

FROM PLURALISM TO IDEOLOGY: THE ROOTS OF APARTHEID THEOLOGY IN ABRAHAM KUYPER, GUSTAV WARNECK AND THEOLOGICAL PIETISM

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Abstract

This paper¹ explains how a “theology of apartheid” was constructed in the first half of the twentieth century in SA from a combination of three nineteenth century European theological currents: The neo-Calvinism of Kuyper, the missiological thinking of Warneck, and Pietism. In this way the celebration of plurality – so evident in postmodern theologies – turned into a debilitating, exclusivist ideology that was ultimately dismantled by the witness of the Confession of Belhar in 1982.

Key Concepts: Theology of apartheid, A Kuyper, G Warneck, Pietism

Facing and dealing with pluralism² have become part and parcel of our postmodern sensibility and an urgent, ongoing task for theology. This is unavoidable if theology wants itself to be taken seriously in the *Zeitgeist* of the 21st century, or if indeed the gospel is to be made heard in our age.³

There are invigorating, enriching forms of pluralism, but also disintegrative, debilitating forms (see Welker 1994:23ff). The latter is usually linked to post-modern forms of pluralistic thinking that are not much more than chaotic relativism celebrating the fact that no construction of integrative sense is possible any more. I would like to argue below, that there are forms of social differentiation and plurality that does not so much relish in “chaos” but exactly “order”, but that imbue their differentiation first with hierarchies, and then with devastating exclusions.

As an example of the latter, the development of a theology that gave material support and moral legitimization to the racial institutionalization of apartheid in South Africa, could sensitise us to the theological bases that turn pluriformed differentiations into an ideology

¹ The paper was delivered to a German audience at the University of Heidelberg on 15 November 2002 and should be read in that context.

² The term pluralism refers to the multiplication of differentiated forms in parts of society or in society as a whole. From a hermeneutical perspective, it denotes differentiated reading strategies and multiple perspectives; from a sociological perspective it refers to the multi-systemic texture and differentiation of modern and specifically post-modern societies. My application of the term to the late 19th and early 20th century might be anachronistic, but will emerge from the argument below.

³ Two of the most prominent and fruitful attempts at constructing a theology of pluralisms are the Catholic hermeneutical scholar from America, David Tracy, and the German Reformed systematic theologian, Michael Welker.

of forced separateness.

Literature on this topic both from inside and outside South Africa, is vast.⁴ It is not necessary to repeat what others have done adequately. This paper will merely attempt to show the main trajectories of theological developments stemming from the second half of the nineteenth century in Europe that provided the framework for an apartheid theology in South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century.

To be as concise as possible, three statements are made and then expanded upon. The first relates to the influence of Abraham Kuyper's neo-Calvinism, the second to Gustav Warneck's missiology, and the third to the cumulative effect of the Kuyper and Warneck receptions into a hermeneutical vacuum that allowed for a specific reading of Scripture via the presupposition of a "separated pluriformity".

Statement One

When pluralism is embedded in a dogmatics that is structured along the axis of general-particular grace (corresponding to organic and institutional forms of the church respectively) and linked to an idealist construct of "civilized development", pluralism and differentiation may – given the right socio-political climate – turn into ideology.

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), a self-professed (neo-) Calvinist since 1870, exerted enormous influence on church and society in the Netherlands during his life-time.⁵ He started his reflections on Calvinism with a series of Bible studies in which he worked out the basis for what became his formal dogmatic works published between 1888 and 1917.⁶

In line with one of the key thrusts of Calvinism,⁷ Kuyper's aim is to provide a theological basis for bringing to the whole of reality under the rule of God. He accomplished this, by constructing an idealistic, organic analogy between Creator and creation, and sustained this relation via his notion of common grace.

What is the crux of the argument?

From eternity all principles of life is hidden in God as a particular *essentia* and *potentia*. Through creation this *essentia* is brought by the Holy Spirit into physical reality as

⁴ See Smit 2000 for a representative selection of material, as well as the older, but still very useful bibliography compiled by Kinghorn (1986).

⁵ Kuyper was pastor, brilliant scholar and theologian, involved with the weekly church paper *De Heraut* since 1869, the power behind a schism in the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (Doleantie, 1886), founder of a university (Kampen, 1880), a newspaper (*De Standaard*, 1872) and a political party (Anti-Revolutaire Party, 1879), and ultimately prime minister of The Netherlands. A recent overview and evaluation of his life and work is Luis E Lugon (ed.): *Religion, pluralism, and public life. Abraham Kuyper's legacy for the twenty-first century* (2000).

⁶ The most encompassing is his broad overview of theology as a science in three volumes, *Encyclopaedie der Heiligen Godgeleerdheid* (1893-1894) en *De Gemeene Gratie*, also in three volumes (1903-1905). For fuller literature information, see Velema 1989.

⁷ "Calvinism can never be accused of having a God who is too small or a vision that is too narrow... In contrast to Lutheranism's quest for a gracious God, Pietism's concern for the welfare of the individual soul, and Wesleyanism's goal of personal holiness, the ultimate concern in the Reformed tradition transcends the individual and his salvation... The concern is for the realization of the will of God also in the wider realms of state and culture, in nature and in cosmos (Hesselink 1983:108-109). One of the strongest attestation to this in Kuyper's own thought is the second chapter of his Stone lectures, delivered at Princeton in 1898 and published as *Lectures on Calvinism* (see Kuyper 1943). Here he makes the case for the universality of religion via his notion of sovereignty of spheres.

existentia that then develops through time according to its own life-principle. The theological basis for this analogy is found in his notion of general/common grace (*gemeene gratie*). This is the grace that flows from God in His work of creation and it implies for Kuyper a distinctive and seamless relation between God and creation. It is precisely this common grace that prevents the world from degenerating into chaos, but rather allows for the evolutionary development of natural forces inherent to creation. In this way creation, including the different peoples of the world, fulfil their potential in nature and culture (see Velema 1989:58ff, Jonker 1981:93-94).

Translated into ecclesiological terms, the church exists as institute and as organism. In its first form the church is the result of God's particular grace; in its second form the church is linked to both particular and general grace: Members of the church act as believers in society (special grace, narrower sense of organism), and positive developments occur under common grace even where the Christian faith is not overtly present (broad sense of organism).

For Kuyper the institutional (i.e. external) form of the church does not belong to its essence. This implies that the attributes of unity, holiness, catholicity and Christian, are marks of the unseen church and will only be realised eschatologically. The formation of various institutional churches (in his case within and even against the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*) is no threat to the unity of the church as the search for external unity is a form of "churchism" (*kerkisme*) which is to be resisted in order to retain the freedom of people to form their own churches. "The people amongst whom the church is formed, is not the same. They differ according to origin, race, country, region, history, potential and psychological orientation, and do also not stay the same, but go through various stages of development" (Kuyper 1904:223, my translation). Because of this, "the differences that separate person from person, had to form a wedge in the unity of the external church" (Kuyper 1898:55, my translation). This pluralistic church-formation is "according to my firm conviction a phase of development to which the church should have come" (Kuyper 1904:231, my translation).

In anthropological terms, all people has a natural knowledge of God, based on general grace which forms the basis and stepping stone (*een hol voor haar voet*) for special grace, that leads to a higher knowledge of God in Christ. Because he depicts the development of grace in organic terms, Kuyper is able to posit a view on civilization and hierarchies of development. Under common grace, the organic principle inherent to creation, is applied to development of the human race. On the one hand he maintains the unity of humanity based on God's counsel (Velema 1989:66). On the other, his conception of common grace allows him to see the confusion of the Babel events as setting forth each nation or people according to each's own type and law-stream (Strauss 1995:12).

A hierarchy then develops: You find people (like in Africa) where natural grace has not yet developed to its full potential. In the middle group you find a greater impact of natural grace with pockets of developed areas like in India and Japan. In social systems where special grace dominates, the highest level of development with maximum "*uitstraling*" toward the whole of society is established. The pivotal example of this is the European and North American civilization (Strauss 1995:11).

Kuyper's *Gemeene Gratie* brought these ideas to their ultimate practical effect: The three children of Noah reflect the various developmental levels: The children of Shem have received both common and special grace; those of Japhet benefited in a lesser sense from special grace, and the descendants of Ham show a clear lack of both forms of grace (he mentions the Zulu people of SA). They are therefore to be subservient to the other groups

until they have reached the same level of development and civilization (see Strauss 1995:14 with references to the original Kuyper source).

Here we have reached the ultimate point where differentiations in creation, pluralistic forms under the peoples of the world, result in a form of Christian imperialism and ultimately open the door for a reception of a theologically motivated racism.

It does not require a lot of imagination to see why Kuyper's theology became so influential in Afrikaans South African churches of Dutch origin.⁸ His own glowing respect for the Boers who resisted colonization, who, inspired by God, trekked into the darkness of Africa, and set up republics as signs of their Calvinistic heroism (Strauss 1995:13), added a very personal dimension to this relation.

When these ideas struck a cord with the socio-economic position of the Afrikaner people after 1929,⁹ the scene was set for this specific brand of structured pluriformity to turn into a theologically guided ideology.¹⁰

But to fully understand why this happened, one has to note the merger with a second stream of thought, this time stemming from Germany. Let us turn to our second statement.

Statement Two

*When the missionary task and object is formulated in such a way that mission becomes a cultural project of Volkschristianisierung with the establishment of differentiated, independent Volkskirchen (subjective genitive), the very nature of the church as *communio sanctorum*, and her catholicity as one church, are undermined.*

The churches of European origin in SA were faced with the issue of differentiation amongst people from the very beginning, although more in a cultural-economic sense than

⁸ As early as 1882 the Rev SJ du Toit attempted to translate Kuyper's ideas to the political and ecclesial situation at the time. After 1907 postgraduate students rather went to the VU in Amsterdam than the Rijksuniversiteit in Utrecht and, like for example JD du Toit, returned to SA as avid Kuyperians. In the Gereformeerde Kerk, Kuyper was carried forth by JD du Toit and HG Stoker, professors of theology and philosophy respectively. In the DRC, academics FJM Potgieter (dogmatic professor at Stellenbosch), AB du Preez and church leaders, JD Vorster and A Treurnicht, became the most significant proponents of a Calvinistic revival in the 1930s and beyond (see Kinghorn 1986, chapter 6).

⁹ I refer here to the rapid urbanisation of Afrikaners when both economic depression and severe droughts forced them to turn from an agricultural economy to an industrial one. For this they were not skilled, and they found themselves in an environment dominated by English capital. The well-known Carnegie Commission was set up to investigate the problem and make recommendations. It found that by the early 1930s about 300 000 Afrikaner people were living in poverty. (A similar study was undertaken for black people in the late 1980s).

¹⁰ There have been two receptions of Kuyper in South Africa. In the one, Kuyper is read as having a liberative role, on the other hand you have the ideological, oppressive role described here. This is not the place to enter this debate. Three short remarks will suffice as possible points for further research: 1. Kuyper has left a wide-ranging, complex and even contradicting legacy which is, like any comprehensive oeuvre, open for more than one interpretation. No wonder Russel Botman (2000:354) argues that Kuyper was indeed both liberative and oppressive! 2. The bases in Kuyper's work for a liberative understanding of Calvinism must be read against the historical context and specific occasion for which they were constructed. Conversely, the liberative claims for Kuyper made by Boesak (1984:87) and De Gruchy (1984:107) for example, should also be seen in their rhetorical context of fighting Kuyperianism at its worst with Kuyper himself. 3. Whatever contrasting evidence or quotations are found, it is the underlying and permeating structure of thought that should ultimately lead our interpretation. And here I am afraid, that at present I see very little liberative ideas flowing from Kuyper's natural theology driven by "a value of separateness" (Botman) that was not unrelated to the his Dutch tribal nationalism (CAJ van Koppen), and to "the influence of idealism and romanticism on his theology" (Botman 2000:355).

in a focussed racial sense¹¹ (Bosch 1983: 31; Kinghorn 1986:72). This intensified as the church spread beyond the confines of the early Cape settlement and as missionary work was undertaken by the churches themselves, and more notably by the many missionary societies who worked all over Southern Africa (see Smit 2000:323-324).

After the formation of the Zuid Afrikaanse Zendingsgenootskap as separate missionary arm of the DR church (1799), a binary system of ministry developed: The normal ministry to white congregants was augmented with a missionary ministry to mostly coloured and black people who were accommodated in separate “oefenhuisse”, although accepted as members of the same congregation.

As the missionaries developed a more autonomous ministry, whole congregations of converts were formed. It is of great interest to note that the real question facing the first (1824) and subsequent synods (1826, 1829, and further) was not the issue of separate congregations, but the Ministry of Holy Communion. This was a complicated issue because it involved on the one hand the officiation rights of missionaries *vis a vis* ordained ministers, and whether communion should be enjoyed together in one place of worship, on the other. The synod of 1829 clearly confirmed that communion is to be served to all, irrespective their origin, in the same place of worship and at the same time, as it was derived from an “unchangeable principle based on the infallible Word of God” (Kinghorn 1986:74; Acta Synodi 1929:71-72).

By the late 1850s a practice had developed where coloured congregants gathered in separate buildings to hear the Word and receive the sacraments. As the church’s mission developed, it was for many a practical solution to accommodate the church services of converts from different language groups¹² in different locations. The idea of a separate congregation or separate institutional church was not on the horizon then.

It was at the synod of 1857 – by now notorious in literature on the subject – that the door for greater separation was opened. The synodical decision¹³ does not mention or propose the setting up of separate churches, it merely regulated formally what was already practice in many areas. In fact, the synod still held as “preferable and scriptural” that converts from paganism become members of existing congregations. The situation of separate *Gottesdiensten* was for some merely a transitional measure, “due to the weakness of some” until the practical situation would enable a return to the “normal” rule of the church.

But in the end, the practical situation (separate ministries) and not the theological starting point (unity in Christ) led the DRC synod of 1880 to decide on the formation of a separate church for Coloureds. The Dutch Reformed Mission Church which was founded on 5 October

¹¹ The doctoral dissertation (completed 1934) of WJ van der Merwe, later missiologist of note himself, contains a careful analysis of social and racial attitudes in the DRC from the settlement at the Cape up to the early 20th century. See Van der Merwe 1936.

¹² David Bosch (1983:24-25) remarks that Protestantism acquired a much greater diversity of churches exactly because it focuses on the preaching of the Word in the language of the hearer, and functioned without an overarching uniform authority as is the case in Roman Catholicism. This led to the formation of “national churches” in Europe with e.g. separate circuits/synods for different language groups (French/Dutch). In the missionary situation, this was intensified, and set serious challenges to the Reformed notion of the church.

¹³ “Synod considers it to be desirable and in accordance with Scripture that our converts from paganism be received and incorporated into existing congregation, wherever possible; however, where this practice, because of the weakness of some, constitutes an obstacle to the advancement of Christ’s cause among pagan, congregations formed or still to be formed from converts from paganism should be given the opportunity to enjoy their Christian privileges in a separate place of worship” (translation from Dutch by Bosch 1983:32).

1881, the first of many such separate institutional church formations that would follow.¹⁴

The “Bantu” (read: Black) question slowly emerged as agenda point in the DRC after 1920. The period 1921-1935 is well described in Kinghorn and his original sources (Kinghorn 1986: 79ff). What is crucial to understand is that the changing political landscape¹⁵ and the deteriorating socio-economic situation of DRC members, forced the DRC to provide some clarity for itself on the social implications of its understanding of the gospel.

The church did not have a developed social ethic at that time (see discussion on Pietism below), and the channel through which it made its most far-reaching policy decisions, was the area of mission. The emerging mission policy, adopted in 1935, proved to be far more than a mere mission document. It was a theological interpretation of the socio-political events of its time. And it is in relation to this and preceding policies that the influence of Warneck must be counted together with that of Kuyper.

Gustav Warneck (1834-1919) is the intellectual giant of nineteenth century missiology. His *Evangelische Missionslehre* in three volumes (1879-1903) had an influence far beyond Germany and far beyond his own time (see Hoekendijk 1948:94, footnote 66). It is clear from the dates of publication, that Warneck could not influence the actual missiological practices as described above. By the time of his major publication, the DRMC was, for instance, already established as separate church.

Warneck’s work, however, unmistakably provided a theological rationale for defending the earlier establishment of separate churches for different race groups based on the notion that the ultimate aim of mission is *Volkschristianisierung*. It was a small step to move from separate *Volkskirchen* to the political design of society as such on the basis of *Völker*.

Like in the case of Kuyper, a short paper like this cannot deal with all the complexities of a Warneck interpretation. The aim here is to show a certain trend, to follow a trajectory of how pluralist forms can become ideological constructs. Apart from certain chapters in the *Evangelische Missionslehre* (ML), (part three, section one:1897), I rely here on the doctoral dissertation of the well known Dutch missiologist, JC Hoekendijk: *Kerk en volk in de Duitse Zendingwetenschap* (1948) and the insightful article by the world renowned SA missiologist, David Bosch, *Nothing but a heresy* (1983).

Let me put the crux of Warneck’s argument forward:

Already in 1874, Warneck chose the well-known text from Mt 28:19ff as programmatic for mission. This missionary call by Jesus was to form the basis of a biblical missiology. But in his explication of this text, Warneck was led by two considerations: The practical situation in the mission field, and a popular idealistic notion of society as structured in concentric circles on the basis of individual – family – *Volk*. This is then motivated with a reference to the same structure in the OT (Abram – clan/extended family – people of Isreal) and the NT (Jesus – house churches – *Volkskirchen*). He therefore logically concluded that mission is the “Christianisierung (*matheteuein*) der Heidenen als Völker (*panta ta ethne*)” (Hoekendijk 1948: 85, my emphasis).

¹⁴ Apart from church formation far beyond the boundaries of South Africa, the family of the DRC was made up of the DRC in Africa (1911) for black Christians, and the Reformed Church in Africa (1951) for Indian converts.

¹⁵ Note the formation of the SA Native National Congress in 1912 (renamed the ANC from 1923) and the establishment of several Afrikaner organisations like *Die Burger* (newspaper); the Broederbond (secret political organisation) and the National Party around 1915. Two “nationalisms” were in the making, with first legal provisions (Natives Land Act 1913, Location Act 1923) protecting white interests against black aspirations.

In subsequent work up to 1891, Warneck still retains a tension between *Einzelbekehrung* and *Völkerpädagogie*. This tension is finally resolved in the work of Reinhold Grundemann, notably his *Missionstudien und Kritikern* (vol I, 1894, vol II, 1898) where he explicitly chose against *Einzelbekehrung*: “Gottes Wege sind es, die zur Sammlung von Volkskirchen führen” (I:3). And this starting point is then confirmed by his interpretation of Mt 18:29 as “Verchristlichung der Völker als Völker” where *ethne* is clearly understood in an ethnographic-nationalist sense, and *matheteuein* as “Einschulung der Völker als Völker” (Hoekendijk 1948: 88, I:3). The *Einschulung* of heathen Völker, is a slow process whereby the heathen norms and ideas are gradually replaced by Christian¹⁶ ones in a dialectic of *Abgewöhnung* and *Neugewöhnung* (see Hoekendijk 1948:89).

By the time Warneck started work on his ML, the debate was wide open. Whereas for Zinzendorf¹⁷ the biblical passage on the Ethiopian convert – therefore mission to the individual as winning *Seelen für das Lamm* – is the appropriate model, and the converting of nations as nations only an eschatological possibility, Grundemann turned the tables exactly upside down. Two crucial questions had to be answered: Is the object of mission individuals or *Völker*? And must the latter be understood in a religious or ethnographic sense?

In which way would Warneck lead?

He starts the chapter on *Die Missionsaufgabe als Volkschristianisierung* (ML III:233ff) by keeping *Einzelbekehrung* and *Volkschristianisierung* in a fine balance where the former serves as basis for the latter (see pp 234-5). He then builds an argument in two phases, one exegetical and one historical, to show that although mission might have started with *Einzelbekehrung*, it clearly developed into *Volkschristianisierung*, and that the latter sentiment is to be found in the New Testament as well. He also shows that although exegetical results are mixed, the historical situation of mission leads him to accept *Völker* as ethnographic entities that are to be christianised. Let us follow his argument:

Warneck engages in quite an extensive exegesis of New Testament texts which focuses on the meaning of *ta ethna*. The core question is whether this is a salvation-historical (and therefore religious) concept, or an ethnological one. His conclusion is: “Noch öfter gehen der religiöse und ethnographische Begriff so ineinander über, dass sich kaum entscheiden lässt ob einer von beiden ausschliesslich gemeint ist... Dass letztere dürfte im Missionsbefehle der Fall sein.” He then argues: “Wie aber Israel selbst ein Volksverband ist, so steht ihm (Jesus) die heidnische Welt als eine in Völkerverbände gegliederte Menschheit gegenüber, nicht bloss als unterschiedliche Heidengattung, sondern auch als eine Naturordnung von Volksgemeinschaften. It would therefore be “unnatürlich... zu behaupten, der Völkerbegriff habe bei ihm ganz und gar keine ethnographische Seite” (ML III:237, my emphasis). With this the door for an ethnographic interpretation (and misinterpretation!) is opened.

The question of single conversion and formation of *ecclesiola* versus *Volkschristianisierung* is subsequently clarified by his historical argument: “Was der biblisch-theologischen Untersuchung an Beweiskraft vielleicht noch mangelt, das wird die geschichtliche Beweisführung ergänzen. The Thatsagen der Geschichte sind auch eine Exegese der Bibel, und zuletzt reden sie das entscheidende Wort, wenn die theologische Auslegung strittig bleibt” (ML III:245, my emphasis).

This is a crucial point, because Warneck concludes that the whole history of mission

¹⁶ Note how close this is to Kuyper’s idea of the slow developmental impact of special grace on the already existing natural grace.

¹⁷ See Warneck’s criticism of Zinzendorf and Pietism in general as harbouring an unrealistic missionary ideal of *Einzelbekehrung* disproved by the historical results of their very own missionary efforts (ML III:254).

(discussed from the apostolic times to his day) "...immer zeigt sich uns als Ergebnis der Missionsarbeit Volkschristianisierung". He consequently sheds serious doubt on the theory of *Einzelbekehrung* that is contradicted by mission realities (255). This allows him to make a crucial move by collapsing the possible historical result of mission into the very method of mission: "Denn sind die christianisierte Volksgemeinschaften immer und überall das tatsächliche Ergebnis der Mission, so muss man den Schluss ziehen, dass sie auch Missionsaufgabe ist" (ML, III: 254).

It is clear from the implications for a mission programme that Warneck had ethnic groups in his mind: The emphasis on the *Volksprache*, the family structure as foundation of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and direct co-operation from *Eingeborenen*. (ML III:256-269).

In this way Warneck provides two crucial points of connections to the South African situation of the early twentieth century:

First: He provides a missionary method where the ethnological reality and the religious ideal are unproblematically – even naturally – linked, with the former providing the base for the latter (in the way that Kuyper's natural grace is the basis for special grace): "Wenn Jesus befiehlt, die Völker, zu christianisierung, so will er, dass man sie christlich mache *auf Grund ihrer volklichen Natureigenart*... Je schonender die Volksart behandelt wird, desto mehr hat das Christentum Aussicht, heimisch in einem Volke zu werden" (ML III:268-9, my emphasis).

The move from here to separate churches for different peoples is as natural: "The indigenous church (*inboorlingkerk*) must be grounded in the life of the people (volkslewe)... and be considered as flowing from the life of the volk and not as an imported or foreign institution", writes Du Plessis in 1932 in his popularised Warneck interpretation: *Wie sal gaan?* (my translation, see Kinghorn 1986:68). This assumption is the later basis for a mission policy that clearly takes the ethnic reality (i.e. "nature") as basis for thinking about the church ("grace").¹⁸ This leads David Bosch to the conclusion that, theologically speaking, the Achilles heel of 19th century missionary thinking was its weak ecclesiology (Bosch 1983:33).

Second: Warneck establishes a ethnographic pluralism based on a romantic *Volksbegriff*¹⁹ that left a reception of his ideas open to mission as a form of cultural propaganda²⁰ and a ultimately a defence of the political structuring of society based on *Volk* in an ethnical sense.

We must note that German Romanticism reached its high point by 1850 and was a reaction "...im Gegenstand zu Rationalismus" and defined "durch das Gefühlsmässige, Irrationale und Volkstümliche" (LThK 8: 1268). I am not suggesting that Warneck was a romantic scholar in the historical or technical sense, only that he reveals the traits of a romantic *Volksidee* in his missiological design. Look at the way in which he extols the virtues of

¹⁸ The German missiologist, Christian Keysser, goes so far as to state categorically: "Der Stamm ist zugleich die Christengemeinde" (see his *Eine Papaugemeinde* 1929:235 as quoted by Bosch 1983:28).

¹⁹ In the context of 19th century idealism and romanticism, the Oxford missionary conference of 1938 rightly remarks: "The word *Volk* is quite untranslatable, because it designates both a sentiment and a body of convictions to which there is no exact, or even approximate, parallel elsewhere" (see Hoekendijk 1948:99 footnote 9).

²⁰ See Hoekendijk's (1948:104) interesting reference to Harnack's clear thought of cultural hierarchy and subsequent supremacy of civilized cultures toward "barbaric" China after the so-called Boxer revolution of 1900: "Diese Kultur verdient nich dass man sie konserviere!"

Germans in mission: “Den Deutschen eignet als besondere Charisma eine... Respektierung fremder Nationalität, die sie befähigt, selbstlos, unbefangen schonend auf die Eigenthümlichkeiten anderer Völker einzugehen” (ML III: 23, Hoekendijk 1948: 101).²¹

The basic outlines of the Warneck-construction found its way into DRC missionary thinking. Already in 1932 we find exactly the same “method” outlined in the missionary policy before the Cape DRC:

It starts with mission as “the collection of souls for God’s kingdom” (*Einzelbekehrung* almost in a pietistic sense). This has as “necessary result” the setting up of organised congregations that had to become “self-reliant and self-governing” churches in accordance with the own nature of the Volk (*Volkskirche*) due to gradual development of the Volk under the sanctifying influence of the gospel (*Volkschristianisierung*). The move beyond church to society is then a small step: Separate societal structures for different peoples are aimed at the well-being of each “...in order that both the Coloured and Black can increasingly take their rightful place (*regmatige plek*) in each area of society” (my translation of original as contained in Van der Merwe 1936:261-263).

When the Federal Mission Policy (all DRC synods participating) was developed in 1935, it was stated unambiguously that evangelisation can never imply denationalisation, because “Christianity does not want to rob the bantu (*naturel*) of his language and culture, but wants to permeate and cleanse (*deursuiwer*) his whole nationalism” (Kinghorn 1986:87). That is why there can be no social equality, as it would imply the *Aufhebung* of the God-created and God-willed social differentiation.

The foundation for a “theology of apartheid” that would have disastrous consequences for both church and state over the next fifty years, was now firmly laid. Whereas the structured pluriformity of Kuyper with a concomitant notion of unequally structured civilization became possible via his dialectic of common and special grace, the ethnological pluriformity of Warneck is built on his notion of *Volkschristianisierung* where history and missiological praxis became determinant for interpreting Scripture.

Both are clear forms of natural theology with a pluralistic slant in the negative sense:

Velema’s critique of Kuyper is unambiguous: The dialectic relation between common and special grace is an exponent of Kuyper’s idealistic philosophy couched in Calvinistic terms. The only way out is a radical brake with common grace to restore some of Kuyper’s Reformed intentions (Velema 1989:69). Jonker notes that Kuyper constructs the pluriformity of the church not on Scripture or the intention of the Reformation, but on his evolutionist and organic concept of both history and concomitant social realities. He introduces a subjectivist element into his ecclesiology (church-formation is an issue of choice) that can be related to the individualism of the nineteenth century (Jonker 1981:91-94, 1989:16-18).

Hoekendijk’s note on Warneck and other nineteenth century German missiologists is equally clear: By relinquishing the eschatological proviso, the missiological praxis became normative via a romanticised and ethnologically structured *Volksidee*. The church is no longer the sign of the coming kingdom in this world, but is seen as prolongation of the *Volk*, as blessed fulfilment of its naturally evolving ethnic structure (see Hoekendijk 1948:107).

The interesting point is that both Kuyper and Warneck went to great lengths to show that their respective theologies were indeed Scripture-based. I already referred to the fact

²¹ Werner Elert later goes even further to put love of the own as precondition for a good missionary: “Wo der Missionar für das eigene Volkstum kein Verständnis mehr hat, kann man von ihm auch für das fremde keines mehr erwarten”(see Hoekendijk 1948:101).

that Kuyper started his theological work with six volumes all entitled *Uit het Woord. Stichtelijke Bijbelstudien (From the Word. Pious Bible Studies 1873-1886)*. Equally, Warneck chooses Scripture as basis for missiology from the beginning, and engages in serious exegesis throughout his ML so that his legacy is even described as seeking an answer for each missiological question “in the light of God’s revelation” and the latter in a pietistic-biblicist sense!²²

How is natural theology possible in the light of Scripture? How can destructive, ethnic pluralism be seen as a biblical injunction? The answer lies in our third statement.

Statement Three

When the presupposition of hermeneutics is constituted by an ideological pluralism, God becomes the Great Divider, Scripture is consistently read from creation and not recreation, and unity in the church is spiritualised and reduced to an unseen reality.

The link between Kuyper and what Loubser has called *The Apartheid Bible* (1987) is much more “direct” than in the case of Warneck. But behind the trend of “model reading” that follows below, lies the enabling shadow of Warneck’s design – perhaps far beyond his own intentions.

Let us not waste time and get directly to the point: If you approach Scripture with an ideological presupposition to which you are not open and critical, you will mostly find what you are looking for.

The logic is razor sharp and equally chilling:

The differentiation in creation (light/darkness, sea/land, plants/animals, man/wife) is forcefully confirmed in the events of Babel where God specifically provided against non-differentiation. This is set forth in the clear injunction to Israel to retain her national and religious identity amongst, and over against, other nations. This is equally confirmed with the differentiated and pluralistic work of the Spirit during Pentecost where the separate existence of singular *Völker* is not abolished, but made more steady (*bestendig*) as each nation hears the gospel in its own language. The land where each *Volk* lives, is the predestined work of God’s promise to Abraham (Gen 12) and others (Amos 9:7), as God alone determines the time and place where each shall live (Act 17:26). The unity in Christ is both a higher spiritual unity and a non-realizable eschatological vision where in heaven all peoples and nations shall come before God and praise Him (Rev 7). The rule (*voogdyskap*) of one Volk over another is not directly stated in Scripture, but can be derived from the subjugation of the heathen nations to Israel, and the principle of love, especially from the more developed to the less developed, the *mündige* toward the *unmündige*.²³

Any reader of this paper will be able to construct the relation between the theological framework described above and the way in which Scripture is interpreted here. Why did this very obviously ideological reading find its way so relatively easy into the Afrikaans speaking Reformed churches who all had always claimed the absolute authority of Scripture?

²² See Hoekendijk’s reference (1948:95) to J Warnack: *Zu G Warnecks 100.Geburtstag* (1934), and his own comments on page 106.

²³ Please note this is my own constructed paraphrase of the many lines that build the network for an apartheid exegesis. The best examples to analyse in depth would be JD du Toit’s speech at the *Volkskongres* of 1944; FJM Potgieter’s opening speech at the Stellenbosch seminary in 1958, and the more refined church document *Ras, Volk en Nasie* of 1974 in which apartheid theology found its culmination.

To understand this, we need to make a short note on Pietism:

The second half of the 19th century brought two important and deeply contrasting “Bible-reading” strategies to the fore. The one was the very influential and fast growing body of historical-critical scholarship that asked difficult and overtly critical questions about historicity, truth and the authority of Scripture. At the same time one finds a maturing Pietism, not only in Germany, but all over Europe, and specifically in Scotland. In fact, much of the Protestant missionary zeal of the early 19th century had its roots in Pietistic communities (see Bosch 1983:25). In these communities a great, almost biblicist respect for Scripture held sway, clearly setting themselves apart from “liberal” and “critical” scholarship. Strong emphasis would fall on a pious personal life-style, an active striving toward holiness, and an enthusiasm to win souls for Jesus through evangelization and mission (see LThK 8: 291-293).

This is the point to raise readers’ awareness of a very important link between the spirituality of the DRC specifically, and evangelically oriented Pietism (see Jonker 1998). Before the DRC could train its own theological students as from 1867, it had to rely on “imported” ministers, in the early years mostly from The Netherlands. By the middle of the 19th century this shifted to the theologically conservative Scotland whence great pietist preachers, academics and church leaders came of whom Andrew Murray had the greatest influence and is internationally the best known.

If one now takes into account that Kuyper, in his criticism of Gunning, set himself up against the modern critical scholarship of his time²⁴ (see *De hedendaagsche Schriftercritiek*, 1881), and that a pietist respect for Scripture was already deep-seated in the spirituality of the DRC in the period of 1860 to 1900, and onward, the chances for a self- or historical-critical reading were indeed slim. We have proof of that in the notorious case where Prof Johannes du Plessis was set off from his teaching position at Stellenbosch due to his perceived alignment with critical scholarship, specifically regarding the Old Testament.²⁵

What is however necessary to note, is that with the action of the church against Du Plessis, the opportunity for critical (and self-critical reading, later stemming inter alia from Bultmann’s notion of *Vorverständnis*) became very difficult. A hermeneutical (and ethical!) vacuum was created in the early 1930’s into which the ideological pluralism of a Kuyper as encompassing Christian world view could step, unchallenged by a largely pious audience who accept the Word “as it stands”, thereby allowing a natural theological construct to destroy a sense for the historical and salvation-historical mode of Scripture (see Lategan 2000²⁶ and, Kinghorn 1986:55-58).

It took the DRC more than fifty years to escape from this hermeneutical trap. It provided the moral legitimacy and authority to not only set up different churches for different *Völker*, but, under the guise and in the name of Christianity, gave Afrikaner

²⁴ It must be noted that Kuyper was too much of a Calvinist to be pietistic in the classical sense of the word. According to him Pietism’s reaction against overt rationalism, understandable as it was, led to an anti-theological attitude that actually left the forces outside the church free play in the world. Kuyper 1909:623-624.

²⁵ Much has been written on this case, even dissertations. The details of the case itself are not the point here, but the effect of this on the development of critical scholarship. This has been excellently espoused by A Nash in his two contributions to the *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 16/1997: 55-69 and 129-139

²⁶ Bernard Lategan, well-known hermeneutical scholar from South Africa, makes a compelling case that a “structural deficit” arose in Reformed hermeneutics in the context of *Geschichtlichkeit* as developed in critical scholarship after the Enlightenment. The reason is that the indivisibility of truth applied to the totality of Scripture was linked to the absolute authority notion that left very little room for internal criticism and *Sachkritik* as practised in for example the Lutheran tradition (*inter alia* Lessing, Reimarus, Strauss and Baur). See Lategan 2000:1-3.

political leaders from 1948 and onward the go-ahead to intensify and complete the racialist construction of the whole South African society.

The deconstruction and eventual dismantling of this massive ideological pluralism came from many theological sources inside SA, and through the work of Bennie Keet, Beyers Naude²⁷ and Willie Jonker also from within the DRC. The most important German influences were without doubt the critique of religion and Christological focus of Karl Barth's theology, and the inspiring example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the Confessing Church. One of the most creative internal theological responses – following on many antecedent witnesses²⁸ – has been the Confession of Belhar (1982), the first addition to the confessional base of the DRC family since the Canons of Dordt in 1618-9, and the first Reformed confessional cry from the African soil by a church created exactly as a result of an ideologised theology 105 years earlier.

Despite the strong cohesive theological and political forces resisting change, the confession of the church is proof that ideologised pluralism – evident today in other parts of Africa, the former Russian federation, Northern Ireland and the Middle East – can indeed be overcome by a prophetic witness to reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

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²⁷ Beyers Naudé was forced to leave the DRC by 1964 inter alia due to his involvement in the Christian Institute.

²⁸ The most important of these are the Cottesloe declaration (1961), the Message to the People of South Africa (1968), and the Ottawa decision on apartheid as *status confessionis* (1982). For a detailed analysis of the relation between Belhar and antecedent witnesses, read Naude 2003.

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