

**N.P. van Wyk Louw and the Moral Predicament of  
Afrikaner Nationalism:  
Preparing the Ground for *Verligte* Reform**

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Despite the misery wrought by the South African state's pursuit of white racial interests, the origins of apartheid ideology in what I have called "the Afrikaner civil religion"<sup>1</sup> meant always that there were those who sought to justify apartheid's fundamental precepts in moral terms. However cruel apartheid was in its effects and however blind its adherents were to the suffering it caused, many Afrikaners (especially Afrikaner intellectuals) saw the policy as tackling a moral dilemma rooted in their own experience of colonial domination. Indeed some of the very ruthlessness of apartheid's implementation may be attributed to internal resistance to the moral predicament it evoked. Much of it, of course, was simply self-interested blindness or unwillingness to see.

From its inception, the full implications of apartheid policy engendered intense debate among Afrikaner intellectuals. During the crises of 1960, the policy elicited moral critique of its implementation even from many supporters. When the Soweto uprising in 1976 (along with incipient economic retrogression) brought matters to a head, Afrikaner critics of the way the system was working, sought to reformulate the policy (often appealing to the anti-colonial roots of Afrikaner sacred history) in order to motivate support for change. The accession to power of P.W. Botha in 1979, might have increased destabilization in the bordering states and eventually occasioned internal states of emergency, but his regime also implemented constitutional reforms that so-called *verligte* intellectuals had been arguing since the late 1950s and urging since 1976. While those reforms failed completely to stem a welter of urban unrest and economic decline, F.W. de Klerk's "leap forward" in 1990 would have been inconceivable without them. This article makes no attempt to argue that debates amongst Afrikaner intellectuals *caused* the transition of the 1990s (there were many much more concrete causes), but De Klerk clearly articulated (perhaps even formulated) his direction and marshalled his support along the lines of those debates.

Moreover, it is striking how *internal* these debates were to a narrow, ethnically defined, intellectual community of Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans. To some extent this was because so much of the policy discussion took place within the Afrikaner Broederbond. This was by no means entirely the case, however. Moral debates amongst Afrikaners were referenced in the Afrikaans press and published in widely read collections of essays, but with little or no participation from Afrikaans-

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1 T Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Apartheid, Power and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975)

speaking “coloureds”, let alone Africans. Such inwardness, compounded by the very effects of apartheid itself, closed off the majority of even morally aware Afrikaners from full comprehension of the suffering their policy had occasioned.

### Van Wyk Louw

The occasional writings of N.P. van Wyk Louw are some of the most striking (and one of the earliest) examples of an Afrikaner intellectual struggling with the moral predicament of Afrikaner nationalism. One of the deepest thinkers writing in Afrikaans, he himself had been an active and enthusiastic participant in what Aletta Norval calls “the Afrikaner myth”, prior to providing an early and profoundly moral interpretation of “the apartheid imaginary”.<sup>2</sup> In this sense he was both an exemplar and a pioneer in setting forth a powerful exposition of apartheid as a moral ideal for ethnic justice, rooted in the Afrikaner’s own sacred history. Again and again, both critics and supporters of apartheid were to cite his aphorism – *voortbestaan in geregtigheid* (survival with justice).<sup>3</sup> Continued existence for the Afrikaner People,<sup>4</sup> he urged, would endure only in a righteous relationship to the other Peoples of South Africa.

At the conclusion of *The Rise of Afrikanerdom*, I mention Van Wyk Louw’s writing on aesthetics as an inspiration for *verligte* South African literature in the 1960s.<sup>5</sup> I had read his early works, *Berigte te Velde* and *Lojale Verset* as contributions to the Afrikaner cultural movement, which is the central topic of my book,<sup>6</sup> but I had neither read nor appreciated the power of his later prose. In *Liberale Nasionalisme*, essays written in the late 1940s and early 1950s, some (but not all) of them perhaps influenced by the fact that he lived and taught in the post-war Netherlands between 1950 and 1958, he extended his trenchant internal critique of the conventional Christian National interpretation of the Afrikaner civil religion.

Readers of *The Rise of Afrikanerdom* will perhaps remember that I criticised Piet Meyer’s early conception of the Afrikaner “calling” as circular. “Afrikaners”, I

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2 A Norval, *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse* (Verso, London & New York, 1996) Despite rather obscure theoretical language and some minor problems of historical detail, to my mind this book constitutes one of the most thoughtful discussions of the moral dilemma of Afrikaner nationalism Her conception of “the Afrikaner myth” conforms quite closely to what I have called “Afrikaner civil religion” “The apartheid imaginary” (she quite correctly dubs it “impossible”) is what in this article I call apartheid ideology What her analysis gains in precision through post-Gramscian theory, it tends to lose in general comprehensibility, however

3 I discovered Hermann Giliomee’s essay, “Survival in Justice: An Afrikaner Debate over Apartheid”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 36, 1994, only late in the writing of this article Not for the first time, he and I have worked the same ground, although independently of one another

4 As in *The Rise of Afrikanerdom*, I translate the Afrikaans word *volk* as “People”, and *volks* as “ethnic” I am well aware of the awkwardness of this usage and sometimes note the Afrikaans word in the text Even more difficult to translate is the word *volkseie* (peculiar to the People) which is often used to formulate the boundaries of Afrikaner identity as different from other Peoples For a discussion of the moral and political paradox implicit in such affirmations of identity, see W Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2002)

5 Moodie, *Afrikanerdom*, pp 288-289

6 Moodie, *Afrikanerdom*, p 41

wrote,<sup>7</sup> “are Afrikaners because of God’s calling and God’s calling means that they should be exclusively Afrikaner”. In his final work, Meyer modifies his argument somewhat, concluding that “for our People it was never a matter of survival (*voortbestaan*) for the sake of survival (*oorlewing*), but to bring to fruition our divine destiny in Africa and in the entire world”.<sup>8</sup> Earlier in the same book he wrote:

The strength of our small People lies above all in the fact that we carry a message larger than ourselves, a message that will transcend our physical survival, however long that may be ... As long as our People carries forward its own message of belief and culture, as long as we move forward on the fixed path to which God has called us, no hostile world shall ever level us to the ground<sup>9</sup>

Just so, perhaps, but Meyer never spells out a meaning for the Afrikaner cultural “message” (what he calls “our divine destiny in Africa and the world”) that extends beyond Afrikaner exclusivity. What exactly *is* the Afrikaner calling?

It is precisely in addressing this fundamental question that Van Wyk Louw started his more mature reflections. “The whole question comes to this”, he wrote: “How do we know so precisely the decision of God [about] survival or demise for our People?”<sup>10</sup> Afrikaner nationalism “has found no reasonable answer to the fundamental political question, ‘What moral right has a small nation to wish to survive *as a nation?*’”<sup>11</sup>

His answer to this question in *Liberale Nasionalisme* was two-fold: national calling demands both that there be cultural values worth defending and that the realisation of that calling should not oppress others. In the first place, Louw said, while people like Meyer are important, “active and faithful on the purely political level: good organisers, wide awake, going to meetings, voting when it is necessary to vote ... [nonetheless] defence on this front opens our flanks from other directions”. If this is all we do, “then one day we will discover that we no longer wish to defend our city, because there is nothing valuable *within* that we want to keep”.<sup>12</sup> This is why, for Louw, literature and art were so important. However, he insisted that art and literature must be truly alive. While necessarily expressed through a national tradition and in a local idiom, ethnic art (*volkskuns*) must develop according to creative demands out of the fullness of human experience in all its moral complexity and tragic intensity. Doubt about national values arises, he wrote,

only when people have the right to feel that the spiritual life of their group is not enough for the individual to exist; when group life becomes a prison for the individual; when the language offers too little to satisfy the hunger for understanding; when the accepted ideas of the People, petrified, isolate persons from the wide world outside<sup>13</sup>

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7 Moodie, *Afrikanerdom*, p 164

8 P J Meyer, *Nog Nie Ver Genoeg Nie* (Perskor, Johannesburg, 1985), p 185 All translations from Afrikaans texts are my own

9 Meyer, *Nie Ver Genoeg Nie*, p 79

10 N P van Wyk Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I* (Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 1986), p 502

11 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 500

12 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 461 This is precisely the point I make in regard to Meyer For him, as for the other Christian National ideologues, national calling had no content – except to *be* (and to be Christian National) One is irresistibly reminded of J M Coetzee’s great novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*.

13 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 459

Soon after the 1938 *Ossewatrek*, he had expressed concern about the suffocating effect of “organisation men” on Afrikaner cultural creativity.<sup>14</sup>

Important, indeed essential, as are social context and ethnic ties (the artist’s language and the history of his or her People) in the end for the artist, these are but means. The end is to convey with integrity, movingly and powerfully, insight into the depths of the human condition in all its grandeur and its grubbiness, its horror, its glory and its pettiness – whether in crisis or in mundane everyday activity. That is the artist’s vocation. It coincides with the calling of his or her People. It provides the reason for their existence. When it is realised (and it seldom is – and never perfectly), then social context, language, ethnic aspirations and realisations are all enhanced. Only through such creative work can a People claim a right to exist.

This was Louw’s intent when he wrote *Die Pluimsaad waai ver* (“The seed of the grave-grass spreads far”) for the 1966 Republican fifth anniversary festival. His depiction of the full humanity of President Steyn and of divisions amongst Afrikaners in the course of the Anglo-Boer War, earned him Verwoerd’s opprobrium because he seemed to depart from the elevated script of the sacred history. From Van Wyk Louw’s point of view, his account plumbed the depths of the adversity faced by his People at that particular moment in their history (his original title for the play was *Bitter Beginning*) and Steyn’s commitment to the national cause, despite its apparent hopelessness, was heroic and fertile precisely because of his doubts. The truly brave are those who know fear and prevail despite it.

Piggy-backing on Verwoerd’s disapproval, the “organisation men” of Afrikaner culture came after Louw in 1966 with a vengeance. Schalk Pienaar sprang to his defence:

What is Van Wyk Louw’s sin in *Pluimsaad*? Only this – that he looked into the heroic time of the Freedom War and saw more than heroism. He saw greatness and smallness, strength and weakness, wisdom and ignorance, treachery, anxiety and courage. He gathered these all in and around his hero figure, President Steyn, the man to whom doubt was no stranger and who won because he was able to overcome the weaknesses of his People in his very self.<sup>15</sup>

For Van Wyk Louw, then, it was cultural creativity with its deep insight into the human condition that ensures that a People have valuable assets worth preserving. In a 1946 article, he returned to the stress on creativity and its revelation of the essentially human through an ethnic medium. “Literature is central to the spiritual life of a People”, he wrote: “I do not believe that we will ever get people to understand, deeply and humanly, the heterogeneous mass of Peoples in South Africa without first having a rich and critically intelligent literature. Literature in the noblest sense is the propaganda weapon for humanity”.<sup>16</sup> By the 1950s, he had expanded his conception of creativity to include “not only the creators of such assets – thinkers, scientists, artists, and so on – but also those who value them, guard them, propagate them – readers, critics, teachers, the best of journalists, smart technicians, economic leaders and many others; propagandists in the original and highest sense of the word”.<sup>17</sup>

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14 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 78

15 J C Steyn, *Van Wyk Louw: ’n Lewensverhaal* (Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 1998), p 1053

16 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 507

17 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 462

Unless one can live a whole life, creative and fulfilling, within and from out of the traditions of a People, he concludes, that people cannot survive.

If a majority of Afrikaners considered it no longer worth the trouble to continue to exist as a People, Louw added, Afrikaans-speaking “individuals each will be able to continue – indeed, perhaps survive in prosperity – but they will no longer make up a separate People”.<sup>18</sup> No longer for Louw the conviction that the nation is an organic entity, indeed “the fulfilment of the individual life”. “A People is not *one being*”, Louw was insisting by 1952, “it has no unity of judgment, no unity of will; it does not make *one* decision. It exists out of countless individuals, and where it thus ‘decides’ or ‘chooses’ this is the result of countless judgments and decisions, half judgments and lame decisions”.<sup>19</sup> For all the passion of his commitment to his People, then, Louw’s “liberal nationalism” is at odds with primordial Afrikaner Christian Nationalism (whether Stoker’s neo-Calvinist or Diederich’s neo-Fichteian version).

In the second place, Louw argued, the Afrikaner People will not survive “if a large part of the People are in danger of reckoning that we do not need to live in justice with our fellow Peoples in South Africa”.<sup>20</sup> He explicitly cited Stoker’s *Stryd om die Orders*,<sup>21</sup> condemning it for speaking of Afrikaners as “the People of South Africa”, rather than as “one of the Peoples of South Africa”. To guard its soul, its spiritual essence, the Afrikaner People is obliged to deal justly with the other Peoples of South Africa.

Suppose that a People has come into the narrows – finding that it must mount a life or death defence; it summons up all material and political powers, guards and marshals its spiritual, technical, intellectual assets, does everything it can to survive. Then it comes before the last temptation: to believe that bare survival is preferable to *survival in justice*.

This is the lasting temptation awaiting a People in their desert days – the biggest almost mystical crisis before which a People can stand. I believe that in a strange way this is the crisis from which a People appear, reborn, young, creative. This “dark night of the soul” in which it says: I would rather perish than survive through injustice.<sup>22</sup>

“How can a small People”, he concluded, “survive for long if it is something hateful and evil for the best within – and without – it?”<sup>23</sup> This is a theme to which Afrikaner intellectuals in the 1970s (and beyond) would return again and again.

There are shades here of Malan’s Christian aphorism, “when we lose, we win”, but with a much deeper (more Greek) sense of tragedy. “Even against power”, wrote Louw, “reasonableness (*redelikheid*) must be preserved, and precisely against power at its most irresistible reasonableness must be most strongly maintained (*gehandhaaf*) ... because to go under with *humanity (menslik)* is better than simply to go under”.<sup>24</sup> There is no hint here of Meyer’s “fixed path to which God has called us”. Louw’s world was much more in flux. There were no divine guarantees for *his* small People, despite a hint of Doctor D.F. Malan’s promise of resurrection through suffering, the dark night of the soul.

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18 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 458

19 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 455

20 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 460

21 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 502 See: Moodie, *Rise of Afrikanerdom*, pp 65-67

22 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 462

23 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 463

24 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 509

Theoretically, Louw was enough of a Platonist to believe that there is *truth* out there. Indeed, he insisted he was not a relativist at heart. How could he be, with his commitment to beauty and justice? Indeed, in the 1930s, he expounded an aristocratic ideal, in the artistic sphere, but also in society, a ranking of commitment and ability. Practice, he came to see, particularly political practice, however, was another matter. Here democracy worked best, he was saying in 1952. How is it possible to know a community, he asked:

The chaotic whirling of a great cohabitation: life-cycle (*lewenskring*) after life-cycle interbreeding and crossing over and thrown down together – an area of study of which the sociologist knows that he sees only mountain-tops sticking out above the mist; the primeval jungle of millions of individual struggles, ideals, deviations, in which the psychologist can hack only one or two paths; the struggle over values, value judgments, which give every humble philosopher bitter knowledge of his own limitations. Even more vexing; this chaos does not stand still and wait for our calm study. It is dragged along in *time*. Or better: it rumbles into the future with its own demonic inner power<sup>25</sup>

No wonder many concluded that the consequences for big decisions should be taken out of the hands of the ignorant masses and taken over by a smaller elite better able to judge. Louw himself had implied the same in some of his earlier writings. Now contrariwise, he asserted:

*No person and no group* can truly see through the chaos of a large community and make proper decisions on its behalf; human partiality and murky insight clings to everyone – even the greatest spirits. Precisely because all knowledge and insight is relative and one-sided, the elite must eternally be pulled by the dull demands, the confused but different insights of the masses. Every human insight needs a corrective; and in the totalitarian state the insight of the dictator or dominant group never gets its necessary corrective<sup>26</sup>

Hence Louw insisted on the importance of democracy, especially of open polemical struggle, of public argument, of ongoing debate (*oop gesprek*).

He was opposed to simple majority rule, which is itself, he said, a form of dictatorship by the masses. Instead, he advocated majority rule within a framework of checks and balances (*remmende faktore*) such as “a free press; party politics; established rights for subordinate bodies: provinces, municipalities, individual persons; an independent judiciary and relatively entrenched written laws”.<sup>27</sup> Compared to the supposed efficiency of totalitarianism, he wrote,

democracy is more reasonable and humane. It accepts stupidity as one of our traits and has its own heavy sort of patience with it. It thus moves more sluggishly, but with a minimum of force; and it can afford to smile at our endeavours. It believes that human efforts must go slowly; is perhaps a little sceptical of all utopias<sup>28</sup>

Louw shared a distaste for unsavoury party politics. Nonetheless, it was necessary for democracy. “The value of parties in a democracy”, he said, “lies not in their *purity*, but in their *existence*; the fact that they can stand against one another; in the fact that each thought can get corrected, however crudely ... The bare existence of more than one party gives to political life in a democracy something of a dull

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25 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 484

26 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 485

27 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 488

28 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 489

reasonableness (*redelikheid*): the possibility of an open debate before the People; the setting points of view against one another”.<sup>29</sup> In the final analysis, for Louw, the “spiritual blood circulation” of any body of People was “open discussion (*oop gesprek*) both within and between Peoples”. “South Africa”, he concluded as early as 1951, “is only officially a bilingual country; in truth it is multilingual”.<sup>30</sup> English-speaking and Afrikaner alike “hear” little of what is said in the Bantu languages, however. Here reciprocal communication simply failed to take place. This article repeatedly returns to that same crucial point.

Despite his commitment to discussion, Louw did recognise that political *decisions* make a difference to human lives. Nor was it always a good difference. He was quite clear about this:

Political measures which strike globally on people [in groups, statuses, organisations] impinge on [the inexpressible individuality of each person] The politician makes a law: he brings a little more or a little less food on many separate tables; and thereby gives a turn – however small – to many, hundreds of thousands of small human dignities He signs, in a time of crisis, another piece of paper – and millions who have not even heard his name must die It is good to remember: laws, social measures, cannot be other than general; but their outcomes are *concrete*.<sup>31</sup>

Administrative decisions have profound effects. Van Wyk Louw was always keenly alert to the human impact of ideas and actions, deeds and decisions.

Van Wyk Louw was a devoted nationalist. He was deeply committed to an evolving interpretation of Afrikaner sacred history and to creative use of the Afrikaans language – indeed, to the survival of the Afrikaner People. For our purposes, however, he made three important points that would be picked up by Afrikaner intellectuals and politicians committed to reinterpretation of the civil religion. They were as follows: firstly, Afrikaner survival must be earned by inhabiting the local ethnic context, but transmuting it to create genuinely moving insights into the human condition; secondly, ethnic survival without just relations with other neighbouring cultures is empty (ultimately for him this amounted to a proclamation of the necessity for separate, but equal development); and thirdly, both insight and justice are best served by open discussion guaranteed by checks and balances.

These are very general guidelines. They could be, and were, used in very different ways by Afrikaner intellectuals, politicians, and church and cultural leaders. How could one ensure both survival and justice, for instance, and what did “justice” imply in South Africa anyway? What does ethnic “survival” mean? What sorts of checks and balances made the best sense in Afrikaners’ own South African context? What were the implications of a single ethnic group having captured the state? Indeed, to what extent did the changing South African social and economic context set limits and create opportunities for Afrikaners?

One further point is perhaps worth making here. The debates about practical politics and moral ideas largely took place among Afrikaners. “Open discussion” amongst Afrikaners usually (but not in every case) excluded English-speaking whites

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29 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 490

30 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, pp 415-418

31 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, p 481

and Afrikaans speakers of colour, and almost entirely excluded open and equal discussion with black Africans. As a result, black South Africans could make themselves heard only through protest. Such protests could be read in different ways – and were – but there was no open debate. Protest confronted power and Afrikaners debated intensely *among themselves* what it all meant with next to no *open* conversation across the fences set up by those in power. Indeed, the effects of apartheid physically impeded dialogue – and progressively so. As we shall see, however, open discussion, even amongst Afrikaners, was sometimes simply silenced – especially during the Verwoerd years.

### The “coloured” question

With characteristic insight and aplomb, Van Wyk Louw was one of the first Afrikaner intellectuals to publically suggest the notion of “separate development” as a policy to accommodate the existence of all the Peoples of South Africa with justice. He argued in 1946 that liberal demands for justice threatened the survival of Afrikaner ethnicity. Liberal demands for individual rights could be realised only “over the dead body of the entire [Afrikaner] People”. The only alternative, he wrote, would be “the separate development of the different groups – with as final goal something other than the current centralized Union”. The ethical impasse between national and individual rights came down “in practical terms in South Africa to a balance of forces between the numbers of the blacks (he writes “natives”) and the cultural, economic and military preponderance of the whites (especially Afrikaners)”. Louw concluded:

The task of liberal thought in South Africa is to develop a policy for the future that remains true to the great European liberal principles but demands that there be no injustice in our multi-national state; perhaps indeed the construction of a form of state unknown in Europe – if it comes to that, the total transformation of the artificial South African “Union”<sup>32</sup>

This argument or something very like it was the logical and moral basis for Verwoerd’s announcement early in his premiership that independent African homelands were to be established.

In the conclusion to my book I use the parliamentary speeches of Daan de Wet Nel to demonstrate the direct intellectual heritage of the Afrikaner’s own ethnic struggle in the proclamation by Verwoerd of Bantustan “independence”. I also try to point up the tension in Verwoerd’s thought and practice between racism and cultural pluralism. There is no more than the slightest trace of racism in any of Van Wyk Louw’s voluminous writings.<sup>33</sup> This is not true, however, for NG Church leaders who originally developed the idea of separate development, making frequent submissions to the Union Party government even before 1948 (consistently obsessed

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32 Louw, *Versamelde Prosa I*, pp 505-506 M Sanders, *Complicities: The intellectual and apartheid* (Duke University Press, Durham, 2002), pp 82-87, discusses lectures Louw gave in Amsterdam in 1952 that develop essentially the same theme

33 I take issue here with Sanders, *Complicities*, whose elision of Van Wyk Louw with Geoff Cronjé is too facile One should note, however, that Louw who was from the Cape, expressed concern about African (he said “black”) encroachment in that area Sanders reads this as “racist”, despite Louw’s embracing of so-called “coloured” (*bruin mense*) If so, this indeed is a peculiarly selective and “Cape-based” racism As we shall see, it was rejected by racist popular opinion even in the Cape

with the need to forbid racially mixed marriages) for both the racial principles of apartheid and the cultural necessity for separate development.<sup>34</sup>

It is from this church concern for cultural (and racial) separation that SABRA was formed by the Afrikaner Broederbond in the late 1940s as a counter to the liberal Institute of Race Relations. SABRA's purpose was to investigate the practical possibilities of separate development as an alternative moral ideal. The Tomlinson Commission was a creature of SABRA's efforts to give practical implementation to separate development. As it turned out, the commission insisted that "survival with justice" along ethnic lines was going to be a costly affair if it could be realised at all. National Party control of South Africa was still tenuous and, as Minister of Native Affairs, Verwoerd seems to have calculated that it was a price white voters would not be willing to pay. That did not stop him adopting "separate development" ideology, however. Nor did it stop a burst of missionary activity *within* South Africa and amongst the various "separate African cultures" by evangelicals in the NG Church – with Verwoerd's personal support.

Verwoerd's mind seems to have operated at two levels; a political and pragmatic racial level, and a moral and theoretical level.<sup>35</sup> Thus, he oversaw one of the most ambitious township construction projects for Africans in South African history, while at the same time convincing himself that African urbanization could be stopped in its tracks. While not racist in his personal behaviour, he flatly refused to compromise the deeply discriminatory racial assumptions of "petty" apartheid in pursuing the cultural goals of "grand" apartheid.<sup>36</sup> At the same time that he constructed a massive empire – a state within a state based entirely on authoritarian rule justified by cultural assumptions – in the Department of Bantu Affairs, he pandered unashamedly to popular white assumptions of racial superiority. Immensely intelligent, he comes across as a combination of administrative competence, theoretical rigor and moral self-righteousness, based on premises that shifted, apparently seamlessly, from culture to race, depending on the context and the level of application. In theory, for Verwoerd, cultural assumptions were central, in practice, race trumped culture at every turn. One could argue that core disagreements amongst those who shared his inheritance centred on whether the power of the Afrikaner state should be focused on racial or cultural differences. One key to this focus, it seems to me, was always to be found in how one addressed the question of Afrikaans-speaking "coloured" People.<sup>37</sup>

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34 JHP Serfontein, *Apartheid, Change and the NG Kerk* (Taurus, Emmerentia, 1982), pp 260-269 The Afrikaner Broederbond in the northern provinces was also partly to such racial concerns In *Rise of Afrikanerdom*, I identify this group with Geoff Cronjé (p 275) For church involvement in the development of apartheid theory, see also H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, 2003), pp 454-464 He also discusses Van Wyk Louw on pp 472-474

35 In a different context, Piet Cillié once noted that Verwoerd had "two brains" operating independently of one another See: JC Steyn, *Penvegter: Piet Cillié van die Burger* (Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 2002), p 123

36 For an account of Piet Cillié's support for "large" apartheid (separate development), but his attack on "small" apartheid (petty racial discrimination that simply became ammunition for South Africa's enemies, was inessential for separate development or simply transgressed sound common sense) – aimed directly at Verwoerd – see: Steyn, *Penvegter*, pp 124-127 Cillié had the support of Willem van Heerden, editor of *Dagbreek en Sondagnuus*, in this particular brouhaha For the standard "thin end of the wedge" response, see A P Treurnicht, *Credo van 'n Afrikaner* (Kaapstad, Tafelberg, 1975), pp 21-24

37 An additional important indicator, although less certain because of its practical implications – and because they mostly spoke English – was the question of urban blacks

As an example of both of Verwoerd's style of government and his ideological ambiguity, then, we may consider his confrontation with the Cape Broederbond and Nasionale Pers on the question of "coloured" representation in Parliament, which tends to get personalised as a confrontation with Piet Cillié, editor of *Die Burger*. Other typical examples might include his confrontation with SABRA on the Tomlinson Commission Report – personalised as a confrontation with Nic Olivier<sup>38</sup> – or with the NG Church on Cottesloe – personalised as a confrontation with Beyers Naude.<sup>39</sup>

The tension between race and culture in separate development theory and practice is perhaps most clearly exemplified by the example of the Afrikaner squabble over "coloured" policy, however. Afrikaans-speaking, Dutch Reformed, sharing common everyday cultural practices, "brown People" were culturally Afrikaner. They even shared many aspects of the Afrikaner sacred history. In the words of D.P. Botha:

They fought alongside us, as members of the militia, as associates on the borders, as allies against Mzilikazi, as confidants at Blood River They were fellow creators of our language and fellow educators of our children They were our playmates in our youth and caregivers in our old age They suffered together with us Their blood flowed for our communal freedom ideal They were cut down with us: more than two hundred by the Zulus at Bloukrans; at Hloma Amabutha the bones of thirty of them lie buried in one grave with the bones of Piet Retief and his seventy When we needed them, they were with us, even to the death<sup>40</sup>

Despite this common history, "brown People" were increasingly alienated from their white Afrikaner culture-mates. On *Geloftedag* (Day of the Vow) 1949, for instance, while thousands of white Afrikaners were celebrating the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument, the "coloured" Dutch Reformed Church called for a day of prayer "to be freed from the trials of apartheid". The next day, 900 people attended a gathering at the Cape Town City Hall at which apartheid was excoriated.<sup>41</sup> The timing was intended to convey rejection of the racial implications of the Afrikaner civil religion.

National Party efforts to remove "coloured" voters from the voters' roll in the Cape after 1948, were initially inspired by a fear that their participation might threaten the NP's narrow election victory. At about the same time, the Appeal Court threw out the disenfranchisement motion because it did not have two-thirds support, it became clear to supporters of the Cape National Party that "coloured" voters did not in fact pose a threat.<sup>42</sup> It was Malan's resignation and Strijdom's election that provided the incentive to enlarge the Senate and thus push through the disenfranchisement bill. Cape Nationalists were slightly embarrassed by the sleight of hand this implied.

38 For the decimation of SABRA and the attack on Nic Olivier, see John Lazar's paper in P Bonner, P Delius and D Posel, *Apartheid's Genesis* (Ravan, Braamfontein, 2003) and P Hugo (ed), *South African Perspectives: Essays in Honour of Nic Olivier* (Die Suid Afrikaan, Pretoria, 1989), pp 3-48 As with the "coloured" question, Van Wyk Louw also weighed in briefly on Tomlinson – *Versamelde Prosa II* (Human & Rousseau, Kaapstad, 1986), pp 589-594

39 There are innumerable accounts of this affair See, for example: P Walshe, *Church versus State in South Africa* (Orbis, Maryknoll, 1983); A H Luckhoff, *Cottesloe* (Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 1978) Because Verwoerd made overt use of the Afrikaner Broederbond, every expose of the Afrikaner Broederbond makes much of it

40 D P Botha, *Die Opkoms van ons Derde Stand* (Human & Rousseau, Kaapstad, 1960), p xv

41 Steyn, *Penvegter*, p 64

42 Steyn, *Penvegter*, p 75

The Sharpeville massacre in early 1960 and the march on Parliament in Cape Town elicited great concern in Afrikaner intellectual circles. The fact that “coloureds” refused to participate in the unrest was noted with approval in Cape Broederbond and SABRA circles. Cape Afrikaner intellectuals embarked on a movement to grant political rights to “coloured” People – to have “brown People representing brown People on Parliament”.<sup>43</sup> At a Broederbond meeting in Cape Town in April 1960, Verwoerd was distinctly cool to the idea, arguing that there could be no turning back on the path to racial separation. Writing in his political column, Piet Cillie nonetheless floated the idea for “general consideration”. It was his impression, he said, “that the National Party was already more than half-way to supporting the principle [of “coloureds” in Parliament representing “coloureds”]. With strong leadership the Party could be completely won over”.<sup>44</sup>

D.P. Botha, the NG coloured mission church minister, had already written a letter to the paper, arguing “that it would be no capitulation to acknowledge that brown People are an organic part of the Afrikaner People”. “That would be no repudiation of identity”, he insisted.<sup>45</sup> At the Cape, intense interracial discussions between representatives of “white and brown” occurred. Phil Weber, the managing director of *Die Burger* wrote to Verwoerd on 26 August 1960 to reassure him about the ferment of thought that was happening in the Western Cape – especially in the Broederbond. “Here and there”, he wrote, “there is talk of ‘a genuine movement in coloured policy’ and it is hoped that the country can get away from job reservation, the Immorality Act, apartheid rules in post offices, and so on”.

Verwoerd was alarmed. He had no objection, he replied to Weber, to people sharing ideas in limited circles, but he “worried that our friends will do our People’s cause harm ... by seeking broader publicity for their ideas too quickly or at the wrong time”. He added that direct representation of “brown People” could only cause trouble – concessions would simply lead to more demands. Weber shared Verwoerd’s letter at the next Cape Town Broederbond meeting.<sup>46</sup>

After the success of the republican referendum in 1960, Verwoerd had begun to make overtures to English-speaking South Africans. After all, despite the long Afrikaner cultural struggle against British imperialism, Afrikaner ideals had finally been realised. With the achievement of this final Afrikaner political goal sealing Afrikaner power, the time seemed to be on hand, Verwoerd implied, for Afrikaners to join hands with English-speaking South Africans in a common South African citizenship. His efforts at rapprochement with the English had engendered hostility from culturally committed Afrikaners such as Albert Hertzog and other unreconstructed Christian Nationalists, however. Albert Hertzog also eschewed those in the Cape National Party who thought that “coloureds” should be included in such reconciliatory moves. Indeed, in terms of Van Wyk Louw’s nationalist logic, Cape Broederbonders argued, they had prior claim.

In October 1960, D.P. Botha’s book, *Die Opkoms van ons Derde Stand*, appeared, with a foreword by Van Wyk Louw. Louw, who had grown up in the

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43 Steyn, *Penvegter*, p 143

44 L. Louw (ed), *Dawie 1946-1964* (Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 1965), pp 182-183

45 Steyn, *Penvegter*, p 144

46 Steyn, *Penvegter*, p 145

Karoo, did not know Piet Cillié well. He had returned from the Netherlands to take a chair at Wits, so he was not in the Cape Broederbond circle, but he shared their most adventurous ideas and argued them passionately in the Emmerentia Broederbond circle (which included Piet Meyer). The cultural logic of separate development should not be applied to “coloured” People, Louw wrote: “The brown People are our People, they belong with us ... I have a sincere desire – no, a passionate *will* – that my People, white and brown, and the language we speak, survive in this land ... In a wider context, I am concerned about all who represent *human* values in this country”. One hears committed Afrikaner and South African nationalists spontaneously saying, he wrote: “We have acted wrongly against the brown People; we have neglected, and indeed repulsed them; we must make right the wrongs that were done ... Our leaders must take care to remain *au faix* with this turn in ethnic feeling; otherwise a wretched estrangement will ensue”.<sup>47</sup>

Verwoerd was livid. Racial apartheid was at stake, he said. Representation of brown People by their own in the white parliament would ultimately lead to racial integration – indeed, “biological assimilation”. “I am not going down in history as the man who led the Afrikaner People to bastardisation”, he told his wife. The racial foundations of his conception of Afrikanerdom came adamantly to the fore. “The Government and the leaders must stand like walls of granite. The survival of a People is at stake”, he declared with implacable insistence.<sup>48</sup> Cape Afrikaner intellectuals were shocked at the flat bleakness of Verwoerd’s announcement. Opperman, the poet, wrote to a friend in Holland, that “all of Stellenbosch (the university) is strongly opposed to Verwoerd”. M.E. Rothman wrote of “strong and wide dismay amongst Nationalists ... even in such a conservative place as Swellendam”.<sup>49</sup> Verwoerd nonetheless elicited unanimous support from the Cabinet – against the grain of ministers such as Dönges, Paul Sauer and P.W. Botha. Letters to the editor of *Die Burger* came in overwhelmingly, and often crudely, in favour of Verwoerd’s appeal to racial attitudes.

Cillié was unrepentant. He warned publicly against a “heresy hunt” against Nationalists who had supported the idea of “coloured” inclusion:

The people who are sympathetic to the idea of direct representation for the “coloureds” are a minority in the Afrikaner ranks, but they are not a small number. They are also not unimportant. Some of them have reached their position through deep thought and much remorse, some also through prayer. We may overrule and reject their ideas because we believe them not to be practical politics; but if we begin to abuse them as liberals, integrationists and supporters of “biological integration” – the hideous new euphemism for bastardization – then it will begin to be the end of our National Party.<sup>50</sup>

Besides, he added in an editorial, Verwoerd’s position was not official National Party policy. The official party line was simply that “coloureds” should be represented by whites in Parliament. That could be subject to change or reform in changed circumstances “without it exposing anyone to automatic condemnation for treachery against Nationalist rule, the National Party or the white race”.<sup>51</sup>

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47 Botha, *Opkoms*, pp v-vi

48 J.J. van Rooyen, *Ons Politiek van Naby* (Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 1971), p 103

49 Steyn, *Penvegter*, p 148

50 Louw, *Dawie*, p 199

51 Steyn, *Penvegter*, p 153

Verwoerd could not let this appeal pass. It did not help that the Cottesloe declaration intervened at this point, insisting there could be no Biblical justification for apartheid. Verwoerd mobilised the full power of Afrikaner Broederbond connections on both fronts; in the church and in the party. All the NG provincial church synods rejected the Cottesloe declaration that apartheid could not be biblically justified. On 21 January 1961, the Federal Council of the National Party unanimously and flatly denied as a matter of principle that “coloureds” could be represented by “coloureds” in Parliament. As Phil Weber noted in his diary at the time, however, the moral dilemma remained: “Coloureds have no homeland and restrictions on them ultimately mean repression”.<sup>52</sup>

The entire business disgusted Piet Cillié. He felt that Verwoerd had had an opportunity to display true moral leadership on the issue. Impractical and impolitic as the idea of “coloured” representation might have been, given racial feelings in the Afrikaner rank and file, Verwoerd could nonetheless have engaged in “open discussion” (to use Van Wyk Louw’s terms) that would have led to further debate. Ordinary Afrikaners could have been educated in a way that would have left the door open for future decisions on the matter. Instead, Verwoerd had acted with crass, arrogant and overweening racism. On 13 December 1961, Cillié wrote to Phil Weber:

The past two weeks have been my most difficult since I have been at *Die Burger*, and it was bitterly difficult to suppress my rage and indignation about what that man has done to our Afrikaner People, and my fear of what he can still do. You can see in the letters (to the editor) what hottentot-hate, dominee-hate, professor-hate and bourgeois-hate he released. He called up the Neanderthaler in our People against everything intelligent and searching, using the classical recipe by which a tyrant makes his power absolute by leading the rabble against their acknowledged leaders in every life arena. I wonder if he is proud of the intellectual quality of the support he has obtained.<sup>53</sup>

Verwoerd had enlisted the Broederbond to close down debate in Afrikaner circles. Race trumped culture and party politics overruled moral dissent in the Afrikaner churches after Cottesloe (despite editorial support for the dissidents from Cillié), in SABRA on serious development in the black homelands, and, as we have seen, in regard to the “coloured” question.

Piet Cillié remained a nationalist, engaging in loyal opposition (as did Van Wyk Louw – unlike Nic Olivier and Beyers Naude). His writing after 1960 was more tempered and he repaired some bridges with Verwoerd. *Die Burger* was remarkably restrained on the draconian forced removals in the Cape for example. Cillié always believed that law and order had to take precedence over the struggle for justice. He ended 1960 on a rather sad note, however, referring to “two inclinations struggling for the upper hand in the bosom of our People”:

The one is the inclination which was seen at its best before the republican vote (*die volkstemming*): the inclination to greatness, toward a new approach to our questions, to understanding of other ethnic groups; away from bare self preservation in its sole sense; away from the inherent drive to live for ourselves alone. It is the adventurous drive again to make our existence in South Africa meaningful for others (and therefore also for ourselves), despite the risks. It is a drive towards the light, searching and hesitant and sometimes naïve, but unmistakably *good*, in the truly religious sense of the word. Then there is the alternative inclination: the inclination of “we alone and to the moon with the rest!” This is the drive to grow back into ourselves, back to our bitterness and

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52 Steyn, *Penvegter*, p 179

53 Steyn, *Penvegter*, p 155

sourness, back to the delusory safety of proven old emotions and attitudes. This drive is, different from the other, strong, clear and decisive – and in its deepest being *evil*, again in the true, religious sense of the word. But don't think of this as a struggle only between persons. This is a struggle in our own hearts; because every Afrikaner worthy of the name, carries those two inclinations in himself: the hankering after the apparently safe stuffiness of our untempered selves against the drive to the freedom and light which alone can bring service and sacrifice.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, in Cillié's later writing, this note of two potentials for Afrikanerdom – the inner-looking and the outer-looking – became something of a refrain, often with examples from Afrikaner history (including the history of *samesmelting* as well as the Anglo-Boer war).<sup>55</sup> In many ways, for Cillié, who refused religious belief, the struggle for freedom was the aspect of the Afrikaner civil religion with which he most fully concurred. Van Wyk Louw's notion of survival in justice took political form for Cillié in the idea of "survival with freedom for all".

We may conclude this discussion of Cillié by glancing at an essay he wrote in 1963, summarising the historical and political principles of his nationalism. He starts with the Anglo-Boer War:

The seeds of the entire anti-colonial case are already to be found in the Republic's struggle for freedom against the greatest imperial power of their time. We rejected domination of ourselves, but we did not find our own domination of other Peoples equally unacceptable. We acquiesced when our topmost political leaders spoke openly of a policy of "*baasskap*" and "permanent domination" and today we acquiesce in the absorption of masses of black workers into our industrial economy without the least plan to give them extended political rights in accordance with their extended economic power. These are colonial attitudes, and they stand judged, not only in the eyes of a hostile world, but also by our own best Afrikaner principles.<sup>56</sup>

What then can the answer be? Not, Cillié wrote, the liberal idea of integration. His worry was not the race of black South Africans, but their sheer numbers. For most Afrikaners "integration of the black majority has the appearance, not of a broadening of democracy but rather of an insidious and irrevocable foreign conquest". What then should be done? Cillié's response was the standard argument for separate development with one interesting wrinkle:

If we want to remain a free nation in the world, we must strive for greater independence in regard to labour in our own national area. We must draw lines on the map and say to ourselves and the world: This is the area of the non-black People of South Africa which in no circumstances will be given over to black domination; and this, on the other side, is the homelands of the Bantu Peoples which can find their own free existence.<sup>57</sup>

Of course, he added "the black areas must be large and sustainable enough to satisfy ourselves and the rest of the world that we are not engaging in charlatanry". By the "non-black Peoples", Cillié wrote, he meant white People, brown People and South African Indians. Blacks could obtain their freedom by separation, but there could be no simple provision of separate freedoms for the "brown minorities". Somehow, he wrote "the non-black minorities, the brown sections, would have to be

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54 Louw, *Dawie*, p 206

55 See especially Chapter 3 in Piet Cillié, *Baanbrekers vir Vryheid* (Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 1990)

56 Cillié, *Baanbrekers*, pp 2-3

57 Cillié, *Baanbrekers*, pp 7-9. See also Van Wyk Louw in Botha, *Opkoms*, p vii

connected to our own nationhood in a manner that cannot be seen as permanent subordination”.<sup>58</sup>

The question of the *Afrikanerskap* of “our brown People” became the logical and ethical Achilles heel of the entire policy of ethnic separate development (along with the question of urban Africans as rapprochement with English-speaking white South Africans got under way). There was no way of getting around it if culture were the basis for political rights. It seems that Verwoerd himself was aware of this. In the middle 1960s, when the South African legal team was defending separate development on grounds of culture as a policy for South West Africa before the International Court in The Hague, they felt they could make a strong case that South Africa was helping the Ovambos, Hereros and so on on a road to independence. They asked Verwoerd (who was working closely with them): “But what about the “coloured” People; they speak our language and share our culture, what logical reason can we supply for them?” Verwoerd said that there was no logical reason. What then?, they asked. “Verwoerd paused for a moment and then he answered: “Eventually the ‘coloured’ will have to find his political future with the whites. But the time is not yet right”.<sup>59</sup>

So Verwoerd eventually acknowledged (at least in private) that Cillié was correct. In that case, Cillié was also right that the debate about “coloured” representation was truly a lost opportunity to establish a genuinely moral basis for separate development. If Verwoerd had conceded the point, even at a theoretical level, the cultural aspects of the policy would have been more defensible down the road. Perhaps Verwoerd was correct politically in the short term, given the racial attitudes of most of the white population at the time, but Verwoerd made no effort to educate his white supporters. Instead, he bludgeoned the Cape Broederbond into silence with adamantly racist arguments. Meanwhile, the policies of forced removal, the devastation of District Six, the international embarrassment of charges under the Immorality Act, and the humiliation of “coloured” cultural, social and political leaders continued unabated. Even revelations of wide-spread economic and social misery by the Theron Commission in the 1970s did nothing immediately to alter the policy of racial separation for the “coloured” People. Claims to rights of citizenship rested firmly on racial rather than cultural foundations. Whatever moral claims might be made for separate freedoms, as long as “coloured” People were excluded from Afrikanerdom, separate development remained apartheid.

### Dangers of “English” liberalism

On the cultural front, however, Verwoerd *was* willing to temporize along *racial* lines. After the formation of the Republic, he extended an olive branch to English-speaking white South Africans. Some Afrikaners, firm believers in the Christian National version of the civil religion, were perturbed. Foremost among them was Albert Hertzog, champion of the Afrikaner working class, who had broken with his

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58 Cillié, *Baanbrekers*, p 10 Cillié did concede in his evidence to the World Court, however [See: W Verwoerd, *Verwoerd: So onthou ons hom* (Protea Boekhandel, Pretoria, 2001), p 143] that if black immigration to the cities could not be turned around by the middle 1970s, Afrikaners would have to think again. In a talk in 1982, he did in fact concede that such rethinking was having to take place (Cillié, *Baanbrekers*, pp 41-44)

59 Verwoerd, *Verwoerd*, p 132

father over *samesmelting* and was quite unwilling to abandon Afrikaner separatism now. Piet Meyer, who had had his differences with Verwoerd during the war years, was another who had his doubts about rapprochement with “the English”, as indeed did the dominating NG minister, Koot Vorster. New, younger doubters, like Jaap Marais and Louis Stofberg were lurking in the wings as well.

Verwoerd’s moves to include English-speakers in the National Party government were suspect in such anti-communist, Christian National circles. When, in 1966, Verwoerd was assassinated, he was succeeded by John Vorster (Koot’s brother), who, along with his security chief, H.J. van den Bergh, had been instrumental in destroying resistance to apartheid after 1960. Vorster continued to be vehemently anti-communist like his brother, Koot, but more and more he came to argue that the anti-communist struggle necessitated the acceptance of English-speaking South Africans into the “South African nation”. His appeal was explicitly racial. “The point at issue is one’s faith in the policy of separate development, one’s faith in the survival of the White man here in South Africa”, he said in a famous speech at Heilbron in August 1968, “from the ranks of the people who believe thus – Afrikaans and English-speaking alike – a nation will be built”. Vorster did, however, make a careful distinction between “the concept of Afrikaner People on the one hand and South African nation on the other”. Such language harks back to the old General Hertzog’s setting of civic attachments to white South Africa over against primordial, cultural commitments, although Vorster was careful to add that “my co-operation with the English-speaking Nationalist does not require me to give up my Afrikaner identity”.<sup>60</sup>

Vorster must have expected that there would be an “Afrikaner” reaction to this speech, for he added a pox on chauvinists from either direction and in the same speech stated: “I am aware that what hinders the building of the South Africa nation is a bunch of jingoos on the one hand ... and on the other hand we now suddenly have a group of super-Afrikaners. Then there are a group of people sitting on the fence ... A time will come when I shall make it possible for them to make a choice”. In Parliament in April 1969, Albert Hertzog (already dismissed from the cabinet), forced the choice by making a speech in which he contrasted Afrikaans speakers with their Calvinist inclinations, and English speakers with their liberal worldview. He added that “only a man saturated with Calvinism will be able to withstand the attack against White rule in Africa”. English-language newspapers were outraged that Hertzog had cast aspersions on their racist integrity. From thence there was a determined effort to rid the National Party of Hertzog. Eventually Hertzog founded the *Herstigste Nasionale Party* (HNP). Ensuring racial power at the cost of Afrikaner Christian and Calvinist integrity, was simply not acceptable to Hertzog and his small band of committed followers.<sup>61</sup>

It has become something of a truism that in the period from 1950 to 1965, National Party rule had guaranteed the embourgeoisment of Afrikaans-speaking white

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60 O Geysler, *B.J. Vorster: Select Speeches* (Institute for Contemporary History, Bloemfontein, 1977), pp 102-103 It is surely not insignificant that these speeches were published in English translation

61 For complex detail on these events, see B M Schoeman, *Vorster se 1000 Dae* (Human & Rousseau, Kaapstad, 1974) Discussion of Hertzog’s “Calvinism” speech may be found on p 225

South Africans. According to O'Meara, "between 1946 and 1960 Afrikaners had moved massively into three distinct social categories: professional, managerial and executive (the upper middle class); clerical, sales and administrative (the middle to lower levels of the middle class); and skilled and supervisory workers (and away from manual labour)".<sup>62</sup> While this is certainly the case, Afrikaner wealth was nonetheless institutionally segregated (in the state and Afrikaner enterprises) and residentially and educationally separated from that of white English-speaking South Africans. While the Broederbond may have become increasingly "bourgeois" (it began to include substantial numbers of businessmen and state employees – especially policemen) and less and less independent of the National Party, it nonetheless remained an exclusively Afrikaner organisation, chaired by Piet Meyer and led with his Christian National zeal.<sup>63</sup> While embourgeoisment may have exerted certain pressures and set distinct limits for Afrikaner nationalists, arguments within the Broederbond centred on what I call civil religious issues buttressed by neo-Kuyperian and *volkskerk* ideological assumptions about a sacred history and an ethnic calling.

Increasingly, however, concerns about ethnic survival for the Afrikaner People had indeed shifted from the cultural threat of Anglicization to the perceived dangers of racial integration. Despite the prosperity of the 1960s, Van Wyk Louw's fears for the cultural (and for many of them, racial) survival of his "small People" continued to haunt Afrikaner intellectuals. "Separate development" remained the favoured solution, with the question of the "coloureds" (and, increasingly, Indians) as a point of division, largely, but not entirely, between the Cape and the Transvaal.

#### Intellectual ferment in the 1970s

On the political front in 1969, Vorster called an early election in which the National Party annihilated Hertzog's HNP. HNP supporters were eventually expelled from the Afrikaner Broederbond as well. Having finally settled with the "Hertzog group", Vorster settled down to govern the country. More generally, to oversimplify the practical complexities of the political and economic situation, one can argue that since the days of Malan and Strijdom, nationalist leaders, including Verwoerd, Vorster and Botha, each developed styles of governance appropriated from their different prior departmental power bases. Verwoerd moved from his authoritarian domination of "Bantu Affairs" to his rule of the entire country.<sup>64</sup> Verwoerd also had a solid base in the *kultuurpolitiek* of the Afrikaner Broederbond. This was less true of Vorster. Piet Meyer notes somewhat disparagingly in his autobiography that Vorster's political leadership did not, like that of his predecessors, emerge from institutionalized Afrikaner *cultural* life, but rather directly from the nationalist *political* struggle; *partypolitiek* rather than *kultuurpolitiek*.<sup>65</sup>

When Vorster came to power, he told his cabinet colleagues that he could not think for them all as Verwoerd had done. Ministers in powerful departments under Vorster had an astonishingly large degree of freedom to run their own fiefdoms. They cleared initiatives with Vorster himself, but the cabinet was often kept completely in

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62 D O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years: The apartheid state and the politics of the National Party, 1948-1994* (Ravan, Randburg, 1996), p 137

63 Piet Meyer's final autobiography contains extracts from many of his speeches as Afrikaner Broederbond head

64 Deborah Posel long ago (1991) pointed out the compromises Verwoerd had to make along the way

65 Meyer, *Nie ver genoeg nie*, p 97

the dark. In 1975, for example, South Africa invaded Angola without the cabinet being informed of the matter. Similarly, massive funding for the Department of Information's secret war to conquer world opinion never received full cabinet approval. Van den Bergh, who was never in the cabinet, was much closer to Vorster than any of his cabinet colleagues. While Vorster indulged a personal style of tolerating a wide range of disparate initiatives, the state was essentially rudderless from the point of view of overall policy formation.

What did occur in the 1970s, was interpretive ferment in Afrikaner intellectual circles as core questions about policy piled up without clear resolution. There were deep divisions within the Afrikaner Broederbond itself. Those such as A.P. Treurnicht, clung indomitably to the cultural and racial foundations of Afrikaner Christian Nationalism (despite a rather wavering political path). His newspaper, *Hoofstad*, took a position close to Albert Hertzog's Afrikaner anti-communist Christian Nationalists, but he chose not to join the HNP breakaway. His theoretical line however very closely to that of H.G. Stoker, following Kuyper in affirming a doctrine of common grace that supported the idea of God's sovereignty within separate spheres constituting the ordinances of creation.<sup>66</sup> Peoples are also ordinances of creation with callings of their own under the independent sovereignty of God. To a greater extent than Stoker, however, Treurnicht insisted on divine institutionalisation of racial divisions.

In a book published in 1975, Treurnicht insisted on the biblical foundations of apartheid, pointing to the ethnic implications:

If the Afrikaner, the Christian Afrikaner, can be convinced that there is no principled or Biblical basis for separate development, that is but one step from the conviction that it is unchristian. And if we believe it to be unchristian or immoral, then we are obliged to fight it. One thing is clear. That is that there is a total war being waged against apartheid – economic, industrial, political, religious, and one can also say: sexual and violent, revolutionary. If this onslaught succeeds, the victim – to name but one – will be the *Afrikaner People* – with everything for which it stands.<sup>67</sup>

He proceeded to cite the standard texts of separate development theology.<sup>68</sup> Slow inching by the NG Church towards recognition of the immorality of racial separation was simply ignored by Treurnicht, who argued instead that separate development of African states should not be uncoupled from “negative” or “petty apartheid”. The alternative was a catalogue of horrors which he listed as follows:

If petty apartheid expires, what will be the position? Shall a Xhosa whose country will become independent soon, thereafter enjoy improved status as guest worker, welcome without reservation to our social intercourse, all “discriminatory” practices in the

66 Within the Afrikaner Broederbond, Treurnicht's most important conservative ally was probably Carel Boshoff, who based his Christian National position as much on German missiology as on Kuyper's philosophy. It is perhaps not insignificant that in a talk entitled “Christian Nationalism” in T. Sundermeier, *Church and Nationalism in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1975), pp 91-97, Boshoff begins by citing Van Wyk Louw's critique of chauvinism as the “black angel” of nationalism. Hence the importance of the “Christian” in Christian Nationalism that rescues it from this dark angel.

67 Treurnicht, *Credo*, p 13

68 Genesis 10 & 11 and Acts 17:26. The General Synod of the NG Church had just the year before accepted that these texts did not imply a biblical justification for racial separation – although it was also argued that the Bible did not necessarily condemn racial division as immoral.

Republic having been removed Will he no longer have to ride in a “taxi for non-white persons?” Will he be able to lodge wherever he can find place and cut his capers across the colour line in hopes of marrying a white? Is the intention, as has already been suggested, that we be released from the “folly” of the Immorality Act so that we can bastardize in an adult manner?<sup>69</sup>

In that case, said Treurnicht, to the extent that South Africa accepted immigrants from European countries, Xhosas could also become South African citizens, able to buy land anywhere in the Republic, although whites were forbidden to buy land in the African homelands. Without petty apartheid making distinctions on a personal level, Treurnicht exclaimed dramatically, “an immigrant from the Transkei could become a member of the Republican Parliament, indeed, even Prime Minister”.<sup>70</sup>

In one regard, however, Treurnicht was closer to Vorster’s position than that of Albert Hertzog. Despite his intense commitment to a racially exclusive Afrikaner ethnic culture, developed out of resistance to “British imperial domination”, Treurnicht by 1975 accepted that “the English cultural group” was in the process of forming a South African cultural identity of its own:

To the extent that English-speakers accepted the political position of the Afrikaner and thus lined up with him in one political party, it speaks for itself that the political party’s concern with the narrower cultural life of the Afrikaner ... could not be so partial as to further exclusively typical Afrikaner cultural issues. The party could no longer be an unqualifiedly active champion and action front for Afrikaner ethnic culture (*volkskultuur*) a government made up of Afrikaners cannot further only Afrikaner concerns.<sup>71</sup>

Difficult as he is to pin down, Treurnicht’s thought seems to be moving toward greater tolerance for English-speaking white South Africans, but a firm rejection of any suggestion of compromise on racial separation. Despite his frequently displayed cultural and religious commitments, race trumped culture in every hand Treurnicht played. On questions of race, Treurnicht argued that any shift from the total apartheid program was “liberalism”, the thin end of a wedge that would ultimately lead to racial integration, indeed, black rule and miscegenation – the ultimate iniquity of racist belief.

In 1971, Treurnicht was elected to Parliament. When Piet Meyer retired, Treurnicht became chairman of the Afrikaner Broederbond for a couple of years. There can be little doubt that his thought was representative of a powerful strand of Afrikaner intellectual thought, especially in the Transvaal. Given the racial assumptions of persons such as Treurnicht, it is hardly surprising that the National Party had a hard time coming to terms with the contemporary Black Consciousness (BC) movement, which argued that white racial consciousness necessitated racially unified opposition. Treurnicht’s response in 1975 is hardly very convincing. He argued blandly that “black nationalism” simply could not exist:

“Black” is a sort of superficial common factor which, however, takes no account of the distinctive nationalisms amongst black Peoples, each with their own history, language, lifestyles, struggles, morals and feeling of mutual relationship. We can only warn

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69 Treurnicht, *Credo*, p 23

70 Treurnicht, *Credo*, p 24

71 Treurnicht, *Credo*, p 44

against efforts towards a black polarization and a black politics of federation or unity: it is utterly unrealistic; it is dangerous; it is wishful thinking; it leads to disillusionment and conflict

Contrariwise, for whites, race was the great unifier and a crucial source of power:

If there is one thing that the white man maintains with great resolution, it is his identity and his political sovereignty ... He has no intention of giving up his power to govern or his domination or to share it with any other People – not in a federation nor a partnership nor in one political connection. The white Parliament remains sovereign and it remains white. But that does not necessarily mean that if we grant to other Peoples what we demand for ourselves, they must be given the same political self-determination. We have already placed them on that road. It implies separate Bantu Peoples. Also for the “Coloureds”, who already have their own Parliament with limited powers there is no future except their own nationalism and political self-determination ... The principle is clear: no integration; no political joint control in the Parliament of the whites ... It is a monstrosity when political parties in South Africa call together the representatives of other Peoples to reflect together and delineate policy about the future of the white People.<sup>72</sup>

There is an obvious *non sequitur* here. White racial power (transcending ethnic differences) was both good and necessary, but black racial power was unacceptable (or could be wished away with the pious assurance it was unacceptable to black People themselves).

For a politician, Treurnicht seemed astonishingly unaware of how power works in practice, and he clearly disdained to read BC literature.<sup>73</sup> “Why should it be so desperately necessary”, he wrote at one point, “that the Afrikaner see himself as oppressor when he puts freedom pronouncements (*vryheidsuitsprake*) into the mouths of other population groups?”<sup>74</sup> Nonetheless, he wrote about his own People at one point:

A People which bears youthful creative power ... does not let its thinking be done by others for it. Seeing its visions, dreaming its dreams, treasuring its past, creative thought ahead, the opening of new pathways, cannot be done for it by substitutes or hirelings. Its leaders, its prophets, its educators, economists, creators of language, bearers of culture must come forward from its own ranks. From the People, for the People.<sup>75</sup>

Steve Biko himself might have said the same, rejecting both liberal sympathies and apartheid impositions in the name of black self-sufficiency! Black consciousness, however, responsive to oppression as it was, fairly readily transformed itself into the non-racialism of the ANC. Treurnicht, entrenched as he was in racial “ordinances of creation” and terrified of loss of racial power, was never able to take such a path.

Perhaps one of the great ironies of South African history is that Treurnicht, as Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, presided over a policy (derived actually from Afrikaner Broederbond discussions about threats to the Afrikaans language) insisting that black schools teach half their courses in Afrikaans and half in English, leading directly to South Africa’s Bastille event, the Soweto

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72 Treurnicht, *Credo*, p 60

73 He simply dismissed it as “liberation theology”

74 “Antwoord van dr. A.P. Treurnicht”, in J.J. Degenaar, *Voortbestaan in Geregtheid: Opstelle or die politieke rol van die Afrikaner* (Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 1980), p 59

75 Treurnicht, *Credo*, p 61

uprising of 1976 – inspired to a very considerable extent by BC ideas, as an alternative racial civil religion, in fact.<sup>76</sup>

### Back to Van Wyk Louw: Degenaar’s critique

The most direct attack on Treurnicht’s rather extreme Christian National position on separate development, which in 1975 was probably the majority Afrikaner stance and had changed little since it was developed in the Afrikaner Broederbond in the 1940s, was mounted by Johan Degenaar, Professor of Political Philosophy at Stellenbosch University, who espoused an existentialist version of Christianity and had developed a reputation of beguiling theological students to rethink Christian National orthodoxy.<sup>77</sup> In February 1975, he gave a series of lectures at the University of Cape Town Summer School on Van Wyk Louw. He argued that Louw had moved from aesthetic to ethical nationalism.<sup>78</sup> This shift, Degenaar argued, arose from Louw’s understanding of the new responsibility given to the Afrikaner People through their attainment of political sovereignty. Hence Louw’s suggestion that the country be spatially divided along geographical lines, his support of the Tomlinson Commission and his insistence that “coloured” Afrikaners belonged with the whites. Even if “coloureds” were to be included, however, Degenaar pointed out, English-speaking white South Africans remained a problem for separate development along cultural and language lines. If they were to be accepted because of their common European culture, what of educated urban blacks who had grown up in Christian Western traditions?

Degenaar’s solution was radical. He took on Treurnicht and Christian Nationalist ideology in addition to Van Wyk Louw. Instead of settling for separate development as a resolution of the problem of *voortbestaan in geregtigheid* (continued existence in justice), he argued that the price for maintenance of ethnic identity in a multi-cultural state must necessarily involve sharing political sovereignty. Degenaar was not a liberal individualist. He recognised the social nature of the self. Human being is inconceivable without social networks. But why should such networks be exclusively ethnic? Why should ethnicity not be one of several possible memberships in which human beings might attain their “full humanity”. What, especially, of religious commitments? Christian Nationalism is all very well for those with a *volkskerk* theology, but what if one’s church belonging is at odds with one’s national belonging?

This is the main positive point of Degenaar’s critique of Treurnicht.<sup>79</sup> “Human life can be described in terms of a process of a plurality of identifications”, he wrote, “of which ethnic identification is but one”.<sup>80</sup> Treurnicht’s hierarchical

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76 For essays setting forth black theology as an African civil religion, see M. Mofokeng, *Essays in Black Theology* (Black Theology Project, Braamfontein, 1972). The same essays were published by Westminster Press in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1974 under editorship of B. Moore as *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*.

77 Useful discussions of Degenaar’s intellectual and personal impact at Stellenbosch University may be found in D. Hertzog, E. Britz and A. Henderson, *Gesprek Sonder Grense: Huldigingsbundel ter ere van Johan Degenaar se 80ste verjaarsdag* (H&B Uitgewers, Stellenbosch, 2007).

78 I would argue that this was less a shift than an amplification.

79 Degenaar, *Voortbestaan*, pp 35-64.

80 Degenaar, *Voortbestaan*, p 50.

world in which families fit into communities and communities fit into Peoples and so on “to the ends of the earth”, was just too tidy a conception. “If [Treurnicht] is so eager to spread out his Christian Nationalism to Christian National Xhosa and Christian National English and Christian National Coloureds”, Degenaar argued, “then to be consistent he must be committed also to geographical areas for the English and the Coloureds and boundaries must be set up by God for them to protect their identity to enable them to fulfil their callings”.<sup>81</sup>

Where do states fit in? Are they always congruent with Peoples? Not in South Africa, said Degenaar. The South African state should develop patriotism and loyalty across racial and ethnic lines. This would involve recognising the equal human value of everyone in the common fatherland. He recognised that there might need to be legal structures set up in such a pluralist state to protect ethnic communities and to ensure that everyone would feel at home. There should be normal daily contact established between all citizens, however. Degenaar recognised a world made up of voluntary associations. Ethnicity should also be voluntary, he wrote. People might move back and forth or belong to more than one ethnic community. Civic loyalties might transcend primordial communities without necessarily destroying them.

Degenaar concluded by circling back to Van Wyk Louw’s central argument. “The survival of the Afrikaner People is important to me”, he writes:

But the Afrikaner must choose between bare survival and just survival. The choice for just survival is difficult, and there can be differences about the content of justice. For the Afrikaner it is meanwhile of great importance that he at least chooses a just method of negotiation en route to the ideal of a just society ... The Afrikaner must follow a method of procedural morality en route to substantive morality. Procedural morality is the long and difficult path of negotiation whereby, with diplomacy and compromise, with power of conviction and good arguments, the assent and cooperation of a plurality of ethnic participants may be obtained.<sup>82</sup>

Given eventual political developments, on this point Degenaar seems prescient. In the 1990s, procedural morality did prevail. In 1980, however, he was a distinct outrider amongst Afrikaners, a voice crying in the wilderness. Very few Afrikaners shared his point of view. Those who did, tended to be outlawed by mainstream Afrikaner society.

### **Gerrit Viljoen’s presentation of situational ethics**

Between Treurnicht’s Christian Nationalism and Degenaar’s argument for voluntary ethnic attachment, there was a great gap fixed in which could be placed a range of Afrikaner intellectuals (including, for that matter, Van Wyk Louw himself). “It is my conviction that the identity of a People is constituted through its entire comprehensive culture, its entire fully human spiritual life, and that the unique singularity and irreplaceable value of all aspects of this spiritual life, where it appears, contributes to the justification of such a People’s separate existence”, wrote Gerrit Viljoen in a lecture honouring Van Wyk Louw, in words which clearly represent Louw’s own stance.<sup>83</sup> This was certainly a more exclusive conception of Afrikaner identity than

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81 Degenaar, *Voortbestaan*, p 47

82 Degenaar, *Voortbestaan*, p 64

83 G Viljoen, “Wat is ’n volk? Die aktualiteit van NP van Wyk Louw se riglyne vir die nasionalisme”, in FIJ van Rensburg (ed), *Oopgelate kring: NP van Wyk Louw gedenkskrif 1-11* (Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 1982), p 139

Degenaar's critique of Louw and Treurnicht. During the 1970s, Viljoen, a brilliant classicist who in 1967 had become the first rector of the new Rand Afrikaans University and succeeded Treurnicht as head of the Afrikaner Broederbond, was probably the most cogent representative of such more pragmatic middle-range Afrikaners.<sup>84</sup> His thought, especially in the early 1970s, overlapped with Christian National commitments inherited from the 1940s, but Viljoen used Piet Meyer's Afrikaner conception of "calling" more flexibly than Treurnicht or Meyer himself to urge reform of Afrikaner national policy without departing from its core principles.

Perhaps the best statement of Viljoen's more pragmatic mode of argument may be found in a thoughtful presentation to the Pretoria University Student Christian Association in May, 1972, in which he expounded the situation ethics of Joseph Fletcher and J.B. Robinson, acknowledging the importance of their contribution, and developing his own ethical hermeneutics. He concluded his talk:

God's law in scripture is an historical, time-bound form and cannot be made more general and universal ... But the historical form is nonetheless a revelation or manifestation of a generally accepted religious ground principle contained in God's will which we can then also apply in other instances, however incomplete our effort. Thus Scripture does not offer us the complete concrete individual will of God, but an outline or framework within which a person or community seeks and asks further for God's will as applicable in a specific instance not fully covered in the Scripture.<sup>85</sup>

He applied similar reasoning in applying Christian National Afrikaner values to contemporary situations. Such a hermeneutic gave him substantial interpretive freedom in reading Afrikaner sacred history, enabling Afrikaners to come to terms with modernity without sacrificing their civil religious commitments.

In a speech on Afrikaner identity to the 1970 FAK Congress in Bloemfontein, for instance, he made a distinction between "the character of a People" and their "identity". While the former might change in different historical circumstances, the latter must remain unchanged, he argued:

It would be a good exercise to ask ourselves how the ethnic character (*volkskarakter*) of the Afrikaner today compares with how it was, for example, in 1834, or after the Second War of Freedom in 1902, or in 1937, or after the Second World War in 1945. Yet the identity of the Afrikaner People remained despite these changes in character ... The question that faces us now today is: how far should we hold on to this character, unchanged, and how far may we accept changes in the light of the necessary adaptation of the People to new life circumstances precisely in the interest of self-preservation ... Character must sometimes change in the interest of identity and exclusiveness. But a change of character by which a People loses its identity is naturally fatal.<sup>86</sup>

If there was a bottom line for Viljoen, it was religious in the traditional sense: "Our Protestant-Christian life-view demands that we test and reform our culture, life-

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84 See for example the essay by P Kapp, "Sy visie vir die Afrikaner", in B Louw en F van Rensburg, *Bestendige Binnevuur: Perspektiewe op Gerrit Viljoen* (Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 1997), pp 177-188. Such "middle-range" Afrikaner intellectuals became known as *verligtes* as opposed to the Treurnicht camp who were called *verkramp*.

85 G Viljoen, *Vernuwings en Voortgang: Rekenskap deur 'n Afrikaner II* (Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 1979), pp 36-37.

86 Gerrit Viljoen, *Ideaal en Werklikheid: Rekenskap deur 'n Afrikaner I* (Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 1979), pp 60-61.

style and traditions against the only infallible measure – the Word of God. No ethnic tradition (*volksradisie*) should petrify into an absolute value”.<sup>87</sup>

That said, however, Viljoen immediately listed Afrikaner cultural traditions that needed to be preserved, albeit transformed. He included as essential to Afrikaner identity: consciousness of a common history; racial purity; republican democracy; language; and, of course, religion. In typical Christian National fashion, he warned against dangers such as communism; liberalism; humanism; secularisation; and materialism; but then added at the end “the absolutisation of the People in ethnic totalitarianism (*volkstotalitarisme*)”.<sup>88</sup> Notice the racial element that haunted Viljoen’s thought in this period. “Without the maintenance of white racial purity the Afrikaner will no longer be Afrikaner”, he argued: “Thus the notion ‘brown Afrikaners’ as a description for coloureds is an oversimplification and an inaccurate term ... It would be more correct to use the term ‘brown Afrikaans-speakers’ in referring to the coloureds”.<sup>89</sup>

From the beginning, he eschewed dogmatism, nonetheless, arguing in 1972 that separate development was “not a goal in itself, but a means, a method, a process. Integration lacked such openness. Integration, he said, “is a final but also more dogmatic and ideological solution (or liquidation!) of ethnic problems”. There can be no turning back from integration, which cannot be partial, Viljoen thought. Separate development, he argued, leaves room for “necessary cooperation and reciprocal interaction between the different communities – the possibility of gates in the border fences”.<sup>90</sup>

In the end then Viljoen’s argument in the early 1970s had to do with racial power, the thin end of the wedge, and racially defined Afrikaner survival. “In our country it comes down ultimately to the political power balance”, he wrote:

Complete undifferentiated political integration of whites and “Coloureds”, even if it happens in a super-senate, will lead to a far-reaching power shift and very quickly inexorably to the end of white political control of our own fate. Such a power-shift will also mean the end of separate black homelands. The new power basis will also quickly lead to full political integration for the so-called urbanized blacks ... [and] great doubt will develop about the survival of the Afrikaner People.<sup>91</sup>

In thus toeing the party line, Viljoen was perhaps currying favour with Vorster and keeping his lines of communication open with Piet Meyer and his Christian National set.

Whatever the immediate reason for Viljoen’s race-based arguments in 1972 (he was running for Afrikaner Broederbond Chairman at the time), he was defeated by Treurnicht for the position. In a turn-around in 1974, however, Viljoen was elected Chairman. In 1976, Treurnicht was appointed to the Cabinet as Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Development. He was placed in charge of Bantu Education. It was on his watch that the Soweto uprising took place in June 1976.

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87 Viljoen, *Ideaal*, p 60

88 Viljoen, *Ideaal*, p 64

89 Viljoen, *Ideaal*, p 63

90 Viljoen, *Ideaal*, p 85

91 Viljoen, *Ideaal*, p 89 This was an explicit statement of what Hermann Giliomee has called “a radical survival plan”

*Verligte* Afrikaner intellectuals' understandings of their world changed almost overnight as they confronted the likelihood of ongoing turbulence in the townships.

### After Soweto

In Gerrit Viljoen's collected essays, papers written after the Soweto uprising took on a new sense of urgency and concrete application. They represented a call to Afrikaners to work together at the fundamental transformation of South African society and contained an immanent critique of the Vorster regime's lacklustre and divided leadership. Viljoen's ideas developed rapidly over the two-year period between October 1976 and June 1978, as he wrestled to adjust his account of Afrikaner sacred history and Christian National ideology to the reality of a South Africa in which black resistance was suddenly on the move and international opinion turned decisively against the apartheid state.

Four months after Soweto, Viljoen (by now well-established as Afrikaner Broederbond Chairman) produced a cogent "global overview of our strategy as a People and a state" spelling out strengths and weaknesses and suggesting ways forward.<sup>92</sup> This surely represented more than his own views. Under his leadership the Afrikaner Broederbond was seeking to point the way forward for a state that had lost direction. International pressure had increased incrementally, he pointed out, militarily as well as diplomatically, as had the extent and direction of internal confrontation. South Africa was also facing an economic crisis, living beyond its means as the price of oil spiralled out of control, the gold price plummeted and inflation took hold.

The country's strength lay in its mineral and agricultural wealth, its military might, its "long history of political stability and law and order despite the inherent tensions of a difficult multi-ethnic situation" and the "creativity, initiative and entrepreneurial spirit" of its white population, he wrote. Its major strength, however, lay in the nationalism of its white inhabitants – "purified and consecrated by our deep consciousness of calling: we live our nationalism not as a mere social or historical fact, but as a calling, in the conviction that the development and survival of our Afrikaner People came about through God's will and that God has a task and mission for us to his honour".

In the crisis situation of 1976, it was not enough merely to appeal to the old sanctities, however. Viljoen had a series of practical suggestions. "In government circles", he wrote, "at cabinet level there is already consciousness and debate about political issues such as the adaptation of the Westminster system, the role of a cabinet council of coloureds and Indians to provide input on a consensus-basis into political decision-making, a new role for the state president above all to implement consultation between Peoples, a model for relationships with independent homelands, and so on".<sup>93</sup> Much more important, however, were more general problems of delivery by the Vorster state; reforms needed to be made to ensure the effective functioning of the state apparatus and there needed to be a key plan informed by a clear vision of policy goals and a coordinated national strategy.<sup>94</sup>

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92 Viljoen, *Ideaal*, pp 7-16

93 Viljoen, *Ideaal*, p 12 These suggestions were eventually worked out in the tricameral parliament pushed through by Botha and his *verligte* allies

94 See also Viljoen, *Ideaal*, pp 45-46

Viljoen then set out what seemed to him the most important of these policy goals. Firstly, the homeland policy needed to be implemented effectively and steadfastly to create political homes for the majority of black people “to form the basis for maintenance of political control by whites in the so-called white country”. In another essay from about the same time, Viljoen wrote “in retrospect one of our greatest errors of judgment was the decision not to allow white initiative and capital within the homelands”.<sup>95</sup> Verwoerd’s dicta were returning to haunt his people.

Secondly, since the white economy clearly could not do without black labour, “the large number of blacks living in white areas, especially the urbanized, who will live there for a long time still, must be given the certainty of humane living conditions, effective local self-management and control of law and order”. Viljoen clearly recognised that, for a long time now, the apartheid state had been unable to effect law and order in the black townships. Reform was desperately needed in African urban life.

Thirdly, there needed to be greater finality and clarity about the future of “coloured” people. In a later paper, written in May 1978, Viljoen recognised the implications of early new constitutional proposals for a tricameral parliament put forward under P.W. Botha’s auspices in 1977. As a result, he wrote, “we must now in all honesty take account of the fact that the Republic of South African can no longer be described as ‘white South Africa’. This Republic is now a multi-ethnic state in which – in the long term – it is accepted that whites as well as coloureds and Indians must be fully fledged citizens”.<sup>96</sup> The use of the term “white South Africa” simply led to confusion on the part of overseas and local observers.

Fourthly, petty apartheid must go. “We have learned from practical experience”, he said in 1978, “that a good deal of our statutorily entrenched self-protection regulations, especially when they involve self-serving discrimination at the cost of other ethnic groups, ultimately create more problems than they solve ... bringing in a harvest of embitterment and division”.<sup>97</sup> The message of Soweto was coming through loud and clear. There was no need to worry, however, Viljoen insisted, “a glance back at our history should instil in us confidence from the time when we were a rightless minority with little or no statutory protection and yet we survived successfully through our determination and ingenuity for decades and generations”.<sup>98</sup>

Practical suggestions, couched as they were in racial terms, went along also with a rethinking of the central events of the Afrikaner sacred history. The main thrust of the early civil religion, despite the importance of the Day of the Vow

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95 Viljoen, *Ideaal*, p 94

96 Viljoen, *Ideaal*, p 39

97 Viljoen, *Ideaal*, p 31

98 Viljoen, *Ideaal*, p 31 As we have seen, each of Viljoen’s “policy goals” had been clearly spelled out by Piet Cillié more than fifteen years before. Viljoen also suggested (p 16), as he did in several other places at this time (such as p 40), that there needed to be careful consideration of the creation of a smaller “white South Africa” that would be exclusively white. This was apparently a topic of serious consideration in the Afrikaner Broederbond. Viljoen was still unclear on this issue in 1978 (p 39). In the end, according to Pieter Kapp in Louw & Van Rensburg, *Bestendige Binnevuur*, p 186, Viljoen settled firmly on partnership with other Peoples as the only solution. In this he disagreed with Carel Boshoff, his successor as chairman of the Afrikaner Broederbond. When Boshoff was unseated, however, Pieter de Lange continued to move the Afrikaner Broederbond towards Viljoen’s goal.

(*Gelofedag*), was on Afrikaner suffering during the Anglo-Boer War which, as it were, filtered understanding of the Blood River covenant through an anti-imperialist lens, adding to it perceived Afrikaner resentment of urban African competition and English as the language of business. By the 1960s, African economic competition with Afrikaner poor whites in the cities (sometimes called the “Second Trek”) seemed to have been resolved by a surge of white prosperity sheltered behind the bastions of apartheid. The “feverish celebrations” of *Gelofedag* in the 1930s had diminished to “repetitive rituals”.<sup>99</sup> The Soweto uprising put all of this into perspective, however. Van Wyk Louw’s central question regarding the substance of the Afrikaner People’s right to exist, returned to haunt Afrikaner intellectual consciousness and reappears in Viljoen’s thought after 1976.

*Gelofedag* still presented opportunities for Afrikaner cultural entrepreneurs to address the faithful. At Groote Schuur on 16 December 1977, Gerrit Viljoen proclaimed the true significance of the battle of Blood River, which he said extended far beyond bare survival. Viljoen evoked Van Wyk Louw, extending Louw’s question along racial lines and saying: “What justifies the survival of the Afrikaner People – and more whites – in South Africa ...? In answering this question we will not only fathom more deeply the meaning of Blood River, but hopefully also find a touchstone by which to measure and judge critically the actual quality of our lives and actions in the present?”<sup>100</sup>

The actual significance of Blood River, Viljoen proclaimed, lay not in the Voortrekkers’ physical survival against Zulu attack, but rather in the civilization-values and culture they represented. Four sets of values were paramount, he argued: the political values of freedom for all Peoples; the economic values of the Protestant Ethic; a fundamental (Christian-based) humanity in dealings with other Peoples and persons; and a rich spiritual life of cultural appreciation and open, critical conversation (*lojale verset*). Viljoen admitted this was an idealisation. The Voortrekkers never achieved it – and neither have their successors. Basic humanity had been transgressed, he conceded, in job reservation, the application of the group areas act, migrant labour, the quality of life in black townships and the handling of political prisoners, but these issues were being raised and debated.<sup>101</sup> One might well wonder what remains of Afrikaner “Christian humanity” after this list?

Viljoen did mention Louw’s notion that the true nationalist loves his People not only in their greatness and purity, but also in their wretchedness (*ellende*), their weakness and backwardness, even in their blindness and prejudice. Afrikaner recognition of African Peoples as cultures in their own right, he said, was a precious gift, a fundamental protection of black humanity, however inhumane separate development in its application might have been. Even for those as intelligent and thoughtful as Viljoen, commitment to ethnic Christian National “fences” was hard to

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99 A Grundlingh and H Sapire, “From Feverish Festival to Repetitive Ritual? The Changing Fortunes of Great Trek Mythology in an Industrializing South Africa, 1938-1988”, *South African Historical Journal*, 21, 1989. See also: JH Cilliers’ analysis of ethnic sermons (*volksprediking*) published in *Kerkbode* between 1960 and 1980 in P Coertzen (ed), *350 Years Reformed* (Barnabas, Bloemfontein, 2002), pp 109-119. This analysis however lacks historical precision.

100 Viljoen, *Ideaal*, p 50

101 Viljoen, *Ideaal*, pp 54-55

cast off, even if many more “gates” might be needed. “Humanity” achieved its fullness only in ethnic terms.<sup>102</sup>

While Viljoen (unlike Degenaar) might not have been able to cast off the ethnic (*volks*) assumptions of his nationalist thought (any more than Van Wyk Louw could), he did recognise the necessary for changes and accommodations if the Afrikaner People were to survive in the changed circumstances after 1976 – “serious changes”, in his own words addressing the ATKV in June 1978, “which have or would have far-reaching influences on our entire survival, our existential experience – we and our children after us must live together through the implications of these adaptations and changes and hopefully outlast them”. Should job reservation disappear or the Immorality Act be repealed, Afrikaners would have to work together informally as they did in the past (he uses the word “*helpmekaar*”) to further the welfare of Afrikaner workers and to proclaim and sanction the unacceptability of miscegenation.<sup>103</sup>

Despite these dire prognostications about the need for change, Viljoen continued to insist that “our objective remains nationalism ... that is to say the maintenance and welfare of our nation, our People, the survival of our identity, our solidarity, our consciousness of calling (*roepingsbewussyn*)”. He continued:

We Afrikaners like to say that nationalism is a calling for us. If we seriously mean this, it means that we identify ourselves with our People and strive for their needs, not only from free choice as an individual human affair, but also because we believe that we have been called by God as a People to a specific task and function here in Southern Africa. (In saying this we do not deny, indeed we make provision for, other’s ethnic callings [*volksroepinge*] as well). Our national consciousness of calling does not indicate a unique election of our People alone, but is based on a conviction that Peoples, like individuals, are called by God to a task which He has allotted to them.<sup>104</sup>

Piet Meyer could not have said it better. Viljoen returns us to the question I have always asked of Meyer. What is the substance of this ethnic calling of the Afrikaner besides bare survival? Unlike Meyer, Viljoen tried to address the question. “Our calling-nationalism (*roepingsnasionanisme*) places on us a strong obligation, one which we cannot unilaterally terminate”, he said. He mentioned several ways in which “the Afrikaner People through their culture make up a unique and valuable component of human cultural history”. Perhaps it is no surprise that he ultimately cites Van Wyk Louw’s justification for ethnic diversity and Afrikaner existence, namely, cultural production, saying “that our military and economic survival is meaningful only if it deals with a People, [which] makes itself an ornament and asset for the enrichment not only of its own People but also for those round about it.”<sup>105</sup>

102 Viljoen had become acutely aware of the injustices of Nationalist state policy. Much of his writing after 1976 seemed to be kicking hard against the pricks. (Perhaps his Damascus road experience came only after he was appointed Administrator of South West Africa/Namibia – and even then he struggled with the full implications for Afrikaners of justice for Africans in the South African heartland)

103 Viljoen, *Ideaal*, p 29

104 Viljoen, *Ideaal*, pp 31-32

105 Viljoen, *Ideaal*, pp 35-36. It is perhaps important to mention, however, that Viljoen’s remarkable Van Wyk Louw lecture makes abundantly clear that he feels Van Wyk Louw’s conception of the nation is too language-centered. Viljoen insists that history and race are also important in the formation of a national culture. Unlike Louw, his nationalism was profoundly race-based.

Let me return to Van Wyk Louw in one final instance. I bought my copy of Viljoen's book, *Ideaal en Werklikheid*, second-hand at Protea Bookshop in Pretoria. When I got it home I discovered it was inscribed (in Afrikaans) "To Johan Heyns with thanks for your word of encouragement from Gerrit." The book was full of scribbled marginal notes (especially on the post-Soweto essays) written in 1978 or early 1979 by one of the most important NG Church leaders of the 1980s, who was assassinated in his home by an unknown sniper in 1994, presumably for his part in bringing the NG Church out of its apartheid isolation. Heyns was clearly tortured by the ethical dilemmas Viljoen presented in those post-1976 essays. At one point he scrawled: "The biggest question in SA is what value is higher – justice/survival, ideal/reality." At another, he wrote, "the value of justice higher than survival (*waarde van geregtigheid hoër as voortbestaan*)"; he added: "do we really display these values in our contemporary dealings with racial others". These marginal notes by Heyns actually sent me back to read Louw. It is amazing that a few sentences in one book, first written by Louw in 1952 and republished in 1958, had such a wide-ranging effect on the intellectual life of an entire People.

What is notable to me is that it was not through *ope gesprek* with Africans or "coloureds" or comprehension of the terrible suffering and dehumanising indignities occasioned by poverty wages, forced removals and racial classification that Afrikaners like Viljoen and Heyns came to see the truth of Louw's words, but through intellectual, theoretical and theological discussion largely internal to Afrikanerdom (in a context of external pressures to be sure).<sup>106</sup> The conversation I have been describing in this article was essentially an inter-Afrikaner discussion carried on in Afrikaans with next to no input from "the other Peoples of our multi-ethnic country". No doubt this helps explain why P.W. Botha's reform efforts were doomed from the start.

## Conclusion

Viljoen sought to apply situation ethics to the Afrikaner civil religion. At one point in an essay on the future of South Africa, Viljoen broke through to a pragmatic insight that would become his guiding light in the 1980s. Reality did not necessarily coincide with separate development ideology, he admitted:

On the road forward we must see that the ideal choice, that which we would most want if we were fully in control of all the circumstances, is not always any longer available  
Circumstances ... over which we have little or no control, hem in our choices We

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106 I suspect this was true even of Johan Degenaar who certainly carried on a dialogue with German theologians of liberation like Dorothee Soele, but seems to have had little contact with Africans. Perhaps I am mistaken here, but two of Degenaar's most often-repeated examples of African attitudes (from Lucas Mangope and, I think, Reverend Kameeta) came from a conference at Mapumulo in 1974 at which I was present. It was an interesting conference (Sundermeier, *Church and Nationalism*), but seems to have had a life-changing impact on Degenaar who apparently had had no prior acquaintance with black theology and black theologians (and shows little evidence that he read their work much afterwards). Degenaar did debate Jakes Gerwel once later, but Gerwel was at that same conference too. Later, Degenaar was clearly shaken to the core by Elsa Joubert's, *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena*, written in Afrikaans. Even Degenaar, the most way-out Afrikaner critic of separate development policy, shunned for his views by his People and his church and watched by the security police, nonetheless developed his arguments theoretically, out of the essays of Van Wyk Louw (written in Holland), rather than innumerable examples of black suffering generally available to him in his contemporary South Africa. Perhaps this was inevitable if he were to be given any hearing at all, but it does demonstrate how few gates there were in Viljoen's ethnic fences.

cannot always choose the best, but must simply choose the best *available*. The lesson to be drawn is to do the *right* thing *in time* so that our future options remain more open and free and in the course of events we can exercise a directive influence in the direction most favourable to our interests<sup>107</sup>

Gates through the fences might not be enough, but there was never any suggestion at this stage that the exclusively Afrikaner state give up ultimate control. Viljoen never questioned that control of the state was an essential means of moving Afrikanerdom forward.

Degenaar, in a review of Viljoen's books, put his finger on the central problem that was unavoidable and yet constantly avoided by Viljoen. The racial state contradicted separate development – not only morally, but also in practical terms.<sup>108</sup> Degenaar saw what was necessary for an Afrikaner future, “public rejection of the identification of Afrikaner culture with Afrikaner power”.<sup>109</sup> In an extended essay Andre du Toit spelled this out even more clearly, referring to “earnest concern about the future of the Afrikaans language and culture”. He continued:

A central argument [in my essay] is that, paradoxically enough, Afrikaner nationalism and Afrikaner power, inseparably interwoven with the historical development of the apartheid order, have become a serious threat to the Afrikaner cultural struggle itself. For the sake of the future of Afrikaans language and culture it must necessarily be separated from this power base<sup>110</sup>

*Verligte* Broederbond Afrikaners like Viljoen and virtually all of his Broederbond and National Party associates who believed that state power could be used to reform apartheid from above, were overlooking a central point – that the miseries imposed by apartheid had completely devalued the currency of Afrikaner nationalist ethnicity.

Degenaar and Du Toit were no more than outriders, however, exploring new ground for an Afrikanerdom that in the end would collapse as they had predicted. Viljoen and the majority of Afrikaner intellectuals were intent on moving forward on the path of reform from above, maintaining “a directive influence in the direction most favourable to our interests”. By the time P.W. Botha came to power in late 1978, his reform policies had already been worked out by Afrikaner intellectuals with all the dire consequences foreseen by Degenaar and Du Toit. But that is a story for another time.

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107 Viljoen, *Ideaal*, pp 33-34

108 To those of us on the outside it seemed obvious. I myself wrote in 1974 (Moodie, “Sociological Aspects of Nationalism in South Africa”, in Sundermeier, *Church and Nationalism*, p 44): “Talk of equal rights for ethnic groups, of the sacred trust of Afrikaners to maintain indigenous African cultures as well as their own, is so much eyewash as long as *Afrikaner* cultural identity is directly related to a monopoly of political power ... A policy of ethnic pluralism can have no cogency as long as political and economic power remains firmly in the hands of whites. And the logic of ethnic nationalism has now come full circle in South Africa – Afrikaners have come to associate ethnic identity with white hegemony

109 J Degenaar, *Keuse vir die Afrikaner* (Taurus, Emmerentia, 1982), p 26

110 A du Toit, *Die Sondes van die Vaders* (Rubicon, Kaapstad, 1983), p 72

### Abstract

This article argues for the continued relevance of the ideas of N.P. van Wyk Louw in debates among Afrikaner intellectuals during the height of apartheid in the 1960s and 1970s. It discusses the moral equivocations of the Verwoerd era and conflicts around questions of race and ethnicity that ensued during the Vorster period. At the heart of these moral debates, it is argued, was the question of state policy in regard to “coloured” People (arguably culturally Afrikaans, but racially other). The article looks less closely at a parallel silencing of debate about inclusion of urban Africans. After the Soweto uprising in 1976, however, intense intellectual contestation reached a high point through advocacy in Afrikaner cultural circles of “reform” by Gerrit Viljoen (Chairman of the Afrikaner Broederbond). Efforts to implement reform after 1979 failed dismally in the 1980s, but the shape of F.W. de Klerk’s “leap forward” in 1990 would have been inconceivable without these earlier debates and their halting implementation by P.W. Botha.

### Opsomming

#### N.P. van Wyk Louw en die Morele Penarie van Afrikaner Nasionalisme: Vorbereidings vir Verligte Hervorming

Hierdie artikel betoog dat die idees van N.P. van Wyk Louw, soos dit gedurende die hoogtepunt van apartheid in die 1960’s en 1970’s in die debatte van Afrikanerintellektuele na vore gekom het, steeds relevant bly. Dit ondersoek die morele dubbelsinnighede van die Verwoerd-era en konflikte rondom vae oor ras en etnisiteit gedurende die Vorster-tydperk. Daar word aangevoer dat die vraag rondom staatsbeleid ten opsigte van “kleurlinge” (moontlik kultureel Afrikaans, maar van ’n ander ras) sentraal in hierdie morele debatte gestaan het. Die artikel kyk ook minder intensief na ’n parallelle verswyging van debat oor die insluiting van stedelike swartes. Na die Soweto-opstand van 1976, het die intense stryd in intellektuele kringe egter deur Gerrit Viljoen (voorsitter van die Afrikaner Broederbond) se voorspraak vir “hervorming”, ’n hoogtepunt bereik. Pogings na 1979 om hervorming te implementeer, het in die 1980’s jammerlik gefaal, maar die aard van F.W. de Klerk se sprong na vore in 1990 sou in die afwesigheid van hierdie vroeëre debatte en hulle gebrekkige implementering deur P.W. Botha, ondenkbaar gewees het.

### Key words

Afrikaner Broederbond; calling (*roeping*); civil religion; coloureds; democracy; ethnicity (*volkseie*); intellectuals; liberalism; loyal opposition (*lojale verset*); morality; National Party; nationalism; petty apartheid; public debate (*oop gesprek*); race; reform; sacred history; separate development; situation ethics; survival with justice (*voortbestaan in geregtigheid*).

### Slutelwoorde

Afrikaner Broederbond; afsonderlike ontwikkeling; demokrasie; heilige geskiedenis; hervorming; intellektuele; klein apartheid; kleurlinge; liberalisme; lojale verset; moraliteit; Nasionale Party; nasionalisme; omstandigheidsetiek; oop gesprek; ras; roeping; volkseie; volksgodsdien; voortbestaan in geregtigheid.