

POWER AND EMPOWERMENT IN THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF SOME AFRIKAANS-SPEAKING PENTECOSTALS IN SOUTH AFRICA¹

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Abstract

The white Pentecostal movement in South Africa made several drastic political turnabouts, from pacifism to supporting the total onslaught, from being a multi-cultural church to being a supporter of apartheid and eventually a unified church after democratisation in South Africa. The Pentecostal struggle for recognition is a key to understanding white Pentecostal attitudes to political and economic power. The decades from the fifties to the eighties were marked by the implementation of apartheid. At the same time the white Pentecostal movement began an endeavour to become acceptable. Once the AFM had aligned itself with the National Party's fight against "communism" it was impossible to remain pacifist. In the succeeding years the reform agenda of the AFM always closely followed the reform patterns of the government. After 1994, the white AFM moved dramatically fast towards unification with the black churches. Determination to maintain their newfound status in society played a role in this dramatic return to non-racialism.

1 INTRODUCTION

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The white Pentecostal movement in South Africa moved rapidly from an extremely racist movement before 1990, to a multi-cultural church in 1996. Very little has been said or written about the dynamics behind this sudden change. One would have hoped that the Church's submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission would have helped to give us a better understanding of the process.

However, the submission is vague and clearly does not represent the black voices in the new non-racial church. Other significant public statements of the church, made by its charismatic president, Dr Isak Burger, do not give the reader much insight into the intercultural dynamics in a broad based community consisting of local congregations representing all the colours of the rainbow nation. On the contrary, it could have come from any church representing a conservative Afrikaner community.

However, this was not the first radical turnabout of the white South African Pentecostals. The Movement started as a non-racial gathering, and then spread with the speed of light through ethnic-based liberal English-speaking congregations and leadership, to an Afrikaner-dominated a-political church, and finally to a reactionary white section in support of apartheid and state security. In the space of one generation it totally abandoned a long peace tradition and finally supported the South African bush war with enthusiasm.

This article looks at the dynamics behind the chameleon-like attitude of white South African Pentecostals, particularly the Apostolic Faith Mission. It will look at the Pentecostal struggle for recognition as a key to understanding white Pentecostal attitudes to political and economic power.

Pentecostals use the terms "power" and "empowerment" in a spiritual sense. "The power of the Lord was present", "He fell under the power of the Spirit", "The Spirit empowered them for service on the mission field", etcetera. Power and empowerment have to do with the power of the Spirit in the believer.

This power and empowerment of the Spirit are the diametric opposite of the power and power structures of the world. However, as the

Pentecostals climbed the social ladder, “the power of the world”, that is social status, recognition and political influence, became increasingly important.

2 POLITICS AND EMPOWERMENT: THE EARLY YEARS

The Pentecostal movement in South Africa started out in the first decade of the 20th century as an extremely exclusivist one. There was a clear distinction between the church and the *world*. Someone who backslid became *worldly*, as did a church member who wore make-up, curled her hair or played hockey. Watching football or rugby or going to the movies were all *worldly acts*,² not to mention drinking a beer or a glass of wine, or smoking a cigarette.³

Politics was initially part of the taboo. Light and darkness had nothing in common. Empowerment of the Holy Spirit had nothing to do with society. This world was under God’s wrath anyway and destined for destruction, together with all other evil. So, why try to reform or transform it?

Pentecostals saw political change as irrelevant at best or even contrary to God’s plans and thus counter-productive. The eschatological Darbyist expectation of an imminent rapture posited that chaos and evil would take over before Christ’s return.

Consequently the power of the Holy Spirit and the empowerment of the believer operated in a restrictive personal domain of gifts, holiness and witnessing to the *world*.

Mervin van der Spuy is of the opinion that these taboos had, among other things, a specific social purpose. Since the early Pentecostals were poor and lived on the fringes of society, they could not afford the worldly pleasures anyway and, like most destitute people, they had no faith in the sociopolitical structures of society. By placing these structures and activities in the devil’s domain, Pentecostals felt superior rather than deprived for not being part of them.

The Pentecostal lifestyle soon brought unexpected results. Their work ethic, sober habits and determination to prove themselves,

resulted in second and third generation Pentecostals going to university,⁴ getting involved and excelling in *worldly* activities such as organised sport,⁵ drama and debating societies and even the entertainment industry.⁶

3 THE UNWRITTEN AGENDA: EARLY PENTECOSTALS AND HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

The *come out amongst them* theology was nevertheless totally different from that of the conservative middle class bourgeois mainline churches of its time.

The early Pentecostal movement was a people's movement. It cared for the poor, it denied the extreme claims nationalism laid on citizens – especially the right of the State to engage Christians in war – and it knew no racial barriers.

The Pentecostal Movement took root in South Africa in a black church in Doornfontein, Johannesburg.⁷ There, despite British colonial and Boer segregation practices, white and black worshipped together.

A similar pattern was encountered in Los Angeles two years earlier. One of the early eyewitnesses of the movement commented that *the color line was washed away in the blood*.⁸

What was even more miraculous, the whites came to be prayed for by Seymour and his black co-workers. No wonder Walter Hollenweger, the retired missiologist and lifelong researcher of Pentecostal history and practice, calls the non-racialism of the initial period the real miracle and the most significant development in spirituality rather than the phenomenon of speaking in tongues.⁹

In the same radical way, the early white South African Pentecostals were pacifists. And their pacifism was not of the other worldly, highly spiritual type. It was deeply grounded in their understanding of the gospel.¹⁰

This radical pacifism, founded on the rights of ordinary people, was the most prominent theological position on war until the end of World War II. For the first forty years the leaders and church government constantly objected to the injustices of war, the abuse of the little people and the senselessness of violence and wars as a means of settling disputes.¹¹

The vision and radical stance of the young movement is even more impressive if one bears in mind that it predated the human rights movement by almost fifty years. They recognised the ugly face of war and racism long before the devastating effects of Hitler's Third Reich struck the international community with the horrors of the holocaust and World War II.

While the early Pentecostals in South Africa did not think of the empowerment of the Spirit in terms of social action, their spontaneous crossing of racial borders convinced missiologist Christo de Wet that it was an intervention of the Holy Spirit.¹² The same can be said of their strong stance against war.

4 POWER TO CHANGE SOCIETY

After World War II white Pentecostals in South Africa were no longer people living on the fringes of society. They had the numbers and the influential members to make a difference, provided they were allowed to do so.

In white South Africa the Dutch Reformed Church did not only dictate political development by persuading the government to implement the apartheid policies, it also guarded the Calvinist foundations of society by vigorously opposing pornography, Sunday sport and commercial activities on Sundays, and heretical religious movements like the *Roomse gevaar* (Roman Catholic Church) and the Pentecostal movement.

The decades from the fifties to the eighties were marked by the implementation of apartheid policies by the South African Nationalist government. At the same time the white Pentecostal movement started endeavouring to become an acceptable, respected church in

the Afrikaner community and society at large. The faster the members climbed the social ladder, the more dramatic the changes that started taking place in the movement.

In the period immediately after the war the AFM underwent several drastic changes, its attitude towards war and politics being two of the most important. The changes were spearheaded by an unofficial group of young pastors, commonly called the New Order,¹³ who wanted to improve the image of the AFM in society. The New Order was personified by two prominent pastors, G R Wessels, who became vice-president of the AFM in 1943 at the early age of thirty, and J T du Plessis, who became pastor of Krugersdorp in 1946 and member of the Executive in 1949.

An important breakthrough came for the New Order when the workers council of 1947 accepted a motion that Dingaan's Day (the Day of the Covenant) would in future be celebrated as a day of thanksgiving and a Sabbath, along with Christmas and Good Friday.¹⁴ The Day of the Covenant commemorates the victory of the Voortrekkers, against the Zulu nation in 1838. The Voortrekkers were Boer rebels who opened up the northern and eastern parts of southern Africa to escape British rule in the Cape colony.

The New Order quickly gained momentum under the leadership of vice-president G R Wessels, general secretary A J Schoeman and J T du Plessis. In a letter to Prime Minister J G Strydom in 1956, asking him to appoint G R Wessels as a senator, Pastor Du Plessis stated that the AFM had not been the bearer of Afrikaner culture. He added that G R Wessels, his brother David du Plessis¹⁵ and others had done important work to incorporate the AFM into the national life of the Afrikaner and concluded: "Today, thank God, the AFM is a pure Afrikaner church."¹⁶

In a personal letter to a reformed theological student in 1951 J T du Plessis raised these issues again. He condemned the earlier apolitical stance of the AFM, the general lack of an attachment to the *volk* (nation) and the ideal of *liberal bilingualism*.¹⁷

The influence of the New Order can be seen very clearly in the drastic changes that took place in both the attitudes and the practices of the church after 1946. Burger, president of the AFM, does not subscribe the changes to the influence of the New Order. He nevertheless calls it times “of many changes”.¹⁸

The old sect image of the AFM was a great embarrassment to the New Order. They worked hard to gain the right for the pastors of the church to preach on the Afrikaans language station of the state-controlled radio, a privilege reserved for the three reformed churches, the so-called sister churches. To attain this goal, it was important for the church to rid itself of the anti-church attitudes of the Pentecostal movement.¹⁹

For the South African Pentecostals of the 1950’s “empowerment” meant state recognition, the right of pastors to broadcast church services and devotions on national radio and the right to have full time pastors appointed as chaplains in the South African Defence Force to serve the spiritual needs of the Pentecostal permanent force and national servicemen. By then there were no conscientious objectors left in the South African Pentecostal movement.

The traditional Pentecostal liturgy, with its informality, loud clapping and even dancing, was another source of embarrassment to the New Order and their followers in the AFM. The New Order wanted to retain the charismatic gifts like healing, prophecy and even speaking in tongues, but they wanted to conduct their religious services in “an orderly fashion”.²⁰ In practice this meant that the assemblies pastored by the New Order had moved close to the liturgy of the reformed churches. In a personal letter to one Abeline Schoeman, a young Pentecostal lady studying at an Afrikaans university, Justus du Plessis compared the liturgy and theology of the older Pentecostals to good medicine packaged in a container used for poison. In other words, the message is good, but the presentation needs to change.²¹

It was, however, in the attitude of the church towards the government that the biggest changes took place. While the AFM was a reactionary church, unlike the other Afrikaans-speaking churches, it

overwhelmingly supported the old liberal, multi-cultural United Party and not the reactionary National Party of the Afrikaners.

According to G R Wessels, who was later to become vice-president of the AFM and a National Party senator, he was the only supporter of the National Party on the Executive in 1937.²² Support was nevertheless limited to voting and moral support. Pentecostals of that era did not believe in active political participation.

Consequently, the pre-World War II church was able to keep a critical distance. It had its own opinion on important matters like military service and in-semination.²³ Burger correctly links the acceptance of combatant service with this new attitude towards government.²⁴

The New Order did not steer clear of party politics. They had a definite political agenda. They soon involved the church in the political ideology of the National Party. As early as 1952 Pastor G R Wessels joined forces with the government in their widely supported campaign against communism. He preached advertised sermons against communism in halls all over the country. These meetings drew large crowds and Wessels became a well-known figure.²⁵

The new image of the New Order did not go unchallenged. In July 1953 (the first time that the National Party had fought an election since it came to power in 1948 by promising the white electorate that it would implement *apartheid*) a member complained in the Trooster (Comforter) that Pastor Wessels was using the communist threat to make propaganda for the National Party from the pulpit.²⁶

Although Wessels rejected the allegations that he had political motives, he remained a controversial figure. In 1955 Prime Minister J G Strydom appointed him senator in the extended senate.²⁷ The politics of Wessels and the New Order, together with their liturgical reforms and their attitudes towards the mainline churches and the government, eventually resulted in the breakaway of a section of the church to found the Pentecostal Protestant Church in 1958.

The new relationship between the AFM and the government spelled in the end of the official pacifist position of the AFM. However, it is just fair to point out that the question of combatant service was never an issue between the Old and New Orders. At least one of the prominent pastors of the Pentecostal Protestant Church, Pieter Snyman, was a veteran of World War II. Like the AFM, the new Pentecostal movement from the outset allowed its members to participate in combatant military service.

But the fact that the AFM aligned itself especially with the National Party's fight against "communism" – which in the 1950s meant almost any anti-apartheid stand – made it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to remain pacifist. A church that sees communism as a major threat to its future existence, would find it very difficult not to be willing to defend the future of the church with the sword.

5 THE PENTECOSTALS AND REFORM

It is generally accepted that the Afrikaans-speaking churches in South Africa only changed their racial attitudes after the National Party had decided to follow the path of reform. Reform in the AFM began in 1974 when the AFM office bearers met the executive council of the so-called coloured church in Bloemfontein. At that historic meeting both parties decided that a united church was the only option for the future.²⁸ The Erica Theron Commission, which was appointed by the government to investigate the social and political future of the so-called coloured people, began its work at more or less the same time. The commission brought out its report in the second half of 1976, while the white workers council of the AFM decided in March 1976 in principle to become one with the so-called coloured church.²⁹

In the years that followed the reform agenda of the AFM always closely followed the reform patterns of the government. When Prime Minister Vorster decided to include the Indians in his reform programme, the AFM did not hesitate to follow suit. Between 1977 and 1985 the white section and several joint commissions made unity proposals based on the trilateral ideas of government.³⁰ The so-

called coloured workers council never hesitated to reject the proposals.³¹

One of the positive aspects of the years of reform was that the white section of the AFM officially recognised blacks, coloureds and Indians as members of the church.³² The full implications of this decision were never tested, but it could mean that all the sections should have an equal share in the legal personality, which was administered by the white section until the implementation of the new constitution of 1991.³³ In 1983 the white section also decided to open its membership to all races.³⁴

The first meaningful movement towards structural unity took place in 1986 when all the sections of the AFM accepted the following Declaration of Intent in which the church clearly rejected apartheid:

- The AFM of SA affirms its acceptance of the Biblical principles of unity.
- The AFM of SA rejects a system of apartheid based on racial discrimination as a principle in the Kingdom of God and the structures of the church.
- The AFM of SA accepts the principle that the church should function as a single structure, based on the mentioned principles.
- The AFM of SA agrees that worship and membership of the church should be based on spontaneous grouping of believers.³⁵

In September 1990 the three black sections (coloured, black and Indian) gave expression to the declaration by merging. The unity was very artificial, since all the former sections of the composite section functioned autonomously, although with limited powers, while a Presbytery consisting of the office bearers of each church was responsible for the joint administration of the composite section. In April 1991 the workers council of the white or single section accepted a new constitution, allowing corporate administration of the legal

personality by the single and composite sections. It also reaffirmed its intention to create a single structure for the whole church.

6 THE AFM AND APARTHEID

Throughout the years of reform, the white AFM supported the idea that God must first change the hearts of people before political structures can be changed. The president of the church also made it clear that the church had no problem living out its mission under a National Party government, or even a Conservative Party government, should the extreme right wing party win a future election.³⁶ Cabinet ministers and even President PW Botha were frequent visitors to the AFM conferences between the 1970s and 1990s.

G R Wessels helped the AFM to gain access to radio and television and to register as a church rather than a company. He resigned as a pastor in 1969. Thereafter the white church went back to the old position that pastors were not allowed to actively participate in politics. Frank Chikane, the anti-apartheid activist, was suspended as pastor by the black church (co-led by white missionaries) for participating in so-called political activities.³⁷

The white AFM never criticised the policy of apartheid. The church was indeed empowered. It was allowed to broadcast services over national radio and subsequently on television, its pastors served as chaplains in the police, army and prisons and AFM members were not discriminated against in the education system.

F P Möller, president of the AFM at the time, was known for his support of the basic principles of apartheid.³⁸ Even his more moderate successor and historian of the AFM, Isak Burger, made no attempt to address the injustices of apartheid in the history of the AFM. He either ignored the issue or gave some justification for it.³⁹ He explains the introduction of separate baptismal services for blacks and whites from a social perspective:

... During the first few months White and non-White (sic) were even baptised together. At the end of 1908 some

Afrikaans speaking brothers came on the executive council. The fact that they understood the history and the nature of the racial feelings in South Africa better, possibly contributed to the gradual separation of the races⁴⁰ (Translation JNH).

Burger quoted a crude racist decision by the AFM in 1944, “The Mission stands for segregation. The fact that an Indian, native of coloured is saved does not render him European” and then stated that there were nevertheless good relationships between the different racial groups!⁴¹

The black, Indian and especially coloured sections of the AFM were something of a mixed bag. The missionaries still played a prominent role in the decision-making of the church and the older black leaders opposed the political involvement of pastors or even church members.⁴² But the up and coming young Pentecostal leaders, under the influence of mainline church leaders like Bishop Desmond Tutu of the Anglican Church and the Reformed theologian and church leader, Allan Boesak, realised that there was a direct link between apartheid and the misery of their people. Consequently, many followed the example of Frank Chikane in opposing apartheid.

Two documents, written in language reminiscent of the confessions of the Confessing Church during the Nazi era, The Evangelical Witness in South Africa, and the Relevant Pentecostal Witness, played an important role in empowering black Pentecostals. In a sense the black Pentecostals, like the whites in the 1940s, realised that political and economic power was necessary to save them from their misery.

7 AFTER APARTHEID – THE CHANGE OF THE PENTECOSTAL MIND

After 1994, the white AFM moved dramatically fast towards unification with the black churches, but not before they had devolved power to the local churches to control church property. The church realised that apartheid was indeed a sin and Isak Burger confessed to it on several occasions. Within two years all the AFM churches were united in a single non-racial unity church.

The unification of the AFM came as a surprise after the years of Pentecostal support for apartheid. The Dutch Reformed Church is still far from unification with the Unifying Reformed Church, the unified black and coloured sister churches of the DRC.⁴³ The dramatic unification service in which Isak Burger embraced Frank Chikane gained the AFM the respect of both political and religious leaders in South Africa. Since 1996, the AFM has moved on to become a respected church and member of the South African Council of Churches. Frank Chikane, now a high profile member of the staff of President Thabo Mbeki, was even vice-president of the church for one term.

However, some questions remain unanswered: How was it possible for a Pentecostal church to be part of a system that human rights activists described as a crime against humanity? And why did the church become aware of the pains of apartheid and the sinful nature of the system only when a new non-racial government came to power? And why were the Pentecostals unable to break the power of racism despite changing the hearts of thousands of people, while the so-called Mandela magic changed the soul of the Afrikaners, including Pentecostals, without the power of the Spirit?

The easy answer would be to revert to a theology where the Spirit has nothing to say about the present world. The Holy Spirit works only in the realm of personal holiness and not in the social or political domain. However, this does not explain why the Spirit did not convict people of sinning against others while apartheid was the official policy of the country.

Or one could try to explain the inability of the white South African Pentecostals to see the wrongs of apartheid from a national sociological perspective. In other words, one should look at the

Afrikaners as a nation deceived by something like mass hysteria, which hypnotised the nation for more than forty years, almost like Nazism in Germany during the 1930s and 1940s. But that does not explain the support the white Pentecostal movement received from the international Pentecostal movement.

The role of American Pentecostals and charismatics like Jimmy Swaggart, Pat Robertson and Kenneth Copeland in supporting apartheid and the white Pentecostals is well documented.⁴⁴ The international Pentecostal movement either supported the white South African movement or kept quiet.⁴⁵ It is noteworthy that unlike the Reformed churches, who were disciplined by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches for their support of apartheid, the South African Pentecostal movement remained a member of the World Pentecostal Conference.

The AFM explained the inexplicable in its representation before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The church acknowledges that “winds of ideological issues led to the sorry state of the church performance, splitting up, into Coloured, Black, White and Indian factions”.⁴⁶

The representation then went on to blame the Afrikaner culture from the 1960s onwards that taught children not to question authority and the role of the radio and the press, which made it almost impossible not to believe the ideology of the day. The analysis is an oversimplification of the apartheid era, almost as if the so-called Boetman generation⁴⁷ was forced into accepting apartheid.

8 THE BOETMAN DEBATE

Chris Louw, a political activist in the apartheid era, found himself at odds with the black bureaucracy at the national broadcaster where he worked. At the same time the old National Party ministers and ideologues of apartheid (“the uncles” as Louw called them), were taking up important positions in the New South Africa. Leon Wessels, former minister of police, became a human rights commissioner, Pik Botha, minister of foreign affairs in the old dispensation and Piet Koornhoff, at one stage an acting president, joined the ANC and

Hernus Kriel became premier of the Western Cape. The other former ministers retired with huge pensions.

Louw's reaction was an open letter to Willem de Klerk, one of the big ideologues of apartheid in the sixties and seventies and later a protagonist of change. The "uncles", Louw asserted, found it easy to change their loyalties after the ANC had totally overpowered them at the negotiations in Kempton Park.

They were the only Afrikaners who never fought a war, too young for World War I, too pro-Nazi for World War II and when the bush war in the defence of apartheid started, they sent their sons. And that was Louw's main thesis. The young generation of the sixties, seventies and eighties did the dirty work of the old Calvinist patriarchs (Louw's father was also a Reformed pastor). They were brought up to be submissive, they had to do the Afrikaner thing, be tough, play rugby and be racist. When the National Party surrendered power, the neo-liberals or *verligtes*, only cared about their pensions. The foot soldiers of apartheid, the Boetmans, were readily sacrificed.

The uncles denied knowledge of the atrocities perpetrated by the police and the military. The Boetmans were the culprits. They had abused their power. Throughout the eighties and the nineties the cabinet and the State Security Council never knew about the killing squads, the covert actions and destabilisation of neighbouring countries, and the brutal killings in the north of South West Africa. So, the Afrikaner men in their forties and fifties were made to carry the weight of a system that they did not develop, but were forced by their fathers to defend with their blood. And when apartheid was over, the uncles were living in prosperous retirement while the Boetmans were losing their jobs through the implementation of transformation and affirmative action.

The open letter "Boetman is die bliksem in" caused a huge stir in the Afrikaner community. The Afrikaans newspapers were flooded by letters, almost all affirming Louw's anger and resentment of the older generation. Louw became the ear for the men who hated him and called him a communist in the apartheid era – the policemen and trained assassins.

Gone was the arrogance of the apartheid era. Louw met pathetic, suicidal alcoholics who could no longer function in society, men who had believed they were killing for God and freedom. And at the negotiations at Kempton Park and thereafter the politicians and generals who gave the instructions deserted them.

The stories of these men are gruesome. One of Louw's confessors, ex-security police officer Eugene Fourie, told Louw the story of a soldier who amputated the leg and head of a guerrilla fighter who had been killed in Namibia. He wanted to cut the skull in half and mount it on the knee as an ashtray.

When one of the suspects did not want to confess (because he did not know anything), Willie Nortje knocked him unconscious with an Uzzi submachine gun, before Eugene de Kock killed him with a shovel. To make sure that he was dead, Nortje pushed his hand into the crack in his head and pulled his brains out. Eugene de Kock is the only policeman who is presently in prison for covert actions, serving a 200 year sentence. One of the newspapers called him Prime Evil.

But, as De Kock pointed out to Louw, there were only 3 000 security police officers. How could the leaders say they did not know of the killings and the violence and human rights abuses? It was totally impossible for 3 000 men to keep forty million people without political power in a state of submission by using normal means.

De Kock's assertion affects every white South African. Can we really say like the Germans "We did not know"? How is it possible not to have known? Apart from the rumours, the mere numbers issue makes the claim somewhat ridiculous.

9 THE SUBMISSION OF THE AFM TO THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

In a subtle way the AFM in its submission placed its pastors and members on the side of Boetman.

Many of us had sought answers during those dark days. But bear in mind that many a time we asked for an explanation, that explanation was given to us by fellow Christians, even members of the AFM. And, accepted those answers (sic).

A plethora of laws made it impossible for the ordinary man to delve any deeper. We are today deeply hurt as we become aware of the injustices of the past as they are being brought to light by your own Commission, by our courts and the media.⁴⁸

Thus the representation blamed people like Möller and Justus du Plessis, people like the “uncles” in Louw’s article. They misled a generation of pastors and church members. And only now do they really know what happened.

Isak Burger, the current president of the AFM, became president in 1985 when FP Möller retired. By then Justus du Plessis had already been retired for several years, the then principal of the theological college had lost his position as vice-president to a junior colleague and several executive council posts were occupied by a new generation in their thirties and forties. One can speak of a take-over by the Boetman-generation in 1985. At least for the years between 1985 and 2004 the younger generation cannot hide behind the excuse of intimidation by the uncles. Also, in the 1980s vocal young black leaders such as the present vice-president Japie Lappoorta and the former vice-president Frank Chikane appeared on the scene and made their theological reasons for rejecting apartheid very clear, both inside and outside the church. The 1980s were the decade of resistance in South Africa. For those who wanted to know what apartheid was all about, there was ample opportunity to find out.

While there is an element of truth in the AFM’s defence of the Boetman-generation, it is also true that there were dissenting voices in the Pentecostal churches, the Evangelical Witness and the Relevant Pentecostal Witness being two very accessible confessions

of the real state of the South African situation and its applicability to Pentecostals.⁴⁹

The United Democratic Front, a front organisation for the banned African National Congress, became organised and made the aspirations of the black people known. Church leaders like Bishop Tutu, Dr Alan Boesak, the then President of the Reformed World Alliance of Churches, and the disciplined AFM pastor Frank Chikane, made it clear that black Christians were no longer willing to accept apartheid in the church or society.

This decade also saw the rise of the independents in white politics. Under the leadership of former National Party *verligte*⁵⁰ politicians Wynand Malan and Dennis Worrall and Stellenbosch businesswoman Esther Lategan, they challenged the National Party in the 1984 elections. The End Conscription Campaign was led by young Afrikaners like Andre de Villiers. In 1987 the first group of Afrikaners went to Dakar to meet the ANC. The group included several pastors and academics who held information meetings all over South Africa when they returned.

Even the young artists began shaking off the apartheid fetters in 1989 with the so-called *Voëlvry*⁶¹ concerts. While these artists were not big political philosophers, and were even somewhat conservative, they made it clear that they no longer accepted the apartheid structures and ideology.

In short: Is it really fair to blame only the older generation? Certainly, history will see Wessels, Möller, Justus du Plessis and others of their generation as the people who implemented apartheid in the Pentecostal church. But do the present leadership of the AFM look like people who are unable to confront those in power when they feel compelled to do so?

After 1994 the AFM leaders were never afraid to challenge the new black government whenever they felt the government was not respecting the rights of Christians or even those of the white minority. AFM President Isak Burger challenged education minister Kader Asmal for removing religious education from the school syllabus⁵²

and even Nelson Mandela for what he called one-sided criticism of white farmers.⁵³ He also criticised the new dispensation for practising reverse racism.⁵⁴

When so many people came to the realisation that apartheid was wrong in the 1980s, why did it take a Pentecostal church until 1996 to come to the same conclusion? And why did the same leaders who had been taught not to question authority suddenly become bold and fearless after 1994?

There are also other disturbing factors in the AFM declaration. It is no *Mea maxima culpa* declaration, but rather an exculpatory statement by the white section. Not only the whites but also “Indian, coloureds and blacks committed excesses”.⁵⁵ While this is true, the violence of the blacks cannot be placed on the same level as that of the perpetrators of apartheid. To do that is to ignore the fact that the National Party introduced the system, and maintained it with the support of the vast majority of its white followers.

The final unequivocal statement of the AFM is not that it helped to build and maintain the system, even making its vice-president available to become a senator and help remove coloureds from the voters’ roll. Or that the New Order took the church right into the heart of the system, or that its pastors even spied against activist leaders like Frank Chikane. No, they opted for the neutral statement “... that the AFM failed in its duty to question the system more ...”⁵⁶

Just imagine for one moment the dilemma of Eugene Fourie, the security officer who testified against his commander Eugene de Kock, who is now serving a 200 year sentence. People like Fourie were admired in the white community. Their pictures were placed in the entrance hall of Pentecostal churches under the banner *Pray for our boys on the border*. When they returned from Oshakati with blood on their hands, the church assured them they were doing it for democracy and even the survival of the church and the gospel. That same churches now confess that they should have questioned the system more.

The blame does not really lie with the present white leadership or the white congregants. It is on the shoulders of the uncles, the Möllers and Du Plessis's, all either in their graves or retired, and of course, on those tagged by the newspapers as the Prime Evil, the Eugene de Kocks and the likes of Eugene Fourie and Willie Nortje, who viciously killed the opponents of apartheid. The respected Afrikaners made sure that they did not know the details. Now the ministers of the old dispensation, the advantaged business people and the church are publicly washing their hands.

How will the South African Pentecostal church ever fulfil its heavy responsibility to the likes of Eugene Fourie if they not only refuse to take corporate responsibility for their actions, but blame the footsoldiers for the atrocities? The only sin of the church was not to question the system more! How can you ever serve someone whom you yourself have made a convenient scapegoat?

Until the white Pentecostals acknowledge their role in the formation and maintenance of apartheid their confessions will remain hollow. Here the confession of the Rhenisch Mission in Namibia can serve as an example. They not only admitted that they supported the occupational forces responsible for the genocide of the Herreros in 1904 but took full responsibility for their role in instigating the Kaiser to colonise Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika and their recommendation that the German forces open concentration camps for the wandering Herreros, an act that caused the death of thousands.

10 FINAL OBSERVATION

While the reconciliatory actions of the AFM after 1994 are commendable and may be, as Burger put it, a sign that "God, the grand architect of His Church, finally let his will prevail", the question of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit is still unanswered. How did a church that produced spiritual giants like David du Plessis and his brother, Justus, and theologians of the calibre of F P Möller fail to see that apartheid was wrong and was leading to actions today perceived to have been crimes against humanity?

I shall leave the theological questions to the scholars of Pentecostal/charismatic dogmatics and doctrine. Speaking as an ethicist I would suggest that the old doctrine of the *corruptio totalis*, that I only took serious notice of while working for a PhD on the theology of Karl Barth, provides at least one angle from which to approach the problem. No matter how “full of the Holy Spirit” a Christian or a church claims to be, the deep scars caused by the Fall can never be wiped out.

The long struggle of white Pentecostals to gain status and power in society may shed some sociological light on the theological issue. It is possible that the white Pentecostals are not really convinced of the moral wrongfulness of apartheid, hence their half-hearted confession to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

They can still remember what it was like to be a sect, rejected by the mainstream and stripped of all public respect and power. The disinherited sect fought a long battle against the Calvinists and the Broederbond. They are not ready for a similar battle against the new elite yet. The ANC has the power, so blame apartheid on the *ooms* and plug into the church of empowered blacks.

In a recent article in *Beeld* Burger suggested that the church has the responsibility to help the Boetman generation to get over their *bebliksemgeid*.⁵⁷ However, as long as the Pentecostal leadership do not take responsibility for their share in the maintenance of the apartheid system, the Boetman generation will have to rely on other sources to help them.

The churches must come up with something much better than “... that the AFM failed in its duty to question the system more ...” or that the present leadership just accepted the heretical advice of the previous leadership, who were the real culprits. The churches and their leaders need to share the shame and the guilt of the Boetman generation, the Eugene de Kocks and the Eugene Fouries.

A good point of departure would be to admit that the white Pentecostals who are now in leadership were part of the society that created the space for the Vlakplaas and the hit squads to operate.

The present leadership, like the *ooms*, actively supported the apartheid government and closed their eyes to the atrocities committed by Eugene de Kock and friends. The white Pentecostals should consider washing their feet.

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ENDNOTES

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- 1 Paper presented at the joint EPTA/EPCRA Conference, Bueggen Castle, Rheinfelden, Germany, April 1, 2005.
 - 2 As late as 1984, when I pastored a church in the industrial town of Uitenhage in the Eastern Cape, most of these taboos were still theoretically adhered to, although the vast majority of members ignored them.
 - 3 The Constitution of the Apostolic Faith Mission of the 1990's prohibited anyone who uses alcohol or tobacco from serving on a church board.
 - 4 The AFM established a scholarship fund in the fifties to enable poor Pentecostal children to go to university. The fund was controversial, since many of the graduates eventually left the church under societal pressure. The study fund was one of the reasons that led to a split in the AFM.
 - 5 In 1953 a young Pentecostal, Daantjie Roussouw, played two tests for the South African rugby team, the Springboks, before his leaders in the Latter Rain Movement (a group that split off from the AFM in 1925) persuaded him to "come out from amongst them".
 - 6 The controversial evangelist, Jimmy Swaggart told the story of Pentecostal entertainers who either left the flock to join the rock and roll revival, or resisted the temptation (like himself), on many of his widely distributed tapes and vinyl records of the 1970s. Swaggart, J [nd]. *No crown without a cross*. Baton Rouge: Jim Records.
 - 7 Burger, I 1988. *Geloofsgeskiedenis van die Apostoliese Geloofsending van Suid-Afrika 1908-1958*. Johannesburg: Evangelie Uitgewers.
 - 8 Bartleman, F 1980. *Azusa Street: The roots of modern day Pentecost*. Plainfield: Logos International.
 - 9 *Priorities in Pentecostal research*, oral presentation at the Conference on Pentecostal and Charismatic Research in Europe, in Utrecht, June 1989.
 - 10 Le Roux, P L 1921. *Vragen en Antwoorde*, in *De Trooster/ The Comforter*, Johannesburg, 2 March.
 - 11 See for example *Oorlog en militere diens: Ons houding en sienswyse volgens Skrif*, (author unknown), *Comforter*, August /September, 1939, 5-7. The author was either the president, P L le Roux, or the general secretary, David du Plessis, who had the authority from the Executive to act and write articles on behalf of the church. Since Du Plessis was the editor of the *Comforter*, and in the light of the fact that the name of Le Roux was explicitly mentioned in other contributions, Du Plessis is the more possible candidate, Du Plessis (Mr Pentecost) later became well-known for his ecumenical contact with the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. On the other hand, the content sounds much like the early articles by Le Roux.
 - 12 De Wet, C 1989. *The Apostolic Faith Mission in Africa: 1908-1980. A case study in church growth in a segregated society*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
 - 13 There might have been political significance in the name. During World War II Oswald Pirow, a former minister of justice in the Hertzog cabinet, turned his back on the democratic institutions and formed a neo-Nazi movement called the New Order. However, the written sources make no mention of any link whatsoever between the two New Orders and all the people that I have consulted see the similarity as a coincidence. It must be noted that while the New Order of Pirow was an organised movement, the New Order within the AFM had no constitution, held no formal meetings, had no office bearers, etc.
 - 14 *Minutes of the Workers Council of the AFM of SA*, April, 1 1947. AFM Archives, Lyndhurst (when consulted by author, now in Centurion).
 - 15 This reference to David du Plessis (later known as Mr Pentecost) as one of the sympathisers of the ideals of the New Order is unclear. Du Plessis resigned as general secretary of the AFM and left the country immediately after the war – at least five years before the New Order and their ideals were known. There is no evidence in the minutes of the executive council, in the articles written by Du Plessis or the editions of the *Comforter* he edited, that David du Plessis supported the rise of Afrikaner nationalism.
 - 16 Du Plessis, J T, *Letter to Prime Minister J G Strydom*. (Date unclear, possibly 1956.) Handwritten copy in the AFM Archives, Lyndhurst, (when consulted by author. The

- archives have moved to Centurion. It is not known if the letter is in the Centurion archives).
- 17 Du Plessis, J T, *Letter to J J van der Linde*, 27 September, 1957, AFM Archives, Lyndhurst (when consulted by author. The archives have moved to Centurion. It is not known if the letter is in the Centurion archives).
- 18 Burger, op cit 130.
- 19 Ibid, 297 ff.
- 20 See Burger, op cit, 316 ff.
- 21 *Letter to Abeline Schoeman*, date unreadable. Handwritten letter in the AFM Archives, Lyndhurst (when consulted by author. The archives have moved to Centurion. It is not known if the letter is in the Centurion archives).
- 22 Quoted in Burger, op cit, 325.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid, p 310.
- 25 Ibid, p 326.
- 26 Letter in *Trooster* (Comforter), July, 1953, p 20.
- 27 Strydom extended the senate to enable the National Party to get a two-thirds majority in both houses of Parliament. The Nationalists needed the majority to change the Constitution by removing the so-called coloureds from the common voter's roll. By allowing Pastor Wessels to become a senator and remain a pastor and vice president in the church, the AFM became an active partner in the implementation of apartheid by robbing so-called coloureds (many of them AFM members) of their constitutional right to vote.
- 28 Louw, J. *Personal Notes*, Nov. 14-15, 1977 (now in possession of the author, Windhoek, p 1).
- 29 Du Plessis, J 1976. *Letter to the Secretary, AFM, Coloured Section*, undated, possibly March/April. Copy in possession of author, AFM Archives (when consulted by author. The archives have moved to Centurion. It is not known if the letter is in the Centurion archives).
- 30 The Tricameral Parliament of South Africa consisted of three separate houses for whites, so-called coloureds and Indians, each being represented proportionally. However, the majority party in the white house remained intact since the different houses voted separately, even during joint sessions. No provisions were made for black (African) participation.
- 31 See Louw, J, *Verhoudinge blank en kleurlinge: n Oorsig*. Unpublished report presented to the AFM Coloured Section Workers Council, date not mentioned, possibly early in the 1980s for some of these proposals. Copy in possession of the author in Windhoek.
- 32 *Circulated Minutes of the Workers Council of the AFM of S.A.*, 7-11 of April 1981, p 10. Anderson is wrong when he asserts that blacks only became members of the church in the 1990's. See Anderson, A. 2001. *Pentecostals and Apartheid in South Africa during ninety years 1908-1998*, in Hunter, H (ed). *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research*. Available:<http://www.pctii.org/cyber/cyberj9/Anderson.html> (accessed on 21 March 2005).
- 33 G Visagie & A Visser, *Ex Parte Joint Unity Commission: Legal opinion on Private Act no 4 of 1961 as amended by Act no 4 of 1970*, (copy in possession of author).
- 34 See my article *Het die AGS in 1983 die stem van God gehoor?* in Horn, N & Louw, J 1987. *Een Kudde, Een Herder*, Kuils River, Ekklesia, pp 35-52, for an emotional description of this workers council.
- 35 *Circulated Minutes of the Seventy-Seventh Workers Council of the AFM of SA*, at Lyndhurst, March 1986, pp 6-7.
- 36 *Address of Dr Isak Burger at the opening of the 1991 Workers Council*. Quote comes from the personal notes of the author.
- 37 See Chikane, F. 1989. *No life of my own*. New York, Maryknoll: Oribis.
- 38 See for example his book *Church and politics: A Pentecostal view of the South African situation*. Johannesburg: Gospel Publishers, 1988. See also Holleneweg, W 1997. *Pentecostalism: Origins and development worldwide*. Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, p 48 ff.
- 39 Burger, op cit p 422 ff.
- 40 Ibid, p 172.

- 41 Ibid, p 423. See also E Studer, *Was Niet in der Presse Steht: Starke Geistliches Wachstum in Südafrika. Ein Beispiel: Die Pfingstbewegung*, in *Wort und Geist*, No 10, Oct. 1989, pp 4-5 for an interview of an European Pentecostal with Burger.
- 42 See Anderson, op cit, p. 4 for some examples.
- 43 The main stumbling block lies in the fact that the Unifying Reformed Church has accepted a confession against apartheid, the Belhar Confession, as a fourth confession with the Heidelberg Catechisms, the Cannons of Dordt and the Belgian Confession. For more information on the Belhar Confession see my MA thesis: '*n Vergelykende studie van die Barmenverklaring en die Konsepbelydenis van die NG Sendingkerk*. University of Port Elizabeth, 1984.
- 44 See my article *Crossing borders in Southern Africa: A lesson from history*, published in Hunter H (ed). *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research*. Available: <http://www.pctii.org/cyber/cyberj9/Horn.html>. See also Anderson, op cit, p 2f.
- 45 See Reichenbach, A. 1989. Südafrika - Ein Strategisch Wichtiges Land, in *Wort und Geist*, No 10, October 1989, pp 4-5 and Studer, E. 1989. Was Niet in der Presse Steht: Starke Geistliches Wachstum in Südafrika. Ein Beispiel: Die Pfingstbewegung, in *Wort und Geist*, No 10, October 1989, pp 4 -5.
- 46 Written representation of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa to the Chairperson of the Human Rights Violations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, dated 7 August 1997. Printed on the website of the University of Cape Town. Available: http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/commiss/trc/afm_sub.htm (accessed on 31 March 2005), p 1.
- 47 Literally Little Brother or Young Man. The term came from a letter in an Afrikaans newspaper Louw, C, "Boetman is die bliksem in" (Little brother is furious), in *Beeld*, 20 May 2000. Louw blamed the generation of the 1940s and 1950s for inventing apartheid and then sending their sons to war to fight for it. The result has been a massive reaction by Afrikaner men in their forties and early fifties against their fathers, blaming them for apartheid and the fact that the Boetman generation is now paying their debt.
- 48 Op cit, p 4.
- 49 Several Pentecostals wrote articles in widely circulated journals that could have helped a searcher for truth. See for example my paper "The pains of Apartheid". Unpublished paper, delivered at the International Missionary Conference of the AFM, Lyndhurst, October 1985. The paper was distributed with *A refutation of the theology of Apartheid* under the title *A time for repentance*, but it was never officially printed. See also articles by Jonathan Leach, Anthony Balcomb et al, in Maharah, P (ed), *Azuza*, official magazine of the Society for Relevant Pentecostal Studies, Durban, 1990-1992.
- 50 The words *verlig* and *verkramp* came from journalist Willem de Klerk, brother of F W de Klerk. Verligtes were reformed-minded Nationalists, still accepting separate development, but rejecting petty apartheid. The *verkrampes* wanted to maintain total separateness in society, including separate sections in shops, whites only hotels and restaurants, etc.
- 51 The word could mean as free as a bird, or outlawed.
- 52 See his "Open Letter to Kader Asmal, Ons leer nie ons kinders volgens die boek van Asmal nie", reported in *Rapport*. See also Jackson, N 2001. "AGS sal hof toe oor Asmal se godsdiensplan", in *Beeld*, 22 November 2001.
- 53 See Gunning, E 1988. "Mandela moet gebalanseerd simpatie betuig", in *Rapport* 19 April 1998. Available: <http://152.111.1.251/argief/berigte/rapport/1998/04/19/4/6.html> (accessed 21 March 2005) and Potgieter, D W 1998, "AGS-verklaring kos man sy pos", in *Rapport* 25 January 1998. Available: <http://152.111.1.251/argief/berigte/rapport/1998/01/25/32/2.html> (accessed 21 March 2005).
- 54 Godsdiens-Aktueel: "Politiek korrek' is bepalende begrip", in *Beeld* 19 December 2004.
- 55 Supra, p 5.
- 56 Ibid, p 5.
- 57 Godsdiens-Aktueel: "Kerk moet Suid-Afrika se Boetmanne help". *Beeld*, 9 Oktober 2006. In a subtle way Burger excludes himself from the generation in need of help. While Louw was addressing the generation now in their forties and fifties, while Burger

addresses the generation in their thirties and forties. This is not only a matter of semantics. The thirty-somethings were in their teens when F W de Klerk made his unbanning speech in February 1990. Burger wrote the article as a result of the bitter reaction of white Afrikaner men to a reconciliatory deed of Adrian Vlok, former minister of police, who washed the feet of Frank Chikane, church leader.