

**Dealing with division:
Some responses to World War II within the
Dutch Reformed Church on synodical and congregational level
(1936-1944)¹**

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Abstract

This article investigates the way in which the Dutch Reformed Church dealt with the challenge of divisions amongst its members after the outbreak of World War II, and how the responses on synodical and congregational level were articulated in theological language. Drawing on some existing studies in this regard, the article seeks to add further texture by looking at certain important official synodical documents from 1936 until 1944, as well as some sermons preached in Dutch Reformed congregations during these years – sermons in which pastors specifically referred to the war and to the conflict and divisions within Afrikaner circles. With regard to the sermons, I draw on some sermons preached by Rev. Beyers Naudé and Rev. CR. Kotzé. These sermons represent different responses to the crisis that the war caused within Afrikaner (church) circles, and as such indicate the way in which the broader viewpoints and emotional debates in society and on synodical level also resonated in congregational life.

Introduction

In 1936 a report was tabled at the Cape Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) on “*Oorlog en Vrede*” (War and Peace) (*Acta Synodi*, DRC in SA 1936:280). This document was augmented and approved by the Council of Dutch Reformed Churches (*Raad van Kerke*) in 1937 (Acts of the Council of

¹ This article was read as a paper at the annual conference of the Church Historical Society of South Africa, held in Pretoria from 16-18 August 2014. The theme of the conference was “War and Peace”.

Churches 1937:84-36).² It saw the prevailing world crisis – with its tense relationship between nations – as resulting from a growing apostasy from God and God's Word,³ and states that the synod deeply mourns the current mistrust and suspicion between world nations. The synod was further convinced that military violence would not provide a solution, and that governments should commit themselves to investigating the causes of the strife and tension, and seek to eradicate them through international negotiations, arbitration and the League of Nations. The document also asks the church to use its preaching ministry to convey a clear message regarding the need to break down the walls of misunderstanding, hate and enmity, and take a stance for peace. In addition to these recommendations, the report makes some further comments on what it views as the biblical view regarding war, arguing in the process that not all forms of war are unconditionally condemned by Scripture, and that in certain circumstances war could be morally permissible (i.e. according to the principles of a just war). Although pacifism is not viewed as a sustainable solution for world peace, the document does state that the church – which has the calling to proclaim a gospel of peace – must struggle against war; it should support every movement towards peace and should condemn both the glorification of war (“*oorlogsverheerliking*”) as well as the stoking of the flames of war (“*die aanvuur van die oorlogsges*”) (Acts of the Council of Churches 1937:85; cf. Durand and Smit 1995:111).

Although the ideas in this document were articulated and were recommended, at a time when the possibility of war in Europe was on the rise, there was not yet a strong expectation that South Africa would be involved in such a possible war. This changed, however, when after the outbreak of the war in September 1939 the issue of South Africa's participation in this war became a matter of intense debate that evoked deep emotional responses, especially in some Afrikaner circles. When the Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, General J.C. Smuts, declared war in support of Britain, the issue came to a head, also within congregational settings in the Dutch Reformed Church. Most Dutch Reformed Church members were against participating in the war on behalf of the British Empire and aligned themselves politically with Malan and Hertzog. In January 1940 Malan's National Party and Hertzog's supporters merged to form the *Herstigte Nasionale Party* (The Reconstituted National Party) under Hertzog's leadership and later Malan's (cf. Giliomee 2003:441). For many

² The Council of Dutch Reformed Churches was the body that represented the various synods of the Dutch Reformed Churches before they formed one general synod in 1962.

³ Denis (2004:116) refers to fact that many contributors to the influential Dutch Reformed newspaper *Die Kerkbode* saw sin in general as a cause of the war. The editor, M. J. van der Westhuizen, for instance, wrote in September 1941 that war was God's punishment so that the nations would turn back to him (Denis 2004:116; cf. Van der Westhuizen 1941:394-395).

the idea of siding with Britain – given the memory of the Anglo-Boer War – was unthinkable and a betrayal of the cause of Afrikaner nationalism. There were some sentiments expressing sympathy for National Socialism in Germany (as seen in movements such as the *Nuwe Orde vir Suid-Afrika*⁴ and, around this time, a right-wing paramilitary group known as the *Ossewabrandwag* (the Ox Wagon Guard) also grew in prominence, especially in the Free State, where the opposition to Smuts was especially strong and outspoken. The *Ossewabrandwag* was founded in the study of a pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church, Rev. CR. Kotzé, in Bloemfontein (cf. Olivier 1981:21), and some members of the Dutch Reformed Church associated with this movement or identified with its sentiments (although many would later become disillusioned). The Dutch Reformed Church, whose members were mostly against the war, thus increasingly had to deal with political divisions *within* its congregations. It should further be noted that the 1930s saw the rise of Afrikaner nationalism,⁵ a movement that found strong expression in the symbolic Ox Wagon Trek of 1938. The *Ossewabrandwag*, in fact, saw itself as exemplifying continuity with the spirit of the 1938 celebrations.

This new political situation and the concomitant divisions within the Dutch Reformed Church confronted the church, as Durand and Smit have rightly pointed out in an interesting article on “The Afrikaner Churches on War and Violence”, with the same two problems that it had to deal with during the rebellion of 1914 and 1915,⁶ namely, the issue of “the unity of the Afrikaner people and their church and the issue of the legitimacy of the

⁴ The *Nuwe Orde* (New Order) was formed in 1942 under the leadership of Oswald Pirow, and it advocated an Afrikaner variant of National Socialism. See Giliomee 2003:442.

⁵ It can be noted, though, that the phrase “the rise of Afrikaner nationalism” is not an uncontested notion and needs some qualification. One should consider in this regard Benedict Anderson’s definition of “the nation”, namely, that “it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (1983:6). For Anderson the nation is an *imagined* community “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). The nation is imagined – according to Anderson – as *limited* “because even the largest ... has finite, if elastic, boundaries” and the nation is also imagined as *sovereign* “because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Reformation were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm” (7). According to Anderson’s definition the nation is also imagined as a *community*, “because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). When speaking of the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, the way in which nationalism is “invented” and the nation functioned as “an imagined community” should be kept in mind.

⁶ When the British government asked Prime Minister Louis Botha to occupy some strategic places in German South-West Africa after the outbreak of World War I, several former Boer generals rebelled. Martial law was declared and the rebellion was crushed, leading to great disunity in Afrikaner society at large, but also within church circles. See Durand and Smit 1995:33-36.

government, with the concomitant idea of the right to resistance" (Durand and Smit in Villa-Vicencio 1987:38).

With their comment in mind, this article focuses more closely on the way in which the Dutch Reformed Church dealt with this challenge of the divisions amongst its members, and how the responses at synodical and congregational level were articulated in theological language, at the time of World War II. Some work has already been done in this regard, for instance by Durand and Smit (not only in the article referred to above, but also in their more comprehensive book entitled *Kerk en Geweld*).⁷ André Olivier's Master's thesis on *Die problematiek van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog met betrekking to the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* could also be mentioned (Olivier 1981), as well as Philippe Denis's article in the *Journal of Theology of Southern Africa*, which investigates the response to the war as reflected in the Roman Catholic periodical *The Southern Cross* and the Dutch Reformed Church's official newspaper *Die Kerkbode* (see Denis 2004). In order to add further texture to the inquiry regarding the Dutch Reformed Church's response to certain challenges arising within the context of World War II, this article will look especially at some important official synodical documents following the outbreak of the war and South Africa's decision to join the war, as well as at some sermons preached in Dutch Reformed congregations during these years – sermons in which pastors specifically referred to the war and the conflict and divisions within Afrikaner circles. With regard to the synodical documents, the focus falls mainly on reports from the 1940 and 1944 synods of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (Cape Church), as well as reports from the 1940 and 1944 synods of the Dutch Reformed Church of the Orange Free State. Given the reference to the 1936 report of the Cape Synod on "War and Peace" in the introduction to this article, the periodisation is indicated in the title as "1936-1944". With regard to the sermons, I draw on a sermon preached by Rev. Beyers Naudé, as published in *Vreesloos gehoorsaam: 'n Keur uit Beyers Naudé se preke 1939-1997* (Fearlessly Obedient: A Selection from Beyers Naudé's Sermons 1939-1997) (Coetzee, Hansen and Vosloo 2013), as well as sermons preached by Rev. C.R. Kotzé, as found in *Die Bybel en ons Volkstryd: Preke tussen 1930 en 1946* (The Bible and the Struggle of our People: Sermons between 1930 and 1946) (Kotzé n.d.). These sermons indicate different responses to the crisis that the war created within Afrikaner (church) circles, and as such indicate the way in which the broader viewpoints and emotional debates in society and at synodical level also found resonance in congregational life, and more

⁷ Although *Kerk en Geweld* was published only in 1995, the initial research and first draft was completed in the mid-1980s and should therefore be read against the background of the state of emergency and the various discourses on violence during this period. The article in the volume edited by Charles Villa-Vicencio (1987) offers a summary of the main argument of this book.

specifically in the preaching ministry of the church. These two pastors are also chosen because their congregations belonged to the Cape Synod and the Free State Synod respectively, and this juxtaposition opens space for the question of how their sermons reflect or contradict the official statements of their respective synods. Without claiming that the sermons of these two pastors are representative of the sermons preached during the war, they do open a window onto the range of theological language used during this period as a way of responding to the crisis of division within the ranks of the Dutch Reformed Church.

Some Dutch Reformed Church synodical documents on war

Already on 28 September 1939 the moderatures of the four federated synods issued a joint declaration after the outbreak of the war. The message concerning the state of the *volk* (“*in sake die 'Volkstoestand'*”) is tellingly addressed to members of the Dutch Reformed Church “and to the whole Afrikaner volk” (“*en voorts aan die hele Afrikanervolk*”). The nationalistic views in some Afrikaner circles of the time found strong resonance in this declaration (references are made in the declaration to the Voortrekker Festival of 1938 and the Huguenot Festival in the preceding weeks). It is stated that the Afrikaner nation has been chosen by God and that it has a divine calling, and that God rules. The declaration calls for prayer, also for the government and the leaders of nations (cf. *Acta Synodi*, DRC Free State 1940:158-160).

How did the various synods of the Dutch Reformed Church respond to the outbreak of World War II, and how did they view South Africa's participation in the war?

The question of South Africa's participation in the war was not discussed at the Natal Synod meeting in 1940, while the Transvaal Synod in the same year refrained from any direct comments (see Van der Watt 1987:364). The Cape Synod, however, was more vocal and affirmed the views expressed at the synod in 1936 and at the meeting of the Council of Churches in 1937, including the rejection of “any glorification of war” (“*alle oorlogsverheerliking*”) and the stoking of the flames of war (“*die aanvuur van die oorlogsges*”). However, at this critical time the synod refrained from making any comments on the possible causes of the war or the policies of the warring nations. This report rejects the view that the war against Germany is a “holy war” to protect Christendom. The report also testifies to the divisions within Afrikaner circles:

With great concern Synod takes note of the division and intolerance and even embitterment that is coming to the fore in our beloved Fatherland as a result of a war far beyond our

borders and as a result of the policy adopted in this regard.
(*Acta Synodi*, DRC in SA 1940:284).

The synod further issued a call to the members of the DRC to act, without forfeiting their convictions, in a calm and dignified way, displaying their faith in God. A serious plea was made for people to guard against the temptation, in this volatile situation, to hurt the feelings of those with different opinions (*Acta Synodi*, DRC in SA 1940:284).

Yet the report is clear that it wants to speak out against any direct or indirect pressure on the conscience of the people. The report also speaks out against the financial costs of the war, stating that these funds could have been used for development work among the needy of the Afrikaner *volk*. In addition, it issues a warning against the misuse of religion in stoking the flames of war. The synod also requested the government “with deep concern”, in the light of the divisions and intolerance and even bitterness that had emerged in our beloved country, to use its God-given authority to address the deep-seated differences of opinion that prevailed (*Acta Synodi*, DRC in SA 1940:284, 285).

From the *Acta Synodi* it is clear that the debate must have been emotional – although the report was accepted, with many delegates voting against the decision to adopt the report and some abstaining from voting on this issue; some even wanted their opposition to be noted: “We abstain from voting since we are convinced that if the Synod spoke out on this matter it would not be beneficial for our congregations, given the differences of opinion in them” (*Acta Synodi*, DRC in SA 1940:285).

At the meeting of the Dutch Reformed Synod of the Orange Free State of 1940 there was also a sense that it was a time of crisis. This is already evident in the opening speech by the moderator, Rev. JP. van der Spuy, who spoke in rather apocalyptic terms of the turbulent times (cf. *Acta Synodi*, DRC Free State 1940:347-351). At this synod a document on “’n Skriftuurlike uiteensetting oor oorlog” (A Biblical Exposition on War) was accepted, after a discussion on some points put forward by those with conscientious objections against the participation of the *volk* in this war. This report opens, in Calvinistic fashion, with a strong emphasis on the sovereignty of God, quoting also from the Heidelberg Catechism (questions 26 and 27). From there the document proceeds to speak about the scriptural basis for government, emphasising that government has its origin in God (with reference to Romans 13, and also quoting article 36 of the *Confessio Belgica*). The view is that it is thus God that gives authority to the government, and that the government has a calling in this regard, and that the citizen also has a calling to obey and pray for the government. But the report also says that there are limits to the obedience to the government, referring in the process to the words of the apostles “We must obey God more than people”

(cf. Acts 4:19 and 5:29). The report also affirms the typical 'just war' arguments, emphasising that Scripture does not prohibit all wars (*Acta Synodi*, DRC in SA 1940:497-501).

Drawing on this report, the Synodical Commission of the Free State formulated "A Message to the Government concerning the Present War", which was adopted at the synod meeting of 1944 (*Acta Synodi*, DRC Free State 1944:49-52). This message was addressed to General Smuts, but also sent to Malan, Hertzog and the media. These forthright comments took note of the declaration of war and then proceeded to challenge some of the claims and allegations that were made to defend it, such as that the war was being waged as part of a fight for the protection of Christendom and Christian values, and that Hitler had plans for world domination. With regard to the first claim, the message states that synod was not convinced by the claim that the German *volk* was a pagan nation set on destroying Christendom and Christian values. With regard to Hitler's ambitions, it states that the church did not know the motives of Hitler's heart. God was the sole judge of that. The document continues by stating in no uncertain terms that the *volk* had a negative view of participating in this war and that it saw its conscience as being compromised. The message to General Smuts affirms that the *volk* (it does not speak of the church here) honoured the government because it is ordained by God (with reference to Romans 13). But – the message continues – for this very reason the *volk* has to resist when the government tramples on the *volk's* rights to freedom. Once again it is stated: "The people must always and in everything obey their God more than government (Acts 5:29)" (*Acta Synodi*, DRC Free State 1944:52).

Durand and Smit's comments in this regard are to the point: "The Synod's opposition to the government's war effort was clearly not motivated on theological or ethical grounds, but was political in nature, despite all efforts to give it a religious flavour. At the same time the old Reformed idea of the right to resist was altered beyond all recognition as the church came to be replaced by the *volk*, and the will of God by the will of the *volk*. (1987:41).⁸

What is interesting about the reports by the Cape and the Free State Synods is their sensitivity to the possible divisive potential of the political situation (this is especially evident in the Cape Synod's report), while one also registers that both synods – although they affirmed the God-given authority of government – raised the point that obedience to government can be resisted in the name of obedience to God.

⁸ It should be noted that this report was never accepted by the Council of Churches. If one looks at the report on war and peace that was accepted by the Council of Churches in 1947, it is clear that the tone of the 1947 report is markedly different. See Acts of the Council of Churches 1947:44-50.

Preaching in the time of war and strife: CF. Beyers Naudé and CR. Kotzé

In a recent volume of selected sermons by Beyers Naudé, one of the icons in the church struggle against apartheid, one finds included a sermon on 2 Chronicles 11:1-4 that Naudé preached as a young pastor in 1943 in the Dutch Reformed congregation of Loxton (see Coetzee, Hansen and Vosloo 2013:63-66). The title of this sermon is "War against brother" and the background is clearly a quarrel within the congregation as a result of the upcoming election in which some supported the National Party while others supported the *Ossewabrandwag*, the paramilitary organisation that had sympathies with National Socialism in Germany. The fact that some members of the congregation belonged to this organisation created some division and strife. Naudé's sermon should be understood against the backdrop of the fact that the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church had called for a day of prayer in the light of the coming elections. Naudé, who ministered to this Karroo congregation between 1942 and 1945, was well aware of the fact that this call for a day of prayer could lead to an increase in the conflict, and he, therefore, addressed these matters in his sermon. He opened his sermon by admitting that when he first heard about the day of prayer he had his doubts about whether it would be wise for the church to get involved in this fierce and emotional conflict in Afrikaner circles. Yet Naudé clearly states that it is his conviction that the church has a message for a time like this, and that the church should not be silent, since by remaining silent the church would either say that it has no message in this situation, or that it does not have the courage to proclaim this message wholeheartedly. For Naudé the message of the church should not be that it prays for the victory of one of the two sides, or that it could be the judge in the current political conflict. No, Naudé notes, the election is in God's hands. But the church has a message regarding the spirit in which elections should take place. Hence a new attitude is needed, namely, that of Christian brotherhood. Naudé asked himself whether a spirit of brotherhood was present in this context, and his answer to this question is clear:

I am afraid that if I have to answer this question myself then I would painfully have to answer: No! ... It is painful to be a spectator of or participant in one of the biggest blood baths the world has ever seen. And it is painful to read in the newspapers, attend meetings, overhear conversations in which a spirit of fierce hate and evil intolerance reigns like an all-consuming fire that burns out the little bit of love and goodwill left (Coetzee, Hansen and Vosloo 2013:64).

Naudé's sermon, as well as the situation in Loxton, opens a small window onto the larger situation within the Dutch Reformed Church during the time of World War II. Although Naudé was against South Africa's participation in the War, he was aware of the divisive potential of the conflict. In Colleen Ryan's biography *Pilgrimage of Faith* we read that Naudé said in this regard: "The emergence of the *Ossewabrandwag* was seen as a very serious internal conflict in the Afrikaner community and we were asked in the Broederbond to try to reconcile these two conflicting viewpoints" (Ryan 2005:33). And in his autobiography *My land van hoop* Naudé writes:

It was the war years, the time of the rationing of petrol, also the time of the *Ossewabrandwag* [OB], and the tension between the National Party and the OB. There were fervent OB supporters in the congregation as well as in our division of the AB [Afrikaner Broederbond]. And I put it to myself: if this tension erupts further I will have to act between Afrikaner and Afrikaner. Emotions were running very high at this time. My view towards everybody was: Look, don't let your political sentiments impair your sense of being an Afrikaner or the higher ideals of the Afrikaner *volk*" (1995:35, 36).⁹

It is interesting to compare the sermon by Naudé on Christian brotherhood with the war-time sermons of a pastor from Bloemfontein, Rev. CR. Kotzé (1881-1950). Christiaan Rudolph Kotzé was born in 1881, and after the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War he immediately joined the Boer commandos. During the war he was wounded and banished as a prisoner of war to St Helena. He returned to South Africa six months after the peace treaty was signed, because he initially refused to pledge loyalty to the British throne. He served in several Dutch Reformed congregations and in 1934 he accepted a calling to serve in the Dutch Reformed Church Bloemfontein (also known as the *Tweetoringkerk*), where he was a minister until his retirement in 1947 (cf. Kock 1951:162). He attended the Free State Synod meetings of 1940 and 1944, and was in favour of the release of those who were interned for their anti-war sentiments. As mentioned, he was a founding member of the *Ossewabrandwag*, although he later resigned from the organisation, but this did not lessen his commitment to the *volk* (for him church and *volk* were not in critical opposition). In 1955 selections from his sermons were

⁹ One can also refer to the crisis around the so-called "*rooi lussies*" during this time. South African troops that voluntarily fought outside the borders of the country wore red bands on each shoulder of their uniform. For many Afrikaners these bands were like a red flag to a bull. Certain pastors even asked these soldiers to leave the church. Cf. Olivier 1981:69. Naudé also had to deal with this challenge in his congregation in Pretoria. See Naudé 1995:37.

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published posthumously under the title *Die Bybel en ons Volkstryd (Preke 1930-1946)*. In the foreword to this book, Prof EA. Venter, wrote about him: "Although there was opposition and much strife, friend and foe knew that the DR Church Bloemfontein had a pastor who fears God, but no human" (Kotzé n.d.: *Voorwoord*).

It is clear from these sermons that Kotzé was strongly opposed to the "reconciliation politics" ("*konsiliatiepolitiek*") of the 1930s, and he was a passionate advocate of Afrikaner nationalism against what he viewed as British imperialism. This is clear, for instance, in one of his sermons with the telling title: "God makes the nations and the Devil makes the Empire". He ended the sermon with the following words:

Balshazzar is dead; Daniel lives. Nero is dead; Paul lives. Milner is dead; Paul Kruger lives. The empire people are dead *before* they are dead. Christian nationalist Afrikanerdom lives and lives ... God says: Flee from the empire's flattery and ballot boxes. Flee from the empire's influences. Flee from the traitors. Stay with the *volk* whom God has chosen for you" (Kotzé n.d.:10-11).

The book also includes 10 sermons preached between 1939 and 1945, and these sermons, according to the publisher, caused quite a stir, drawing large crowds to the *Tweetoringkerk* in Bloemfontein. In a sermon entitled "War" Kotzé uses as his text Ecclesiastes 3:3, 8 "A time to kill and a time to heal ... A time for war and a time for peace." Towards the end of the sermon he asked how World War II got started. He referred to the Peace of Versailles and saw it as an oppressive treaty that stole from Germany. Yet England declared war, thus World War II was started to keep looted goods. Therefore God's blessing could not be on this war. The view of the Christian, therefore, should be: "If a war is there for the sake of injustice, looting or oppression, I will have no part in it. A person must be obedient to the government, but we must be more obedient to God than to people" (Kotzé n.d.:36).

Also included among his war-time sermons is a sermon he preached around the time of the 1943 elections. In this sermon he called upon the congregation to make their choice by answering the question: "Where does your salvation lie? In nationalism or in the empire?" He continues:

From the earliest times the empire and nationalism have been involved in a struggle for life and death. On which side do pious men and women stand? ... Think of Moses against Pharaoh, Isaiah against the empire of Nineveh, Daniel against Nebuchadnezzar, Paul against the Roman Empire. These are

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the people who wrote our Bible. Name *one single* imperialist God could use to write the Bible (Kotzé n.d.:67).

The sermons of Ds. Kotzé, as reflected in *Die Bybel in ons Volkstryd*, open a window onto some sentiments within the Dutch Reformed Church. Here we have a strong anti-imperial sentiment and also the affirmation of the idea of resistance against government in obedience to God. The concepts of church and *volk* are, furthermore, clearly merged and fused.

Conclusion

In their study of the position of the Dutch Reformed Church towards war and violence in the 20th century Durand and Smit note:

The Afrikaner churches, like most other churches, do not have a well-defined, authoritative and essentially timeless position on issues of war and violence. They have responded to these issues, like most other churches, in a variety of particular circumstances and therefore with differing voices (Villa-Vicencio 1987:31).

During the first part of the 20th century there were strong sentiments within the Dutch Reformed Church favouring resistance to imperialism. One might think, for instance, of some of the responses to the suppression of the rebellion of 1914 to 1915, the message to the government by the Free State Synod, and the sermons of C.R. Kotzé. What is interesting in the sermons of Rev. Kotzé is how his sermons conflate church and *volk*, as is also seen in the 1944 report of the Free State Synod, albeit that Kotzé's strong rhetoric may not have been welcomed by all. In Kotzé's sermons, the strong emphasis on the *volk* is coupled with strong anti-empire sentiments. The call to stay with the *volk* is linked to the call to flee from the empire. Kotzé's anti-war sentiments and resistant language should thus be understood within this pro-*volk* and anti-empire framework.

It is beyond the scope of this article to deal with the responses to war and violence in the second half of the 20th century, but it can be said that generally the church did not support those who opposed war and state violence, or who claimed the right to resist the government on moral or religious grounds. Biblical texts such as Romans 13 and Acts 5:29 were given a different emphasis in the latter part of the 20th century as apartheid theology became more deeply entrenched in the church.

I referred earlier to the sermons of Beyers Naudé when he was a pastor at Loxton. Naudé was clearly against South African participation in the war and at that stage shared the sentiments associated with the growing

Afrikaner nationalism, and in this sense he reflected the position taken by the Cape Church at the synod of 1940. In the sermon referred to earlier in this article, Naudé emphasised the need for Christian brotherhood. For Naudé, Christian brotherhood is not to be equated with the brotherhood of one political party, or of people who have the same economic concerns, or share the same ideology, or long for the same form of government. No, Christian brotherhood means something deeper, namely, that “we are all children of the one Father and therefore brothers (*sic*) in the one Jesus Christ” (Coetzee, Hansen and Vosloo 2013). But in this sermon – as in other sermons during this time – Naudé also strongly emphasises the notion of justice. There can be no unity if justice is not the basis of all our relationships and interactions. Hence his comment: “This is for me the big open wound, the sore place, the main cause of the painful events of our times: the lack of a truthful justice!” (Coetzee, Hansen and Vosloo 2013:65). One can argue that at this stage Naudé’s emphasis on brotherhood and justice should be understood – in accordance with the spirit of the times and within the context in which he ministered – as operating within the confines of the Afrikaner *volk*. Yet he already had to grapple with the wider South African experience. Looking back on this time, Naudé later said:

Once a quarter or when there was communion or baptism, I conducted services in the little mission church in Loxton. Looking at the terrible poverty, the lack of any real or proper education, I began to ask myself: ‘How can we justify this?’ Whites were always justifying why the people got the wages they did, and that there was very little they could do about it. I started to question this ... This was also linked to my very strong sense of mission ... I said to myself, ‘Part of your mission, certainly, is to uplift the people’ (Ryan 2005:33).

As is well-known, Naudé would later on radically question the legitimacy of the apartheid government and the theology of the church that was, in his view, blind to its own structural violence. And he would join the majority of South Africans in their resistance to apartheid, and in the process he in some sense also tapped into his own denomination’s history of resistance. It is also interesting to note how his initial emphasis on the unity of the *volk* and brotherhood (during the time when he was still a member of the Afrikaner *Broederbond*), developed into an emphasis on (racial) reconciliation in South Africa, as well as how the seeds of the emphasis on justice in his thinking and preaching would grow into a broader and more inclusive understanding of justice.

The Dutch Reformed Church is facing new challenges in South Africa today, not the least of them being how to deal with the challenges posed by

secularisation. At the same time, the Dutch Reformed church is also grappling with internal divisions within the church as a result of different views on church reunification within the Dutch Reformed family of churches and on how to make the Belhar confession (with its emphasis on unity, reconciliation and justice) part of its confessional base. Given these challenges one can ask: Is the concern for internal unity within the denomination – which might be similar to the concern for the unity of the *volk* during World War II – still the main pursuit that drives the theology behind fundamental church and synodical decisions? Or can the Dutch Reformed Church find the necessary (theological) resources to challenge narrow and reductive understandings of unity, reconciliation and justice?

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