

**PREACHING BETWEEN ASSIMILATION AND SEPARATION:  
PERSPECTIVES ON CHURCH AND STATE IN SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

*This paper attempts to describe the basic hermeneutical structure underlining “apartheid preaching” (when there was a complete assimilation of the Dutch Reformed Church into the state), in terms of its historical analogies, moralistic trends and stigmatization of the “enemy”. This is contrasted to the post-apartheid experience of separation between church and state, posing the question whether the abovementioned structures have somehow re-emerged, albeit in different forms, to haunt the current homiletical scene, as expressions of stabilization, emigration and separation.*

**1. THE HERMENEUTICAL STRUCTURE OF APARTHEID PREACHING**

**1.1 Introduction**

During the apartheid years church (specifically the Dutch Reformed Church<sup>3</sup>) and state were for all practical purposes, one. As a matter of fact, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) was often referred to as the National Party (apartheid government) at prayer. This complete *assimilation*<sup>4</sup> of the church into the state had a profound influence not only on the church and theology of the day, but also on its preaching. In the first part of this paper I will give a brief summary<sup>5</sup> of some of the trends in DRC preaching during these years of assimilation.

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<sup>3</sup> In this paper comments on church and state are made only from the perspective of the Dutch Reformed Church. Of course, there are a multitude of churches and denominations in South Africa, each with its own stories and contributions in this regard. Many of these churches and denominations criticized the state prophetically and produced many articulate and well-known “prophets” like Desmond Tutu, Beyers Naude and others. It is impossible to do justice to the richness of this tapestry within the limitations of this paper.

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps it could even be called *domination*, with the National Party government prescribing fully what form of theology was to be practised within the Dutch Reformed Church.

<sup>5</sup> What follows is a condensation of my book *God vir ons. ‘n Analise en beoordeling van Nederduitse Gereformeerde volksprediking (1960-1980)*. B-reeks van Woord teen die lig (B/2). Kaapstad: Lux-Verbi 1994; also translated into English: *God for us? An analysis and evaluation of Dutch Reformed preaching during the apartheid years*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press 2006.

During 1992 to 1993 I analyzed a substantial corpus of sermons preached within the DRC<sup>6</sup> during the heyday of apartheid, the results of which were published in 1994, the birth-year of our democracy in South Africa. In formal terms the purpose of my research was to assess the *hermeneutical method* of these sermons by means of rhetorical and theological criteria, following the analytical method that the theologian, Rudolf Bohren, and the German author, Gerd Debus, developed at the University of Heidelberg in Germany (summarized briefly in Bohren/ Jörns 1989:55-61).

The sermons were all from the period 1960 to 1980, an era in South African history that, on the one hand, was still characterized by a post-war prosperity among a large part of the white population, and on the other hand, by a growing relational problem and alienation among the various population groups. In this respect the events at Sharpeville (1960) formed a type of watershed and focused the world's attention on South Africa, with increasing international isolation, sanctions, and internal unrest and violence. (For an extensive discussion, cf. Muller 1980:510-520.) South Africa's subsequent withdrawal from the Commonwealth (May 1961) led to its greatest economic crisis since the depression of 1930 to 1932. A combination of political, economic and social factors resulted in experiences of anxiety amongst a section of especially the whites, who felt that their identity and continued existence were threatened. In many respects it was a time of upheaval in which the "white" church wished to guide its members pastorally, also in its preaching. The sermons that are at issue here must be understood in this light as sermons that had the explicit or implicit intention to be relevant by uttering a timely word for that troubled era. In a sense these sermons expressed the religious interpretation of the "people's"<sup>7</sup> state of emergency, expressed a search for religious anchors, for consolation, and thus could be called a type of *pastoral preaching to the people*.

Therefore, the broad coordinating system within which the sermons could be placed is the experience of threat and anxiety, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the intention to define theologically the "people's" situation and, indeed, justify it, as the analyses

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<sup>6</sup> Thus, the *theological tradition* pertaining to the sermons were Reformed; in fact all of them were published in *Die Kerkbode*, the official paper of the DRC, but in no way represent an exact image statistically of all preaching from this time. Naturally, there were also other voices that expressed the "people's situation" completely differently. There were also sermons – perhaps the majority – that made no mention of the situation.

<sup>7</sup> The Afrikaans word "volk" constitutes a key concept in these sermons. "Volk" could be translated as people or nation, but explicitly meant the white Afrikaner as an ethnic group.

indicate.<sup>8</sup> The hermeneutical choices and short-circuiting that emanated from the response to this threat were assessed with the help of linguistic and theological criteria. They could be summarized as indicated below.

## **1.2 The first step: backwards, into the security of historical analogies**

The most general and indeed decisive structure for understanding the sermons analyzed is the *situational analogy* that was presumed between current and biblical times. Its basic point of departure is: what applied then, also applies to us; what God did or asked of humans then, also applies in our times. Applied to a person, this reads: as it happened to this or that biblical figure, it also happens to contemporary people in their encounter with God (Josuttis 1966:23).

Therefore, the hinges on which such an analogous scheme turn are often expressions such as: “*Thus, precisely thus, it also is today*”; “*We are also ...*”; “*Exactly so our people also ...*”; “*Like the Jewish people, our people also ...*”; “*Our times and circumstances are not very different than in Noah’s time,*” etcetera. The purpose is to say: what we now experience is not unique - others have already experienced it. The intention was to indicate that the respective times were in reality *identical* and, in so doing, to try to place our own situation and time within the salvific-historical perspective. *The use of this analogous scheme represented a search for security in a time of emergency.* The basic *presumption* of this was that the actuality of God’s Word *depends* on the parallelism of historically comparable situations and the conformity of general anthropological structures. Therefore, preaching must seek similarities, identifications, comparisons and examples to serve as a current consolation and appeal.

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<sup>8</sup> These factors played a decisive role in providing the *criterion* for the selection of the sermons, in the sense that sermons were selected that strongly addressed the two abovementioned poles, i.e. the external threat, on the one hand, and religious “solutions”, on the other.

*In my opinion, this analogical schematism<sup>9</sup> dispelled unilaterally the tension that characterizes the dialectic relation between God and time. Instead of (the eternal) God being proclaimed as the One who acts in new and surprising ways in relative times, He becomes bound and thus idolized in these relative times. By implication, He is divided into two. On the one hand, He is written into an ancient situation (e.g. 300 BC). On the other hand, He becomes trapped in the present day. Strictly speaking, He cannot act anew and differently. Ironically, by His being so trapped in history and in proclamation, He is taken from history and his Sovereignty over history is taken from Him. If I interpret this correctly, through this He becomes an *unhistorical principle*.*

Actually, this kind of analogical schematism is a way of escaping from time, from the continuation of time, and from God's self-revelation *in* time; it is a reaching back into history to avoid contemporary realities and the future. It represents a particular form of anti-prophecy that does not dare to jump ahead, but rather arrests time and reproduces history. In this arrest and reproduction, God becomes comparable and inactive. However, God is precisely the opposite: He is the *incomparable, active One* (Wolf 1969:400ff), because He is distinct from all gods, powers of nature, historical events, or the world's primeval functions.

Most of the sermons analyzed linked the historical situation on the Afrikaner people to proposed comparable or even identical situations in ancient Israel. *So Israel, so the Afrikaner*. This schematic analogy was used as a primary and primitive homiletic tool to *stabilize* the Afrikaner in times of anxiety and turmoil, implying that as God was for Israel, so He is for us. God Himself becomes the personification of an idea, a mechanism by which national viewpoints are projected on a metaphysical level. *God becomes nationalized*.

### **1.3 The second step: inwards, into the “potential” of the people**

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<sup>9</sup> The analogical scheme that wants to create a timeless system is a form of myth building. This “history,” this myth, is the nation's history as reflected in the sermons and in which the people's identity can be found. Its purpose is to give the national history eternal, unchangeable value. This takes place through an “exchange” of histories, an identification of it: the salvific history is replaced by the nation's history, and vice versa. The history of the people becomes divine, becomes a revelation – of the myth. In the process God is not only dehistoricized, but He also becomes historicized nationally in the sense that he must legitimize the national history. This exchange of histories is possible – in terms of Barthes (1964:113ff) – because the myth changes history into nature, because it brings to the fore and absolutizes timeless, generally valid, stringent aspects of history by means of abstraction, reduction and analogies.

The abovementioned analogical schematism implements a number of mechanisms that are usually reliable signs of, and consistently accompany, these schematisms. For example, the analogical schematism is continuously articulated in *imperative speech structures*. As a matter of fact, there is a logical connection between analogical schematism and these speech structures: the analogical schematism as such already embodies and therefore provides the imperative structure. *The actions or situations of people who in biblical times formed the presumption for the proclamation today become conditional for this proclamation* (Josuttis 1966:24). What previously was a word about God's actions in history becomes a word about people's actions in history, and then in such a way that it forms an appeal to the present audience to act accordingly. Theological declarations become moralistic appeals; given situations (in which God acts) become conditional situations (in which people must act); for example: "*If we as Afrikaners can act again like the people of Israel, God will bless us exactly as He blessed Israel*"; "*If we as Afrikaners have faith like Abraham, God will lead us to our destiny, just as He led Abraham*", etc. (cf. Cilliers 2006: 19 f.).

Therefore it is quite understandable that the analogical schematism appears mainly in *conjunctive speech forms*: realities are discussed as possibilities; instead of realities, possibilities are postulated in the *futurum*. However, these postulations are also subject to a condition: when people perform certain actions, it will be evident that the (mythological) postulated and unreal image of history can become a "reality" in the sense that it is "true" and "normative"; the current time will then indeed be akin to past times, and vice versa. Therefore, the *conjunctivus irrealis* becomes evident in the *conditional construction of sentences*, even when it does not function explicitly, like "when ... then," "if ... then", etc. In this way salvific historical realities, the reality of God Himself, are preached as future goals. *Because God is incorporated in the postulated image of history, He is also discussed in unreal, conditional terms* (Bohren 1991:3).

One could say that this form of moralistic preaching stems from a perspective of God's absence. In this sense nothing *happens in this preaching*: the congregation is informed about *what happened* in biblical times, but which *does not happen* today, and what the congregation must do now to *allow it to happen again* (Josuttis 1966:30).

That the boundaries between “nation” and “church” are flexible, that they are even alternative terms, is a fixed and logical element in all the sermons. The church becomes the nation, and the nation becomes the church. *Essentially, the sermons are not concerned about the one, catholic church, but about the condition of the nation.* All the sermons include a type of “national programme” which consists basically of moralizing appeals. The nation must be strong and healthy. In this way God will ensure its future. *Within this national imperative framework, the unique nature of the church, as church of Jesus Christ, can in principle not come to fruition. Rather, the (Afrikaner) people are called upon to dig deep into themselves, to become introspective, to find the answers to the crises in the recesses of their inner potential.*

#### **1.4 The third step: outwards, projecting guilt onto the “enemy”**

One of the ways in which the security (identity) of the people is stabilized in these sermons is by projecting guilt onto *others*. The tendency of *escaping* from time (cf. 1.2) is accompanied by the creation of a *scapegoat*. A dualism is formed between the “inner group” (the nation) and the “external group” (the enemies). Throughout this process the *enemy* is regarded as the active force, while the people are seen as passive victims of these external forces. *This active-passive dualism forms a fixed component in each “situational analysis” that is done:* the future existence and identity of the nation are at risk; it experiences one of its greatest crises - but did not cause it. Examples like the following (cf. Cilliers 2006: 60 f.) were quite (stereo)typical of the preaching of that period, and speak for themselves:

*The Afrikaner nation, indeed, finds itself in an unenviable position. We are eminently the target of hate-propaganda in virtually all countries worldwide. Many associations or complicities are busy inciting hatred and intolerance against us, apparently supported by virtually inexhaustible financial sources. In writings, newspapers, over the radio, by means of television, the crudest lies are exuberantly blazoned forth presenting our nation as evildoers...The plan is clear. We must be isolated and then ultimately be liquidated.*

The primary function of this projection of guilt is self-justification, in the sense that a negative delimitation of the others confirms the nation's own identity. To the extent that the others are stigmatized as enemies of God, the nation is stabilized as friends of God; the polemic against the others strengthens the apology for one's own nation. Here we truly see the homiletics of apartheid at work: we, the Afrikaners, are here (a minority against the world, but righteous in our actions); and they, the enemy are there (a majority and intrinsically evil). We must be kept apart and intact as a people at all costs. With preaching like this, small wonder that we had signs like these all over our country:



## 2. THE FRAGMENTATION OF POST-APARTHEID PREACHING

### 2.1 Introduction

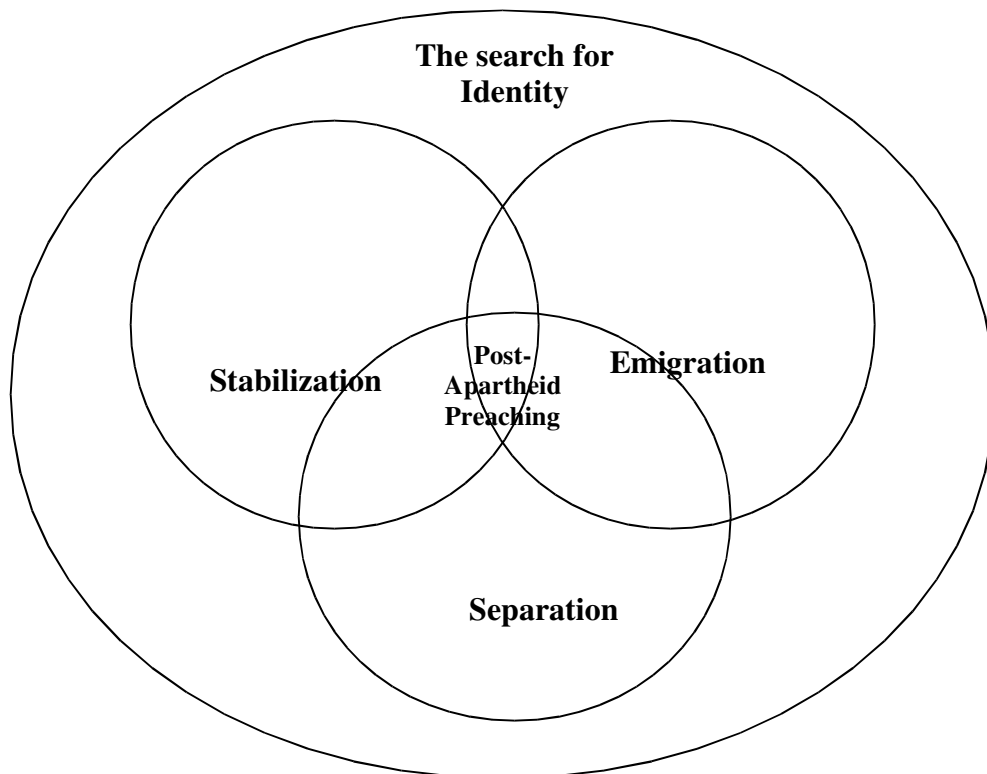
With the demise of apartheid the relationship between church and state has changed profoundly: whereas the state controlled the (Dutch Reformed) Church to a large extent under apartheid, the church has now found a new freedom to express and be herself. This *separation* between church and state also had the effect of *liturgical and homiletic fragmentation*: different ecclesiological styles, liturgical spiritualities and modes of preaching have arisen, following certain patterns, for instance, with fundamentalist,

charismatic, meditative (and sometimes aesthetic), consumerist (often coupled with technological expertise), liberalist (so-called “New Reformers”), ascetic, and apathetic considerations – to name but a few.

A fascinating question would be whether the stereotypical hermeneutical structure that I have described so far has in some way survived and perhaps re-emerged in different forms in post-apartheid preaching, specifically also in the DRC. For the sake of comparison<sup>10</sup> I would like to discuss certain contemporary trends using keywords that are reminiscent of the hermeneutical structure as described, namely *stabilizing* (or *de-stabilizing*), *emigration* (that is, inner emigration), and (once again!) *separation*. The common denominator in all of these keywords, however, is the search for a (new) *identity* that permeates our young democracy and which, in my opinion, also has an impact on contemporary DRC preaching. Perhaps this could be illustrated graphically as follows:

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<sup>10</sup> This of course implies delimitation: many other trends could be identified, according to the perspective from which one views the contemporary South African (homiletic) scene.

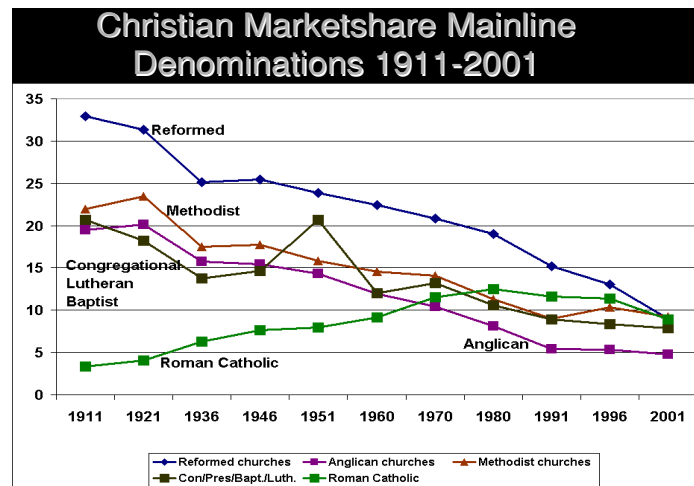


## **2.2 Stabilization**

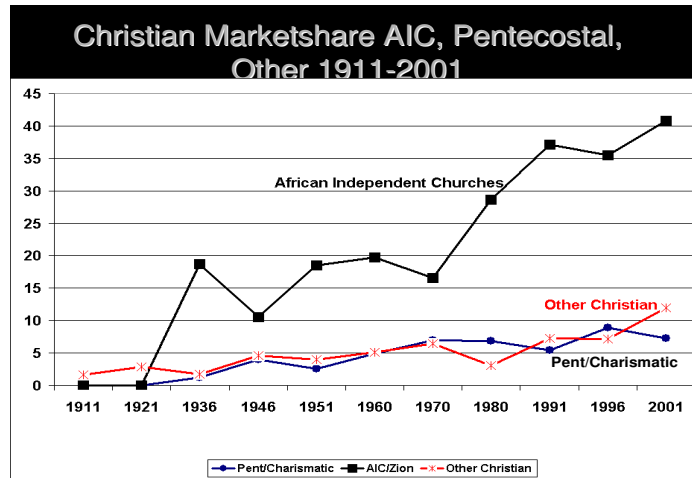
During the days of apartheid the church-going members of the DRC were told time and again that they had an anchor in analogical biblical histories. Security lay in the fact that the God of these histories was on their side, against their “enemies”. Over many decades, and through thousands of sermons, this myth was shaped and kept intact: if the Afrikaner household acted according to (this specific interpretation of) the biblical histories, all would be well. God Himself would secure our future.

After the demise of apartheid and the shattering of the myth, the question that faces DRC preachers is: *what form should “pastoral preaching for the people” now take?* It is clear that many of these people are desperately looking for security, historical links and anchors – as an expression of their search for identity. They have been *fundamentally disillusioned* by the church, and specifically also the preaching within this church that has indoctrinated them for so long. Many people no longer trust the church, or at least have lost their blind and naïve loyalty to the church. The anchors that kept them tied to their moorings have been cut. Stability has become instability; a defined identity has been replaced with the search for a new identity. The shattering of the old myth has opened up a vacuum – the question now is: what new myths are being embraced by the disillusioned? And: how do you preach to these people?

The first and foremost problem facing the church is simply that many of these people are no longer present; the audiences who listen to sermons are rapidly decreasing. The past decade has seen a dramatic decline in the membership of the so-called mainline churches in South Africa (specifically also the DRC), mostly in favour of the charismatic movements, accompanied by a phenomenal growth in the African Independent Churches (AIC), as depicted by the following graphic illustrations:<sup>11</sup>



<sup>11</sup> Cf. Hendriks, HJ 2003. *The future of the Church, the Church of the future; Inaugural lecture.* Stellenbosch: University Press.



From these statistics it is clear that the institutional (mainline) churches are now fighting for survival. Not only are the institutions<sup>12</sup> of these churches viewed with scepticism, but also the theology, or basic dogma, is no longer accepted as obvious. The argument is understandable and goes like this: if the church misled us once in such a fundamental way, how are we to know that it will not do the same again? The emergence of the so-called “New Reformation”, which challenges traditional confessions of the church such as the immaculate conception, the historicity of the resurrection, the authority of scripture and the validity of promises concerning the second coming of Christ, perhaps exemplifies this break-away in a tangible way.<sup>13</sup> Others simply no longer engage in dialogue with the church.

This *syndrome of apathy* could also be ascribed to the *accelerated dawn of modernity* on South Africa since 1994. Whereas the country was isolated up to this point in time, its borders are now open to all the influences of globalization. Processes of *secularization* and *privatization*<sup>14</sup> have been condensed into fourteen years of democracy, with the expectation that South Africans should digest this in a much shorter time span than was the case in many other countries. All of these factors contribute towards the trickling, and in some cases, flooding away of members from the worship services.

<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note how many DRC congregations no longer use the name Dutch Reformed on their billboards and in their marketing. Names such as The Community Church, The Family Church, The Hospitable Church, The Cross Church, etc. are preferred and seem to be popping up everywhere. For some, the link to their historical roots has become an embarrassment.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the book under editorship of Piet Muller: *Die Nuwe Hervorming*. Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Pieterse, HJC 2008: *Liturgy on the edge of community*. Paper read at the annual meeting of the Society for Practical Theology in South Africa, UNISA, 16-17 Jan 2008, 1-8.

On the one hand, preaching has become *more tentative* than before, no longer emanating from the certainty of a fixed and stable “truth”. On the other hand, preachers tend to be very *pragmatic* in their approach, desperately trying not to rock the (sinking) boat too much. Preaching has to an extent taken on the *mode of maintenance*, rather than being an expression of innovative theology.

Paradoxically enough, another strand could be identified in the various efforts that are made to retain those members who still show up for worship services, with *liturgical experimentation and innovation* taking place within the DRC in a way that few would have dreamed of before. In many cases congregations are structured according to *market-driven and consumerist considerations*, coupled with the copious use of modern technology. Preaching and liturgy have become geared towards the attraction and entertainment of people. One often has the feeling that now, since the *controlling power of the church* no longer exists, members of the church, and preachers and liturgists in particular, are frantically searching for new forms of security and identity, up to the point where they may become guilty of *cultic smuggling across dogmatic borders* (cf. Noordmans 1939: 5), without giving much thought to the theological (homiletic and liturgical) consequences of doing so.

### **2.3 Emigration**

A common denominator in most of these homiletic and liturgical practices seems to be the fact that they are fundamentally *introversive*. Whilst many (mostly white) South Africans have immigrated to other countries, those remaining in South Africa seem to be *emigrating inwardly* (cf. Durand 2002: 60). *The hermeneutical movement of the apartheid era into the potential of the people’s pietistic reserves now takes on different forms: no longer to rectify the state of society according to certain nationalistic ideals, but simply to escape from all responsibilities regarding the new South African society.*

This movement is strengthened by the fact that the DRC always had a certain pietistic component in its theological make-up, dating back to the times and undeniable influence of the Scottish ministry in South Africa, the most prominent figure being Andrew Murray. Many DRC members still have it inscribed in their theological DNA that church and society are two separate worlds and should be kept as such, with the life of faith

being a personal and subjective matter. The whole catastrophe of apartheid added fuel to this belief: Christians should refrain from becoming involved in societal issues; the Kingdom of God is alien to the kingdoms of this world. We have burnt our fingers, badly; now it is a case of: *hands off*. This stance is sometimes embodied in what could be called an *ascetic liturgy*, in which, for instance issues such as poverty are not reflected at all (cf. Cilliers and Wepener 2004: 364-372; also 2007 (3): 37-55).

But this is nothing new. Research done on trends in Afrikaans religious programmes as far back as 1987 (Müller 1987:44-46) indicates that the religion that was offered to ordinary Afrikaans-speaking people then was almost always *imperative* in nature, but not as an appeal that affects the daily and concrete reality. It rather was a type of alien-to-daily-life, non-existential appeal on the grounds of pietistic potential. The programmes' *contents* said virtually nothing about the issues that, for instance, received attention in the daily press. This research, conducted in conjunction with the Department of Journalism at the University of Stellenbosch, found that *not one* of the ten most commented on issues of the day was reflected in the sermons that were broadcast!

Through research<sup>15</sup> that was done during 1996-2000, it became clear that the *basic moralistic trend* that also characterized the apartheid sermons was alive and well in preaching in the "new South Africa." But whereas this trend was coupled to certain nationalistic ideals under apartheid, it seems to have become more individualistic in the new dispensation. Now it is no longer up to the nation to save the day (it is in any case too divided for that), but rather the pious individual. Ethical preaching that impacts on societal issues still seems to be glaringly absent.

This inward emigration of DRC preaching and liturgy takes on many forms. One tendency that is often commented on is the so-called *charismatic spirituality*<sup>16</sup> that has taken root in many DRC congregations, with liturgies becoming more informal and orientated towards personal experience. Preaching as such seems to be gradually losing

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<sup>15</sup> Documented in my books *Die uitwissing van God op die kansel. Ontstellende bevindinge oor Suid-Afrikaanse prediking*. Kaapstad: Lux-Verbi 1996; *Die uitwysing van God op die kansel. Inspireerende perspektiewe op die prediking – om God te sien en ander te laat sien*. Kaapstad: Lux-Verbi 1998; *Die genade van gehoorsaamheid. Hoe evangelies is die etiese preke wat ons in Suid-Afrika hoor?* Kaapstad: Lux Verbi. BM 2000.

<sup>16</sup> I am not evaluating the charismatic movement as such here, nor postulating that this movement is a-societal in its approach. One of the charismatic mega-churches in South Africa, headed by Pastor Ray McCauley, for instance, is well known for many outreaches into society and ethical (even prophetic) declarations on societal ills.

its prime position and role in worship services, and is often reduced to a short “conversation” towards the end of the service. In some cases the *inward movement* also represents a *movement over*, and thus avoidance of, the harsh realities of the South African context, with a strong emphasis on *celebration* and virtually no expression of *lament* (cf. Cilliers 2007 (4): 155-176).

The phenomenal growth of the charismatic movement (cf. the statistics in 2.2) could be ascribed to many factors, one of them being their usage of media technology. It is well known that the so-called video-sphere<sup>17</sup> places emphasis on emotion (as opposed to cerebral rationality), embodiment (calling for a “theology of the body”) and immediacy. The charismatic movement seems to tap into exactly these elements, whilst many of the mainline churches, especially in the Protestant tradition, are still battling to invent or re-invent, for instance, liturgical practices that take body, emotion, imagery and immediacy seriously into consideration.

Another interesting trend that could be described as “inward” is the phenomenon of *meditative worship services*, with a return to symbolism and aesthetics<sup>18</sup> - although one must hasten to add that this movement is not necessarily pietistic or contra-society. As a matter of fact, the *Centre for Christian Spirituality*, an ecumenical body constituted by none other than Archbishop Desmond Tutu, is doing sterling work in this regard, in development of ideas concerning meditation, mysticism, spiritual mentoring and

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. the so-called eras or spheres of communication as proposed by the French philosopher Debray: the logo-sphere (oral tradition), grapho-sphere (printed media) and the video-sphere (transmission of images via electronic means). Cf. Debray, Régis 2000. *Introduction à la médiologie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. Whilst the Western world has to a large extent moved (successfully?) through these spheres, South Africa has been slowed down in this process, specifically under apartheid, and now faces the challenge of processing in a condensed time-frame what other countries have achieved under more normal conditions. To a large extent Africa is still within the logo-sphere, whilst the grapho- and video-spheres have only been integrated in an elitist fashion on corporate and governmental levels. Although South Africa shared in many of the fruits of the video-sphere (films, etc.), television was artificially withheld from its inhabitants until as late as 1975. After this many South Africans departed at an increasing rate from the grapho-sphere in favour of the video-sphere.

<sup>18</sup> I am very positive about this development. For too long the Reformed tradition has neglected the value of aesthetics, specifically also for liturgy. But there seems to be a renewed interest in this. Cf. my book *Binne die kring-dans van die kuns. Die betekenis van estetika vir die gereformeerde liturgie*. Sun Press 2007 (1).

contemplative worship, but also coupled with ethical responsibility.<sup>19</sup> It seems as if serious theological reflection on this subject, however, is still in its early stages.

## 2.4 Separation

It is clear that South Africa, as a young democracy, is struggling to find its identity (cf. Cilliers 2007 (2): 1-19). In the euphoria of the political transition in 1994, much was made of the uniqueness of South Africa as a “unity in diversity”, epitomized in Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s colourful phrase: *rainbow nation*. The dark days of *ethnocracy* seemed to be over. Since then, however, there have been some indications that people are again retreating into ethnic categories when trying to define their identity, sometimes even in *fundamentalist* ways. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, for instance, said recently that politicians should not play each and every political ball with an ethnic bat,<sup>20</sup> and someone like Mangosuthu Buthelezi even warned the then former deputy-president Jacob Zuma not to fan the flames of ethnic nationalism.<sup>21</sup> On the streets of many art festivals (one of the interesting phenomena of the new South Africa) people can be seen wearing T-shirts saying something like “100% Boer”, or “30% Boer”, etc. Perhaps this is not meant to be taken seriously, but at the very least it represents an expression of (ethnic) identity.

Perhaps one of the reasons for the abovementioned retreat into an *enclave mentality* could be the ongoing violence, coupled with the painful realities of poverty and HIV/AIDS. People are feeling insecure about their future – and therefore they retreat into what is well known to them: their traditions, their language, their own people. Added to this is the fact that some political leaders are using these fears and uncertainties in a cynical and opportunistic way for political gain, and this could indeed fan the flames of a renewed embracement of ethnically based definitions of identity.

That the church and her preaching have been affected by this seems to be evident. A sad expression of this is the fact that the church (at least the Reformed Family of Churches) is

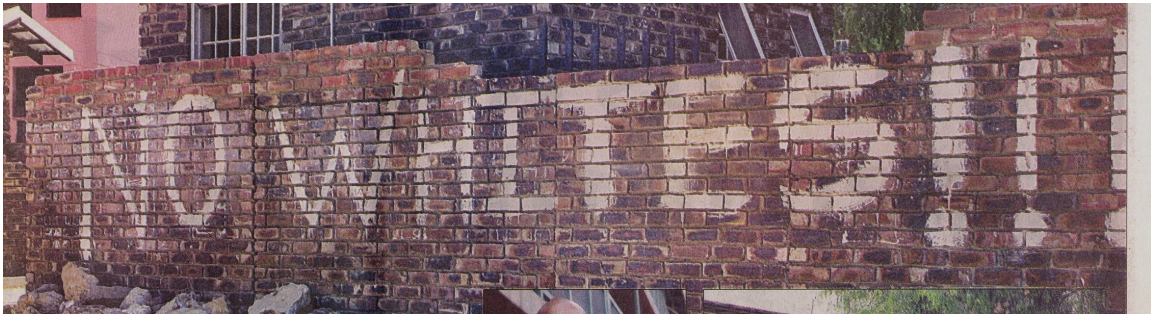
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<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that classical authors such as Henri Nouwen, when speaking about solitude, always stress its ethical dimension. Cf. his *Reaching out. The Three Movements of the Spiritual life*. Collins: Glasgow, 1986, in which he refers to the three movements of the spiritual life: first movement from suffocating loneliness to receptive solitude; second from hostility to hospitality; third from illusion to prayer.

<sup>20</sup> *Cape Times* 1 October 2006.

<sup>21</sup> *Cape Times* 8 October 2006.

still to a large extent separated structurally. The process of unification between the Dutch Reformed Church and the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA) seems to be derailing – with a large contingency of (white) members and ministers of the DRC indicating in a recent survey that they will not accept the Belhar Confession – which forms the heart of URCSA theology and church life. Therefore the *unified, prophetic voice* of (Reformed) churches in South Africa is absent: it is as if the church has lost its energy to protest against societal evils like poverty, corruption, crime, stigmatization, etc. It is as if the myth of separation between “us” and “them”, so integral to the ideology of apartheid, has come back to haunt us. It is as if the wheel has turned, and we now have depictions like the one below<sup>22</sup> in our country, sadly all too familiar to South Africans:



### 3. Conclusion

It is difficult, if not impossible, to predict how the future scenario in South Africa will turn out with regard to the relationship between church and state. What is clear in my opinion, however, is that the different churches (denominations) will have to *cross borders* in order to be enriched and guided by the other. We will have to move beyond *denominationalism*, if we hope to have any impact on society. We will have to revisit the *hermeneutical space of the ecumenical church* in order to address societal ills in our country, also by means of preaching. For it is exactly within this hermeneutical space that we may discover not a self-destructive “stability”, but rather our true identity; not a misleading introversion, but rather vocation (to help transform society); not

<sup>22</sup> Graffiti on the wall of a block of flats in Mmabatho, Mafikeng, stating in no uncertain terms that white people should not even try to purchase a dwelling here. Other slogans on the walls include: *Blacks only*. Cf. *Rapport* 16 March 2008.

stigmatization of, and separation from, the other, but rather the experience of facing the other and, in doing so, facing ourselves – and in the end, hopefully, the Other.

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