FMC was in many ways more significant than the previous FMC conferences since it

---

<sup>49</sup>The gathering took 119 decisions about race relations, the most significant of which was the declaration that the only lasting solution to the race question "is to be found in eventual total separation of white and nonwhite and a differentiated [gedifferensieerde] economic development" (Kongres Verslag 1950: 117 quoted in Gous and Crafford, Een Liggaam, p335).

<sup>50</sup>Strassberger, Ecumenism in South Africa, p201; p205.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p207.

<sup>52</sup>Keet."Opening Address," Christian Principles in a Multiracial South Africa, p20.

<sup>53</sup>Strassberger, Ecumenism in South Africa, p210.

...was the first time in which racial tensions had been becoming more acute, that representatives of the Afrikaans-speaking, the English-speaking, the African and the Coloured churches had come together to consider any common problem.

Hopeful too was the fact that out of one hundred and sixty delegates, approximately one-third were African. By conference end, a committee had been appointed to continue the efforts at interchurch cooperation. The decade of deepening ecumenical dialogue closed with a conference held in Johannesburg (7-10 Dec. 1959) in which eight international and forty-seven union bodies participated. In the conference report it declared itself to be a "turning point in church and race relations in the union." Once again, however, the conference had only reached "the stage of fact-finding and discussion."<sup>54</sup> Thus the ecumenical agenda and its hopes of reconciliation were set high for the sixties.

Not only were these conferences a stage within which English-Afrikaner tensions played out,<sup>55</sup> they were a prominent site for conflicts within the NGK between those more critically open leaders and the propositionalists. Yet as significant as these internal conflicts were, equally important was the shared ecumenical interest expressed by both parties. For the more missionary-minded liberals, ecumenical discourse was the logical consequence of a missionary emphasis upon dialogue and openness. For the propositionalists ecumenicity was becoming an increasingly important arena. The propositionalists sought other European (white South African) and if possible African support for the slew of apartheid legislation it began to implement. Moreover, multiracial conferences could deflect an increasing international scrutiny on the National Party's racially driven policies. In political power the NGK controlled the discursive foundations of these missionary conferences to secure a kind of "consensus" building about apartheid. Increasingly the NGK's theological scholarship and discourse was becoming the handmaid to a politics of apartheid. This we explore further in chapter four.

---

<sup>54</sup>ibid. p213.

<sup>55</sup>We will trace these English-Afrikaner developments more closely in chapter four.

During the fifties, there were more than theological reasons brewing in South Africa for an animosity with regard to the World Council. Tensions were growing between the World Council and all of its South African member churches over the matter of race relations. Already in 1949 at the WCC's Central Committee meeting, the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) wondered whether the Council shouldn't take action over the racial situation in South Africa. By 1950 at the World Council's Central Committee gathering in Toronto, race relations were highlighted and within this, the South African situation of apartheid. The Transvaal NGK was at this point still a member of the Central Committee, and Prof. Ben Marais (later to coauthor the prophetic Delayed Action! (1960)) was sent as Prof. Gerdener's replacement to represent the Transvaal synod.<sup>56</sup>

At this same meeting the CCIA further proposed that the WCC send a multiracial delegation to South Africa to discuss racial problems with the member churches. The Afrikaans-speaking churches, though in favor of such a delegation, felt that a multiracial one would create difficulties. Thus in 1952, in lieu of such a delegation, General Secretary W. A. Visser't Hooft spent five weeks visiting the South African member churches.<sup>57</sup> Though the situation of apartheid drew the World Council's attention, however, there was, as late as the early fifties, uncertainty about the implications of the term "apartheid" or its euphemistic alternative "separate or distinctive development." Thus, while Visser't Hooft, Free University professor J.H. Bavinck and other visitors were quick to condemn racial

---

<sup>56</sup>Gous and Crafford, Een Liggaam, Baie Lede, p332.

<sup>57</sup>Remarking on this visit in his Memoirs he underscores the complexity and ambivalence he encountered within the "apartheid position" among NGK members during these years: "I was surprised to find that there was often a very considerable divergence between the official position of the churches and the opinions which my Afrikaans-speaking hosts expressed in private. There were of course conversations during which I had to listen to an exposition of the apartheid doctrine in unadulterated form. But there were many other conversations in which men who held prominent positions in the Afrikaans-speaking community spoke of their perplexity concerning the race question and of their doubts concerning the policy of the government (Memoirs, p276).

prejudice, this was not tantamount to an unambiguous condemnation of apartheid. Indeed, after the 1950 Bloemfontein Congress took up the matter of race relations ("*die naturellevraagstuk*"), Visser't Hooft deemed it a fruitful gathering for having given "radical apartheid" (economic and territorial) a constructive content. Thus the injustice to be overcome lay not in apartheid per se (itself compatible with missionary understandings), but rather in the unjust carrying out of the policy in the form of a "partial apartheid." Into the fifties Visser't Hooft, Bavinck and others were well prepared to give the "radical" or "vertical" apartheid a chance.<sup>58</sup>

By the WCC's second general gathering in Evanston (1954), one of the subthemes considered by the assembly was "The Churches Amid Racial and Ethnic Tensions." The gathering repudiated segregation as being in conflict with the gospel and irreconcilable with the church's teaching about human beings.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the right of states to forbid mixed marriages (contradicting South Africa's Mixed Marriage Act of 1949) was flatly denied. Again Prof. Marais was present, offering a liberal voice from within the NGK. Significantly, he declared that no grounds for racial segregation (*rasseskeiding*) could be found within Scripture, but held that separate churches were acceptable if this was understood to be a temporary situation.<sup>60</sup> It need hardly be said that such statements arising out of the WCC were highly disconcerting to many within the Afrikaans-speaking churches. Nevertheless, it was not until after Cottesloe that the Cape and Transvaal NGKs withdrew their membership.

---

<sup>58</sup>Kinghorn, "Die Groei van 'n Teologie--Van Sendingbeleid tot Verskeidenheids-Teologie," Die NG Kerk en Apartheid, p155.

<sup>59</sup>The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches declares its conviction that any form of segregation based on race, colour, or ethnic origin is contrary to the Gospel, and is incompatible with the Christian doctrine of man and with the nature of the Church of Christ. The Assembly urges the churches within its membership to renounce all forms of segregation and discrimination and to work for their abolition within their own life and society" (from Statement from the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches Evanston (1954) quoted in A. van der Bent, ed., Breaking Down the Walls, p23.

<sup>60</sup>Gous and Crafford, Een Liggaam, Baie Lede, p332.



### Cottesloe Consultation

The struggle between the missionary vision of ecumenism and the propositionalists' external apartheid agenda culminated around the events surrounding the World Council-convened 1960 Cottesloe Consultation. The more liberal vision of ecumenism and race relations dominated during the consultation but was then cut short as participants subsequently distanced themselves from the consultation's decisions. The WCC first called for the Cottesloe gathering of its South African member churches in response to the Sharpeville riots of 21 March 1960 in which South African police opened fire on a defenseless crowd killing sixty-nine black Africans and wounding one hundred eighty (later investigation revealed that most of the bullets were received in the back).<sup>61</sup> The delegates gathered at Cottesloe, a residence at the University of the Witwatersrand and the only place in this era that could accommodate a multiracial conference of more than eighty delegates. The consultation itself was a great success; broad consensus was reached and progressive declarations on race relations approved.<sup>62</sup> Indeed this triumph was strengthened by the fact that the majority of memoranda upon which Cottesloe's decisions were based came out of official study commissions put together by the Cape and Transvaal synods of the NGK. In other words, the churches which would have been the most difficult to please were actually responsible for the consultation's progressive agenda in the first place.<sup>63</sup>

The irony came when, under pressure from Prime Minister Verwoerd and others within the NGK, the FMC and nearly all the Cottesloe participants eventually repudiated

---

<sup>61</sup>Kotzé, Die NG Kerk en die Ecumene, p82.

<sup>62</sup>Scriptural grounds for mixed marriages were denied; it was declared that no one could be kept out of any church on the grounds of color or race; the gathering warned about the dangers of nationalism, etc. (Gous and Crafford, Een Liggaam, Baie Lede, p342).

<sup>63</sup>Gous and Crafford, Een Liggaam, Baie Lede, p341-42.

the decisions made at Cottesloe,<sup>64</sup> thus rejecting something which had originated within their own churches.

Magisterially, Verwoerd...in effect called the Dutch Reformed Churches to order. They had been unduly influenced by the World Council of Churches, in the end submitting to their liberal views. Theologians too had to keep a single mind, remembering the high purpose of apartheid...Neither would he allow this group of leading [NGK] churchmen to confuse the nation. They would have to recant. And they did: enough of them and in sufficient measure to undo everything that had taken place at Cottesloe.<sup>65</sup>

In further reaction against the WCC-initiated gathering the NGK's Free State and Natal synods placed an ultimatum before the Cape and Transvaal synods. The federated NGKs had been moving toward gathering under one synod, and, this in view, the Free State and Natal synods declared that their cooperation in realizing this general synod was contingent upon the Cape and Transvaal synods withdrawing from the WCC. By the end of the same year, the WCC-member NGKs did just that.<sup>66</sup> While the Cape synod decided to maintain correspondence with the WCC, the strong opposition within the FMC prevented the Cape and Transvaal synods from sending representatives to the WCC's third general assembly (New Delhi, 1961). Only Ben Marais attended and he, in an individual capacity.<sup>67</sup>

### **Inside the NGK: Ecumenicity?**

To this day, the other Afrikaans-speaking churches (the NHK and the GKSA) have shared with the NGK the same confessional foundations and yet the three churches have never joined to become a single church. Of course this is not particularly striking, since

---

<sup>64</sup>At the FCC's March 1961 gathering.

<sup>65</sup>W. A. de Klerk, The Puritans in Africa (London, 1975), p254, quoted in De Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, eds., Apartheid is a Heresy, p63.

<sup>66</sup>In the words of the Cape church: "Alhoewel die Sinode nie glo dat die Kerk se heil in algehele isolasie lê nie, maar dat hy steeds ekumeniese verband verbreek, besluit hy om onder die huidige omstandighede uit te tree uit die Wêreldraad van Kerke" (Handelinge 1961:55 and Algemene Sinode Handelinge 1962:149, quoted in Gous and Crafford, Een Liggaam, Baie Lede, p343).

<sup>67</sup>Gous and Crafford, Een Liggaam, Baie Lede, p342.

these doctrinal foundations are shared equally by the CRC in North America and the GKN of the Netherlands. And yet, particularly around the late thirties and forties, many within the three Afrikaans-speaking churches did indeed espouse such a union and argued for it on the grounds of these shared confessions. Events were organized and articles penned to no avail. More curious than why these events and articles didn't join the Afrikaans-speaking churches, however, was why so many Afrikaners expected that they should.

Apart from those purer desires for church unity, many were seeking to use the Afrikaans-speaking churches to further the Afrikaner politically. A volk "ecumenicity," thought the Kuypertian neoCalvinists, would undergird (indeed, help to construct) a volk unity and would therein aid their political agenda. Thus within Afrikaner politics the common heritage of Bible and doctrine was emphasized as that transcending the political histories separating the churches. As this "religious" construct of volk stood above these political distinctions, however, it was forging its own. We shall consider this briefly in what follows, and more extensively in chapter four.

While in the Afrikaner rise to power, the Afrikaans language served as a significant unifying force, the earliest efforts within the Afrikaans-speaking churches in this regard were fiercely resisted.<sup>68</sup> Thus in 1905 Rev. J. van Belkum (NHK) reacted negatively to Gustav Preller's support of Afrikaans, declaring it "a play by the evil one to spur divisions." Prof. J.I. Marais wrote further against the language movement declaring Afrikaans to be a "kitchen tongue" ("kombuistaal") wrongly glorified in Pretoria.<sup>69</sup> Not until 1914 did the idea of an Afrikaans Bible translation gain momentum, in a proposal by B.B. Keet before the Afrikaans Language Council. Despite the early resistance, however, this project did eventually draw the participation of all three Afrikaans-speaking churches;

---

<sup>68</sup>While by 1903, in response most saliently to the war, English was banned from official use in the Afrikaans-speaking churches, it was overtaken we must remember not by Afrikaans but by Dutch (Gous and Crafford, Een Liggaam, Baie Lede, p307).

<sup>69</sup>Kotzé, Die NG Kerk en die Ecumene, p117.

among the five final translators were representatives from each.<sup>70</sup> Following the Afrikaans Bible came the translation of the three formulas of unity and the liturgical formulas. In addition, attention was given to translating the confessions into Afrikaans. In these endeavors the Gereformeerdes took the lead.<sup>71</sup>

Indeed there were many projects around which the three Afrikaans-speaking churches came together during these years. In addition to the translation work, they joined to erect the Vrouemonument (1907); to organize and participate in the celebration of Calvin's 400th birthday (1909); even to hold a public gathering over the immorality (ontug) of Afrikaner women after an investigation by a three-church commission! Equally, particularly in the forties, the churches came together on political matters such as Christian National education and the communist threat. Indeed by 1941 they jointly presented a memorandum to Minister of Justice Colin Steyn on communism's dangers.<sup>72</sup> To be sure, the planning of a birthday party (even Calvin's!) might come and go without bringing its participants nearer to ecclesial unity--such cooperation need not move toward union. Yet we might perhaps expect that translation work, engaging as it did the churches' Bible and confessions, would have engaged at a deeper level the issues dividing these churches. Here we must remember that the dominant drive for unity was political. If doctrine had been functioning in a more dynamic way (as grammar), such translation work would perhaps have enabled such a deeper dialogue, but as it was, doctrine's capacity to unify was a static one, intended as a fence to keep Afrikaners in and all others--black and white--out.

---

<sup>70</sup>Moreover, it was in some sense an ecumenical affair as British and Foreign Bible Societies underwrote the costs of production and publication (Kotzé, Die NG Kerk en die Ecumene, p122).

<sup>71</sup>Kotzé, Die NG Kerk en die Ecumene, pp122-23; As late as 1949 the two official languages in which RES acts were issued were English and Dutch (RES Acts 1949, p11).

<sup>72</sup>Kotzé, Die NG Kerk en die Ecumene, pp118f; p127.

The year after the 1938 Voortrekker centennial celebrations one under the name of "Unitas" entered an article into Die Kerkbode addressing the relationship between the volk unity expressed in the centennial and the disunity of the participating churches. "Laat ons 'n nuwe weg probeer, die weg van die Scrif, nl.: eenheid...In so 'n geheel sal daar nog altyd die verrykende en opbouende verskeidenheid wees. Veelsydigheid in die eenheid is wat ons wil hê." Separate churches, the author insists, is not God's will. The Lord does not walk the path of division, and thus "ook kan die verdeling nie op skriftuurlike grondslag verdedig word nie."<sup>73</sup> To defend the separation on the grounds that Christ asks only for spiritual unity is in most cases, he continues, only an evasion. Thus he urges the three "Hollandse Kerke" to set aside historical differences (created by the trek, etc.) and to embrace the greater unity of Christ. For "Unitas," however, the greater unity is not finally universal but is rather the unity of a particular volk. This in view, he professes a practical dimension to the unification: unified, the churches could be more effective in uplifting the Afrikaner economically, politically and spiritually. "...[D]ie redes vir ons verdeling," he concludes, "is dikwels slegs uitvlugte <sup>[dit sou]</sup> is, en ~~dat dit~~ vir die geestelike lewe van die Afrikanervolk en vir die vervulling van die roeping van die Boerekerk in Afrika ver beter ~~set~~ wees as ons een word."<sup>74</sup>

Dr. S. H. Roussouw, submitting to Die Kerkbode about a year and a half after "Unitas," seeks equally to relate the need for church unity to increasing expressions of volk unity.<sup>75</sup> Among other cooperative efforts, he cites the various congresses held to address the economic plight of the Afrikaner in the depression's aftermath. And within the churches themselves, he reminds, "ons gemeentelede lees dieselfde Bybel; ons trou oor en weer met dieselfde formuliere en hou Nagmaal met dieselfde sakramente!...Waarom kan

---

<sup>73</sup>15 Nov. 1939, p36; p37.

<sup>74</sup>Die Kerkbode (15 Nov. 1939), p37.

<sup>75</sup>"Die Vereniging van Ons Drie Hollands-Afrikaanse Kerke," Die Kerkbode (9 July 1941), pp73-75.

ons nie ~~wees~~<sup>wees</sup> een volk met een Kerk en een God nie?" "Kom," he implores, "laat ons saamtrek en ons sal vir mekaar doen goed..."<sup>76</sup> Interestingly, the trek here makes intentionally hazy the line between the cultural and religious dimensions of the Afrikaner identity.

With "Unitas" Roussouw has no qualms equating church and volk; the unity of each is to undergird the other. This is clear from the reasons he cites for church unity. Significantly, he explains, it would empower the self-preservation (*selfbehoud*) of the Afrikaans-speaking volk. But underlying this Roussouw argues that the unity of the Afrikaner churches is the will of God ("God het ons volksplanting hier laat geskied met 'n grootse en heilige doel"). Finally, he calls on Scripture to state his case: How can it be said among us, he asks, <sup>that</sup> "ek is Nederduits Gereformeerd, ek is Gereformeerd, ek is Hervormd!" Is Christus dan nou in ons tyd verdeel?"<sup>77</sup> Scripture seems to be employed here as an afterthought to undergird a political agenda and its construct.

It is Dr. E.P. Groenewald who directly challenges the position of Roussouw and "Unitas." In an article entitled "Kerkvereniging en Volkseenheid"<sup>78</sup> he questions the equation of church unity with volk unity. Harkening to the theology of Abraham Kuyper, he explains that church union (*kerkvereniging*) belongs to the realm of special grace, while volk union (*volksvereniging*) belongs to the realm of common grace. It follows that they are of a very different nature. Thus in church union, he insists, arguments of race and blood and volk existence (*volksbestaan*) are less important. For unlike a volk, a church begins with a spiritual unity and then seeks to manifest it visibly. By definition, he states with Calvin, church boundaries cannot be tantamount to those of a volk--in South Africa or anywhere else. Thus for Groenewald, church unity is not that of the volk but of a more

---

<sup>76</sup>Die Kerkbode (9 July 1941), p34.

<sup>77</sup>Die Kerkbode (9 July 1941), p35.

<sup>78</sup>Die Kerkbode (30 July 1941).

universal people of God, coming from all nations and languages. Groenewald rightly objects to the equation of church and volk, but his attitude has its place in the apartheid politics as well. For in emphasizing the church as comprising the universal people of God, he underscores equally its invisible, spiritual nature. With such a position, in other words, churches come nearer to neither volk unity nor that of a more universal (interracial) kind. This spiritual universal does not make urgent but rather relativizes tangible efforts at horizontal union. For it is not in human hands to bring about, but in God's.

Die hoogste motief vir kerkvereniging mag...nooit 'n sosiologiese, kulturele, politieke of dergelike wees nie, maar moet 'n teologiese wees. Dit moet uitgaan van God en sy verkiesende genade.<sup>79</sup>

We turn now to consider more closely the doctrinal dimension of the NGK's confessions, on whose basis significant decisions and the identity of the NGK were made to stand.

---

<sup>79</sup>Die Kerkbode (30 July 1941), p25.

### Chapter Three: Confessional Foundations

#### The RES and the WCC: The Fallibility of Scriptural Foundations

For the NGK, at stake in the issues of ecumenicity were those foundational matters concerning the authority of Scripture. Ecumenical discourse was genuine only when undergirded by a shared acknowledgment of this infallible foundation. Furthermore, what constituted "sola scriptura" was to be read through a doctrinal framework, namely, that historical discourse instantiated by the "forms of unity" or Reformed confessions. We turn now to focus more closely on the confessions themselves as they grounded the RES's and the NGK's self-understandings and as they framed a discussion within the RES and the NGK about the WCC's lack of confessional and scriptural foundations. We begin with the RES foundation ("testimony") laid out in the 1946 acts.

The foundation for the Reformed Ecumenical Synod of Reformed Churches shall be the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament *as interpreted by the Confessions of the Reformed faith*, namely, the First Helvetic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Gallican Confession, the Belgic Confession, the First Scots Confession, the Second Scots Confession, the Westminster Confession, the Canons of Dort, the Thirty-nine Articles. It should be understood that these Scriptures in their entirety, as well as in every part thereof, are the infallible and ever abiding Word of the living Triune God, absolutely authoritative in all matters of creed and conduct, and *that the Confessions of the Reformed faith are accepted because they present the divine, revealed truth*, the forsaking of which has caused the deplorable decline of modern life. It has to be emphasized that only a wholehearted and consistent return to this Scriptural truth, of which the gospel of Jesus Christ is the core and the apex, can bring salvation to mankind and effectuate the so sorely needed renewal of the world.<sup>1</sup>

Scripture is absolutely authoritative in all matters of creed (in the form of the Reformed confessions) and creed, in turn, presents the divine, revealed truth of Scripture. This is the dynamic of "sola scriptura" to be reckoned with. Indeed as van Niekerk earlier conceded with regard to the World Council, the problem lies not in finding those who accept the Bible as truth; the problem is equally "which Bible?" Will it be the Bible of Karl Barth, or modernism? Along with articulating the RES's own self-understanding, the testimony names the crisis of modernism marked most saliently by the relativizing of Scripture's

---

<sup>1</sup>RES Acts 1949, p9, my ital.



authority and inspired status. In this way, the crisis around Scripture centers a much more encompassing crisis. At stake--indeed most acutely after two world wars, is the relationship between revelation and history (history's meaning and God's guidance therein); between creation and history's eschaton; as well as that between faith and the rigors of "historical-critical" and "scientific" reason. As with any other debate over history's foundations, this one is as political as it is theological.

Indeed, as much as the Reformed confessions are here abstracted out of their own historical and political context<sup>2</sup> to serve as the boundaries of a new Reformed identity, the new matrix of these confessions (in the RES testimony and in the constitutions of its participating churches) makes highly political rather than apolitical assertions and declares largely historical and extrabiblical rather than "ever abiding and scriptural" points of view. Thus as many within the RES and NGK discourses lament the relativizing of Scripture's authority and seek grounding in the Reformed confessions, our questions will be: How are the confessions functioning? What are the more immediate ecclesio-political and, indeed, political issues involved when the conversation turns most saliently to the articles of these "timeless" creeds? Still later in this chapter, particularly in discussing the "du Plessis affair," we will ask further, what is at stake within the discourse of conservative Calvinism in revising these confessions?

As we have suggested earlier, the RES's objections to the WCC's basic formula<sup>3</sup> during this period have largely to do with the formula's ambiguity. The committee reporting to the 1953 RES wisely notes for the basic formula what is of course always the case with confessions and statements of identity, namely, that its impact and meaning is necessarily determined by the historical context within which it is uttered. Not only is the

---

<sup>2</sup>We will consider the complexities of this more closely a bit further on, since the confessions are "abstracted" precisely for the historical and political authority they carried in their own contexts.

<sup>3</sup>"The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour."

basic formula open to multiple interpretations, it is relativized precisely because the historical context in which it appears is one plagued by relativism. Finally, it has cast the WCC net too broadly leaving "...no certainty that the churches, tied together in the W.C., really accept the basic formula in its *true Scriptural sense*. *Resultant on the theological development of the last century this formula is not equivocal.*"<sup>4</sup> Most explicitly what is called for as "scriptural" is ironically a trinitarian interpretation of this basic statement about Jesus Christ (indeed, this trinitarian interpretation is one of the stipulations made by the NGK's Cape synod as it joins the WCC in 1954). Still, what is meant by "scriptural" becomes clearer as the 1953 report discusses the ICCC. The ICCC Constitution is favored over that of the WCC (and over the NAE) for the contents of its constitution:

For the Constitution of the I.C.C.C. contains among the Biblical truths believed and maintained the following: "The necessity of maintaining, according to the Word of God, the purity of the Church in doctrine and life."<sup>5</sup>

It is, in fact, "scriptural" (a "biblical truth") that the purity of church doctrine must be upheld. Thus "scriptural" is a dynamic in which doctrine and Scripture work dialectically to undergird one another.

Already at the first assembly of the WCC many member churches sought a clarification of the Council's basis. Those concerned were requested to present their questions in writing to the central committee for further study. By the central committee's 1950 Toronto gathering the Remonstrant Church of Holland proposed an amendment, and more proposals soon followed. Shortly before the general assembly at Evanston (1954) the Church of Norway requested the addition of the words "in accordance with Scripture" to the basic formula. Though the proposal was received too late to be formally considered, it made explicit one of the central objections many had with respect to the basic formula. Along with questions over the formula's content came related queries as to its intention.

---

<sup>4</sup>RES Reports 1953, p8, my ital.

<sup>5</sup>RES Reports 1953, p39.

Seeking to clarify the Council's position on this issue, Evanston perhaps generated more questions than it answered: "while the Basis is less than a confession, it is much more than a mere formula or agreement" (quoted in Fey 34).

In 1960, prompted by Orthodox recommendations, General Secretary Visser't Hooft proposed a formulation of the basis which emphasized the role of the Spirit, but did not yet refer to the foundation of Scripture. Finally, by the general gathering at New Delhi (1961), a further formulation was submitted and the following amended version was accepted overwhelmingly<sup>6</sup>:

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which *confess the* Lord Jesus Christ as God the Saviour *according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit*.<sup>7</sup>

The four changes from the submitted formula appear above in italics: i) substituted for "accept" is now the word "confess"; ii) before "Lord Jesus Christ" "the" replaces the original "our"; iii) "according to the Scriptures" is added and iv) "and therefore seek to fulfil together..." is added bringing the organization's missionary element.<sup>8</sup> Striking is the addition of the word "confess" to a formula and an organization which claimed to stand as a unifying force *above* the particular confessional dimensions of its member churches. Were these diverse ecclesiastical bodies any nearer to gathering under a shared confession?

Ironically, this synod which adopted this more "scriptural" formula is the same synod in which the NGKs of the Cape and Transvaal formally withdrew from the World Council. Thus as the WCC's explicit basis became more acceptable by NGK standards, its politics (the working out of this basis) became unbearable. After the statements on race relations released by the WCC through the fifties and the tragedy of the WCC-initiated

---

<sup>6</sup> 383 in favor; 36 opposed; 7 abstentions (Fey, The Ecumenical Advance, p35).

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p35.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p35.

Cottesloe Consultation, little could be done to heal relations between the WCC and its NGK member synods.

### **The RES Reads "the Bible of Karl Barth"**

Just as the World Council functioned both as an outside "threat" and as one component of a struggle for self-understanding within the RES discourse, the Reformed theologian Karl Barth--himself present at the WCC's first assembly, served (and suffered) similarly. For the RES's conservative Calvinists Barth was in many ways more threatening than more liberal modernists because in his theology of the word he claimed the Reformed heritage. Depending upon where one stood, Barth could, in fact, have appeared quite orthodox. In the face of communism and other ideological seductions, Barth sought to bring individuals and the church back to the word of God found in Scripture. Furthermore, his seminal Epistle to the Romans (1919) did not employ the historical-critical method so opposed by many within the RES, but relied instead upon the authority of the inspired Apostle Paul as its sole human author.

What put Barth on the 1946 agenda of the RES, however, was a theology which underscored God's absolute freedom and, correlatively, the utter discontinuity between this God and the workings of human history. God was not bound to any salvation history along whose path we humans might be inching. And God's nature, in turn, could not be known from history as it had played out. Just as Barth's rejection of a preordained history was heresy to many within the RES, his espousal of universal salvation over against predestination stood in direct contradiction to the Canons of Dort, one of the keypins in the Reformed "forms of unity."

Equally problematic was the way in which Barth's dialectical theology left a discontinuity between nature and grace. He rejected the notion of a common grace that ordained at creation the sovereignty of civil authority and insodoing he undermined the relationship between church and state declared in the Belgic Confession (a.36) as well. Because Barth believed that God in God's sovereignty would not be bound by the finished

revelation canonized in Scripture, he would not equate the word of God with the sum of words statically contained in the Old and New Testament. Rather, the true word was an event initiated in God's grace. The Bible was the word of God only insofar as God allowed it to be so, insofar as he chose to speak through it. In other words, Barth relocated the infallibility of the word of God from the words on the page to the encounter with God that would take place in and through them. Thus from the RES perspective, Barth endangered both Christianity's historical foundations and history's trinitarian ones. Inside the NGK the task of so "endangering" fell to Johannes du Plessis.

### **Inside the NGK: The du Plessis Affair**

There is a craving now in many minds for something like a fixed eternal authority to ensure our fidelity to at least the essentials of the faith. There is no such authority and no such security. Our only security against apostasy is to be sought in faith, in prayer, in the work of God, in the presence and power of the Spirit, in the maintenance of fellowship within our living King...To place our trust elsewhere is apostasy."<sup>9</sup>

For the NGK, the withdrawal of the Cape and Transvaal synods from the WCC in 1961 was only one action in a much larger struggle for an ecumenical and confessional identity. Already at the turn of the century, indeed before, internal events were framing these questions and revealing rifts inside the church. Synod's role in deciding doctrinal matters for the life of the church was complicated when, in 1862, the civil courts declared the need for those NGKs outside the Cape Colony to establish separate synods and no longer to send voting delegates to the Cape. Thus the political identity of the "trekkers" was then underscored in the formation of distinct synodical identities. After the turn of the century, Johannes du Plessis (1868-1935) declared that the church was moving away from its true Reformed identity and toward a most unReformed isolation. In the heated role of

---

<sup>9</sup>J. du Plessis quoting Rainy, Het Zoeklicht (15 Aug. 1931), pp243-44; (15 Nov. 1933), p337.

heretic/prophet he provides the site from which we will consider the dynamics of this period.

Referring to the drawn-out heresy trial to which du Plessis was subjected, F.E. O'Brien-Geldenuys, late ecumenical officer of the NGK, declared that it was "in essence the last purely theological conflict of the half-century in the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa."<sup>10</sup> We however have yet to explore the mix of ecclesial politics found within the "pure theology" of this affair. Du Plessis himself was baptized in the NGK and at twenty-six ordained in the same church. In 1903 he became the Cape NGK's very first general secretary for missions, and by 1910 he was appointed editor of Die Kerkbode. As editor of the NGK's official mouthpiece, he had been given, so to speak, keys to the "tower" and before long he was indeed ringing the church bells and everyone else's. The same year of his appointment to Die Kerkbode du Plessis penned an article in which he warned that a recent doctoral thesis by W.A. Joubert of Amsterdam's Vrije Universiteit marked a narrowing (*verenging*) within the church to a static and authoritarian scholastic orthodoxy. The following year (1911) a Rev. Dwight Snyman (minister of the church where du Plessis attended) responded to this article by charging du Plessis with heretical teaching before the Paarl presbytery. The charge was dismissed, and just five years later du Plessis was sanctioned with an appointment to Stellenbosch as senior lecturer in New Testament. Still the debate within Die Kerkbode played on.

In 1923 a separate publication, Het Zoeklicht,<sup>11</sup> was launched under du Plessis's editorship in an attempt to both to replace the *Gereformeerde Maandblad*, closed after the overseas departure of G.B.A. Gerdener, and to remove the increasingly heated theological debate from the church's main mouthpiece.<sup>12</sup> Just five years later (1926) another new

---

<sup>10</sup> Whitelaw, "A Crisis of Credibility: Contemporary Dialogue with Colenso and du Plessis," p17.

<sup>11</sup> Changed to the Afrikaans Die Soeklig in 1933.

publication, Die Ou Paaie,<sup>13</sup> appeared under the strongly fundamentalist editorship of Dwight Snyman, du Plessis's original accuser. By May 1928, however, it was the board of trustees at the University of Stellenbosch who issued a complaint against Prof. du Plessis to the Ring of Stellenbosch (the body that handled charges made against the Stellenbosch faculty). Officially the board offered the following as objectionable in du Plessis's teachings and beliefs: 1) that the Holy Scripture is not in all its parts infallibly inspired; 2) that the critically reconstructed standpoint of the history of Israel is the correct one, thus denying the authorship of Moses; 3) the doctrine of kenosis whereby Christ in his incarnation laid down his godly qualities and thus, being human, could offer no authoritative judgment with regard to the Old Testament writings; and 4) that a minister should have the right to express conflict or struggle with the confessions without first laying the matter before the synod<sup>14</sup>. Prof. du Plessis responded by refuting the accusations and nuancing his position for the record, and after considering the matter at length, the ring gave a verdict of "not guilty."

The plaintiff board of trustees, in turn, appealed the ring's decision before the October synod of that year. By synod's end, the commission appointed to consider the content of the charges (die leerkommissie) could not reach consensus. Thus a majority report appeared rejecting du Plessis's teaching as confused and a minority report suggesting that the matter be referred to an interchurch committee of experts. Finally synod voted to accept the majority report and the original decision of the ring was overturned. With two-hundred-twenty-eight voices against ninety-three du Plessis was pronounced guilty on all counts. On the basis of this decision he was then suspended from his

---

<sup>12</sup>Hofmeyr, "Johannes du Plessis in kerkhistoriese perspektief: Ketter of profeet?", p7.

<sup>13</sup>In 1933 becoming Die Gereformeerde Vaandel (O'Brien-Geldenhuis, In die Stroom-Versnellings, p10).

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. , p5.

professorship and his ministerial duties. Were he willing, among other things, to subject himself to the synodical expression, an appendage added, he might keep his full salary and subsidy until he reached pension age. Du Plessis not only ignored this, he appealed to the civil court, requesting that the synod's decision be declared invalid. This time he argued on legal grounds, namely, that the board of trustees had no right to appeal the ring decision to synod according to church law. His appeal was upheld and he emerged out of the civil courts "justified."<sup>15</sup>

While the civil courts clearly could not address what was theologically at stake in the whole affair, the argument presented by du Plessis's attorney did reveal something of the NGK's internal dynamics. Addressing the question as to whether or not du Plessis had transgressed the boundaries of the church's confessions, Mr. de Wet pointed out the church's internal inconsistency. By the very fact that the synod took, from time to time, decisions on doctrinal questions, he declared, it conceded that the confessions were not unambiguous on these points.<sup>16</sup> In other words, it seemed clear that du Plessis's position contradicted not the confessions themselves (indeed the word "inspiration," whose denial he was accused of, never appears within them), but synod's particular interpretation of them. Thus even if du Plessis stood alone in his confessional interpretation, he argued, the church would yet have to prove that such an interpretation *explicitly* contradicted thus confessions--thus in the letter of them, not the spirit.

In February 1932 the synodical commission gathered in Cape Town to discuss the civil court decision and to come to an agreement with Prof. du Plessis. Rather than the professor resuming his position at the seminary, it was agreed that he would take a leave of absence, maintaining his salary and privileges, until the following synod could make a more concrete decision regarding his status. In October the same year Synod decided by

---

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp3-6.

<sup>16</sup>Deist, "Die wa van Ussa," p59.



majority vote to terminate the professor's services to the seminary.<sup>17</sup> Prof. du Plessis submitted a letter to the body the following month, objecting on legal grounds to his dismissal and speaking of his desire to continue in the profession and position he deemed to be his calling. Yet while he continued to speak his vision for the church in the pages of Het Zoeklicht, he was not to lecture at Stellenbosch again. Though by the end of the affair he still cherished the NGK, the scope of its true identity had been for him painfully undermined. Addressing Synod about his desire to return to his teaching post he finally offered the following:

My haar is al grys, ek is nie meer so ver van die Jordaan des doods nie, en ek vra u, vaders en broeders, kan selfs die Jordaan al die modder afwas wat in die afgelope vier jaar op my gewerp is?<sup>18</sup>

Needless to say, within the NGK's own judicial process the core issue was complex and difficult to extract. The deeper questions of the original ecclesial matter were not so much whether du Plessis transgressed the creedal boundaries of the Reformed confessions. Rather, at stake were the confessions themselves and their capacity to speak the identity of the NGK. The question was in some sense the same posed with regard to the WCC's basic formula, the RES's foundation, and the federated NGKs struggle to unify: the very identity of the confessing church. The same challenging dialectic found within the church's struggle toward ecumenicity was playing out within the church as well--that between identity and openness; substance and change. Equally at stake within the church was which tradition would speak the church identity--the more liberal "du Plessis manne," out of the evangelical missionary stream, or the theologically and politically conservative "oupajane," under the influence of Kuyperian neo-Calvinism.<sup>19</sup> Despite du

---

<sup>17</sup> "...hoe ongaarne ook, dat die beeindiging van die professor se dienste aan die Kweekskool die uitweg die moelikheid bied" (NGK Handelinge 1932 quoted in O'Brien-Geldenhuis, In die Stroom-Versnellings, p9).

<sup>18</sup>"Die Kommissie van Onderhandelinge [1932]" quoted in Gerdener, Die Boodskap van 'n Man, p293.

Plessis's eventual exoneration by the civil court, the larger victory was not his but that of the theologically conservative opposition.

### **The Rise of the "Oupajane"**

The narrowing of the NGK was of course not simply the result of the du Plessis affair, but also its cause. Indeed, as we have mentioned earlier, it was du Plessis's comments on the narrowing trend in Die Kerbode that led already in 1910 to Snyman's first accusation of him. Already by the turn of the century this more fundamentalist shift manifested itself in a number of tangible ways. Ferdinand Deist cites several: 1) up until 1909 only three NGK ministers studied at Amsterdam's conservative Free University (founded by A. Kuyper<sup>20</sup>), but between 1910 and 1919 no less than seventeen candidates studied there while only six in this same period studied at the more liberal state university of Utrecht; 2) around 1912 a number of church members voiced their difficulties in subscribing to the confessions as interpreted by some dominant voices of the time; and 3) Around this same time the periodical Die Kerbode began to register a struggle in which more conservative voices were unabashedly declaring the NGK to be a fundamentalist church and the seminary at Stellenbosch "ons fundamentalistiese Kweekskool."<sup>21</sup>

After the du Plessis affair, the character of the seminary at Stellenbosch changed as academic posts were increasingly filled by those known for their "anti-du Plessis" positions. Professors favoring du Plessis (among them B.B. Keet) were increasingly cautious, fearing the content of their lectures would be used against them. Students equally

---

<sup>19</sup>Whitelaw, "A Crisis of Credibility: Contemporary Dialogue with Colenso and du Plessis," p17.

<sup>20</sup> Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) was a Dutchman who saw the need for religion (and in his vision, Calvinism) to permeate all the life spheres. Thus, after receiving his doctorate in sacred theology in 1863, he went on to become editor of a daily newspaper, member of the lower house of parliament, and founder, in 1880, of the Free University of Amsterdam. See his influential Lectures on Calvinism (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1931). We will discuss his influence on the NGK's doctrine and race relations policies in chapter four.

<sup>21</sup> Deist, "Die Wa van Ussa," p41.

felt the change in mood and many of those with du Plessis sympathies went overseas for study (among them Ben Marais who left for Princeton Seminary during this time, many others for the Free University in Amsterdam). From 1932-37 Prof. Keet was the only "du Plessis man" on the Stellenbosch faculty.<sup>22</sup> Politically, the decade closed as England declared war on Germany (3 Sept. 1939) and the Cape Parliament voted to walk with Britain. The divide within the NGK then took on the political dimensions of the war as the Kuiperians gave their loyalty to the struggle of the German "volk."

For du Plessis the conservative trend of the church had a name, and in his letter responding to Synod's failure to restore his professorship, he declared it for the church record:

In ieder geval, ek voel dat daar gevaar is dat ons Kweekskool op weg is om eng te word, om doppers te word--en ek gebruik die woord "Dopper" nie in smadelike sin nie, maar slegs as 'n aanduiding van die rigting wat ek bedoel.<sup>23</sup>

Still, while he detected the "verdoppering" of the NGK, this was no indication for him that the NGK was moving any nearer to the union with the Gereformeerdes (i.e., the "Doppers" or to the NHK) sought so ardently by some, let alone a sign that the NGK's synods were moving closer to uniting amongst themselves. Indeed, permitting its individual synods to make judgments about the confessions and their boundaries could only be divisive within the NGK--theologically and at a practical level. For example, he offered, a minister's theological stand could simultaneously be in accord with the Federated Council of NGKs and in violation of his own synod's position. In fact, he argued, if the NGK synods continued to make separate decisions on the confessions, the consequence would eventually be the formation of separate confessions.<sup>24</sup> At stake in the confessional debate, in other words, was more than the individual's freedom with respect to the church.

---

<sup>22</sup> O'Brien-Geldenhuis, In die Stroom-Versnellings, p10.

<sup>23</sup> "Die Kommissie van Onderhandeling [1932]" quoted in Gerdener, Die Boodskap van 'n Man, p290.

<sup>24</sup> "Die Toekoms van ons Belydenis," pp231-35.

Rather confessional forms which had served previously as the prominent unifying factor in the NGK identity (and that linking the NGK to the NHK and the Gereformeerdes) now threatened to separate the churches.

At first glance one might think of the case between the NGK's "du Plessis manne" and its "oupajane" as a conflict between liberal and conservative notions of theology and ecclesial identity. Indeed many within the NGK have considered it as such. Yet for us to glean insight from this struggle we must question more closely the application of the categories themselves. Though du Plessis was painted as a liberal, open to modernist trends of secularism and rationalism, he himself rejected this explicitly in writing as well as in his actions. In fact, referring to the NGK's struggle of the previous century against liberalism, du Plessis declared his support not for those ministers conflicting with the confessions, but for the synod which denounced them.<sup>25</sup>

...ek <sup>stem</sup>op geen enkele punt met die Moderniste van sewentig jaar gelede saamstem; intendeel, as ek lid was van die Sinode van 1862, dat ek skouer aan skouer sou gestaan het met die Faures en die Murrays en die Hofmeyrs en my eie vader, as verdediger van die geloof wat eenmaal aan die heiliges oorgelewer is.<sup>26</sup>

For du Plessis this 1862 synod spoke of that NGK in whose spirit and tradition he encountered God and developed his vision of the church. Particularly with the Murrays came the evangelical influence of the Scottish Reveil and, herein, the prominent role of the Holy Spirit that enabled one to look more critically at the Bible and gave one greater freedom in considering the confessions and other doctrinal teachings. Thus what the 1862 Synod rejected in dismissing the liberal ministers Kotzé and Burger was not openness but modernism, for replacing the foundation of Scripture with that of rationalism. In this respect, while the "oupajane" and the modernists came from opposite ends of the

---

<sup>25</sup> For a full account see du Plessis's own The Life and Times of Andrew Murray, especially "The Struggle with the Civil Courts and the Extrusion of Liberalism," pp. 209-36.

<sup>26</sup> "Die Kommissie van Onderhandeling [1932]" quoted in Gerdener, Die Boodskap van 'n Man, p292.

theological spectrum, they nevertheless had something in common, namely, their replacement of the foundation of Scripture with a foreign foundation.

### **Du Plessis reads "the Bible of Karl Barth"**

In the end, at stake between the two streams was which hermeneutical foundations would ground the church's evaluation of history, Scripture and the confessions. For du Plessis, to accept God's hand in history meant that revelation had no static foundation and, consequently, that no "canonical interpretation" existed of history, Scripture or the confessions.<sup>27</sup> This was not, however, the subjective relativism toward which modernism would eventually lead. True both to his evangelical, missionary roots and to Calvin himself, du Plessis's hermeneutical foundation was the dynamic of *verbum internum* (*testimonium Spiritus Sancti*) and *verbum externum*. The Holy Spirit, in other words, had a primary role to play in hermeneutics. First, it prepared the Christian individual for hearing the word of God by dwelling within her. And second, it was that inspiration (lit., *in breathing*) which dwelled within the text, making from the human words of Scripture a divine word of God. In no way for du Plessis did this make interpreting the word of God a purely subjective endeavor; rather, it was to be located in the context of an event of revelation whose living site was a space between the person and the Book. Insofar as God continued to reveal Godself through history, the individual struggling to hear this divine word and will for a particular context had an authority which was not purely subjective or rational, but, for the indwelling of the Spirit, a kind of "subjective-objective correlative." This dialectical understanding was not a devaluing of the authority of Scripture, but a higher valuing for the care it took to give breath to the living word.

If du Plessis's emphasis upon the dynamic and dialectical nature of the word of God suggests the influence of Karl Barth, this influence is confirmed in the pages of Het Zoeklicht, particularly as du Plessis reports of a visit made to the professor at Bonn.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Deist, "Die Wa van Ussa," pp55f.

Defending Barth against the "liberal" label, du Plessis speaks with admiration about Barth's vision for the church. Far from Barth relativizing Scripture's position as the word of God, Barth's ambition is, in fact, to bring the church back to this word. Barth too laments the weakening of Protestant churches in the face of modernist philosophy, subjectivism and relativism and seeks not a stronghold but a strengthening, from within the church, and in the language of faith. Du Plessis did stand with the NGK in having serious hesitations about Barthian theology as well. It lacked, in emphasizing God's absolute freedom from the categories of human knowability and history, the mystical element of faith so valued in du Plessis's evangelical roots. Nevertheless, critical openness to the riches of Barthian theology was, for du Plessis, more significant than any problems he might have with it.

Thus, considered from the standpoint of the authority of Scripture, du Plessis was the conservative, moreso in fact than the "conservative" synod that first dismissed him from his duties as minister and professor. For to their more Catholic valuing of extrabiblical tradition (viewing the confessions as guarantors of the faith), du Plessis declared the Reformed "sola scriptura"! What he espoused, in other words, was not liberalism itself, but a place within the NGK where, on the foundation of Scripture, "liberals" and all others could dialogue--in true Reformed spirit--with the needs and issues of the time, with other voices within the tradition, as well as ecumenically, with other Reformed and non-Reformed churches. For du Plessis, this unquestioned adherence to the confessions of three centuries back was ironically the death or petrification of the church's norms for faith. This was not, he emphasized, a theologians' crisis; it was a church crisis. Indeed, as foreign life philosophies and ideologies addressed the age, the faithful would soon be found on the other side of those walls built to keep out liberalism; the NGK was losing its own.

A consequence of the previous century's struggle against liberalism was the institution of a *colloquium dictum* before which all those seeking legitimation as ministers

---

<sup>28</sup> Het Zoeklicht (15 Dec. 1930), pp386-89.

were to appear. Originally intended to measure the candidate's theological knowledge, it received from the 1862 Synod an added stipulation, namely, that a special inquiry was to be included "...as to the opinions on regeneration by the Holy Spirit and the personal experience of God's grace, and also as to fidelity to the doctrine of our Church..."<sup>29</sup> In effect, this served as a kind of "gatekeeper" on the church identity, and the rise of the liberal rationalists was quashed soon enough. As the century turned, however, the gate would turn into an embankment (*damwal*) against modernism. Inside, the NGK would fall increasingly subject to a kind of ghetto theology to the extent that the church would eventually declare, borrowing a slogan from nineteenth-century Dutch nationalism, "in isolation is our strength!" When, in 1910, du Plessis raised his concerns about the NGK's narrowing trend, the confessions (and the *legitimasie-beloofte* or "legitimation promise" required of each minister in the face of them) had begun to serve as similar embankments.

#### **"Uitbou" v. "Hersiening": Old Facts and Unchanged Truths**

Large service can be rendered by all who help to restate the old facts and unchanged truths in terms that will make them vivid and vital to others: and who assist in the work of a theological restatement which is a requirement of every age...Men who...are not ready to do the hard constructive and courageous work necessary to meet the need, are not qualified to be guides and leaders...<sup>30</sup>

One of the most heated issues within the du Plessis affair was the professor's position regarding the *legitimasie-beloofte*<sup>31</sup> required of every minister upon entering his call. Du Plessis rejected the static acceptance of and adherence to the confessions that such a promise implied and believed instead that each minister needed to grapple with the

---

<sup>29</sup> Du Plessis, The Life and Times of Andrew Murray, pp230-31.

<sup>30</sup> Du Plessis quoting John Mott, "Die Kerklike Situasië," Het Zoeklicht (15 May 1931), p131.

<sup>31</sup> "Ons belowe om die voornoemde leer naars<sup>nik</sup>te te leer en in ons wandel getrou te handhaaf, sonder iets teen die leer, hetsy direk of indirek, te leer of te skrywe" (We promise diligently to teach the forenamed doctrine and in our conduct to faithfully maintain it without teaching or writing anything against the doctrine, either direct or indirect).

confessions and Scriptures in a more dynamic and free way. To abide by the confessions unrevised was for him tantamount to saying that the three hundred years of theology since their composition had yielded no new insights or revelations of the truth. God's truth being dynamic, he insisted, ministers should be able to struggle with the relationship between their experience and the confessions without first laying their questions before the synod. Furthermore he wondered if the confessions themselves, unrevised and unchallenged, could adequately address the spiritual crisis introduced by modernism and the historical-critical method. Thus the pages of Het Zoeklicht began to call for a revision (*hersiening*) of the forms of unity in step with the NGK's more liberal stream.

Already in 1920 the Leeuwarden synod of the GKN had raised the possibility of extending (*uitbrei*) or modifying (*wysig*) its confessions in light of modern developments, and a commission was appointed to further consider the matter. The three major doctrinal issues under consideration were 1) the authority and inspiration of Scripture; 2) the teaching re: the true and false church and 3) the relationship between church and government authorities.<sup>32</sup> Though in 1927 the commission reported that the confessions were sufficiently clear on the authority and inspiration of Scripture to preclude any addition or modification, enough GKN members were dissatisfied with the committee's conclusions to bring about a new commission. This second commission decided that an "*uitbou*" (literally, a "building out") of the confessions was indeed necessary, and it proceeded to articulate what it understood by that--not, first of all, a modification of the existing confessions, but the creation of an additional one.<sup>33</sup>

The precise sense of "*uitbou*" intended by the GKN's synodical commission was then disputed within the context of the NGK's own internal debate about the confessions.

---

<sup>32</sup>Van Rooyen, "Die Gereformeerde Kerk van Nederland en die 'Uitbou' van die Belydenis," p12.

<sup>33</sup>Van Rooyen, "Die Gereformeerde Kerk van Nederland en die 'Uitbou' van die Belydenis," p15.



Writing in 1930 Stellenbosch professor E.E. van Rooyen offers his version of the difference:

Die "uitbou" het seker geskied in ou-gereformeerde gees en is nie 'n "hersiening" van die Nederlandse Geloofsbelydenis nie, soos die Redakteur van "Het Zoeklicht" die argelose publiek op die mou wou spelde nie.<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, in the pages of Die Ou Paaie during this time du Plessis' interpretation of "uitbou" is repeatedly rejected. The revisions he calls for represent an insult to the confessions, an undermining of their authoritative position within the tradition and a relativizing of the authority and inspired status of Holy Scripture. What, however, is also clear is that the problematic difference between du Plessis' "hersiening" and the GKN's "uitbou" is not so much one of degree--as if the former were objectionable merely for being a more radical version of the latter. Rather, what is so objectionable to the more conservative "oupajane" is the *direction* of du Plessis' proposed "hersiening"-- toward a more open relationship with the discourse of modernism rather than away from it. Though this would later change, the GKN at this point viewed the challenge of modernism in much the same way as the "oupajane"--as something demanding not engagement but sharper distinctions made over and against it. Further explaining the meaning of "uitbou," the GKN's Professor van Gelederen writes in a letter to the NGK (16 April 1928) the following:

Onder uitbouw der Belydenis verstaan wy in deze Geref. Kerken allerminst radicale wyziging der drie Formulieren van Eenigheid. Integendeel, wy verstaan er juist onder, dat sommige punten, die nu meer op den voorgrond staan dan in de 16de en 17de eeuw, scherper moesten worden geformuleerd--*in de eerste plaats dat de leer van het Schriftgezag duidelik wordt omschreven teenover de critische stromingen van onzen tyd.*<sup>35</sup>

While the difference between the oupajane's "uitbou" and the du Plessis manne's "hersiening" represents a theological division, it also signifies two fundamentally different understandings of the function of confessions. For the conservative stream the

---

<sup>34</sup>Van Rooyen, "Die Gereformeerde Kerk van Nederland en die 'Uitbou' van die Belydenis," p11.

<sup>35</sup>"Die Gereformeerde Kerk van Nederland en die 'Uitbou' van die Geloofsbelydenis," Die Ou Paaie (October 1928), p240, my ital.

confessions served to delineate what constituted the "scriptural" perspective in any given situation and to set the doctrinal boundaries for the orthodox Reformed identity. For the liberal stream, following in the evangelical, pietistic tradition of Andrew Murray, the confessions functioned more dynamically as faithful responses to particular contexts and remained vital only insofar as the theological freedom of personal interpretations was maintained, only as individuals continued to engage the confessions in living ways.

Indeed for du Plessis "uitbou" was tantamount effectively to a revision of the *function* of the confessions as understood by the synod which condemned him. Instead of serving as a means of insuring continuity of faithfulness through the ages, they were, with an emphasis on the testimony of the Holy Spirit, intended to render the Christian truths open to dialogue with the modern developments. Their strength was found not in their eternal or universal applicability, but in their adaptability and capacity to speak to particular contexts while remaining true to their scriptural identity. Indeed, this understanding of the confessions was the legacy of the evangelical, missionary tradition. He saw the authority given to the confessions by the NGK as standing in the way of an honest encounter with the word of God, one which could explore the fruits of the historical-critical approach without feeling threatened. In the NGK's desire for a tangible authority and its neglect of the testimony of the Holy Spirit, he wondered whether it wasn't forsaking its Reformed inheritance for the Roman Catholic church's intolerance of change.<sup>36</sup>

The strength of the Reformed tradition, du Plessis maintained, was its capacity to address and respond to changing contexts. While many confessional articles would maintain relevance through the centuries, certain others would in time become obsolete (*verouderde*). For example, he offered, no one still believes in the inspiration of all the [vokaalpunte] of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, yet this belief is an article of faith that remains in the church's confession. Likewise, he insisted, confessions written during

---

<sup>36</sup>Du Plessis, "Werk daar 'n Roomse Suurdesem in ons Gereformeerde Kerke?", p246.

the sixteenth and seventeenth century could not be expected to answer adequately the questions raised by the historical-critical method. New confessions or the revising of old ones would be needed to address with relevance the particular crisis of faith brought on by the twentieth century.

"In die besit van daardie erfstukke is ons geestelik ryk--die vraag is alleen maar of ons dit wel besef."<sup>37</sup> In 1935, the first volume of Koers in die Krisis was presented to voice further the conservative side of the NGK debate.<sup>38</sup> Within this volume an article entitled "Ons Belydenisskrifte" gives further insight into the more conservative understanding of the role of the confessions. The church cannot exist, Rev. Erasmus explains, without a determined confession wherein its faith is clearly formulated. While this is a necessity for the church's internal life, it is equally a protest against heresy, confusion, and an unfaithful world. In the confessions the church marks its relationship over and against the world and other church formations. Here in the confessions the church gives grounding reasons for its faith.<sup>39</sup> Speaking of the forms of unity Erasmus then hearkens back to the context out of which they first emerged. They came out of a period in the past, he declares, when the life of faith in the church was still resilient (*verkragtig*) and blooming (*gebloei*), when the boundaries between faith and unfaith were drawn sharply and there was no talk of compromise between the two. They were drawn up, furthermore, by "godly men of daring and action" prepared to die for their convictions.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup>Stoker and Potgieter, eds., Koers in die Krisis, Vol. I, p111.

<sup>38</sup> Indeed, its editors were among the principal architects of apartheid. Stoker is particularly interesting for us as he was one of the three Gereformeerdes at the first RES meeting in 1946. Heavily influenced by A. Kuyper and H. Dooyeweerd, Stoker dominated the Broederbond executive during the thirties. As late as 1958 Potgieter would appear as an observer at the RES's fourth assembly.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p108.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p104.

What implications does this understanding have for how the confessions should be treated? Scripture, he continues, has unconditional authority over the conscience. And because the confessions are grounded on this word, they too have authority over the conscience, though a derived authority. The confessions, Erasmus concedes, are human works and fallible as such, but they are nevertheless the "purest interpretation" (suiwereste vertolking) the church has of the fundamental truths of Scripture. They can indeed be modified if that is necessary to bring them into agreement with the Scriptures, but insofar as they are the church's possession, the institutional church (and not individuals) must determine the need for such changes.<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps D. Lategan comes closest to explicitly declaring the confessions to be the church's foundation, thus superceding Scripture. In an article from Die Ou Paaie (October 1931) he quotes du Plessis and responds. For the Reformers, says du Plessis, the confessions were considered to be of a limited, secondary nature. This Lategan directly rejects. Conceding the limitations of their historical, cultural context, he nevertheless insists:

Vir die Hervormers was hulle Belydenisskrifte van primere betekenis--die vaste uitdrukking van hulle geloofsoortuiging, en was seker nie beskou as van veranderlike of verbygaande betekenis nie.

Thus, he continues, "n [h]ersiening in hierdie geval kan niks anders beteken nie as 'n omverwerping van die Kristelike Gereformeerde Kalvinistiese geloof soos neergele in die Belydenisskrifte."<sup>42</sup>

In an earlier article from Die Ou Paaie (August 1929) J.S. Krige conducts a revealing discussion about church doctrine and adds one voice to the NGK's fundamentalist stream. The call to leave doctrine and return to Jesus, he explains, is misleading. For one does not find Jesus apart from the Bible wherein doctrine is also

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p104.

<sup>42</sup> "Hersiening van ons Gereformeerde Belydenis," p380.

already inextricably contained. Paul's letters in particular, he argues, are thoroughly dogmatic. There is thus no experience of Jesus which escapes the struggle for orthodoxy.

And this is, in fact, the Christian project:

Die soms versmade woord "orthodoxy" het 'n baie mooi betekenis. Dit kom van twee griekse woorde wat **reguit dink** beteken. Dit is die dure plig van elke gelowige om **reguit te dink**, en om ander te help om **reguit te dink**.<sup>43</sup>

"Thinking straight," he declares rehearsing Calvin, does not occur by the light of a person's own understanding, but by the light of God's word and the working of the Holy Spirit. And yet one is clear from the article's conclusion that the project of "thinking straight" is acutely different in the age which the author seeks to address. They are "dangerous days" and the duty of the Christian within them is further spelled out as Krige quotes from 2 John:

If there comes any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him godspeed. For he that biddeth him godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds (10-11).

In "Die Toekoms van ons Belydenis"<sup>44</sup> G.B.A. Gerdener speaks of the confessions' past and considers their future. The way ahead for the church, he insists, involves a choice between three roads. Firstly, it might maintain sterile confessions (without revision) against which everyone would be cut. However, such intolerance would be contrary to the church's Reformed identity. Sterilization, he argues, would lead to isolation. So calcified, the confessions would be increasingly vulnerable, for their inability to speak, to political manipulation. When this road is taken confessions serve as a kind of static "gate" controlling the theological character of the church by exclusion. Thus on the official, explicit level the confessions initiate and bind one to Scripture and the faithful grappling--particularly of the Reformers--of centuries. Engaging the church's historical and political context, however, is a level of implicit doctrine which can be

---

<sup>43</sup> "Die Noodsaaklikheid van Dogma of Leer. Reguit Dink en Reguit Lewe," pp107-09.

<sup>44</sup> Het Zoeklicht (15 July 1931), pp204-08.

insidiously more lively. Indeed, is this not the attitude that led to the du Plessis affair? Synod's allegation that du Plessis's teaching explicitly conflicted with the confessions (i.e., with the words on the page) could not stand up to the secular logic of the civil courts. Rather, what he contradicted--in his teaching and his politics--was the implicit, operative doctrine of the church, and particularly of the church's Kuyparian stream. We shall consider the political dynamics of this more closely in the next chapter on race relations. Given Gerdener's metaphor of the confessions as a kind of sterile "knife," the name of du Plessis's original accuser, Rev. Snyman ("sny" is to cut), is ironic indeed.

Second, he suggests, the church could keep its same confessions (unrevised) and simply change its attitude with regard to them. This, he explains, is the way taken by the Herformde Kerk in the Netherlands in granting each minister the authority and freedom to use from the Catechism only that which speaks to the needs of his particular community. Intended to relate doctrine to the life of faith, such a position accomplishes the opposite. The confessions, and the scriptural foundation they intended to undergird, lose their space to modern "needs" and the popular philosophies created to address them. Doctrine is then separated from life and soon the dialectic is lost altogether. What, then, Gerdener asks, will the church confess? Equally on this second road the confessions operate on two levels. Primary once again is the implicit level which in this case becomes increasingly vulnerable not to politics but to the unscriptural "gospels" of the age. Unlike the first road, however, the explicit level of the confessions (the unrevised "letter" of them) is here unapologetically relativized for the spirit of the age; the church no longer dialogues with them, but instead receives and modifies only that which fits its foreign categories.

As might be expected, the right road is the middle road, least certain of the three and most faithful. Gerdener casts only a few guiding pebbles. It must as far as possible, he insists, strive after unity and catholicity. "Die eenheid van die Kerk is in daardie tyd sinoniem met die vrede in die Kerk geag."<sup>45</sup> And it must provide space for deep thought,

---

otherwise the road will split into separate paths and the strength of the church will be broken. All of Gerdener's roads, it must be conceded, lead to a doctrinal dynamic of "implicit" and "explicit." Indeed, a kind of canonization process is inevitable within which the church grapples--successfully or unsuccessfully--with the tension between "facts" (old and new) and "unchanged truths." At its best (the middle road), a dialogue takes place between the two. And yet this is not purely a dialogue between Scripture and experience (or history); rather it is a dialogue whose very foundation is the word of God revealed in Scripture.

Indeed, the "oupajane" and the "du Plessis manne" were in accord in giving primacy to the word of God over and against human understanding or subjective feelings. The conflict lay rather in different notions of the word of God, with the du Plessis stream granting a greater hermeneutical role to the Holy Spirit. Du Plessis's tradition emphasized the way in which the Holy Spirit enabled the word of God to dwell inwardly in individuals. Because of this, when the scriptural framework was not superceded, the Christian experiences of every age would bear new insights for the confessions, not relativizing their scriptural foundation, but strengthening it. Out of this awareness du Plessis struggled for the freedom to pursue and express these insights. We turn now to explore, particularly with regard to matters of politics and race relations, the road which the NGK did take.

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p208.

## Chapter Four: Race Relations and the NGK

### "Race Relations": English and Afrikaner

Within the history of the NGK matters of ecumenism, mission and doctrine have been inextricably related. In the late twenties and early thirties the trials of the ecumenically and missionary minded Professor du Plessis revealed as much. However, particularly since the time of Union in 1910, race relations (*die rassevraagstuk*) served as the touchstone for these other dimensions of the church's identity. Indeed, while reference was not made within the trials of Prof. du Plessis to his outspoken position on race relations, his own involvement in these political matters would have constituted much of what was deemed "heretical" in the eyes of his opponents. In this chapter we will explore these connections further--between doctrine, as it was inscribed in the NGK's evolving missionary policies, and the NGK's growing discomfort in a larger missiological discourse of race relations. In this missiological arena, as doctrine's character as "doctrine"<sup>1</sup> got caught up with South African politics, missionary policy and "native policy" became disturbingly interchangeable with consequences for both politics and church doctrines.

We begin well before the National Party comes into power and after the South African War, at a time when the English and the Afrikaner were discussing old tensions and seeking to reconcile with one another in preparation for national union. At the time of Union in 1910 the matter of race relations in South Africa was constituted largely by the struggle of the English and the Afrikaners to come together on a coherent countrywide solution to the "native problem."<sup>2</sup> While, as we have said, tension lived between the two "nations" (and, amongst Afrikaners, between those willing to include the English in their

---

<sup>1</sup>We recall Lindbeck's definition of doctrines as "communally authoritative teachings regarding beliefs and practices considered essentially to the identity or welfare of the group in question."

<sup>2</sup>Gerdener, "The Crux of the Racial Situation in South Africa," p281.



national conception and those unwilling), it had more to do with historical animosities (re: the South African War, the Great Trek, etc.) than with disagreements over the need for racial segregation. In fact, in 1905 the Lagden Commission, preparing for Union, laid out parameters for a policy that sought to reconcile English and Afrikaner (as well as the Cape and the Afrikaner Republics) in its vision of segregation. The time had come, it declared, when native land needed to be defined, delimited and reserved by formal legislation. With respect to the native franchise, reconciliation required a solution amenable to both the Cape, in which the franchise was granted, and the Republics, in which it was denied. Thus the commission recommended that natives be placed on a separate voting list and represented by a few white members in the government. Finally, the commission took the position that civilization and not color needed to be the measure for segregation and that economic, political and cultural assimilation over the longterm could not be prevented. Eventually, the compromise of Union did not follow through with all the commission's recommendations but permitted the divergent status quos of each province.<sup>3</sup>

While the need for segregation was by and large accepted, the meaning of the word itself was at this point the heart of the debate. For the English-speaking churches, conceptions of race relations had been forged in a history of missions. Within denominations involved in missionary work, the formation of settler congregations was secondary. Thus at first separate churches for native and European came naturally enough. For the NGK as well the matter of race relations was first inscribed in missiological discourse. Indeed its practice of church segregation was in step with missiological ideas debated and sanctioned in international circles of the time: the aim of missions was the establishment of self-supporting native churches as truly inculturated expressions of the Christian faith rather than the "Europeanizing" of converts. Thus despite historical

---

<sup>3</sup>Lombard, Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke en Rassepolitiek, pp25f.

tensions, English and Afrikaner were at this stage, if not in perfect agreement, at least in the same conversation about how to treat the "native problem."

From early on, the Cape NGK had its own tensions, located as it was within the political milieu of English liberalism and yet seeking to identify confessionally with the racially conservative NGK synods of the Republics and Natal. Indeed, we recall its efforts particularly after the establishment of its Federal Council in 1907, to bring its mother synods into a single synod. Anticipating such an organic union, the NGK moved Parliament to pass in 1911 "an Enabling Bill (Act No. 23, 1911) which, in addition to defining the rights of the Church Body, prescribed also the procedure to be followed by the four parties interested in order to attain to the desired union." The act required a three-fourths majority within the Federal Council for the union to take place. Though the majority was not attained, the act remained on the books with implications for the identity of the NGK.<sup>4</sup> Like the political decisions made at Union, this act acknowledged the status quo--namely, that should a native cross from the Cape province to the northern states, he or she would be excluded from worship or membership in any of the NGK's European congregations. Yet from the perspective of outsiders--and particularly black Africans--the 1911 act codified (and implicitly sanctioned) segregation churchwide in such a way as to make the NGK in its entirety appear as an "anti-Native" church.

By August 1914 World War I had begun, subsuming domestic tensions within South Africa--at least to some extent--into the political loyalties of its larger conflict. Within the NGK the resolution of Cape Parliament to fight with Britain revealed fissures in the foundation laid for church union. Parliament's decision sparked off the Afrikaner Rebellion of September 1914 and placed the NGK's Federal Council between a rock and a hard place. It could neither support nor reject the rebellion without alienating one part of its

---

<sup>4</sup>Du Plessis et al., The Dutch Reformed Church and the Native Problem, pp5-6.

constituency. Indeed, the ambivalence of the FCC's statement on the rebellion spoke of growing tensions within the NGK's ecclesial identity at the time.<sup>5,6</sup>

With regard to race relations, du Plessis epitomized the Afrikaner liberal position which he articulated in numerous conferences and delegations. On the race relations continuum between the conservatism of the Afrikaner Republics and the English liberalism of the Cape, du Plessis perhaps fell nearer to the latter for espousing with missionary paternalism segregation along the lines of civilization rather than race. A 1921 report of a committee convened by du Plessis, for example, urged that provision of franchise be made for those "exceptional natives" ready for its responsibilities.<sup>7</sup>

Barring the "exceptional native," however, the report underscored segregation on "national" lines.

We hold, then, that the demand of the natives for equal rights is foolish and futile; but we are willing to offer them equal opportunities. That is to say, they should have the fullest and largest scope to develop themselves along their own national lines, and in accordance with the highest ideals which their national consciousness, suffused and transformed by the spirit of Christianity, shall create for them.<sup>8</sup>

In a paper delivered to the 1923 European and Bantu Conference, du Plessis takes this language of nationalism a step further away from English liberalism, specifically contrasting his understanding of native rights with liberalism's version of "natural rights."

...segregation is as necessary in matters of politics as in matters of education or domicile. It is futile for the natives of South Africa to hope to be fused into one and the same political system with the Europeans. They are not ripe for it; it will do them no good...why then

---

<sup>5</sup>June 1995 draft of Social History Project (in possession of the Research Institute on Christianity in South Africa (RICSA), University of Cape Town), v3, s3, p21.

<sup>6</sup>Just four years later, at the close of the war (1918) the Broederbond was formed, organizing further those Afrikaners of anti-British (or Afrikaner nationalist) sentiment.

<sup>7</sup>Among the socially Darwinistic attitudes of missionary liberalism at this time is the following: "It is not to be expected that the South African natives can with one bound attain to the moral stature of those who have generations of Christian forebears behind them, and the influence of centuries of Christian life and thought flowing in their veins...The South African native has to pass through an evolutionary process that for the European lasted a millenium..." (The DRC and the Native Problem, p11).

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p13.

should the native insist upon what he conceives to be his "natural rights" by straining after the deceptive ballot-box and battering at the inhospitable doors of Parliament?...Develop your own educational system, my native friends, hold by your own social traditions, advance along your own economic lines and work out your own political salvation. Remember that you are Bantu, not Boers or Britishers, and let pride of nationality impel you to the pursuit of national aims and the achievement of national ambitions, within the wide constitutional scope which our commonwealth allows you.<sup>9</sup>

It is this language of nationalism that begins to separate Afrikaner liberalism from the English liberal assimilationist viewpoints early on. Speaking on South Africa's missionary history the report continues, critiquing the assimilationists for having blurred the categories of national identity.

For more than a century education of the native has developed in scattered fashion according to the ideas and traditions of whichever missionaries were operating. No policy was agreed upon. They failed to recognize that "Bantu education must be conducted on Bantu and not on European lines...It should be a system that will call into play [the Bantu peoples'] noblest powers and capacities, and enable them to realise their highest national aspirations, and fulfil their true function in the Divine plan of the ages."<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the practical solution to the native problem, the document declared finally that total segregation, though desirable, was not possible, given the need of white society for black labor. In place of this "unattainable ideal" the report then proposed rather a partial segregation in which black labor could reside near enough to white areas to retain the health of the white economy and to preclude total economic segregation. Nevertheless, in true liberal spirit the report emphasized the need for just implementation of the segregation measures. Equally in the 1924 report of the NGK's General Missionary Commission, collaborated upon by du Plessis, Gerdener (Transvaal) and others, this liberal spirit of justice held sway. Indeed among the most pressing problems of missions inside South Africa, the report cited the demoralizing living conditions of coloreds in the towns and the plattelands and expressed the hope that the recently passed Group Areas Act (1923) would

---

<sup>9</sup>"Native Education," European and Bantu (1923), p15.

<sup>10</sup>The DRC and the Native Problem, p15.

improve the situation. It was, the report insisted further, the duty of the church--indeed part of its mission--to ameliorate this situation.<sup>11</sup>

Due to the particular political projects brought by Union, the parameters of mission were extended to encompass political and economic issues of land rights and franchise. In this context the ecumenicity sought in missionary conferences had everything to do with efforts to arrive at political consensus on race relations and to alleviate the country's political unease. This in mind, in 1923 the NGK convened a multiracial conference of Protestant church leaders and political leaders to study the race problem. The 1923 European and Bantu Conference, attended by thirty-four whites and thirty-two blacks, was unprecedented for bringing the races together on equal footing to discuss the country's future. Though the editor of De Kerkbode, P. G. J. Meiring, and others were apprehensive about the outcome of such a multiracial attempt, the conference did much to deepen the dialogue between whites and black Africans. Indeed, by conference end two African ("Bantu") representatives raised a resolution of thanks to the NGK for convening the assembly, and it was unanimously accepted.<sup>12</sup>

Topics for discussion included matters of Bantu education, land, social upliftment and self-government, as well as the recently passed Urban Areas Act (1923). That the conference included more than simply the NGK's perspective is clear in its divergence from the NGK's own report of 1921: where the 1921 report declared segregation an "unattainable ideal," the 1923 conference declared total segregation of the races to be both impossible and undesirable. "Different development," however, if based on Bantu traditions and needs and not used as a means of repression, was sanctioned. The conference called for greater clarity on native land possession and the allocation of more

---

<sup>11</sup>"Het is de plicht van onze kerk haar aandacht aan de verbetering van deze sociale toestanden te geven." Verslag van de Algemene Zendingkommissie aan de H.E. Synode, 1924, p66.

<sup>12</sup>Lombard, Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke en Rassepolitiek, p31.

land for native use. Finally, insisting on the importance of the Bantu sharing the management of his own affairs, the conference recommended the establishment of local Bantu councils in which natives could be initiated into the privileges and responsibilities of civilized government.<sup>13</sup> The decisions taken at an international missionary conference in Belgium in 1926 accorded well with the 1923 conference. Indeed, the NGK was equally a part of the missionary deliberations in Belgium, sending as a contributor Prof. du Plessis, and as participants, the missionary secretaries of the Cape and Transvaal, J. W. L. Hofmeyr and D. Theron, respectively.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Hertzog Bills: A Catalyst in the Politics of Mission**

As fundamentally different understandings of mission (integrationist v. segregationist) were forged into different political positions, the conversation amongst the churches entered a new and more difficult stage. In June 1926, just two years after the Pact government's election victory, Prime Minister Hertzog laid four bills of native legislation before Parliament, further challenging the churches to speak their gospel in the political sphere: the Volksraad Representation of the Native, the Native Council Bill, die Native Land Bill and the Colour Bar Bill.

Many church leaders were hesitant to take political positions with respect to the bills. Indeed, the Rev. Hofmeyr declared at this point that the church was to give the lead in race relations precisely because it stood outside politics. Nevertheless, the Hertzog Bills were taken seriously enough to occasion a conference in September 1926 by the Native Affairs Commission of the FCC, itself called into existence just the year prior (1925). The first day of the Bloemfontein assembly, only members of the Native Affairs Commission gathered. On the second and third day, however, ministers and missionaries of the NGK met together with leaders from the Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist churches. Here

---

<sup>13</sup>"Resolutions of the Conference," European and Bantu (1923), p41.

<sup>14</sup>Lombard, Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke en Rassepolitiek, p32.

again the liberal position of different development, justly executed, dominated. The Bantu is created, as is the white man, in the image of God, the conference declared. However, concern was expressed over the social and more intimate blood mingling of the races. Once again it was emphasized that the work of the church is not limited to evangelization, but must concern itself with all terrains of life.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the conference declared its hearty approval of the Bills.

The 1926 conference laid the groundwork for the second NGK-convened multiracial conference the year after. To a greater extent than with the 1923 conference, many feared the 1927 assembly would foment growing divergences of opinion. After all, by this time a number of those invited, white and nonwhite, had spoken out against various aspects of the Hertzog Bills. Still, the challenge had to be faced, and thus on 31 January 1927 forty-five European and twenty-six natives gathered in Cape Town at the Anglican cathedral of St. George. Among the Africans in attendance was Mr. Selope Thema who spoke on the land bill proposed within the collection of Hertzog Bills. The prime minister's segregation policy could only result, he declared, "in the permanent domination of the Europeans, and the permanent degradation of the Bantu race." As far as he could determine, the land bill aimed at none other than the inflammation of the black man. "It gave no scope for the progressive native [and sought] to prevent Bantu solidity and unity."<sup>16</sup>

Equally, Mr. J. D. Rheinallt Jones, honorary secretary of the Joint Council of Europeans and Natives, spoke negatively of the proposed bills. Efforts to solve the native problem were, he suggested, proceeding along a fundamentally erroneous path. Among his more progressive tenets was the idea that natives should be given the right to lease and rent land in European areas. What the country needed, he declared, was "not so much a native land policy as a national land policy, in which Europeans and natives, Indians and

---

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p34.

<sup>16</sup>"European and Bantu Conference," Cape Times, 1 Feb. 1927.

coloured, would be given adequate consideration, not because of their colour, but because they were integral parts of the national life."<sup>17</sup>

Interestingly, the dominant objection to the Hertzog Bills from black and white participants was the way they drew segregation on the lines of race rather than civilization. The whole of the land bill, for example, was condemned by Thema for "ignor[ing] a large number of detribalised natives, who, if they were unable to obtain employment in the towns, would have to return to their tribes, where they would be treated as complete strangers and great difficulties would arise." Indeed if such bills were passed, warned Dr. C. T. Loram as well, "the educated native would be thrust back amongst his uneducated brother [*sic*]." By the close of the assembly, consensus could not be reached with regard to the native franchise. However, the Native Land Bill and the Union Native Council Bill were welcomed by the conference majority. In closing the conference, the archbishop of Cape Town, Dr. W. M. Carter, expressed to the FCC deep gratitude on behalf of the Church of the Province (CPSA) for convening the conference. After the conference a deputation, including du Plessis and the Rev. D. S. Botha (the conference chairman), then presented the conference decisions to Prime Minister Hertzog.<sup>18</sup>

At the outset of the conference Prof. du Plessis had declared "that the whole civilised world was expecting great things from the Conference... [and] looking to see how South Africa was going to tackle the question of guiding and helping a backward race." This awareness of international scrutiny was entering into ecumenical attempts increasingly, and would be present particularly after 1948 as the National Party sought international sanction for its apartheid policy. Inside the NGK the conference was criticized for, inter alia, locating the church too much within politics and marginalizing the Afrikaans language in the proceedings. Nevertheless, the overall impression was

---

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.



favorable, and the FCC's report that same year expressed great thanks for all who had made the discussions possible.<sup>19</sup>

### **The NGK and the English-speaking churches: A Parting of Ways**

Despite the civility maintained, the 1927 conference made clear that ecumenical discourse on race relations was becoming increasingly difficult for the NGK; the liberal assimilationists, more and more troublesome as it consolidated its own segregationist vision and nationalist understanding. While in the discourse on race relations, this nationalist emphasis finally divided the Afrikaner from the English liberal, it still did not unite the Afrikaners amongst themselves. Indeed, a new more narrow discourse began in which the term "nationalism" would be as ambiguous as was the term "segregation" in the earlier, more inclusive discourse. The two Afrikaner streams that in the broader discourse came together in their distrust of English liberalism and their espousal of nationalism, now began to face more acutely the differences in their own understandings of nationalism. On the one hand was that nationalism, articulated by du Plessis and others, which came out of missiological beliefs of the time, namely, that Christianization should not be made tantamount to Europeanization. Rather, Christianity was to be inculturated, the gospel "purifying" and helping to preserve those native customs which didn't violate the Christian truths. On the other hand was a more "hardcore" nationalism with affinity (particularly from the thirties) for the "volk" rhetoric of German romanticism.

If we are looking for a battle site within which the conflicts between these two streams played out, we find it not in the political arena, but in the doctrinal issues taken up through the du Plessis affair, formally commencing just a year after this last NGK-convened European and Bantu conference (1927) and the parting of ways it brought about. In other words, as the NGK's Cape synod pursued du Plessis for his heretical theological teachings, many within sought to quell his "liberal" political teachings as well. Insofar as

---

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

the resulting theological victory of the "oupajane" placed strictures on the critical openness of the du Plessis stream, it was a political victory for the Kuyperians as well. Indeed as synod silenced du Plessis's questions about the confessions, it silenced those of a generation of seminary students as well. With this legalistic structure of static confessions and unquestioning assent operative at the seminary, the Kuyperians could better wield the NGK in achieving their vision of Afrikaner power and apartheid. The less dynamic the church's own internal questioning became, the more vulnerable the church became to the Kuyperians' foreign agenda.

In 1929 the founding of the South African Institute of Race Relations marked the beginning of the South African churches' parting of ways. For from its establishment, the Institute took over the NGK's role in convening multichurch conferences. By 1933 it convened two conferences--one in Cape Town for whites and coloreds and one in Bloemfontein for whites and blacks. While no member of the NGK was asked to participate in the Cape Town conference, Prof. du Plessis and several others, ambivalent about the NGK's lack of involvement in the organization, attended with the intention of voicing the NGK's point of view. Viewing their representation at the conference positively, they nevertheless lamented the fact that the role of convening such conferences had been taken from the NGK. Equally the FCC report of 1935 expressed its dismay over the NGK's absence and spoke therein of a growing attitude of exclusivity within the church: "want dit [the NGK's presence] sou verhinder het dat onder diegene, wat referate moes lewer, daar mense sou gewees het, wat blote teoriste is en uit onkunde van plaaslike toestande en van geskiedkundige ontwikkeling aan onbehoorlike en onpraktiese beskouinge en voorstelle uitdrukking gee."<sup>20</sup> Such a statement was only one amongst many reminders from the NGK that it had, for its near three-hundred-year history in the country, the monopoly on contextual insight into the native problem.

---

<sup>20</sup>Handelinge van die Raad van die Kerken, p. 90, quoted in Lombard, Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke en Rassepolitiek, p37.

### Inside the NGK: Missions as a "Volksaak"

In response to the Institute's exclusion of the Afrikaner from its discussions on race relations, the Afrikanerbond vir Rassestudie was established in the Transvaal in 1934. And although this Afrikaner organization did not last long,<sup>21</sup> it too underscored the attitude of exclusivity that was coming to the fore with regard to the Afrikaner's evaluation of its capacity to understand and solve the native problem. In the report of the NGK's 1931 missionary conference at Uitenhage this is especially clear. The report suggests that the NGK has a special calling with regard to the nation's future mission policy for being the only true indigenous church in South Africa and for understanding the colored and the native better than the other Europeans and particularly those from overseas.<sup>22</sup>

This rhetoric of exclusivism and "special calling" was strengthened within the church by developing a sense that mission was the concern not of a small group of missionaries, but of all Afrikaners: "Hierdie sending is nie die saak van 'n klein klompie sendingvriende nie, maar is 'n volksaak geword."<sup>23</sup> As mission policy was increasingly declared a concern of the volk, two nationalisms were being constructed at once. The nationalist awareness of the Afrikaner, increasing already with the Cape's British alliance during the First World War and the postwar problems of the poor urban Afrikaner was made to correspond in the NGK's missiological discourse to an increasing emphasis upon the national identities of those natives to whom the NGK's missionary endeavors were directed. For example, the 1928 report of the NGK's General Missionary Commission, for which du Plessis is yet a prime collaborator, says of the black Africans (*die volkere*) something which might well have been said of the Afrikaners at the time, namely, that they

---

<sup>21</sup> According to Lombard it is not exactly clear when the Afrikanerbond did cease to exist. From a reference made to in Op die Horison he dates its demise before 1944, i.e., within the decade of its inception (Ibid., pp119-20).

<sup>22</sup>Groot Sendingkonferensie te Uitenhage (1931), p. 79.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p26.

are awakening to national awareness, associating their national worship more and more with their national survival.<sup>24</sup> Likewise the 1931 Uitenhage report cites nationalism as one of the important missionary issues of the day. One need only look to South Africa, it proceeds:

Waarom het ons volk hier so 'n taalstryd deurgemaak?...Waarom het ons hier, binne die Britse Ryk ons eie vlag, en waarom 'n eie Volkslied? Dit is die openbaring van die Gees van Nationalisme waar ons van praat. Hierdie selfde Gees vind ons vandag ook onder die naturrelle van Afrika. Hulle begin hulleself te word...<sup>25</sup>

When one thought of the missionary contribution that could be made with the Afrikaner's unique "indigenous" insights and "special calling" as a "volk," historical tensions amongst the NGK synods were insignificant, a distraction as base as the party politics of liberalism. In this way the organic nationalism of "volk" was being forged in missiological discourse at the same time as native "nationalisms" were being constructed. Indeed, the growing relationship between the concerns of mission and volk can be seen in the cooperation between the FMC and the FAR (Federale Armesorgraad).<sup>26</sup> Already in October 1942 a representative of each organization met together with the minister of native affairs to discuss mixed marriages, separate university education for the native, as well as ways to extract the native problem from the tangle of party politics.<sup>27</sup> By 1953, in a paper given at the FMC-convened ecumenical conference of English and Afrikaans-speaking church leaders, the Rev. C.B. Brink (then moderator of the Transvaal NGK) would more explicitly underscore the role the Afrikaner's struggle for identity played in its mission policy and in the construction of apartheid:

---

<sup>24</sup> Verslag van die Algemene Sendingkommissie (1928), p47.

<sup>25</sup> Groot Sendingkonferensie te Uitenhage (1931), p6.

<sup>26</sup> a council established to address the problem of the poor white Afrikaner.

<sup>27</sup> Kinghorn, "Die Groei van 'n Teologie--van Sendingbeleid tot Verskeidenheids-Teologie," Die NG Kerk en Apartheid, p91.

[The Afrikaner] had to love himself, that which he had become through the grace of God, in order to be able to love his neighbor. He had to separate himself in order to be a blessing to the millions of nonwhites. Thence he derived his apartheid idea.<sup>28</sup>

That missions in particular and race relations in general was increasingly a matter for the "volk," however, had a dimension which the church viewed more negatively as well. The Depression and its effects upon the Afrikaner made many within the NGK less interested in prioritizing missions to the native population. Indeed, the 1921 report declares that "[t]here are many who view with deepest concern the rapid growth of 'poor whitism,' and demand to know why our kith and kin, who are sinking daily lower in the scale of civilisation and religion, should not have the first claim upon our sympathy and aid."<sup>29</sup> From the twenties the discussion of the poor white problem came under the auspices of missionary discussions.<sup>30</sup>

Just as the scope of those concerned with mission was expanding, so too was the scope of mission itself. With the gospel, it was acknowledged, came the desire for education, improved economic conditions, and, for the missionaries, the responsibility to concern themselves with such matters. "Immers," Gerdener among others would increasingly affirm, "dit is hoegenaamd nie waar dat die Sending geroep word om net die evangelie te verkondig en niks meer nie."<sup>31</sup> The line between missions and politics was thus becoming hazier and hazier.

---

<sup>28</sup>"The Fundamental Principles of the Mission Policy of the 'Nederduitse Gereformeerde' Churches in South Africa," Christian Principles in a Multiracial South Africa, p32.

<sup>29</sup>The DRC and the Native Problem, p10.

<sup>30</sup> Indeed in September 1940 an article entitled "Sending en Armsorg" speaks of the tension between alleviating the poverty of the poor white and "uplifting" the native population. "Dit laat ons te staan kom voor die groot en ingewikkelde vraagstuk van die verhouding tussen die Armblanke en Naturelleprobleme... Ons moet ons laat lei deur oorwegings wat die toets van Gods Woord sowel as die toets, wat die oortuiging van 'n eie afsonderlike volksbestaan en 'n eie volksroeping ons oplê, kan deurstaan." Op die Horison 2, 3, p103.

<sup>31</sup>Op die Horison (March 1944), p20.

### **The NGK's 1935 Mission Policy: A "Rough Draft" for Apartheid**

We have referred to the NGK's relationship with the Christian Council (CCSA) already in chapter two. As with the earlier establishment of the Afrikanerbond vir Rassestudie in lieu of involvement in the more inclusive Institute for Race Relations, after the NGK's withdrawal from the CCSA it again traded a broader ecumenical involvement for a more inclusive sort. Just as the Rev. Nicol formally resigned the Transvaal synod from the CCSA, he suggested that a federal mission council be formed out of the four federated NGKs, the mission churches in the Cape, the Transvaal and the Free State, as well as four German societies.<sup>32</sup> What is interesting about the formation of the FMC in the context of race relations is the political impact it effected. On the founding of the FMC the Rev. Nicol hinted at at least one of its aims: "If these thirteen bodies stood together we should be able to form a powerful Afrikaans missionary block."<sup>33</sup> Missions, by now too important in South Africa's political discourse, was no longer something to be shared. Rather, it was an arena in which the Afrikaner was increasingly vying for political power and the rights to determine the country's native policy. Given the political backdrop for the FMC, namely, World War II and the anti-British/pro-German sentiment it precipitated amongst a growing number of Afrikaners, the NGK's decision to forego ecumenical contact of a more international sort with English-speaking churches for an organization of Afrikaner churches and German societies is interesting indeed.

As significant as the Christian Council was in the FMC's formation, equally important was the FMC's call to replace the FCC's former Native Commission; indeed, the FMC was established in large part to implement the Commission's 1935 mission policy--the policy, significantly, which would remain in effect until 1962, when the churches

<sup>32</sup>Gerdener, Recent Developments in the South African Mission Field, p162.

<sup>33</sup>Nicol, "Why the Christian Council Failed," The South African Outlook (1 Dec. 1941), p251.

finally joined in a single synod.<sup>34</sup> Already in the structure of the 1935 statement (of which evangelization is only a subsection) are the means by which the newly established FMC approached and attempted to shape the government with regard to its race relations policies.

According to Johann Kinghorn the NGK's 1935 policy is a turning point on the road toward the National Party policy of apartheid for the nationalist language and scriptural sanctioning that appear within it. Indeed, he declares that the contrast between it and the principles laid down by the NGK in 1926 is marked.<sup>35</sup> While we have seen nationalist language in NGK mission statements already in a 1921 report, the 1935 policy does indeed mark a decisive shift inside the NGK, a victory for the Kuiperians over and against the more critically open "du Plessis manne." What changed, however, was not so much the language of the policy itself, as the context within which it appeared. The victory it represented for the Kuiperians, in other words, was a quiet one--one which relied heavily on the policy's ambiguities and the implicit Kuiperian understandings increasingly operative within the church.

The policy itself--formulated as an edited version of the Cape and the Free State policies and influenced more heavily by the latter--does indeed delineate more sharply than earlier policies the boundaries between the Afrikaner understanding of the native problem and that of the English-speaking churches. In accord with English liberalism the policy speaks the language of European guardianship and social Darwinism. In addition to this, however, the policy reminds,

that evangelisation does not presuppose denationalisation. Christianity must not deprive the Native of his language and culture, but must eventually permeate and purify his entire nationalism.

Equally under the discussion on native education the policy declares the particularly

---

<sup>34</sup>with only slight modification in 1947. Kinghorn, "Die Groei van 'n Teologie--van Sendingbeleid tot Verskeidenheids-Teologie," Die NG Kerk en Apartheid, p87.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p87.

Afrikaner emphasis on nationalism:

[t]hat all education and instruction should be aligned with [the native's] racial culture and that his language, history...and customs must attain to their fullest rights. Education must not denationalise.<sup>36</sup>

As we have earlier suggested, such notions of mission were, at least at first glance, in line with the inculturation espoused in international mission circles of the time. To restate the significant point, however: the shift in this 1935 policy, though decisive, is also subtle, less powerfully a shift in language than in the context within which the language appeared.

### **The Kuyperian Context**

The policy speaks a very different message when viewed against the shift in the country's, and particularly the Afrikaners', political discourse at this time. The nationalism which was playing an increasing role in the Afrikaner's (and the NGK's) political identity would claim ironically to transcend politics. Volk was becoming for the Afrikaner the new political configuration which transcended the party politics of liberalism, with its emphasis upon the rights of the individual and its universalizing notions of equality. It was German Romanticism that provided the emphasis upon the volk as the organic unit which had primacy over the individual in the unfolding of history. "Thus men were above all," Douglas Bax explains, "members of their national communities; only as such, only through the meaning of the language and traditions of the *volk*, could they be truly creative, truly themselves, in accordance with God's calling." Indeed Hegel regarded Absolute Spirit as coming to fullest manifestation in a nation and its *Volksggeist*.<sup>37</sup>

Such Romantic ideas of the volk first met Calvinism in the work of Abraham Kuyper, a theologian in the state church of Holland. For him, the Calvinist doctrine of common grace, as it suggested the God-ordained structure of creation and society, made

---

<sup>36</sup>"Mission Policy of the Federated Dutch Reformed Churches of South Africa [1935]" in Gerdener, Recent Developments in the South African Mission Field Appendix A, pp270, 272.

<sup>37</sup>Bax, A Different Gospel, p29.



Calvinism--and indeed the gospel--relevant well beyond the church. Among the blessings of common grace was for each nation, Kuyper insisted, a particular culture and for each volk, the God-given task of preserving it. "Kuyper's mutation of Calvin's theology into a neo-Calvinism concerned with the preservation of national cultures as distinct and inviolate," Bax explains, "was the decisive development that opened the sluice-gate for Romanticism to flood into the thinking of Dutch Reformed intellectuals in South Africa."<sup>38</sup>

In Holland Kuyper eventually split from the established church to help form the Gereformeerde Kerken (GKN), and it is this church to which South Africa's GKSA is most closely related.<sup>39</sup> Thus, Kuyperian thought first entered the discourse of the Afrikaans-speaking churches through the GKSA (the "Doppers"). And thus the "verdoppering" of the NGK, against which du Plessis warned already early in the century, was tantamount to this shift toward Kuyperian neo-Calvinist sympathies. When, at the second assembly of the RES (1949) the NGK joined the GKSA and the GKN, this narrowing trend entered a new phase.

This Kuyperian neo-Calvinist stream of thought was laid out decisively in a volume of essays entitled Koers in die Krisis Vol. I, published in 1935. Coedited by Gereformeerde Professor H.G. Stoker of Potchefstroom and the NGK's Dr. F. J. M. Potgieter, a professor of dogmatic theology at Stellenbosch, it likewise represented the ideological shift undergirding the NGK's 1935 mission policy, and the growing alliance between the NGK and the GKSA. Indeed the history of the federation under whose auspices the volumes came together, namely, the Federasie van Calvinistiese Studentverenigings in Suid-Afrika (FCSV), also speaks of these developments. On 27 August 1933, the same day the Afrikaner churches first officially received and celebrated the Afrikaans Bible, the FCSV came together out of the Calvinistiese Studentverenigings of

---

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p30.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p30.

Potchefstroom and Stellenbosch. While the Potchefstroom organization had been in existence since the previous century, the Stellenbosch group had formed only in 1930--in the midst, in fact, of the du Plessis affair and the challenge to the confessions which it raised.

In a sharper way than would be the case with the RES in the following decade, the FCSV represented an alliance between the GKSA Kuiperians and that stream of the NGK with Kuiperian sympathies. As would the RES, the federation declared as its foundation the confessions of the "Hollandse" churches. Interestingly it added the Westminster Confession with a view to collaboration with English Calvinist students in the future. Still, by and large the FCSV sought the kind of controlled and narrow ecumenicity articulated in the FMC and the RES. Between the Nasionale Unie van Suid-Afrikaanse Studente (NUSAS) and the Afrikaanse Nasionale Studentbond (ANS), for example, the FCSV's principles compelled it to forego collaboration with the former.<sup>40</sup> Indeed the reasons cited sound remarkably similar to arguments made later by those more conservative in the NGK for declining membership in the World Council:

Van die bogenoemde organisasies besit die N.U.S.A.S. geen grondslag of beginsel nie, want dit glo in neutraliteit ten opsigte van enige saak in die lewe; in die saamgroepeer van mense wat nooit in hulle harte bymekaar kan wees nie; en daarom kan ons Federasie nooit met die N.U.S.A.S. saamwerk nie, en is dit prinsipiël sowel as prakties daarvan geskeie.<sup>41</sup>

That these volumes were related to the NGK's ecumenical verdoppering expressed in the RES can be seen in the fact that both the editors of the first volume, Stoker of the GKSA and Potgieter of the Cape NGK would later be representatives at the RES, in 1946 and 1958 respectively. Moreover, the majority of GKSA delegates to the first four assemblies of the RES (1946-58) were contributors to these volumes. Contributors to these volumes were equally connected to the Kuiperian neo-Calvinist Broederbond. In the

---

<sup>40</sup>Potgieter, F.J.M. and Stoker, H.G. Koers in die Krisis, Vol. I, p380f.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p385.

thirties professors Stoker, L. J. du Plessis and J. C. van Rooy in particular, all Koers in die Krisis contributors, were among those dominating the Broederbond executive.<sup>42</sup>

Addressed in the essays of the Koers in die Krisis volumes is a variety of topics--political, cultural, ecclesial, theological and scriptural--under the rubric of Calvinism. However, it is particularly in an essay such as "Ons Houding teenoor die Naturel" that one senses the intersection of missiology and politics with which all three volumes eventually undergird the 1935 policy. In the language of nationalism it develops, the article goes well beyond the missionary language of inculturation towards a racist nationalism along the lines developing in Germany at this time:

Die Naturelle verskil nou eenmaal van al die ander nasies. Dit is nie iets vreesliks nie. Vir bekrompe en domme mense is dit natuurlik 'n verbysterende feit. Maar dit is heeltemal natuurlik. Dit moet so wees. Ook in hulle kom die veelvormigheid van menslike lewensuiting en die verskeidenheid van menslike lewensvorme tot openbaring. Hulle vertoon 'n eenaardige tipe in die menslike natuur...<sup>43</sup>

Indeed such language informs the equality spoken of in the 1935 policy. While all individuals are "souls for whom the Saviour shed his blood, ...equal in the eye of God," all nations are not. Thus while Gerdener would later affirm that "[e]very nation has the right to be itself and to endeavour to develop and elevate itself," already in the thirties this was showing itself to be, save for the grace of God, impossible particularly for the black African.<sup>44</sup>

Omdat hulle 'n ander soort mense is, verskil hulle ook van die ander mense...Deur hondere jare van ontwikkeling of liever van verwildering, alleen bewaar deur die temmende en betomende werking van die lankmoedigheid van 'genadige God wat Hom met al die nasies bemoei, het hulle, dank sy dié genade, nog mense gebly en kan daar onder hulle nog sprake wees van menslike lewensuitinge, sodat hulle in sommige opsigte nog goeie eienskappe besit en selfs goeie gebruike voorstaan.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup>Furlong, Between Crown and Swastika, p93.

<sup>43</sup>Potgieter and Stoker, Koers in die Krisis, Vol. I, p261.

<sup>44</sup>Gerdener, Recent Developments in the South African Mission Field, p272.

<sup>45</sup>Potgieter and Stoker, Koers in die Krisis, Vol. I, p261.

In fact, the call to preserve nationhood and culture spoken of elsewhere (the missionary language of inculturation), is here--for the Africans, and particularly their Afrikaner guardians--a call to "become" a nation at all, to nourish an awareness on the level of volk (ironic indeed given the African sense of ubuntu) over and against the competing individualism taught by the English missionaries. What the Afrikaners must not forget, Dr. Fourie exhorts, is their role in the work of common grace:

...deur die prediking van die saligmakende genade moet ons die werking wat die algemene genade versterk, sodat hulle 'n volk kan word wat iets beteken en iets kan presteer in Suid-Afrika, wat tog ook hulle vaderland is en sal bly.<sup>46</sup>

Significant in this Kuiperian attempt to construct an African "national feeling" is the way it echoes the adamant claims to transcend politics seen elsewhere in the construction of Afrikaner nationalism.

...die sendeling moet nie gaan om een of ander wereldse ryk uit te brei of sekere politieke belange te behartig nie, en veral nie om die naturelle-bevolking op te stook en teen die Afrikaners vyandig te maak nie. Hy moet die suiwere Evangelie gaan verkondig.<sup>47</sup>

In other words, where previously it was in the Kuiperians' interest to expand the scope of missions to include political concerns, here politics is being intentionally underemphasized.

In an essay treating the poor white problem, Prof. D. Lategan, faithful to the Kuiperian doctrine of common grace, then addresses the relationship between church and state.

Ten slotte wil ons nadruk lê op die gevare van 'n verwarring van die kerklike en die staatkundige aspekte van die Armeblanke-vraagstuk. Die kerk en die staat het elk 'n eie terrein en 'n eie werk, 'n eie roeping."<sup>48</sup>

The separation of these spheres does not, however, make space for a secular state. The state, separate from the church, is equally ordained and imbued with a mission from God.

---

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p263.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p260.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p253.

Thus, facing modern trends toward secularism, the gospel, which according to Calvinism does indeed address all spheres of life, runs into difficulties. In short,

[d]ie neutrale onchristelike of anti-christelike staat, die neutrale moderne opvoeding, die nuwe moraal, die modernistiese anti-kerklike leringe in die boesem van die kerk, die sosialistiese, revolusionêre gees wat die algehele vryheid van die individu en die omverwerping van staat en kerk en samelwing eis--dit alles verswaar en bemoeilik die taak van die Calvinisme om die reus-vraagstuk op te los.<sup>49</sup>

Thus Afrikaner politics, now undergirded by the theology of Kuyper, was a complicated affair. God's calling of state and church were separate and never to be conflated. The church, moreover, was never to be overly political. Indeed, the politicization of the church was time and again the Afrikaner's complaint about ecumenical discussions.<sup>50</sup> And one of the key selling points of the ideology of "volk" was the way it "transcended" politics--both the divisive politics of the trek and the party politics of English liberalism--for the ethico-religious plane.

#### **"Afrikaner Liberalism": After du Plessis**

In the same year the 1935 policy was born, Stellenbosch Professor du Plessis died, thus marking the formal close of one battle in the struggle for the church identity in which the oupajane were now on the rise. Nevertheless, the more critically open stream within the NGK continued to voice its vision of the church in the period after his death, though the conservative oupajane had the ascendancy and the more hardcore Afrikaner nationalism was on the rise.

The year 1938 illustrates this continuing tension inside the church. On the one hand, it marks the earliest use of the term "apartheid" inside the NGK from Ds. J. G. Strydom of the Orange Free State.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, it marks Ben Marais' earliest

---

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p253.

<sup>50</sup>NGK leaders registered this complaint after the 1927 European and Bantu Conference as well as after the Transvaal NGK's withdrawal from the Christian Council (CCSA).

questioning of the NGK's mission policy. As a result of the Transvaal NGK's association with the CCSA, Ben Marais was invited in 1938 to represent the Transvaal synod at the World Mission Conference in Madras, India. At this conference Marais came increasingly under the conviction that the NGK's mission policy was out of step with the larger ecumenical world. While it might be the most practical solution, he insisted, it had little if any direct scriptural support. Nevertheless, this did not mean that he was a supporter of social mixing or that he intended equality.<sup>52</sup>

Equally an "Afrikaner liberalism" lived in the ecumenical exhortations of Prof. Gerdener, editor of Op die Horison, a quarterly missionary journal of the NGK. Speaking of the CCSA and the NGK's troubled relationship with it, he declared,

Dit kom ons altyd voor 'n teken van swakheid te wees as iemand 'n andersdenkende of handelende vermy: Waarlik, ons belydenis en ons beleid kan tog daglig en kritiek verdra...Wie weet hoeveel kan ons van andere leer en hulle van ons!<sup>53</sup>

And yet in an article four years later Gerdener revealed the other dimension of this liberalism. On what grounds, he asked, must South Africa remain a white man's land? With implicit reference to some of the views of English liberalism, he exhorted that it must not be out of fear, selfishness or an unsupportable feeling of biological superiority. Rather, he insisted that it must be on higher grounds!--cultural, ethical and religious. Higher civilization had to be preserved. Thus assimilation needed to be rejected, total segregation applied. Rejecting the "reasoning" of a foreign liberalism, namely, that fear and selfishness manifested in party politics, he took ideology to a plane that "transcended" politics.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup>Kinghorn, "Die Groei van 'n Teologie--van Sendingbeleid tot Verskeidenheids-Teologie," Die NG Kerk en Apartheid, p90.

<sup>52</sup>Lombard, Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke en Rassepolitiek, p49.

<sup>53</sup> Op die Horison 2, 3 (Sept. 1940), p102.

<sup>54</sup>"Die Sending en die Naturellekwessie," Op die Horison (March 1944).

Such a citation underscores what we have been declaring since the beginning, namely, that the "racial" tensions which impacted South African politics most prominently at this time were not those between the Afrikaner and the native, but between the Afrikaner and the English. What they shared was a European attitude of superiority--a belief that South Africa needed to be preserved as a "white man's land." What they disagreed on was how to use South Africa's indigenous population to best achieve this.

In a four-part article straddling the years 1940-41, Prof. A. H. Murray evaluated the "new liberalism" articulated by Prof. A. Hoernle<sup>55</sup> in a series of lectures entitled South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit, and therein evaluated, from the Afrikaner perspective, some of the significant differences between English and Afrikaner liberalism. The "old ideal" of equal rights and assimilation, he declared, had been pushed aside. The "new liberalism" stood rather for consistent segregation. The liberalism of the nineteenth century, under whose influence many of the missionary societies first came to South Africa, did much, Murray conceded, to further education, democracy and science and to alleviate poverty. Afrikaner liberalism did not forego its achievements or the freedom of the individual it espoused, but went farther to recognize the individual in the racial and cultural differences that constitute him or her.<sup>56</sup>

While the Afrikaner could glean from the achievements of nineteenth-century liberalism, Murray nevertheless insisted that it had created for South Africa's race relations discourse a number of falsifying factors. First, he accused English liberalism in general, and the London Missionary Society in particular, of an ignorance with regard to the native worldview which had slowed the development of the natives' own self-awareness.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, he asserted that such ignorance had extended to an insufficient notion of the

---

<sup>55</sup>president of the Institute of Race Relations from 1934-43.

<sup>56</sup>Die Soeklig (June 1941), pp67-68.

<sup>57</sup>Die Soeklig (Sept. 1941), pp120-21.

principle of guardianship (by which he likely means one which leads to assimilationist views on native development). Moreover, he cited the use of the native problem by liberal politics (and particularly its manipulation of the native vote before 1936 ended native franchise) to agitate and divide opponents.

### **The NGK Through the Fifties: The Apartheid Context**

In chapter two we noted the blossoming of a particular ecumenism inside South Africa in the FMC-convened conferences of the fifties. In this last section we consider the nature of this ecumenism (and the ambiguities and tensions therein) more closely. There is neither space nor time to consider in detail the proceedings of all these conferences. Thus we choose to focus upon a close reading of the 1953 conference of English- and Afrikaans-speaking church leaders, whose lengthy minutes record many of the English-Afrikaner and internal NGK tensions we have pursued throughout. We recall from chapter two that this conference was important at the time for providing the first significant contact between the NGK and the CCSA since the NGK's withdrawal from the Council in 1941. For our purposes, the conference is both significant and surprising for its actual content and the state of affairs it reveals: first, a happy alliance between English and Afrikaner and second, a most unhappy disunity amongst Afrikaners, one which the volk rhetoric of the preceding decade had apparently been unable to ease.

Insofar as English and Afrikaner found a certain common ground, the conference was a return to those English-Afrikaner conversations held around the matter of South African union (from just before Union (1910) until 1927, when the two groups parted), as both parties sought to reconcile the native policies of the English Cape with those of the Afrikaner Republics. Here too, as many tensions existed within the NGK as without. The meaningful difference between this and earlier discussions is one of context. Indeed, in much the same way as the FMC's 1935 mission policy relied on the Kuyperian context for its true impact and meaning, the proceedings of this 1953 conference relied on the apartheid context. Since the National Party had come into power just five years earlier (1948), the



following oppressive policies had already become law: the Population Registration Act, classifying and registering all South Africans under the racial categories of white, bantu, coloured and Asian; the Group Areas Act which reserved specific lands for specific population groups; the Suppression of Communism Act and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act.<sup>58</sup> Thus, whereas the earlier conversations about union had taken place in the context of the English victory and Afrikaner defeat of the South African War, here in 1953 the discussion took place on the Afrikaner's terms.

What the English and the Afrikaner found in common in this context was nevertheless similar to what they had shared at the time of union: both groups were white, European and intent on maintaining South Africa as a "white man's land." In a spirit of conciliation and even intimacy the Rev. Dr. van der Merwe said to English and Afrikaner alike "...that he had regarded this conference as a *family meeting* in which the things said would remain *within the family*."<sup>59</sup> Prof. A.C. van Wyk, also referring to the delegates of both the English- and Afrikaans-speaking churches, said further that we all had the same purpose, the saving of souls and the organizing of saved souls in churches. Only in our methods did we differ. If we were honest we would all admit that we all applied *apartheid* in our churches.<sup>60</sup>

Equally in a statement released after the conference common ground was underscored. "It was sincerely felt," the statement declared, "that during the discussions we were meeting one another first as christians and only afterwards as representatives of different national groups." Indeed, "[i]t was found that we, *as christians*, have much in common..." And yet as the common ground was more explicitly spelled out, the statement betrayed a category that preceded both Christian and national identities, namely, the heritage and privilege of white European descent. Thus the conference's primary

---

<sup>58</sup>Gous and Crafford, Een Liggaam, Baie Lede, p338.

<sup>59</sup>Christian Principles in a Multiracial South Africa, p156.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, p151.

achievements and goals were framed with the European/Non-European distinction. "It was realised anew," for example, "that the first task of *us all* is to bring the Gospel to Non-Europeans and to build up the Church of Christ amongst *them*." Moreover, an awareness was expressed of the "...unhappy effect on Non-Europeans when European Christians were at variance."<sup>61</sup> Another motivation for good relations amongst English and Afrikaners was largely implicit: "The Rev. W.A. Malherbe urged that the Church should," with respect to the country's native policy, "show a united front to the world..."<sup>62</sup>

The conflicts and divergences that were manifested at the conference about apartheid and segregation did not, as the recorder of the minutes made clear, cut along English-Afrikaner lines:

The matter under discussion ought not to be an Afrikaans-speaking versus English-speaking affair. Some of the most heated attacks on apartheid had come from the Afrikaans-speaking delegates.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, even among the Anglican delegates there was a bishop who supported apartheid.<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, the greatest divergences were found amongst the Afrikaners themselves. Referring to the paper delivered by Prof. Keet, fellow Afrikaner Prof. Potgieter asked if Prof. Keet would be willing to modify the phrase, "the policy of my Church is utterly wrong". Would Prof. Keet, for instance, not be willing to amend it to read "...utterly wrong theologically"? Prof. Keet said that if he had used the word 'utterly', he was prepared to have that word deleted.<sup>65</sup>

Ironically Keet offered to amend his words not with the additional "theologically," but by deleting the qualifier "utterly," making little difference and little concession in the end.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p176, my ital.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p162.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p159.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p174.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p168.

Thus in the apartheid era Keet was one who carried the more critically open stream embodied in the witnesses of Johannes du Plessis and Andrew Murray before him. What is striking--even curious-- is that the NGK permitted such a man, known for opposing the church's official policy, to deliver the opening address at such an ecumenical and public affair.

How can we make sense out of this conference in particular and this decade as a whole? How do we explain why, for example, after the cultural and political efforts of the late thirties and forties to join Afrikaners over and against English and black African alike, these open forums for dialogue were then initiated by the Afrikaner? And how, moreover, are we to understand the NGK's willingness to allow such dissident voices as Keet's or Marais' to represent it?

As with the NGK's other ecumenical affiliations, no single motivation for convening these conferences can be neatly extracted. Rather, they were sites of ambiguity in which the political agendas of the propositionalist Kuypersians mixed with genuine desires for dialogue on the part of the more critically open and missionary minded leaders of the NGK.<sup>66</sup> Thus when Prof. de Klerk raised the missionary question of culturalisation and declared that "[t]he Bantu's own culture should be preserved," it was, like many statements in the 1935 policy, ambiguous until the underlying apartheid context provided its "practical" meaning.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the silent strength of this implicit apartheid context freed the reigning Kuypersians to permit such ambiguities. Within South Africa and internationally they could in this way keep up appearances without endangering their

---

<sup>66</sup>who, it must not be denied, came to the table with their own political interests. Indeed, Prof. Keet, known opponent of apartheid, made his liberal political agenda explicit already in his opening address to the conference: "The Church is not called upon to conform to prevailing conditions, but to take the lead...the time has now arrived for the Church, in accordance with the principles of the Gospel, to lead the State in the direction of unity" (Ibid., p20).

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p167. Indeed, many of the conversations about diversity that characterize the postmodern agenda are only beginning to take place in South Africa, as they are only now being removed from the tragic fixation upon differences of the apartheid context.

position politically. Seeking to give the impression of harmony, Prof. P.A. Verhoef urged the delegates, among other conference directives, to maintain "circumspection and tact," "the avoidance of everything that is dubious and offensive," as well as "the avoidance of everything that can disturb mutual good relations."

Thus as the apartheid architects of the forties used missiological discourse to underscore the special calling of the "volk," therein seeking to unify the Afrikaans-speaking churches (and their members) politically, the apartheid leaders of the fifties again employed the arena of missiology--now in ecumenical conferences, to build the "European" alliance, as well as to undergird theologically the native policy they were in the process of implementing. In a conference whose discussions were explicitly declared to be "of a church or missionary nature and not political,"<sup>68</sup> both the unity sought and that found were not doctrinal but political; it was, to repeat, not the Afrikaners who became aware of shared foundations, but Afrikaner and English.

We, of course, already know what came at the end of this decade of ecumenical endeavors. The Sharpeville riots of 1960 were the tragedy that occasioned the WCC-convened Cottesloe Consultation with South Africa's World Council member churches. Pressure from Prime Minister Verwoerd and a lack of support from the churches themselves then led the majority of Cottesloe delegates to abandon the consultation's progressive resolutions. The following year the Cape and Transvaal synods officially withdrew from the world body, and the year after that, 1962, the Cape and Transvaal synods joined together with the Natal and Free State synods in a single general synod. Indeed, how, in the light of these events, are we to make sense of these open discussions of the fifties when, as the National Party established its apartheid regime, we might well have expected just the opposite?

---

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p176.

Particularly in chapters two and three we have underscored the role of doctrine in the NGK's self-understanding and its decisions during the period under review. We have tried to show the way in which doctrine ceased to function as the church's grammar for the primary language of Scripture and became instead a static fence to keep out change. As the church's doctrines--inscribed in its confessions and articulated in its mission policies--no longer functioned dynamically, they (and Scripture itself) were manipulated and replaced with the political doctrines of apartheid. It is this apartheid context perhaps more than anything else that helps us to understand why this decade of ecumenical relations and internal prophesy<sup>69</sup> ended so abruptly in the unity-in-isolation of the NGK's general synod (1962). Thus despite the Rev. Meiring's conference motion to place on record "...gratitude to God for the one common ground which we possess in Holy Writ,"<sup>70</sup> what was "common" was not so much Scripture as a shared history relating to (evangelizing and "civilizing") South Africa's indigenous population and a "shared" historical struggle for executive powers in what remained a "white man's land."

---

<sup>69</sup>See Keet's Whither South Africa? (1955) as well as the multiauthored Delayed Action!: An Ecumenical Witness from the Afrikaans-speaking Church (1960).

<sup>70</sup>Christian Principles in a Multiracial South Africa, p172.

## Conclusion

Throughout this thesis we have used Lindbeck's theory of doctrine to evaluate dynamics within the NGK. We have considered his metaphor of doctrine as grammar for the primary language of Scripture and have suggested that the NGK went wrong when doctrine ceased to function in this way. Yet what we have hinted at earlier, we now pursue more fully, namely, that Lindbeck's theory does not finally take us far enough in evaluating the relationship between doctrine and politics in the NGK during the years under review. In conclusion we examine the relationship between doctrine and Scripture more closely in the work of Lindbeck and in the life of the NGK.

Lindbeck's theory of doctrine has been a "good fit" for this study of the NGK because it takes seriously the determining role of doctrine in the Reformed identity. Moreover, Lindbeck rightly recognizes Scripture's foundational importance in a church's self-understanding. And yet as fruitful as Lindbeck's work has been, this study brings to the fore some critical problems inherent in his theory as well. In true Reformed spirit, both Lindbeck and the NGK have wanted to keep doctrine and Scripture distinct--Scripture as primary (first-order) and doctrine as secondary (second-order)--to avoid the pitfalls of Roman Catholicism's leveling of the distinction between Scripture and tradition. Indeed, Lindbeck in view, one might say that the NGK's fallibilities have been largely caused by a reversal of the priorities of Scripture and doctrine, a muddling of the difference between the divine authority vested in Scripture and the human authority of doctrine and tradition.

We needn't turn to Lindbeck for this insight. For this was equally the message of men such as Prof. Ben Marais who uttered their prophetic critique as insiders to the NGK.

We reproach the Roman Catholic Church, and rightly so in my opinion, that it has placed human tradition on the same level as the Bible. But what are we doing when we place the principle of division within the Church according to colour, on the same level as the Bible with its confession of the communion of saints? We reproach the Roman Catholic Church, and rightly so in my opinion, that equalisation of the Bible and tradition leads to the Bible losing its authority, and tradition becoming supreme; but will not the same happen to us? We have added to the Bible on one point--have we not in this way impaired the authority

of the Bible? Are we not busy forsaking the stable ground of the Reformation and drifting away on the waves of political passions?<sup>1</sup>

Thirty years earlier Prof. du Plessis expressed similar concern about the NGK's prioritizing of the confessions in an article entitled "Werk daar 'n Roomse Suurdesem in ons Gereformeerde Kerk?"<sup>2</sup> And Prof. Keet gave the prognosis lucidly in the mid-fifties:

In any case I am convinced that without the background of apartheid as it is practised in this country we should never have drawn the conclusions we do from our study of the Bible. Our problem, surely, is not how we can use scripture to justify our attitude, but what attitude we should adopt that will stand the searching test of the scriptures.<sup>3</sup>

To say with Lindbeck, Keet and others, that Scripture lost its primacy for the NGK is, however, not to say enough. For it does not yet tell us how this happened or what attitude was adopted toward Scripture that led to this relativizing reversal.

That propositionalist stream of the NGK which eventually undergirded theological and political apartheid approached the Bible with a fundamentalist hermeneutic. The Bible was historical in the sense that its stories--from Eden onwards--really happened. This historical dimension was, in fact, intimately connected to Scripture's infallibility and its abiding value. Not only did it have something to say to human history, it conceived that history and laid down the divine plan by which that history was to proceed. In this way the Bible contained revelation about the politics and histories of human kingdoms and was a measure by which proper historical developments (aligned with God's plan) could be distinguished from perversions (which threatened to do violence to this plan).

Ironically, as highly as these fundamentalists valued this historical dimension of Scripture, there was another sense of its "historical" nature which they actually undermined. Especially in the discussions around the thirties about revising the confessions, the static nature of the church's scriptural foundation became clear. The

---

<sup>1</sup>Marais, B. "The Church in the Contemporary World," Delayed Action!, p49.

<sup>2</sup>Het Zoeklicht, 15 Aug. 1931.

<sup>3</sup>Keet, Whither South Africa?, pp19-20.

confessions did not open up a multiplicity of interpretations, but secured a single interpretation over and against the winds of modernism. Thus the "historical" dimension the propositionalists denied to Scripture was an ongoing relevance and capacity to continually engage new contexts. In other words, doctrine (in the confessions) didn't enable the relationship between Scripture and the challenges history continued to present, but served to hermetically seal the Bible from them.

For Lindbeck the way to protect Scripture from a debunking historical criticism is not through a confessional safeguard, but by orienting oneself differently to Scripture and its authority. While he does not deny Scripture's important historical dimension ("historical" in the sense emphasized by the fundamentalists), he declares, in the company of other postmoderns<sup>4</sup> that its truth finally transcends its facticity. For him we do not so much pose questions to Scripture as ask our questions and determine our realities through Scripture's framework. What is meaningful about the Bible is not its earlier appearance on our human time line (its historical "truth"). Rather, significant is its paradigmatic function in Christian communities-- the way that it creates a "biblical world" out of which a church draws its lessons and metaphors, providing paradigms and types for informing Christian actions. What, then, is important about Moses is not so much that he *lived* but that he *lives*, as a paradigm of what kind of people God chooses to lead God's people.

When Scripture's authority is conceived in this way, no historical development threatens it, for it is not subject to the criteria of secular history; rather, secular history is subject to the criteria of this biblical world--not in the historical sense of its fitting into the divine plan, but in the following way: "What," Lindbeck asks,

does the Holocaust have to do with Mt. Sinai, on the one hand, and another mountain, Calvary, on the other? As these questions indicate, a postliberal intratextuality provides warrants for imaginatively and conceptually incorporating postbiblical worlds into the world of the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>notably Hans George-Gadamer. See his Truth and Method. New York: Crossroad, 1992.

<sup>5</sup>Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine, p123.



Thus in a "postliberal intratextuality" our response to the events of history itself--our interpretations and our actions--will arise out of this more primary biblical encounter.

While, according to Lindbeck, for the Christian church there is, in some sense, no "extra-biblical" reality, he himself concedes: "there is always the danger...that the extrabiblical materials inserted into the biblical universe will themselves become the...framework of interpretation."<sup>6</sup> In other words, while Lindbeck means to suggest a more dynamic way of understanding a church's scriptural foundations as it grapples with historical and corresponding doctrinal developments, he can finally do no better than the fundamentalists in securing this foundation for the NGK.

Through the length of this thesis we have subjected the NGK to Lindbeck's critique, in closing we pose a question to Lindbeck himself from the NGK's recent history. Recalling the pseudotheological claims of the NGK's apartheid hermeneutics, was the church's problem, as Lindbeck would suggest, really one of inserting "extrabiblical" realities into "biblical" ones, or was it rather a failure to revere (or at least be realistic about) the haziness of the line between the two? Lindbeck's theory in the end draws too clean a line between the "biblical" (first-order) and the "extra-biblical" (second-order) and fails finally to relate Scripture and doctrine in a way that engages the historical dimensions of each. His ahistorical paradigmatic approach to the Bible leaves it in the end as vulnerable to being abstracted for ungodly purpose as it was under the Kuypersians. For hermeneutics and church identity there is no right answer. The challenge to the churches and to Lindbeck is the challenge of every human attempt to hear the word of God: to acknowledge in humility the messiness of the hermeneutical enterprise, and to grant both doctrine and Scripture their full historical dimensions--in the sense of their capacity, in intimate interrelation, to continually engage new contexts, to relate the vision of the kingdom of

---

<sup>6</sup>The Nature of Doctrine, p118.

God to the politics of our human kingdoms, and to test the spirit of each age by the inbreathing of the Holy Spirit and the light of God's word.

## Bibliography

### books:

- Barth, K. Theology and Church: Shorter Writings 1920-28. Trans. L.P. Smith and with an intro. by T.F. Torrance. London: SCM Press, 1962.
- Bax, D. A Different Gospel. Johannesburg: Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, n.d.
- Berkhouwer, G.C. A Half Century of Theology. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977.
- Berkhof, Louis. Systematic Theology. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982 (1941).
- De Gruchy, J. and Villa-Vicencio, C., eds. Apartheid is a Heresy. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983.
- De Gruchy, J. The Church Struggle in South Africa. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986.
- Domingo, E. Apartheid and the Liberalistic Fallacy. Johannesburg: Die Tranvaalse Kleurlingvolksbond, 1951.
- Dooyeweerd, H. Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular and Christian Options. Trans. J. Kraay. Toronto: Wedge Publishing, 1979.
- Du Plessis, J. The Life and Times of Andrew Murray. London: Marshall Bros., Ltd., n.d.
- Du Preez, A.B. Die Skriftuurlike Grondslag vir Rasseverhoudinge. Pretoria: N.G. Boekhandel, 1956(?).
- Fey, Harold E., ed. The Ecumenical Advance: A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1948-1968. Vol. II. London: SPCK, 1986.
- Furlong, Patrick J. Between Crown and Swastika: The Impact of the Radical Right on the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement in the Fascist Era. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand Univ. Press, 1991.
- Gerdener, G.B.A. Die Boodskap van 'n Man: Lewenskets van Prof. J. Du Plessis. Stellenbosch: Christen-Studentvereniging van Suid-Afrika, 1943.
- Gerdener, G. B. A. Recent Development in the South African Mission Field. Cape Town: NG Kerk-Uitgewers, 1958.
- Geyser, A. S., B. J. Marais et al. Delayed Action: An Ecumenical Witness from the Afrikaans speaking Church. Pretoria: NG Boekhandel, 1960.
- Gous, G. and Crafford, D. Een Liggaam, Baie Lede: Die Kerk se Ekumeniese Roeping Wereldwyd en in Suid-Afrika. Pretoria: Verba Vitae, 1993.
- Hoernlé, A. South African Native Policy and the Liberal Spirit. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand Univ. Press, 1945.

- Hofmeyr, Jan H. Hoernle Memorial Lecture 1945: Christian Principles and Race Problems. Johannesburg: S.A. Instit. of Race Relations, n.d.
- Hofmeyr, J.; Millard, J.A.; C.J.J. Froneman, eds. History of the Church in South Africa: A Document and Source Book. Pretoria: Sigma Press, 1991.
- Kalsbeek, L. Contours of a Christian Philosophy. Toronto: Wedge Pub., 1975.
- Keet, B. B. Whither South Africa. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch Univ. Pub., 1956.
- Kinghorn, J., ed. Die NG Kerk en Apartheid. Johannesburg: Macmillan Suid-Afrika, 1986.
- Kneifel, T., J. Leatt and Klaus Numberger. Contending Ideologies in South Africa. Cape Town: David Philip, 1986.
- Kotze, C. S. Die NG Kerk en die Ecumene. Deel I: Die Ned. Geref. Kerk Teen Dwaalrigting en Skeuring. Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel, 1984.
- Kotze, J. C. G. Principles and Practices in Race Relations: According to Scripture. Stellenbosch: S.C.A. Pub., 1962.
- Kuyper, A. Lectures on Calvinism. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1931.
- Lindbeck, G. The Nature of Doctrine. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984.
- Lombard, R. T. J. Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke en Rassepolitiek met Speciale Verwysing na die Jare 1948- 1961. Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel, 1981.
- Loubser, J. A. The Apartheid Bible: A Critical Review of Racial Theology in South Africa. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1987.
- Louw, D. J. et al. Op die Breuklyn: 'n Feesbundel saamgestel ter herdenking van die 125-jarige bestaan van die Teologiese Seminarium Stellenbosch. Cape Town: NG Kerk-Uitgewers, 1985.
- MacIntire, T., ed. The Legacy of Herman Dooyeweerd. Lanham: University of America Press, 1985.
- Marais, B. J. Colour: Unsolved Problem of the West. Cape Town: Howard B. Timmins, 1952.
- Marais, B.J. et al. Delayed Action!: An Ecumenical Witness from the Afrikaans-speaking Church. Pretoria: NG Boekhandel, 1960.
- Moodie, T. D. The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion. Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1975.
- O'Brien Geldenhuys, F.E. In die Stroom-Versnellings: Vyftig Jaar van die NG Kerk. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1982.
- Potgieter, F.J.M. and H.G. Stoker, eds. Koers in die Krisis. Vol. 1. Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia-Drukkery, 1935.

Ryan, Colleen. Beyers Naudé: A Pilgrimage of Faith. Cape Town: David Philip, 1990.

Stoker, H.G. and Vorster, J.D., eds. Koers in die Krisis. Vol. 2. Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia-Drukkery, 1940.

Strassberger, Elfriede. Ecumenism in South Africa 1936-1960. Braamfontein: South African Council of Churches, 1974.

Van Elderen, Marlin. Introducing the World Council of Churches. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990.

Visser't Hooft, W.A. Memoirs. London: SCM Press, 1973.

Visser't Hooft, W.A. The Genesis and Formation of the World Council of Churches. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1982.

Zwaanstra, H. Catholicity and Secession: A Study of Ecumenicity in the Christian Reformed Church. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991.

#### **unpublished papers:**

Townshend, R. "Beyond Freedom vs. Democracy: A Dooyeweerdian Contribution to the Individual-Collective Debate." Submitted to the Faculty of Law, University of Toronto in May 1991.

#### **articles:**

Ackermann, Ds. "Minderheidsrapport: Insake 'Organiese Vereniging tussen die Vier Gefedereerde N. G. Kerke' in Suid Afrika." Die Gereformeerde Vaandel 26, 2. Feb. 1948. pp6-7.

Berkouwer, G. C. "Revelation: The Christian View." Christianity Today 3. 1958. pp15-17.

Bosch, David. "The Fragmentation of Afrikanerdom and the Afrikaner Churches." Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naude, ed. J. W. de Gruchy and C. Villa-Vicencio. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985.

Coertze, P.J. "Oplossing van die Naturelle-vraagstuk: Wenke Ooreenkomstig die Afrikaner-Standpunt van Apartheid." Op die Horison 5,1. Mar. 1943. pp20-27.

De Beer, J.M.A. "Die Sending van die Gefedereerde N.G. Kerke en die Gevare wat dit Bedreig." Op die Horison 4,2. Jun. 1942. pp85-90.

Deist, F. "Die wa van Ussa ofte wel Johannes du Plessis en die Belydenniskrifte." Theologia Evangelica 19, 1. 1986.

Du Plessis, J. "Die Kwessie van Rasse-Verhoudings." Die Soeklig. 15 Feb. 1935. pp35-39.

Du Plessis, J. "Werk daar 'n Roomse Suurdesem in ons Gereformeerde Kerk?" Het Zoeklicht. 15 Aug. 1931.

- Durand, Jaap. "Afrikaner Piety and Dissent." Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naude, ed. J. W. de Gruchy and C. Villa-Vicencio. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985.
- "European and Bantu Conference." Cape Times. 1 Feb. 1927.
- Gerdener, G. B. A. "Die Sendingraad van die Ned. Geref. Kerke in Suid-Afrika." Die Kerkbode. 9 Jul. 1941. pp36-38.
- Gerdener, G. B. A. "The Crux of the Racial Situation in South Africa." International Review of Missions 38, 151. Jul. 1949. pp280-94.
- Gerdener, G.B.A. "Die Toekoms van Ons Belydenis." Het Zoeklicht. 15 July 1931. pp204-08.
- Goodall, Norman. "The Inter-Racial Conference of Church Leaders: Witwatersrand, Dec. 1954." International Review of Missions 44. 1955. pp193-97.
- Groenewald, E. P. "Kerkvereniging en Volkseenheid." Die Kerkbode. 30 Jul. 1941. pp24-26.
- Hartenstein, Karl. "The Third Way: An Interpretation and Criticism of Amsterdam." International Review of Missions 38, 149. Jan. 1949. pp77-88.
- Heidemann, Eugene P. "Old Confessions and New Testimony." Reformed Journal 38, 8. Aug. 1988. pp7-10.
- Heyns, J. A. "Enkele Gedagtes oor Die Antropologie van Karl Barth." Die Gereformeerde Vaandel 23,3. Sept. 1954. pp22-29.
- Hofmeyr, J.W. "Johannes du Plessis in Kerkhistoriese Perspektief: Ketter of Profeet?" Theologia Evangelica 19, 1. 1986.
- Krige, J.S. "Die Noodsaaklikheid van Dogma of Leer: Reguit Dink en Reguit Lewe." Die Ou Paaie. Oct. 1931.
- Lategan, D. "Hersiening van ons Gereformeerde Belydenis." Die Ou Paaie. Oct. 1931.
- Lindbeck, G. "An Assessment Reassessed: Paul Tillich on the Reformation." Journal of Religion. Oct. 1983. pp376-93.
- Lindbeck, G. "Scripture, Consensus and Community." This World. Fall 1988. pp5-24.
- Lindbeck, G. "The Church's Mission to a Postmodern Culture." Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World, ed. Frederic Burham. New York: Harper and Row, 1989. pp37-55.
- Louw, A.F. "Die Christen Raad." Die Soeklig. 15 Oct. 1936.
- Marais, B. J. "The Church's Role in Africa: Part I." Christianity Today 4. 23 May 1960. pp6-8.

- Marais, B. J. "The Storm over South Africa: Part II." Christianity Today 4. 6 Jun. 1960. pp11-13.
- Moodie, T. D. "The Dutch Reformed Churches as Vehicles of Political Legitimation in South Africa." Social Dynamics 1, 2. Dec. 1975. pp158-66.
- Murray, A.H. "Wat is Segregasie?" Op die Horison 9,4. Dec. 1947. pp130-36.
- Potgieter, F. J. M. "Die Skrifbeskouing Van Barth." Die Gereformeerde Vaandel 23, 3. Sept. 1954. pp31-38.
- Roussouw, S. H. "Die Vereniging van ons Drie Hollands-Afrikaanse Kerke." Die Kerkbode. 9 Jul. 1941. pp33-35.
- Roux, L. A. D. "Die Rassevraagstuk." Die Gereformeerde Vaandel 25, 4. Apr. 1947. p14.
- "Sending en Armsorg." Op die Horison 2, 3. Sept. 1940.
- Serfontein, Hennie. "The Road to Isolation: A Report from South Africa." Reformed Journal 35, 3. Mar. 1985. pp7-10.
- Shepherd, R. and Grant, E. "The Christian Council of South Africa." International Review of Missions 33. 1944.
- Strauss, H. J. "Religieuse Koers en Burgervryheid." Die Gereformeerde Vaandel 23, 2 Jun. 1954. pp17-25.
- Strauss, H. J. "F. C. S. V.-Rubriek: Calvinist Volksbeskouing." Die Gereformeerde Vaandel 25, 4. Apr. 1947. pp11-13.
- "Unitas." "Eenwording van Drie Hollandse Kerke." Die Kerkbode. 15 Nov. 1939. pp36-37.
- Van Niekerk, F. N. "Korrespondensie: Die Kaapse Sinode en Die Wereldraad." Die Gereformeerde Vaandel 23, 2. Jun. 1954. pp32-34.
- Van Rooyen, E. E. "Die Gereformeerde Kerk van Nederland en die 'Uitbou' van die Belydenis." Die Ou Paaie. Jun. 1930.
- Van Rooyen, E. E. "Die Meerderheidsrapport Wat Nader Beskou (Sien Inleidingsartikel)." Die Gereformeerde Vaandel 26, 2. Feb. 1948. pp9-10.
- Van Rooyen, E. E. "Die Twee Verslae oor die Vereniging van die Gefedereerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika." Die Gereformeerde Vaandel 26, 2. Feb. 1948. p2.
- Van Til, C. "Has Karl Barth Become Orthodox?" Westminster Theological Journal 16. May 1954. pp135-81.
- Whitelaw, D. "A Crisis of Credibility: Contemporary Dialogue with Colenso and Du Plessis." Journal of Theology for Southern Africa 60. Sept. 1987.

**church documents and reports:**

Acts of the First Reformed Ecumenical Synod of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika, and the Christian Reformed Church of America: August 14 to 30, 1946 in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Acts of the Fourth Reformed Ecumenical Synod of Potchefstroom, South Africa, August 6-13, 1958.

Acts of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod Held at Amsterdam from August 9 to 19, 1949.

Acts of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod in Session at Edinburgh, 4th to 13th August 1953. Printed in Edinburgh.

Reports of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, Edinburgh 1953.

Die N.G. Kerke in Suid-Afrika en Rasseverhoudinge: Opsomming van Belangrike Uitsprake en Besluite vanaf 1950-Desember 1960. Pretoria: NG Boekhandel, 1961(?).

"Die Rassebeleid van die Afrikaner (Besluite van die Volkskongres, Bloemfontein, Sept. 1944)." Op die Horison 7,1. Mar. 1945. pp16-23.

Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa and the Problem of Race Relations: A Report of the Ad Hoc Commission for Race Relations Appointed by the Fed. Council of Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa (1956).

Dutch Reformed Churches of South Africa: Statement on Race Relations. Johannesburg: Information Bureau of the DRC. 1960.

European and Bantu: Being Papers and Addresses read at the Conference on Native Affairs. Held under the Auspices of The Federal Council of D.R. Churches at Johannesburg on 27th to 29th September, 1923.

Evanston to New Delhi 1954-1961: Report of the Central Committee to the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1961.

Gerdener, G. B. A., ed. The Racial Issue in South Africa: Findings on the Native Problem of Various Congresses Held under the Auspices of the Fed. Missionary Council of the Dutch Reformed Mother and Mission Churches (1950-1952) Bloemfontein: D.R. Mission Press, 1953.

Groot Sendingkonferensie te Uitenhage gehou van 25 tot 28 Junie 1931. NGK Archives, Cape Town.

Report of the Proceedings of the Third General Missionary Conference for South Africa held at Bloemfontein, July 1-6, 1909. Cape Town: Townshend, Taylor and Snashall, 1909.

Statement for General Information in Connection with the Native Question held in Bloemfontein on April 4-6, 1950. Issued by the Church Congress of the Dutch Reformed Federated and Mission Churches on which the Hervormde & Gereformeerde Churches were represented. N.G. Sendingspers, n.d.



The Dutch Reformed Church and the Native Problem. Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia, 1921.

The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches: The Official Report. Vol. 5. New York: Harper, 1949 (?).

The First Six Years: 1948-1954. A Report of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches on the Activities of the Departments and Secretariats of the Council. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1954.

The Racial Issue in South Africa: Being Findings on the Native Problem of Various Congresses held under the Auspices of the Federal Missionary Council of the Dutch Reformed Mother and Mission Churches (1950-1952). Bloemfontein: D.R. Mission Press, 1953.

Van der Bent, Ans J., ed. Breaking Down the Walls: World Council of Churches Statements and Actions on Racism 1948-1985. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986.

Van Wyk, F. J., ed. Christian Principles in a Multi-Racial South Africa: A Report on the Dutch Reformed Conference of Church Leaders, Pretoria, 17-19 November 1953. 1954.

"Verslag van die Algemene Zendingkommissie aan de H.E. Synode." Handelinge 1924 (NGK). pp61-75. NGK Archives, Cape Town.

"Verslag van die Algemene Sendingkommissie." Handelinge 1928 (NGK). pp47-58. NGK Archives, Cape Town.