

The contribution of the Gereformeerder Kerk to Afrikaner culture

I

The term culture is employed in this paper in the same comprehensive sense as in Van Til's work.¹⁾ Its fullest meaning is contained in the divine command to man to replenish the earth and to subdue it. God Almighty, by the strength of his Word, created what we usually refer to as nature in the broadest sense of the word. Man's calling is to "create", in a secondary sense, by unfolding the embryonics of nature. The Lord God created nature, man is bound by divine command to bring forth culture. The two specific and interrelated subjects then are the Gereformeerde Kerk and Afrikaans culture in mutual relation.

An analysis of this kind unavoidably meets with the problem stated by prof Karl Holl²⁾ in his excellent book on the significance of the Reformation for the cultural life of Germany and Western Europe. To pinpoint definite cultural institutions as creations or direct contributions by a specific church appears to be rarely possible. Max Weber's thesis³⁾ on the relation between protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism is well known and probably as much abused. Troeltsch⁴⁾ sought to uncover a causal link between protestantism and modern civilisation. By and large the attempts of these eminent scholars did not succeed in achieving much more than pointing to the impact of the Reformation in modifying either by way of diminishing or strengthening existing cultural institutions.

Typical of the nature of an analysis of this order

is Holl's conclusion on Luther's approach: "Yet the aim is not to supercede the secular order, but rather to enoble it and convert its harshness into something humane."⁵⁾ This approach does not differ fundamentally from the Calvinistic and reformed view. The main aims in the cultural activities of the reformed faith are centred in the concepts of reformation and sanctification.

A fair amount of energy has been spent in endeavours to trace the actual contribution of Holy Scripture, of Calvinism or of the reformed faith to what is popularly called the Afrikaner national or ethnic character.⁶⁾ The writers in question usually define ethnic character in terms of culture. These writings are open to one general point of criticism in their tendency to link cultural traits such as hospitality, religious practices, individualistic patterns etc either to descent or to Calvinism, or to a combination of the two. It is doubtful whether this can be accepted as proven. In any case, to anticipate the evidence, the G K rarely if ever superceded existing cultural institutions or initiated new ones. Its influence, spirit and contributions is rather to be found in a particular emphasis, in an observable nuance, in a specific motivation, in a discernable evaluation and in a specific atmosphere.

In order to arrive at a justifiable evaluation of the G K in this connection, it should be kept in mind that during phases two and three of its existence, the reformed element represented a minority of the Afrikaner people. For the duration of the second period this element did not include the fashionable elite: they were the border pioneers. The third phase brought no fundamental change in this situation. Affluent and influential citizens were and are rather sparsely distributed amongst the members of the G K. These are factors of considerable importance for the purpose of portraying and understanding the role of the G K in the evolution of Afrikaans culture.

The G K has no obvious claim to the title of sole formative factor as far as the history of Afrikaans is concerned. Afrikaner culture originated

from merger of Dutch, French and German groups bringing with them their own traditions.

For a limited period the original G K had one condition in its favour. Apart from a minute Lutheran element, the G K was virtually the only religious factor and directing force. Of course the French Huguenot addition was more than welcome. All culture springs from a religious base. As a spiritual force the reformed faith, ecclesiastically instituted in the G K, imbued the evolving culture with its tenets.

But after a century of unopposed existence the reformed faith was challenged by new religious and philosophical trends from the European mainland and from the British Isles. In the process its force and range of effect were weakened and confined to what may rightly be termed a sub-culture within the Afrikaans culture as such. Especially as far as the "new" G K is concerned, it remains an almost impossible task to distinguish in any specific case its contribution from that of the other Afrikaans churches.

Owing to the Dutch and French Reformed origins of the majority of the South African population of European extraction until deep into the nineteenth century, Afrikaners are popularly described as a Calvinistic people. This continues to be the tenor of liberalistic and permissive English - and Afrikaans - criticism against what is regarded as Calvinistic Afrikaner conservatism. From a different point of view Calvinism is often regarded as an Afrikaner virtue. What is used as term of abuse by one is cherished as a term of honour by the other. Usually both are wrong.

This thesis stands open to doubt.⁷⁾ As outlined above the original Calvinistic stream has been polluted and diluted by religious modernism and humanistic philosophy. As a permeating force in the field of culture it was driven back-stage. In the religious sector methodism and pietism eventually made substantial incursions. Many Afrikaners may pride themselves on their (alleged) Calvinistic heritage while their overt attitudes and

actions are in conflict with reformed conceptions of Scriptural principle and precept. This directly serves to reveal how essentially foreign this particular life and world view has grown to them. It is a fairly general tendency in South Africa to denote as Calvinist any protestant who has grown up with knowledge of the Bible whatever his subjective interpretation of scriptural teaching might be.

To distinguish between three categories of Afrikaners, seems to be nearer to reality. The first group consists of those practically weaned from, and totally unacquainted with, Calvinism and reformed faith. This includes humanists, liberals, atheists, Roman Catholics, Methodists, followers of Islam and of oriental cults. To a second category belong those who still accept a Calvinistic tradition but who lack all knowledge of a true reformed scriptural interpretation and when faced by the demands of recognised Calvinistic principles, are shocked by the challenge and averse to taking it up. Finally we have a minority who still maintain a deeper loyalty to and an inner conviction of the reformed pastulates even if they are not entirely conversant and acquainted with its basic tenets and practical implications.

The distinction between these categories of Afrikaners also applies to Afrikaner culture. Humanistic, liberalistic, Darwinistic and atheistic trends are observable in Afrikaans cultural practices and conceptions and tend to increase in extent and substance. Probably a major part of Afrikaans culture still contains Calvinistic traits. But even so one has to admit that at least part thereof is hardly more than a crust of tradition, lacking all intention, consciousness and meaning. In Tylor's idiom⁸⁾ Afrikaans culture harbours a good portion of Calvinistic survivals - cultural forms from the past without conscious meaning for the present except as interesting relics.

In so far as the G K is to be considered a contributing factor and a staying force in relation to the Calvinistic survivals and sub-culture, several other aspects need attention. The present G K has

no exclusive demand on what still remains of a reformed Christian heritage in Afrikaans culture. It shares this honour with both the "original" G K of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century and with the Doppelelement in the Hervormde and the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk from the late eighteenth century to the present. In addition to tracing the origin of those Calvinistic forms, contents, influences and trends which are present, to a single spiritual mother, the G K, recognition should be given to different ways of their coming into existence.

They either stem from direct initiative and action of the church as an instituted body or - probably in the majority of cases - from the behaviour and actions of members of the church, motivated and directed by, and acting on, the strength of their religious convictions. Hence I choose to refer to the role of the *gereformeerdes* so as to include both the ecclesiastical institution and its members in their individual office of the faithful which accompanies them in the total spectrum of their secular life.

Finally the honour for the various contributions can neither be shared by all members nor by all of them equally. In the process of evolving a culture it is a recognised fact that followers and maintainers are more numerous than creative spirits and that active reformers are outnumbered by passive traditionalists. In attempting to evaluate an institution's impact on a specific cause, it remains a *sine qua non* of methodology not to allow an equal rating to each and every member. The G K and the *gereformeerdes* are no exceptions to the rule.

II

When not shocked outright, outsiders are at least very often puzzled by what appears to them as a kind of dualism and contradiction in the behaviour of the *gereformeerdes*. They seem to embrace conflicting approaches in their system of values, and to make curious bedfellows of static conservatism and amazing progressiveness; they appear to be

verkramp and *verlig* simultaneously. Of itself this is not as strange a phenomenon as people are apt to believe. Every society provides sufficient examples of people extremely liberalistic and modernistic as far as religious concepts and practices are concerned, but exceedingly conservative in secular life or vice versa.

The popular image of Afrikaners and particularly of the *gereformeerde* element is one of die-hard traditionalists both in religion and in national and cultural affairs. They are thought to stick to the ways of their fathers most conscientiously. Hence any progressive action on their side usually is found astonishing. It has been said jokingly that the *gereformeerdes* take one step forward, then halt and look back with the question: Where is Dort? Of course many a true word is spoken in jest.

In a specific sense conservatism correctly describes the culture of the Afrikaners and their psychomental complex.⁹⁾ For a better understanding of the apparent contradictions it is necessary to distinguish between basic principles and their application to life situations. A tendency towards general cultural traditionalism cannot be denied, but more often the *gereformeerdes* remain loyal to their basic religious and scriptural principles. Due to explicable circumstances a trend to an overall conservatism embracing all spheres of life also affects the religious premises to the extent of fundamentalism and biblicism. The preceding outline of South African ecclesiastical and cultural history ought to provide some explanation of the conservatist attitude.

Both the Dutch settlers with their Dordt background and the Huguenot immigrants who had to flee their land of birth for the cause of their reformed faith, seriously upheld the basic religious principles of the Reformation according to the Calvinist approach. Towards the second half of the eighteenth century this was referred to as orthodoxy in contrast to the "modernistic" and "libertine" religious creeds of the time. Circumstances in the new country were favourable to a hardening of

this orthodoxy. On both the religious and secular front Christianity met and clashed with heathen beliefs and life. This was the basic difference between homo Europeana and homo Africana and became the yardstick of separate identity.

At the end of the eighteenth century this development was stressed from a new angle. New political and ethnic relations were involved. A contact was forced - right from the outset in the form of conflict - between the Afrikaner people with its religious and secular life rooted in and fed by the orthodox or Calvinistic reformed faith, and the largely modernistic protestant British. Two ways of life with two different cultural systems collided. For a second time at least part of the Afrikaners sought security and safety for their national identity in a reformed religious orthodox creed in order to keep themselves distinct from the foreign European element in its usurpation of political authority.

Naturally sociological forces played an important role in the ensuing process. The orthodox part of the population occupied the more isolated rural areas. As farmers and rural residents they were generally less exposed to influences from abroad and less open to change than their urbanised compatriots. At the same time the inland pastoralists lived face to face with indigenous barbarism and heathenism and experienced the logic of these differences at first hand. The whole problem of, and contrasts in, attitudes to border politics are closely interwoven with these religious and secular incompatibilities.

With the Bible and a few orthodox authors as their sole literature in a situation of pastoral semi-isolation and strife with foreign and heathen peoples, the trend towards a culture strongly resembling the patriarchal pattern and attitude of the Old Testament, cannot be regarded as amazing. Observed in retrospect, these were God's measures to safeguard the reformed faith against contamination by digressive influences via Dutch and British sources. The idea of a chosen people in the midst of the children of Ham, the consciousness of a

divine calling to tame the wilderness and to maintain their identity as a Christian people, were clear indications of the general Old Testament imprint on the life, thought and culture of the emerging Afrikaner ethos. They lived a life of sobriety and aristocratic simplicity. Inhibition of emotions in interpersonal relations, especially on the side of the male, was a strong cultural trait.

In general these farmers developed an independent spirit. They possessed a set of norms firmly based on scriptural principles. These were accepted as the ultimate truth and stood in clear distinction from the modernistic, libertine and humanistic systems of values with a subjective and relativistic character. Different religious creeds lead to differing directions for creative action. Liberty was a highly appreciated value; individualism was cultivated by the social situation but also imbued with a singular quality derived from the faith in the Lord, their refuge. Both liberty and individualism were curbed by obedience to the Word of God. Liberty had to provide the opportunity to serve the Lord according to his Word; individualism to execute one's calling in the service of the Almighty and as members of his fold. Neither ever was transformed to an individualistic liberalism.

The apparently dichotomous attitude and behaviour referred to previously tends to be misleading. It is due neither to lack of consistency nor to uncertainty of principle. Superficially dialectical, it does not fit into Hegel's system. It is truly and essentially Biblical dialectics: die to gain everlasting life; the Christian has to be freed from the slavery of Satan and sin in order to be made a slave of Christ; bound by the word of God in order to attain liberty. Nothing can be more erroneous than to typify this manner of life as a middle of the road attitude in an effort to avoid the sharp edges or the pitfalls to the right and to the left. Essentially it is the outcome of a different approach, different from others in premise as well as in aim. Hence it cuts through most of the popular contrasting distinctions:

conservative vs progressive, national vs cosmopolitan, orthodox vs liberal. Consequently it leads to different controversies and contrasts with what is usually regarded as being harmonious.

The preceding paragraphs are meant to supply the necessary background for an evaluation and appreciation of the *gereformeerde* contribution to Afrikaner culture.

Intensely national and possessing a strong ethnic consciousness, the *gereformeerdes* took a strong and clear stand on the relation between church and people (volk). The ideas of "volkskerk" and "staatskerk"¹⁰) are unequivocally rejected. Church membership does not derive from ethnic membership or political citizenship. Nevertheless, a particular church is rooted in a particular people and primarily functions within that people. It exists within a nation in that the christian members of the specific nation belongs to the Church of Christ. More-over, a people continues its existence into the new dispensation solely in its redeemed members as members of the people of God and as heirs to life eternal through Jesus Christ. The church thus exists temporarily within a people and at the same time transcending all boundaries and limits of this life in its capacity and nature as Church of Christ and as people of God.

According to the reformed concept of the nature of the church it cannot be subject or handmaiden to either nation or state. Its *prophetic* office has to be practised amidst the people in the divine proclamation: Thus saith the Lord ... In the midst of the people the church has to live up to the demands of its *royal* office by governing those within its sphere of spiritual authority in order to obey the divine commands and to walk in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. It must be *priest* to the people in its prayers for reconciliation of their sins, for blessings, for peace and order and for sound government. To serve in the kingdom of Christ is a people's ultimate destination. To believe this and to practice it means to be truly Christian-national.

The bearing of this approach upon the whole gamut of secular life - not secularistic - especially on politics, can hardly be overrated. *Gereformeerdes* are noted for their patriotism and nationalism. Rarely is a minister of the G K or of *gereformeerde* conviction to be found in the ranks of an English oriented political party. Nevertheless, this does not prevent *gereformeerdes* from differing from the party to which they belong. During the turbulent days of the second world war, a considerable number of prominent *gereformeerdes* occupied leading positions in the Ossewa-Brandwag. This is one outstanding example of the apparent dichotomy in *gereformeerde* behaviour. Attempts to stain their reputation by describing them as Nazis were totally off the mark. They were strongly republican-minded and -motivated and were pro-German only in so far as the hope existed that by beating the British, the coveted republic of South Africa would materialise. This action serves as an indication of their political independence too.

In the hearts of a substantial component of the *gereformeerde* Afrikaners a conviction of the necessity for Christian national politics still endures. The astonishing situation presents itself that they do not secede from the existing party to form a separate and independent faction. This attitude, too, can be explained only by the principle of the reformed approaches of national loyalty, coupled to the command to reform. As long as the possibility and opportunity to set right what is wrong presents itself, they are not to break away. A kind of independent and distinctive attitude within the party or group to which they are affiliated seem to be characteristic of the *gereformeerdes*. This is perhaps best illustrated by the tenor of the newspapers and journals initiated and controlled by *gereformeerdes*. Within the political party they support, they tend to form a critical and independent-minded element, supporting where agreement exists, criticising where differences arise.

Prof L J du Plessis once made the statement¹¹⁾ that Calvinism very seldom attains the position of a ruling or governing force. Its essential role is that of a controlling power. In biblical idiom

it could be formulated as the relation of prophet and king, with the reformed faith in a apostate world in the position of the prophet and the king's conscience. This more or less portrays the role of the *gereformeerdes* in South African politics. The more imminent the danger, the more strongly the *gereformeerde* element comes to the fore and the more its voice is heard.

The specific principles and form of ecclesiastical government of the G K, a kind of controlled democracy, was not, of course, without effect on *gereformeerde* politics. Paul Kruger was an eminent exponent of a political philosophy and practice professing the necessity of the voice of the people without accepting the dictum of *vox populi, vox dei*. The highest loyalty and obedience was due to God, not to the people. Reformed politics cannot be pragmatic, they must be principled. The high rating of the lawful political authority was clearly expounded in Kruger's rejection of the judiciary's demand to test the decisions of the legislature.¹²⁾ High appreciation of the office without deifying the person in the office, is characteristic of *gereformeerde* political philosophy. Officebearers should be democratically elected but obedience to them derives from the authority of their office.

A similar characteristic feature of *gereformeerde* politics is the role of morals. Political efficiency and brilliance does not override moral laxity. This even applies to the political leader's religious doctrines. The more orthodox *gereformeerdes* in the Transvaal Republic, in fear of God's afflictions resulting from the presidency of the liberal Rev Burgers, chose to leave the country in what is known as the Dorslandtrek (the desert- or thirstland trek).¹³⁾

A clear distinction between state and church, between secular and ecclesiastical authority, between the rule of the state and the ministry of the church, is a tenet of *gereformeerde* political approach. The distinction, however, does not imply isolation neither does it mean subordination. This concept finds its prototype in the Old

Testament relation between king and prophet. The respective fields of activity of the two institutions partly coincide but their functions differ according to the basis of their distinctive origins. The state or king, wields authority, derived from the King of kings, over believers and non-believers in its area of jurisdiction. His sign of office is the sword. The sphere of ministry of the church or prophet cuts across the boundaries of state although it is limited to the faithful only. Its sign of office is the Word of God - the Bible.

The instituted church as such has to refrain from indulging in politics. Its political actions are limited to awakening of the conscience, to admonition and reprimand. Its members are bound to participate in politics in their capacity as Christian citizens. They expected to practice in politics what they are taught by the church. The church stands under an obligation to the government to pray for the rulers, for peace and order, for good government, as well as to admonish by way of dialogue and communication and not in the first place by way of demonstration, and to teach its members to be obedient and responsible citizens.

Undoubtedly the most distinctive and important contribution of the G K to Afrikaner culture is manifested in the field of education. Even under the most dire circumstances of border pastoralism or on trek, a high premium was maintained on the acquisition of a basic knowledge of the "three R's" for the sake of religious education. Youngsters had to be prepared for church membership through confirmation. By stress of circumstances the curriculum was more than once limited to Biblical history, the Heidelberg catechism and the psalmody. In this bare minimum, the religious core and foundation of education, serving as grounding for morals en ethics, was fortunately maintained.

This served well for the renaissance of education when better times dawned. The Church was to constitute the foundations of what came to be called C N O or *Christelik-nasionale onderwys* (Christian

national education). The term is self-explanatory. The primary stress on Christian education sprang from the conviction of the overwhelming importance of a pious life in the service of and according to the precepts of the Word of God, and found its logical and organic link with the almost exclusively religious education of the past. At the same time it held the promise of a safeguard for the maintenance of the Christian identity in contrast with the coloured heathen tribes. This helps to explain the "national" part of the term. Education was valued as an instrument or an agent enabling the national group or the people to fulfil its cultural calling and to fit it for the struggle for existence. A national education, springing from the heart of a people, rooted in its tradition, culture and values and destined to serve and develop its mental, spiritual and material needs, was regarded a *sine qua non*.

The core of the curriculum included three branches of learning: scripture, the mother tongue and the national history. Scriptural knowledge was not valued solely as a common school subject. To qualify as Christian education, the school in all its activities and the whole of its atmosphere has to be saturated with a Christian spirit and guided by scriptural principle. On the organisational level three partners act in co-operation: the group of religiously like-minded parents, a teaching staff of qualified and pious teachers and the state.

This ideal has never been fully attained. Handicapped by circumstances it lead either to denominational schools (church schools) or to government schools. Denominational schools were usually short-lived because of the financial burden on their supporters. Government schools never succeeded in satisfying the *gereformeerdes* and the G K because of a lack of a thoroughly Christian spirit in the schools and a lack of Christian content in the subjects taught. C N O-supporters continually stressed and still emphasize a system of "parent schools", meaning a differentiated schooling system organised on the basis of schools for groups of parents of common faith.

The introduction of legalised separate language schools brought partial satisfaction but even the latest Education Act¹⁴⁾ does not wholly reassure *gereformeerdes*. The role of the parents in the control of schools, for example is not given enough prominence. They also harbour a feeling of disquiet because of the possibility that, with a change of administration under circumstances of increasing secularisation, a government school has no safeguard against an unchristian spirit and practice, notwithstanding the legal guise of Christian education.

The logical extension of the G K's stand on C N O is its insistence on a Christian science. What is demanded for primary and secondary education must logically be claimed for post-secondary instruction also. Christian education at all levels needs Christianly educated teachers, trained either by professional colleges or by universities. Professional training and instruction in the use of subject material have to harmonise in their approach both to the child and the teaching material. That approach must be a Christian one. And what applies to teaching undoubtedly applies to every other profession too.

The G K specifically experienced the need from two sides. In order to put its ideal for Christian education into practice in the private C N O-schools, or at least to maintain an element of Christian teaching in government schools, teachers pious by upbringing as well as Christian in training were regarded a *sine qua non*. Great sacrifices were made for the establishment of a Christian teachers' training college.

Even more pressure was felt in the field of the ministry. The newly re-established church had to find properly trained pastors. The output from the Netherlands was inadequate. In addition, with its strong leaning towards the national community, the G K preferred a ministry recruited from its own spiritual and national ranks. This soon necessitated an additional institution, originally called the Literary Department of the Gereformeerde T S, which taught the secular subjects as

auxiliaries to the theological encyclopaedia. This in due course developed into the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education. Right from the outset the founders proclaimed their aim of an institution for practicing and teaching the broad spectrum of science "in Thy light". (Psalm 36:10.)

This naturally made another valuable contribution to the academic sphere of culture. A Christian training college and a Christian university offered the laboratory and the cathedra for evolving a Christian or scriptural science. To enumerate the most outstanding achievements resulting from this source is difficult. But one thinks spontaneously of prof J Chris Coetzee in the field of education, prof H G Stoker in the sphere of philosophy and prof L J du Plessis in the area of political sciences. These men and others alongside or following in their tracks are firmly embedded in the reformed sub-culture and are gaining ground in the reformed circles of the related churches. As far as theology is concerned - and this applies to educational theory and to philosophy - the *gereformeerde* academics maintained a strong attachment to their reformed colleagues in the Netherlands. In a small way this perhaps also served to keep the bonds with the Dutch cultural heritage alive. Kuyper and Bavinck and scholars of their calibre and school of thought undoubtedly exerted considerable influence on Afrikaner thought, mainly by way of their impact on Afrikaner leaders in the theological educational and philosophical world.

To isolate a definite *gereformeerde* influence in the field of arts is a far more complex and difficult commission. It is doubtful whether the *gereformeerde* component made any strong impact on this sector of culture. The eminent theologian and poet, Totius, stands out as a notable, but at the same time solitary, exponent. Both his secular and his religious poetry, the latter consisting of the Afrikaans psalmody and the rhymed version of a number of Old and New Testament texts, represents an exceptional trend in Afrikaans literature. Jan Lion Cachet tried his hand at prose. His writings belong to the childhood of Afrikaans literature and do not reveal a strong and distinctive tenor. This applies

to the satire and humor of dr O'Kulis too.

Prof G Dekker succeeded in gaining for himself an independent platform with a relatively strong and characteristically Christian spirit in his literary criticisms and evaluation of art in general. Both the quality of his work and his outstanding personality contributed to the acceptance of his stand in wider circles than that of the *gereformeerde* world. The reformed component was, however, unable to exert an influence and to make a wider impact on the arts than that enumerated above. On the academic level intense interest is being applied to a Christian philosophy of art.

A considerable part of Afrikaner tradition is concerned with inter-ethnic and inter-race attitudes and practices. Afrikaner history in particular is for the greater part moulded by contact with aboriginal and "imported" tribes, peoples and individuals of vastly different colour, race, culture, civilization and religion. In addition the other historic tread of contact with British conquerors and immigrants runs through nearly two centuries of Afrikaner history. Almost without exception, contact throughout spelled conflict. The outcome was a peculiar psycho-mental complex of attitudes and behavioural institutions usually expressed as a system of "apartheid" or separateness.

The G K as well as its adherents and the wider group of *gereformeerdes* took a consistent and clear stand in favour of "apartheid" in close co-operation with the rest of Afrikanerdom. In due course the concept in these circles acquired an independent and peculiar meaning. As indicated earlier, apartheid germinated from the original and general Black-White distinctions but not in its overt sense of difference of colour. The origin was far more than skin deep. The fundamental difference was embedded in the contrast of Christian vs heathen and civilized vs barbarian. The somatic differences especially that of colour however, served a practical purpose in acting as a naive and overt indication of a complex of cultural and civilisational characteristics. But it outstayed

its usefulness. Practically the difference of identity and the deep desire to maintain and to safeguard their Christian and civilized identity was expressed by the numerical minority of European immigrant-settlers, in the idiom of colour.

The struggle for existence as a separate ethnic entity, emphasized these somatic differences. The Old Testament life pattern imbued it with further meaning. In this process of generalisation and modification of the true meaning of racial differences, the *gereformeerdes* took the same direction as the greater population. Early in the second half of the twentieth century the G K experienced a measure of uneasiness in pursuing this course. The synod of 1955 appointed a commission to study and to advise the synod to behold the following year on the question of race in the light of Holy Scripture. Remarkably the mandate did not include a study of "apartheid" and in addition the political and social problems were submitted to the authority of the Word of God.

Six years later the commission's final report was submitted. Synod accepted as leading scriptural dictums the principles of charity and righteousness in all questions of ethnic and race relations. It shifted the focus from race to people on the strength of the argument that the Bible does not even mention race but clearly speaks in terms of peoples. It denied the idea of superior and inferior peoples or races. It further formulated the implications of these fundamentals for situations of common worship, marriage, ecclesiastical organisation, etc.

On the question of common worship the synod took the stand that since divine service is an open act of worship, no scriptural objections can be forwarded against participation of people of all race and culture. The normal situation, considering differences in language, culture etc, would however, be the provision of separate congregations and opportunities for worship for the different ethno-racial groups. The same applies to racially mixed marriages. The attitude of the G K and its approach to the field of inter-ethnic and inter-

racial relations is best expressed in the structure adopted in its ecclesiastical organisation after the institution of new congregations as a fruit of its missionary work amongst Bantu peoples and Coloureds.

They all belong to a single *Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika* with one general synod made up of equal numbers of representatives from the various national synods of the Bantu peoples, Coloureds and Whites. In considering the extreme importance of the service of the Word, separate local churches are instituted for the different peoples, each with its broader connections and meetings of circles, in particular territorial and national synods. By meeting in a general synod the idea of ecumenical unity finds expression. Channels for mutual contact are provided on all levels.

Both the decisions of the 1961-synod and the organisational structure of the G K reveal the latest stage of the evolution of the *gereformeerde* tradition pertaining to ethnic and race relations. Group differences on the basis of ethnic identity, culture, language etc. are recognised and strongly emphasized without, however, accepting isolation as a substitute. Contact is maintained both horizontally and vertically, from the core of the local congregation to the broader unity of the ecumenic synod, and without excluding in principle or practice personal contact over the boundaries of either congregation or synod. These developments represent a most important contribution to present-day Afrikaner culture and are accepted in wider circles than that of the G K only. It is exerting its impact in spheres outside the ecclesiastical world and serves as a model for political structuring too.15)

The reformed faith awarded a high premium to work and to economic independence. The G K has a reputation for devoted diaconal work and priestly charity. The church jealously guards this as its specific service. It is opposed to dependency on state welfare and to secular social work. The idea of institutional care for the aged and for neglected children had a hard and uphill struggle

before being accepted in the G K. The majority of the members of the G K could be classified as middle and lower middle class. During the era of poor whitism and both rural and urban poverty, the church had to face a substantial rate of poverty. Nonetheless, its rate of pauperism was exceedingly low.¹⁶⁾

The *gereformeerde* population was given to a sober and simple life. Extravagance runs counter to reformed convictions. The *gereformeerde* ethos rejects excesses though the image of a *gereformeerde* as a melancholy and gloomy person is a caricature. In their entertainment the basic pattern of sobriety and avoidance of excesses and extravagance is observable. The *gereformeerde* rejects dancing, gambling and excessive drinking as sinful.

In the economic sphere the contributions of the *gereformeerdes* are slight. The G K, perhaps more than its related denominations, is a church of farmers, exclusively pastoralists rather than agriculturists. In practice it came nearer to Luther's economic concepts than to Calvin's. Occupations and economic pursuits apart from farming were introduced into the ranks of the *gereformeerdes* mainly by the Dutch immigrants to the Transvaal Republic in the days of Paul Kruger. They manned the civil service, entered trade and commerce and the professions, mainly teaching.

South Africa's industrial revolution, following on the economic depression and the era of the poor white problem, enticed and forced the Afrikaner ruralists to the towns and cities. These pioneers of Afrikaner townsmen started their urban life as labourers in the mines and on the railways and to a lesser extent in the embryonic industries. In ever growing numbers they entered the civil service from the lowest ranks, the police force and the teaching profession and still later law and medicine. Finally they made their debut in the fields of commerce, trade and industry. For the *gereformeerde* Afrikaner, Potchefstroom University opened a door to the academic profession.

It remains an open question whether the relatively

few *gereformeerdes* in the later economic sectors have left any imprint on these pursuits or have succeeded in creating a distinctive cultural pattern. Law, engineering and medicine for instance were previously taught almost exclusively at English orientated and so called neutral universities. The next stage was the establishment of law faculties, engineering departments and schools of medicine on Afrikaans campuses. At the present time the only Christian university in South Africa still lacks the facilities for teaching engineering and medicine.

III

To conclude: It is extremely hard, if not impossible, to pinpoint the *gereformeerde* influence on Afrikaner culture. The researcher would be wise to be on the look-out for intentions and goals, interpretations and motivations different from those customary, to discover a leaning towards principle rather than to pragmatics, to catch sight of a trend away from humanistic approaches and in the direction of a straight and to the point appeal to Scripture and to scriptural directives. The fruits of *gereformeerde* principle and practice cannot easily, if ever, be sorted out, counted and weighed. None the less, they truly exist and are undoubtedly real.

It is largely of a spiritual nature. *Gereformeerdes* wear the same clothes, drive the same cars, serve on the same committees, attend the same schools, belong to the same political parties and sports clubs, read the same papers as their fellow nationals - but with a difference.

To grow acquainted with the varied kaleidoscope of Afrikaner life and customs, means to experience the atmosphere of a kind of submerged *gereformeerde* life style - submerged in the general bustle of national activity and at once clear and discernable when coming face to face with its manifestations. It is observable in the national ethos and in everyday activity.

Teachers brought up in *gereformeerde* homes possess a quality undefinable and different from their colleagues in the same profession and something in addition to professional ability. They express themselves differently in their appeal to and in formulating principles, both in general and in those specifically relevant to their profession. The same applies to men and women in other professions. Exceptions do of course exist. One encounters those who have lost this *gereformeerde* cachet. On the other hand one meets men and women, members of the other Afrikaans churches, emanating from the same atmosphere. Yet, the *gereformeerde* minister can easily be distinguished from his colleagues in the "sister churches" by his style of preaching, his pulpit terminology and his homilistic expressions, the pattern and tone of his prayer. The main tenor in *gereformeerde* devotions is the humble approach to the sovereign and holy God Almighty, the avoidance of all familiarity as well as the use of pet names. This attitude pervades the *gereformeerde* life in its characteristic feature of shunning all forms and semblance of sentimentalism. It tends to give the impression of a cold and rationalistic religion. It is also, falsely, believed to result in an undue accent on dogmatic learning and to the neglect of personal relations with our Father in heaven.

It is no exaggeration to contend that these rather vaguely indicated qualities and characteristics are rarely totally assimilated by "proselytes" from the sister denominations. There is the general saying that a person has to acquire it with his mother's milk.

Finally then, one has to admit, with deep gratitude and at the same time with the utmost humility, that the Gereformeerde Kerk, by God's eternal grace, was privileged to contribute a spiritual feature to the cultural life of the Afrikaner, one difficult to isolate, to define and to measure, but none the less real and recognisable to the keen observer. It is a contribution springing from the reformed faith in Calvinistic tradition and perpetuating features of that peculiar spiritual aristocracy and yet humble faith, based on the

consciousness of man lost in sin, redeemed by
grace and springing from the acceptance of the
absolute authority of the Word of God.

J H Coetzee
PU for CHE

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

1. Van Til, H R, The Calvinistic concept of culture. Philadelphia, 1959.
2. Holl, Karl, The cultural significance of the reformation. N Y, 1959.
3. Weber, Max, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Tübingen, 1922.
4. Troeltsch, Ernst, Die Soziallehre der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen. Tübingen, 1923.
5. Holl, Karl, p 28.
6. Several works can be quoted. The most representative examples would be: Bosman, F C L, Die Franse stamverwantskap en kulturele bydrae tot die Afrikaanse volk *In* Van den Heever, C M en Pienaar, P de V, Kultuurgeskiedenis van die Afrikaner, Kaapstad, 1945. Also Coetzee, Abel, Die wortels en kenmerke van die tradisionele Afrikaanse lewenstyl *In* Koers, XXXVII/3 en 4, Des - Feb 1970.
7. The following articles treat with this issue in greater particulars: Coetzee, J H, Must an Afrikaner be a Calvinist *In* New Nation, June 1969, and by the same author, Die Afrikaanse volkskultuur *In* Die Taalgenoot, Okt 1964.
8. Tylor, Edward B, Primitive culture. London, 1920.
9. For an exposition of the concept see Shirokogoroff, S M, The psychomental complex of the Tungus. London, 1935.
10. A *staatskerk* means a church recognised by the state as official denomination. A *volkskerk* indicates the idea that members of a specific people or nation are ipso facto members of a "national" church.
11. Du Plessis, L J, Die Calvinisme in sy aktualiteit gehandhaaf *In* Op die voorpunt van die tye. Stellenbosch, 1945.
12. Kruger, S J P, The memoirs of Paul Kruger. London, 1902. Morley, op cit, arrives at more or less the same conclusion.
13. Van der Walt, A J, Noordwaarts. Potchefstroom, 1906. Also Kruger, S J P, op cit.
14. Act 39/1967.
15. Vide the Synodal acts of the Geref Kerk 1958, 1961, 1967, 1970 and 1973. Also Coetzee, J H, Die Gereformeerde Kerk en die rasseverhoudings *In* Du Toit, S (red): Die Gereformeerde Kerk 1859-1959.
16. Coetzee, J H, Die barmhartigheidsdiens van die Gereformeerde kerk in Suid-Afrika, 1859-1949. Potchefstroom, 1953.