

Afrikaner grandmother's Huguenot heritage

David Whitelaw

Emeritus Professor, Point Loma Nazarene University,
United States of America

Abstract

Anna Susanna le Roux was born in Worcester, Cape Province in 1879, the descendant of Huguenot forbears, and died in Cape Town in 1963. As an Afrikaner woman, she cherished her Reformed roots and education at the Huguenot Seminary for Girls established by the Murrays in 1874. Her story exemplifies the more typical features of piety in Afrikaner women, but transcends these in her legacy unburdened by bitterness after the murder of her husband in 1922, and her quiet creation of free and fearless space for the celebration of her faith centred in Christ. She dignified menial tasks and opened the door for her children (all women) to embrace lives of wholeness and public service. The story is told by one of her grandchildren in conversation with other descendants and critiqued for its church historical significance. She was a marginal Afrikaner woman who did not let life marginalise her.

Introduction

This article offers a historical church critique of the life story and legacy of an ordinary Afrikaner grandmother by one of her grandchildren. It seeks to describe her Huguenot roots accurately, to recognise honestly the strands of pietism, romanticism and Methodism implicit in her story, and to articulate probing questions that test the nature of her legacy within the framework of developments in Afrikaner Calvinism in the twentieth century. Written by a male grandchild of Anna Marais, it may assist the telling of an Afrikaner woman's story from her own perspective without escaping the traditional default of Afrikaner men of that time speaking for women. Crafted by a family member, objectivity may be balanced by an inside grasp of what her legacy offered her own tradition: calling it beyond the confines of national, cultural, creedal, and denominational kinships to new, transforming connections within the wider human family.

Given her story, her time and her roots, questions with significance for church historiography such as these emerge: How was the Calvinism in her Huguenot heritage re-formed or transformed in the legacy she handed over to her children? Did she embody or escape the typical piety of Afrikaner women of her age? What were the sociopolitical and cultural consequences raised for this woman schooled in the Western Cape in the 1890s? How did her Christian faith nurtured in the formal structures of the Reformed faith endorse or critique these creedal-liturgical practices and sociopolitical allegiances? Some of these will be addressed.

Huguenot roots and saving faith

Anna's face always lit up at the mention of Worcester, her birthplace. Here Anna Susanna le Roux was born on April 25, 1879. She died not far away in Cape Town on October 25, 1963. She was baptised in the Worcester Dutch Reformed Church (during the pastorate of the beloved Rev/ds William Murray, brother of Andrew) on June 1, 1879. Anna never failed to proudly claim, "My mense is nie sommer so nie, ne!" by which she wanted her hearers to know that she exulted in the worth of her roots and family.¹

Anna Susanna le Roux was the descendant seven generations removed of Gabriel and Marie-Catherine le Roux, Huguenots who arrived on the *Voorschoten* from France in 1688. She was the eldest of five siblings, followed by Hendrik Jacobus (b1881), Thomas Hugo (b1883), Elizabeth Maria

¹ Gabriel le Roux, born July 25, 1669 Came in 1688 from Blois, Orleanais, France on the *Voorschoten* to the Cape. He settled at La Concorde on the Berg River, Paarl (Great x5 grandfather of Anna Susannah le Roux b Worcester April 25, 1879; baptized Worcester June 1, 1879, d October 10, 1963, Cape Town. She had four siblings, Hendrik Jacobus, b Feb 2, 1881; Thomas Hugo, B March 18, 1883; Elizabeth Maria, b 18 October 1884; and Susanna Catharina, b August 30, 1886 (all recorded in Worcester). The record shows that Petrus was baptised at Worcester April 10, 1878 and Anna on June 1, 1879, probably both by the resident pastor Ds William Murray (Andrew Murray's brother) whose pastorate extended from 1865–1899.

(b1884) and Susanna Catharina (b1886). Visits to or from them were always events of signal importance across the years. She was proud of them, and loved to tell stories about them. From birth to death she was anchored in her family roots (Marais, 1963: Letter to daughter Elma Marais).

Next to family, Anna treasured her education at the Huguenot Seminary for Girls. She unfailingly spoke with gratitude and awe about going to school for the first time in her early teens in a society where education for girls received marginal attention. Worcester in 1847 had a “first class government school” under Jan Daniel Hugo. Under the leadership of his successor, Albert Rowan it developed into “one of the best schools in the land” between 1856 and 1872 (Heese 1970:97–106; family memories).

Education for boys was favoured. Anna’s younger brother Thomas Hugo le Roux (known as “Oom Tom”) excelled at school, completing primary school education at a farm school, matriculating from the “middelbare” school at Worcester in 1900, then graduating three years later from the University of the Cape of Good Hope with distinction in modern languages (after completing some work at Victoria-kollege, which was to become the University of Stellenbosch). He left in 1904 for the Netherlands, and completed a work of pioneering importance for the emerging Afrikaans language in his doctoral dissertation at the University of Leiden in 1910. Professor T H le Roux’s story highlights the contrast between what was possible for and expected from a young Afrikaner man and the opportunities open for an Afrikaner woman in those years. He chose a career in languages and literature and headed the Department of Afrikaans-Nederlands at the University of Pretoria with distinction for the years 1936-1948 (RGN 1987:476-478).

Family records cannot establish which of the two schools founded by the Murray brothers Anna attended: Wellington (founded 1874) under Miss Bliss and Miss Ferguson, or Worcester (founded 1876) under Nellie and Anna Smit. They were established with staff invited from Mount Holyoke Seminary in the USA (Robert 1993:103). Anna herself spoke often of Miss Bliss and Miss Ferguson as her primary mentors, suggesting that the Wellington Seminary, 50 km away, was the one she attended. “What they taught me there”, she quietly emphasised, “was firstly what it meant to be Christian”. But her competence in English language and grammar, and her skills in music, were undoubtedly learned there too (Ferguson 1927: facing 1, 47; Heese 1970:99).

Mary Lyon, chemistry teacher and founder of Mount Holyoke Seminary in 1837, was never content with “the best intellectual training possible” (one of her stated goals) nor simply “a full-orbed education that would deploy all a woman’s powers for true independence and power to rule or to help others’ unless her pupils had ‘learnt to seek first the kingdom of God and devote themselves to Christ and His service’”. Lyon (and by extension Bliss and Ferguson) combined a culture of the “head, hand and heart” so that she honoured domestic work “not only as a duty to be willingly accepted when it was a necessity, but as a means of developing one’s whole nature” (Duff 2008; Roberts, 1993:105, quoting Andrew Murray, *The Huguenot seminary annual*, 1898,3:2).

The documentary *Precious Time* (Mount Holyoke: publicised at AAR, New Orleans in 1990) provides a capsule of Anna’s Huguenot heritage: Life is to be lived soberly, in orderly moderation, in trust and obedience to the will of God. This life is centred in faith in Christ. Our time and days are ordered by the providence of God. A woman is to serve publicly and privately in the full dignity of her redeemed humanity with the world as her field of mission (Duff 2008).

Being transplanted from the Hex River Valley to the bleak and barren Highveld in the Transvaal after the turn of the century must have come as a shock to young Anna. Possibly her marriage to Alwyn Petrus Marais (also from Worcester) on April 15, 1903 in Johannesburg, Transvaal before her twenty-fourth birthday triggered the move. Petrus (“Pieter” or “Peter” as he became known in the family), was born on February 12, 1878 in Laingsburg, Cape and baptised at the Worcester Dutch Reformed Church on April 1878, as Anna had been. Petrus and Anna had six children: five daughters and one son.²

Anna never kept a diary but a number of letters have been preserved. The stories of many Afrikaner women are still being written. Early attempts to tell these “were primarily told by men in their behalf. Such stories usually had male agendas shaping them”, claims Christina Landman (1994) in *The piety of Afrikaans women: Diaries of guilt*. Landman’s work has generated a new honesty in telling Afrikaner foremothers’ stories by letting women speak for themselves, using their diaries and letters. She discerns in the faces of her diarists the demeaning marks of faith in a demanding male God, submissiveness to a dominant male culture in order to please, disloyalty to other women in competing for this favour of the dominant male culture, and finally suspicion of other cultures alien to

² Charles Marais came from Le Plessis-Marle, Hurepoix (Ile-de-France), France to the Cape in 1688 on board the *Voorschoten*. He farmed at Le Plessis Marie, Drakenstein and died April 3, 1689 “after being thrown with a stone by a Hottentot”. Seven generations later, a descendant Daniel Johannes Marais (b Villiersdorp, October 27, 1853) and Hester Elizabeth Jordaan (b Montagu, January 24, 1856) gave birth to their second son Alwyn Petrus Marais, b February 12, 1878 in Laingsburg, baptised Worcester, April 10, 1878.

Afrikanerdom. Like these, Anna was a “marginal Afrikaner woman”. Afrikaans society was divided into a male dominant culture and a female “subculture” where women were typically assigned roles of submissiveness and serving at the pleasure of others (Landman 1994:1, 3).

One of these, Catharina Allegonda van Lier (1768-1801), “was the prototype of Afrikaner womanhood”, a kind of “Eve of our female sin”, which was a pessimistic piety that became the trademark of Afrikaans female religious expression. Excessive feelings of guilt and a poor view of self in the face of a demanding God alienated women from their true selves. This Calvinism was a grim and melancholic piety that brought women to the brink of depression.

Pieter found ways to counter this in his young wife, Anna. She would write, after his death, “Peter, you taught me the meaning of love” (Letter, Marais: 1923). With words too private in their pain and poignancy she wrote of the strong, liberating love of a man who forever held her secure as equal and as queen in his life. She never quite conquered her reticence and hesitancy in the presence of God, but she lived, after his death, with the demeanour of a queen, secure in her calm confidence that she was not defined by any secondary humanity as a woman (various letters from friends after her death confirm this).

Anna Susanna Marais (née Le Roux) 1963

In this, she shared more in common with “the young Mrs Murray” – Emma Rutherford – who was born and bred in Cape Town, and accompanied her new husband, Andrew Murray, to his pastoral charge in Bloemfontein in 1856-1860, prior to moving to Worcester in 1860. Emma was a generation older than Anna, but she and Andrew (as well as brother William later) exerted a strong formative influence on the Worcester congregation and young Anna, who attended there and was educated at Huguenot Seminary (Murray 1954).

“Emma had very definite ideas of herself as her husband’s companion rather than his housekeeper.” Emma wrote, “I am obliged to listen very attentively to his sermons for he makes me critic, & always expects to know just what I think.” John Murray, Andrew’s brother, wrote an Abridged Catechism and Kinderbybel, which was a free translation of *Line upon line*, and Andrew translated a good deal of *The peep of day*, both used for children in Victorian England, and used by Anna for children’s devotions with her children and grandchildren. The editor records that “Emma had no intention of drifting into a tame Domesticity”. Emma wrote, “We have had a most amusing clever & really good little man staying with us, a new clergyman lately from Holland. He calls me the *New idea of a wife*.” This was because Andrew had used research done by his wife in a sermon, and the “little man” commented, “... a living Encyclopaedia must be a useful possession”. Like Emma, Anna would have bristled at being termed a “useful possession!” (Murray 1954:19, 38, 68)

Anna’s piety was far closer to Emma’s than to that of Catharina van Lier. Pieter humanised her faith through his whole-hearted embrace as a loving husband, transforming her life into one of dignity and wholeness in daily living. This glad chapter of a young wife reveals the translation of her Reformed faith into practical living. She embodied the use of “*precious time*”. She discovered something of the intimacy and immediate presence and love of God through human love and affirmation. Romantic and piously sentimental, perhaps, a favourite lyric she often used after these years exhibited this humanisation of her faith:

Absolutely tender, absolutely true, understanding all things, understanding you;
Infinitely loving, exquisitely near, this is God our Father. What have we to fear?

Her legacy from this period is one of a growing intuition that God’s will is known in loving service in daily living. In sum this was reflected in a calm, composed posture, assured by trust in divine providence. This could mask deep pain and even indignation at the injustices or perceived wrongs of life (for example, when recalling the roles of Lords Milner, Kitchener and Roberts during the South African War of 1899-1902), but did not deter her from going about humble, ordinary tasks “doing the next right thing”.

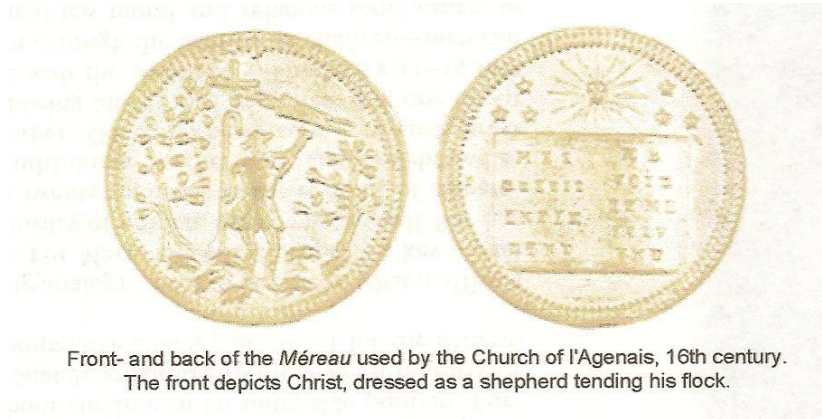
Anna’s unspoken creed was an insistence that the distinctive character of *saving faith* was the cleaving of the soul to God in love through Christ. A grandson discovered a new way to re-interpret Anna’s embodiment of saving faith in conversation with Brian Gerrish, who served as John Nuveen Professor of Historical Theology at the Divinity School, University of Chicago in the 1980s. Gerrish provided the historical perspective and theological language to do so. This was, in essence: a more humane discernment of God’s good will towards us in both *faith* and *trust*.

Anna’s legacy of calm assurance may be understood in the light of John Calvin’s definition “[Faith is] sure and steadfast knowledge of the fatherly goodwill of God toward us”. Such “Faith includes elements of both belief and trust”, claimed Gerrish. “What Christians do, then, in believing the gospel, is to construe the story of Christ as a surprising, even paradoxical, disclosure of divine benevolence that resembles parental care.” [This recognition] “enables them to turn to the entire range of their experience, and to construe it, too, as in every moment the work of a parent-like goodwill, so that even the negative experiences of suffering and adversity now make sense as discipline, not punishment. In short *Saving faith is both (1) perceiving one’s experience under the image of divine benevolence (fides) and (2) a consequent living of one’s life out of an attitude of confidence or trust (fiducia)*” (Gerrish 1999:1, 14).

Being “catechised” by Anna, a grandchild could deduce that she did not allow the connection between a Protestant *trust/faith* to become unravelled from a Catholic *assent/love* (Gerrish 1999:7). Also, like Luther, that faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace, a hold on the presence of Christ in the Gospel Story as the one in whom God’s fatherly heart is revealed (Gerrish 1999:10). Also, that Anna’s faith exhibited John Calvin’s *recognition* (construction, construal) of faith as the sure and steadfast knowledge of the fatherly goodwill of God toward us imparted through the Gospel Story (Gerrish 1999:1, 12-14).

For Anna, this faith firmly connected inward trust and outward observance of the quarterly *Nagmaal*, which is symbolised by the Huguenot *mereau* (circular token given by an elder to each

parishioner qualifying for participation at the Holy Communion, a practice established in France in the 1600s).



Critique of her Calvinist Reformed faith would require recognition that the typical charge that Anglo-American Methodism was imported into the South African ecclesial context through the employment of Scottish ministers including the Murrays in the early 1800s applied to Anna le Roux Marais as well. Her husband Pieter was a close friend of the Methodist minister in Brixton, father of well-known Rev L Hewson, at the time of his death in 1922 (the “liberal” Hewson was held in disfavour by some of Anna’s relatives). Anna’s daughter Irene attended Central Methodist Church, Johannesburg, whose minister was the popular Dr Joe Webb, before her death in 1943. Anna’s brother Henri, who came to the family’s support after Pieter Marais’ murder by mine strikers in 1922, became a member of a Pentecostal congregation in Pretoria. A friend and neighbour (Mrs Axel) in Melville, Johannesburg in the 1940s was known to be a member of a “Pinkster” group (generally disparaged in Reformed circles). Her brother, Tom le Roux, declined the pursuit of a vocation in the ministry in the Dutch Reformed Church in his student years on the grounds of theological resistance to the generally accepted Calvinistic interpretation of predestination.

Anna quietly interpreted all of these associations and relationships from the repose of her own faith. She acknowledged the quirks and distinctive expressions of others from a kindly, non-judgemental perspective. They were family members, neighbours, friends, members of the human family. Anna was wont to say, “You cannot understand someone else, until you come to where they are” (Marais Letter to Elma, July 26, 1963; also Goulden 1944).

Acceptance never required compromise or hiding her faith, but suggested that an enrichment of life and faith might occur through the diversity and ambiguity of a wider fellowship. She commented with a wry smile that in the week before the final judgement was passed on the accused in her husband’s murder trial in 1922, she attended her own Dutch Reformed Church to hear a heavy-handed denunciation of “*die Roomse gevaar*” (Catholic heresy) from the pulpit. “The sheep were served with stones”, she said. Later that week came a strong letter of comfort and support from a Catholic friend of the family, Dorothy Courtie. Years later she suggested that God must have a sense of humour about our mutual hostilities in the Christian family, but described her own experience of that week in grim terms of isolation and family devastation (the final verdict in the trial, Turrel 2004:129-140).

It was life’s tough realities that tended to knock out of Anna any of Romanticism’s “passion for moonlight, red waistcoats and Gothic churches” or C Louis Leipoldt’s “ecstatic contemplations of nature”. Neither pious idealisms nor religious sentimentalities could fortify her against the searing experiences of seeing Lord Kitchener’s scorched earth policies enacted at first-hand during the Boer War, the brutal murder of her husband by mine strikers in 1922, and the death of their only son in infancy to meningitis. The further deaths of her eldest daughter in childbirth and her son-in-law to malaria within months of each other in 1939 crowned this list. All these called forth in her the more classical than romantic responses of reason, restraint, and even repentance (Louw 1991:64).

Ecclesial and sociopolitical context and the re-forming of faith

How was the Calvinism in her Huguenot heritage re-formed or transformed in the legacy she handed over to her children? Did she embody or escape the typical piety of Afrikaner women of her age? What were the sociopolitical and cultural consequences raised for this woman schooled in the Western Cape in the 1890s? How did her Christian faith within the formal structures of Reformed life either endorse or critique these sociopolitical and creedal-liturgical practices and allegiances?

Consequences of openness and functioning on the margins of Reformed institutions were unavoidable in the family. Her eldest daughter became active in inter-church gatherings through the YWCA and the Holiness Association in Johannesburg in the 1930s. In a renewal of her faith she desired “adult” or “believers” baptism and spoke to her Dutch Reformed minister requesting this. Anna later reported that he, with tears, begged her to reconsider, cautioning her that his only recourse would be to excommunicate her as being in violation of her own baptismal vows as a child.

The family became associated with the Africa Evangelistic Band (AEB), a faith mission whose representatives visited the home prior to regular conventions, annual Keswick Conventions and others sponsored by the national Holiness Association. Partly through this, another daughter became a missionary to China through the Oriental Missionary Society (OMS) in 1938 (Wood 1983:193-195). She later married a professor of anthropology, and both became members of the Roman Catholic Church, choosing more formal liturgical worship and ecclesial structures over the personal piety and revivalism of her former sphere of missionary service. Another daughter married a Baptist minister and served a number of Baptist congregations across the years, as did one granddaughter. Anna’s youngest daughter was a communicant member of Trinity Methodist Church, Linden Johannesburg at the time of her death in 1993. A great-grandson serves as an ordained minister of a Reformed Baptist church.

Others entered public service in education. One granddaughter teaches at Treverton School, Mooi River. Another was Headmistress of Waverley Girls’ High in Johannesburg in the 1980s. A great-granddaughter serves in the School of Education at Witwatersrand University. A grandson has been in education and ministered for years in the Wesleyan-Holiness denomination, the Church of the Nazarene. Anna’s descendants represent a wide diversity within Catholic, Evangelical, Reformed, Baptist, and Wesleyan-Holiness denominations, and considerable depth in public service.

This kaleidoscopic description (almost random) of some of the diversity to be discovered among Anna’s descendants provokes serious questions with significant implications for the transmission of an authentic, sustained and sustainable Reformed tradition. A preliminary rather than substantial critique shows that there is both a committed connection throughout her life with her Reformed tradition (attendance at *Nagmaal* and regular diaconal visits from her *ouderling* attest to this), but also a disengagement from culturally embedded Calvinism and ecclesial structures (regular Sunday worship services were fostered but not necessarily in the Dutch Reformed Church) and the traditional links between her church and the National Party (or, any political party) were not endorsed.

What made Anna’s Reformed faith different is that it was practised on the margins of Afrikaner ecclesial and cultural life. Her home became a neighbourhood space where it became possible for very different cultural, social and religious streams to converge. The commerce of ordinary life permitted doors and windows of access for her family into a wider world, primarily explored by her children and grandchildren. For example, the missionary and evangelical enthusiasms of AEB workers as well as occasional visits from persons like Professor Robert Broome and the Afrikaner poet C Louis Leipoldt (b Worcester 1880) occurred. One daughter could engage in personal correspondence with the esteemed anthropologist Broome, while another became enamoured of the romantic creations of the Afrikaner poet (Tobias 1997:67-79).

The writings of Graham Scroggie and of F B Meyer, beloved Baptist pastors from England, as well as the works of Charles Spurgeon and Andrew Murray, Jane Austen and Sir Walter Scott, Elisabeth Eybers (first Afrikaans woman to publish a volume of poetry, 1936) and Mark Twain, surfaced on bookshelves and in conversations. *From log cabin to White House* brought Abraham Lincoln’s life and statesmanship into prominence. Missionary heroes such as William Carey, David Livingstone and Hudson Taylor were household names, as well as Amy Carmichael of India. Such ideas, persons and influences created a tapestry of living within which Scripture reading, faith and Christian worship occurred. Grandchildren read *Scripture Union study notes on the Bible* as well as completing annual Baptist Sunday School Examinations rather than being catechised using the *Heidelbergse kategismus* or the *Belgic confession*, meanwhile being made aware of the *Thirty-nine articles of faith* of the Anglican Church (their father’s church).

Resources for Anna’s catechetical instruction were *The peep of day*, *Line upon line*, and large print editions of the Gospels, Psalms and Proverbs. For her personal devotional use, her *Afrikaanse*

Bybel, her hymnal *Psalms en Gesange*, and *Evangelie liedere, Hymns for life & service* (compiled by Frank Huskisson), as well as the Sankey/Moody Hymns and Gospel Songs, served. She frequently used *The living light* with portions for daily reading from the Scriptures. The family's catechetical formation took place as much on the floor of the living room on a Sunday afternoon, gathered round the radio and a copy of Dorothy Sayer's *A man born to be king* (Radio Drama on SABC TV during the 1950s) as it did in church using a creed.

Anna's displacement from an ecclesial centre was therefore followed by a meaningful re-engagement with Christian faith and practice. Douglas John Hall has coined a phrase in the context of North American church and society – the “theologic of Christian awkwardness” – which is useful in describing such a dis-engagement/re-engagement of Christian faith from its host culture (Hall 1996:198-213). Here the importance of the “symbols of the small” emerge: a little yeast, a little light, a little bird, a little donkey. Christianity is not considered as a dominant power in public life but symbols of the “kingdom of God” are preferably employed.

Anna's life was lived where these symbols were better descriptions of her religious life than vociferous engagement in *Die kerksaak* of the day (important as these were in her time: the du Plessis “Saak” in the 1920s, the Ben Marais controversies of the 1950s, the storms swirling around Beyers Naude, Cottesloe in the 1960s and later). The symbols of Afrikaner Calvinism in Southern Africa have tended to seek dominant space, like the Voortrekker Monument, the Vroue-Monument in Paarl, the local Dutch Reformed Church at the centre of town and suburb, and so on. Afrikaner women have more to do with yeast and little birds. They are the ones seeking to light up dark spaces in a home. The Afrikaner poet of the Boere-Oorlog (the South African War 1899-1902), Totius, wrote “Doring-boompie” as a symbol of the defeat of the Afrikaner forces by the crushing wheels of the British Imperium. It may better represent the spirit of the Afrikaner woman refusing to bow or bend under overwhelming force, to rise and stand erect as an undaunted example of faith not trapped in cultural attachments.

Anna's legacy was the creation of sacramental space at the margins of societal life in the home, a neighbourhood where the Stranger in our midst could be found. Here her descendants learned that “being broken bread and wine” for the neighbour in our midst was as much or more important than the ritualised “taking of the bread and wine” at the table in church.

It is fair to say that she laid on those who followed her task of considering the re-imagining, the re-imagining and of re-construing the structures and practices of denominational Christianity including Reformed Calvinism (see Mullins & Richey 1994).

Conclusion

The primary findings of this study are threefold: Firstly, Anna did not escape the dominant posture of Afrikaner women of her time summarised by the term “submission” but she did transpose this into a different mode described by the phrase a “voluntary displacement” free of guilt and subservience. In this her loyalties were shifted beyond those imposed by familial, paternal, national and denominational connections towards habits and practices informed by practical obedience to God (as she understood this). These were *arbitraged* (negotiated by equals as protagonists) with relatives and neighbours (rather than by competitive conflict with males or aliens) in a wider human community – at the margins of Reformed life and institutions – often by her daughters and grandchildren. She never became “a rebel with a cause” but she nurtured the roots of a radical obedience to Christ in her descendants, an obedience that was impervious to the domestication of Christian faith within neatly prescribed forms.

Secondly, Anna never relinquished the vital element of participation in the quarterly *nagmaal* within her Reformed connection, but transcended it in her hospitality at the cultural and ecclesial margins of life towards persons considered alien within her own tradition. In this she could not escape the critique of a loss of essential Afrikanerdom defined within formal Calvinist creedal and contemporary cultural forms. Conversations with her Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal and Catholic companions and friends were too open not to result in the learning of new languages (not simply English, for example, but new modes of expression such as those that dissolved barriers between the elites in her world and her disenfranchised and underprivileged neighbours. Her sons-in-law helped to teach her the difference between the words “solemn” and “serious”).

Finally, a careful student of her life is impelled to discern a significant reality hidden beneath her subtle smile: the *wise use of power*. Anna's heritage was that of a persecuted Huguenot minority in 17th century France, symbolised by the simple symbol of the *mereau*. In this, and in common with Anabaptists of that period, she learned that the true mark of saving faith lay in the willingness to suffer for the faith in order to be faithful to it rather than in the exercise of power to separate from, judge,

excommunicate or kill those who dissented from this faith. She did not impose her faith on those placed within her care, but opened the door to such a faith, a faith voluntarily chosen.

Through both brutal tragedies and minor church disciplines exercised in the name of various orthodoxies, she discovered the limits of her own power and authority as a woman, as a widow, and as an ordinary believer and human being. Deeply wounded by the first (brutal tragedies), she never entered a place of full healing from these wounds. But she did discover a true sense of her own limits and worth. Her legacy afforded access to the wise use of power, for she learned to use what was given her in a moderate and measured manner. She exercised a queenly dignity (not rendered harsh by bitterness) within her realm of service in a family raising two orphans resulting from the death of her eldest daughter and her husband. And her legacy did not include the burden of anger. Like Pumla's mother, she had to pick up the pieces of shattered life and move on without bearing the burden of bitterness (Gobodo-Madikizela 2004: *The roots of Afrikaner rage* 2004).

This writer proposes that this has clear implications for ecclesial practice and polity, for church historical discernment and writing. Much if not most church historiography is focused on the identification of true (that is, orthodox) authority and power, and much or most of it is taken up with consequent conflicts and even divorces (East and West; Catholic and Protestant; Reformed and Anabaptist) within the Christian family. There is place for a sophisticated post-mortem on Anna le Roux Marais's life and legacy in this context leading to penetrating analysis and precise distinctions. But to do so would be to impose a theological and historical analysis on a life lived in a different mode. Her legacy compels reconsideration of the significance of the symbols of the small, and the influence of integrity even when not invested with the instruments of power.

Let the story therefore close with this description and a conclusion reached by Anna's brother Tom le Roux, just before her death in 1963:

In April 1957 Anna Akhmatova wrote: "In the awful years of the Yezhovian horror, I spent several months standing in line in front of various prisons in Leningrad. One day someone "recognised" me. Then a woman with blue lips, who was standing behind me, and of course, had never heard of my name, came out of the stupor which typified all of us, and whispered into my ear (everyone there only spoke in whispers) 'Can you describe this?' And I said, 'I can.' Then something like a fleeting smile passed over what once had been her face" (Coffin 1983:82).

In October 1963 – on another continent far south of Leningrad – a brother used the words of another Russian writer, Ivan Turgenev, to describe his sister Anna, then in the last month of her life. Turgenev's story was of the "unrecognised virtues" that appeared at the Great Celebration in the form of unknown women before the Supreme Being. "Two of these were 'Charity' and 'Gratitude'," he wrote, "and if your mother had been present at that feast, these virtues would have recognized themselves in her" (T H le Roux 1963, Letter to Elma Marais).

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