Calvin's election mix in small-scale theology

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ABSTRACT

This paper shows how Calvin's ideas about the Old Testament concept of Israel's election can be dangerous when they are applied uncritically. The main illustration material is drawn from a context the author was himself part of, notably the South African apartheid theology of Calvinist provenance. The paper begins with documenting Calvin's views on Israel and Israel's election in the Old Testament, moving to a consideration of how this motif was connected to the idea of predestination and construed to become an instrument to defend apartheid in what may be called a substandard theology. It is suggested that a glance at the English-speaking world shows surprising similarities that justify further consideration. In this title several dimensions are present that need to be explicated.

INTRODUCTION

The following elements are suggested:

- What is offered has to do with Calvin,
- concerns the concept of election,
- which is a mix of Old Testament motifs
- and Calvin's preoccupation with predestination, and
- also has to do with a Calvinist perspective that is critically called 'small-scale'.

I would like to show how Calvin's ideas about the Old Testament concept of Israel's election can be dangerous when they are applied uncritically. My main illustration material will have a personal touch, since it will be drawn from a context I was part of for practically a lifetime, notably the South African apartheid theology of Calvinist provenance. But I would also like to argue that this kind of small-scale interpretation or – better – misuse of Calvin is by no means only a phenomenon of the so-called 'Old South Africa' and did not even originate here but is an Anglo-Saxon invention from its very inception, which began in England and with Scottish Calvinist immigrants to Northern Ireland and is still a real danger in the world we live in.

In order to do the aforementioned, we must first consider a short overview of the topic in Calvin's own writings and only afterwards come to the small-scale theology based on these concepts.

Israel's election in Calvin's thought

In his essay '"Israel" in der Theologie Calvins' the Old Testament scholar turned systematic theologian, Hans-Joachim Kraus, makes an effort to present Calvin's view of the Old Testament Israel and its successors, the Jews, as totally opposite to that of Martin Luther. He says,

> *We know today that Calvin was not satisfied to use the learned Bible commentaries of the great Jewish exegetes Ibn Ezra (1092–1167), Kimchi (1160–1232) and Rashi (1040–1105) in the compendia of Nicolaus of Lyra (1270–1340) as Luther had for example done, but that he read these commentaries in the original language and continually referred back to them.* Ad fontes *– 'to the sources', that was the solution of humanist scholarship. Calvin looked for the sources of Hebrew linguistic knowledge by the Jews. For him they were the authentic teachers of the language.*
>
> (Kraus 1991:189)

This is correct, but it provides no grounds for presenting Calvin's view of the Old Testament as friendly to the Jews. The same phenomenon of learning Hebrew in the school of the Jews is, for instance, also found in the work of Jerome (347–419) in which the goal is explicitly anti-Jewish. The Second Prologue to the Psalms says,

> *It is one thing to read the Psalms in the churches of those who believe in Christ, it is another to answer the Jews who erroneously cast suspicion on every word.*
>
> (Second Prologue to the Psalms, lines 33–35)

In the Prologue to the Book of Joshua Jerome's goal is formulated quite clearly:

> *[18] For what is the use [19] to the audience if we work ourselves into a sweat and exert ourselves to criticise others so that the Jews may be deprived of the chance to falsely slander and insult Christians, when men of the church then hold in contempt and [21] even tear apart that by means of which the opponents may be tortured?*
>
> (Prologue to the Book of Joshua, lines 18–21)

The difficult task of translating the Bible only makes sense if it produces something by which the Jews can be opposed, which again can only be done when one is willing to use the Jews' own text to confound them.[1]

A similar example is the cofounder of the Viennese Theological Faculty, Heinrich von Langenstein (1325–1397). He too has enlightened work on the Old Testament to his credit; he too learnt his Hebrew

1.*cf.* Sparks 1970:532, Müller 1989:113.

with the help of Jews, both in Paris where he had taught earlier and in Vienna where he taught since 1384. But that did not stop him from being far more than intolerant of Jews, classifying them as 'worse than heathens'.[2] To not only appropriate the Holy Scripture of the Jews but also their language apparently was no reason for thankful open-mindedness towards them. This can also be observed in Calvin.

When we consider his statement on the Jews, his position is quite clear. In a text, probably written near the end of his life, he says,

> *Their [sc. the Jews'] corrupt and stubborn obstinacy deserves that they be unceasingly and excessively repressed and die in their misfortune without any form of pity.*[3]
>
> (Detmers 2006:216)

Kraus tries to give this dialogue a positive complexion (admittedly not denying the possibility of a negative understanding) by calling Calvin 'an attentive and open-minded listener' who considers issues 'on the common ground of the Hebrew Bible'. But that is unconvincing, especially in the light of Calvin's outburst, which Kraus is quiet about. Equally unconvincing is his effort to present Calvin's respect for the Hebrew text and his use of medieval Jewish commentaries as pro-Jewish humanism. First, the examples of Jerome and Langenstein just referred to and, second, the example of the crass anti-Judaism of Martin Bucer (1491–1551), Calvin's mentor influenced by humanism, demonstrate how little weight this effort carries.[4] On the contrary, Calvin accuses the Jews with scoffing words that they understand neither their own nor the Christian writings,[5] although he does not invoke the customary curse on the Jews as murderers of Christ (to which I may add that the dictum that the Jews should 'die in their misfortune without any form of pity' is in no way milder than a curse[6]).

Calvin certainly used the Hebrew Text of the Old Testament as well as Jewish commentaries. The philological character of this work may be regarded as influenced by humanism, all of which can be observed in his commentaries and sermons.[7] But that he was against 'annexing' the Old Testament, as Kraus claims, cannot be upheld. Exactly the point where Kraus tries to exemplify this, the idea of Israel's election, rules that out. Kraus rightly says that Calvin's view of *Israel's* election and not the doctrine of a comprehensive double predestination characterises the meaning of Israel for Calvin. But here the total context should be considered: In the *Institutes* II.11.11 Calvin shows that only Israel received the revelation of God and the covenant with him. This covenant is not terminable and on the basis of Romans 9–11, Calvin, unlike Luther, does not arrive at an opposition between Law and Gospel but postulates the permanent validity of the covenant. But he does this in as ambivalent a way as Paul himself in the relevant chapters of the Epistle to the Romans.[8]

This priority of 'the Jews' (as Calvin often calls 'Israel' in his sermons) is, however, heavily relativised in the context of an overall argument concerning the *differences* between the Old Testament and the New, respectively between the Jews and the church:

- Salvation was merely prefigured to Israel only in an 'earthly' way; under the New Covenant, however, it is revealed not in an 'earthly' but in a 'spiritual' manner (*Inst.* II.11.1).
- The revelation to Israel could only foreshadow Christ by means of types, but in the New Testament the full truth becomes visible (*Inst.* II.11.4).
- The Old Covenant was 'literal', geared towards death and passing; the New Covenant, already predicted in Jeremiah 31:31–34, is 'spiritual', life-giving and eternal (*Inst.* II.11.7–8).
- The Old Covenant belongs to fear and servitude, the New to joy and freedom (*Inst.* II.11.9).
- The Old Covenant belonged to one people only, the New to all (*Inst.* II.11.11).

Even if one could agree with Kraus that 'Torah piety' is to be found in Calvin because he does not devalue the Law as in opposition to the Gospel, it is equally true that Calvin's fundamental hermeneutical scheme still is 'promise and fulfilment', while he in no way tries to interpret God's demands in the 'Law' within the framework of the narratives supporting them. Moreover, the typically humanistic idea of the education of a nation still in its infancy, which Calvin often uses, influenced his view of Israel's election. His exposition of Galatians 4:2, for instance, argues that Israel is the under-aged heir mentioned there:

> *The people of the Old Covenant have the same heritage as we, but at their age they were not yet capable to take possession of this heritage or to administer it. They had the same church, but they were still children* (sed cuius aetas adhuc puerilis erat*). So the Lord held them under this state of being taught* (sub hac paedagogia*) and did not give them the spiritual promises plainly and clearly, but reproduced by earthly things.*
>
> (*Institutes* II.11.2)

Therefore the election of Israel has never been annulled, but it remains the election of an under-aged child as long as Israel does not accept Christ. The covenant with Israel was broken by Israel and is in need of renewal. For this argument Calvin only uses the motifs used in the New Testament to claim the church's surpassing of the old order (*cf.* Col 2:17; Heb 8:5; 10:1).

We can thus conclude with Detmers that Calvin's expositions of Israel's election and therefore of Israel's status were predominantly carried by *theological* and not by anti-Jewish *sanctions*. However,

> *This incorporates the view that God had smitten the Jews with blindness and that therefore hope of conversion existed only for individual Jews. Calvin saw the major impediment in the way of a conversion in the Jewish exposition of Scripture, which suppressed the Christological understanding of the Old Testament.*
>
> (Detmers 2009:3)

It is to be agreed with Potter Engel that Calvin's views on the election of Israel remain dark and enigmatic.[9] One thing is, however, clear: Israel's election is always an election of the whole people. According to Potter Engel the logical solution for the inconsistency in Calvin's conception may even be situated here: Not individual Jews but the collective Israel is elected, which could open the possibility for Calvin to identify this chosen entity with the 'remnant that turns around'. He says, for example, in a sermon on Daniel,[10]

2. I owe this information to Professor Thomas Prügl, *Bibeltheologie und Kirchenreform: Die Gründungsepoche der Wiener Katholisch-Theologischen Fakultät angesichts der theologischen Herausforderungen am Ende des 14 Jahrhunderts*, paper presented at the 625th anniversary of the Catholic Theological Faculty at the University of Vienna, 21 February 2009.

3. *Ad Quaestiones et objecta Judaei cuiusdam responsio*, CR XXXVII, 653–674, according to Burnett 1993:113–123, a reaction to an anti-Christian Jewish document, *sefer hannizzahon*, from the 14th century.

4. *cf.* Hobbs 2006:137–169 on Bucer's respect for the Hebrew Bible and his crass anti-Judaism.

5. *cf.* Burnett 1993:115.

6. Detmers 2006:217 lists a series of insulting words used by Calvin in this document to describe the Jews: *unclean dogs, lost people, pigs, animals, an unthankful race* etc.; they are caught in *brutal obstinacy, arrogance, presumption* etc.

7. Potter Engel 1990:106–123 (esp. 107); *cf.* also Schenk 2009.

8. Potter Engel 1990:122–123, who calls both Paul's and Calvin's statements 'maddeningly complex', even confused and contradictory (e.g. the covenant of the elect is permanent; it has been broken by Israel). This complex state of affairs is also realised in the statements of the Leuenberger Protestant Churches of Europe (2001:48–49), who, with reference to Romans 9–11, speak of 'uncompleted thinking' and the wish the church should search further for an adequate understanding (footnote 8 continues...)
of her identity *vis-à-vis* Israel. It is not surprising to read that the church has not yet reached clarity in this respect – not if the same goes for Paul.

9. She calls the whole issue a 'puzzle', *op cit.*, *passim*.

10. Also see Potter Engel 1990, 112–113.

> *So we see how God sometimes hid his church underground so that she could not be seen as far as human opinion is concerned.… Some people thought that the church had completely disappeared, but we observe how God protected a tiny seed.*
>
> (Calvin CO 41, 491)

Because the motif of the 'remnant' enables him on the one hand to call the actual people of Israel who do not accept Christ blind and unrepentant and on the other hand to simultaneously recognise a remnant among them with whom the New Covenant or the non-termination of the Old is realised, this ambivalence is endemic to 'the Jews' in the writings of Calvin.

Election as predestination

Predestination is a completely different theologoumenon in Calvin's system. Calvin developed this doctrine heavily depending on Augustine and formulates it quite clearly:

> *By predestination we mean God's eternal decree through which he determined by himself what would happen to each human being. All have not been created equal, but some were pre-ordained to everlasting life, others to everlasting damnation. As the individual has been created either for the one or for the other purpose, so we say he is predestined to life or to death.*
>
> (*Institutes* III.21.5)

In this formulation is hidden a fateful expression, 'all have not been created equal', to which we will return shortly. It is to be expected that this doctrine could not but deeply influence the Calvinist conception of Israel's election. Since predestination contains a massive collective determination to either life or death, it presupposes a general election or rejection. As such the absolute predestination necessarily had to engulf the election of Israel so that the latter had to become an aspect of the former. This is how it is developed in the Calvinist creeds.

In the oldest of these creeds, the Confessio Belgica (1561), one can see how the concepts of 'election' and 'predestination' are identified[11]:

> *We believe that – all Adam's descendants having thus fallen into perdition and ruin by the sin of the first man – God showed himself to be as he is: merciful and just. He is merciful in withdrawing and saving from this perdition those whom he, in his eternal and unchangeable counsel, has* elected and chosen *in Jesus Christ our Lord by his pure goodness, without any consideration of their works. He is just in leaving the others in their ruin and fall into which they plunged themselves.*
>
> (Confessio Belgica 1561:n.p.)

In the Canons of Dordt (1619) this identification is formulated in all polemical clarity[12]:

> *That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree, for known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.… According to this decree, he graciously softens the hearts of the* elect, *however obstinate, and inclines them to believe, while he leaves the* non-elect *in his just judgment* [sic] *to their own wickedness and obduracy.*
>
> (Canons of Dordt 1619:n.p.)

In the Westminster Confession (1643) it is expressed likewise[13]:

> *By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are* predestined *unto everlasting life, and others* foreordained *to everlasting death.*
>
> (Westminster Confession 1643:n.p.)

Here predestination is even radicalised so as to be more than an umbrella for the election of Israel or the church as new Israel, notably to determine everything that happens.[14] The result is an evolutionary election > predestination > general determination:

> God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, *freely and unchangeably* ordain *whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the* liberty *or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.*
>
> (Westminster Confession 1643:n.p.)

This is already to be seen in the Calvinist doctrinal textbook, although not so crassly formulated. In answer to the question what divine providence means, it says,[15]

> *God works through his almighty and everywhere present power whereby, as it were by his hand, he upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, and all else come over us not by chance, but by his fatherly hand.*
>
> (Heidelberg Catchism 1563:n.p.)

Although this is a positive formulation and not necessarily deterministic, it can easily be so construed (as clearly illustrated by the Westminster Confession), especially since the Heidelberg Catechism also incorporates the whole doctrine of predestination into a positive declaration of the holy, catholic Christian church[16]:

> *That the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world gathers, defends, and preserves to himself by his Spirit and word, out of the whole human race, a church* chosen to everlasting *life, agreeing in true faith, and that I am and always shall remain, a living member thereof.*
>
> (Heidelberg Catechism 1563)

So, if the pun be allowed me, a development has been predestined, the fatal outcome of which was hardly avoidable: The blending of these beliefs in popular Calvinistic credence became a mix of Israel's election, the election of the church and the idea of predestination expressed in a new nationalistic unit that could see itself as God's favourites and that could reinterpret and apply the New Israel's task of being a blessing *for* the nations to its *own* advantage.

Election and Covenant in South Africa

Defending apartheid theologically is both simple and complicated. Simple because its exegetical underpinning worked with straightforward one-on-one relationships, complicated because the inevitable movement between logical levels involves juggling inner inconsistencies. I shall now provide some examples from my own archive, that is, cases I was personally confronted with during the heyday of small-scale theology.

The confluence of predestination to everlasting life and election of a chosen people to save the country became the platform of the effort to substantiate the politics of apartheid in a South Africa moulded by Calvinism. Since the election of Israel entailed a chosen people and since Calvin, as we saw, strengthened the ethnic dimension by his highlighting the collective character of being chosen, a seemingly simple logic could be designed with this schema:

- God has chosen his people Israel
- This involves an ethnic unit
- The election was transferred to the Christian church
- The ethnic dimension of Israel's election remains valid
- Therefore, the election of an ethnic unit is completely biblical
- The white people is (singular!) chosen to bring the heathen of Africa to Christianity.

11.Confessio Belgica, Art. XVI (my emphasis).

12.Canons of Dordt, Art. VI (my emphasis).

13.Westminster Confession III, 3 (my emphasis).

14.Westminster Confession III, 1 ('ordain' = 'predestine' = my emphasis).

15.Heidelberg Catechism, Sunday 10, Answer 27.

16.Heidelberg Catechism, Sunday 21, Answer 54 (my emphasis).

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Apartheid thus means that the white people to whom the Gospel had been entrusted could only pass it on to Africa if, like Israel of old, it held itself apart, separate or segregated from the other ethnic units. The logical conclusion of this train of thought would be that all who then convert to Christ to receive everlasting life *ipso facto* belong to those predestined to everlasting life and are taken up into the chosen people as Ruth was integrated as a proselyte. But the argument cannot be maintained, and here one observes the first indication that it actually is about something else. The logical consequence is not drawn: Black converts were not taken up into the chosen people of God but had to continue remaining apart.

As a consequence the inner necessity of the argumentative thrust forced an inconsistency in terms of the underlying Calvinist tenets themselves: Black Christians do belong to those elected *to receive everlasting life* (or else, according to Calvinistic predestination, they would not have been able to convert in the first place), but they still could not belong to the chosen *people of God*. How does one escape from this dilemma? One distracts. One distracts attention from the fact that this kind of argument saws off the very branch on which it sits by means of a *metabasis eis allo genos* (with a disguised leap from one argumentative level to another).[17]

In a memorandum for the so-called Cottesloe-Colloquium[18] of the World Council of Churches (WCC) on church and apartheid it is propounded that the exegesis of Genesis 10 and 11, Deuteronomy 32:8 and Acts 17:26–27 proves that God himself has installed the various ethnic groups in the world.

Genesis 10 is a list of the nations known at the time and is closely related to the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1–9, according to which God confused the language of humankind. The simple exegetical insight that the table of nations in this context cannot be used to justify that nations should forever stay as they are now and that the confusion of language was punishment for the sin of arrogance is not taken into account.

In Deuteronomy it is said,

> *When the Most High apportioned the nations and divided humankind, he fixed the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel; the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his share.*
>
> (Dt 32:8–9)

The context of this statement is the election of *Israel*. This is, however, ironically ignored *de facto* and thereby tacitly annexed in order to turn it into the opposite of its essence (v. 9!), namely an ordination of the principle of apartheid (for all people!). Moreover, this use of the Deuteronomic text as a fundamental principle leads to the absurd consequence that the whole of South African history that it seeks to justify as manifestation of God's will is made one continuous sin. The origin of a white people from Dutch Calvinists, French Huguenots and other Protestants from Britain (especially from Calvinist Scotland) and Germany would be sinful because many ethnic contingents were moulded together whereas they were supposed to have remained apart in accordance with the fixed number of nations.

According to Acts Paul says,

> *From one human he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – although he is not far from each one of us.*
>
> (Ac 17:26–27)

Paul proclaims the Creator God, contrasting him with insignificant idols of the Greeks. Since he has made us all, Greeks and non-Greeks, from one ancestor, we should all seek him. If anything, Paul here means the *unity* of humankind across ethnic divides and not its *diversity*, and additionally the issue is not the borders between nations but their turning to God.

But the memorandum decontextualises all texts from the Old and New Testaments and recontextualises them into a new environment where the proclamation of the Gospel to non-Christian peoples, the election of Israel and the fundamentally ordained separation of all nations (read: apartheid) are employed for another purpose: justifying the separate existence of whites and all others in South Africa.

That this cannot provide a logical validation is clear not only from the biblicistic use of the Bible but also from the fact that it is applied not to peoples, that is, ethnic groups that are defined by *cultural* criteria, but to *racial* groups. The members of different ethnic units within any one of the racial groups may mix but not across the racial lines. That shows that the rhetoric serves neither the linguistic and cultural conditions for profitable preaching nor the wish to bring all into the people of God and to mould them into the new Israel but serves to keep them socially, economically and politically apart.

In another document[19] the story of the tower of Babel is again used in such a way that the concept of Israel as the chosen people – otherwise thought to be so important – is ignored in favour of the *ad hoc* use of texts from the Old Testament. Here the difference and uniqueness of Israel is extensively espoused, but vague allusions to the Bible (without actual citations[20]) are made to give credibility to the idea that ethnic homogeneity is biblically called for. For instance, by stating that Abraham fetches a wife for his son from his own clan, that Esau's non-Israelite wives are disliked by Rebecca and that neither is reprimanded by God for this attitude, it is concluded with an *argumentum e silentio* that humans should marry 'their own people'.

Once more without citing a text,[21] Jesus' cleansing of the Temple is used to build an inference on another inference. His anger about conditions in the Temple is ascribed to the fact that the Jews despised the separate court for non-Jews, not that there actually existed such an ethnic apartheid. Although the issue is not even found in the text, background material is used to justify existing practice in the church: Those taking part in the religious service who are somehow Jews and non-Jews at the same time should remain apart liturgically, which is then set up as a model for keeping apart people in the church despite their faith and only on the grounds of their racial make-up.

In this memorandum an important concept from an important branch of 19th-century Dutch Calvinism is used, namely the '*Volkskerk*' idea. Based on the idea of a national church standing under the Word of God together with the state, as this was propounded by Philippus Jakobus Hoedemaker (1839–1910), the effort is made to justify the necessity of different '*Volkskerke*' for South Africa's different ethnic groups. But this too was flawed by the fact that not ethnic but racial groups were the issue. Zulu and Xhosa speakers were accepted as members of one black church, but Afrikaans-speaking 'coloureds' were not accepted as members of white congregations speaking their language.

Naturally this tendency in official documents was also widespread in the general theological discourse. I now give some examples in order to show how enticing such substandard hermeneutics can be when clothed in popular Calvinist garb,

17. Many instances can be quoted from the extensive document by the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, *Ras, volk en nasie: Volkereverhoudinge in die lig van die Skrif*, Pretoria, 1974, according to which apartheid is biblically justifiable by appeal to divinely given ethnicity. I, however, only present documentation of instances with which I was confronted first hand.

18. Acts of the Genral Synodal Commision, Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk 1960, 48.

19. Memorandum for the WCC Central Committee: Appendix MM, Acta Synodi 1961.

20. Genesis 24:1ff., 26:34f. and 27:46 are probably meant.

21. Matthew 21:12ff. par. is probably meant.

particularly when people are readily prepared to believe and instrumentalise them. A powerful example is the use of the Old Testament Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, in which the restoration after the exile, the forced expulsion of non-Jewish wives and the rejection of shared labour between Jews and non-Jews in the holy place are at issue. In Ezra 9–10 Israelites are forced to divorce their non-Jewish wives, which most were in fact prepared to do and to register in writing. The elders report to Ezra that the people have not kept themselves apart from other peoples, for

> *… they have taken their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons. Thus the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the officials and leaders have taken the lead.*
>
> (Ezr 9:2)

H.P. Wolmarans[22] sees this as ethnic mixing, which is explicitly called that in the biblical text (vv 1 and 2). Here we can observe how even a leading Barthian scholar of the time could pounce on the special position of Israel as the chosen people to apply it directly to the South African situation by means of a naïve hermeneutic. The usual terminology was 'mixing' and 'integration', the opposite of which is clearly and extensively prescribed in the last chapters of the Book of Ezra:

> *Therefore do not give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters for your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity, so that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.*
>
> (Ezr 9:2)

From this prayer can be inferred that not only were mixed marriages with non-Jewish inhabitants of the land forbidden but prosperity in the land, power and peace in this life, that is, secure existence in the social, economic and political sense, were also meant for only the chosen ethnic people of God. The practical consequence is inevitable. Ezra commands,

> *You have trespassed and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel. Now make confession to the Lord the God of your ancestors, and do his will and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.*
>
> (Ezr 10:10–11)

Nehemiah also prohibited mixed marriages and even fought physically with men whose children did not speak 'the Jewish language' (Neh 13:23–31).

Wolmarans's argument is summarised in the refrain of his article: 'We call that apartheid!'[23] Its thrust can be summarised as follows: We hear continually that Israel should not be spiritualised and about its hopes for this earthly reality; continually the permanence of Israel's election even through the lens of Paul's view in Romans 9–11 is stated and restated. So when Paul says that the church is grafted on Israel and not the other way round (Rm 11:17–24) the church must today take the same actions as ancient Israel.

This whole structure (here only briefly illustrated) is held together by the motif of the covenant. The final aspect of the use of Israel's election in the service of a theology of apartheid is the *hieros logos* of the covenant. As the chosen status of Israel was sealed by a covenant with the patriarchs and at Sinai, so a majority of Calvinists in South Africa regarded themselves as bound to the same God by a formal covenant forged at Blood River in December 1838. This history was made the foundation of a covenantal theology that was closely related to the idea of the chosen people having to function as symbol of a religious superstructure for the socio-political substructure, enabling the blending of the Old Testament motifs of the people of God, election and the covenant, as well as developing their ethnic dimension in the service of socio-political interests. Besides, it was achievable to Christianise the whole edifice with the help of the difficult and therefore all the more controllable Pauline views on the election of Israel. All of this could be attained thanks to the infrastructure provided by Calvin's views of election and predestination, which were passed on via the Calvinist orthodoxy of the 17th century and could effectively be associated with and carried by the Calvinist covenant (or federal) concept.

22. Wolmarans 1968:11.15 (April), 11.23 (May), 9–10.17 (June). Wolmarans was an important exponent of Barthian theology in South Africa.

23. *Die Hervormer*, *op. cit.*

CONCLUSION

The end of apartheid and a glance at Great Britain

What has happened to this once mighty giant on its feet of clay? In South Africa I do not need to show how its discrediting came about (as I have to do in Europe). Apart from certain pockets, this theology of apartheid is not taken seriously anymore. So Paul and Calvin seem to have been right in a sense not foreseen by them: God has not rejected this part of his people.

But I do have one more word.

- As grand apartheid was *not* invented by the Boers, *not* by the Afrikaans-speaking Europeans of Dutch and Huguenot provenance but by the colonial government of the British Empire (where grand segregation between 'Caffraria' for the Xhosa and the so-called 'Border' region for the white farmers was determined by several shifts of the dividing line and no-man's land in the Fish, Keiskamma and Kei regions (e.g. 1819, 1834–35)[24]
- as the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, saw the calling of the British to bring their civilisation, 'the highest the world had ever known', to the non-white races (Taylor 1995:370–394)
- as Lord Milner, British Governor of the Cape Colony at the *fin de siècle*, sought to impose the idea of 'British racial superiority' with a popularised form of quasi-scientific Darwinism on South Africa (Gilliomee 2007:233);
- so Cecil John Rhodes took over the concept of the 'British Race as the finest on earth' and embarked on grand-scale colonialism to make Africa British from the Cape to Cairo. He did so with the secular argument similarly structured to the Calvinistic one we have seen: We bring the light not of the Gospel but of civilisation to Africa. With this justification British colonial policy has exploited Africa and has pocketed her raw materials, gold, cheap labour and political influence *ad majorem gloriam* of her Majesty.
- The same secularised parallel of instrumentalising a religious pattern was even recently advocated by Baroness Margaret Thatcher: The well-being of the world in technology and progress is 'to be left to the English-speaking nations of the World'. This self-centred history shows just how arrogant human *hybris* can also be in non-Calvinist garb.
- But the same British loyalty also has a Calvinist face. Glancing at Northern Ireland, where Calvinists from Scotland were settled as early as the 17th century in order to counterbalance the Roman Catholic Irish – once again in the interests of the Majesty on the British throne – one can observe the identical Orange rhetoric, the same conviction of having been chosen by God, the same civil religion and – the concept of the covenant.[25] In this expression of the

24. Therefore much older than the thesis of 'English-speaking capital' (*cf.* TRE 32, 328, 26–39).

25. This was still implemented until the Ulster Covenant of Northern-Irish Protestants in 1912 and upheld in Presbyterian churches as well as combined with Calvin's concept of election and defended in this form. As a relevant example of this, see the article by Stewart, A., *John Calvin's integrated covenant theology I & II*, accessed 3 March 2009, from http://www.cprf.co.uk/articles/calvinscovenanttheology1.htm. The covenant concept of Scottish Protestants could also merge Calvinist convictions with pre-Reformation covenanting between the clans: 'Even before the Reformation the Scots used covenants or bonds between feuding parties in an attempt to maintain some social order at the local level in a highly decentralized society. They therefore had little difficulty in grasping a concept advanced by the reformers of a series of covenants (God with Christ, Christ with the monarch and

Calvinist consciousness of election (here in the tradition of Calvin's follower, John Knox) one sees the covenant idea in its clearest manifestation. The Orange brotherhoods have a covenant to stay loyal to the British throne, founded on the theological tradition of Calvin.[26]

How dangerous is the election motif in its small-scale theological design? Looking at South Africa, we see that such aberrations are curable without abandoning the faith. Looking at the islands to the rear of Europe, one can only hope that the ancient saying comes true also in this respect: *ex Africa semper aliquid novi*.

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(footnote 25 continues...)
the monarch with his people) that justified secular authority. The idea of a covenant with God, indeed, sometimes became an element in personal faith. God called on the elect (those chosen by Him for salvation) to covenant with him. Those who believed that they belonged to the elect believed that they were bound by an agreement with their maker, and there are examples of people drawing up such covenants on an annual basis and recording them in their diaries. Coupled with the belief in such bonds sometimes went a conviction that Christ was about to return to earth as predicted in the Bible. This would, it was further believed, herald the defeat of Anti-Christ, the personification of evil, the chief manifestation of which on earth was the Roman Catholic Church.' (Maxwell 2009).

26.*cf.* Akenson 1992:97–150; 183–202.

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