

The history of theologised politics of South Africa, the 1913 Land Act and its impact on the flight from the black self

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to examine the role and impact of the history of theologised politics in South Africa and the 1913 Land Act and its impact on the flight from the black self. This is done specifically to locate the question of land and land dispossession of black South Africans that, according to the author of this article, resulted from the theologised politics of South Africa. It is the contention of the author that land dispossession, which was officialised in South Africa with the passing of the 1913 Land Act, was chiefly responsible for the “flight from the black self”. This is crucial, simply because the author is of the view that land dispossession had a terrible impact on black people’s self-worth. It is for this reason that the author argues that black people in the main have internalised oppression. On the basis of this, the author surmises that Apartheid, which was rationalised as being biblically and theologically sanctioned, precipitated the 1913 Land Act and in turn the flight from the black self. It is in this context of the flight from the black self that we must understand the assertion that there are many South Africans within one South Africa.

Introduction

The history of Dutch Reformed Church theology in South Africa has been deeply entrenched within politics in South Africa. This church tradition is intensely bound with the painful history of suppression, oppression and dispossession. The Reformed churches, which subscribe to Reformed theology in general and the Dutch Reformed Church in particular, cannot be divorced from the painful history of apartheid (De Gruchy 2004) which resulted in the humiliation caused by the land dispossession of the majority of the people of South Africa. This humiliation and land dispossession had tremendous effects on the majority of black people in South Africa. It resulted in black people internalising oppression and thus fleeing from being black (Lephakga 2012:7-11). Land dispossession which was justified as a result of the “theologised politics” of South Africa had a terrible impact, particularly upon the identity, of black people – hence black people’s internalisation of oppression and some black people even affirming the apartheid system which was supported by the Dutch Reformed Church (Serfontein 1982:63-69). The apartheid system, which was a precursor of land dispossession, in South Africa destroyed black people. It is therefore not by chance that black people have become the greatest consumers of material goods. This is evident in the disconnect seen in many black communities which results because of a need for the individual black person to attempt to recreate himself or herself in an image that is at least more acceptable to a society that cherishes white values and ideals (Fanon 2008:3, 82-108).

The identity of black people is deeply rooted in the ancestral and motherland (Mosoma 1991:26). The dislocation of the African from his or her land would certainly have implications for his or her identity. Because of land dispossession and the subsequent dislocation, black people began to doubt their standing as being fully human (Mosoma 1991:26). The author of this article is of the view that the Reformed theology, specifically the Dutch Reformed Church which subscribed to this kind of theology, assisted in the institutionalisation of separation and oppression which resulted in the promulgation of the 1913 Land Act, Bantustans, the pass laws and all the other laws which led to the majority of the people of South Africa occupying the margins of society (Serfontein 1982:9-10, 63-69). Such oppression was indeed resisted from many circles. The 1960 Sharpeville massacre, which became a painful turning point in the history of South African politics, came as result of the black masses’ resistance against the pass laws that humiliated and made black people aliens and slaves in their ancestral and motherland. The pass laws, which resulted from the Dutch Reformed Church’s misunderstanding and misreading of the Covenant and Calvinistic theology, led to this painful massacre in the history of South Africa. The year 1990 became a transformational turning point in the painful, oppressive, suppressive and humiliating history of South Africa. This is the year when (1) the last president of the apartheid government, FW de Klerk, announced the release of Nelson Mandela from prison and the scraping of apartheid, and (2) liberation movements were unbanned.

It is the contention of the author of this article that the theologised politics of South Africa resulted in the promulgation of the 1913 Land Act which officially (as this had began long before the passing of the 1913 Land Act [Smith 1979]) begun the dehumanisation and Land Dispossession Project. This in turn resulted in black

people's flight from the black self. Therefore, it is argued that the Reformed churches, specifically the Dutch Reformed Church, have to play a major part in the land restitution programme of the government in order to help reconcile black people to their selves. It is for this reason that the author will look at the following: (1) the history of theologised politics of South Africa; (2) the Bible and land dispossession in South Africa; (3) the 1913 Land Act and the officialisation of the Land Dispossession Project, the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936, and the forced removals of the 1950s to the 1980s; (4) the journey from the Sharpeville massacre to the unbanning of the liberation movements of South Africa; (5) the Kairos Document and (6) concluding thoughts.

Calvinism and theologised politics of South Africa

The relationship between politics and religion (theology) in South Africa can be traced back to the influence of the Kuyperian so-called neo-Calvinism, Scottish evangelicalism and romantic nationalism which helped to form and strengthen the Afrikaner civil religion. The Afrikaner civil religion was an attempt by the Afrikaners, after their arrival in the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, to establish themselves as a unique people before God with their own civil liturgy, sacred days and leaders. Afrikaners came to South Africa as colonists from different countries and then later blended as the Afrikaner people, who had their own history, language and culture. All this was greatly influenced by the doctrines of John Calvin (Villa-Vicencio & De Grunchy 1985:39-51, De Klerk 1975:3-21, Giliomee 2003:355-402).

This civil religion – which was greatly influenced by the Kuyperian (neo-Calvinism), Scottish evangelicalism and romantic nationalism – came under the banner of the Reformed tradition (theology) to South Africa. The Reformed tradition (theology) in South Africa, which was greatly influenced by the pseudo-interpretation of the doctrines of Calvin, played a crucial role in separating people on the basis of race and colour, and thus promoted the ideologies of apartheid (Williams 1991:1-7).

The civil religion was also greatly influenced by the Dutch theologian Abram Kuyper, who was one of the founders of the Free University of Amsterdam. This university had great influence on the architects of apartheid in South Africa. This Afrikaner civil religion, in the South African context, formed what came to be known as neo-Calvinism. This kind of Afrikaner theology, which was greatly influenced by the Kuyperian theology, emphasised God's sovereignty over all spheres of life. The Afrikaner theology was later racialised when it emphasised that God had created the white person (civilised) different from the black person (heathen). This kind of thinking of the Afrikaner theology was later translated into the apartheid theology, which produced theologised politics (Villa-Vicencio & De Gruchy 1985:39-51).

Through the influence of Abram Kuyper and the doctrines of Calvin, Afrikaners wanted to have a purified nation of Afrikaners who would be proud of their language, culture and religion. This came after the Afrikaners were forced to fight alongside the British in World War I and after the betrayal of the Afrikaners by General Hertzog when he joined General Smuts and the United Party. Afrikaners were later also betrayed when they were again forced to fight in World War II against the friend of the Afrikaner cause, Adolf Hitler. This was terrible for the Afrikaners, hence they dreamed of a future republic which would be separate from the British Empire (Giliomee 2003:83-127).

According to the Afrikaners, the British Empire neglected their language, culture and religion. Thus, they wanted a republic of their own, which would preserve the purified Afrikaners who were proud of their culture, language and religion. This kind of thinking of the Afrikaners resulted in the development of the separate races policy because they were the chosen nation. It resulted in the apartheid theology, which was translated into the apartheid ideology. This ideology was later adopted as the political ideology of the Nationalist Party after the election in 1948. This ideology was backed by the teachings of Calvin as interpreted by Abram Kuyper and the teachings of the Covenant theology as presented in the Old Testament (Du Toit 1983:920 & Moodie 1975).

The pseudo-interpretation of the doctrines of Calvin as interpreted by Abram Kuyper and the theologised politics in South Africa had a terrible impact upon the people of South Africa (both white and black). It resulted in the inception of the "Chosen Nation" ideology among the white Afrikaners. Afrikaners saw themselves as the Chosen Nation who were civilised and who had conquered South Africa through sweat, tears and blood. They came to see themselves as the Israelites who were chosen to conquer and lead because God was with them (Du Toit 1983:920-952).

The Afrikaners regarded themselves as a chosen nation that was predestined by the grace of God to be superior to the inferior black nation. According to their understanding of Calvinism, they (Afrikaners) conceived of themselves as a chosen and covenanted people (like the Israelites of the Old Testament) and early Afrikaners presumed a divine mandate to smite heathen peoples and reduce them to their pre-ordained position as perpetual hewers of wood and drawers of water. To the Boers, the Old Testament was like a mirror of their own lives. In it, they found the deserts and fountains, the drought and plagues, the captivity and the exodus. Above all, they found the Chosen Nation guided by a stern but partial Deity through the midst of the heathen to a promised land. Moreover, it was the Old Testament and the doctrines of Calvin that moulded the Boer into the Afrikaner of today (Du Toit 1983:920-952).

This kind of thinking according to the Afrikaner theology resulted in the segregation of people based on race. This segregationist theology had a terrible impact upon black people. It resulted in the institutionalisation of the apartheid ideology within the Church and then, in turn, was adopted in the political sphere (Serfontein 1982:63-69, 70-86). This institutionalisation of the apartheid ideology resulted in the formulation of the theologised politics in South Africa. The theologised politics resulted in the oppression, exploitation, suppression and humiliation of black people, who in turn internalised this oppression, exploitation, suppression and humiliation. This internalisation resulted in “blackness” being regarded as an inferior colour and thus black people developed an inferiority complex associated with blackness. This inferiority complex led to black people fleeing from being black.

Neo-Calvinism played a crucial role in the establishment of the apartheid ideology within the Church, specifically in the Reformed churches in South Africa. It was the teachings and doctrines of Calvin and the pseudo-interpretation of the Bible that moulded and formulated the apartheid ideology in the Church, which was then adopted in the political sphere. The Afrikaners misinterpreted the doctrines of Calvin, specifically the doctrine of predestination or grace. Calvinism in this context refers to the pseudo-incarnation of the “chosen people ideology” which was taken from Calvin’s doctrine of election or predestination (Villa-Vicencio & De Gruchy 1985:39-51).

For Calvin, election or predestination solely depended upon God. Therefore, Calvin defined this doctrine as “the eternal decree of God, by which he determined what he wished to make of every person. For he does not create everyone in the same condition, but ordains eternal life for some and eternal damnation for others” (McGrath 2011:367). With this doctrine, Calvin tried to explain that there are those who are graciously chosen or elected by God so that they deserve God’s grace and there are those who will not receive this grace because they do not respond to the gospel message (McGrath 2001).

This pseudo-interpretation of the doctrines of Calvin and of the Old Testament had a terrible impact upon the history of South Africa. It resulted in the theologisation of the segregation of people based on race. This in turn had a terrible impact on the race relations of the people of South Africa. Hence, Du Toit (1983:209) argues:

Accounts of South African history and politics have been influenced by what might be termed the Calvinist paradigm of Afrikaner history. As a model for the historical understanding of modern Afrikaner nationalism and of the ideology of apartheid, it has proved persuasive to historians and social scientists alike. In outline, it amounts to the view that the “seventeenth-century Calvinism” which the Afrikaner founding fathers derived from their countries of origin became fixed in the isolated frontier conditions of trekboer society and survived for generations in the form of a kind of “primitive Calvinism”; that in the first part of the nineteenth century, this gave rise to a nascent chosen people ideology among early Afrikaners, which provided much of the motivation for, as well as the self-understanding of, that central event in Afrikaner history, the Great Trek, while simultaneously serving to legitimate the conquest and subordination of indigenous peoples; and that, mediated in this way, an authentic tradition of Afrikaner Calvinism thus constitutes the root source of modern Afrikaner nationalism and the ideology of apartheid.

Many people, especially in the South African context, misunderstood or misused Calvin’s reflection on human experiences in the light of the Gospel message. Calvin emphasised that this election or predestination rests upon the grace of God, which depends solely upon God. McGrath (2001:467) further alludes to this when he argues:

Calvin’s predestinationarianism is to be regarded as reflection upon the data of human experience, interpreted in the light of Scripture, rather than something which is deduced on the basis of preconceived ideas concerning divine omnipotence. Belief in predestination is not an article of faith in its own right, but it is the final outcome of scripturally informed reflection on the efforts of grace upon individuals in the light of the enigmas of experience.

The Bible and land dispossession in South Africa

Furthermore to the pseudo-interpretation of Calvinism in South Africa, the Bible was used to suppress, oppress and dispossess black people of their ancestral and motherland. It is for this reason that Mofokeng regards the Bible as part of the problem and solution in South Africa. Mofokeng (1988:34) argues:

... no statement in the history of political science as well as that of Christian missions expresses the dilemma that confronts black South Africans in their relationships with the Bible with greater precision and has whipped up more emotions than the following, ‘when the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us “let us pray”. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the bible’. With this statement, which is known

by young and old in South Africa, black people of South Africa point to three dialectically related realities. They show the central position which the Bible occupies in the ongoing process of colonisation, national oppression and exploitation. They also confess the incomprehensible paradox of being colonised by a Christian people and yet being converted to their religion and accepting the Bible, their ideological instrument of colonisation, oppression and exploitation. Thirdly, they express a historic commitment that is accepted solemnly by one generation and passed on to another – a commitment to terminate disinheritance and eradicate exploitation of humans by other humans.

The Bible was misused to oppress and destroy the black people of South Africa. Through the process of land dispossession, many black people lost their identity that is deeply rooted in the land. Black people were forced to stay in the Bantustans, which were economically disadvantaged. They were made aliens and slaves in the country of their birth. They were made foreigners in their ancestral and motherland. This was because of Afrikaners' wrong interpretation of the Bible and of Calvinism. Du Toit (1983:920) argues:

According to their understanding of Calvinism, they (Afrikaners) conceived of themselves as a chosen and covenanted people, like the Israelites of the Old Testament, and early Afrikaners presumed a divine mandate to smite heathen peoples and reduce them to their pre-ordained position as perpetual hewers of wood and drawers of water. To the Boers the Old Testament was like a mirror of their own lives. In it they found the deserts and fountains, the drought and plagues, the captivity and the exodus. Above all they found the chosen People guide by a stern but partial Deity through the midst of the heathen to a promised land. And it was the Old Testament and the doctrines of Calvin that moulded the Boer into the Afrikaner today.

This interpretation of the Bible and of Calvinism led to racial discrimination and separation that was later adopted by the Dutch Reformed Church and the Nationalist Party as apartheid. This policy had a dreadful impact upon black people in South Africa. It resulted in black people being at the margins of society. It resulted in the generational impoverishment, humiliation and dislocation of black people. This policy, which was regarded by the Dutch Reformed Church as a Godly-ordained system, resulted in evil policies that were adopted to make black people slaves, aliens and foreigners in their ancestral and motherland. It was churches like the Dutch Reformed Church that supported the policy of apartheid. Hence, Ritner (1967:17) argues:

It was the Church that did not rest content with the traditional *baasskap* principles on which South Africa had been run since 1652 – the simple pragmatic acceptance of the superiority of the white man to the "native" he dwelt among. It is the Church that insisted upon the progressively sterner definitions of "separateness", ending up with the present government's elaborate programme – still in the theoretical stage – of the total physical segregation of the races.

Jubber (1985:274) maintains that "[a]partheid implicates Calvinism and Reformed Christianity very deeply because it was from these sources that a particular Reformed Church evolved which, in the context of South Africa, gave the world a new crime against humanity – as apartheid has been called".

Apartheid, which was regarded by the Dutch Reformed Church as biblical, had a terrible impact upon black people; it resulted in dislocation and statelessness for black people and this resulted from land dispossession. For black people, belongingness, identity and faith are deeply rooted in land (Lephakga 2012:34-50). Land and faith speak to the issue of belonging, and suggest that land dispossession has had negative impacts on the dispossessed. This is so because the basic need of the disposed is threatened. The issue of belonging is centred on relatedness (to people, environment and land). Thus Hagerty, Williams, Coyne & Early (1996:235) assert that "the nature and quality of a person's relatedness to others affects bio-psycho-social processes that influence behavior and promote or impair health". For Hagerty et al, the sense of belonging has defining attributes, which can be summarised as follows: (1) the experience of being valued, needed or important with respect to other people, groups or environments; and (2) the experience of fitting in or being congruent with other people, groups or environments through shared or complementary characteristics. Sense of belonging has the following consequences: (1) psychological, social, spiritual or physical involvement; (2) attribution of meaningfulness to that involvement; and (3) establishment or fortification of a fundamental foundation for emotional, cognitive and behavioural responses. According to this model, sense of belonging is a psychological experience with both cognitive and affective components that are associated with affiliated behaviour and psychological and social functioning (Hagerty et al 1996:236). It is for this reason, that this author argues that the 1913 Land Act, the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936, and the forced removals of the 1950s to 1980s were the direct and indirect results of the influence of the pseudo-interpretation of Calvinism in South Africa, which was used to inculcate the notion of a superiority complex in white South Africans and an inferiority complex in black South Africans.

The 1913 Land Act and the officialisation of the Land Dispossession Project

The Land Act of 1913 (passed after the establishment of the Union of South Africa) made black people (Natives) slaves and foreigners in their own land. This point was also asserted by Plaatje when he said: "Awaking on Friday morning, June 20, 1913, the South African Native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth" (Plaatje 2007).

Thwala (2006) argues that the Act "... [r]estricted the area of land for lawful African occupation, stripped African cash tenants and sharecroppers of their land, and consequently replaced sharecropping and rent-tenant contracts with labor tenancy. The Act resulted in only 10 per cent of the land being reserved for blacks."

This Act was the first official law to be put in place to pave way for land dispossession. Land dispossession by white people in South Africa was successful because of the laws that were passed to suppress and prevent black people from owning land. Hence Plaatje argued with regard to the 1913 Land Act that he became an exiled in the land of his birth (Plaatje 2007). But it must be noted that the passing of the law was the officialisation of the land dispossession which had already begun long before the 1913 Land Act was passed.

The objective of the 1913 Land Act was to limit black people's (Natives) possession of land. Their intention was to make black people dependent upon the white economy, as they were independent from it because they had their own land for agriculture. Hence, the government introduced this Act to force black people off their land and the result of this force removal was poverty. Black people had to depend on white people for survival. The Report of the Southern African Anglican Theological Commission is significant in explaining what occurred. It states:

... It was hoped with the introduction of this Act that Africans could be forced to become less independent in relation to their participation in the colonial cash economy. The result was that thousands of poorer African peasants were forced off the land. One other thing which this Act did was to undermine the chieftain system of traditional African society as these tribal authorities acted as an independent political pole, which resisted these changes. This Act was set out to facilitate the formal establishment of African reserves. Seven per cent of South Africa's land area was set aside for this purpose and it was from these reserves that the mines, the urban employers were to draw migrant labour. In addition to addressing the labour needs of the mines, the Act also set out to eliminate independent rent-paying African tenants and cash croppers residing on white-owned land. This was done through restricting African residence on White land to labour tenancy or wage tenancy, and through prohibiting African land ownership outside of the reserves. It is through these tenancy regulations that the Act proposed to address the labour needs of White farmers (University of South Africa 2002:v).

After this Act was introduced, the exact consequence was the establishment of reserves. These reserves were about 10 per cent of the land that was reserved for black people. However, as black people were a majority in this country, the result would be overcrowding in these reserves. Terreblanche (2002:260) argues:

As the reserves areas identified in the Act were already overcrowded, the drafters of the Act put in place a holding clause on the enforcement of the tenancy provisions. Additional land to expand the designated reserve areas needed to be secured first, since, if the tenancy provisions were enforced with the situation as it stood, evicted African tenants would be captured by farmers. Thus the holding clause in the Act placed a moratorium on removals, and established the Beaumont Commission to identify additional land for the reserves. But there was a great deal of opposition from White farmers to the 1913 Land Act. Rather than having African tenants removed to the reserves, farmers wanted tenants evicted and redistributed as farm labour.

The Land Act of 1913 prohibited, except with the approval of the relevant minister, the following:

- a. The purchase, hire, or other acquisition of land or interest in land or servitude there over outside the scheduled black areas
 - i. By a black from a person other than a black; but this prohibition does not apply to land in a resealed area (the Development Trust Act of 1936, provided that the South African Development Trust should gradually acquire more land in each of the provinces for black settlement. (The land so acquired was not to exceed 7,25 m Morgan – about 6,21 m hectares); and
 - ii. By a person other than a black from a black; and

- b. The acquisition of land in a scheduled black area by a person other than the South African Development Trust or a black from a black; but this prohibition does not apply to a mortgagee who may acquire such land at a sale in execution; however, if he does so, he is obliged within one year to sell the land to a black (Report of the South African Institution of Race Relations 1987).

The impact of the 1913 Act was nonetheless devastating. Plaatje vividly described the cruelty and suffering imposed on African tenants:

The *baas* (boss in English) exacted from him the services of himself, his wife and his oxen, for wages of 30 shilling a month, whereas Kgobadi had been making over £100 a year, besides retaining the services of his wife and of his cattle for himself. When he refused the extortionate terms, the baas retaliated with a Dutch note, dated the 30th June 1913, which ordered him to betake himself from the farm of the undersigned, by sunset of the same day, failing which his stock would be seized and impounded, and himself handed over to the authorities for trespassing on the farm. (Plaatje 2007)

The Native Trust, Land Act of 1936 and forced removals 1950s–1980s

Following the 1913 Land Act, the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 was passed. In 1936, at the end of a 10-year campaign, the Union's constitution was amended. African voters, who had been on the common voter's roll in the Cape, were placed on a separate roll and allowed to elect three white representatives to the Union parliament. At the same time, the Native Trust and Land Bill was passed. These Acts extended the principle of territorial and political segregation in South Africa, and meant that Africans in the Cape were deprived of their right to purchase land outside the reserved areas, and that policy towards Africans was uniform throughout the Union (University of South Africa 2002:i).

In 1936 and 1937, three important Acts were passed which developed further the process of dispossession of land from Africans (Natives). These Acts were the Representation of Blacks (Native) Act (1936), the Development Trust and Land Act (1936), and the Black (Native) Laws Amendment Act (1937). The first Act removed African voters in the Cape from the common roll and they were placed on a separate roll. The second Act authorised the government to expand the "native reserves" to a total of 13,6 per cent of South African land. The third Act prohibited Africans from acquiring land in urban areas, thus extending the Stallardist legislation of 1923 and taking a more aggressively Stallardist line in its quest to control the influx of Africans to urban areas (Terreblanche 2002:278).

The Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 was a continuation of the Land Act of 1913 that formalised the separation of white and black rural areas. This Act, which was the continuation of the Land Dispossession Project, was followed by the forced removals (from the 1950s to the 1980s) which came about under the Group Areas Act. According to this Act, Africans were not allowed to own land in towns and were discouraged from trading or building there: towns were viewed as white reserves where Africans were permitted to stay only if they could be employed as servants. In 1952, Section 10 of the Native Laws Amendment Act limited the right of Africans to live permanently in urban areas to those who had been born there, had lived there continuously for 15 years or had worked for the same employer for 10 years (University of South Africa 2002:iv). In the same year (1952), the Natives (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act compelled all Africans to carry reference books and was designed to increase control over African movement into towns, which increased the hardship in the reserves. Both laws contributed to the removal of hundreds of thousands of Africans from urban areas in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s (University of South Africa 2002:iv). The 1954 Native Resettlement Act was passed to remove the right of Africans who in some areas had the right to own properties in towns and to rezone these areas for use by white people: in terms of this legislation, the African residents of Sophiatown were removed to Meadowlands in 1956 (University of South Africa 2002:iv). Africans were removed from places where they squatted and lived as labour tenants on white farms. This reduced the number of Africans who remained on farms outside the reserves. Thus, in 1951, the Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act was passed to make the anti-squatting provisions of the 1936 Native's Trust and Land Act enforceable. With this Act, the minister of Native affairs could compel Africans to move off public or private land, and could authorise local authorities to establish camps where squatters could be settled (University of South Africa 2002:iv). In the Transvaal alone, 400 000 Africans were moved into reserves from white farms, 350 000 from urban areas, and 280 000 from "black spots" or areas of black-owned land while 120 000 were moved in the interests of "territorial consolidation" (University of South Africa 2002:v). In Natal, three-quarters of a million people were moved between 1948 and 1982, nearly half had been living on white farms while 100 000 came from "black spots" where the land was legally owned by black farmers under individual tenure. By 1983, black freehold in Northern Natal had been destroyed (University of South Africa 2002:v).

Two measures were used to enforce this massive scheme: the 1964 Bantu Laws Amendment Act that allowed the government to prohibit labour tenancy and the 1967 instructions to magistrates on the implementation of the 1951 Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act. This provided for removal of “surplus” “Bantu” from white farms: the elderly, unfit, widows, women with dependent children, and families without residential rights in urban areas, as well as business and professional people (University of South Africa 2002:v). Between 1960 and 1980, the population of the reserves increased from four and a half million people to 11 million people. This created an enormous population density (University of South Africa 2002:v).

Resistance to segregation and the Land Dispossession Project

The Sharpeville massacre

The year 1960 was a painful turning point in the history of the oppressive, suppressive, humiliating and racist South Africa. This is the year when the Pan Africanist Congress launched the historic positive action campaign against the pass laws that resulted in the Sharpeville massacre, where 84 people were killed and 365 seriously wounded (Pheko 1984). The pass laws and Bantustans were established to make black people aliens in their ancestral and motherland. Black people were foreigners in their birthplace, hence they had to carry passes wherever they went. They were forced to stay in the Bantustans. Biko (2004:90) argued that “... Black people reject this approach for so many reasons, none of which are so fundamental as the fact that it is a solution given to us by the same people who have created the problem. In a land rightfully ours we find people coming to tell us where to stay and what powers we shall have without consulting us”.

The 1960 pass laws campaign was a rejection of the pass laws that were the result of the establishment of the Bantustans. The Bantustans and pass laws racially separated black people into different groups. This was to cause disunity among African people and resulted in the destruction of black communities and family structures. The Bantustans and pass laws made a population and a generation of black people stateless. They were forced to stay in the Bantustans but the economic conditions forced black people to be dependent on white South Africa, hence the pass laws were passed to limit their access to the country. Smith (1979:8) argues: “It does not need much imagination to see that if, in the end, there are ten independent black states, as the white rulers would have it, and six million workers recognised neither in their homelands nor in the white areas, there could be six million stateless persons – nearly a quarter of the population of South Africa in a stateless condition.”

Black people were forced to go to white South Africa, which was economically advanced, and as a result many of them left their families and many of them were brutally humiliated. Biko (2004:162) further argued that “... white man[sic] in South Africa has carefully constructed a political system which ensures continued white domination by the use of psychological pressure and physical violence against the black majority”. The pass laws and the establishment of the Bantustans forced black people into a situation they could not handle any longer. Thus, Smith (1979:7) asserts: “Much depends on how the blacks will be treated in the future. Blacks form the bulk of the population. Hitherto they have been constrained by the law and the police and contained by the homelands and the townships. For a time they were suppliant. Then came a notable change in attitude. Blacks started to make demands. And, as they made demands, so more of their leaders were locked up ...”

The pass laws campaign, which resulted in the murdering/destruction of black people, was a guerrilla project aimed at uniting black people and reclaiming their dignity through political resistance rather than military resistance. Pheko (1984:77) notes:

The Battle of Isandhlwana in January 1879 was the last major battle of national resistance in Azania fought against settler colonialism. By the early eighties, Africans were already realizing that they needed something more powerful than assegais against the settler’s guns. They decided to opt for political struggle rather than a military campaign. Interestingly it was the Christians who first moved in this direction. A number of educated African Christians began to question the inequality of opportunities.

The Black Monday (Pheko 1984) of 1960, which was a turning point in the painful history of South Africa, was a transformational initiative by black people to reclaim their identity and their birthright that is deeply rooted in the land. The history prior to 1960 was a humiliating and suppressive history for black people because it dislocated them. It resulted in the impoverishment of many black people; it resulted in black people doubting their humanness that was ordained by God in creation. This history destroyed the image of God in black people; it made them aliens and slaves in the country of their birth. It had terrible effect on black people as it resulted in them internalising oppression and hating themselves. Therefore, this campaign was a transformational campaign on the side of black people, even though it seemed an impossible task. This campaign was aimed at reclaiming the humanness of black people and their citizenship. Sobukwe (1984:94) said in a speech before the magistrate when those who led the march against the pass laws were sentenced:

Your worship, it will [be] remembered that when this case began we refused to plead, because we felt no moral obligation whatsoever to obey laws which are made exclusively by white minority ... But I would like to quote what was said by somebody before- that an unjust law cannot be justly applied. We believe in one race only- the human race to which we all belong. The history of that race is a long struggle against all restrictions, physical, mental and spiritual. We would have betrayed the human race if we had not done our share. We are glad to have made our contribution. We stand for equal rights for all individuals. But the whites have to accept allegiance to Africa first; once a truly non-racial democracy exists in South Africa, all individuals, whatever their color or race, will be accepted as Africans ... We are not afraid of the consequences of our action and it not our intention to plead mercy ...

The Soweto uprisings: 1976 (when enough was enough)

The year 1976 was a turning point in the heroic struggle for freedom and justice against the oppressive, suppressive, humiliating and dispossessing apartheid government. This was the year when young people said, “enough is enough”. They embarked on guerrilla action, sacrificing their lives for the struggle for the total liberation of South Africa. In a newspaper article in 1976, entitled “The day our kids lost faith”, it was said that “If the police had not tried to wrest the posters from the children, if they had not set dogs on them, if they had not fired shots – June 16 would not have been as black a day for Soweto as it turned out to be.” The year 1976 became an eschatological reality for those who experienced the evils of the apartheid government. The years before 1976 were years of brutality, oppression and humiliation for black people. Those years resulted in the internalisation of oppression by black people. Biko (2004:30) argues:

Black people under the Smuts government were oppressed but they were still men. They failed to change the system for many reasons ... But the type of black man we have today has lost his manhood. Reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the “inevitable position”. Deep inside his anger mounts at the accumulating insult, but he vents it in the wrong direction – on his fellow man in the township, on the property of black people.

The young people in 1976 were not willing to accept everything. They embarked on a transformational struggle that seemed rather dangerous for others. They engaged in a struggle to reclaim their dignity, identity and humanness. Smith (1979) misunderstood the 1976 Soweto Uprisings when he argued:

One of the saddest ironies of the 1976 riots in Soweto and other townships was the extent of material violence, of crimes against property. The black and coloured mobs set fire to the very institutions that could have uplifted them – the schools, the universities and libraries. Deliberately they destroyed the buildings, given, sometimes grudgingly, by white authority, that could have brought them mental equality with and even superiority over the whites. Often they laughed, unfeelingly, as their hopes went up in smoke.

Black people were frustrated and had had enough. The burning of buildings was a sign of anger against the government that had brutally forced their ancestors away from their birth land. It was anger aimed at the apartheid government and the Dutch Reformed Church for declaring the evil system of apartheid biblical, oppressing and humiliating them, making their lives a living hell. Black students had had enough. Mofokeng (in Hlongwane & Ndlovu 2006:160) argues:

My children, nieces and nephews, and future generations will know that the South Africa they live in, or call their roots, was once stolen from their ancestors by colonizers and then the Afrikaners and then the puppets that fell for Bantustan rule. I pray that freedom and equality will bear more meaning as we commemorate the 1976 Soweto Student Uprising – a turning point in the life of an African child; an awakening call for the National Party government that our generation would not succumb to their rule like my labourer father, domestic worker mother and a whole generation of both paternal and maternal aunts and uncles, who were moulded to becoming hewers of wood and drawers of water.

The release of Nelson Mandela and the journey to democracy (1990–)

The year 1990 marked the exodus ("exodus" in this context refers to liberation in the sense of being taken out or liberated from unbearable conditions) for many South Africans who were living in oppressive, humiliating, suppressive and impoverished conditions. This was a joyful year like in the Israelites' history when they were told they were leaving the land of slavery and exile. This is the year when the president of the apartheid government announced the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the liberation movements. The long walk to freedom was slowly reaching its peak. This was the year when many black people hoped that transformational democracy and tangible liberation would be achieved. In his speech in 1990, Nelson Mandela said:

It is our belief that the future of our country can only be determined by a body which is democratically elected on a non-racial basis. Negotiations on the dismantling of apartheid will have to address the overwhelming demands of our people for a democratic, non-racial and unitary South Africa. There must be an end to white monopoly on political power and a fundamental restructuring of our political and economic system to ensure that the inequalities of apartheid are addressed and our society thoroughly democratized. (Mandela 1990)

The moment of truth

The Kairos Document as a Christian and theological reflection upon the then and now political situation of South Africa is 28 years old. It is one year since the South African Reformed churches' confession, the Belhar Confession, which was a contextual and situational confession in response to the political, social, theological and economic situations which threatened the heart of the gospel message. The Kairos Document and theology was a theological project led by concerned Christians in South Africa who reflected upon the unpleasant situation of oppression, suppression, humiliation and death in South Africa. Saayman (2008:17) argues:

The years 1983 to 1989 can be described in some respects as the most difficult years in terms of the struggle for the maintenance or destruction of the Apartheid state. The regime declared one state of emergency after the other and poured all its resources into the battle, particularly for control of the large urban townships. Security forces, both police and army, roamed the streets of the townships, death squads from Vlakplaas and other centres were on the prowl, and the issuing of body counts in terms of the daily unrest reports was accepted as part of everyday life.

This was the moment of truth for the apartheid government and for the Church. South Africa was burning. Black people had had enough; they were tired of living in oppressive, suppressive and humiliating conditions. It was 25 years after the Sharpeville massacre, which was a horrible turning point in the painful history of South Africa. People had had enough of being humiliated by carrying passes and being forced to stay in the Bantustans. This humiliation escalated to the point where black people were willing to die for their liberation from the evil system of apartheid. It was nine years after the Soweto students' uprisings. Black students had been angered to the point where they marched in the streets of Soweto and boycotted the Bantu education grounded in the policy of training black students to be inferior. Black students had had enough. It was five years before President FW de Klerk announced the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the liberation movements in South Africa. All these situations were threatening and shaking the foundations of the gospel message. They demanded that the Church prophetically raise its voice. Saayman (2008:16) explains: "Kairos was meant to be a theological comment on the contemporary political crisis in South Africa. Its hermeneutical key was the old Judaeo-Christian eschatological concept of a prophetic reading of what is called in Christian theology *the signs of the times*, a term Jesus used, for example, in Matthew 16:1–4 ..."

The Kairos Document (1985:314) opens in chapter one with the following response: "The time has come. The moment of truth has arrived. South Africa has been plunged into a crisis that is shaking the foundations and there is every indication that the crisis has only just begun and that it will deepen and become even more threatening in the months to come. It is the KAIROS or moment of truth not only for apartheid but also for the church". The Church and the people of South Africa had suffered in silence. This was the time for the people of South Africa and the Church to reflect on the problems of South Africa and voice their concern. This was the time for the Church to take up its prophetic role that had been taken away from them because of oppression, humiliation and dislocation. Now the Church and the people of South Africa were taking a new transformational direction of standing where God stands, which was against the injustice prevailing in South Africa. The Church was challenged to stand against the structural, economical, social, religious and political injustices that were happening in South Africa. This theological reflection was prophetic. It stood where God stood (this is the theological language of the Belhar Confession), and people's experiences and its prophetic theological reflection

was the departure point of the Kairos Document. Prophetic stance and prophetic theology took serious the conditions of the people. The Kairos Document proposed a prophetic theology as the most powerful weapon to fight the problems of South Africans then and now. Saayman (2008:19) says: "A prophetic theology cannot be imposed in isolation from the poor and the oppressed; indeed, it required a preferential option for the poor. It could furthermore not be imposed from the top down but had to grow organically from the bottom up. It would therefore issue a challenge to action founded on a message of hope."

The Kairos Document (1985:314 & 315) stated:

... For very many Christians in South Africa this is the KAIROS, the moment of grace and opportunity, the favorable time in which God issues a challenge to decisive action. It is a dangerous time because, if this opportunity is missed, and allowed to pass by, the loss for the church, for the gospel and for all the people of South Africa will be immeasurable. Jesus wept over Jerusalem. He wept over the tragedy of the destruction of the city and the massacre of the people that was imminent, and all because you did not recognize your opportunity (KAIROS) when God offered it (Lk. 19:44).

The Kairos Document or the moment of truth (as articulated in the Kairos Document itself) was not only conformed to that moment but was also an eschatological Moment of Truth. The Church was challenged by the horrible situation in South Africa that threatened the heart of the gospel message and trampled on human dignity ordained by God through creation. However, this Moment of Truth is also the present and future Moment of Truth. The Church today is faced with problems brought about by the wrong decisions taken in the past. Therefore, the Church even today is called to be the Salt and Light of the world. These two metaphors are transformational in the sense that the Salt transforms bitterness into saltiness, whereas the Light transforms darkness into light. The Church today is challenged to again speak out against the problems of poverty, continued economic inequality, humiliation and racism which many South Africans experience in their everyday lives.

Conclusion

The Reformed theology to which the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa subscribed created separateness, oppression, humiliation and land dispossession that was later coined "apartheid". This was done because of their misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the Bible and Calvinism. This had serious and future consequences because they disadvantaged the majority of the people of South Africa and fragmented South Africa. Because of the misuse and misreading of the Bible and Calvinism, black people were forced to live in the Bantustans. They were made aliens and slaves in their ancestral and motherland. This was done to their ancestors but the consequences are still experienced by the present generation. This process led to the painful and humiliating process of land dispossession. Land was and is central to black people, because their identity, culture and their being are deeply rooted in the land. Land dispossession had a terrible impact on the livelihood, psychology, economy and communal structures of black people. Because of land dispossession, black people were forced to internalise oppression and doubt their humanness. It is for this reason that black people are fleeing from being black. Therefore, the Reformed churches (specifically the Dutch Reformed Church) must take responsibility for making the process of land restitution possible because land restitution is necessary to reconcile black people to their humanity and to attain true reconciliation and true justice.

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