"Theologising the Bounds of Community: VOC Religious Policies in the Early Cape Colony"

Scott Spurlock
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2469-7207
Research Associate, Stellenbosch University
The University of Glasgow
Scott.Spurlock@glasgow.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper seeks to challenge scholarly assumptions over the role that Reformed religion played in the first 50 years of the Cape colony. Rather than rooted in a doctrine of external holiness, it is argued the practice of baptism reflected a covenantal framework that served as a theological basis for ordering and demarcating an increasingly diversified community while maintaining strict social hierarchies. In so doing, the VOC created a community defined by covenantal inclusion and exclusion. While this radically changed over time, the early policy should be understood in its context.

Keywords: Covenant; VOC; baptism; colonial government; Reformed theology

Introduction

Religion remains a consistent but disputed element in interpreting the early history of the Cape colony. The narrative that developed in Afrikaner historiography of being a chosen people, exemplified by the so-called Blood River Covenant in 1838, proved a significant and pervasive one epitomised in Willem de Klerk's *Puritans in Africa* (1975). It remained largely unchallenged until T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and Afrikaner Civil Religion* reduced the narrative to a "myth" (Moodie 1975, 26–29) and André du Toit's seminal article, "No Chosen People," derided it as a "Calvinist Paradigm" and "ideology" projected back upon the early colony by 19th century Afrikaner nationalists (Du Toit 1983, 920, 925–7). J. Alton Templin's *Theology on a Frontier* (1984) and Donald Akenson's comparative study, *God's People: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster*, wrestled with Du Toit's dismissal of Calvinism as an ideology: the former seeking to explain the

UNISA
Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae
2024 | #15540 | 26 pages
https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/15540
ISSN 2412-4265 (Online), ISSN 1017-0499 (Print)

formulation of a Calvinist paradigm at the frontiers of colonial expansion and the latter minimising the particularity of a South African experience by providing comparative studies of Ulster and Israel (Akenson 1992, 56–59). By the early 1990s, Jonathan Gerstner's ground-breaking work, *The Thousand Generation Covenant* (1991), argued for a deep and lasting influence of Reformed theology upon the development of the colony's identity, rooted in the liturgies, catechisms, sermons, and theological treatises formulated in the Dutch Reformed Church [hereafter DRC] and embedded in the Dutch East India Company's [*Verenigde Oostindisch Companie*, hereafter VOC] commitment to a Reformed identity reflective of the Dutch Republic. Gerstner largely avoids the thorny issues of an Abrahamic covenant as in any way integral to the formation of the colony's identity. Instead, he argues that the debates of the Netherlands, particularly around covenantal holiness inherited from believing parents, led to ethnic distinctions and hierarchies. Gerstner's work is impressive, covering a vast array of source material, in which he argues that theological debates in the Netherlands were played out in South Africa. What became particularly important was the belief that baptism depended on the professing faith of the parent, which fostered a vision of external holiness imparted hereditarily. For Gerstner, this led to an emphasis on inclusion and exclusion, and ultimately in the South African context a near inevitable emphasis on racial distinctions (Gerstner 1991, 258–62).

For J. Alton Templin, Gerstner's study was largely convincing—probably because it agreed with what he had published in relation to the centuries that followed—but Templin suggested important questions remained open: "Whether the understanding of religion shaped the opposition to equality," or "whether it was merely developed to defend theologically an attitude derived from other sources [which he argued remains] one of the insoluble questions of South African colonial history" (Templin 1994, 466 citing Gerstner 1991, 260). Around the same time, the social historian Robert Shell produced his important study, *Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652–1838* (1994). His chapter "Religion, Civic Status and Slavery," a slightly reworked version of an article published two years earlier, discusses the role of baptism in the Cape colony. Baptism of adult slaves was rare, but what became a pressing issue was whether the children of "heathens" could be baptised. The question arose from Batavia and was tabled at the Synod of Dordt in 1618–19. The synod itself and the ruling will be discussed later in this article, but as Shell notes, the Cape colony adopted one position proposed at Dordt that the children of slaves could be baptised, because Abraham baptised his slaves so long as they subsequently received a Christian education. Thus, the responsibility rested with the heads of households rather than fathers. As such, baptism was theoretically available to the children of all slaves in the colony as long as they were presented by a Reformed sponsor guaranteeing they would be taught Christian doctrine. VOC employees served in this role for company slaves. In reality, baptism only became common for the children of VOC slaves. Private owners became increasingly anxious that baptism might provide access to wider civic rights, as they did in the Netherlands (Shell 1994, 333), risking what Hermann Giliomee has termed *gelykstelling* (social levelling) (Giliomee 2003,

44). As such, Shell argued the baptismal font became "a hotly disputed place at the Cape. Baptism was seen not only as a signifier of spiritual salvation but also as a primary symbol of the civic incorporation or exclusion of slaves and people of non-Christian descent" (Shell 1994, 336–7). Shell further demonstrates that a significant shift took place in the 1670s whereby the responsibility for baptising "heathen infants" shifted from the head of household, as Dordt had instructed, to the child's father. This made it easier for slaveowners to avoid baptising slave children or children of mixed race—especially in cases where the fathers of illegitimate children sought to hide their shame—and this rapidly came to reflect the priorities of a "descent conscious" community in which "theology had become the handmaid of racial descent *and* genealogy" (Shell 1994, 339). Compounded by fears that Christian faith might lead to obligations to manumit slaves, prohibitions on selling Christian slaves to non-Christians, and restrictions on transferring ownership, even to other Christians, among private slave owners it became generally accepted that baptism inherently diminished a slave's value. As such, baptism rates of children born to privately owned slaves plummeted (Shell 1994, 341). As the number of privately owned slaves came to significantly surpass the number owned by the VOC, this trend shaped the wider social conventions and ideas at the Cape. While Shell's thesis is compelling and demonstrates how social and political factors considerably shaped the approaches of private slave owners to baptismal practices, it does not explain why the VOC continued to demand the children of their own slaves be baptised and, well into the 18th century, to instruct private slave owners to do the same.

More recently, the works of Gerritt Schutte and Andries Raath have added significantly to the study of religion's role in different but complementary ways. Schutte rejected the Cape-specific impact of religious practices, arguing against Du Toit's "Calvinist paradigm" as Cape specific and instead seeking to frame the Cape experience within the broader VOC contexts in Batavia, the Moluccas, and elsewhere. While there were some distinctive aspects of the Cape that meant practices manifested local particularities, and indeed changed over time, for Schutte, "the evolution of the [colonial] Reformed church into a national church does not prove the thesis that the continued influence of orthodox Covenant theology impeded the Christianization of diverse ethnicities" (Schutte 1998, 46). Raath seeks to address a similar issue in arguing the preoccupation with Calvin's influence upon the Cape is a red herring. Instead, he suggests a "theologico-political federalism" derived from Bullinger and the theological tradition of Zurich—mediated to the Dutch through Ursinus and the German Reformed traditions—was foundational for the Cape colony. At its core, theologico-political federalism argues for a conflation of secular and religious jurisdictions that tends to diminish the idea of two kingdoms: "Since the visible church was coterminous with civil society, the conditions of the covenant were applicable to both church and commonwealth" (Raath 2002, 1002). Coined by Raath and employed widely by his student Shaun de Freitas, theologico-political federalism is distinct from the intellectual legacy of political federalism developed and spearheaded by Daniel Elazar. Raath and de Freitas emphasise more strongly the ongoing religious interpretation and obligations of the covenantal

foundations of Reformed communities. They use the idea as a means of explaining a tradition that they trace through Bullinger, Philippe DuPlessis-Mornay, Johannes Althusius, Samuel Rutherford, and on to America which seeks the foundations of a political society rooted in theologically grounded and continually binding covenants (Raath and de Freitas 2009). For them,

> Theologico-political federalism provided a model of how the constitutional dispensation of the Christian Community should be structured, and as point of departure, political society's status as a party to the covenant with God was postulated, this covenant relationship acting as the fundamental framework for political content and activity. According to the theologico-political federalists, within the realm of God's sovereignty is the responsibility of the political community to adhere to God's law. More specifically, this law forms the covenantal condition by which government and governed interact with God and with each other (Raath and de Freitas 2012, 10 n23).

The upshot for Raath is that the Cape colony came to embody a "theocratic ideal, along the same lines envisaged by Zwingli" in which secular and ecclesiastical authorities worked closely together to uphold God's law and suppress evil (Raath 2003, 155, 159). Foundational for this view is that "baptism was not only relevant in ecclesiastical matters but also of primary political importance," representing not just admission to the church, but "the initiatory rite to enrol the individual in the Christian commonwealth" through which "one was placed under the promises and conditions of the covenant" (Raath 2002, 999, 1002). For Raath, this led to the VOC projecting a vision of Zurich upon the Cape colony whereby "the possibility of stronger involvement by the political authorities of the church and its ministration of the sacraments … was exploited by the Council for its own selfish reasons" (Raath 2003, 168). The implication here is that baptism was used as a means to mark the boundaries of a self-defined Christian commonwealth. All active agents in the colony should be Reformed Christians, which accounts for the VOC's intolerance of other religions—even other Christian churches—and their limited legal standing in the colony. Baptism did not elect someone unto salvation, but it did make them a citizen of that local Christian commonwealth and pressed upon them the obligations of Christian learning, obedience, and liability for discipline whatever one's social rank: be that governor or slave. Raath concludes "the religious, social and legal structures in the early Cape settlement leads us to the influence of the Zurich reformation with its emphasis on the covenant with its infralapsarian theological elements in the line of Huldrych Zwingli, Heinrich Bullinger and Zacharias Ursinus … rather than the predestinarian commitment of John Calvin" (Raath 2003, 173). In making this bold claim Raath has helpfully restored the centrality of Reformed theology and the fundamental importance of covenantal assumptions for understanding the worldview of the early Dutch settlement scheme at the Cape. Yet as helpful as this is, the question remains as to whether the Cape colony can be hung on the singular peg of Zurich, when drawing on Karel Schoeman, Raath argues there was never a single strand of Reformed theological thought (Raath 2002, 1000). What is needed, however, is to relate the colony more clearly to wider Reformed and Protestant perspectives.

Comparison to the Netherlands will be returned to shortly, but Raath is not the only scholar to frame the early Cape colony in broader theological terms. A slightly more moderate reading of some of these themes can be found in Jan Hendrik Nieder-Heitmann's 2007 doctoral thesis "Christendom at the Cape: A Critical Examination of the Early Formation of the Dutch Reformed Church." As the title suggests, he opts for Christendom rather than commonwealth and seeks to contextualise the experience of the Cape colony in relation to failed attempts to establish Christendom in Europe and North and South America. This aligns with Groenwald's assertion that the open practice of baptism by the Reformed church in the Dutch Republic reflected its perceived "duty … to perform this service whereby children were publicly confirmed as belonging to Christendom" (Groenwald 2008, 10). However, in the Cape colony, the practice of the VOC was at times stricter than in the fatherland. For instance, only those baptised in the DRC could be legally married in the colony. Thus, in contrast to the more lenient practices in the Dutch Republic, under the VOC baptism might be understood as "*the* foundation for the public identity of a free individual at the Cape–it was both a marker of one's position in society and a crucial step in the establishment of a legitimate civic existence" (Groenwald 2008, 11). Albeit, as has already been noted, this did not equate to mobility within the rigid social hierarchy of the colony. In this respect, the VOC was more stringent than merely extending Christendom, because Catholics and even other Protestants were excluded from full civic participation and rights. Piet Strauss gives a more severe interpretation that goes beyond Raath, pushing for the colony to be understood as a "Reformed theocratic covenant community" [*Gereformeerde teokratiese verbondsgemeenskap*], not merely attempting to replicate a Swiss city state, but rooted in the very nature of Dutch Reformed thinking itself (Strauss 2015, 10). Strauss claims in the Netherlands, where the Reformed church was a privileged church, the citizens of the state and the members of the church were "two sides of the same coin" — an idea reflective of Raath's theologico-political federalism. For Strauss then, it was a straightforward step to see that the VOC at the Cape had to be understood as a theocratic society under covenant obligation governed by God in church and state (Strauss 2015, 5). Schutte generally agrees (Schutte 2002, 15). These are bold claims, particularly since the relationship between church and state in the Dutch Republic was complicated and varied between cities and provinces. Scholars of the subject frequently paint a clearer picture than was actually the case, in part because this remained a contested space throughout the early modern period.

The DRC held a privileged position from 1571 and in 1576 the church order, authorised by Zeeland and Holland, declared no child should be denied baptism. Thus, the font was open to all—albeit sometimes begrudgingly—leading to a practice of separating baptism from full membership and access to the Lord's Table, which itself became a contested issue. By the early 17th century, it became normal to require confession of faith before the consistory, demonstrate a knowledge of the faith, have one's reputation scrutinised, and submit to ecclesiastical discipline before being admitted to membership and communion. Only a minority of the Dutch population ever became full members of the Reformed church in the early modern period (Selderhuis 2014, 244). However, as a

public church, the umbrella of inclusion was stretched widely. While a distinction was held between *liefhebbers* ("lovers") or *toehoorders* ("hearers"), who supported the church and attended sermons, and full members who submitted to discipline and could take communion, the benchmark for admission to public office came to be having "sympathy" with the church (Pollman 1998, 7). The children of *liefhebbers* were baptised, not on the basis of their parents' membership, but increasingly on the grounds that "one born in a Christian nation … was part of the covenant with God and therefore entitled to the sign and seal of the covenant" (Selderhuis 2014, 250). The idea of the Dutch being a covenanted people is a very complex and contested historiographical debate, which there is no space to unpack here, but a strong case has been made for the Dutch "Neerlands Israel" (for a summary see Dunkelgrün 2009). By the early 17th century the authenticity of the "Dutch Republic" as a "Fatherland" was being framed on its rightly Reformed religion. This was particularly true in writings by men such as Willem Teellinck and Godefridus Udeman (Groenhuis 1981, 121) who had close links to the VOC's directors and produced narratives setting out the divine nature of their endeavour, including the need to take the Gospel, as Teellinck put it, to the "as yet blind Heathens and Indians" (Teellinck 1622, 11 cited in Knegt 2018, 272). For Udeman, global Dutch mercantile enterprises offered a providential means for taking the Reformed religion to the ends of the earth (Weststeijn 2019, 113). In other words, there is reason to believe that a more comprehensive vision of the Reformed Dutch Republic and its global significance framed the policies of the VOC.

Contextualising the Cape

It is important to remember that the population of the Cape colony was small through the first 50 years. While it is difficult to get a precise picture due to the movement of company employees, in 1657 there were just 38 free residents of the colony. This number increased to 259 in 1679 and with immigration, particularly the influx of Huguenots who began to arrive in 1688, the free population of the colony reached 954 by 1692 and 1,223 in 1700 (Gouws 1987, 9). The great historian of South Africa, Herman Giliomee, offers an extrapolation of what these numbers might look like. In 1662 company employees comprised 57 individuals, 113 family members, and 24 slaves; while there were 36 freeburghers, 37 family members, and 23 slaves. By 1673 the number of freeburghers had risen to 142 (Giliomee 2003, 2, 9). The population had diverse interests and conflicts arose between freeburghers seeking to eke out a living and the colonial government steered by instructions from the Heren XVII and local exigencies. Despite any dissatisfaction on the part of freeburghers, it was a VOC-appointed colonial government that ruled. Thus, the particularity of the Cape colony was, in some sense, the result of the peculiar relationship between the colony and the company. For the first thirteen years of the colony, the council of policy and the commander (later governor) were responsible for all aspects of life, including ecclesiastical. In the early years, the colony depended on the sacramental ministration of ship chaplains or ministers passing through en route to the East and on the pastoral care and reading of scripture, prayers, and sermons by a sick-comforter. The lack of a resident *predikant* or minister did not diminish the ecclesiastical standing of the

community at the Cape. Gerald West notes that the pastoral care of the sick-comforter was sufficient for "each and every Dutch person" in the colony to be considered part of the church (West 2016, 44), regardless of whether they were full members of the church or not. With the arrival of a permanent minister in 1665, a church council was established. Yet, the church council's decisions were always subject to the approval of the council of policy, which also appointed elders and deacons to the church council from a list of names provided. From 1674 it was determined, by the council of policy, that elders should be split between employees and freeburghers. Moreover, the council of policy was also represented by an official at all church council meetings, in addition to the employee elder. According to Pieter Coetzen, there is clear evidence of the council of policy's oversight of all church activities (Coetzen 2013, 32). This level of control was at the heart of the council of policy's rejection of any other Christian denomination at the Cape and the requirement for the children of French Huguenots, Lutherans, Mennonites, and even Catholics to be assimilated into the monopoly of the DRC through their baptism. This dominance continued into—and almost completely through—the 18th century, with Vorster declaring "The Church was in one sense merely an engine of the State and was always – and in every sense" subject to the authority of the council of policy (Vorster 1956, 39). For Biewenga, following van Staden, the purpose was clear domination over ecclesiastical matters. This is also evidenced by the fact that religious services were held in the fort and then in the great hall of Cape Castle, the construction of which began in 1666, until a church as completed in 1703 (Biewenga 1994, 4, 7). Built halfway between the fort and the town, the new church's geography persisted in evincing the centrality of religion and the VOC's control.

Just as financial gain drove the VOC's enterprises, religion played an integral role in managing social norms and expectations. Of course, these priorities were held in competing and often irreconcilable tensions. Noorlander has argued for the *Westindische Compagnie* (WIC) that "God and Mammon didn't just exist uncomfortably side by side; they were partners" (Noorlander 2019, 193), but these were shaped by the local exigencies. According Weststeijn, the Dutch colonial enterprises had a plurality of manifestations as they forged "a hybrid colonial conglomeration where gain and godliness" both served as imperatives (Weststeijn 2019, 109, 112, 113). Ultimately, through the 17th century, the responsibility for maintaining this balance rested with the commander/governor. As he prepared to depart the Cape in 1699, Simon van der Stel wished God's blessing and the guidance of the Holy Spirit upon his successor as he set to "the administration of Church and State, and the furtherance of the Company's interests here, that your work may tend to magnify God's Holy Name, satisfy our masters, and preserve and augment your own honour and reputation" (Leibbrandt 1887, 17). As much as the VOC was driven by a thirst for profit, the central role of religion was evident from the outset of the colony. The commander Jan van Riebeck wrote to the Heren XVII to confirm the behaviour of his men would be closely monitored, that they would not irritate the local inhabitants, and finally that employees would—despite some early absences from daily prayers and Sunday services—"principally and before all other things cherish [their religious duties] carefully, *if the*

blessing of the Lord on this place is not to be withheld, and he does not wish to forfeit the grace of the Lord" (italics added, Leibbrant 1897, V, 128). Van Riebeeck took religious observance by employees very seriously, requiring attendance at sermons read by the sick-comforter and active participation in learning the catechism (Engelbrecht 1953, 125). He ordered that those who failed to attend would "forfeit 6 days' wine rations, for the first offence, and one month's pay for the second as well a further 6 days wine ration." A third offence would result in a year of public works in chains. To ensure no one could plead ignorance van Riebeeck had the orders publicly posted. While this helped to maintain public order, it also served as a means to ensure continued divine blessings upon their mercantile endeavours. These acts of public performance would best be understood not necessarily as the pious responses of the elect, but the proscribed rituals of a Christian commonwealth. Here the Scottish example may be useful for understanding a Reformed community enforcing religious observance. According to Samuel Rutherford, in a covenanted society the magistrate whom God has made a "civil and politick head" must compel attendance at preaching and "other external performances of worship" because these are covenant obligations which if neglected will bring "ill upon the church … and the fierce anger of God" on the community (Rutherford 1649, 53).

Frequently scholars, such as Gerstner, have overly simplified the interpretation of the covenants into soteriological terms, and this essentially is the presumption of his entire thesis. Many early modern Reformed theologians persisted in understanding the nature of the Abrahamic covenant (even in its new dispensation in Christ) to continue to relate to external calling, rather than solely to the promise of salvation. So, the thinking would go, a people, city or nation may be elected and corporately covenanted to God: thus, receiving the blessing of being a chosen people with the obligation of obedience resulting in either blessing or punishment. This is, after all, the overarching narrative of the Old Testament and one that persisted in Reformed traditions. Yet it would be wrong to cede this only to the tradition of Zurich. Calvin himself articulated a two-fold election. The first is an external, general election of a people (like Israel or Geneva) and, the second is a special election unto salvation much more limited in scope (Calvin 1583, 439). The former was often understood to require a corporate response as demonstrated in the covenanting of Josiah and Asa, which Calvin emphasised in his 1538 catechism (Hesselink 1997, 4–6; Calvin 1849, 345). This should probably be the framework for understanding the enforced subscription of a confession of faith imposed in Geneva in 1536, as well as the grounds for compulsory infant baptism and church attendance. For some Reformed theologians, simply the corporate profession of Christian faith brought a community into covenant. John Knox implored the nobility of Scotland to understand that every city, realm, province, or nation that professed Christianity entered into the same league and covenant God had made with Israel (Knox IV, 505). Knox likely derived this from his experience of Calvin's Geneva, and it was the fundamental concept upon which Calvin had compelled Scotland to adopt a comprehensive practice of infant baptism. For, as Calvin wrote to Knox, God's covenant promise "is extended to a thousand generations … wherever the profession of Christianity has not wholly perished

or become extinct … no one is received to baptism in respect or favour of his father alone, but on account of the perpetual covenant of God" (Knox VI, 96).

Nowhere did this idea develop more fully than in Scotland, where Samuel Rutherford argued for external and internal aspects of a singular covenant of grace, with the promises made to Abraham and the law given to Moses being dispensations of that covenant. He and other Scottish Presbyterians believed God called whole nations into covenants and made them visible churches (Spurlock 2020, 82–3). While it has already been noted above that the tradition of "Neerlands Israel" is a contested one, there can be little doubt the Netherlands were influenced by the Scottish tradition. For example, John Forbes of Alford, espoused the distinction of the external and internal covenant while serving as minister in Middelburg, Zeeland (Forbes 1616, 8–9). He had studied under Andrew Melville, after Melville had returned from Geneva where he had worked closely with Theodore Beza and Thomas Cartwright. Melville, a leading Presbyterian in Scotland, actively advocated the 1581 Negative Confession be sworn across Scotland as a national covenanting. In 1600, James Melville, Andrew's nephew and professor of Hebrew at St Andrews, called Scotland to follow the Judean kings Asa and Josiah in making people and king to covenant with God and with one another, and this was understood to be the covenanting of the nation (Spurlock 2019, 365). That same year, as enthusiasm for national covenanting percolated in St Andrews University, the visiting Dutch student Willem Teellinck arrived. Previously a student of law, Teellinck enrolled to study theology under the Melvilles (Eglinton 2013, 134–5). Although Teellinck did not explicitly replicate the Scottish covenanting tradition upon his return to Zeeland, through his more than 20 pamphlets he played a leading role in developing, and potentially coining, the idea of a Reformed Dutch fatherland and establishing the Dutch *Nadere Reformatie* (Further Reformation) (Gorski 2000, 1445–6). It would not take much imagining to see how the Melvilles might have influenced Teellinck's vision. Links between Scottish Covenanters and the *Nadere Reformatie* were solidified by the 1650s. Gijsbert Voetius, first rector and professor of theology at Utrecht University where the *Nadere Reformatie* became deeply rooted, twice offered Samuel Rutherford chairs. Numerous works by Covenanters appeared in Latin, English, and Dutch translations, many by Jacobus Koelman. Perhaps over optimistically, the Scottish Covenanter Robert Baillie declared "Holland and we are but one in our cause" (Mijers 2020, 418, 421, 423). In Scotland and the Netherlands, many Reformed theologians generally agreed right profession could make a covenant community. In the broader Dutch context, Pont argues adoption of the Belgic Confession's article 36 by the Seven United Provinces in 1651 and their commitment to maintain the Reformed religion as its public faith—albeit with toleration maintained out of pragmatism—constituted a Dutch "Calvinistic theocracy," demanded inclusive baptismal practices, and established the United Provinces as a covenanted nation equivalent to a new Israel. Certainly by 1650 Maximiliaen Teellinck, Willem's son, viewed the Dutch Republic as a "Canaan" or "Israel, our Fatherland" and Reformed religion to be for "us like the Ark of the Covenant" (Groenhuis 1981, 124–5, 127–8). The VOC functioned as an international agent of this vision.

Numerous scholars agree the Cape colony functioned as a covenanted community. For Pont, confession of faith—in the Netherlands and the Cape—could be expected from the community beyond the church due to humanity's obligation to obey divine law (Pont 1986, 35–6). Du Toit similarly argued that the church council's espousal of the Heidelberg Catechism and public catechising served to actively renew the community's covenant (Du Toit 1947, 47). Gerstner recognised this as well, claiming that at least the church of the colony understood itself as an Israel in southern Africa (Gerstner 199, 240–3). Raath, on the other hand, views the foundation resting not on confession, but on the covenantal obligations on a largely coterminous church and commonwealth (Raath 2002, 1002). Although scholars do not agree on the grounds upon which the covenant was established on a colonial level, we can see in the activities of the colony an awareness of the transactional nature of being under such obligations. Jan van Riebeeck made religious observance compulsory to ensure God's blessing on the colony was not "withheld" or His grace "forfeited," implying the benefits were positively confirmed but conditional (Leibbrant 1897, V, 128). A report from the sick-comforter in 1655 noted this obligation rested upon all the people in the colony, regardless of their feelings. It was fulfilled by daily religious observance; every night after dinner they recited a prayer, sung psalms, and heard a sermon read from a postil. On Sundays a reading was added, which alternated between a Gospel passage one week and a passage from the commentaries on the Heidelberg catechism by Ursinus or Johan Philip van Lansberge the next (Spoelstra 1906, I, 3). Days of prayer and thanksgiving were ordered when the colony felt blessed (Leibbrant 1897, VII, 12, 346), and days of prayer and fasting when it felt under threat, as in the face of disease in 1656 (Spoelstra 1906, I, 7; Leibbrandt 1897, VI, 24). In 1659 it was: "decided to have every Wednesday afternoon at 4 p.m. a fasting or prayer sermon to ward off the anger of God from us by praying and beseeching" (Leibbrant 1897, VII, 29). Observance of corporate prayer and humiliation could also be declared by the VOC across its regions, such as on the eve of the Anglo-Dutch war.

According to Raymond Mentzer, this was a pattern of behaviour shared across early modern Reformed communities in France, Geneva, England, and Scotland (Menzter 2007, 356–60), but it also occurred in Ulster and New England. Van Riebeeck was not unique in understanding the prospects of the colony in terms of blessing or punishment. Zacharias Wagenaer was convinced the appearance of a comet in the sky was an omen of impending divine punishment for "our dirty and sinful business." He knew precisely what for. The sick-comforter and schoolmaster appointed in 1663, Ernestus Back, was so lax in his duties and prone to drunkenness that sometimes he could not read sermons. After Wagenaer's epiphany, Back and his family were put on the first boat leaving for Batavia and Wagenaer imposed strict Sabbath adherence (Theal 1882, 136–7). At its core the VOC defined itself as an agent of the Dutch nation and under the bilateral obligations of a covenant, but on what grounds might the colony have had for such a self-perception?

An insight into this can be gained from the Reformed political theorist Johannes Althusius. In his 1603 *Politica*, Althusius argued an "association" is formed when a group of people come together for a "common and political interest" under a special covenant (Althusius 1995, 6), such as the Dutch Republic or the VOC. The same foundations form the basis of a commonwealth. When this is undertaken by Christians, they enter into a covenant not just with one another, but also with God, who "makes a promise to the magistrate and people in this religious covenant concerning those who perform these things, as well as a threat to those who neglect or violate this compact" (Althusius 1995, 121, 163). Althusius argues that in such a commonwealth right worship and fear of God become the "cause, origin, and fountain of private and public happiness", while its neglect is the "causes of evil and misfortune" (Althusius 1995, 161). Such a commonwealth may be governed in one of two ways—either by ephors representing the people (a republican form, as in the Dutch Republic) or under a supreme magistrate (for example under a commander or governor as in the VOC colonial administration) (Althusius 1995, 27, 99). Two important aspects should be commented on, in relation to this study. First, this vision of a community requires clearly defining who is included among "the people" and who is not. Althusius argued that when a covenant community fulfils its obligations of law and worship through faith and "with a right purpose, namely, the glory of God" the "external and civil life of words, deeds and works [the duty] … becomes theological." This is important, because in such a religiously constituted commonwealth only the "works of the Decalogue … performed by the Christian to the glory of God … are pleasing to God", while "if, to the contrary, they are performed by an infidel or heathen … these are not able to please God" (Althusius 1995, 147). Second, the members of this covenanted community and its leaders are responsible for maintaining the community's obligations. In wider application of Althusius' theory, this was used to justify Reformed resistance to ungodly magistrates; however, what is more applicable for the Cape colony is that God becomes vindicator of this covenant when it is violated by the magistrate or ephors representing the people (Althusius 1995, 164). Thus, responsibility falls on the governor.

While the pragmatic necessities of the Dutch Republic required toleration that stifled advocates of the *Nadere Reformatie*, such as the Teellincks and Udeman, in the VOC and WIC covenantal assumptions could be worked out unfettered. After all, according to Althusius, toleration should only be permitted where the magistrate lacks the power to impose religious uniformity without risk to the political commonwealth or the "household of the church" (Althusius 1995, 175). The WIC colony of New Netherlands denied religious toleration until it fell to the English in 1664. When Lutherans petitioned for toleration, the governor, Peter Stuyvesant, declared "he would rather relinquish his office than grant permission in this matter, since it is the first article of his commission, which was confirmed by him with an oath not to permit any other than the Reformed Doctrine" (Zwierlein 1910, 188–9). The Cape followed a similar policy. That is not to deny the presence of other religions in the colony, particularly among employees, but even Lutherans were not given their own church until 1780. The importance of Reformed religion as a marker of identity was reiterated in 1660 after a French ship ran

aground at the Cape. Van Riebeeck ordered that none residing in the colony outside of Cape Town "shall permit or tolerate in his house or on his lands any except those of the Reformed Religion; and should any of them be found in the country or anywhere else, it shall at once be reported to the authorities, that proper action may be taken" (Leibbrant 1897, VII, 137). In 1699 Simon van der Stel stressed to his successor that only those of a Reformed faith and subjects of either the States General or "another Germanic nation" should be made freeburghers (Leibbrandt 1887, 10). Although scholars have argued, for example, Groenewald (2008, 20), that the percentage of the population of Cape colony that "belonged" to the Dutch Reform Church remained low throughout the period this paper covers, what did it mean to belong? Biewenga suggests that in 1700 there were only 100 members of the church, representing roughly eight per cent of the population (Biewenga 1994, 203). However, as in the Netherlands in the latter half of the 17th century, full membership was not the expectation, rather sympathetic association evidenced through baptism and profession of faith (and at least in the early decades participation in religious observance) was enough to be compliant with the VOC's expectations. But all residents of the Cape were subject to VOC discipline, whether the offence be secular or religious.

Reconsidering Baptism

The discussion above provides a framework for reconsidering the practice of baptism in the early Cape colony. Scholars have widely recorded the comprehensive baptism of European children. What has been much more contested is the practice applied to the children born of slaves. In the early decades, this occurred with little explanation. The diary of the commander Zacharias Wagenaer records in 1663 that "12 children were baptized. Only one however was found to be of Netherland Christian parents, the rest were all of the female slaves of the Company, mostly illegitimate and born from time to time" (Leibbrant 1901, XIV, 73). Again, in September 1665, "This afternoon eight children of female slaves, as well as the little son of Sieur [Abraham] Gabbema were baptised" (Leibbrant 1901, XIV, 154). Gerstner has argued that this inclusive model of baptism demonstrated in the short ministry of Johannes van Arckel, the first minister at the Cape, meant "he was clearly a believer in the external holiness view of covenantal holiness, all children raised in a Christian environment are holy" (Gerstner 1991, 204). Yet that need not be the case. In fact, it is highly unlikely that van Arckel presumed that the children of slaves were ontologically holy upon their baptism. Baptism in the VOC was a contested practice from early on. In 1612 a letter from Batavia sought clarification on the practice of baptising the children of heathens. As the Synod of Dordt began drawing to a close in 1619 the issue was tabled for discussion. The English representatives at Dordt argued that slaves acquired by gift or purchase could be baptised because Abraham and all his family—including those bought with money—were circumcised (Gen. 17:27). While this found support from the representatives of Bremen and North Holland, the Swiss and South Holland contingent argued that anyone born to uncovenanted parents should be made to wait until they professed the faith for themself. A number of Dutch classes adopted the latter view, including Amsterdam, who would later have responsibilities for ecclesiastical oversight of the Cape colony.

Despite this, the VOC chose to adopt a position based on Abraham's covenantal status. In 1664 orders arrived at the Cape from the governor-general and council of India instructing the colony:

> with reference to the doubt formerly entertained by us whether the children of slaves, being unbelievers, should be baptized, the Church Authorities in India and in the Fatherland have decided in the affirmative, provided that those with whom they live bind themselves to such children educated in the Christian religion. This decision has been based principally upon the example of the Patriarch Abraham, on account of whose faith all that belonged to his house were circumcised. This practice has been observed for a long time in India, and by the Company itself, for whose baptized slave children schools have been established, that when they are old enough they may be taught the Christian religion. We are instructed the same rule here (Theal 1881, 97).

The council of policy at the Cape replied confirming van Arckel, the first minister of the colony (1665–6), had baptised "all children that were brought to him, whether they were of Christian or of heathen parentage…. Mr Johannes de Voocht [Feb–Nov 1666], the present acting clergyman, is following the same order" (Theal 1881, 97). Despite this, the matter did not seem uniformly approved of by those from outside the colony. When two children were to be baptised on 21 March 1666 (one born to Dutch parents and one born to a female slave), "to our astonishment" a visiting ship's chaplain, Philipus Baldaeus, who had been invited to take the service baptised the first child of European descent, but stopped mid-rite to protest the baptism of the slave child and declared he was "better informed in such matters than anyone here." The council was incensed, viewing his actions to be premeditated, and recorded their displeasure he had not "inquired of the Commander, or at least of an elder or deacon, what method of administering baptism had been hitherto observed by us" (Spoelstra 1906, I, 30 cited in Du Plessis 1911, 35). The council then voted unanimously to continue their established practice and ordered the child to be baptised the following Sunday.

The Cape practice was again questioned in 1679 by the newly arrived minister, Johannes Overney. He wrote to the classis of Amsterdam for clarification on baptising the children of "heathens" and reported the practice at the Cape as he found it. Only one Khoikhoi woman, Eva, and her children had been baptised. For privately held slaves, only the children presented by their owners—upon the condition of promising them a Christian education—were baptised, unless they were born to children of parents baptised by the Portuguese, in which case they were understood to have a right to baptism. All children born to the "Dutch nation," the children born to company slaves and the children of Catholics were baptised so long as a Reformed Christian stood as a witness to ensure they would receive a Christian education. For company slaves, this was an employee (Spoelstra 1906, I, 28–29). The classis advised Overney that those old enough to grasp Christian teaching should profess their own faith first, while those below that age might be baptised. However, the instruction lacks reference to Abraham's faith as being the foundation for baptising the children of slaves. The classis urged Overney to institute a church order at the Cape in alignment with the practice of

the fatherland for the sake of unity and edification (Spoelstra 1906, II, 10). Clearly, there was a disconnect between the directors of the VOC and the Classis of Amsterdam. Despite the guidance presented by the Classis, the Cape's council of policy continued to adhere to the inclusive policy set out by Batavia in 1664 and van Reede encouraged the inclusion of those on the fringes born to Europeans and company slaves (Hulsof 1941, 209). Biewenga notes the significance of this choice, emphasising the tendency of the Cape to follow the practices of Amsterdam (who adopted the church order of Dordt in 1624), rather than the church order of Batavia (1643) in most matters (Biawienga 1994, 3).

Shell has demonstrated that practices of baptism for the children of slaves belonging to private owners shifted significantly by the mid-1680s. While there was never any risk that baptism would lead to social levelling or an immediate requirement for manumission of Christian slaves, as can be seen in the company's baptising the children of their own slaves, private slave owners feared that it theoretically might, and baptism was therefore perceived to lower a slave's value. While the company served as head of household for the slaves in their service, meaning they even baptised the children of Muslim slaves, for privately owned slaves the owner served as the gatekeeper. A range of economic and social factors might inhibit them from fulfilling this responsibility, including the risk of manumission, the cost of providing Christian education, a general sense that conversions were unlikely, or a fear of social levelling. Eventually, the number of children born to privately owned slaves being baptised significantly decreased. However, three things should be noted. Firstly, the VOC continued to order the company and colonists to baptise the children of their slaves, but since the person who presented them also had to commit to providing Christian education, it was difficult to enforce this upon private owners. Secondly, the wider perception remained that the VOC, and more specifically the colonial governor, determined the colony's baptismal policy. In 1706, in the wake of colonial unrest, the minister of Drakenstein complained to the Amsterdam classis that "baptism is scandalously misused at the Cape … a person could believe that if the Governor presented a sheep in the clothing of a person, then the ministers would baptize that sheep" (Spoelstra 1906, I, 63–65 cited in Shell 1994, 339). By 1721 the ministers of Cape Town, Stellenbosch, and Drakenstein jointly pushed back against the Cape's policy of baptising the children of slaves arguing Abraham's slaves were not baptised for his faith, but for their own. This reinforces the covenant understanding of baptism but indicates a significant shift as the number of settlers and privately owned slaves increased dramatically. Thirdly, despite these anxieties, the colony's policy remained unchanged and continued to be framed on a covenantal understanding of baptism.

While children of slaves could be baptised on the grounds of the covenant, Dordt declared those old enough to make a profession must first be educated in the faith and make their own confession before being baptised. Within weeks of the first shipment of slaves arriving at the Cape in 1658, the sick-comforter was instructed to provide catechesis. To encourage the slaves to participate, the commander "ordered that

everyone shall receive after school a glass of brandy and two inches of tobacco each" (Leibbart 1897, VI, 115). In 1663 the colony established a second school for "teaching and catechising" children of colonists, slaves, and Khoikhoi (Moodie 2011, 272). The number of Khoikhoi children was small—two in one report—but the governor clearly set out the purpose of their inclusion. They "should be educated and in time brought to the true knowledge of God … as the sick comforter had already done in the case of Armazie, Crisen, Zon and Basoe – a laudable commencement" (Leibbrandt 1901, XIV, 83). Europeans paid for their children to attend the school, while slaves and the children of Khoikhoi were educated "*pro Deo*." Christian catechism and the Dutch language were prioritised because those were requisite for adult baptism and the accompanying admission into the civic community, even if it did not change the station of the individual baptised. What it did allow was for them to be perceived as part of the Christian commonwealth that the VOC understood the Cape colony to represent. Therefore, Christian slaves could marry and inherit property (Shell 1994, 348), yet they remained slaves.

Despite discussions of manumission solely on the basis of Christian faith, this was never really a risk. During his visit to the Cape in 1685, the VOC administrator Hendrik Adriaan van Reede was surprised to find so many light-eyed slaves in the lodge and prescribed guidelines that Christians should not be held in perpetual slavery and proposed lengths of service depending on race and gender (Shell 1994, 186, 345). But this was not a declaration for wholesale manumission of Christian slaves. Nor should it be presumed to have been. Elsewhere in the Dutch and wider Reformed Atlantic, Christianity and slavery were seen as compatible throughout the 17th century. The New England Puritan Cotton Mather argued that a shared Christianity provided a clearer lens for a master and slave to understand their stations, and he celebrated the baptism of slaves (Mather 1706). While in the Protestant English colonies of Virginia (1661) and Jamaica (1696), it was made clear that becoming a Christian did not mean freedom for slaves, instead they declared perpetual servitude. In the Cape, it is not even clear that the colony's practice was impacted by van Reede's suggestions. Requirements for manumission of slaves at the Cape included having served faithfully, being confirmed in the DRC, having the Dutch language (both written and spoken) and paying 100 florins or providing a replacement slave, but as Shell notes, this was rarely achieved. It should also be noted that van Reede's concerns regarding manumission were principally for children of company slaves and Dutch fathers, who made up 44 of the 92 slave children under age 12 (Hulsof 1941, 210, 213). Regardless, Shell suggests only 103 of the 4,213 slaves born in the company's lodge ever gained their freedom (Shell 1994, 375). But we can presume that "free blacks" were expected to be confirmed in the DRC, as far as the company could control this. Regardless, knowledge of Christianity was viewed as important for company slaves. The Cape's church council reported to the classis in Amsterdam in 1703 that one prayer was said every evening and the slaves in the company's lodge were questioned and trained in the principles of "Christendom" (Spoelstra 1906, I, 35). Moreover, race did not serve as a barrier to church participation. The church council reported in 1697 that the number of "heathens" entering the church

and receiving communion was increasing (Spoelstra 1906, I, 31). Moreover, the role of religion as a bridge across social and racial identities was significant. Angila van Bengal was one of the earliest slaves at the Cape. She was purchased by van Riebeeck from a freeburgher and then upon his departure from the Cape sold to Abraham Gabbema, a member of the council of policy and secunde (deputy commander) 1663–6, who prepared her for baptism and manumission. She was baptised in April 1668, along with another slave from Bengal, Groote Catrijn, and in June her son was baptised with Catrijn standing witness. Three of Catrijn's children born to VOC employees were baptised before her, but after she married Anthonij van Bengal, a free black man, in 1671, Angila would stand witness to the baptism of their child. Catrijn herself was pardoned in 1671 for the crime that led to her banishment to the Cape but appears never to have been freed. Angila and Catrijn would go on to stand witness for a number of children born to slaves (Cape Town Baptisms: 3, 4 June 1668; March, May and 20 Oct 1669), sometimes with Catrijn's husband, Anthonij van Bengal, also standing as a witness (12 Sept 1670). By the mid-1670s, the baptism of Angila and her husband Arnoldus Willemsz's children were being witnessed by company employees, freeburghers, and their wives (14 July 1675; 29 Aug 1677). At least in some instances slaves or freed slaves served as the witnesses and guarantors of Christian education for the baptism of children. As such, the experience at the Cape is significant in the wider discourse on the relationship between Protestantism and slavery in the Atlantic world, for it fundamentally pushes back against the claim that slavery required an ideology of mastery and religious exclusivity (Gerbner 2018, 12).

If, as many scholars have noted, Christianity was a prerequisite for admission to Cape society, and Dordt set the standard of baptism, then this also helps us to understand the essential nature of the company's relationship to the Khoikhoi. They were by default outside the covenant and external to the community at the Cape. If they were to be integrated, they must be equipped to be citizens of a Christian commonwealth: educated in the Christian faith, baptised, confirmed, and conversant in Dutch. Few Khoikhoi experienced this level of integration. The most prominent example was the Khoikhoi woman, Krotoa, who came to be known as Eva. Although her story is well known, the details are worth presenting here for context. She was brought up in the van Riebeeck household and eventually became a translator for the company. Only after van Riebeeck's departure from the colony in 1662 was Eva baptised under the authority of the new commander Zacharias Wagenaer. This occurred in 1664. Two years later, she married a surgeon, Pieter van Meerhof. Wagenaer purportedly believed this union would strengthen relations between the colony and the Khoikhoi. The ceremony was followed by a party in the commander's house, a financial gift from the company to the bride, and the promotion of her husband in rank. The following year their daughter was baptised. After van Meerhof's death in 1666, Eva's circumstances changed. Plagued by alcoholism, she lost custody of her two daughters and spent time in banishment on Robben Island where she died in 1674 (Theal 1897, I, 29, 72, 84, 156, 217–18). Her experience significantly shaped the colony's perspective on efforts to convert the Khoikhoi.

From the establishment of the colony, how the Khoikhoi would be dealt with was uncertain. The original proposal for a refreshment station at the Cape came in 1649 from two sailors who had been shipwrecked there. They argued for the benefits to sailors and company profits for having a resting place on the long trip to Batavia. They also argued for the benefits of educating the Khoikhoi in the "Christian Reformed Religion" through good relations and employing children as servants, which would:

> Not only tend to the gain and profit of the Honourable Company, but to the preservation and saving of many men's lives, and what is more, to the magnifying of God's holy name, and to the propagation of his gospel, whereby, beyond all doubt, *your Honors' trade over all India will be more and more blessed* (italics added, Du Plessis, 20–21).

Here again, the link between the service of God and company profits are seen as inextricably linked and this would remain an assumption throughout correspondence and van Riebeeck's diary (West 2016, 22–74). The prayer introduced by van Riebeeck at the beginning of the council of policy meetings declared "may your true Reformed Christian teachings be established and spread among these wild and uncivilized people [if possible], to the honour and praise of your Holy Name and the prosperity of our God Almighty, without whose merciful help, we are powerless" (Spoelstra 1906, I, 37). The "if possible" was added by van Riebeeck at an unknown later date. Although he brought Eva into his family and taught her Dutch customs and Christianity, her baptism only occurred after his departure from the colony. However, as George Frederickson has noted, within the self-understanding of the colony, the Khoikhoi did not need to be Christian so long as they remained outside the community; they were neither subjected nor enslaved and did not have to be Christian in order to supply livestock (Frederickson 1981, 29). Or, as Biewenga has noted, the Khoikhoi were never part of the VOC's jurisdiction (Biewenga 1994, 10). They remained on the periphery of the colony and would remain so as long as they remained non-Christians. Yet the early sick-comforter, Willem Wylant, declared his intent to the Heren to work towards their conversion (Spoelstra 1906, I, 4) and in March 1669 a Khoikhoi child was baptised with the freeburgher Hendrik Reinstje standing as a witness (Cape Town Baptisms, 3 March 1669).

Although rarely a priority, attempts to evangelise the Khoikhoi continued, generally on a very small scale and principally in relation to imparting a Christian education and the Dutch language as a starting point, as will be discussed below. Yet the colony did not give up on the possibility of stretching its covenantal canvas over the indigenous people of the Cape. Petrus Kalden, minister in the Cape from 1695–1707, reported the ongoing growth of the church, the baptism of Muslim and Chinese converts, 120 children attending weekly catechism class, and a second class to be established for the "elderly," while sermons were read in the sick house. But he stressed what he needed was more time to improve his language skills to help evangelise the Khoikhoi. He fully expected the Reformed church would eventually extend to the most remote parts of Africa as the fulfilment of Psalms 72 and 87: God's glory will fill the earth and the nations would be

gathered (Spoelstra 1906, I, 33, 35–7). His great disappointment to that point was that the "natie" [nation] of the Khoikhoi remained "strangers of the covenants of grace" (Spoelstra 1906, I, 37). His reference to a plurality of covenants of grace would tend to indicate the view that acceptance of the faith was not inherently equated to covenantal holiness and election to salvation. Rather it was a verdict that as a people they had not yet received the external calling of a people or nation through the adoption of the Christian faith, a prerequisite for their integration into the VOC's endeavours. Yet the church council of Drakenstein, including the minister Henricus Beck, reported their desire for "our great God and shepherd of the sheep" to bring the Khoikhoi into "the flock of Jesus beloved, so that Cham too may no longer be one of the servants of servants" (Spoelstra 1906, I, 34). Until then, they could not yet be knit into the covenantal calling of the Dutch project in Africa. Nonetheless, there remained those who believed that the external covenant of the church could be extended to encompass the peoples of Africa.

The importance of baptism as a marker of identity is further reflected in the famous report of the Cape's governor in January 1670 that "two German Jews, who had embraced the Christian faith, were baptized with proper ceremony" (Leibbrant 1901, XIV, 310). Similarly, in 1656 and 1659 men born to Mennonite parents received baptism into the DRC upon their confession of faith. Yet this should not be read as indicating an equality of Christians, or even Protestants, in general. Lutherans were denied their own minister until 1780, despite their sustained presence in the colony. Although allowed to worship in a private home, their children—like Roman Catholics—were required to be baptised into the Reformed church and were increasingly required to have a Reformed sponsor who promised to ensure the child received a Reformed education. Even when the VOC began to encourage French Huguenots to settle in the Cape in 1688, they too were denied an autonomous French church and initially even their own French-speaking congregation. While the importance of their Reformed religion was noted in the report produced by the Heren XVII, it was not to be a marker of independence, but a ground for assimilation (Botha 1970, 1–2, 126). They were settled between Dutch burghers "so that they could learn our language and morals, and be integrated with the Dutch nation" (Giliomee 2003, 11). When they submitted a petition in 1689 to form their own congregations, they received a vehement denunciation from the commander Simon van der Stel, who claimed they would next be wanting "their own magistrate, Commander-in-Chief and Prince" (Botha 1970, 28–9, 149–52). However, Pierre Simond successfully secured the establishment of the colony's third congregation at Drakenstein in 1691. The majority of its members were French-speaking Huguenots, but it remained in a joint consistory with Stellenbosch and only in the late 1690s was the minister permitted to preach in French on alternate weeks. By 1701 even this freedom ended, with the Heren instructing the Cape's governor to stop permitting French preaching in order to eradicate the language in the colony (Giliomee 2003, 11). Thus, the Reformed church served as a necessary marker of colonial identity, along with the Dutch language, and a condition of full civic participation at the Cape colony into the 18th century. As Giliomee put it, "the principle

of one language and one church for the European community had become well established" (2003, 12). Thus, one could say that the boundaries of the society were at least in part theologically defined.

Education and Liturgy

Through church liturgy, catechism and formal schooling colonists received a steady drip feed of covenantal rhetoric. While ministers could preach, including visiting ship's chaplains, more often than not, in the first 50 years the community received sermons from approved postils or *huys-boeken* read by sick-comforters (individuals trained to provide spiritual guidance, particularly to the dying, but not ordained to word and sacrament) or schoolmasters. Bullinger's *Decades* were widely used. Structured on the Ten Commandments and beginning with an explanation of God's covenant with Abraham, the decades refer to the patriarch nearly 200 times. William Taffin's VOC approved postil book espoused the covenanting of Israel under Josiah as the grounds for obeying magistrates, admission to the covenant through baptism, denial that strangers to the covenant have any "portion in the commonwealth of Israel" and that rejection of the covenant leads to ruin (Taffin 1595, 218, 324, 329–30, 505, 535). Ministers and sick-comforters were also issued the commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism written by Zacharius Ursinus. The concept of covenant is only mentioned explicitly in questions 74 and 82 and their corresponding answers, which discuss it as the basis of baptism resting on the covenantal promise to Abraham. Yet Ursinus's commentary returns to the topic of the covenant on nearly four dozen occasions and links baptism to the external call to be part of the church, rather than a seal of holiness (Williard 1888, 288, 364). The catechism was taught every Sunday afternoon, supplemented by the commentaries of Ursinus or van Lansberge, mentioned above. While Gerstner has argued this covenantal rhetoric fuelled a belief in external holiness, that need not be the case. Rather it reaffirmed a sense of community identity, responsibility, and boundaries. It was not just full members of the church who participated in these religious activities. In fact, at a communion service in 1717, a visitor noted most of the 40 men and 48 women in attendance—as well as the majority of those who partook in the sacraments—were not members of the church (Elphick 1979, 363).

Within the church service itself, the order of worship included a prayer read out after every sermon, which expressed the gravity of obligation for obedience:

> Your people Israel provoked you to anger so many times ... but as often as they again converted themselves to you, you always received them in grace ... you turned away the plagues which you had prepared for them because of the covenant which you made with your servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.... *Now we have the same covenant through your grace* … Yes it is even now so much more glorious and powerful (italics added, Gerstner 1991, 64).

Repeatedly hearing this formulation would have profoundly shaped corporate identity, as well as reinforced the transactional understanding of covenant: obey or be punished.

Through sermons, instructional material and prayers, the inhabitants of the early colony were primed to understand that throughout history God related to people through covenants. Zwingli, Bullinger, and Calvin all espoused this interpretation and the need for obedience as the reciprocal obligation of the chosen. Whether explicitly preached or implicitly imparted through the liturgy, this wrought a belief in the transactional nature of the colonists' covenantal status. For instance, when Stellenbosch petitioned for a schoolmaster/sick-comforter in 1683, they expressed a sense of risk. The 30 families had been unable to attend church services at the Cape Castle due to the distance and they were concerned that failing to live as good Christians, and teaching their children to do so as well, might lead to God's blessing being withheld from their crops (Theal 1881, 209). A schoolmaster and building were approved for Stellenbosch, and the schoolmaster's role remained the same as it had throughout the VOC, serving as an active agent of religion: providing religious education including instruction in the Bible, catechising, and Psalm singing—another source for sowing an identity rooted in covenant and promise. Until Stellenbosch received its own minister, the schoolmaster read sermons from the kinds of prescribed sources discussed above, fulfilling his primary role of preparing children for church membership (Spilhaus 1970, 124). Yet in light of what has been argued, this should be understood as preparation for their place within the wider covenanted Christian micro-commonwealth the VOC fostered at the Cape. Here too it might be helpful to remember the population of the Cape colony was small but grew rapidly and exponentially. By 1706 it comprised 568 burghers with 1,151 family members and 991 slaves, while the company maintained 542 men, 104 family members and 404 slaves (Giliomee 2003, 16). From this point, the VOC began to lose its vicelike control over the colony and the expansion of farmers into the frontier fostered new perspectives and practices.

Conclusion

Before finishing this article, it is essential to return to the question of race. Shell and others have set out why policies relating to the manumission of Christians, or at least limiting the lengths of service, which arrived in 1685 served as a reason for slaveholders to hesitate in baptising their slaves. But it is too great a jump to wholly embrace the thesis of Gerstner that divisions between races were first and foremost theological. If anything, the Reformed theology touted by the VOC over the first 50 years asserted Reformed Christianity as a hallmark of the community—if not its principal justification—and actively sought policies of inclusion. Shell demonstrates that the baptism of slave children by private owners dropped to 20 per cent by c.1700, but the company continued to baptise the children of their slaves, demanded confirmation in the Reformed church as a condition of manumission and instructed private slave owners to baptise their slaves (Shell 1992, 37–8). A better place for trying to understand how theology might have come to influence racial separation would be in relation to the VOC's approach to the Khoikhoi. The famous case of Eva and her liminal experience between the Cape colony and the Khoikhoi is important, but more enlightening is the decision to stop trying to evangelise the Khoikhoi. From Wylart to Kalden, the limitation was one of resource

rather than willingness and the lack of resource rested on the fact that for the VOC administration of the colony, the Khoikhoi did not need to be incorporated out of necessity.

This article does not seek to dismiss the claims of previous scholars, but rather to challenge the narrative that Reformed theology or a "Calvinist paradigm" teleologically led to racial discrimination. In fact, quite the opposite can be argued. For the first 50 years at least, the VOC employed what might be deemed an inclusive baptismal policy. At its heart was a fuller embodiment of the "Neerlands Israel" motif than could be manifested in the fatherland itself. This was not unique. The linking of community and election was a pervasive Reformed doctrine from Hungary to the American colonies. What has perhaps clouded the important role of religion in the early Cape colony has been attempts to interpret it as being either excessively pietistic or overly degenerate. However, the particular dynamic of a small community, isolated at the southern edge of Africa, prompted a more intentional construction of corporate identity than was necessary even in other VOC centres. The Cape colony did not need to tolerate diverse Christian confessions as in the fatherland nor did it face the complex cultural establishments encountered in India, Myanmar, Japan, and Batavia. Reformed theology served as an integral motif not merely for defining the colony itself, but also served as a key lens for interpreting whether other peoples or nations could be brought into deeper relationship and ultimately integrated. The limited number of Khoikhoi conversions and the VOC's lack of any necessity to bring them under its jurisdiction (and attendant covenantal responsibility) weakened interest in missions, while the revolt of 1706 demonstrated anxieties among settlers that they were outnumbered by the enslaved population leading ministers to complain "baptism is scandalously misused at the Cape … simply baptiz[ing] as the Pope does" (Shell 1992, 41). However, it was not until 1742 that the baptism of five Khoikhoi by the Moravian missionary George Schmidt—who had been barred from working within the colony because his theology was not Reformed—raised anxieties over the implications of the Khoikhoi being baptised (Elphick 2012, 13–14). What had not caused any concerns was the baptism of 26 illegitimate children (25 per cent of the total baptised) in Cape Town the previous year (Gerstner 1991, 87). Gradually the limits of the covenant were shifting, and theological boundaries were mapped onto changing social, economic, and political concerns. However, the role or Reformed theology in demarcating the boundaries of the early Cape colony pushes back against the eventual legacy of innovations developed in the colony's frontier regions. As such, rather than Reformed theology being seen as an ideology, myth or paradigm inevitably leading to racial division, as numerous scholars have argued, a clearer understanding of its significance and application in the first 50 years may actually help to contextualise the deep-seated commitment to the Reformed tradition across a wide racial spectrum from the early colonial period. For, as Schutte has argued, coloured membership continued to increase throughout the 18th century, especially in Cape Town and Stellenbosch, but also Swartland and Tulbagh (Schutte 1998, 45–46). While separate worship was introduced in the mid-19th century due to the "weakness of some," as late as 1829 the Cape synod of the DRC ordered that all

races should receive communion at the same time. Therefore, the current study may suggest the need to reconsider the diversity and the nature of participation in the DRC before 1800.

References

Althusius, J. 1995. *Politica*. Ed. and trans. Frederick S. Carney. Foreword by Daniel J. Elazar. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund.

Biewenga, A.W. 1994. "Kerk, armenzorg, onderwijs en zending aan de Kaap 1652–1732. Een overzicht van de stand van het onderzoek: resultaten en leemten." *Journal for the History of Dutch Missions and Overseas Churches*, 1: 1–22.

Botha, C. Graham. 1970. *The French Refugees at the Cape*. Cape Town: C. Struik Ltd.

Bullinger, Heinrich. 1849. *The Decades of Henry Bullinger, Minister of the Church of Zurich. The First and Second Decades*. Trans. H.I. Cambridge: University Press.

Calvin, John. 1849. *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*. Trans. and ed. John Owen. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society.

Calvin, Jean. 1583. *The Sermons of M. Iohn Caluin Upon the Fifth Booke of Moses called Deuteronomie*. London: H. Middleton.

Cape Town Baptisms, 1665–1695. "The Genealogical Society of South Africa: eGSSA Branch, South African Records Transcribed. A Selection of Historical Records Transcriptions." https://www.eggsa.org/sarecords/index.php/church-register-transcripts/church-registers/cape-town-ngk-1665-to-1695 (accessed 6 April 2024).

Coertzen, P. 2013. "The Dutch Reformed Church." *NGTT is now Stellenbosch Theological Journal (STJ)*, 54: 30–40.

De Klerk, W. A. 1978. *The Puritans in Africa: A Story of Afrikanerdom.* London: Collings.

Du Plessis, J. 1911. *A history of Christian missions in South Africa*. London: Longman Green.

Du Toit, A. 1983. "No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology." *American Historical Review*, 88:4: 920–52.

Du Toit, H.D.A. 1947. "Predikers en hul Prediking in die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk van Suid-Afrika." Ph. D. dissertation, University of Pretoria.

Dunkelgrün, T., 2009. "'Neerlands Israel': Political Theology, Christian Hebraism, Biblical Antiquarianism, and Historical Myth". *Myth in History, History in Myth.* Edited by Laura Cruz and Willem Frijhoff. Leiden: Brill. 201–236.

Eglinton, J. 2013. “Scottish-Dutch Reformed Theological Links in the Seventeenth Century.” *Dutch Crossing*, 37(2): 131–148.

Elphick, R and Hermann G (eds). 1979. *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652–1820*. Cape Town: Longman Penguin Southern Africa.

Engelbrecht, S.P. 1953. *Geskiedenis van die Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika*. Pretoria: HAUM.

Forbes, John. 1616. *A Treatise Tending to Clear the Doctrine of iustification*. Middleburg: R. Schilders.

Frederickson, G. 1981. *White Supremacy. A Comparative Study of American and South African History*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gerbner, K. 2018. *Christian Slavery. Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Gerstner, J. 1991. *The Thousand Generation Covenant*. Leiden: Brill.

Giliomee, H. 2003. *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*. Cape Town: Tafelberg Publishers.

Gorski, P. 2000. “The Mosaic Moment: An Early Modernist Critique of Modernist Theories of Nationalism”. *American Journal of Sociology*, 105(5): 1428–68.

Gouws, N B. 1987. “The Demography of Whites in South Africa Prior to 1820.” *Southern African Journal of Demography*, 1(1): 7–15.

Groenhuis, G. 1981. “Calvinism and National Consciouness: The Dutch Republic as the New Israel.” *Britain and The Netherlands: Volume VII Church and State Since the Reformation Papers Delivered to the Seventh Anglo-Dutch Historical Conference*. Edited by A.C. Duke and C.A. Tamse. Dordrecht: Springer. 118–133.

Groenwald, G. 2008. “*Eeen Spoorloos Vrouwpersoon:* Unmarried Mothers, Moral Regulation and the Church at the Cape of Good Hope, circa 1652–1795.” *Historia*, 53(2): 5–32.

Hattingh, J.L. 1982. “Beleid en praktyk: die doop van slawekinders en die sluit van gemengde verhoudings aan die Kaap voor 1720.” *Kronos*, 5(1): 25–42.

Hesselink, I. J. (ed). 1997. *Calvin’s First Catechism. A Commentary*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

Hulsof, A. 1941. “H.A. Van Reede tot Drakestein, journaal van zijn verblijf aan de Kaap.” *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap. Deel 62*. Utrecth: Kemink en Zoon. https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_bij005194101_01/_bij005194101_01_0003.php [accessed 24 May 2024].

Knegt, C. 2018. “That Christ be Honored: The Push for Foreign Missions in the Seventeenth-century Reformed Church in the Netherlands.” *Puritan Reformed Journal*, 10(2): 263–277.

Leibbrant, H. C. V. 1896–1906. *Precis of the archives of the Cape of Good Hope*. 17 Vols. Cape Town: Richards and Sons. [v. I] Journal, 1699-1732. 1896; [v. II] Letters received, 1695-1708. 1896; [v. III] Letters despatched, 1696-1708. 1896; [v. IV] The defence of Willem Adriaan van der Stel. 1897; [v. V–VII] Riebeeck's journal, &c., pt. 1-3, Dec. 1651-May 1662. 1897; [v. VIII–IX] Letters and Documents Received, 1649–1662. 1898; [v. X] Resolutiën van den commandeur en raden van het fort de Goede Hoop, 1652-1662. 1898; [v. XI–XIII] Letters despatched from the cape, 1652-1662. vol. I-III. 1900; [v. XIV] Journal, 1662-1670. 1901; [v. XV] Journal, 1671-1674 & 1676. 1902; [v. XVI–XVII] Requesten (Memorials) 1715–1806. 1905–6.

Leibbrant, H.C.V. 1887. *Rambles through the Archives of the Colony of the Cape of Good, 1688–1700.* Cape Town: J.C. Juta and Co.

Mather, Cotton. 1706. *The Negro Christianized. An Essaty to Excite and Assist that Good Work, the Instruction of Negro-Servants in Christianity.* Boston, MA: B. Green.

Mentzel, O.F. 1921–44. *A Geographical-Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope*, 3 vols. Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society.

Mentzer, R. 2007. “Fasting, Piety, and Political Anxiety among French Reformed Protestants.” *Church History*, 76(2): 330–362.

Mijers, E. 2020. “‘Holland and we were bot one in our cause’: The Covenanters’ ‘Dutch’ Reception and Impact.” *Scottish Historical Review* 99, supplement: 412–428.

Moodie, D. (ed.). 2011. *The Record: Or, a Series of Official Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Tribes of South Africa.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Moodie, T.D. 1975. *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and Afrikaner Civil Religion*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Muller, Richard. 2003. *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Traditions*. Oxford: OUP.

Nieder-Heitmann, J.H. 2007. “Christendom at the Cape: A Critical Examination of the Early Formation of the Dutch Reformed Church”. PhD Thesis, University of Cape Town.

Noorlander, D L. 2019. *Heaven’s Wrath: The Protestant Reformation and the Dutch West India Company in the Atlantic World.* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

Raath, A.W.G. 2002. “Covenant and the Christian Community: Bullinger and the Relationship between Church and Magistracy in Early Cape Settlement (1652-1708).” *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 33(4): 999–1019.

Raath, A.W.G. 2003. “Law, Religion and the Covenanted Community: The Impact of the Zurich Reformation on the Early Cape Settlement, 1652-1708.” *Acta Theologica*, 23(1): 150–174.

Raath, A.W.G. and S. de Freitas. 2012. “Samuel Rutherford’s Theologico-political Federalism in Early American Society.” *Tydskrif vir Christelike Wetenskap*, 3: 1–42.

Raath, A.W.G. and S. de Freitas. 2009. “The Reformational Legacy of Theologico-political Federalism.” *The Ashgate research companion to federalism*. Edited by Ann Ward and Lee Ward. Farnham: Ashgate. 49–68.

Schutte, G.J. 1998. “Between Amsterdam and Batavia: Cape Society and the Calvinist Church under the Dutch East India company.” *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, 25: 17–49.

Schutte, G.J. (ed.). 2002. *Het Indisch Sion: De Gereformeerde kerk onder de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*. Hilversum: Verloren.

Selderhuis, Herman J. 2015. *Handbook of Dutch church history*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Shell, Robert. 1994. *Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652–1838*. Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press.

Shell, R. 1992. “Religion, Civic Status and Slavery from Dordt to the Trek.” *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, 19: 28–63.

Spilhaus, M.W. 1970. “The Story of Simon van der Stel.” *Historia*, 15(2): 122–31.

Spoelstra, Cornelis. 1906. *Bouwstoffen voor de geschiedenis der Nederduitsch-Gereformeerde Kerken in Zuid-Afrika. Dle. I & II.* Amsterdam and Kaapstad: Hollandsch-Africaansche Uitgevers-Maatschappij.

Spurlock, R.S. 2019. “The Boundaries of Scottish Reformed Orthodoxy, 1560–1700.” *History of Scottish Theology*. Edited by David Fergusson and Mark Elliott. Vol. 1 Oxford: Oxford University Press. 359–376.

Spurlock, R.S. 2020. “Polity, Discipline and Theology: The Importance of the Covenant in Scottish Presbyterianism, 1560–c. 1700.” *Church Polity and Politics in the British Atlantic World, c. 1635–66*. Edited by Elliot Vernon and Hunter Powell. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 80–103.

Strauss, Piet. 2015. *Gereformeerdes onder dies Suiderkruis 1652–2011*. Bloemfontein: SunBonani Scholar.

Taffin, Jean. 1595. *The Amendment of Life*. London: John Windet.

Templin, J. Alton. 1984. *Ideology on a Frontier: The Theological Foundation of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1652–1910.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Templin, J. A. 1994. “Review of Jonathan Neil Gerstner, The Thousand Generation Covenant: Dutch Reformed Covenant Theology and Group Identity in Colonial South Africa, 1652–1814.” *Church History*. 63(3): 464–466.

Theal, G. M’Call. 1881. *Abstracts of the Decisions and Resolutions of Council of Policy at the Cape from 1651 to 1687.* Cape Town: Saul Solomon.

Theal, G M’Call. 1882. *Chronicles of Cape Commanders*. Cape Town: W.A. Richards & Sons.

Theal, G M’Call. 1897. *History of South Africa under the Administration of the Dutch East India Company (1652 to 1795)*. 2 vols. London: Swan Sonnenschein.

Vorster, J.D. 1965. *Die Kerkregtelike Ontwikkeling van die Kaapse Kerk onder die Kompanjie 1652–1792*. Potchefstroom: Pro Rege Pers Beperk.

West, G.O. 2015. *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon.* Leiden: Brill.

Weststeijn, A. 2019. “Colonies of Concord: Religious Escapism and Experimentation in Dutch Overseas Expansion, ca. 1650–1700.” *Enlightened Religion: From Confessional Churches to Polite Piety in the Dutch Republic*. Edited by Joke Spaans and Jetze Touber. Leiden: Brill. 104–130.

Williard, G.W. (ed. and trans.) 1888. *The Commentary of Zacharias Ursinus, on the Heidelberg Catchecism*. Cincinnati, OH: Elm Street Publishing.

Zwierlein, F.J. 1910. *Religion in New Netherland: A History of the Development of the Religious Conditions in the Province of New Netherland 1623–1664.* New York: John P. Smith.