

Chapter 5

The character and worldview of the Afrikaner society in the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek

Van Jaarsveld says that the troubled times in the history of the Afrikaner nation worked together to bring forth the best characteristics of this nation (Van Jaarsveld 1971a:9). This is probably true for it is only in times of desperation that Afrikaners managed to put their personal differences aside and stand together as a nation. The one thing that really united the Afrikaners was their religion and religious education. In the previous chapter we saw that the Christian based education was seen as fundamental and in this chapter the result of the conservative view on religion and education is spelled out by looking at the character and world view of the Afrikaners that was formed by those fundamental issues.

Erlank says if we look at the history of South Africa and use it as criteria for the establishing of the unique character and worldview of the Afrikaner nation, it can be divided into two parts (Erlank 1952:8). From the time of Jan van Riebeeck's landing at the Cape (1652) until the British invasion of 1806, patterns formed and the character and culture of the Afrikaners developed. These patterns were burned into the souls of the nation during the next 150 years of history. The sorrow, pain, hardship and struggles acted like acid to burn the patterns deeper and brighter into the Afrikaners (Erlank 1952:9). This 'burning process' melted different aspects of the lives, culture and character of the people into one solid mass, making it nearly

impossible to distinguish between the character, religion and worldview of the Afrikaners living in the ZAR (Erlank 1952:12). Together they ensured that the Afrikaners became a unique nation.

Booyens calls for caution when one tries to establish the character of a nation (Booyens 1970:30). Certain attitudes or manners of conduct must not be seen as character trends because they can be a reaction to a certain situation. It is therefore only temporary, but because it is easily detected and identifiable, it can put you on the wrong track. A possible example of this, to my mind, is the aspect of Afrikaner nationalism that can be over-emphasized or misread. The spirit of nationalism only came to life after the annexation of the ZAR in 1877 (Engelenburg 1925:34) and died again even before the Second Anglo-Boer War. The spark of Afrikaner nationalism never really got a grip on the nation as a whole (see also chapter three). Even today Afrikaner nationalism is only briefly visible at sport stadiums during international competitions like rugby, cricket or soccer.

To avoid falling into the trap of making a temporary reaction into a characteristic, the advice of Wilcocks is helpful (Wilcocks 1945:287). He says that the character of a nation has a sense of permanence. It continues from one generation to the next to form a pattern, detectable in each generation. This immediately cancels Afrikaner nationalism as a characteristic.

Looking at the Afrikaner, one must be aware of the duality in the character of the nation. Throughout history, there were Afrikaners 'who trekked and others who stayed on their farms. There were the Voortrekkers and those who came much later; there were adventurers and those who did not seek adventure. Those who broke loose and others who pulled in the yokes. Some were joiners and others fought until the bitter end. There were brave ones and cowards, "Doppers" and "Filistyne" [Philistines]. Afrikaners with Afrikaner hearts and those with English hearts' (Coetzee 1977:154).

Another important aspect to take note of when one tries to establish the character of a nation, is: Whose criteria are used? (Booyens 1970:30). People from different backgrounds will make different judgements on the same issues. Things like personal experience, prejudice, objectivity, distance and even the time slot in which the person lives will all have an influence on the person's opinion. Sadly, the Afrikaners of the nineteenth century did not talk or write about themselves (Van Jaarsveld 1981:2). We are dependent on the judgement of outsiders and Afrikaners who much later, looked back and tried to establish the main trends that influenced the nation. Seen from the inside the prototype is usually heroic, an example for others to follow (Coetzee 1977:152,153).

Rose, an Englishman who stayed twelve years in South Africa wrote *The truth about the Transvaal* in 1902 and in the very first chapter of this work, he referred to the prominent characteristics of the Afrikaner nation as he saw them. He says that religiosity is the main characteristic of the Afrikaners, colouring every aspect

of their lives (Rose 1902:10,11,17,19). Other outstanding characteristics of the Afrikaner nation are patriotism, stolidity, sobriety, ignorance, and ‘unconscious humour’. He notes that the people are reserved because of their isolated lives on the farms (Rose 1902:18). He concludes:

The average Boer had no thought and no ambition beyond the boundaries of his farm. Content to herd his cattle, and grow his mealies and wheat in peace; living a simple, homely, if uncultured life; his only holiday, attendance at the quarterly “Nachtmaal” in the nearest town; his only recreations his gun and his pipe; recognising no authority but his God and his Fieldcornet; obtaining sufficient from his farm to supply his modest requirements, he simply asked to be left alone in his self-sought isolation from the outside world (Rose 1902:25).

A distinction should be made between the identity of the nation and the identity that we want them to have (Booyens 1970:30). In the first half of the twentieth century, lists of Afrikaner character trends were drawn up, focusing on the good qualities of the nation. These lists were used for education and to promote national unity, but often it showed the Afrikaners as they should be and not as they were (Booyens 1970:30).

A possible example of one of the character trends that would be omitted in such lists, is the dishonesty and lack of trust of the Afrikaner. Giliomee says: ‘Individuals tended to trust their families, but trusted few, if any, outside the family circle’ (Giliomee 2003:190). He based this on the word of Leyds (1885) and Bryce (1895). Leyds says: ‘The national characteristic appears to be cunning dishonesty or dishonest cunning’ while Bryce says the Afrikaners were ‘...very suspicious because [they were] afraid of being outwitted by English traders’ (Giliomee 2003:190). Before the Great Trek started, a common saying amongst

the farmers was: 'The Englishman is very learned and we are very stupid' (Giliomee 2003:140).

The political and religious struggles within the Afrikaner communities also provided fuel for suspicion and dishonesty. The joiners (Afrikaners who betrayed their nation, and joined the British cause) of the Second Anglo-Boer War proved those suspicions right. Although the Afrikaners do not want to admit it, dishonesty and lack of trust is part of their character and in sad contrast to their religious claims.

Finally, when characterising the nation, people tend to highlight certain aspects of the character, giving an incomplete picture (Booyens 1970:30). Although I am aware of the danger of falling into this trap, I stated only the most prominent characteristics of the nineteenth century Afrikaner nation that influenced their worldview and behaviour to such an extent that it made a lasting impression on the nation, still visible today.

5.1 Religion

'The centre of all Afrikaner spiritual and social life is the Dutch Reformed Church....' (Calpin 1944:17). This influence of the Church in the 20th century was the direct result of the influence religion had on the Afrikaners of the previous century. The character of the Afrikaners cannot be understood unless one primarily takes note of their religion because it infiltrates the essence of the existence of these people. Everything they do and say is linked to their religion

(Neppen 1938:58). On this, Fuller comments: 'In character, he is different from all others: he maintains a kind of patriarchal religion' (Fuller 1908:36). A few years earlier, Rose said the same thing:

Based far more upon the Old than the New Testament, it [the religion of the Afrikaners] is simply part and parcel of his daily life, and, personally, I could far more easily imagine a Boer dispensing with his breakfast than with his morning prayers, or with his supper than with his evening psalm singing. He is, so to say, unconsciously religious; it simply never enters into his head to be otherwise (Rose 1902:10,11).

Jeppe, who came to South Africa as a young lad and lived in Pretoria, quickly summed up the typical Afrikaner. It seems his youth gave him the open-mindedness to understand the Afrikaner better than other people coming from abroad did. He wrote about the same time as Fuller: 'The religious sentiment in the Boer has been often scoffed at; it certainly sometimes verges on cant, and naturally it is not equally sincere in all individuals; but upon the whole it is unfeigned and deep-seated' (Jeppe 1906:75).

The great number of references to the religious aspect of the Afrikaner's life gives us an indication of the utmost importance that religion played, not only in their private lives but also in their practical day-to-day life open for all to see. The Afrikaners are religious, without even knowing it (Stockenström sa:226). 'Every morning after breakfast the whole family...assembled for prayers, and if I ever enjoyed religious worship, it was there (Fuller 1908:155). The Christian foundations were given to the children on the knees of their mothers. By the time they were grown-ups, religion was part of their character and worldview (cf Stockenström sa:229).

Religious terminology was used in day-to-day conversations and became part of the Afrikaans language. Even today, Afrikaans is rich in idioms and proverbs taken from the Bible (Oliver 1998:79-82 – see Appendix 6). The Great Trek leader Maritz talked about Natal as ‘the land overflowing with milk and honey’ (Van Jaarsveld 1962:238 – my translation). He also used words like ‘Sabbath’ when referring to Sunday, ‘promised land,’ when he refers to Natal as well as words like ‘Nile River,’ ‘desert’ and ‘covenant’ all used with a spiritual nuance (Van Jaarsveld 1962:238). MW Pretorius addressed the people as ‘fathers of Israel’ (Van Jaarsveld 1961:239 – my translation).

As early as 1854, Stuart remarks on the public display of religion in the ZAR: ‘The first building when a town is set up is the Church. All the people work together, every one brings whatever he can to help and they work without stopping, like bees in a cove. The Churches are big, simple, and used only for religious purposes. Everybody respects the members of the Church council and they have great influence in the community’ (Stuart 1854:213 – my translation).

Nearly fifty years later, religion was still the most important factor in the lives of the Afrikaner nation: ‘Lastly, one cannot fail to touch upon the religion of the Boers, which forms so important a factor in their life and habits. The whole spirit of religious life in South Africa has always been intensely Protestant. “Left to itself” says Mr Greswell, “Puritanism has seemed to harden and crystallize in the veld” (Garrett-Fisher 1900:48).

‘Religion was the life-blood of the Voortrekkers; their Churches are at the centre of towns all over the Transvaal (Tingay, Johnson 1978:83). Many photographs in museums and books remind us of the time when the Church formed the centre of town with the ox-wagons spread on the vast plain surrounding the building (Pont, Botha, Storm, Herbst 1986:59). ‘In Pretoria the big Dutch Church occupies the best situation, in the middle of the market square’ (Bryce 1900:320). Today, one hundred years later, the big Churches standing tall in the centre of the old towns built by the Afrikaners like Potchefstroom, Lydenburg, Rustenburg and Krugersdorp are silent but vivid testimonies of the importance of religion and faith in the lives of those people (cf Coetzee 1945:422). It is worthy to note that the towns that were founded by people like the gold diggers, for example Pelgrimsrus and old Johannesburg (Langlaagte, Fordsburg and Braamfontein) do not have Churches and big Church squares in the middle of the town (Coetzee 1945:422).

To sceptics, the Church buildings could look like empty monuments of public display of religion, but faith stood strong in the hearts of the people attending the services in these Churches. On his journey through the ZAR in 1853, Rev Neetling was delighted to find ‘living faith’ on the farms. People were living like the patriarchs of the Old Testament (Stuart 1854:408) and the Bible knowledge of the youth, living in the isolated town of Lydenburg, was much better than that of the young people living in the Cape Colony (Stuart 1854:380).

However, one must not get the impression that the 'living faith' means that the Afrikaners were masters in theological terms. They knew the contents of the Bible and practised its commandments in their day-to-day lives, but could not debate about any theological issues because they were unschooled in this way of thinking. Calvinism taught believers to read and study the Bible but not to question it. They simply believed that everything the Bible says is true and made it part of their own lives. This gave Rev Dirk van der Hoff of Potchefstroom the shock of his life when he came to South Africa in 1853. He wrote: 'Yes, most of them can read, but they do not understand a word of it...I sometimes wonder if they can think at all' (LK Nr 249: Van der Hoff to Louts, Potchefstroom, August 1, 1853 – my translation). An anecdote told to Ellman serves to explain this way of thinking:

Some forty years ago a schoolmaster was imported from Holland to teach in the Zoutpansberg District. To their horror, the elders of the district one day discovered that the children were taught that the world turns on its own axis. The elders met and consulted regarding these new doctrines, and finally agreed to refer the subject to the minister, who requested the schoolmaster to explain. The schoolmaster said: "I teach them about the heavenly bodies, and that the earth revolves round the sun." The minister answered: "Well, this may be true, no doubt – and what the earth does in Holland, but it would be more convenient at present if in the Zoutpansberg district you would allow the sun still to go round the earth for a few years longer. We do not like sudden changes in such matters." (Ellman 1914:3).

During the time when the foundation of the Afrikaner nation was laid, the Bible and the Calvinistic faith was the single most important factor in life (Booyens 1970:32) resulting in another unique phenomenon, namely the firm belief that the Afrikaner nation was the chosen people of the Lord. Giliomee states that some historians argue that '...it is wrong to think that the Afrikaners saw themselves as

a Chosen People with a Divine mission before Kruger started to expound this idea in the 1880s' (Giliomee 2003:178). Giliomee refers to the mentioning of the idea amongst the Voortrekkers (Giliomee 2003:178). He also refers to the specific language used at the 1837 Cape synod regarding the Great Trek, expressing its concern over the 'departure into the desert, without a Moses or Aaron' (Giliomee 2003:162). The language used and frame of reference for the people in the Cape and those who trekked was that of the Bible.

'The Old Testament stands Bible to the Afrikaner; his nation has been described as the modern counterpart of an Old Testament tribe' (Calpin 1944:17). The Afrikaners believed that they were God's chosen people, who had a special calling from God Himself. This proved to be a constant cause of irritation to everybody who was not part of the Afrikaner nation. Outsiders tended to feel that the Afrikaners gave themselves a priority above all other people, being closer to God and living a holier life than others. 'They have persuaded themselves by some wonderful mental process that they are God's chosen people...' (Mackenzie 1899:158). The fact that Afrikaners distanced themselves actively from people not living according to the Reformed dogma and faith (Stuart 1854:211), also contributed to the 'holier than thou' assumption that others had of them. Fuller seems to understand that this was the result of a strong heritage on the one hand and isolated nomad life on the other hand, but like other non-Afrikaners judged it negatively.

The reading of the Sacred Book was all in all to them. Their forefathers in Holland and France had suffered for freedom to read its life-giving pages, and they with inherent steadfastness sought therein the bread of life. But even this had its darker

side. Their life, so near to that of the old patriarchs who like them had gone forth hardly knowing whither they went, begot in them the thought that they, as well as the Israelites of old, were God's chosen and peculiar people, and in consequence that they were superior to other peoples (Fuller 1908:164).

It is very important to take note of an observation Meyer makes about this in 1940. He argues that the Afrikaner nation is the only nation that came into being as a Calvinistic nation. From the very first moments of the birth of this nation and all through its development, the Afrikaner nation was formed, in every aspect of life, by Calvinistic faith (Meyer 1940:27). This is why religion plays such a major part in the life and existence of the Afrikaner nation. The strong sense of Divine calling was part of the Afrikaner character and worldview, seeping through even to the juridical aspect of life: 'The laws of the Transvaal (1865) were upon the whole as good as those of any other country, but for want of a police it was impossible to enforce justice in all cases, yet great crimes were exceptionally rare, for nowhere in the world was the moral law of greater force than among the farmers of the South African Republic' (Nixon 1880:208).

Earlier I referred to the opinion of Schonken who distinguishes between two different kinds of Afrikaners: The laughing, cheerful and spirited wheat farmers of the *Boland* and the much more serious *Ondervelder* – the cattle farmer, pessimistic and sorrowful, living in accordance with the traditions and customs of their forefathers (Schonken 1914:28). In the Afrikaners of the ZAR, these two different worldviews melted into one. On the one hand, the Afrikaners living in the ZAR were serious and sorrowful, but they also had a fine sense of humour and a positive attitude in life because they firmly believed that God is in control of

everything and everyone. 'In the Afrikaner civil religion, God imbues all history with ultimate meaning. He rules sovereign over the world and works His will in the affairs of nations – most visibly of Afrikanerdom' (Moodie 1980:1). '*Alles zal rechtekom*' (everything will turn out well), the favourite expression of President Kruger, indicates the habitual attitude of *laissez faire* adopted by the Afrikaners; 'and is also very indicative of the somewhat fatalistic bent which their minds so frequently take' (Rose 1902:14).

Rose also notes that the holidays and festivals celebrated by the Afrikaners were religious festivals – 'an anniversary of thanksgiving to their God' for having preserved them (Rose 1902:21). The Afrikaners' celebration of Amajuba Day and the Day of the Vow or Dingaans' day are two examples of the Afrikaner religious festivals (Rose 1902:21). Moodie calls those festivals 'ritual reunions' where 'Constant repetition of the civil theological themes and images on innumerable ritual occasions made the emotional logic of the civil faith personal to ordinary men and women' (Moodie 1980:18). He also notes that 'the sacred psalms' (Psalms 38, 46, 118, 130 and 146) are sung at these festivals (Moodie 1980:20).

Psalm 38 is the traditional *Geloftepsalm* (Psalm of the Vow) and is still a favourite (for repenting of sins), sung to the traditional *Voortrekkerwysie* (melody of the Voortrekkers). The *Voortrekkerwysie* of Psalm 130 is still in use today – it is sung in Churches as a song of repentance for sins. Psalm 146 is probably the most well-known spiritual song to all Afrikaners of the past generations and today still known by heart by most of them (see also Appendix 5).

Nearly all the characteristics that will be discussed next, are directly or indirectly influenced by, and based upon the foundation of the Christian religion of the Afrikaners.

5.2 Conservatism

‘The Boer is a born conservative’ (Froude 1886:38). This was the conclusion of most people who encountered the Afrikaners of the nineteenth century. Booyens named two factors that contributed to the unique conservative nature of the Afrikaner (Booyens 1970:33). The first and most important influence on the shaping of the nation was their Calvinistic religion that made them sceptical to new ideas. This was underlined by the words of Froude in 1886: ‘They are a deliberate and slow people, not given to enthusiasm for new ideas’ (Froude 1886:34).

The conservatism of the Afrikaner kept him, at least up to World War II, free from foreign influences like dances, strong liquor, horse racing and bioscopes (Booyens 1970:33). ‘Most Afrikaners have a dislike in strong liquor and the first laws [of the ZAR] placed huge sums of revenue on the sale of all liquor’ (Stuart 1854:213 – my translation). In 1849 the *Volksraad* imposed heavy taxes on the sales of strong liquor (Suid-Afrikaanse Argiefstukke, Transvaal nr 1, Notule van die Volksraad van die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek. Deel 1, 1844-1850:118). Two years later, the *Volksraad* declared that only one canteen will be allowed in each town (Suid-Afrikaanse Argiefstukke, Transvaal nr 3, Notule van die Volksraad van die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek. Deel 3, 1854-1858:464).

Conservatism was not an abstract intellectual outlook on life. It was a practical way of living day-to-day life. Generation after generation used the same farming methods (Wilcocks 1945:294), spoke the same language and observed the same customs and clothing. Everything that was intended to change or improve their customs was frowned upon as either 'English' or the 'antichrist' (Weilbach, Du Plessis 1882:24).

The sacredness of the Sunday was always observed and this led to the practice that no shops were allowed to be open for business on Sundays (a custom that was upheld till the late 20th century). The selling of liquor on Sundays was forbidden and bioscopes and other places of entertainment were closed on Sundays. No national or club sport were played on Sundays. Public holidays that were related to religion, such as Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day and the Day of the Vow were also observed in the spirit of a Sunday – quiet, with no work, no sport and no shopping or other means of entertainment (cf Booyens 1970:33).

The second factor in shaping a conservative nation was the isolation over a period of 200 years from the influences of the world (Booyens 1970:33). Living in the southern part of Africa, thousands of miles from Europe definitely had its impact on the people. Even in daily life, the people were isolated from one another because they lived far apart on farms, with insufficient communication systems and poor roads and transportation (Booyens 1970:33).

Although conservatism is often criticised, it was an important positive factor in the shaping process of the Afrikaner nation and not always a restricting influence on the development of the Afrikaner:

The conservatism of the Boer has in it nothing of the nature of mental ossification, and that he has preserved his pliability intact, is shown by the peculiar facility with which when the time comes, the Boer leaps in one generation from the rear of the seventeenth century thought and action to the forefront of the nineteenth.

It would almost seem as though that very dogged strength of character which for ages has made him capable of retaining his hold upon the old, when the necessity of doing so passes, makes him equally resolute to grasp the new (Schreiner 1923:259).

Froude, the famous British history writer once said that only Afrikaner conservatism could counter British colonialism (De Kock, Krüger 1986:252).

5.3 Isolation

As mentioned above, poor roads, the lack of ‘modern technology’, slow transport and numerous other factors isolated the farmers on their huge farms from frequent contact with people living in the towns and villages (Grobbelaar 1974:158). ‘The Boer character was formed in the isolation of the veld and amidst the insecurity and turbulence of the expanding frontier’ (Patterson 1957:291). The family members learned to depend on one another for support and survival (Wilcocks 1945:298). This isolation of the Afrikaner acted as a preservative of morals and character, although it also had some negative influences.

The most peculiar and characteristic type that the country has produced is the Boer of the Eastern plateau, the offspring of those Dutch Afrikaners who some sixty years ago wandered away from British rule into the wilderness. These men had, and their sons and grandsons have retained a passion for solitude

that even today makes them desire to live many miles from any neighbour, a sturdy self-reliance, a grim courage in the face of danger, and a sternness from which the native races have often had to suffer (Bryce 1900:56).

On the positive side, one of the results of the isolation on the farms was the fact that it made the farmers independent and self supportive (Cronje 1945:320). Men were not only stock farmers, they were also blacksmiths, sharp shooters, wagon makers, shoemakers, builders, carpenters, thatchers, tanners, transport riders, painters, and furniture makers (Stuart 1854:210). Everyone was a jack-of-all-trades and so were the women who made their family's clothes and could do anything from baking bread in an anthill, making soap and candles from the fat of a hippopotamus to loading firearms. They also acted as teachers for the children (cf Cronje 1945:320,321).

Another positive result of the isolated farm life was the Afrikaner's hospitality (Stuart 1854:204). This is underlined by the words in which Aylward describes the 'graceful hospitality' of the Afrikaners: 'Not only [was he] most kindly welcomed and made comfortable all along his road, but that he could not prevail upon his Boer entertainers to accept payment, even for the feeds supplied to his horses' (Aylward 1881:25). Stockenström says that 'writers and travellers wrote books on the wonderful hospitality' they received from Afrikaners. He also refers to some of the stories and anecdotes told about the hospitality given to strangers (Stockenström sa:248-251).

A habit that is characteristic of the hospitable Afrikaner and one that distinguishes him from all others, often to the delight and amusement of onlookers, is his inherited custom to greet all males with a firm handshake and all females with a

kiss on the lips, regardless if he knew them well or whether it was a first encounter.

Their habits and customs are strongly impressed by their wandering and sufferings. If one of the family is about to ride but a few miles beyond his own extensive holdings, before leaving his house he respectfully bids farewell to his father and friends with almost as much ceremony as a European would use before undertaking a journey of weeks' duration. In the same way persons, whether they be visitors, strangers, neighbours or kinsmen, coming to a homestead, greet each of the family on their first entrance under its roof, and are in turn shaken hands with by each and every member of the household (Aylward 1881:16,17).

Acts of kindness and hospitality extended even into the Anglo-Boer Wars: 'So when the Burgher met the "rednecks" as he calls them, during peaceful interludes, his first act, whether he was prisoner or captor, was to shake hands with Tommy; the next to offer him a smoke....This feeling was soon reciprocated, and had as its outcome countless acts of kindness to prisoners and wounded, on both sides' (Jeppe: 1906:243,244).

The sudden influx of people into the ZAR after the discovery of gold, showed the negative side of the Afrikaner's isolated lives:

The great majority of the nomad Boer population, cut off as they have been from Churches, schools, shops and every kind of social intercourse save with one or two accessible neighbours and the occasional trader or explorer, have retained to the full habits, alike in thought and action, of their forefathers. The wandering Boers, who were never content to make a home where another man's smoke was in sight, had little chance of that social intercourse which softens manners. In the Transvaal, the Boers have jealously secluded themselves from possible influences of change. It is only the last few years, with the gold discoveries and the coming of the Outlanders, which have introduced an element of novelty which even the stubborn Boer tries in vain to resist (Garrett-Fisher 1900:35).

Meyer gives a summary of the things that Afrikaners were accused of and among them, mentioned that the Afrikaners did not trust strangers (Meyer 1940:118). He says that they immediately became defensive in a situation where they were not the masters, never spoke their minds and some times acted impolitely (Meyer 1940:119). The reason for all of this, says Patterson, was fear, due to the lack of contact with strangers and the negative experiences they had when meeting strangers in the past (who either wanted to kill them or take the land from them): ‘Almost without exception, Boer contacts with other peoples have served to evoke uneasiness and fear, however much these fundamental responses might be masked by superficial aggressiveness’ (Patterson 1957:279).

5.4 Individualism

Contrary to the motto of the ZAR proclaiming *Eendragt maakt magt* (unity gives power), unity never was a strong characteristic of the Afrikaner nation. This motto was taken from the Republic of the Netherlands. The Voortrekkers were familiar with it because the arms and the motto of the Republic of the Netherlands appeared in all Dutch Bibles (Pama 1956:75) and it was taken from the Bible to serve as the motto of the ZAR, although the word ‘unity’ cannot be used to describe either the Voortrekkers or their offspring living in the ZAR (cf Preston 1989:36,48). A more appropriate way to describe the Afrikaners would be ‘strong-minded individualism’.

The political situation in the early years of the ZAR, clearly illustrates this side of the Afrikaner character:

And even while that instrument [the constitution] was being adopted by a section of the community there were no fewer than three republics to the north of the Vaal. In 1858, however, two of these, Zoutpansberg and the ZAR – the latter name had been adopted in 1853 – joined hands, while Lijdenburg maintained its independent position for two years more, and was eventually brought into the fold by an agreement which contained a series of compromises admirably illustrating how impossible it was to overcome the feelings of local and personal independence (Eybers 1918:1xviii).

Booyens (1970:33) argues that the individualism of the Afrikaners was the result of the isolated farm life that forced them to think and act for themselves. Nepgen adds that the religion of the Afrikaners also played a major part in forming this aspect of their character: ‘The principle issue of being a pioneer is to act independently in new and uncertain circumstances. Calvinists have a strong sense of individualism, with an indestructible urge for freedom and independence’ (Nepgen 1938:105 – my translation).

Individualism had a great impact on the lives of the people. Even during times of war, the Afrikaners thought and acted for themselves. ‘With the Boers each man is practically his own commander’ (Reitz 1931:143). Booyens comments that this individualism of the Afrikaners not only created dangerous situations in the military history of the nation, but also at times was the cause of bloodshed and major disasters (Booyens 1970:33).

‘The Boer’s idea of freedom was “free grass” with no taxes and to be left absolutely alone. He wished to be a law unto himself’ (Fuller 1908:35). This was written after the two Anglo-Boer Wars, and it is still true of the Afrikaner. The flame of nationalism that began to spark after the first Anglo-Boer War, never

succeeded in becoming a fire in the hearts of the nation (cf Wilcocks 1945:293). There was however, in one aspect of the Afrikaners lives a strong bond – it was the social unit formed by the family who lived and worked and fought together.

5.5 The family unit

The social unit of the Afrikaner nation was the family (Moodie 1835:165), founded upon the patriarchal system of the Bible, a closed unit with very strong bonds that again could be seen in day-to-day living. ‘Individuals tended to trust their families, but trusted few, if any, outside the family circle’ (Giliomee 2003:190).

Due to isolation and slow and poor transport, amongst other factors, the family unit took over the role of the Church (Grobbelaar 1974 Vol 1:158). During the years in which the Afrikaner nation was formed, the Bible and *huisgodsdienst* (family worship) were the outstanding factors that acted as glue to make the family unit a strong fortress (Meyer 1940:63). The Biblical norm of the family as an institution ordered by God, was kept and therefore the authority of the father was respected even by married children (Keyter 1940:86). The unity of the family as a social and self-sufficient workforce grew to a strong characteristic of the Afrikaner nation living in the ZAR (Meyer 1940:63).

The great part that religion played in family life could be seen in the influence it had upon marriage (Grobbelaar 1974:158). Marriages were ordained and legalised by both the Church and the State (Stuart 1854:213). Marriage was observed in the

Biblical way; it was holy, ordained by God and above all, unbreakable by man (Keyter 1940:80).

‘Characteristic of the Boer family was its size. Girls married young and a family of ten or twelve was nothing exceptional. Widows and widowers rarely remained single, and multiple families were in consequence fairly common’ (Patterson 1957:244). Built firmly on the family tradition of living faith to the letter of the Biblical laws, this resulted in unique households: The father and his married children stayed together on gigantic farms, each with his own house and garden and cattle. ‘I never saw so much unity, childlike obedience and respect woven together’ (Stuart 1854:208 – my translation).

It can be stated that the character of the Transvaal Boer was built on the Old Testament examples. The patriarch was respected both inside and outside the family. ‘That the Boer was and is a good husband and father has been always admitted by his bitterest enemies’ (Jeppe 1906:79).

He was peace loving but ‘...the African Boer, devoid as he is of all passion for conflict, regarding it as part of the stern and unavoidable evil of life, to be quietly faced, but never sought, will, if his people, his land, or his freedom are attacked, go forth to meet war with the same grim unbending resolution with which his forefathers went out...’ (Schreiner 1923:256). ‘The old-fashioned Boer never speaks of war without becoming solemn and reverential, and, metaphorically speaking, taking off his hat’ (Schreiner 1923:255).

The women, on the other hand, were 'spirited and strong-willed' creatures (Patterson 1957:240). Many people were astonished by the power and influence of the women in the family: 'There alone you will find obedience to parents as strict as among the ancient Sabines, the *severa mater*, whose sons fetch and carry at her bidding' (Froude 1886:37). The following serve as proof of the influence, both in politics and religion, women had:

It was she who in those days, when conflicts with savage men and wild beasts were a part of daily life, faced death side by side with the man, who stood always shoulder to shoulder with him; and it is she who still to-day – and rightly, considering her past and present – has a determining influence in peace or war.

The Transvaal War of 1881 was largely a woman's war: it was from the armchair beside the coffee-table that the voice went out for conflict and no surrender (Schreiner 1923:201).

I have the greatest respect for the men living in Transvaal, but for the Transvaal women, I feel admiration of the highest level. They are serious in praying, wise, brave when fighting, and have an absolute ennobling effect on the men and youngsters. They are the reason that this nation, despite isolation, did not degenerate, but stayed true to the old traditions of virtue, high morals and political freedom...Even to the babies, the virtues are taught. This brought a generation, a nation to be the heroes of Bronkhorstspuit, Laingsnek, Schuinshoogte, Spitskop and Krugersdorp, and gain the respect and admiration of the world (Rovers 1896:16,17 – my translation).

Children were Biblically obedient to their parents and other adults. When talking to adults, they would use the third person singular to address them (Patterson 1957:239). Children were educated within the social unit of the family. 'The origins of Christian National Education are traced to the informal religious instruction which the Boer child received at his mother's knee. It did not, however, emerge as a movement until the end of the nineteenth century' (Patterson 1957:220).

The Afrikaner child is the product of his home background and natural environment, quite as much as of his formal education. Indeed, the ideal Boer education was based mainly on home and informal instruction....The ideal Boer upbringing, whether in the frontier districts or in the Republics, conformed more or less to the classic Persian ideal. The young Persian nobles were taught to ride, to shoot with a bow and speak the truth. The Boer who set forth into the wilderness with his Bible and his gun needed, and got, little more instruction. The Boer child of old got his training for life within the family circle (Patterson 1957:216).

Family was very important to the small nation. The family Bible contained the names and dates of every marriage, birth and death in the family (cf Pretorius 1992:63). Babies were named after grandfathers and grandmothers (Cronje 1945:334), and strangers were always asked about their families over the very first cup of coffee (cf Cronje 1945:334).

5.6 Pastoral living

In his heart, the Afrikaner was a farmer, loving nature and animals. By 1851 only 2 000 families were living north of the 26 degree of latitude, stretching over an area of about '71 600 square miles' (Cronje, Venter 1958:15). The most important reasons for this were the farming methods (only natural pastures were used) and the low rainfall of the country (Cronje, Venter 1958:15).

By 1870, about 80% of all Afrikaners were living on farms or rural areas, close to nature (Booyens 1970:33). Although this changed in the 20th century, I believe that in their hearts, most Afrikaners still saw themselves as *Boere* (Farmers). This word is often used as synonym to Afrikaner and only in the last part of the 20th century did it get a negative meaning in a political sense.

The shift from a mainly pastoral country to a mining and industrial country put enormous pressure upon the pastoral Afrikaner nation (Erlank 1952:25). If the foundations of religion and faith were not strong, this revolution could have meant the downfall of the nation, but although there were wobbling steps, the Afrikaners did not lose their balance (Erlank 1952:25).

Closely linked to the pastoral living of the Afrikaners, was their so-called *Wanderlust*.

5.7 Wanderlust

Hendrina Joubert says that they (the Voortrekkers) always had to move in order to get away either from the British or the Native tribes (Rompel-Koopman 1916:12). Van Jaarsveld notes that some historians like Hall, Wilmot and Chase say that the Afrikaners were lawless revolutionaries who fled from civilisation (Van Jaarsveld 1958:11). It does seem to be a characteristic of the Afrikaners to become restless whenever they are agitated by living conditions or the government. Blok notes that this habit of the Afrikaner must not be judged as entirely negative (Blok 1927:7). Rose comments on the Afrikaners' love of independence:

No less intense than their religious faith is their love of independence. Their history is one long record of trekking away from the domination of Great Britain in accordance with their national and ineradicable craving for complete freedom from control. This is really more than a mere sentiment with them; it amounts to a veritable passion, the strength and intensity of which is simply not understandable by those who have not come into actual contact with these people (Rose 1902:11).

The search for independence led Afrikaners to spread though Africa. Leaders of the Thirstland Trek could not explain the yearning in their hearts to pack their wagons and move further north into Africa (Jooste 1974:17,18). Du Plessis says: 'He must trek, nothing in the world can stop him' (Du Plessis 1900:258 – my translation).

This *wanderlust* is one of the lasting characteristics of the Afrikaner nation, always lurking, and seen as recently as the 1990's, when again Afrikaners left South Africa in great numbers when the government and living conditions changed drastically (cf Van Rooyen 2000).

5.8 Sense of humour

The Afrikaners developed, during their times of trouble and strife, a very fine sense of humour (Rompel-Koopman 1916:85). Bosman says that the Afrikaners inherited their dry sense of humour from their Dutch ancestors and their way with words from their French ancestors (Bosman 1945:198).

Every nation has its own perception of humour. The Afrikaners' sense of humour is a constant presence in all situations. The Afrikaners love to tease and mock, and their ability to see something funny in even the worst situations is often seen by others as *hempen* humour. Maybe this kind of South African humour was introduced during the sad and difficult times to act as instrument of debriefing and to cheer people up; to make them see the silver lining on the darkest clouds, a surviving skill. A great advantage, and one of the most positive characteristics of

the Afrikaner nation, was and still is their ability to laugh at themselves (cf Wessels 1999).

5.9 Afrikaans

Afrikaans – the unique language of a unique nation, speaks the soul and mind of the people. It reveals their religion, their worldview and their passions (Meyer 1940:29). The spear point of the building of the Afrikaner nation was the Afrikaans language (Booyens 1970:34). This was the means used by parents to educate their children in a unique way. Leaders used it to shape the people who looked up to them for guidance, be it on the battlefield, the *Volksraad* or in the kitchen of the farmhouse.

The conservative, religious nature of the Afrikaner expressed itself in the language used in day-to-day life. Many a traveller remarked on the fact that there was seldom if ever swear words or curses heard from Afrikaners. Instead, their language is coloured by expressions and quotations from and references to the Bible. Even idioms and proverbs, used very frequently, were taken from the Bible: *Die arbeider is sy loon waardig* (the labourer is worthy of his hire), *Uit Noag se ark* (very old), *Babelse verwarring* (a confused mass) (De Villiers, Gouws 1996:5,6 – see also Appendix 6). When referring to the Bible, they simply talked about ‘The Book’ and family worship was called *Boekevat*.

Scripture reading and prayers were also done in public, outside the Church. Public gatherings, be it a political gathering (like the *Volksraad* meetings – Coetzee

1945:369) or a local school meeting or even a cattle auction, all were opened and closed with Scripture reading and prayers in the Name of the Lord (De Vaal 1939:27). This custom prevailed into the 21st century.

The Name of the Lord was never used during conversations, because the Ten Commandments were kept strictly and this was seen as blasphemy. The acceptance that God Almighty is in charge of the whole universe, resulted in a saying, quite foreign to the ears of outsiders, but even today heard from the older people, ending every sentence referring to the future with the words *as die Here wil* – the Afrikaans translation for *Deo Volente*.

Not only the spoken word, but also the written Word of God, was part of the lives of the Afrikaners. Vast numbers of *muurtekste* (decorated verses) can still be seen in museums (Pretorius 1992:88). The *muurtekste* were well-known Bible verses that decorated the walls of the houses (Pretorius 1992:88) and constantly reminded the people of the presence of the Lord – *De oogen des Heeren zijn in alle plaatsen* (The eyes of the Lord are on all places). The *muurteks* shown in Appendix 7 is richly decorated in typical Victorian style with flowers and angels.

Related to the *muurtekste*, and very popular, was the 19th century colour lithograph of the *De Brede en de Enge weg* (the broad road and the narrow road – see Appendix 8) that refers to Matthews 7:13,14 (Pretorius 1992:89). This picture, dating back many centuries, has a didactical, moralising and religious content (Pretorius 1992:88). The broad road contains signs with words like dance hall,

theatre and lottery. The end of the broad road is the hell. The steep narrow road leads to heaven. All of the signs and pictures are accompanied by appropriate pieces of Scripture (Pretorius 1992:88).

Volksprente (pictures or words that spelled out the love for the country) were also popular and the religious impact is seen in all of these. *Voor God en ons land* (for God and our country – see Appendix 9) - is decorated with an angel and leaves (Pretorius 1992:89). A *volksprent* showing the faces of MW Pretorius, SJP Kruger and PJ Joubert, the three political leaders during 1880-1881, is decorated with the words: *Met God voor Vryheid, Regt en Vaderland* (With God for liberty, righteousness and home country) (Pont, Botha, Storm, Herbst 1986:35).

5.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, the words of Garrett-Fisher give a summery of the character of the Afrikaner living in the ZAR:

It is not very easy, indeed, to ascertain the exact truth about the nature and habits of the Boers in the midst of the contradictory reports that one finds in the works of various travellers. Recent writers have shown regrettable but natural tendencies to lose sight of the undoubted good qualities of the typical Boer on the one hand, or minimize his numerous faults and anfractuositities in the other according as their political prepossessions ranged them on his side or on that of the Outlanders (Garret-Fisher 1900:36).

The truth seems to be that the average Boer, like most human beings, is compact of good and evil. His best qualities are his stubborn perseverance in the face of difficulty and danger, his genuine family affection, his equally genuine though narrow and antiquated religious spirit, his determination never to endure injustice, his hospitality to guests of whom he approves. His worst faults are his brutal treatment of the natives, his defect in political honesty, and his curious lack of the Dutch

passion for cleanliness and industry. It is a further fact that he is usually opposed to what we call 'progress' and looks with strong dislike, carried to the extremist length in practice, upon the incursion of gold-miners and others who desire to 'open up' his country. But whether this is to be accounted as a defect, a good quality, or simply a natural outcome of the Boer's history, in which he has so often seen himself dispossessed of a peaceful life, depends greatly upon the point of view (Garret-Fisher 1900:37).

The characteristics of the Afrikaner nation can also be distinguished in the lives and work of individual Afrikaners. In the next chapter reference is made to a few prominent Afrikaners as well as the impact that their Christian based education had on the ZAR and the people living in it.