

Afrikaner socio-theological discourse in the early twentieth century: War and mission in J. F. Naudé and J. du Plessis

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Introduction

Wars and their subsequent interpretations have shaped twentieth century Afrikaner public discourse profoundly. The remembered trauma, particularly of the Anglo-Boer War might have been a contributing factor to the late survival of white supremacy in South Africa, and Afrikaner doctrines of separateness and apartheid.¹ With this view in mind, here I shall present a close reading of a couple of interesting early twentieth-century Afrikaner Christian leaders concerning their experiences and thought relating to war, *volk*, and religiosity.

Background to du Plessis and Naudé

One potentially valuable historical theme of research concerns the theorisation of a secondary, even alternative discourse in Afrikaner Christian nationalism, as I think might be particularly revealed in two leading, if controversial, clergymen Johannes du Plessis (1868–1935) and Beyers Naudé (1915–2004). Although belonging to different generations, both du Plessis and Naudé were outcasts, being judged as heretical to some of the central tenets of Afrikanerdom in its twentieth-century development. It has even been suggested that later resistance to apartheid among Afrikaner clergy such as Beyers Naudé was flowing forth from a source of critical theological discernment that was originally introduced into Afrikaner religious discourse by none other than du Plessis.²

Du Plessis' problems with the Afrikaner mainstream centrally concerned his endorsement of higher criticism in biblical scholarship. Yet, there might also have been other, contributing factors to his falling out with the establishment. He was certainly very comfortable within the English-speaking intellectual world, which included his numerous ecumenical contacts both locally and internationally. Saul Dubow even claims that du Plessis held unconventional views regarding the rights and roles of the black population in South Africa and that this was a subsidiary reason for his ostracism in the Dutch Reformed Church.³

One of the curious things about du Plessis is that although he is mostly remembered in Afrikaner theological circles as a biblical scholar with

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1. See R. Müller, "War, Religion, and White Supremacy in Comparative Perspective: South Africa and the American South", *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 25, 1, 2004, pp 193–216.
2. See M.H. Coetzee, *Die "Kritiese Stem" teen Apartheidsteologie in die Ned Geref Kerk (1905–1974): 'n Analise van die Bydraes van Ben Marais en Beyers Naudé* (Bybel-Media, Wellington, 2010), p 312.
3. S. Dubow, "Afrikaner Nationalism, Apartheid and the Conceptualization of 'Race'", *Journal of African History*, 33, 1992, pp 209–237.

unconventional views, the main thrust of his academic contributions were actually in the history of Christianity and theory of missions. Regarding this latter theme, Richard Elphick maintains that du Plessis promoted a conventionally evangelical position of the church as the main locus of mission; a view which distinguished him from later more nationalist Afrikaner thinkers who considered mission to be a responsibility of the Afrikaner *volk* par excellence.⁴ Given this brief introduction of certain themes associated with du Plessis, it will perhaps be apparent why he might plausibly be considered as representing an alternative stream of thought against the normative mainstream, which is the stream of neo-Calvinist Afrikaner nationalism.

On the other hand, for the most part, there was enough that was characteristic of the mainstream Afrikaner elite in the role that du Plessis played to debunk his maverick status. Some of this might become apparent in the discussion below.

A further reason for focusing on du Plessis is that he played a role in the Anglo-Boer War. He served as a chaplain to Boer prisoners of war for a time. His public career also included the period of World War I. Since the popular emergence of Afrikaner nationalism in the early twentieth century relied quite heavily on a discourse of suffering at the hands of the British Empire, and because I am attempting to understand du Plessis' role or stance within the context of the nationalist discourse, it seems prudent to consider his ideas and activities during these periods of war involving the British.

If du Plessis was to represent something of an alternative voice within the Afrikaner mainstream, the question then becomes who would represent the mainstream as such. An obvious candidate emerges in the form of Beyers Naudé's father, Jozua Francois Naudé (1873–1948) who was a contemporary of du Plessis. Rather ironically, considering the later truly rebellious (even traitorous) status of his son, J.F. Naudé might indeed be termed a flag bearer of early Afrikaner nationalism. Although the extensive recent biography by his granddaughter does occasionally aspire to the hagiographical, Milde Weiss is perhaps correct in claiming that towards the end of his life, J.F. Naudé was a hero for the Afrikaner inhabitants of Graaff-Reinet: “want sy naam het 'n simbool geword van die geskiedenis van die Afrikanervolk.”⁵ (because his name had become a symbol of the history of the Afrikaner people.) On the other hand, this is not the kind of statement anyone would have been tempted to make about du Plessis.

A close compatriot of Boer generals Beyers, Kemp, and de la Rey, among others, Naudé was one of six Boer representatives who refused to sign the Treaty of Vereeniging that ended the Anglo-Boer War. He also became a champion of the Afrikaans *taalbeweging* (language movement) and was a founding member of the Afrikaner Broederbond. He was furthermore instrumental in a bitter church struggle in the early 1920s in Graaff-Reinet, which saw the local Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) congregation split along political lines between the nationalist pro-Afrikaans *moederkerk* (mother church) of which J.F. Naudé was the minister, and

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4. R. Elphick, “Missions and Afrikaner Nationalism: Soundings in the Prehistory of Apartheid”, in B. Stanley (ed.), *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2003), pp 54–78.
 5. M. Weiss, *Vuurtoring: Biografie van ds Jozua Francois Naudé* (Milde Weiss, Stellenbosch, 2014), p 267. This and all other translations provided in the text are by the author.

the English-oriented *nuwekerk*, which considered itself a continuation of the original church founded there by Andrew Murray, snr, who was one of the Scottish Free Church ministers recruited to serve in the DRC in the early nineteenth century.⁶

Du Plessis and J.F. Naudé were men of very different backgrounds, remembered for different reasons, and although there is no indication that the two ever moved in similar circles, there are some noteworthy points of convergence between their respective public careers. Principally, both were ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church. Du Plessis' pastoral career was cut short in order to make way for other roles, which included that of the DRC's mission secretary, missionary traveller and researcher, and eventually seminary professor. Naudé, on the other hand, began his professional life as a schoolteacher and only after the end of the Anglo-Boer War at the age of 28 did he go to Stellenbosch to train for the ministry. Unlike, du Plessis, Naudé ended up having a long, if not untroubled career in the DRC as minister until the end of his life.

As mentioned already, both were controversial within the church, but for entirely different reasons. The one interest that both men shared, and which I will argue is significant for further analysis, was a strong interest in and passion for missionary work among Africa's indigenous peoples. Undoubtedly, missionary fervour was part and parcel of the *zeitgeist* for many early twentieth-century Protestant church leaders, not only in South Africa in the years following the Anglo-Boer War, but also internationally. The symbolic climactic event of missionary Protestantism was after all the 1910 Edinburgh Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, which optimistically had as its slogan: "The evangelisation of the world in this generation." Still, for a variety of reasons to do with their peculiar colonial history in southern Africa, the Afrikaner, although a predominantly protestant people, were rather less mission friendly than some of their overseas counterparts might have been. So the missionary enthusiasm of du Plessis and Naudé, although not uncommon, was also not exactly normative within Afrikaner religiosity.

Du Plessis was eventually a mission theorist and historian of international acclaim and although Naudé's contributions in this regard were somewhat more modest, they were not insignificant either. In the midst of the hardships of the Anglo-Boer War, Naudé and his compatriots in the commando under the leadership of the devout General Beyers, founded the *Commando Dank Zending Vereniging*. Naudé himself was an instrumental driving force in terms of this mission society, and had also served as its chairperson after the death of Beyers.⁷

J.F. Naudé and the Anglo-Boer War

Milde Weiss describes her grandfather as veritably confronting this war with his Bible in one hand and the rifle in another.⁸ He was indeed a fighting preacher, because although not ordained he had already experienced a calling to the ministry, which meant that he took to the field as a lay preacher within his

6. See S. du Toit, *Die Onstaan van die Gemeente Nuwe Kerk op Graaff-Reinet: 'n Kritiese Kerkhistoriese – Kerkregtelike Evalueering van die Gebeure wat Aanleiding was tot die Kerkskeuring in 1927* (The Author, Murraysburg, 1993).

7. See *Kerkbode*, 3 June 1915.

8. Weiss, *Vuurtoring: Biografie van ds Jozua Francois Naudé*, p 142.

commando of rather pious Boer soldiers, if his personal accounts as described in his memoirs is to be taken at face value.⁹

Naudé was a born and raised native of the Karoo in the Cape Colony, but he spent the majority of his young adulthood as a teacher in Germiston and became a citizen of the ZAR just prior to the outbreak of the war in 1899. His move to Germiston in 1895 apparently coincided with a massive shift in his loyalties in terms of “taal en volkstrots”.¹⁰ This conversion-like “taal ommeeswaai” was quite dramatic considering that his education and prior teaching career in the Cape had been conducted in English. Weiss explains that his journal entries had been in English until 1896. Then, after a three year hiatus he began writing again in 1899, but in Dutch. By then his sentiments regarding English had so deteriorated that once he even reprimanded his future wife, Ada, for daring to write to him in English after receiving a steady stream of Dutch letters from her.¹¹

Interestingly, one of his own teachers who had a formative influence on him at the Normaalskool van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk was Jan Smuts, the later Boer general and prime minister of the Union. According to Weiss, Smuts taught Naudé in preparation for his matriculation examinations in 1891 in Cape Town.¹² Apparently the two became fast friends, at least until the end of the Anglo-Boer War when their ways parted rather dramatically ... but that is a story for later.

In Naudé’s description of his wartime experiences the quasi-religious theme of the war as a baptism of blood and fire infuses the narrative. Old Testament covenant theology is similarly applied to the Boer cause in an imaginatively allegorical way as the following description of the alliance between the ZAR and the OVS illustrates:

De hand genomen van de Zuster-republiek over de Vaal. “Bloed is dikker dan water”. Immers “Uw Volk is mijn Volk, uw God mijn God, waar gij zult sterven, zal ik sterven, en aldaar sal ik begraven worden.” Met zulk een wederzijdschen geest beziel, werd in 1897 een Politiek Verbond gesloten tusschen de twee zuster-staten...¹³

(They took the hand of their sister republic across the Vaal. “Blood is thicker than water.” After all “Your people is my people, your God is my God, where you die there I shall die, and there I shall be buried.” Inspired by such a mutual spirit, a Political Covenant was made in 1897 between the two sister states...)

The blood metaphor returns as Naudé further narrates the victimised Boer:

[W]ij konden niet denken dat het vuur der beproeving voor het Afrikaansche Volk “7 maal heeter” sou gemaakt worden, dat het land met zulk een vuur zooveel bloed zou gedoopt worden, bloed nog door velen te worden veracht en vertreden...¹⁴

(We could not imagine that the fire of affliction for the Afrikaner people would be made “7 times hotter”, that the land would be baptised by such a fire with so much blood, blood that is still despised and stamped under foot by so many people ...)

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9. See J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en Vluchten van Beyers en Kemp bôkant de Wet* (Nijgh & Van Ditmar, Rotterdam, 1903).
 10. Weiss, *Vuurtoring: Biografie van ds Jozua Francois Naudé*, p 24.
 11. Weiss, *Vuurtoring: Biografie van ds Jozua Francois Naudé*, p 27–28.
 12. Weiss, *Vuurtoring: Biografie van ds Jozua Francois Naudé*, p 10.
 13. J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en Vluchten*, p 10.
 14. J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en Vluchten*, p 25.

This is rich material for national myth making. Note that the *volk* was tested by a hot fire; that an abundance of their much despised blood was spilled to baptise the land. That should lead to the obvious question: How could a land so baptised not belong to the one group whose blood was thus sacrificed? Truly, it is no wonder Naudé eventually refused to sign the peace treaty ...

In contrast to the blood kinship ties referred to above between the OVS and ZAR, the theme of blood features again when Naudé describes an improved relationship between formerly distrustful Transvalers and Cape colonists who had joined the Boer commandos, in a way which opposes the apparently divisive blood ties of the two regions. Such blood ties had to be abolished so that both groups could be covered “onder den vereenigden Afrikaanschen geest.”¹⁵ (under a united Afrikaans spirit.) Therefore, a union of blood is not of ultimate concern to Naudé. In his view at least one thing that could trump blood and its ties, is the spirit of Afrikanerdom.

This Afrikaner spirit is however a spirit that required strengthening. This seems to be an emerging religious theme as the war dragged on and victory for the Boers seemed an ever more elusive prospect. Naudé describes a visit by two DRC ministers one evening as they were camping out. The ministers encouraged the commando not with sweet words of comfort, but rather by suggesting the real reason for the testing and tormenting of God by means of the war provided experiences that would result in a higher goal than either victory or defeat; that is, the tempering of the *volk*.¹⁶

This kind of rationale had the potential to engender a potent national theology, because it entrenched the view that God was on the Boer side, not only in victory, as especially earlier in the war, when Naudé had occasion to proclaim: “de Heer had ons een schitterende overwinning doen behalen.”¹⁷ (the Lord has achieved a brilliant victory for us.) Now this same God was causing them all manner of hardship, but for a higher purpose, a purpose that was to be revealed in the future.

Naudé’s dream for the future, illustrated in a wonderful sketch (also referring to an earlier phase of the war) is instructive. It depicts three streams, representing Britain and the two Boer republics tumbling down a waterfall to clash in a maelstrom representing the war at the base; a war in which the two republics become united. What emerges out of this chaotic whirlpool is a rest-full united South Africa. Although he does not elaborate further, it is unclear what role the British element was imagined to play in this united vision, other than to diffuse entirely, because at the very bottom of the sketch there is the ironically telling slogan: “Afrika voor de Afrikaanders!”¹⁸ Was he aware that he was echoing yet usurping Joseph Booth’s seditious anti-colonial proclamation, “Africa for the African”, regarding Nyasaland and published just a few years earlier in 1897?¹⁹

However, one would be hard pressed to imagine Naudé recognising any affinity between the struggles of the Boers in South Africa and black Africans elsewhere on the continent. In fact, a prominent theme in the latter parts of

15. J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en Vluchten*, p 34.

16. J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en Vluchten*, pp 117–118.

17. J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en Vluchten*, p 74.

18. J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en Vluchten*, p 55.

19. See J. Booth *Africa for the African* (African Books Collective, Zomba, 2007).

Vechten en Vluchten concerns Boer anxiety and indignity at British employment of African commandos. The role played by black people becomes so problematic for Naudé and by inference for the Boers, that an impression forms as the book progresses that the role of primary enemy has shifted from the British as such, to centre instead on the British-African alliance, but particularly those Africans who commit all sorts of atrocities, sometimes involving Boer women and children, in the telling of Naudé.²⁰ In terms of all of this, the British are primarily depicted as the devious enablers of the misdeeds committed by indigenous Africans. Yet, unsurprisingly their unholy alliance comes back to haunt them when a British citizen by the name of Pettendrigh relates to General Beyers, and paraphrased by Naudé, how:

... de kaffers zijn huis plunderden; toen hij hun vroeg waarom zij het deden, antwoordde zij slechts: "British"; zooveel als te zeggen "wij zijn vrije Britten". Dit was voor hem te walgelijk, dat de naam van dat groote volk opgehouden moest worden door barbaren, die zoo onmenscheijk en goddelooslijk handelden.²¹

(...the Africans had plundered his house; when he asked why they were doing this, they simply answered: "British"; as if to say "we are free Brits". That was for him too horrible, that the name of that great nation should be taken over by barbarians, who have acted so inhumanely and godlessly.)

Black people are however not exclusively depicted in terms of their savage barbarity. Instances of co-operation and trade with the Boers are mentioned, as is the budding missionary spirit that rather unexpectedly emerges within the ranks of the Beyers Commando as they make their pilgrimage-like trek through the northern Bushveld.

Having fought and travelled under the commando of Louis Botha, the Beyers commando became an independent unit at Lydenburg with a mission to travel northwards while Botha went east.²² This set the Beyers commando on a journey with far-reaching consequences that had little directly to do with the war effort. In fact, Naudé even writes that as a consequence of the trek through relatively unexplored territory, unexplored from a Boer point of view at least, their commando was cut off from any communication with other commandos and they had no news regarding war proceedings.²³ What was the purpose of this journey then? Apparently they were led by a Higher Hand, because Naudé states that "het niet bloot toeval was, dat wij hier door het Boschveld moesten komen ..."²⁴ (it was no coincidence that we had to come here through the Bushveld ...)

There seems to have been elements of liminality in this trek through the Bushveld, the beauty of which including the birdlife is described in lush terms. In the midst of a hard fought war there occurs this period of tranquillity in peaceful natural surroundings. Central to the experience as mutually decided by commando members in their reflection about it afterwards, is a visitation made to a mission station called Shilouwane. This was a novel experience for all concerned, and their meeting with the resident Swiss missionary couple, Thomas, made a lasting impression on the Boers. So did the trappings of European civilisation observed

20. See J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en Vluchten*, p 229 and following pages; pp 256, 264–5, 269 and following pages.

21. J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en Vluchten*, p 315.

22. J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en Vluchten*, p 148.

23. J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en Vluchten*, p 165.

24. J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en Vluchten*, p 166.

such as the brick church with hardwood benches, all the material having been gleaned from the surrounding Bushveld.

Three Boers, Naudé, C. Raath, and J.A. Retief accepted the missionary's invitation to return the following day for a church service, in which Naudé himself had the opportunity to address the congregants.²⁵

Having learnt that Thomas was the only Christian missionary in the whole region, the missionary need was further pressed upon the commando's consciousness when: "Generaal Beyers een kaffer aan de Olifantsrivier naar zijn God vroeg, deze hem antwoordde, dat zijn God een beestvel is."²⁶ (General Beyers asked an African at the Olifants River regarding his god, and this person answered that his god is a cattle hide.)

When the commando reached Haenertsburg they held a church service, which was apparently something of a thanksgiving service for everything they have learnt through their Bushveld trek. Naudé relates how one after the other gave impressions regarding various aspects of the natural landscape, fauna and flora: "Doch al die stemmen en indrukken der natuur schenen op ééne zaak onze aandacht te hebben gevestigd: 'Wat zal ik den Heere vergelden?'" (Though all the voices and impressions of nature achieved to fix our attention on one issue: 'What shall I sacrifice to the Lord?') The consensus was that although their church was not completely anti-mission, members of this commando have apparently come under the conviction that not enough was being done:

[O]m 's Konings bevel, "predic het evangelie aan alle kreaturen", te gehoorzamen. Daarom zijn er vreemden uit andere landen gekomen, die ons niet verstaan, nog minder de verhouding tusschen den blanke en den kleurling en hebben alzoo dikwijls veel kwaad veroorzaakt.²⁷

(to obey the King's commandment "to preach the gospel to all creatures". Therefore foreigners have come from other countries, who did not understand us, and still less the relationship between white and coloured, and so have often accomplished much evil.)

This emerging sentiment led to the making of a communal vow undertaken by all the commando members to support a missionary in either Zoutpansberg or Waterberg. At a later meeting this vow was put into practice with the founding of the "Kommandos Dank Zending Vereeniging" for the support of mission work in Zoutpansberg.²⁸

Although it might perhaps be unfair to claim that this sudden missionary interest had everything to do with Afrikaner self-preservation, i.e. a case of simply continuing the fight on a different level, the quotation above regarding foreigner missionaries not understanding local racial relationships is revealing.

In the meantime the fight with the British went on until the bitter end, and here Naudé's unwillingness to cease fighting was legendary because he became

25. J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en Vluchten*, p 167.

26. J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en Vluchten*, p 168.

27. J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en Vluchten*, p 169.

28. J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en Vluchten*, p 178.

one of six burghers who refused to sign the peace treaty, much to the chagrin of his erstwhile friend, General Smuts.²⁹

Johannes du Plessis and the Anglo-Boer War

Johannes du Plessis was not a fighting preacher by any means, but the outbreak of the war troubled him deeply for different reasons. At the time in October 1899, du Plessis was serving as a minister in die DRC congregation of Sea Point. However, he had only arrived in this congregation earlier in that fateful year, because between 1894 and February 1899 du Plessis served as the minister of Zastron in the Free State.³⁰ During this time he felt perhaps somewhat homesick at times for the Cape where he had spent much of his life and where his mother still lived. Such a sentiment is expressed in the view that there was “no place like the Boöland”³¹ in an 1898 letter to his cousin. Nevertheless, Erasmus indicates that he had a fulfilling time in Zastron and that he had made many friends, the plight of whom so distressed him after the war had started, that he almost immediately approached his church council in Sea Point with a request to be allowed three months of special leave in order to go North and offer “eenige Christelijke vertroosting” (some Christian consolation) to the victims of war. His request was granted to go as chaplain to the medical corps, but only on the condition that he would not become involved in any armed action.³²

However, his public role at this time already extended far beyond the boundaries of the local congregation. He served as treasury secretary of the Predikante-Sendingvereniging, a missionary society that was instrumental in establishing the foreign missionary enterprise of the DRC, particularly in Nyasaland.³³ The outbreak of war had potentially devastating consequences for the DRC’s missionary endeavours in this British Protectorate as A.C. Murray, one of the original two missionaries to Nyasaland and supported by the Predikante-Sendingvereniging expressed in correspondence to his uncle, Andrew Murray, jnr: “We are expecting to hear ‘retreat’ as a consequence of this terrible war! May God forbid!”³⁴ The British never interned the Afrikaner missionaries as feared, but accessibility to funds was severely restricted by the war, and illness and other natural calamities caused missionaries, including A.C. Murray, to leave the field.³⁵ Du Plessis did much work during and after the war to propagate the cause of mission, and even if mission itself rather than Afrikanerdom was his chief concern, if the former could be served by an appeal to *volksgees* or *volksideale* it seems du Plessis would have no qualms over it as illustrated in a couple of essays he wrote, to be elaborated on below.

This is not to suggest that his concern for the Afrikaner was anything but genuine. As a chaplain, du Plessis clearly identified himself with the Boers. Erasmus even calls him an apologist for their cause.³⁶ Towards the end of 1899 he joined the Rouxville commando, from where he spent his special leave visiting

29. See Weiss, *Vuurtoring: Biografie van ds Jozua Francois Naudé*, p 48.

30. See A.S. Erasmus, *Prof. Johannes du Plessis 1868–1935: Baanbreker, Verbreker van die Gereformeerde Geloof?* (UV Teologiese Studies, Bloemfontein, 2009), p 75 and following pages.

31. Quoted in Erasmus, *Prof. Johannes du Plessis*, p 86.

32. Erasmus, *Prof. Johannes du Plessis*, p 95.

33. See Erasmus, *Prof. Johannes du Plessis*, p 91.

34. A.C. Murray, quoted in Erasmus, *Prof. Johannes du Plessis*, p 95.

35. Erasmus, *Prof. Johannes du Plessis*, p 100.

36. Erasmus, *Prof. Johannes du Plessis*, p 98.

different Boer laagers in the Free State. Upon his return to Cape Town he continued to create public awareness for the situation of the Boers, by writing a number of articles including rebuttals of the views of those Cape Afrikaners who wanted to encourage the Boer fighters to surrender their weapons. Du Plessis' actions and words during this time were occasionally seen as "seditious" by the Cape press.³⁷ His chaplain's permit to visit Boer prisoners at a camp in Green Point was also suspended after he became accused of attempting to give money to prisoners.³⁸

In February 1900 an article appeared in the *Gereformeerde Maandblad* in which du Plessis published some of his thoughts on his war experiences, which he had also delivered as a speech to a group of friends in Stellenbosch. Du Plessis is at pains in this article to stress the high moral fibre of the Boer soldiers. He insists on the unity of the Boers behind their cause, contrary to mentioned speculations that there had been feelings of discontent from the side of "de Vrijstaters tegenover de Transvaal".³⁹ (the Freestaters towards the Transvaal.) What might have been seen as more disloyal to the British Empire were the suggestions made throughout the article of the extraordinarily pious nature of the Boers who never greeted a victory with a "hooray!", but rather with "Prijzen den Heer met blijde galmen."⁴⁰ (praise the Lord with joyous sounds.) However, the rather more seditious nature of his wartime stance emerges in the final paragraph where du Plessis intimates that God was on the side of the Boers:

De burgers geven God al de eer van hunne overwinning. Aan Hem zeiden zij was het te danken dat zij niet volkomen verrast werden; aan Hem dat de versterkingen juist in tijds opdaagden. Dit gevecht heeft hen in't geloof bevestigd dat God aan hunne zijde staat en met hen strijdt.⁴¹

(The burghers gave God all the glory for their victories. To His side belonged the thanks for not being totally surprised; to Him that their reinforcements arrived exactly on time. The battle has confirmed in them the belief that God stood on their side and fought with them.)

On 28 August 1901, du Plessis went inland for the second time to serve as chaplain, but this time he ended up in the Kraaifontein concentration camp near Aliwal North, where he eventually stayed for six months, three more than originally intended.⁴² Some of his time there was set aside for activities such as a week of prayer, followed by a revivalist week where the congregants were encouraged to come to full conversion, which included the giving of personal testimonies of faith; they received encouragement from du Plessis for their contribution of thanksgiving, which apparently quite literally translated into funds for the Nyasaland mission.⁴³

The connection between the sufferings brought about by the war and Christian mission was explicitly addressed by du Plessis in his concluding chapter to one of the original two Nyasaland missionaries' memoirs.⁴⁴ Under three

37. See Erasmus, *Prof. Johannes du Plessis*, p 101.

38. Erasmus, *Prof. Johannes du Plessis*, p 98.

39. J. du Plessis, "Op het Oorlogsterrein", *Gereformeerde Maandblad*, 10, 8, February 1900, p 153.

40. du Plessis, "Op het Oorlogsterrein", p 153.

41. du Plessis, "Op het Oorlogsterrein", p 154.

42. Erasmus, *Prof. Johannes du Plessis*, p 103.

43. Erasmus, *Prof. Johannes du Plessis*, p 104.

44. T.C. Botha Vlok, *Elf Jaren in Midden Afrika* (Taylor & Snashall, Townshend, 1901).

headings, all beginning with the Dutch equivalent of “What the war has taught us ...” du Plessis expounds on how the themes of mission and war compare, and how the former is infinitely more important than the latter. Whereas war concerns an earthly enemy of flesh and blood, mission is a fight against the biblical principalities and powers, evil spirits in the sky. He might be quoted at some length:

Hier vallen menschenlevens door de kogels van den vijand, maar daar vallen menschenzielen den Satan ten prooi. Hier offert men goed en bloed om een vergankelijk wereldsch rijk te behouden of uit te breiden, doch daar legt men het leven af in het belang van het eeuwig koninkrijk van Christus den Heer. Hoe gering is nochtans de belangstelling in den geestelijken strijd die men in Midden-Afrika en elders voert, in vergelijken met de warme belangstelling die men in den aardschen oorlog stelt.⁴⁵

(Here human lives fall through the bullets of the enemy, but there human lives fall prey to Satan. Here people sacrifice belongings and blood to hold on to or expand a temporal worldly empire, but there people lay down their lives for the sake of the eternal kingdom of Christ the Lord. How small is the interest still in the spiritual battle that people wage in central Africa and elsewhere, in comparison with the warm interest that people show in the worldly war.)

In continuation to the above, du Plessis writes about the earnest prayers during wartime and asks why such prayers are not also made on behalf of the spiritual need in darkest Africa. The needs of the missionary workers there should be foremost in his readers' prayers, because they are exposed to illness, mental trauma, and “aanvallen van woeste barbaren of wilde dieren...”⁴⁶ (attacks from rough barbarians and wild animals ...)

Then, of course, there is the question of money, and how generously people were willing to dispense with it in aid of the victims of war. “Het is ons een leerzame les, van wat het Afrikaansche volk doen *kan* als het eens met waren geestdrift vervuld is.”⁴⁷ (It is for us an educational lesson, regarding what the Afrikaans people *can* do once they are filled with enthusiasm.) Yet, when will they also learn to be as generous when undying souls are concerned? And then there follows a really telling couple of sentences both in terms of du Plessis' anthropology and his contemporary understanding of the difference between Christians and non-Christians:

De heiden is toch, evengoed als wij, van Gods geslacht; hij is, evenzeer als wij, voor redding vatbaar; hij heeft, niet minder dan wij, aanspraak op de Evangelie dat “eene kracht Gods is tot zaligheid *een iegelijk* die geloof” – zoowel den heiden als den blanke.⁴⁸

(The heathen is surely, just as we are, created in God's image; they are, just as much as us, open to salvation; they have, no less than us, a claim on the Gospel that “is a power of God for the salvation of *every one* that believes” – both the heathen and the white.)

Du Plessis clearly here gives the monogenesisist missionary perspective that Europeans and Africans alike were created in the image of God, but he also

45. J. Du Plessis, “Slotwoord”, in Vlok, *Elf Jaren in Midden Afrika*, p 102.

46. du Plessis, “Slotwoord”, p 103.

47. du Plessis, “Slotwoord”, p 103.

48. du Plessis, “Slotwoord”, p 104.

seems to imply that white equals Christian, while a similar conflation is inferred between heathen and African.

Despite his vehemently pro-Boer stance,⁴⁹ du Plessis was clearly both willing and able to transcend the narrow nationalist perspective, but he was at least at this stage, not able to transcend the colonialist missionary discourse of white Christians and black heathens.

J.F. Naudé and the First World War (the 1914 Rebellion)

Perhaps somewhat remarkably given his bitter-ender status in the Anglo-Boer War, and for someone who subsequently continued his pro-Afrikaner activities on the language and cultural levels, J.F. Naudé did not take up arms on the side of the rebellion after the Union government declared itself on the side of the Allies. Milde Weiss suggests this might have had something to do with the fact that he was by this time an ordained minister in the DRC, which was not the case in the turn of the century war, and the official DRC policy endorsed obedience to the authorities.⁵⁰ Perhaps one might further speculate that the maturity that sometimes comes with age also played a role. He was now married with children, not the ideal situation to continue the cultivation of a hot-headed predisposition.

During the years of WWI, J.F. Naudé was a minister in Roodepoort on the Witwatersrand. He had moved here in 1911 from his first post after graduating from the Stellenbosch Seminary in 1909. This first post was a dual position of congregational ministry in the district of Rouxville in the Free State, and as superintendent of the DRC labour colony at Goedemoed. According to his son Beyers, the reasons for taking up that particular post had to do with J.F. Naudé's lifelong concern for poor Afrikaners who lived on the fringes of society – their impoverishment primarily as a result of the misery caused by the Anglo-Boer War.⁵¹

Roodepoort was then another ideal location for a budding Afrikaner nationalist, given the nearby gold mines and the role this emerging industrial area played in terms of the so-called “poor white” problem. Weiss reports how disappointed Naudé had been in the generally low levels of interest that the language issue generated in the Cape during his student years in Stellenbosch after the Anglo-Boer War. In fact the culture was alarmingly English-oriented.⁵² Later the Seminary professors themselves opposed the rebellion in no uncertain terms.⁵³ By contrast the manse of the Naudé family in Roodepoort in the following decade served as the centre of Afrikaner activities.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, Naudé kept up good relations with Boer generals Beyers, Kemp, and De la Rey.

49. Also see his newspaper articles under the pseudonym Mikros on the theme of “The New Patriotism” in his *Plakboek i.v.m. die Anglo-Boereoorlog* (Kerkargief, Stellenbosch, K-DIV 873).

50. Weiss, *Vuurtoring: Biografie van ds Jozua Francois Naudé*, p 142.

51. B. Naudé, *My Land van Hoop: Die Lewe van Beyers Naudé* (Human & Rousseau, Kaapstad, 1995), p 15.

52. Weiss, *Vuurtoring: Biografie van ds Jozua Francois Naudé*, p 66.

53. Weiss, *Vuurtoring: Biografie van ds Jozua Francois Naudé*, p 131

54. Weiss, *Vuurtoring: Biografie van ds Jozua Francois Naudé*, p 132.

Increasingly, however, a rift would become apparent between the ideals coveted within this group, which still seemingly believed in the possibility of an Afrikaner republic in continuation of what was lost at the Treaty of Vereeniging, and the more conciliatory views represented by especially the prime minister, Louis Botha and his minister of defence, Jan Smuts – both celebrated Boer generals.

When Botha made the announcement that the Union would support Britain militarily against German West Africa, Naudé entered the fray in the form of a paper war against the prime minister. A petition of 50 signatures was drawn up and sent to the government, and an apparently heated telegraphed correspondence between Naudé and Botha ended with the latter writing: “Zal bly zyn voortaan van uwe beleedigende telegrammen verschoond te blyven.”⁵⁵ (Will be glad to be spared in future from your insulting telegrams.)

From here on further, Weiss suggests that Naudé became a close co-conspirator of Beyers, de la Rey and others, and the manse became a venue for secret meetings, often held in the evenings. According to oral testimony within the family, such a meeting involving both generals occurred on the evening of 14 September 1914, the night before de la Rey was shot dead while en route to Potchefstroom together with Beyers, reputedly to start the rebellion along with Kemp.⁵⁶

When the rebellion did get underway the following month, after this initial tragic hiccup, Naudé continued to play a supporting role by holding protest meetings and encouraging leaders such as Beyers in their activism. Significantly, however, his biographer Weiss writes that despite his support for their cause, Naudé was in this event against the use of violence.⁵⁷ How such a non-violent perspective might be held up within the context of all the evidence of covert support given to the rebellion leaders is a matter not explored by Weiss. A question one might pose would be: Was he really against violence by this time of his life, or only against violence involving himself?

Whatever the case, at this stage Naudé as a respected DRC minister, was increasingly making use of the powers of language, education and cultural mobilisation rather than physical confrontation. His work towards the recognition of Afrikaans as medium in the school system had already started in Germiston prior to the Anglo-Boer War, but was taken further in Roodepoort where he was instrumental in founding the first Afrikaans medium school in the Transvaal in 1918. During the same period he was one of the founding members of the Afrikaner Broederbond, and was chosen as its first president on 2 July 1918.⁵⁸

Johannes du Plessis and the First World War

From late 1912 until early 1916, du Plessis was in a sense removed from the action as far as the aspirations and angst of the Afrikaner *volk* was concerned. He had first gone to Livingstone College in London for a year of study in tropical

55. Louis Botha quoted in Weiss, *Vuurtoring: Biografie van ds Jozua Francois Naudé*, p 131.

56. Weiss, *Vuurtoring: Biografie van ds Jozua Francois Naudé*, p 133 and following pages.

57. Weiss, *Vuurtoring: Biografie van ds Jozua Francois Naudé*, p 137.

58. B. Naudé, *My Land van Hoop*, p 16.

diseases and medicine in order to prepare himself for an epic tour of sub-Saharan Africa.⁵⁹

In the intervening years since the end of the Anglo-Boer War, du Plessis had served the cause of mission in the DRC in different capacities, most prominently as general mission secretary of the DRC. Between 1910 and 1912 he served as editor of *Die Kerkbode* and that meant a period of wide publicity for his theological views, which were garnering an increasing stream of opposition from friend and foe alike. In fact the avalanche of opinion that later in the 1920s cast him in the role of heretic for his support of higher criticism, was steadily gaining force in this early stage. Erasmus speculates that this growing opposition might have played a role in du Plessis seeking “n uitvlug” (an escape) in mission with the departure for London and tropical Africa.⁶⁰ Whether this is true or not, no one can dispute that du Plessis had a genuine commitment to this theme of mission, and the malaria he contracted and other dangers and hardships he faced along the often lonely route of the missionary traveller, is testimony to this.

Nevertheless, the increasing theological disagreements with the mainstream opinion of Reformed Orthodoxy within the DRC along with the geographical displacement caused by his tour, which occurred during the first half of World War One, might have served in its liminal approximations to subtly supplant du Plessis’ formerly rather cosy endorsement of the aspirations of the Christian Afrikaner *volk*.

Even though he was physically removed from the Union of South Africa, du Plessis remained in contact with the goings on in his homeland through a steady stream of correspondence with friends, colleagues, and family, including his future wife “Daughtie”. In these correspondences a couple of interesting themes become apparent: i) He strongly disagreed with the aims of the rebellion; and ii) he did not particularly care for the question of Afrikaans, both the language question and the cultural movement that would find its estuary in Afrikaner nationalism.

Of course these two themes are interconnected and for du Plessis their popularity represents a moral indictment of his people. This disappointment in what was perceived as the emergent narrative of the mainstream Afrikaner becomes apparent in a letter written to Prof. Marais, who evidently shared his views at the Seminary in Stellenbosch, from the Belgian Congo. It is instructive to quote du Plessis here at length:

I had no idea, nor did the cables give me the slightest suspicion, that the rebellion unrest was so widespread and its sympathies so numerous. At this distance it really does seem as though the moral sense of the community was perverted, so that it can no longer distinguish between an honourable war of independence and an unjustifiable rebellion. At present I am happily out of the maelstrom; and I must say that I feel more and more thankful that I have been led to keep myself clear of “Taalbewegingen” and “Nationalismes” of every sort, and to devote my time and my thought to something which really matters for the advance of God’s Kingdom (emphasis original).⁶¹

59. The details of this missionary exploration in the tradition of Livingstone, Stanley, et. al are recorded in J. du Plessis, *Een Toer Door Afrika* (Publicatie-Commissie van de Z.-A. Bijbelvereeniging, Kaapstad, 1917).

60. Erasmus, *Prof. Johannes du Plessis*, p 229.

61. Kerkargief, Stellenbosch, K-DIV 858 (outgoing letter), Rev. Prof. Marais, 27 May 1915.

A couple of days later, Du Plessis returns to this theme of disillusionment regarding news from the Union in a letter to his future wife, Daughtie: “To me everything seems to be confusion and chaos, and the SA people, who were welded together by a just war of independence, have been torn asunder by a rebellion which I find hard to justify.”⁶² I find this sentence incredibly revealing, not so much for the repeated opposition to the rebellion, but for what seems like an understanding that the South African (white) people (note not the Boers or Afrikaner people) were actually unified, not only politically but in a rather more fundamental sense after the Anglo-Boer War. One might suggest that this shift from pro-Boer apologia to an emphasis on “the SA people”, also accurately reflected the views of former Boer generals Botha and Smuts who were now actively propagating the cause of the Union whilst suppressing the rebellion of their erstwhile compatriots in South Africa.

Related sentiments are expressed in correspondence some months later, to Mrs Marais. In this letter du Plessis laments the state of theological education in Stellenbosch particularly after the unexpected death of the apparently admired Prof. Muller. There seemed to be no one appropriate to fill his boots. Du Plessis discounts one candidate after another: Malan for forsaking theology for politics; Brümmer for doing similarly, but in favour of philosophy. Dr Tobie Müller is also discounted by du Plessis for being “obsessed by the question of ‘Afrikaans’”. The study of theology has fallen upon evil times” (emphasis original).⁶³

What is furthermore noteworthy is that du Plessis did not at this time write anything in Afrikaans, relying respectively on English and Dutch.

Conclusion: Mission and the two figures, different facets of the same discourse ... or different discourses?

In an article entitled “De Zendingherleving” published in *Die Kerkbode* shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging, du Plessis praised what he discerned as a mission revival among his church members: “Hoe moeten wij deze teekenen der tijden verklaren? Hoe anders, dan dat God het wil, dat onze volkskrachten zich voortaan meer dan ooit in de richting van Zendingwerk moeten ontwikkelen.”⁶⁴ ([How should we explain these signs of the times? How other than that God wills it that our national powers will more than ever be developed in the direction of mission work.) Clearly from this quotation it would seem that du Plessis was not averse to interpreting mission as a responsibility of the *volk*.

That this blending of the causes of church and *volk* was not an uncommon sentiment at the time finds support in a book specifically written about the influence of the Anglo-Boer War on mission in the DRC. The author quotes a certain Dr H.S. Bosman who during the first Synod of the DRC after the war in 1903 expressed himself thus:

62. Kerkargief, Stellenbosch, K-DIV 858 (outgoing letter), Thysville, Congo Belge, 30 May 1915.

63. Kerkargief, Stellenbosch, K-DIV 858 (outgoing letter), Broken Hill, 27 September 1915.

64. Kerkbode, 20 June 1902, pp 448–449.

Onze kerk is onder maar niet dood. En wanneer ik spreek van de kerk, verbind ik daaraan ons volk. Ons volk is onder maar niet dood. En zolang het kerkelijk leven sterk is, zolang zal ook ons volk sterk zijn.⁶⁵

(Our church is down but not dead. And when I speak of the church, I connect to it our nation. Our nation is down but not dead. And as long as our churchly life is strong, so long shall our nation remain strong.)

Although both characters discussed in this article were deeply interested in mission, there were differences in terms of degree and reach. Du Plessis was of course much stronger philosophically in terms of positioning his interest and reflecting about that theologically. As far as Naudé is concerned, one gets the impression that his interest became increasingly subsumed within the poor white discourse. The alleviation of his own people's need was his overriding concern.

On this point, du Plessis went in a different trajectory, controversially different from the point of view of Afrikaner nationalism. Having delivered one of his typical appeals for greater mission enthusiasm among his church members as recently appointed theology professor in 1916, du Plessis found himself accused by a Pretoria newspaper of exchanging the plight of his own people for the sake of imperialistic foreign missions in Africa.⁶⁶ Du Plessis responded to this and other allegations regarding his divided loyalties by writing an open letter to *De Volkstem*, in which he questioned the explicitly Christian nature of concern for the Afrikaner poor white issue: "Maar toch, het is eigenlijk slechts de *nationale trots* die zegt, 'ik moet mijn eigen volk voorthelpen.' Zelfs de onbekeerde spreekt alzoo: ook hij geeft zijn bijdrage voor de Arme Blanken."⁶⁷ (But still, it is actually only the national pride which says, "I must help my own people". Even the unconverted speak thus; they too give their contribution for the Poor White.) Yes "vaderlandsliefde" (love of one's country) and "volksliefde" (love of one's nation) are common concerns for every right-thinking person, but "het vuur van menschenliefde en Christusliefde" (the fire of love for humanity and love for Christ), for these a special grace is required.⁶⁸ Du Plessis seems to now hold a more nuanced perspective in terms of differentiating between church and *volk* than was perhaps the case at the close of the Anglo-Boer War as seen in his "Zendingherleving" article quoted above.

At any rate, this differentiating approach comes further to the fore when du Plessis denounces the editor of *De Volkstem* for his use of political terms such as "nationalism" and "imperialism" for describing Christian contexts. Still, in addition to such semantic confusion the editor is guilty in the estimation of du Plessis of taking recourse in that age-old and not yet "geheel overwonnenne vooroordeelen van een deel van ons volk tegen wat men 'Chams geslacht' pleegt te noemen."⁶⁹ (wholly overcome prejudice of one section of our nation against what has been termed the "people of Ham".]

Such close identification, or fusion of nationalist ideology and Christianity in certain circles of Afrikanerdom has been described by the term *volkskerk* (people's

65. Quoted in J.W. Kok, *Sonderlinge Vrug: Die Invloed van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog op die Sendingaksie van die N. Kerk in S.A* (NG Kerkboekhandel, Pretoria, 1971), p 14.

66. *De Volkstem*, 06.03.1917.

67. J. du Plessis, *De Arme Blanke en De Heiden-Zending: Open Brief aan den Redacteur van "De Volkstem"* (ZA Bijbel Vereniging, Kaapstad, 1917), p 5.

68. du Plessis, *De Arme Blanke en De Heiden-Zending*, p 5.

69. du Plessis, *De Arme Blanke en De Heiden-Zending*, p 19.

church).⁷⁰ *Volkskerk* assumptions clearly informed the criticism levelled against du Plessis by the Pretoria-based *De Volkstem*. Arguably *volkskerk* notions depended on the persistence of rather undifferentiated socio-religious attitudes in addition to heady emotionalist discourses concerning injustice and victimhood. The well-known laager mentality is the perfect psychological milieu for the fostering of *volkskerk* spirituality. Such was the context in which Afrikaner nationalism grew. Du Plessis, despite his earlier sympathies for the Afrikaner cause was eventually completely unable and unwilling to find his home in the *volkskerk* paradigm. His missionary ideals and self-identification certainly played their roles, but one might furthermore venture to speculate that his international travels and ecumenical contacts resulting from these missionary interests enlarged his world to a degree that was unfathomable to the vast majority of his DRC contemporaries in the early twentieth century. Such a wider perspective might have functioned as a very effective tonic against overtly parochial and nationalist considerations. “Absence makes the heart grow yonder” is the more sceptical version of a well-known saying. In the case of du Plessis it might be that his prolonged physical absence reinforced an increased ideological distancing, which was already starting to take shape before he embarked on his missionary travels.

Volkskerk might however be convincingly linked to the kind of religiosity fostered and espoused by J.F. Naudé during this period. One could point to the heartfelt identification of this man with Afrikaner nationalism, so much that he named one of his daughters Vryheidster, and a son Beyers, the latter in remembrance and honour of the Boer general who died for the cause of the rebellion in December 1844. I have mentioned Naudé’s involvement in Afrikaans-medium education in Roodepoort as well as his Broederbond connection. But what best symbolises for me the emergent *volkskerk* theme in relation to the narrative told here is the rise and fall of the Commando Dank Zending Vereeniging (CDZV). This society which was called into life under such strangely auspicious circumstances during a restful period in the Anglo-Boer War, and in which both Beyers and Naudé played such prominent roles in the earlier years, increasingly struggled for life financially and was in all likelihood disbanded in 1917.⁷¹ Although its final years and eventual demise seem somewhat shrouded in mystery, I find it rather interesting but perhaps historically also understandable that the CDZV would for all practical purposes disappear off the scene around the same period when J.F. Naudé became one of the founding members of the Broederbond. Perhaps it was a situation of having only so much time and energy for extracurricular activities. After all, everyone is limited in such respects, even a *Vuurtoring*.

Perhaps the life-stories these of two figures might even serve to illuminate some general aspects in the emergence of nationalism, which appears to grow in environments where proponents are apt to essentialise a particular narrative of their past for a specific application to the conditions of the immediate and the local. Both du Plessis and Naudé were evidently strong personalities with firm convictions who were able to influence people, but whereas Naudé’s bitter-ender status at the end of the Anglo-Boer War might be construed to define his later

70. See R. Elphick, *The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (Charlottesville: VA, University of Virginia Press, 2012), p 49 and following pages; J. Durand, “Afrikaner Piety and Dissent”, in C. Villa-Vicencio and J.W. de Gruchy (eds), *Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naudé* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1985), p 45 and following pages.

71. See Kok, *Sonderlinge Vrug*, p 30.

career to the extent that his unstinting efforts towards Afrikaner identity formation and self-determination remained of paramount concern, Du Plessis moved in increasingly wider and more inclusive circles during the same period. Their divergent life trajectories were undoubtedly the result of a combination of choice and circumstance, but the relative commitments to cross-cultural mission versus the real or imagined needs of the Afrikaner people had perhaps drawn up the blueprint for the further development of their respective careers.

Abstract

The lives and works of two formative and controversial Afrikaner Christian leaders, Jozua Francois Naudé, and Johannes du Plessis, are considered in this article and evaluated according to the themes of war and mission. Both had public careers in the years spanning both the Anglo-Boer War and the First World War. Both men were significant in terms of the emerging Afrikaner nationalist discourse; Naudé especially so, with much of his own life choices marked by nationalist aspirations. Du Plessis presents a rather more complex, even ambiguous picture. He was controversial enough to be considered by some historians of South African Christianity as representative of an alternative Afrikaner Christian discourse that would eventually challenge the normative neo-Calvinist nationalism espoused by the religious establishment. Their contributions during the different war years are assessed here and while it is clearly evident that J.F. Naudé was an ardent defender of the Boer cause as well as being a supporter of the 1914 Boer Rebellion during the First World War, du Plessis on the other hand seems to have had a more fluid understanding of nationalism, that started out staunchly pro-Boer, but would later acquire more inclusive perspectives.

Keywords: J.F. Naudé; Johannes du Plessis; Anglo-Boer War; First World War; Afrikaner nationalism; Christianity.

Opsomming

Die lewe en die werke van twee formatiewe en omstrede Afrikaner Christelike leiers, Jozua Francois Naudé, en Johannes du Plessis word in hierdie artikel bespreek na aanleiding van die temas van oorlog en sending. Albei se openbare loopbane het gestrek oor 'n tydperk wat beide die Anglo-Boereoorlog en die Eerste Wêreldoorlog beslaan het. Albei figure is belangrik in terme van die opkomende Afrikaner nasionalistiese diskoers, veral Naudé, aangesien baie van sy eie lewenskeuses gekenmerk is deur nasionalistiese aspirasies. Du Plessis bied 'n meer komplekse, selfs dubbelsinnige prentjie. Hy was omstrede genoeg om deur sommige Suid-Afrikaanse kerkgeskiedkundiges beskou te word as 'n verteenwoordiger van 'n alternatiewe Afrikaner Christelike diskoers wat uiteindelik die normatiewe neo-Calvinistiese nasionalisme van die religieuse hoofstroom sou uitdaag. Hul bydraes tydens die verskillende tydperke van oorlog word hier beoordeel en dit is duidelik dat J.F. Naudé 'n vurige deelnemer in die Boere se vroeëre stryd was, sowel as 'n ondersteuner van die Boere-Rebellie tydens die Eerste Wêreldoorlog. Du Plessis daarenteen het blykbaar 'n meer soepele verstaan van nasionalisme gehad. Aanvanlike was hy 'n stoere pro-Boere apologet, maar later het hy 'n meer inklusiewe perspektief gehuldig.

Sleutelwoorde: J.F. Naudé; Johannes du Plessis; Anglo-Boereoorlog; Eerste Wêreldoorlog; Afrikaner nasionalisme; Christendom.