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Perspectives on Southern Africa

The Rise of Afrikanerdom

*Power, Apartheid, and the
Afrikaner Civil Religion*

T. Dunbar Moodie

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to public pressure. Members of the Broederbond, except insofar as they were involved in party politics, seldom gave expression to anti-Semitic opinions despite the temptation of the "Hoggenheimer" image. The problem in South Africa, most of them argued, extended beyond the Jews to include just about all English-speaking South Africans—Jewish and non-Jewish alike. In Germany it was impossible to be fully National Socialist without violent anti-Semitism; but for Afrikaners, Christian Nationalism excluded non-Calvinists as well as non-Christians (and, of course, all non-whites). Hence, insofar as Afrikaner intellectuals were anti-Semitic, they were elaborating a personal prejudice and not an integral aspect of the Christian National ideology.

Be that as it may, for intellectuals in the A.N.S., their foremost task and calling was to work for the return of all stray Afrikaners to the national fold. Unlike Malan, who was seeking the same goal on a political level, they chose to operate within the realm of *kultuurpolitiek*.

Two major divisions hindered Afrikaner *volkseenheid*, argued Diederichs in speech after speech—vertical political differences and urban migration, which divided the nation horizontally. Both these dislocations in the Afrikaner organism could be healed only by a higher adherence to "culture":

There are matters upon which Afrikaners can clasp hands across the chasm of division, bitterness and fragmentation. Political programs disappear but culture continues to exist. We ought not to sacrifice our nation for a political party; we must stand together as a separate Afrikaner nation. . . .

If the worker is drawn away from our nation, then we might as well write Ichabod on the door of our temple. The worker has always supplemented the higher classes; the working classes are the spring from which the nation draws. Today there is a determined struggle underway which is aimed at the working classes, the foundation of our People. There are forces at work in the bosom of the People which seek to unite our workers with the proletariat of other lands. . . . The headquarters of this movement is in Moscow. . . . In South Africa we believe that the Afrikaner worker is still the best and most reliable Afrikaner. He must be drawn into his nation in order to be a genuine man. There must be no division or schism between class and class. May the day break here as

is the case in Italy and Germany, where the worker may comfort himself with the thought: "What I do here I do as a worker, but I do it in service of my nation." [*Die Oosterlig*, November 8, 1937]²¹

Diederichs thus continued to preach his version of nationalism, but increasingly and with typical vigor and clarity he began to speak and write against communism. By 1935, neo-Fichtean nationalists seemed to believe that if there were not a concerted drive to bring city-dwellers back into the organic unity of the nation, communism would gather in the poor urban Afrikaners. This threat was indeed imminent, warned Dr. J. de W. Keyter:

In the cities black and white live together. There is no chance of moral development. Where is our religion and our love for the nation? We reject our own people and they shy from our religion. . . . The people are easily exploited. They have but one ideal, bread alone is necessary for life, they know not religion and ethnic feeling. They have no sense of duty. The feeling of dependence [on charity] has overcome them. . . . Youth is by nature interested in politics. They would rather follow heroes but we are driving our young people to communism. . . . The chase for profit, irresponsibility towards our neighbors and preference for native-labor is driving our young people away from us. . . . [*Die Vaderland*, September 24, 1935]

No systematic attack on class problems was launched until 1936. At the beginning of that year, Piet Meyer returned from Amsterdam having completed his doctoral studies and became assistant secretary of the F.A.K. (cf. *Wapenskou*, November 1935). His impact on the ideological direction of the organization was immediate. In May he issued, in the name of the F.A.K., two lengthy statements proposing cultural unity as the solution to the two most serious threats to Afrikaner *volkseenheid* as perceived by him and his fellows: the conciliatory party politics of the United party and the divisive effects of "communist-inspired" class conflict.²² In

²¹ The Nazi influence in this attitude to class conflict is obvious. It was explicitly acknowledged in a speech by H. G. Schultze at the 1934 A.N.S. congress (*Die Burger*, October 6, 1934).

²² Characteristically wordy, these circulars were published in full in *Die Republikein* (May 1 and May 8, 1936). See also Cronje's editorial in *Wapenskou* (March 1936).

July 1936, after the annual meetings of the Broederbond and the F.A.K., he formed a Nasionale Kultuurraad ("National Cultural Council"). According to Meyer, the new Raad was designed to unite all organizations of the Afrikaner People under a single direction:

Not only would the Afrikaans churches, the women's associations, teachers' organizations, cultural associations, youth organizations and so on be included, but provision would also be made for the establishment of political and legal study circles and the organization of Afrikaans workers and officials into Afrikaans-Christian personnel and labor unions. Finally, farmer and homecraft associations would also be represented on the great national council. [*Die Volksblad*, July 2 and July 3, 1936]

In practice, what Meyer was proposing was that the F.A.K. together with the Afrikaans churches become involved in organizing urban Afrikaner workers into "Christian National" labor unions in order to reintegrate them into the organic unity of the *volk*.

On October 4, 1936, Meyer and Diederichs along with Albert Hertzog and an Afrikaner banker named Frikkie de Wet met in Johannesburg to found an organization which would provide financial backing for the Christian-National Afrikaner trade unions. They called this organization the Nasionale Raad van Trustees ("National Council of Trustees"). Among those eminent Afrikaners who agreed to serve on this council were Mrs. M. T. Steyn, widow of the late president, along with Totius, J. D. Kestell, J. C. van Rooy, and Ivan Lombard—the last two chairman and secretary, respectively, of the Broederbond—and Ds. J. R. Albertyn, Poor-Relief Secretary of the Transvaal N.G. Two thousand pounds was given by Mrs. Jannie Marais in order that full time union organizers could be appointed (Naude, 1969, pp. 36-62).

There was only one precedent for the formation of "cultural" trade unions in South Africa. In March 1935, a few enthusiastic Broederbonders who were also railway employees founded a union for railwaymen called the Spoorbond. Their goals included the defense of the Afrikaans language and the encouragement of a Christian spirit in addition to better working conditions and higher wages. They made no distinction between different classes of railway workers, but appealed

to all to unite in a single organization.²³ By 1938, a majority of the employees of the South African Railways had joined the Spoorbond. Then the United party broke the movement by requiring separate union representation for different skilled trades. However, at the time that Meyer, Diederichs, and Albert Hertzog founded the National Council of Trustees, the rapidly growing Spoorbond must have served as an inspiring example.

Since the whole South African economy revolves around gold production, the National Council of Trustees decided that their first major task was to organize the mine workers. Not only were a majority of white miners Afrikaans-speaking but there was general dissatisfaction within the existing Mine Workers' Union over its corruption and ineffectiveness (Sachs, 1953, pp. 169ff.). If the mine workers, the aristocrats of labor, could be organized along Christian National lines, other industrial employees would follow suit.

On November 24, 1936, Meyer and Albert Hertzog officially established the Afrikanerbond van Mynwerkers. Faas de Wet, himself a mine worker, was appointed part-time chief organizer. One of those who was part of the movement from the beginning described the task of enlightening and organizing the mine workers as "thankless work."

Most of them had to be convinced of the necessity of joining a trade union and those who belonged to the [existing] Mine Workers' Union had to be persuaded to leave it. From one end of the Rand to the other the young men had to work night after night, from Nigel and Springs to Krugersdorp and Randfontein, at the shaft heads and in homes. And the time in which such work could be done was short—during the brief hours between the time when the worker returned from the afternoon shift and the time when he crawled early into bed. There were 52 mines with 189 shafts spread over a distance of 80 miles across the Rand. Thence Dr. Hertzog and his fellows had to hasten every evening, winding between endless mine heaps and through thickly populated areas. It was an enormous task. . . ." [Naude, 1969, pp. 27-28]

²³ A good brief account of the founding of the Spoorbond is the speech by P. J. de Kok at the foundation meeting of the Afrikanerbond van Mynwerkers reported in *Die Volksblad* (November 27, 1936). See also *Die Burger* (May 8, 1937) and *Die Transvaler* (October 8, 1937).

As the wagons approached their destinations, so the call for unity reached a crescendo on the note of republican independence. The colors of the old republics were everywhere displayed, and republicanism became more and more the expressed goal. On December 3, 1938, at Pietersburg, Professor J. C. van Rooy, chairman of the Broederbond and normally a very cautious man,⁴ was moved to say:

We must gather as a consolidated People at the feast in Pretoria. If we stand together as Afrikaners, the leaders and enemies who would keep us divided will be unable to prevent us. We shall go there as one People despite the leaders and others who divide us, and we shall throw off all the ties which hinder our march to freedom. Why should not the privilege of freedom, which is granted to all the countries of the world, also be granted to us? [*Ossewa Gedenkboek*, 1940, p. 669]

In his diary, N. G. S. van der Walt reported:

Last week I was in Johannesburg for important matters. Grobbelaar (of the Bondswag) came to fetch me for a meeting of four movements to decide about the freedom of our nation on December 16. From three in the afternoon to two the next morning, we discussed continuously. The outcome is that we shall be ready should difficulties arise. We shall not ourselves lead a *coup d'état*, but will make every effort to get the People thinking in that direction. [Van der Walt, N. G. S., diary, November 13, 1938]

Thus did the fringe movements make ready to profit from any fortuitous disruption. However, the wakeful watching was not restricted to the right-wing fringe of Afrikanerdom. According to Piet Cillié,⁵ in the very editorial offices of *Die Burger* there was a sense of expectancy. Had the eschatological moment promised by the civil theology at last arrived? "Tomorrow," said the editorial in *Die Oosterlig*, (December 15, 1938) "a new day will dawn for the Afrikaner People; the dayspring of the fulfillment of its ideal; of victory in its freedom-struggle."

The slowly mounting tension as the oxwagons gradually, laboriously moved closer to Pretoria and Blood River was whipped to fever pitch by a torch marathon organized by

⁴ For a measure of van Rooy's moderation see his article in *Koers* (August 1935).

⁵ He is at present editor-in-chief of *Die Burger*.

N. J. van der Merwe's Voortrekker movement. Torches, symbolizing the light of both freedom and "white civilization," were handed from one group of runners to the next along the Path of South Africa, in order that, fourteen days after the departure from Cape Town, they should arrive on the eve of Geloftedag in Pretoria and Blood River together with the oxwagons.

In Bloemfontein on December 12, the arrival of the torches on their way north aroused an enthusiasm that knew no bounds. Traffic was at a standstill, and everyone pushed forward to touch a torch or place a handkerchief in the flame. Old Father Kestell haranged the assembled on the significance of the torches:

We have received a fire from God, that fire is our nationhood. It is wonderful to think that this nationhood is from God—a burning torch which is not extinguished. It has been kept burning all the way from the statue of van Riebeeck to here. By the mercy of God it has burned until now. It must be kept burning. We must assure that it continues to burn in the future. To the gift of our nationhood is bound the virtues of righteousness, of goodness, sincerity and piety—the torch must be kept burning. [*Die Volksblad*, December 12, 1938]

On arrival in Pretoria, the holy torches were met by three thousand Voortrekkers, each with a torch of his own. They marched in company over the hill to the monument site. At their head strode the robust figure of N. J. van der Merwe. A huge bonfire had been prepared at the scene, and as each Voortrekker filed past it, he hurled his torch onto the conflagration. Flames shot heavenward—a signal for other fires to be lit on the hilltops all about Pretoria, so that the city should stand encircled with fire. Elsa Joubert, one of the three thousand scouts, who was then sixteen, described the scene:⁶

The hearts of the three thousand Voortrekkers, each of whom in his own town had formed a link in the chain of the Torch Marathon, beat faster when they saw the light of the torch coming towards them over the hills in the dusk. . . .

The hill is on fire; on fire with Afrikaner fire; on fire with the enthusiasm of Young South Africa! You are nothing—your

⁶ *Die Burger* ran a competition in January 1939 which elicited many descriptions of "my most memorable moment in the Ossewa-trek."

to Prosperity and so enable it to fulfill its God-given calling. . . . [In the past] we accepted as inevitable that the masses who were unable to adjust [to capitalism] quickly or well enough should drop to poor-whiteism. Sympathetically we belittled them and separated ourselves from them, or at best offered them "alms" in a philanthropic manner. . . . Meantime this process of adjustment was destroying our People by denationalization of its economic leaders and proletarianization of its producing masses. But in the awakening of self-consciousness the People has become aware of this also, and the new ethnic movement is intended to prevent the further destruction of the Afrikaner People in an effort to adjust to a foreign capitalist system, and intends rather to mobilize the People to conquer this system and to transform it so that it fits our ethnic nature. [Du Plessis, E. P., 1964, p. 104]

Capitalism had thus to be transformed from its base in liberal individualism to an ethnic system which would work to the good of the Afrikaner People as a nation. This was to be achieved by Afrikaner control of both production and consumption. Afrikaner capital should thus be organized to support Afrikaner enterprise, both by investment in Afrikaner business and by purchase of Afrikaner goods. For this purpose M. S. Louw proposed the establishment of a specifically Afrikaner investment house, and H. F. Verwoerd urged the formation of Afrikaner consumers' cooperatives.

Fifty percent of the Reddingsdaad fund was to be invested in the new Afrikaner investment house, Federale Volksbeleggings, and the remainder was to be placed under the control of the Economic Institute of the F.A.K., an appointed body whose executive was made up entirely of members of the Broederbond. Of this amount, ten percent was to be devoted to miscellaneous expenditures—mostly grants to Afrikaner church and women's poor-relief organizations. The remainder would be invested in Afrikaner business. Although about twenty percent of this sum was invested in the large Afrikaner insurance companies, SANLAM and SANTAM, and in Volkskas (the Afrikaans bank, founded by the Broederbond in 1934) in the absence of other large Afrikaner companies the rest was used to support retailers with short-term loans (Diederichs, n.d.). Such loans were granted only after due

"investigation" by the Broers of the Economic Institute. Although by 1950, Afrikaners still numbered only about ten percent of all businessmen in South Africa, the Reddingsdaad fund did give the Broederbond a remarkable measure of control in Afrikaner business life. Director's lists of Afrikaner companies read extraordinarily like the membership rolls of the Broederbond.

What touched ordinary Afrikaners most closely, however, was the third prong of the Broederbond advance into the economic sphere. The economic congress also determined to establish the Reddingsdaadbond (R.D.B.) a "great ethnic organization, Christian National in principle," whose purpose was "to knit together all Afrikaners in order to further their cultural and, above all, their economic interests" (*Die Volksblad*, April 24, 1941). Dr. Diederichs gave up his professorship to become leader of the R.D.B. He embellished it with his own zeal and and rhetoric. The R.D.B., he said, must be seen not as an organization or association but as a "deed"—a deed which unites all Afrikaners, which frees them from economic bondage, a sacrificial deed, and above all, a deed of faith.

Our People has need of such a salvation deed (*reddingsdaad*). And if Father Kestell were alive today, he would surely have cried out again to the whole People, saying: Come Afrikaners across the length and breadth of our land, come in your thousands, your tens of thousands, your hundreds of thousands. Come from near and come from far. Come you rich and come you poor, you learned and you unlettered, you from the farms and you from the cities. Come Afrikaners, children of the same nation, one and all you must come. For we are busy with a great work; we are building a temple. Come, let us build together. Come let us do great deeds. Deeds of sacrifice which unite, deeds of sacrifice which are fed by a great faith. Come, let us stand together for a great deed which shall unite and liberate. Come, let us stand together in an immovable sacrificial deed; let us stand together one and all in a great mighty resounding Reddingsdaad. [*Die Transvaler*, November 20, 1942]

The R.D.B. was financed from subscriptions (sixpence per month), and by 1946, the membership was more than 65,000. Local R.D.B. branches gathered throughout the year for

properly Afrikaner recreations like folk dancing and *boeresport*. However, the movement was meant to be more than simply inspirational for the civil religion. Its major intention was to teach Afrikaners that trade and commerce were not at odds with the civil faith and Afrikaner *volkseenheid*. To this end, Afrikaners were provided with loans for the study of trades and business and were proffered advice on investments,⁵ and efforts were made to organize the buying power of Afrikaners into cooperative unions. Afrikaners were urged to save in Afrikaans savings banks, and membership in the R.D.B. automatically brought a small amount of life insurance and burial insurance for those who joined (*Die Volksblad*, May 24, 1941).

The entire Broederbond attack on urban poverty was focused through a narrow ethnic lens. Despite the undoubted poverty of the white urban migrants, the major burden of industrialization in South Africa was borne not by these whites but by the mass of black men who were moving into the cities along with them. In 1935, the average annual cash earnings of whites in the mines was eleven times that of non-whites. In manufacturing and construction, the ratio of earnings was five to one. The fact that by 1950, the ratio had increased to fifteen to one in the mines perhaps reflects the success of Hertzog's reform movement; but in industry the ratio remained a fairly constant five to one, increasing to six to one during recessions (Houghton, 1967, p. 256). Malan's polemics of the "Afrikaner of the new Great Trek" meeting "the non-white beside his Blood River, partly or completely unarmed" bear no weight against such statistics. In fact, the new Afrikaner urban migrant was extremely well armed with the tradition of racial wage inequalities, backed by General Hertzog's "civilized labor" legislation, and with the vote, that was of course denied to the black man.

Economic advances through the Reddingsdaad were therefore slight for the ordinary Afrikaner, although it certainly helped enrich those Broederbonders who organized it. The economic "great leap forward" for the Afrikaner came after

⁵ The R.D.B. was the instrument by which the Economic Institute circulated its loans to small businesses.

the victory of the National party in 1948, when political power reinforced the economic movement.⁶ However, the Reddingsdaad did have two important results. First, it gave the Afrikaner elite such experience in commerce that they would be able to make valuable economic use of their new-found political power once the National party came to power. Second, the symbolic effect of the Reddingsdaadbond, impossible though it is to measure must have been considerable. For example, certain intellectual leaders of the Afrikaner civil faith began to shift from the old attack on "Hoggenheimer" to praise of the new "People's Capitalism," without in any way casting off their traditional civil religion, and to urge that Afrikaners cultivate the virtues of an urban industrial society: to invest, to strike, to spend, to borrow, and to lend at interest. Despite its rural origins, the Afrikaner civil religion adapted surprisingly easily to urban industrial life. Perhaps, as Marxists would argue, this was because the Afrikaner proletariat was part of a racial oligarchy. However, relative to his English-speaking white fellow countrymen, the Afrikaner remained economically inferior (Afrikaners' average annual income was two-thirds that of English-speaking South Africans during this period); and the new interpretation of the civil religion had always to present ethnic interest against the English as well as racial domination of the black African.

⁶ For a convincing statement of the argument that the economic successes of Afrikanerdom have been based upon the acquisition of political power, see Bunting (1969, Chapter 14).

to commit matricide, and that at a time when in the face of the crisis on the political front we need the party more than ever before. . . .

Our new ethnic organizations are all necessary and signs of life and growth, but they must all stand upon their own roots and draw their strength from the Afrikaans mother earth which has been prepared by our party in years of struggle and sacrifice. . . . (Pienaar, S. W., 1964, pp. 38-39)

Malan's speech was greeted with wild enthusiasm by the delegates, who not only voted to establish the leadership of the party in party-political matters, but went as far as to declare Malan *volksleier* ("leader of the People") as well as the party leader.

Furthermore, du Plessis' Broederbond *Eenheidskomitee* ("Unity Committee") issued a "Declaration on Behalf of *Volksorganisasies*", signed by Ivan Lombard for the F.A.K.; by J. F. J. van Rensburg for the O.B.; by L. J. du Plessis for the Economic Institute of the F.A.K.; by Nic Diederichs for the R.D.B.; and, in their individual capacities, by Ds. J. P. van der Spuy, chairman of the Council of Dutch Reformed churches; Ds. I. D. Kruger, chairman of the interchurch commission of the Dutch churches; and Ds. D. F. Erasmus, of the Calvinist Union. Each signatory promised support in his own respective terrain to any political party whose principles coincided with his own. Their statement of principles, although lengthy, I quote in full because it provides in reasonable compass a summary of the Christian National ideology which was acceptable to both party and O.B. groups within the Broederbond, as well as representing a compromise between the social metaphysics of the Kuyperians on the one hand and Diederichs and the A.N.S. on the other. The declaration reads with regard to principles:

The state must be genuinely free and republican and Christian National. It must acknowledge as basic the eternal legal principles of the Word of God, the clear direction of the development of our ethnic history, and the necessary application of this past to modern circumstances.

The constitutional system must not be cast in a foreign mold. It must break away from all which is false or damaging to the People in democracy as it is here known, and must make

possible a powerful government built upon the concepts of People's government of the South African republics, with necessary application in an industrial state for furthering the interests of the People. No inroads may be made upon the freedom of conscience and independence of the social spheres which are grounded in creation unless state policy as laid down is being undermined.

Far-reaching social and economic reforms must be undertaken. Exploitation of Afrikanerdom by any financial power must be ended. The riches of the land must be powerfully developed in service to the People and in order to ensure a worthwhile living standard for every member of the People. The backward position of Afrikaners in various professions must be eliminated. Education must rest upon a Christian National foundation, and the maintenance of mother-tongue education must be ensured. The Afrikaner, as the original exploiter of the land, must be confirmed in his citizenship, and protected against domination by any who will not extend their fullest loyalty to the country. His rights must receive absolute protection and be guarded at all times. The state must undertake the fullest measure of responsibility for the health of the People. . . . Strongest emphasis must be laid upon the purposive disciplining of the People. The leaders must be able to expect complete obedience and faith from Afrikanerdom as long as they manage the state or other activities of ethnic concern in accordance with the way shown by Afrikanerdom itself and flowing from its history. [*Die Transvaler*, June 13, 1941]

The guiding principles of this Broederbond Christian Nationalism were thus the sacred history of Afrikanerdom and the Word of God. Hence the emphasis on the coming republic and on mother-tongue education. On the face of it, *sowereiniteit in eie kring* was assured, although on the condition that it not undermine state policy.⁸ The principles of economic and social action are the areas in which the declaration comes closest to National Socialism. In fact, if one may be permitted a theological analogy, the *kerygma* ("gospel") was firmly rooted in the Kuyperian version of the civil religion, but the *didache* ("ethical prescriptions") were National Socialist, or at least neo-Fichtean.

⁸ It is difficult to imagine that Kuyperians especially Stoker, can have felt easy about this reservation. Certainly Kuyper himself would have rejected it out of hand.

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