

**THE INFLUENCE OF STATE IDEOLOGY ON PENTECOSTAL
THINKING AFTER WORLD WAR II, WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO WHITE PENTECOSTALS IN SOUTH AFRICA.¹**

Nico Horn

Associate Professor of Public Law

University of Namibia

¹ This paper is an adaptation of a previous paper, *Pentecostal Themes for the 21st Century: Human Rights, Pacifism and Prophetic Chiasm* delivered at the European Pentecostal/Charismatic Research Association, Uppsala, Sept 2007.

INTRODUCTION

How do Pentecostals deal with human rights issues? How sensitive are Pentecostals to human rights abuses? And what can Pentecostals do to narrow the gap between themselves and human rights activists? I will try to answer these questions by referring to the conduct of white Pentecostals during the devastating apartheid era.

Not that apartheid is the only human rights issue that has ever confronted the church. On the contrary, I could easily have looked at the conduct of the North American white Pentecostals in the war on terror, or the reaction of Pentecostals worldwide to the death of civilians in the conflict in Iraq and in the recent conflict in Lebanon. I have chosen the white Pentecostals, or more specific, the white AFM church because unlike the other conflicts that I mentioned, apartheid lies in the past. And in hindsight very few people will still defend the ideology or the church's support of it.

But for some balance, here's a few words on Germany. After WW II the German Pentecostal church reacted to the issue of political influence on the church by pointing to the fact that their opposition to Nazism was spiritual and therefore did not attract the international attention of the likes of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Niemöller. The Pentecostal pastors helped the suffering masses and were not trained in the social sciences. But their opposition to the system caused them severe suffering.

No one can deny that Pentecostals suffered under Hitler and that the churches were constantly harassed by the Gestapo and other organs of the oppressive state. Yet, when Nazi power was at its height, and the oppression of the Jews well-known (maybe not the extermination programme), the Pentecostal Church congratulated Hitler on his birthday.

How much training did pastors need to realise that the Jews were severely oppressed and that the Jewish programmes were heading for a humanitarian disaster, one may ask. Was the protest action of Martin Niemöller or the

conspiracy of Bonhoeffer and his comrades less spiritual than the neglect of the Pentecostals?

Or let us look at a more recent example, the presentation of the Apostolic Faith Mission before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. One searches in vain for anything that resembles a confession of the white members of a racist church. No *mea culpa* by the former white church.

The presentation speaks of the corporate guilt of both white and black, putting the violence of resistance on par with the violence of the apartheid State. It is almost like blaming the victim of rape for resisting, to use an old struggle metaphor.

And the present white leadership are exonerated because they did not know the truth and the oppressive system prevented them from learning the truth. But how can anyone who lived in South Africa in the 1980's honestly declare they did not know about the suffering of ordinary blacks? They worked in our kitchens, cleaned our gardens and begged in our streets. If we did not know, all the fingers point to us – we did not want to know.

And what about the voices of the young lions in the black Pentecostal churches, the Relevant Pentecostal Witness and even the secular voices of the independent press? Or to ask the question of Eugene de Kock, convicted murderer and former commander of Vlakplaas where numerous opponents of apartheid were killed: *How did the white population expect 3 000 security policemen to control 40 million oppressed people with conventional methods?*

The TRC submission also blames the previous generation of white Pentecostal leaders: the likes of Francios Möller, GR Wessels and JT du Plessis. Again, the white leadership who were part of the TRC submission, gained leadership positions in the church in the early 1980's. Were they really

too humble to question their apartheid fathers for more than ten years while the country was heading towards a full blown civil war?²

UNDERSTANDING PENTECOSTAL CONSERVATISM

It seems as if we need to start somewhere in the psyche of Pentecostals if we want to address the issue of Pentecostal involvement in human rights issues. Both German and white South African Pentecostals totally failed to discern the spirits of their time. Not one Pentecostal was present when the Confessing Church (Bekennende Kirche) gathered at the epoch making Barmen Synod where the church made the historical stand for Christ in Nazi Germany. And not one member of the white AFM bothered to sign or declare solidarity with the Relevant Pentecostal Witness or Evangelical Witness in South Africa, two confessional statements condemning apartheid.

The white South African Pentecostal church went a step further: They actively supported the system of apartheid. There are more examples in post-World War II Pentecostalism where a significant stream within the movement embraced nationalism against all odds, the white Pentecostal pro-war stance on the invasion of Iraq is another case in point.

This phenomena of is so frequent in western, white Pentecostalism that one can almost speak of an article of faith. I use the phrase to describe what Rahner calls a catechism of the heart vis-a-vis a catechism of the books. The catechisms of the book are our official confessions of faith. To use an example: Pentecostals still confess that they believe in initial evidence as a sign of the baptism in the Spirit. Yet research in the USA indicated that speaking in tongues are no longer generally practised by North American pastors. Pentecostals confess it because they were taught to do so and believe in the doctrine on an intellectual level. On the other hand, Pentecostal statements of faith says nothing about nationalism, loyalty to the apartheid state, or support of the Iraqi invasion, or the presence of the American flag in the liturgical area of many Pentecostal churches in the USA. Support of the

² I addressed this issue more elaborately at the EPCRA conference in Rheinfelden in 2005. The article was published in SHE in 2006.

government has become so overwhelming important in many western Pentecostal churches, that it gets a ring of an untouchable believe, a catechism of the heart.

A recent example in the South African Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) explains the point. The white President of the non-racial united AFM issued a statement to support the conduct of a white member of the opposition calling a minister a thief in Parliament. Blacks were offended. They did not care if the allegation was true or not. The conduct of the president, Dr. Isak Burger smelled of a white agenda and not the conduct of the president of a multi-cultural church. But for Isak Burger it was natural to defend the white member and condemn the Speaker in the name of the Church. It is nowhere written that Pentecostal leaders ought to protect their own tribe, but for the president it is the truth. He cannot even imagine that it will offend black members.

The reactions of Isak Burger and Frank Chikane, president of the AFM International, to the prosecution of the apartheid minister of police and the apartheid chief of police for their attempt to kill Chikane in the apartheid days, illustrates the point.

Chikane approves the prosecution, despite the fact that he and Vlok reconciled after Vlok became a Christian, asked Chikane to forgive him and then washed Chikane's feet. Chikane told the story to the media as an example of real reconciliation in the rainbow nation.

His approval of the prosecution seems to contradict his own confession of the reconciliation that took place, but it is in line with the official position of the ANC and Chikane played an important role in the administration of President Mbeki. Burger, as we have seen, accepts the role of the spiritual father of the whites (although he is the president of a multi-cultural church). In both cases the catechisms of the book and the catechisms of the heart does not seem to meet.

In my Rheinfelden paper³ I have suggested that white Pentecostals have become closely connected with power after WW II. The necessity to remain connected seems to be the driving force behind the unification of the church, the vocal role of the president and even the acceptance of Chikane by white members who used to despise him. I do not wish to repeat what I have said then. Suffice to say that the changes that took place in the white Pentecostal churches in southern Africa after World War II were all aimed at creating a more acceptable image in the post-apartheid society.

The white leaders of the AFM were possibly sincere in their belief that a Afrikaner church sharing Afrikaner values will have a bigger impact on society and will lead to the salvation of more Afrikaners. But the price was high: participating in the oppression of the vast majority of the people.

THE FOUNDATIONS LAID BY PRE-WORLD WAR II PENTECOSTALS

If the theology of the powerful is a new phenomenon is there still something to be learned from the pre-WW II Pentecostals? Pentecostals opponents of the apartheid regime will answer yes. The relevant Pentecostal Witness was a confession of the early non-racial roots of Azusa Street (the birth place of Pentecostalism in Los Angeles in 1906) and John G Lake's early ministry in the black Zionist church in Doornfontein, Johannesburg.⁴ This non-racial witnesses became powerful narratives against the ideology of separateness of the apartheid regime and its false prophet, the apartheid church.

There are several reasons why this re-evaluating of Pentecostal origins must form part of future Pentecostal research. Azusa and Doornfontein became strong Pentecostal narratives in the struggle against apartheid. Pentecostals, using the faith of the fathers, were able to join hands with human rights

³ *Power and Empowerment in the Political Context of Some Afrikaans-Speaking Pentecostals in South Africa*, Paper presented at the joint EPTA/EPCRA Conference, Bueggen Castle, Rheinfelden, Germany, April 1, 2005.

⁴ Lake with Thomas Heshmalhalch, were two American missionaries who brought Pentecostalism to Africa. The Apostolic Faith Mission was founded by them.

activists and Christians from the Protestant and Catholic confessions in their struggle for justice.⁵

One of the biggest threats to humanity today is undoubtedly militarism driven by nationalism. Think of the conflict in Darfur, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe, the Iraqi crisis, the on-going Middle East conflict and we get the picture.

But there is another reason why we need to look at our radical peace history. We need to understand how is it possible that a church that produced the likes of JT and David du Plessis, became supporters and ally of a violent, abusive and oppressive regime.

HISTORICAL PENTECOSTAL PACIFISM

Although some North American Pentecostals, notably Murray Dempster and Edith Blumhoeffter have recently denied that pacifism was a general accepted Pentecostal article of faith in the early years, at least in the AFM we have ample evidence that it was the official position of the church until after World War II.

John Lake and Tom Hezmalhalch found a deeply divided community when they arrived in Cape Town in 1908. South Africa was all but unified. The country was divided into four different political entities. The Cape of Good Hope Province was a British colony since the second annexation. Natal was also a British colony. The Trekkers declared the Republic of Natalia, but its existence was short-lived.

Transvaal and the Orange Free State, however, were two republics until they lost their freedom in 1902 at the Peace of Vereeniging after a devastating three year war against the mighty empire. The Anglo-Boer War was one of the

⁵ It is a sad reflection of the historical awareness of Pentecostals that so many churches all over the world have accepted or are considering acceptance of the Reformed Belhar Confession against apartheid as their confession of faith, while even the drafters of the Relevant Pentecostal Witness have forgotten their own confession against apartheid.

bloodiest wars fought in modern times. When the British troops could not force the Boer troops into submission on the battlefields, Lord Kitchiner, commander of the British troops, issued his Scorched Land Policy. The farms in the republics were burnt to the ground, including the crops, and the women, the elderly and children were taken to concentration camps. The black labourers left on the farms were taken to separate camps. More than 27 000 people died in the camps, twice the number of soldiers who died on the battlefield.

The AFM was possibly the only church to break through the political, cultural and social divides caused by the Anglo-Boer War. Its leaders came from vast different backgrounds: British subjects who lived in South Africa, Americans, former British soldiers, former ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church, former boer officers who were sent to St Helena island, India and Ceylon (presently Sri Lanka) by the conquering Britons after the war and even the wife of the leader of the Nationalist Party, General JBM Hertzog.⁶

Probably the first reference to any political issue is to be found in the minutes of the executive council on 19th August, 1914. A brother in Ventersdorp wrote a letter asking a member of the executive to open a hall.⁷

Bro. Greef promised to go and take Bro. Van Vuuren if possible and from there to visit Genl. De la Rey

The reference is vague. No reason is given for the visit to General De la Rey. General De la Rey was a Boere general during the Anglo/Boer War. He was a *bittereinder*, i.e. one of the generals who remained in the field long after most general have surrendered. Some of his fellow *bittereinder generals* led a rebellion against the government of the prime minister, Genl. L Botha, who declared war against Germany in solidarity with Britain.

⁶ Burger, I, *Geloofsgekiedenis van die Apostoliese Geloofsending van Suid-Afrika* Evangelie-Uitgewers, Johannesburg 1988, 269, .

⁷ *Minute book of the Executive Council of the AFM*, 161, AFM Archives , Lyndhurst,.

However, from the rest of the minutes it is clear that the rebellion was one of the first major social issues the new church had to deal with. The council also appointed a delegation to attend the “*Union*” (probably a reference to the government).⁸ It seems as if the executive wanted to be in contact with both the government and the rebels.

The subject of taking up arms was placed on the agenda at the same meeting by PL le Roux, who had just succeeded John Lake as president. He (Le Roux) felt the necessity of sending a circular to the people and the government on the subject, noting their objection to taking up arms, but *willing to serve in other capacities if it becomes imperative*.⁹ From the minutes it is clear that the AFM, unlike the majority of Afrikaans-speaking churches (the so-called Reformed sister churches) did not give their support to the rebellion. Their refusal to participate in the military operations of the Union was apparently not political. The church was even *willing to serve in other capacities* in government services.¹⁰

But it is clear that the decision *not to take up arms* was not politically inspired or taken out of sympathy for the rebel leader or against the war efforts. It was an ethical-religious decision, based on the belief shared by most of the Pentecostals of the time that it is wrong to take a life.

At the next meeting on 30 September 1914, the secretary tabled the reply of the minister of justice, stating that all the applications for exemption from military service will receive immediate consideration.¹¹

⁸ ibid , 162

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ Burger, I., *Geloofsgekiedenis van die Apostoliese Geloofsending van Suid-Afrika*, 269, interprets the "other capacities" as a willingness to serve in non-combatant capacities. However in the light of the declaration to members and the answer of the minister, this interpretation seems wrong.

¹¹ ibid., 165

The AFM did not only want exemption from service in a combatant unit , but "exemption from military service".¹² The "willingness to serve in other capacities" seems to mean that the AFM considered alternative extra-military duties and not service in a non-combatant unit.

According to Isak Burger, who is also the best known church historian in Pentecostal circles, the executive council decided that young men can join the forces in non-combatant units.¹³ However, he gives no reason why the "other capacities" should be interpreted in such a way. This pacifist stand remained the official position of the AFM until at least World War II

When war in Europe became an acute possibility at the end of 1938 the executive decided to endorse the position taken in an article printed in a publication of the Assemblies of God in the USA , Pentecostal Evangel¹⁴. In The Comforter of 15th November 1938, the article written by E S Williams, was published in paraphrased form as the official position of the AFM on war . Participation in non-combatant forces is mentioned as one way of doing one's duties, while the article also states that even the farmer, the railway workers and those who build ships and trains participate in the success of military battles¹⁵.

The tension between loyalty to the government and conscientious objection is a central theme in this article. The Mission states its *unswerving faithfulness* to the government and assures it that the church will be subjected and "*assist wherever it is humanly possible (and) in accordance with our Faith*"¹⁶ .

¹² "...onze opvatting van de Schrift en de leer van ons Genootschap onze lidmaten niet toelaat wapens op te nemen tegen de medemensch". *Declaration of a AFM Member*, M J Schoeman , 24 . 10 . 1914, AFM Archives, Lyndhurst .

¹³ Burger, op. cit., 269.

¹⁴ *Minutes of the Executive Council*, 29th September 1938, 2045.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.* (translation JNH)

The article then elaborates on the kind of help a Christian can give in a time of war. He or she must decide how to assist the government so *that we can be protected against unnecessary trouble in a time when there will be enough misery.*

Possibly the most significant aspect of this article is the fact that the church states that it does not see it as the right of a Christian church to dominate the conscience of the individual, but only wants to give its members guidelines in connection with military service.¹⁷ This article marks an important change of course in the AFM. Although conscientious objection is still the norm, non-combatant service is no longer just a possibility under extreme circumstances, but it becomes the official position.

This "new" position of the AFM is contradictory in more than one way. If the prohibition of taking up arms is really a command of Jesus Christ, how can the church restrain from stating it as an article of faith? One may well ask if the church would leave other commands of Jesus Christ like the baptism, the prohibition of fornication, etc. to the conscience of their members and suffice only with guidelines.

It is not clear how the church can reject the destruction of human life and nevertheless helping the military forces to win battles by doing non-combatant or supporting service. If war is contrary the commandment of the Prince of Peace one would expect the church to encourage its members to abstain from both combatant, non-combatant and supporting services. It is also an unanswered question of the article how it is possible to be unconditionally obedient to Jesus Christ and simultaneously be "*unswervingly loyal*" to the government.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

The fact that members are instructed to act in such a way not to add trouble to the misery of war, gives the impression that the church wanted to protect its members from prosecution and imprisonment.¹⁸ However if non-participation in war is a command of the gospel, Pentecostals, who have suffered so much persecution for what they believed to be the truth, should rather have been encouraged to follow Christ no matter the cost.

The first two decades after World War II were marked by the fact that very little has been said about war and military training. Initially the church maintained its non-combatant stance. In 1950 the General-Secretary wrote a letter to inform the congregations that members of the AFM can get exemption from military service in a combatant unit.¹⁹

In 1955 Past J T du Plessis, minister of Krugersdorp and member of the executive council,²⁰ circulated a "*provisional*" viewpoint on several issues (the attitude of the AFM towards other churches; race relations; military service and war; and healing) on behalf of the spiritual committee.²¹

According to Du Plessis the State has the right to command his subjects to do military training because God gave the power of the sword to the King.²² Military service is not against Scripture: Soldiers who came to the Lord, were not commanded to leave the army, but only to be good Christian soldiers (Luke 3:14, Acts 10, Matt. 8 5 - 10).²³ When a soldier has to kill someone in

¹⁸ The Defence Act did not make provision for exemption to conscientious objectors in times of war, but only in peace time.

¹⁹ AFM Archives, Lyndhurst

²⁰ J T du Plessis is the younger brother of DJ du Plessis, general secretary in the forties and fifties.

²¹ Du Plessis, JT., *Standpunte Oor Verskillende Sake*, Unpublished Paper, Krugersdorp, 1956, AFM Archives, Lyndhurst.

²² *ibid.*, 3

²³ *ibid.*

war, it is not murder because the soldier does not act in his personal capacity, but as an instrument of the state who has the power to kill.²⁴

This statement is the first example of partial pacifism in the AFM, The church or the individual can only refuse military service if the government is unjust. Both total pacifism and non-combatant pacifism are rejected and the critical attitude towards the State is almost completely lost.

The next step was to appoint a full-time military chaplain. In 1961 the AFM approached the government in requesting a chaplain to serve the denomination's needs²⁵ and in January 1964 Commandant Pastor WJ Rheeders, a former police sergeant, was appointed as the first full-time military chaplain of the AFM.²⁶

After the death of Past, Rheeders, Pastor JJ Liebenberg succeeded him in Pretoria, while Pastor SF du Plessis became chaplain in the Cape.²⁷ Liebenberg was an eager writer and wrote several articles for the Comforter. Shortly after he has taken up his new position, he wrote an article, "*The National Serviceman in the Defence Force.*"²⁸ He states that national service is necessary to enable our sons to defend "*our Fatherland*".²⁹ His article is an apology for the Defence Force. Instructors have a good knowledge of people, they are not hard people, and they want the best for the servicemen. Only people without discipline who do not want to bow, will have trouble in the forces.³⁰

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Minutes of the Executive Council of the AFM 14th August, 1964 , 5757

²⁶ *ibid.*, 6259

²⁷ *In die Weermag* (author unknown) in Comforter , May, 1970, 24.

²⁸ Liebenberg, JJ, *Die Dienspligtiges in die Weermag*, Comforter, Sept., 1990.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *ibid.*

In June the same year Pastor Liebenberg wrote a second article on the defence force.³¹ The article begins by predicting that because of the lack of peace, more people will be involved in the Defence Force. He points out that the Defence Force is a good qualified army, not only in the military field, but also its social workers, medical corps, teaching staff, and even those responsible for religious education (the chaplains). In other words we have a well-organized iron fist that is able to defend the heritage of our costly country.³²

The ideological orientation of Pastor Liebenberg is clear. The chaplain is not only in the Defense Force to minister to the people, but he is part of the "iron fist" that defends the "costly country". It is not surprising that he portrays the chiefs of the army, air force and navy and the leaders in the Defence Force as people who express a deep dependence upon the Lord in their speeches and who acknowledge God as their source of power.³³

The roundabout turn of the AFM is nowhere better illustrated than in an article by F P Möller (jr) in the church's official publication, Pinksterboodskapper (Pentecostal Herald, the successor of the Comforter) in January, 1989.³⁴ This is not an official statement by the AFM, but nevertheless portrays an important viewpoint in the church. Möller was a member of the influential Committee for Doctrine Ethics and Liturgy and vice-rector of the theological college of the AFM. Möller rejects the idea that aggression and violence can never be legitimate for a Christian. He identifies a pacifist (wrongly spelled as a passifist) as a person with "hang shoulders and a halo over his head". This somewhat other worldly world view is so far from the experience of a Christian that it only

³¹ Liebenberg, JJ., *Ons Eie Seuns in die Weermag. 'n Nadere Kennismaking met die SA Weermag*, in Comforter, June, 1912, 7 f.

³² *ibid.*, 7

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Moller, FP (jr.), *Passifisme (sic) in die Koninkryk van God*, Pinksterboodskapper, January. 1988, 4 - 7

frustrates him.³⁵ He then states explicitly that "*passivism (sic) is not a Biblical principle*".³⁶

Möller refutes the pacifist view that a Christian can never participate in violence.

*There are times when humans will turn the other cheek, as Calvary has pointed out, but there are also times when the bad person must be confronted with the violence of the Kingdom of God, where the temple is cleansed and the godless are struck with blindness. (Joh,2:13; Acts 13:10-11)*³⁷

To state his case Möller caricatures the pacifist position by stating that Christ is portrayed by some (the pacifists) as a hopeless, weak and harmless soul who did not accept any challenges. Non-pacifist Christians, however knows that Jesus was portrayed as someone with power and authority.³⁸

The obvious weakness of Möller's article is the fact that he does not understand pacifism, or the pacifist Pentecostal tradition. He was possibly misled by the word "passive". And he does not address the Pentecostal pacifist position, which, according to Burger, is still the official position of the AFM.³⁹

However, this ignorance of someone as influential as Möller, is clear indication of the full turn of the wheel in Pentecostal attitudes and ethics. Pacifism or a non-violent lifestyle is not only completely unknown to one of the most prominent and influential theologians. He even describes it as a false doctrine.

Although the AFM of SA has never repelled it's official position that Christians should not participate as combatants in war, it is no longer practiced by the church. It seems to be inappropriate to see pacifism or non-violent attitudes towards war as the present view of the church.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 4.

³⁶ *ibid.*, (translation JNH)

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁹ Burger I., *op. cit.*, 211

The AFM started as a peace church in the true sense of the word. Over the years the church has slowly moved away from this position.

The AFM has repelled it's former stand by it's actions. Not only some of it's members, but the whole church and all it's councils have moved to a position where the official position is no longer known, understood or tolerated.

Pentecostal Christians who feel the need to combat nationalist militarism, can do no better than to reconsider the historical roots of pacifism. In South Africa the apartheid ideology and the desire of white Pentecostals to become part of the establishment, rather than a logical analysis of Pentecostal thinking, meant the end of pacifism. An honest historical memory demands us to re-evaluate this issue.

Pre-millennial dispensationalism and militarism

No doctrine has done more in the Pentecostal movement to encourage nationalist militarism than pre-millennial dispensationalist.

Take for example the role of pre-millennial USA pastors in the Iraqi crisis. During September 2006, when the Bush administration were encouraged by the Jim Baker Committee to speak to Syria and Iran, pre-millennial pastors encouraged the Bush administration on TBN Television to execute a pre-emptive strike against Iran.

The first was a message of John Hagee of the Cornerstone Church, San Antonio, Texas, the second Rod Parsley of World Harvest Church, Columbus, Ohio. Both were giving a detailed exegesis of Ezekiel 38 and 39 to prove that the Arab states and Russia will invade Israel and be crushed by God. Benny Hinn and Jack von Impe soon followed suit. Ever-present Pat Robertson, broadcasting live from Haifa with Hezbollah rockets flying over his head, is

very vocal in his news bulletins and Middle East commentary of his beliefs in God's preferential choice for the state of Israel.

This doctrine was also one of the cornerstones of white Pentecostal support for apartheid. One figure stands out in South Africa in the 1940's and 50's: Apostolic Faith Mission leader GR Wessels.

Wessels was a charismatic leader and became a member of the AFM executive at the young age of 25 in 1937. In 1943 he was elected as vice-president of the church. He was from the outset interested in political issues. According to his own testimony he was already pro-Nationalist Party (the only one on the executive) when he became a member of the executive.⁴⁰

After a study tour abroad, Wessels started teaching on the dangers of communism.⁴¹ The sermons were extremely political, so much so that the Minister of Social Services, Dr Karl Bremer, thanked Past. Wessels in a speech before the Workers Council in 1953 for his wonderful work warning the people of South Africa against communism. In 1955 Wessels received a seat from the Nationalist Party in the Senate. He remained vice-president of the AFM until 1969.

Wessels managed to link pre-millennial dispensationalism with his pro-Afrikaner, pro-apartheid agenda. Stalin and Khrushchev were anti-Christ, but they were also the biggest enemies of Christian South Africa.⁴² South Africa closed the Soviet embassy in 1955.

Consequently, if the anti-Christ was against South Africa, and if the newly formed State of Israel, personification of the fulfilment of prophecy, was also

⁴⁰ Interview with Burger, I, quoted in Burger, I., 1989. *Geloofsgeskiedenis van die Apostoliese Geloofsending van Suid-Afrika*, Johannesburg, Evangelie-uitgewers, p.325.

⁴¹ Van der Spuy, M.(1985). *Die Spanning tussen Vryheid en Formalisering ten opsigte van die liturgiese verskuiwing in die AGS van Suid-Afrika*, unpublished MTh dissertation. Pretoria, UNISA.

⁴² The Constitution implemented by the apartheid regime recognised the sovereignty of God over the State. Apartheid as a policy was developed by the Reformed Churches and the first Nationalist prime minister after World War II was a former Dutch Reformed minister.

one of South Africa's closest international friends, then the apartheid government must be doing something right.

In the oversimplified clear distinction that dispensationalists draw between good and bad, the Russians were the evil ones. Therefore South Africa must be amongst the righteous. This way of thinking explains how the South African Pentecostals could be sectarian on a personal level (denying that those members of traditional churches are saved), while on a national level recognising South Africa as a Christian country and the Nationalist Party government as a Christian state.

In South Africa the identification of the Council movement as a structure of the false prophet was politically extremely helpful. Pentecostals did not oppose apartheid in the 1950's and 1960's. Even the black Pentecostals silently accepted their fate.⁴³ And the international Pentecostal movement maintained ties with the white South African Pentecostals long after the Reformed traditions suspended the white Reformed churches for their participation in the apartheid structures.⁴⁴

THE VOCAL YEARS: THE END TIMES AND APARTHEID

Bennie Kleynhans was never an international figure. He was never recognised as one of the top leaders in the AFM, although he served on the executive for many years. His biggest influence, however, was in his eschatological preaching and later his books.

⁴³ When GR Wessels became a senator with the main political objective to remove the coloureds from the voters roll, the same coloured section of the AFM expressed their support for Wessels since his participation in politics will help the church.

⁴⁴ The other so-called white South African denominations came under fierce attacks from their related international denominations for their support of apartheid. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) is a good example of continued isolation over the last fifty years. In 1941 the DRC left the Christian Council of South Africa and in 1960, after the Cottesloe conference the DRC left the World Council of Churches. In 1978 the relationship between the DRC and the Reformed Church of the Netherlands was terminated, in 1982 both the Schweiz Reformierte Kirche and the Reformierten Bund of Germany cut their ties with the DRC. The biggest blow to their international ecumenical relations came when the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) declared a status confessionis on apartheid and suspended the membership of DRC in 1982. Two years later the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES), followed in the footsteps of the WARC by declaring a status confessionis on apartheid and gave the DRC two years to get its house in order.

Kleynhans mixed pre-millennial chiliasm and apartheid politics like no else before him. He did not carry the political baggage of GR Wessels. His influence stretched much further than the AFM or even the Pentecostal movement. Many of his books were published by a pre-millennial evangelical reformed church. And he received a PhD for his published works from the Commonwealth University (although he was not an academic in any sense of the word).

His first book, *Die Koning kom (The King is Coming)*⁴⁵ is a 376 page exposition of the end times. The book is not different from similar books that were published in the USA and the United Kingdom during that time. However, neatly tugged in between a Biblical rejection of the United Nations, communism, the international monetary system, the position of Israel and the coming antichrist, is a twenty page exposure of the diabolic conspiracy against South Africa and an eschatological defence of apartheid.⁴⁶

The book starts with a long conspiracy theory, beginning with the discredited story of Illuminati ruling the world. The Illuminati not only created Nazi Germany, it was also responsible for the formation of the United Nations. Its main objective was a world government, in other words, the sanctioning in of the antichrist.⁴⁷ And the American administration is infiltrated by the Illuminati and subservient to it!

The ecumenical movement is deeply involved in this creation of a one world religion.⁴⁸ One of the objectives of this one world religion is racial integration (rasse-integrasie)! Even the civil rights movement in the USA was the creation of Illuminati and the communists!⁴⁹

⁴⁵ 1980. Pretoria. Private publication by the author.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 48 – 69..

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 1 – 50.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 55

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 50.

In Kleynhans' second book, *Die Koning Kom II* (The King is Coming II) Kleynhans identified the powers of darkness and deception: the "terrorists" Nelson Mandela, Dr. Allan Boesak, President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Frank Chikane, suspended AFM pastor and Dr. Beyers Naude, amongst others.⁵⁰

The lukewarm church of Laodicea is not a liberal or backslidden church, but a human rights church.⁵¹ Humanism is like Marxism, the worship of humans. The South African Council of Churches has replaced preaching of salvation and holiness with themes like apartheid, human rights abuses, oppression and the restructuring of South Africa. (Including the release of the "terrorist" Nelson Mandela).⁵²

The Illuminati remained a central theme in Kleynhans' books. In ± 1990 he published *Diaboliese sameswering* (Diabolic Conspiracy).⁵³ The book identified Illuminati and the New Age movement as the enemies of God and the powers behind the one world church. But this diabolic conspiracy also includes Islam, the charismatic Kingdom Now-theology and again the ecumenical movement.

In *Die Laaste Uur en die Merk van die Dier* (The Last Hour and the Mark of the Beast)⁵⁴ and *In die Laaste sewe Jaar* (In the Last Seven years)⁵⁵ Kleynhans discusses the popular Ezekiel 38 and 39. Both books appeared shortly before the fall of communism and the assault of Russia on Israel is the main theme in his interpretation. This is not a new interpretation, but links to pre-millennial teachings of its time, including Pentecostals and evangelicals like Hal Lindsey, Jack von Impe, Derek Prince, Salem Kirban, MR de Hahn, Dwight Pentecost. The list goes on. While Kleynhans sees a role for the West

⁵⁰ (date unknown 1981?). Brakpan, VG Publishers, pp. 85 – 89.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 81

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 84

⁵³ (Date unknown 1990?), ?). Brakpan, VG Publishers.

⁵⁴ (1990), Brakpan, VG Publishers.

⁵⁵ (1989), Brakpan, VG Publishers.

in opposing the diabolical conspiracy against Israel, he believes that only God can stop them or saving His church by taking them out of the earth.⁵⁶

However, what makes Kleynhans unique is the messianic position of the apartheid regime in his writings. Russia and communism in general hate God. Therefore they hate the religious Jewish state and the Christian State in South Africa. The diabolical attack will not be directed at Israel alone, but will also include South Africa.

Kleynhans worked with a hermeneutic of fear. His books never start with Biblical exposition, or even a social analysis. It starts with all his conspiracy theories and myths, beginning with the Illuminati myth, with its only source the long discredited Protocols of Zion. And then he moves to the international arena, the UN, the liberal, New Age communist-infiltrated USA administration. These myths and theories lays the foundation for his exegesis, but not before he uses the myths and theories to interpret the threats against the present-day church: communism, humanism, liberalism (all different manifestations of the same deception). Scriptures are used sparsely here just to identify the deceptions with prophetic warnings. And good, committed Christians who serve Jesus and seek holiness (like the South African whites) are being persecuted by the world.

Finally Kleynhans comes with the solution: The rapture of the Church. And while we wait for Jesus to return, our task is to resist the enemies of God. We can do nothing to make this world better. Our only solution is Jesus. And then not as a catalyst for changing society, but as the King who will take the church away.

One can argue that not all the end-time preachers of the apartheid era preached such a blatant political conservative message. Many of them did not work with the myths if Illuminati and the theories of the New World Order. But it is also true that no one ever opposed the opinions of Kleynhans. He was a

⁵⁶ The identification of the list of enemies of Israel has always depended on the international scene in the time of the interpretation.

sought-after conference and revival speaker and he wrote more books (and sold them to Pentecostal people) than any other South African Pentecostal. And he received a PhD in recognition of his prophetic writings.

One can also ask why Kleynhans was so popular with the Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal pre-millennialists. If his writings were books on the extreme periphery of pre-millennialism, surely the more middle of the road exegetes and pastors should have been much more prominent.

In the South African context the enthusiasm for Kleynhans is understandable. Whites feared the communism and black nationalism. Rationally speaking there was very little hope for eternal white rule. After the political unrest of 1976, international analysts and political observers agreed that it was just a matter of time before the apartheid regime would be replaced by majority rule. For the white Christians who believed that they had a God-given calling to lead the black nations of southern Africa to nationhood and protect their own identity with political power, majority rule was not an option.

Solution: Get God on our side. If He can (or will) not give us political power, the rapture is the solution.

Time does not permit to elaborate on the similarities between the pro-apartheid eschatology of Bennie Kleynhans and other white South African Pentecostals on the one hand and USA prophetic preachers. Suffice to say that the fruits that are produced by pre-millennial dispensationalism are destructive and a threat to everything Pentecostals believe in: Biblical exegesis, the sanctity of life and the love of God in Jesus Christ for the lost world.

Conclusion

Political conviction and the desire to be part of the establishment played an important role in the AFM's round about turn on issues of nationalism and pacifism. In this paper I concentrated on pacifism. I could have looked at the rejection of non-racialism, once a mark of Pentecostalism in both the USA and

South Africa. I could have looked at the Assemblies of God in the USA. The same trends in a somewhat different milieu can be seen.

The important conclusion for this study is that Pentecostals are driven, like most religious movements, not only by Biblical conviction, but also by nationalism, the desire to be acceptable and the political movements of its time.