

The Awkward Positioning of a Dutch Reformed “Missionary” in Apartheid South Africa: Rev. D. P. Botha and the Cape “Coloured” question

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Abstract

The Rev. D. P. (David) Botha was a lifelong apartheid critic and minister in the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and later the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). Early in his career, he served as a “missionary” in a DRMC congregation in Wynberg, and subsequently in other congregations in the Western Cape, South Africa. During his career, he wrote an important book and engaged in public discourse through contributions in newspapers and other mainstream publications. Focusing on these sources, most of which now form part of his private collection in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) Archive, this article traces Botha’s growing agitation regarding the implementation of apartheid policies, in the aftermath of the institution of the 1950 Group Areas Act. Among other things it illuminates the early apartheid-era white view of the other, as experienced and critiqued by this insider-outsider minister with respect to his assessment of general white perceptions of so-called “coloureds” in the Cape Town area. Through specific attention to Botha’s correspondences with A. P. Treurnicht and Beyers Naudé, this article also shows the problematic perspective of a white missionary seeking to alleviate the impact of policy decisions on his church members, while simultaneously buying into the predominant ideology of racial categorisation.

Keywords: apartheid; “coloureds”; Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC); group areas; South Africa; theology

Introduction

This article concerns the writings of Rev. David P. Botha, who started his career as a Dutch Reformed “missionary” and became a long-serving minister and otherwise influential policy shaper in the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) from the



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middle of the 20th century onwards. As will be indicated below, I use the term “missionary” as it accords with his own early self-description, as indeed was the common usage in early apartheid Dutch Reformed circles referring to white ministers serving black congregations. The very term DRMC describes a complicated situation, in a sense, as this was clearly a church for black or “coloured” Christians, served by white missionaries who were de facto ministers. This was an anomalous usage of the term mission/missionary, which more typically referred to those evangelising and ministering to unbelievers, rather than to a settled Christian congregation. It would be fair to say that Botha’s self-understanding from missionary to minister developed over time, and Botha to this day remains a respected emeritus minister in what is now the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). During the course of his ministry, Botha served in important leadership positions, including assessor and moderator of the DRMC, as well as editor of the *Ligdraer*. For the purposes of this article, I am focusing on his views with respect to group areas and the developing apartheid policies from the late 1940s through the 1970s. I am considering both published and unpublished writings that form part of his personal collection in the DRC Archive, Stellenbosch. This collection has not previously been utilised by researchers. Hence, the primary purpose of this article is to bring some of these sources to the fore within a coherent, albeit undeniably limited biographical narrative. Inevitably, this concerns Botha’s views of apartheid, particularly in respect to the community of so-called “coloureds,” as it is among people so designated that he ministered throughout his career. This article thus seeks to introduce this important Christian personality and his activities during the height of apartheid, while also showing some of the complexities this era posed to a well-intentioned yet ideologically compromised insider-outsider minister in the DRMC. Due to the length and scope of this article, the perspective is by necessity both limited and preliminary.

Published Writings mainly Focusing on Newspapers

The oldest apartheid era article by Botha I have access to was published in *Die Wekroep/The Clarion* in August 1949 (Botha 1949). *Die Wekroep/The Clarion*, founded in 1946, was a bilingual newspaper of the interdenominational Students’ Christian Association (*Die Wekroep/The Clarion* 1946, 4). In his article, Botha introduces his coloured congregation of Wynberg to the readers. In the very first sentence, he introduces himself as a “missionary,” but then immediately qualifies it by stating that this self-description is actually a misnomer, because unlike any regular pioneer missionary he is the minister of a large and long-established congregation. Subsequent writings by Botha, that I have seen, did not make use of this self-designation. In fact, as he came to identify more closely with his church members over time, as described below, it is a logical assumption that he would rather have wanted to de-emphasise terminology that might highlight the divide between the congregation and their minister.

A summary of the general gist of the abovementioned article would amount to the following: Botha attempts to humanise his coloured congregants to an intended white

readership. He does this by, among other things, debunking the stereotypical white view that all coloureds were “*skollies*.” He also elaborates on the details of the social and implicitly political struggles they were facing, such as inadequate schooling. Under his final subheading, aptly titled “*Ook Mense*” (Also People), he pleads with his readers to treat their coloured workers “as people.” Finally, he puts a religious spin on these sentiments with statements such as “You believe that Jesus has taken away your badness and sins, do you not also believe that he can take away their badness and sins? If you love them they will also love you as they love me”¹ (Botha 1949).

The following year saw the 1950 Group Areas Act called into being. Its implementation received some criticism from Botha, initially particularly due to the government’s plan to segregate the Cape Malay and coloureds into two separate categories, and hence to relocate them in different group areas. Botha is reported in *Die Burger* to have opposed this, arguing that apart from their different religions, these groups form a unified community with much intermarriage among them and the mutual sharing of customs and lifestyles (*Die Burger* 1956a). *The Cape Argus* also quotes him as saying that “there was not the slightest justification on racial grounds for dividing Malays and coloured people into separate groups” (*The Cape Argus* 1956a, “Zone Plan to Separate Coloured and Malay Opposed”). It seems that Botha was at least partly driven by pastoral concerns in taking up this position. According to a 1956 article in *Die Burger*, he argued that segregation along religious lines would have the negative consequence of breaking up families (*Die Burger* 1956a, “Kerk Steun nie Skeiding volgens Geloof”).

It seems that the Cape Town City Council, which was a multiracial body in the 1950s, was itself strongly opposed to the workings of the Group Areas Committee tasked to implement government legislation. *Die Burger*, in 1956, comments on one city council meeting that derailed into chaos as a result of opposition to group areas, and a resolution followed not to cooperate with this committee (*Die Burger* 1956c, “Stadsraad wil niks te doen hê met Groepsgebiederaad nie”). A sympathetic *Cape Argus* article comments as follows regarding the city council’s stance: “But the fundamental objection to the Act is one of principle. There is not even a pretence that there is any moral basis for coloured apartheid. The Natives have at least received promises that they will be encouraged to develop their ‘own culture’ in their ‘own areas,’ provided this does not interfere with the labour supply. The coloured people have neither a distinctive culture nor their own reserves. All they are to receive is an order to quit their homes” (*Cape Argus* 1956b, “Group Areas Act”). One consequence of this position of non-cooperation by the city council, as pointed out in *The Cape Argus*, was that it left the “defence of the rights of many people ... mainly in the hands of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, which fortunately has faithfully discharged this task” (*Cape Argus* 1956c, “Group Areas fact”).

1 “Jy glo dat Jesus jou slegtigheid en sonde weggeneem het, glo jy nie ook dat Hy hulle slegtigheid en sonde kan wegneem nie? As jy hulle liefhet, sal hulle jou ook liefhê soos vir my.”

It is perhaps a normal thing to search the past, or more specifically in my case the Dutch Reformed missionary heritage, in the hope of finding glimmers of light or unacknowledged prophets of equality when this was still quite rare in Afrikaner circles. Was Botha such a candidate? The 1950s evidence presents a complicated picture, which betrays views deeply embedded within a discourse of apartheid as a supposedly just solution to the existence of a variety of supposedly innate racial groups as they were designated by the regime. It appears that Botha did not, at least not initially, question the legitimacy of the system of apartheid. His main bone of contention was in terms of how those groups were categorised, and this especially due to his perception of the unfair consequences of this policy from the point of view of coloured people. In this respect, his perspective was clearly different from that of the mainstream contemporary Afrikaner, as he indicates in a 1957 newspaper article entitled “*Apartheid sonder Bitterheid.*” Here Botha (1957) argues that although it might appear normal for the Afrikaner, who had grown up in an environment where racial division had already been in practice as a matter of course, to see this system as the ideal, the same point of view could not be attributed to the coloured.

For the coloured this system offers nothing to gain, but only more exclusion and the curtailment of existing rights. How might the coloured be won over to the policy of separate development? Botha asserts that this should be a necessary development, because the policy could not be considered successful if in the process the so-called white loses the friendship of the so-called coloured. Botha champions the example of the Mission Church that had, according to his perspective on the matter, segregated coloured from white in a fair and just manner. The imperative for Botha is to export this positive group feeling generated within the Mission Church to the coloured community at large (Botha 1957).

1960 saw the publication of Botha’s important and, in retrospect, controversial book, *Die Opkoms van ons Derde Stand*. Enthusiastically introduced by the well-known “*verligte*” Afrikaner literary giant N. P. van Wyk Louw, this book basically expounds on a developing view of Botha that the coloured people were in all relevant categories of distinction, skin tone being the only exception and one of no real consequence, part and parcel of the white group. Hence, Botha pleads that the government should acknowledge this situation, forsake apartheid policies with respect to coloureds and duly have them included within the white group (Botha 1960).

A 1965 article in *The Cape Times* reports on a visit made by Botha, then minister at Malmesbury and actuary of the Mission Church in the Cape, together with a coloured colleague Rev. H. M. Beets, to the eastern United States. The newspaper relates Botha’s sentiment that it would become more and more difficult to justify the South African government’s racial policies to American people as the Civil Rights movement continued to gather momentum there. The newspaper quotes Botha as follows:

I found it easier to vindicate South Africa's Bantustan policy on a sociological basis than on a political one. ... They think Bantustans are politically unwise, but they understand when we tell them that the Bantustans are based on the sociological incompatibility of the two races. I found it very difficult to vindicate the Government's policy of separate development for coloured people, however. Actually they are very confused about the colour set-up there, what with coloureds and Negroes. They do not realise that you cannot compare their Negroes with our Africans. (*The Cape Times* 1956, "Civil Rights Damper on S.A. Policies, DR Pastor Tells of US Tour")

Notwithstanding the role of the DRMC's attempts to protect the rights of the coloureds, and Botha's own part in this drama, the Group Areas Act was, of course, enforced in the Cape as elsewhere. What was left for Botha and others was to comment on the consequences of the enforcement of this legislation. Botha's personal collection contains a 1967 clipping from an article in *Die Burger* that laments some of these consequences. Botha himself is cited for commentary on the negative effects the implementation of the law had had on the coloured community's religious situation. One particularly detrimental effect Botha mentions is the fact that, as a result of forced removals, communities were thus separated from their historic church buildings with the consequence that one now found lots of buildings without people to worship therein, and similarly lots of people in areas where they had no buildings to worship in. To quote and translate him directly:

In the Peninsula alone *eleven church buildings* were affected. Those of us who saw the suffering and sorrow and many tears accompanying the farewell of committed church members to the three church buildings that had already been alienated, we shudder at the thought of what would happen when the doors of all the affected church buildings close for the last time. ... For the sake of stable community development the coloureds should not be cut loose from their historical roots² (Hugo 1967).

The latest newspaper article I could find by Botha on the theme of group areas was a letter published in *Die Transvaler* towards the end of 1973, in which Botha purports to state both positive and negative aspects of the policy in so far as it relates to the coloured population. On the positive side, Botha argues that the newly constructed housing schemes inaugurated in many ways an improvement in conditions compared with the situation in the poverty stricken older neighbourhoods. On one aspect, which would now be deeply problematic for our sensibilities, I translate him as follows: "For the coloured communities, especially in the northern provinces, it was a great gain to move to expedient housing schemes from areas where they formerly had to live amongst the Bantus. Many coloureds are then also openly expressing their appreciation regarding

2 "In die Skiereiland alleen was en is *elf kerkgeboue* geaffekteer. Die van ons wat die leed en smart en baie tranes aanskou het waarmee toegewyde gemeentelede afskeid geneem het van die drie kerkgeboue wat reeds vervreemd is, sidder by die gedagte aan wat sal gebeur as die deure van al die geaffekteerde kerkgeboue vir die laaste maal gesluit word. ... Ter wille van stabiele gemeenskapsontwikkeling mag die Kleurlinge nie los gesny word van hulle historiese wortels nie."

this fact”³ (Botha 1973, “Groepsgebiede: Mooi Kante en Probleme”). However, on the negative side, Botha mentions what is evidently his more familiar context of the Cape Peninsula where the policies on group areas as enacted by authorities had mainly tragic consequences for coloureds, such as the loss of historic church buildings. “The aim of group areas was to eliminate levels of friction between population groups. Now it is unfortunately so that especially in the Western Cape the implementation of the law stimulated the clashing of interests between whites and coloureds to such an extent that new and larger levels of friction emerged”⁴ (Botha 1973).

Botha’s own published writings in newspapers and elsewhere in print present an interesting and complicated character. On the one hand, he was a notable campaigner on the side of the coloured population against many of the strictures imposed by the apartheid regime. However, he firmly operated within an ideology of ethnic and racial plurality. Apartheid, as a just response to this situation, is not disputed or questioned except in the ways the government had drawn the particular lines of their racial categorisation. To further situate Botha within the wider scheme of his contemporary Afrikanerdom, it might be useful to look at the people he corresponded with. His personal collection exhibits an impressive collection of close contacts and friends, including Allan Boesak. However, his correspondences with Andries Treurnicht and Beyers Naudé and the ways in which he both agrees with but also differentiates himself from these two fellow white Afrikaner clergymen of opposing political disposition, are most illuminating for illustrating Botha’s position. Let us consider the correspondences with Treurnicht first.

Correspondences with Andries Treurnicht

Treurnicht, who would eventually end up on the opposite side of the political spectrum from Beyers Naudé within Afrikaner circles, was a minister in the DRC. Over time, he would pursue a political career, first within the National Party, but after a right-wing breakaway from that party in the early 1980s, Treurnicht became the leader of the hard-line Afrikaner nationalist Conservative Party, which was to become the official opposition to the government in the late apartheid era.

In the early 1960s, Treurnicht was still thoroughly mainstream within Afrikanerdom, and editor of *Die Kerkbode*. It is in this context that Botha took up correspondence with him. It is evident from the tone of the letters that they had been good friends. The motivation for Botha’s first letter (28 March, 1961), however, concerned an editorial piece Treurnicht had written on 15 March 1961 for *Die Kerkbode* (Treurnicht 1961a) in

3 “Vir die Kleurlinggemeenskappe, veral in die noordelike provinsies, was dit ’n groot wins om na doelmatige behuisingskemas te verskuif uit gebiede waar hulle tussen die Bantoes moes woon. Baie Kleurlinge spreek dan ook openlik hulle waardering vir hierdie feit uit.”

4 “Die doel met groepsgebiede was om wrywingsvlakke tussen bevolkingsgroepe uit te skakel. Nou is dit ongelukkig so dat veral in Wes-Kaapland die toepassing van die wet die belangebotsing tussen blankes en Kleurlinge so gestimuleer het dat nuwe en groter wrywingsvlakke ontstaan het.”

which missionaries came in for a bit of a hiding. In this article, Treurnicht first gives a standard defence of mission and why it is important for the church to engage in it. God wills it and driven by the love of Christ it is the church's duty in obedience. The article subsequently proceeds to its core message, which is that from Treurnicht's point of view there were legitimate concerns to be raised against missionaries and the way they actually approach their vocation. There is a "kind of approach to racial affairs and political policy as accompanied by the mission preaching and speeches of some ministers that are difficult to swallow. In the same breath as mission preaching, as if of essentially the same concern, the national love of Christians are condemned and insulted as unchristian and immoral. In some simplistic way it is contended that the Bible only makes a distinction between believers and unbelievers and not between national groups"⁵ (Treurnicht 1961a, 356). Treurnicht then continues to detail the apartheid theory that there are at least 10 different national groups (*volks-groepe*) in South Africa. Treurnicht expresses grave concerns about the denial and vilification of these groups' national interests, especially when it comes to the whites.

Then Treurnicht comes to what is evidently the main sticking point necessitating a personal letter from Botha, who had obviously perceived that he himself was the target of this jibe. Treurnicht indignantly and sarcastically mimics the sentiments of his unnamed opponents: "In the name of Christianity and the promotion of the kingdom, Brown people may not be designated as a separate national group, but rather we should against all natural feeling and other factors believe that we and they are one *volk!*"⁶ (Treurnicht 1961a, 356).

Botha's personal letter to Treurnicht admits to some internal wrangling over whether it would have been better to respond officially by way of a letter to *Die Kerkbode* or by personal writing, as he ultimately did. The decision to forego the former course of action, according to Botha, was due to not wishing to seek out a polemical debate with an editor and, also not wanting to place Treurnicht in a difficult position over against, especially, members of the mission church. Hence, in the letter Botha expresses his concern in a familiar and friendly yet also candidly critical fashion. He denies knowing of any minister working in the mission church who preaches the kinds of sermons Treurnicht had accused missionaries of preaching, i.e. in denial of national love (*volksliefde*). According to Botha, if such persons were to be found, they "without a

5 "Maar daar is 'n soort beskouing oor rasse-aangeleenthede en politieke beleid soos dit met die sendingprediking en toesprake van sommige leraars en sendelinge gepaard gaan, wat mense dwars in die krop steek. In een asem met die sendingprediking, asof dit wesenlik daarin opgesluit lê, word Christene se volksliefde veroordeel en beledig as onchristelik en immoreel. Op goedkope wyse word beweer dat die Bybel slegs van 'n skeiding tussen gelowiges en ongelowiges weet en nie van volks-groepe nie."

6 "Uit naam van Christelikheid en die bevordering van die koninkryk mag die Bruinmense nie as 'n afsonderlike volks-groep aangedui word nie, maar moet ons teen alle natuurlike gevoel en ander faktore in, glo dat ons een volk met hulle is!"

doubt would deserve the most strident denouncement from our official organ”⁷ (Botha 1961).

On a more critical level, Botha now pointed out the most basic problem in Treurnicht’s assertions, which is that he does not provide any names. Who were these treacherous missionaries? If Treurnicht could be so kind as to provide their names to the Mission Church’s leadership, they could take it up further with anyone in the wrong. As things stood, everyone was under suspicion as a result of Treurnicht’s article (Botha 1961).

In Treurnicht’s reply, he states that he appreciates Botha writing to him “although I can feel that you are on the verge of saying something, but that you didn’t want to write as ‘sharply’ as I have done”⁸ (Treurnicht 1961b).

Treurnicht furthermore writes that he did not resent Botha for not knowing of anyone in the Mission Church that was busy with the types of “sins” he had alleged them of committing, but of course, he did not blame Botha, because Botha did not have a “hand on everyone’s pulse.” Regarding Botha’s own position and their implied differences, Treurnicht writes the following: “Your stance is certainly not the most radical, but still I do not think you realise how much reaction there has been against your plea for political and churchly integration of whites and coloureds!”⁹ (Treurnicht 1961b). And further along in this lengthy, rather admonishing letter: “I must point out to you that your book has been embraced as an important contribution in the total onslaught against apartheid policy. It has been said: Your book has arrived at just the right time! And these are people in whose company I would prefer not to have seen you in”¹⁰ (Treurnicht 1961b).

Correspondences with and about Beyers Naudé

Although Treurnicht did not elaborate on who these unsavoury people might have been, a good guess is that at least one of them would have been Beyers Naudé. The first letter I could find that Naudé sent to Botha dates from 16 May 1962. At the time Naudé was still minister of the DRC congregation Aasvoëlkop. He had, however, started to experience the awakening of his consciousness in the aftermath of the Cottesloe consultation that would eventually put him on the path of outright rebellion against the apartheid regime and Afrikanerdom at large. The letter to Botha concerns the newly founded journal, *Pro Veritate*, of which Naudé was the editor. Naudé states that he

7 “... verdien ongetwyfeld die allerskerpste teregwyding van ons amptelike orgaan.”

8 “Ek waardeer dit dat jy aan my geskryf het, al kan ek voel jy dreig om iets te sê, maar jy wou nou nie so ‘skerp’ skryf soos ek nie.”

9 “Jou eie standpunt is welig nie die radikaalste nie, en tog dink ek jy besef nie watter reaksie daar teen jou pleit vir politieke en kerklike integrasie van die blankes en die kleurlinge is nie!”

10 “Ek moet jou ook daarop wys dat jou boek deur mense aangegryp is as belangrike bydrae in die totale stryd teen apartheidsbeleid. Dis gesê: Jou boek het net op die regte tydstep verskyn! En dis mense in wie se geselskap ek jou nie graag sou wou sien nie.”

would gladly receive from Botha “and other sympathetic brothers healthy and constructive criticism regarding the contents and structure of the paper.” However, his main reason for writing was to invite Botha to contribute a piece of his own writing on a topic of choice, but perhaps on any issue involving the coloured population (Naudé 1962a).

The next letter to Botha, dated 3 November 1962, concerns Naudé’s wish to obtain more information regarding the just completed DRMC Synod, since very little about it had been reported in the Transvaal newspapers. Naudé now asks Botha to please write an article for the *Kerkbode* explaining the implications of synodical proceedings for the DRMC, including their resolution on coloured education, Cottesloe, and cooperation with the “Mother Church.” He then especially asks Botha to recruit the voices of coloured pastors since: “For us men in the North who are struggling to bring home the truth of things such a testimony would be incredibly valuable—especially if it could be pointed out that if we are not careful then we are going to lose our Christian coloured community”¹¹ (Naudé 1962b).

A response from Botha (28 December 1962) to Naudé at the end of 1962 refers to the 3 November letter (Naudé 1962b). Here, Botha apologises for his late reply to this mentioned letter, which was due to synodical obligations that had kept him busy. Botha mentions some of his church colleagues whom he had approached to contribute writings, and then states the following, which I translate directly: “If I may be of any further help with articles in support of you men in the North then I would gladly do so ...”¹² (Botha 1962). He then states that, generally speaking, the ministers in the DRMC did not like to become involved in battles of the pen. This was why one saw so few letters from that quarter. “However, we should become a little more talkative if we want to give a clear witness. I shall definitely encourage them to write and especially to give commentary by way of their letters.”¹³ Finally, Botha expresses his wish for the “blessing and encouraging grace of our Lord ... so that you may complete your career joyfully and continue to give the beautiful leadership to a confused church as you have been doing so excellently”¹⁴ (Botha 1962).

11 “Vir ons manne in die Noorde wat stry om die waarheid van die dinge tuis te bring sal so ’n getuienis ontsettend baie beteken—veral as daarop gewys word dat ons ons Christen-kleurlinggemeenskap gaan verloor as ons nie oppas nie.”

12 “As ek verder kan help met artikels veral ter ondersteuning van julle manne in die Noorde sal ek dit graag doen ...”

13 “Ons sal egter ’n bietjie meer spraaksaam moet raak as ons ’n duidelike getuienis wil gee. Ek sal hulle beslis aanmoedig om te skryf en veral om kommentaar by wyse van briewe te lewer.”

14 “Mag u die seën en ondersteunende genade van onse Here kennelik ondervind, sodat u met blydschap u loopbaan kan volbring en voortgaan om die pragtige leiding te gee aan ’n verwarde kerk wat u op die oomblik so skitterend gee.”

Some further letters by Naudé to Botha follow, among other things serving to thank him for his financial contribution to the establishing of *Pro Veritate* (Naudé 1963), as well as for writing a positive review of the journal for *Ecumenical News Notes* (Naudé 1965).

The next communication of interest, indirectly involving Naudé, concerns a 1977 draft article for the *Centraal Weekblad voor die Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*. The unnamed Dutch author quotes Botha extensively, including with respect to his differences of opinion concerning certain thorny issues with Beyers Naudé. The first concerns the direction of the Christian Institute, which, according to Botha, had in recent years branched out into a new, and not quite correct, direction. The article and quotations from Botha are in Dutch, but I shall translate the most salient points as follows:

[Naudé] has committed himself to the interests of the oppressed people of South Africa, which is also a biblical principle. But now it transpires that he has become exclusively the advocate of the interests of the black community and that, because of that, he has very little appeal on the white sector. Additionally he has adopted an extremely critical approach over against the DR Church and naturally also against the policy of separate development, etc. He proceeds from the point of view that the apartheid philosophy is an ideology, which stands diametrically opposed to the gospel. Then it follows that everything done in the name of separate development is nothing other than an unholy attempt to maintain the domination of white over non-white. There, in my opinion he misses the point completely, because you can't say that the Afrikaners and the DR Church are engaging in this with evil intent ...¹⁵ (*Centraal Weekblad voor de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* 1977).

Botha further laments that Naudé's black support is all politically focused and of a polarising sort. The following comment betrays what seems like an enduring racial perspective in Botha's thinking, and perhaps the root of his difference of opinion with Naudé: "Every person represents an ethnic group. So it is also in South Africa. We cannot proceed from the dim-witted assumption that white and black could forget their own backgrounds"¹⁶ (*Centraal Weekblad* 1977).

15 "Hij heeft zich verbonden met de behartiging van de belangen van de onderdrukte mensen in Zuid-Afrika, wat ook een bijbels begrip is. Maar nu komt het erop neer, dat hij uitsluitend de pleitbezorger is geworden van de belangen van de zwarte gemeenschap en dat hij daardeur weinig appèl heeft op de blanke sector. Hij neemt daarbij een geweldig kritische houding aan ten opzichte van de N.G.-kerk en natuurlijk ook tegenover het beleid van afzonderlijke ontwikkeling ens. Hij gaat van het standpunt uit, dat de apartheidfilosofie een ideologie is, welke diametraal staat tegenover het evangelie. Daaruit volgt dan dat alles wat uit naam van die afzonderlijke ontwikkeling gedaan wordt, niets anders is dan een onheilige poging om de heerschappij van blank over niet-blank te handhaven. Daar slat hij m.i. de plank behoorlijk mis, want je kunt niet zeggen dat de Afrikaners en de mensen van de N.G.-kerk met bóze opzet te werk gaan ..."

16 "Elke man vertegenwoordigt een ethnische groep. Zo is het ook in Zuid-Afrika. We kunnen niet van de simpele gedachte uitgaan dat blank en zwart hun eigen achtergronden zouden vergeten."

Botha, in this article, is furthermore quoted as denying the importance of the role of liberation movements, commenting that it is problematic when people from abroad give prescriptions about which movements “we” should accept as political movements. In this vein he denies the relevance of the ANC and PAC as being “without any influence” in the Transkei. Regarding SWAPO in Namibia, he identifies it with the MPLA and Cubans in Angola, and he laments the fact that “our righteous demands” and those of these various groupings are being bundled together by outsiders.

Analysis

Botha’s ongoing positioning on these matters strikes me as a balancing act. He was situated within an Afrikaner Reformed context that took apartheid principally for granted. The church in which he served, the DRMC, was arguably the first apartheid structure of note, created in 1881,¹⁷ long before apartheid became the official government policy. It might suffice to state that the DRMC would not have existed were it not for “the weakness of some” (see e.g. Ritner 1967, 19)¹⁸; i.e. the apartheid-inclined worldview of racial separation at the foundations of the white DRC’s social engagement.

Long-term exposure to and direct involvement with a group of people and their problems and concerns apparently had an effect on Botha, who had started out his career as a self-identified missionary. That is to say, he became an insider-outsider; an insider due to his long-term commitment to the church and people among whom he ministered, but at the same time he remained an outsider. In the period under discussion, he remained a white Afrikaner, ideologically embedded in the anthropological views at the foundation of apartheid policy. On a certain level, he came to identify with the people among whom he served, but perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he came to identify with his idea of them, as I shall now explain.

Botha increasingly came to sympathise with the plight of coloured people and their sufferings and indignations at the hands of the regime’s painstaking legislation, that often seemed like a process of dotting the proverbial “i’s” and crossing the proverbial “t’s” in the implementation of their state ideology. This was particularly felt under the hammer of Connie Mulder’s hard-line stance on the matter of coloured segregation.

17 The DRMC came into being when a number of congregations made up of “coloured” members separated from the DRC that had since 1857 officially accepted and allowed the existence of racially divided congregations. The creation of the DRMC, as a semi-autonomous denomination exclusively for coloured/black people, was thus a de facto apartheid structure, even if apartheid as a political policy only emerged in the 20th century.

18 The phrase “weakness of some” refers to the 1857 synod of the DRC, where it was acknowledged that it was wrong and unscriptural to segregate people along racial lines in church. Yet, the synod immediately proceeded to make provision for exactly such wrong and unscriptural regulations to be implemented in situations where the “weakness of some” white members made them disinclined to hold worship together with their black brothers and sisters (See NGK, *Acta Synodi*, 1857, 60).

Mulder, who was Minister of Home Affairs in the early 1970s, rejected any attempt at relaxing apartheid policies for coloureds (*Die Burger* 1973, “Die Kleurlinge is geen Bruin Afrikaners, sê Mulder”). Contrary to Mulder et al., Botha proposed to recognise the coloured population as part and parcel of the white group, in other words to end apartheid measures with regards to the coloured, because such measures were a mistake to begin with. To quote him directly:

The apartheid policy regarding the Bantu was the product of colossal thought and reflection, but as far as the coloureds were concerned, the policy was that of unmotivated and unreasonable application on them of principles that were regarded as valid for the Bantus. This was not only an unforgivable thought error, but it reveals also a regrettable lack of focused reflection.¹⁹ (Botha 1960, 142)

Botha, in his selective critique of apartheid, also quite interestingly rejected the biblical foundation of apartheid as propagated by hard-line apologists at the time. What he describes as a “*teologiese mistasting*” (theological error) had occurred, and this “was in my view responsible for the near religious enthusiasm in which a practical policy direction was propagated”²⁰ (Botha 1960, 149).

This is an interesting stance, because if the biblical justification of apartheid was theologically wrong, did that not make it a heresy by implication? Botha argued that this theological error was precisely the reason why dissenting views in Afrikaner circles were “met with unwavering intolerance and the proponent of such views is so easily termed heretic”²¹ (translated) (Botha 1960, 149). Yet, Botha did not exactly seek to turn the proverbial tables of theological orthodoxy on these Afrikaner assigners of heresy, and as indicated above, this issue of apartheid as a pseudo-gospel was precisely a point of difference between him and a later Beyers Naudé. It seems though that in Botha’s mind, apartheid as a practical matter emphasising whatever was distinctive of every “nation” (*die volkseie*) might indeed be completely plausible and acceptable if there was more difference than similarity between two people groups. To justify this notion, Botha uses the image of centripetal (*middelpuntsoekende*) and centrifugal (*middelpuntvlietende*) forces. With respect to whites and “bantu,” Botha believed that there were still too many centrifugal forces at play moving them into opposite directions.

19 “Die apartheidsbeleid teenoor die Bantoes was die produk van ’n kolossale stuk dinkwerk en besinning, maar wat die Kleurlinge betref, was die beleid die ongemotiveerde en onredelike toepassing op hulle van dieselfde beginsels wat vir die Bantoes as geldig beskou word. Dit is nie alleen ’n onvergeeflike denkfout nie, maar dit openbaar ook ’n betreuenswaardige gebrek aan doelgerigte besinning.”

20 “Bogenoemde teologiese mistasting was myns insiens verantwoordelik vir die byna religieuse geesdrif waarmee ’n praktiese beleidsrigting gepropageer is.”

21 “Dit was myns insiens ook die rede waarom enige afwykende beskouing veral in Afrikanergeledere met so ’n onverbiddelike onverdraagsaamheid bejeën en die verkondiger van daardie beskouing so maklik verketter is.”

“Therefore, apartheid is at this stage certainly the proper practical policy for whites and Bantus ...”²² (Botha 1960, 149).

The problem with respect to the coloureds in the view of Botha was precisely that the majority of them did not have any customs or culture that could properly define them as distinct from the white Afrikaner as a people group. In fact, the centripetal forces weighed heavier in this relationship. Hence idealistic apartheid theorisation, while seemingly quite plausible with respect to the black African population groups, and which therefore had justified their segregation from whites, fell flat when applied to the coloured population. This was the basis of the problem for Botha and what made apartheid policies, including group areas, a morally unacceptable solution when applied to coloureds. The final sentence in his ground-breaking book is both telling in terms of his ideological position in 1960, but also ironic in retrospect: “Let us then give a new meaning to these words by dr. D. F. Malan: *Bring together that which belongs together!*”²³ (Botha 1960, 173).

In retrospect, it is easy to be critical of Botha during this period. By wishing to abolish apartheid for coloured people especially, he did not significantly challenge a system that had its primary stake imbedded in the programme of othering and stereotyping specifically black Africans as much as possible. This would be a valid criticism provided one keeps in mind that every person can only see reality from their own perspective. This point is not made in order to attempt to absolve him, or indeed any other white Afrikaner in the period under question, but it is important to understand the nature of ideological blind-spots for that time—and indeed for any time. Botha’s perspective and blind-spots from the late 1940s to late 1970s were profoundly shaped by a peculiar cross-“cultural” context; that of the Cape coloured communities among which he ministered. That he wanted to assimilate these communities into the white culture and thereby save them from apartheid, might seem rather patronising and somehow insulting. That should not be surprising. It was and is a *sine quo non* of white culture to be patronising and insulting, i.e. there is no white culture without white supremacy.

Hence, an unhelpful question to pursue with respect to Botha in the period under discussion would be to ask whether he was a racist. Apartheid was a racist paradigm and he operated selectively within it rather than diametrically opposed to it. As with much else, racism and non-racism are perhaps not binary conditions. Rather, they function on a spectrum with various possibilities in between. Botha, as a white Afrikaner in the period under discussion, certainly featured somewhere on the spectrum of shades or racism. However, what is evident from the above was that to his own mind, at least, his perspective was shaped more by culture than race. Hence the culturally closer

22 “Daarom is apartheid in hierdie stadium sekerlik die aangewese praktiese beleid vir die blankes en die Bantoes ...”

23 “Laat ons aan hierdie woorde van dr. D. F. Malan ’n nuwe betekenis gee: *Bring bymekaar wat bymekaar hoort!*”

aligned could be classed together, while separation should characterise greater cultural diversity. The ironic tragedy of this line of theorisation is the unavoidability of the fact that race lay at the root of apartheid. For that reason, white supremacy could only be aided by a white man theorising about selectively cancelling apartheid for some, but not for others, however well-intentioned he might have been.

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