

## CHAPTER 6

## A PROPHET FOR HIS TIMES, BUT FOR OTHERS TOO

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In an interview in *Kerkbode* (11 December 1992), Ben Marais was asked his reaction to the following statement:

“In various circles, today, you are seen as a prophet who posed points of view that were proven correct – and who lived to see it happen. Your reaction?”

Ben Marais answered:

“I experienced many years of loneliness and even rejection. But I thank the Lord that I could see and experience so much, which gives me much pleasure.”

This interview was conducted in 1992. The acknowledgement by the official popularised newspaper of the NG Kerk that Ben Marais is considered a prophet is significant. The newspaper is considered to be intentionally an instrument for the provision of information and a means to influence public opinion. The placement of such an interview indicates that the newspaper was conditioning its readership to the fact that errors of the past needed to be rectified, and that Ben Marais is one voice from the past (1940s-1970s) who could assist in the present and future healing in the church.

Thus, a few questions are raised: Who determines who are the saints and who are the sinners in the church? Who determines who is a prophet and who a heretic? Why was Ben Marais called a prophet when it was convenient and a liberal when his points of view were not? These questions will not be answered directly. Rather, this chapter will consider Ben Marais' pronouncements and formulations of his points of view – as expressly formulated also in his letter to Carson Blake (3 September 1970). It will be apparent that his points of view are rooted in his person, his background and his development as a church historian, a theologian and a thinker – and a romanticist.

In this chapter the legacy of Ben Marais is considered, a logical sequence in the line of thought argued in the previous chapters. In this chapter distinction is drawn between his various activities and the reactions he evoked through his person and pronouncements. Thus far it has been indicated that Ben Marais was a person of his times, but the principles he adhered to hold a strong message for others who find themselves in situations where politically and/or culturally manipulated sentiment abuses religion for alternative reasons.

## 2. THE LEGACY OF BEN MARAIS

In his consideration on the role of the Netherlands in the history of Apartheid, Van Butselaar (2001:155) reviews the sterner voices of criticism against Apartheid, as for example, J.C. Hoekendijk and J.J. Buskes. In 1955, under commission of the International Brotherhood of Reconciliation, Buskes made a three month tour through South Africa. Buskes returned home a convinced fighter against racism in South Africa. He wrote a book (1956), which contains a report of his tour and some important insights on Ben Marais.

Van Butselaar (2001:156) indicates that the book formulates few principled arguments against Apartheid. The report has two parts. The first part is a description of how Buskes experienced South Africa. The second part describes the (theological) criticism against Apartheid that he had heard in South Africa. Buskes allows the opinions of especially Ben Marais, B.B. Keet, T. Huddleston and Alan Paton to be heard. Buskes understands how Marais did not reject Apartheid outright, but effectively carved it out from the inside using theological criticism. Buskes (1955:200) concludes:

“Who ever reads the statements (of Marais) and considers them, would feel that Ben Marais is always debating ... Actually he does not believe in it (apartheid) ... In actuality apartheid is a horror for Marais.”

Buskes considered Marais to be “an expression of South Africa at its best, one humble man” (Buskes 1955:201).

On 13 October 1987, the principle of the University of Pretoria, Prof. D.M. Joubert, wrote to Ben Marais informing him that on the previous day, the Council of the University, had motioned to honour him with the degree D.D. (*honoris causa*), on recommendation of the university's senate. The degree was granted on 31 March 1988, during the autumn graduation ceremony. Joubert's letter mentioned the grounds for the honouring, which summarise the heritage of Ben Marais. The degree was to be granted for his significant influence and contribution as theologian, as minister and as a Christian, given as a result of his definite contemplation on the place and calling of the church in Southern Africa.<sup>229</sup> Ben Marais was not a political activist, and most certainly not a party politician, though certain parties dearly wished he were.

### **a. Spoken Legacy**

#### ***i. In the Classroom***

“It is impossible to guarantee the creation of right and just minded people at our tertiary institutions. But it is imperative to appoint such people in training and development roles. Important aspects relate to academic suitability, affective and formative qualities, and of pleasant bearing. For how would it be that we nurture sour scholars because their mentors had no enthusiasm.” (Anon)

Ben Marais tried to make the subject Church History alive. He prepared his lessons in such a way that it would come across as a drama, firstly to evoke the students' interest, and secondly, to present Church History as the great drama of all of God's people on earth. In his inaugural lecture delivered during an evening session of the Transvaal Synod (1954b), Ben Marais shared his views on the study of Church History. In this lecture he brings the study and teaching of Church History to bear upon the calling of the church. In his introduction he states (1954b):<sup>230</sup>

“This year in which you called me to accept responsibility in the teaching of the history of Christianity stands in the sign of significant things.<sup>231</sup> In this time of times the Church of Christ is called on the world front to once more reflect upon its own history on which God has led it, and with this vision and the eye established upon Him who is and was and will be, to enter the

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<sup>229</sup> Vir sy “diepgaande invloed en bydrae as teoloog, as predikant, as Christen mens, gelewer van (sic) beslissende worsteling rondom die plek en roeping van die kerk in Suider Afrika” (Joubert 1987).

<sup>230</sup> My translation.

<sup>231</sup> Beslissende dinge.

new storms that thunder darkly on all the horizons.<sup>232</sup> It is good that the Church knows its path in such an hour and reflects upon the routes on which God has led him.”

On periodisation, Ben Marais considers the contemporaneous church (1964b) to be in the 4<sup>th</sup> crisis hour, the onslaught of communism against the whole world. He places Church history writing in the context of history recording, placing particular emphasis on the early historians and on the Christian and biblical views on history. In his elaboration on the Christian view of history, Ben Marais emphasises the linear character of the Christian and biblical view compared to the cyclic view of eastern thought and religions. He continuously refers to Christianity as a western religion. He then moves chronologically through time, touching on particular views of history, such as Origen and Eusebius who wish to indicate that Christianity is not presenting anything new and St Augustine with *The City of God*, Irenaeus, and the development of the idea of progressive movement. He also highlights particular moments of history writing in the Enlightenment and the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the historical century. Ben Marais then places particular emphasis on the value and importance<sup>233</sup> of Church History as a subject, which he summarises in five points.

Ben Marais taught his students (Marais 1962b:3):

“This is no time for church disputes, but for the description of the broad avenues of the life of the church of Christ as witness of eternal things in an always striving world.”

Interesting insight can be gained into Ben Marais’ teaching by looking at the examinations he set. For example, the examination set in November 1956 for BD I, II and III, as well as Dip. I, II and III, can be looked at as representative. The examination was on History of Doctrines,<sup>234</sup> and while Ben Marais was internal examiner, the external examiners are indicated as the Professors of Theology, Section B.

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<sup>232</sup> Wat donker op alle horisonne uitslaan.

<sup>233</sup> Nood en noodsaaklikheid.

<sup>234</sup> Dogmengeskiedenis.

Seven questions were set, of which five had to be done, and two, Questions 1 and 7, were compulsory. The compulsory questions each had two further options. The questions are formulated in broad terms, indicating the extent of course work covered. In Question 1, students had to choose between answering on either the teachings of Thomas Aquinas and his meaning for History of Doctrines, or scholasticism as a system and its main figures from Anselmus to Occam. In the second compulsory question, Question 7, students had to choose between providing a sketch of the origin and meaning of the *Formula Concordiae* also providing a summary of its main doctrines, and indicating the place Calvin's doctrines on the Eucharist and predestination took in Reformed Doctrine.

The remaining five optional questions, of which three had to be done, indicate that strong emphasis was placed on the Reformation, while Question 6 asked for the main figures and for more information (nature and meaning) of medieval mysticism. In Question 2 three separate questions were incorporated, firstly asking for the contributions of Petrus Abelardus to History of Doctrines, a comparison between the soteriologies of Petrus Abelardus and Anselmus, and the method Petrus Abelardus followed in his *Sic et Non*. Question 3 asks about the sacraments and how the church of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century understood sacraments. While being very general in his reference to "church" in this question, Question 3, Ben Marais is very specific in requiring the students to describe three of the recognised sacraments referring to their *materia*, *forma*, and *intentio*. While Question 5 asks about the "forerunners of the Reformation" – a two page essay, Question 4 requests more information on Duns Scotus and William Occam.

It appears from the question papers (various – Archives Pretoria NG Kerk Synod) that Ben Marais reviewed and alternated the material he covered in his classes. It is also interesting to note how his students performed, in the above examination, without indicating the students names, there were no fails, and the allocated symbols ranging between A, A-, B+, B, and B-. The value of a "B" was 60% (Archive Pretoria NG Kerk Synod).

Other disciplines taught by Ben Marais included Church Law, History of Missions and General Church History, besides the Church History of the Fatherland, South African Church History.

Ben Marais provided his students with the minimal class notes (Viljoen Interview 1986). A few extant copies, though, are available for perusal. Of particular interest is his course work on Ecumenical Studies. The 5 page handout (Archive Pretoria NG Kerk Synod) provides a densely factual summary of the principle moments in the ecumenical movement, ranging from a reference to John 17:21, the early church, the time prior to, during and after the reformation, and more detail during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The notes center strongly on what is meant under the term “ecumenism”, looking at its “conceptual necessity”, “linguistic justification” and the “history of the term”.

In the Conclusion 3 aspects of the meaning of the term “ecumenism” are distinguished. This is done in reference to the developments in the use of the term until the end of Vatican II. In the first aspect, Ben Marais considers it as a specific attitude or approach that contains in it a view to a new horizon and broader perspective, and in the second, it is indicated that the term is associated with institutions that help the churches in their strive for better understanding and promotes communal actions. The 3<sup>rd</sup> aspect Ben Marais considers is most interesting, since he emphasises that the word “ecumenical” indicates the relation of the church to the world, and then concerning its commission to proclaim the Gospel to all people. This last aspect emphasises the difference between Ben Marais and the general thinking in the World Council of Churches towards the end of the 1960s and early 1970 concerning the relation between church and world, as expressed in the Programme to Combat Racism.

## *ii. At the Synods*

While the focus is frequently placed on Ben Marais’ protests against the scriptural justification of policies (Mission and Apartheid), even by this thesis, at the synods held during the 1940s (1940, 1944, 1948) his observations at synods during the 1970s and 1980s are equally as important. Botha (1979:15) considers the reasons for Ben Marais’ role in the various synods not being reflected in their respective Acts. Botha indicates

that it was “the policy of the Transvaal Synod” to notarise only the motions and proposals that were accepted. Botha then contends that Ben Marais did not state the popular points of view.

In a letter to the editor of the Afrikaans newspaper *Beeld* (23 January 1985), with the heading “Ope Kerke” (Open Churches), the contribution made by Ben Marais can be deduced. The letter reflects on the changes that had taken place over the previous decade. He writes (23 January 1985):<sup>235</sup>

“... In 1974 I suggested at the General Synod of the NG Kerk in Cape Town: ‘The NG Kerk declares that all its churches are open to all people for the purpose of worship’. Only 12 people had the conviction or courage in that meeting of hundreds of delegates to publicly raise their hands in support of the motion! I know more felt that way, but the pressure of the political and ecclesiastic opinion was still too strong. When a man from ‘Die Burger’ asked me afterwards: ‘Prof Marais, are you disappointed?’, I answered: ‘Naturally I am, but I forecast that the church will accept such a proposal within 10 years’. And then in 1984, exactly 10 years later in the same city and in the same hall, the Cape NG Kerk accepted a similar proposal! And this morning when I opened ‘Beeld’, the decision made yesterday by the Gereformeerde Kerke was on the front page: ‘Nobody may be excluded from a service or from the Lord’s supper based on race or colour’....”

This extract indicates the change in thought that came about in the NG Kerk on separate services and on Apartheid. Ben Marais was instrumental in influencing this change of thinking.

### **Ned. Herv. or Geref. Kerk of Transvaal**

#### ***1940: Mission Policy***

Ben Marais presented his report on the Tambaram conference, which was held the previous year, to the synod. He was not a delegated member of the synod because he was not associated with any one particular congregation. He was in service of the synod. He said that Apartheid was questioned at the conference and had to be thought about carefully (*Die Voorligter* 1 January 1976).

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<sup>235</sup> My translation.

***1944: Issuing Weapons***

This was the first synod Ben Marais attended as a delegate of a congregation: Pretoria East.

During the Second World War, the question was raised whether weapons should or should not be issued to black soldiers fighting in the war (it needs to be remembered that soldiers of colour – the Cape Corps – had helped to suppress the rebellion at Slagter's Nek in 1810, and many black people had supported the English during the Anglo-Boer War). The formulation of the resolution was based on ideology, and not on either correct Scripture interpretation and hermeneutics or the practical situation. Ben Marais protested against the scriptural justification. The result was that they changed the wording, but not the sentiment (Handelinge 1944:57).

***1948: Justification of Apartheid***

Prior to the session of the 21<sup>st</sup> Synod of the Ned. Herv. or Geref. Kerk in which the justification of Apartheid from Scripture was to be tabled, Ben Marais consulted with Prof. Pellisier, who encouraged him to raise his objections (Meiring 1979:88). The report had been prepared by only one person, and he, Pellisier, had undersigned it – while not being in total agreement with all it contained. The study of the justification of Apartheid and guardianship was the responsibility of the Commission for Current Affairs. Other issues that were reported on by the Commission included: Chiliasm; the “Roomse Gevaar” (The Roman Catholic Church); the Catechism text book; the Noavitian Covenant;<sup>236</sup> weddings of divorced persons; Sects; Cremation; and Spring day (Handelinge van die Sinode 1948:368-369).

The synod of 1948 will be known as the synod in which church leaders attempted to manipulate the reading of Scripture to serve an ideological and political purpose. Furthermore, as has been seen in the section on the relations between E.P. Groenewald, who was responsible for the preparation of the “Report on the Justification on Scripture”, the constitution of the synod was manipulated to ensure that the objections

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<sup>236</sup> Noagitiese Verbond.

raised by Ben Marais would not forfeit their political plans.

It is indicated in Appendix B (Report of Current Affairs) of the Acts of the Synod (*Handelinge van die Sinode 1948:279-284*) on the Scriptural grounds of the policy of race Apartheid and guardianship that the policy of the church is clearly formulated in the official “Mission Policy” of the church. The Scriptural grounds of the Mission Policy were previously questioned by Ben Marais. From Art. 5 of the Mission Policy the following justification is provided (*Handelinge 1948:279*):<sup>237</sup>

“The traditional fear of the Afrikaner for placing blacks and whites on the same level<sup>238</sup> is born in his aversion of the idea of the mixing of races.”

And from Art. 6 of the Mission Policy (*Handelinge 1948:279*):<sup>239</sup>

“The indigenous<sup>240</sup> and coloured people must be helped to develop to self respecting Christian nations, as far as possible separate from the whites.”

Reference is also made to the synod of 1944 (*Handelinge 1944:283*) in the report on the policy of the Church (*Handelinge 1948:279*):<sup>241</sup>

“In the report of the Commission of the Synod on the issuing of weapons to the indigenous people the Synod modifies the formulation of the policy of apartheid to read as follows: ‘The Commission of the Synod wishes to indicate with earnest that the policy of the church is based on the principles of race-apartheid and guardianship as it is cemented<sup>242</sup> in the Word of God’.”

The report is careful to emphasise that principles of Scripture and not proofs from Scripture are central to the argument (*Handelinge 1948:280*). Further attention is then given to documents in which the principles of Scripture on race relations (*Handelinge 1948:281*), to racial and national Apartheid in Scripture (*Handelinge 1948:281-283*), and to guardianship in Scripture (*Handelinge 1948:283-284*).

Ben Marais was outspoken on the justification of Apartheid on Scripture.

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<sup>237</sup> My translation.

<sup>238</sup> Gelykstelling tussen swart en wit.

<sup>239</sup> My translation.

<sup>240</sup> Naturel.

<sup>241</sup> My translation.

<sup>242</sup> Vasgelê.

The justification was based primarily on the Old Testament, and the prescription to Jews in order that their religion not be influenced negatively. Ben Marais maintained (Viljoen Interview 1986) that everyone was Semitic, and that it was therefore not a prescription for race differentiation. He asked about the how the texts were to be made applicable to the situation in Southern Africa, thus a hermeneutic question.

After talking for half an hour, Ben Marais says (Viljoen 1988) that one of the small miracles in his life happened. Ds P.J. Viljoen, minister of the Heidelberg congregation and assessor of the synod seconded his motion. The motion was thereafter accepted by the synod. Ben Marais had been successful in influencing the church's position on Apartheid! But only to avail for a short period. Certain ministers were furious, and they expressed it towards Ben Marais (Viljoen 1988), the rejected report on the Scriptural justification of Apartheid was to be used in the General Elections later that year (Swart Interview 20 January 2003). Two days later, on 13 April, in the evening, the issue was re-addressed in a special hearing of the synod. In the report (*Handelinge van die Sinode 1948*: 446) it is indicated that at this special hearing it was determined that the church's policy of Apartheid is not only born out of circumstances, but has its foundation in the Holy Scriptures. Reference is also made to Ben Marais' original motion and that he once more objected to justifying the policy of Apartheid in Scripture. The special session was attended by virtually all the delegates, but of these, only 10 had it noted that they were at this time not yet convinced to support the negation of the scriptural justification of race Apartheid.

Thus followed a regression of policy. The synod reversed to the 1944 formulation. In his argument, Ben Marais mentioned practical grounds as an alternative substantiation. In Viljoen's interview with him (1986), Ben Marais claims that he did so to keep the discussion open. However, I would rather determine that Ben Marais was of the opinion, in 1948, that Apartheid could be justified on practical grounds. He would later reject also this justification of Apartheid. Quite correctly Ben Marais distinguished (Viljoen 1986) between different services, ministries, for different language groups and separate churches for separate people. The first would be acceptable, the latter not.

A further seed was planted when 13 young ministers signed the document that they were not convinced that Apartheid could be based on Scripture. One of these signatures belonged to Beyers Naudé.

***1951: Confirming Scripture's Stance on Apartheid***

The arguments proposed during the 1948 synod were refined and expanded and reformulated (*Handelinge 1951:179-192*). The election was won and now the church was setting about substantiating its position as a national church. Thus, new headings appear: "The Word of God our Only Guide" (*Handelinge 1951:179*); "Holy Scripture and International Relations" (*Handelinge 1951:179*); "Scripture and the Unity of Humanity" (*Handelinge 1951:179*); and "Division of Humanity into Races, Nations and Languages a Determined<sup>243</sup> deed of God" (*Handelinge 1951:180-188*). The Next Appendix (F), is a response to a general statement of the United Nations on Human Rights (*Handelinge 1951:189-192*).

***1954: Disappointing Notice***

In comparison to previous years, the debates on Scriptural Justification received less attention. In the report of the Commission of the Synod for Current Affairs the following notice appears, indicating that the church had received strong criticism from abroad (*Handelinge 1954:313*):<sup>244</sup>

"2. Scriptural Justification of Race-Apartheid: The commission is sorry that it has not been given an opportunity to comment on the preliminary report of dr Visser't Hooft, in as much as the criticism of last mentioned affects the report on race-apartheid, which was approved by the Synod of 1951."

This announcement is an indication of the response to international criticism on the church's policies, in which a challenging stance is taken, as well as a self-assured attitude. This attitude contributed towards the church's self imposed isolation due to its policies on race. As has been indicated, Visser't Hooft consulted Ben Marais on various issues. Ben Marais would have influenced the report by the General Secretary of the

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<sup>243</sup> Doelbewuste.

<sup>244</sup> My translation.

World Council of Churches.

***1957: Secret Societies***

During the 24<sup>th</sup> Synod of the Ned Herv. or Geref. Kerk, held in 1957, it was recommended that the name of the church change from Ned. Herv. or Geref. Kerk van Suid-Afrika to Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk van Transvaal (NG Kerk of Transvaal), thus signifying an important step in the unification of the different member churches of the Federation of NG Kerke. The report on race relations is finally completed and approved, and the focus now shifts more to the laws of the country (*Handelinge 1957: 487-488*).

In May 1957 a recommendation was made at the Northern Transvaal Synod of the NG Kerk that a ban should be placed on the appointment of freemasons in church positions, because of the secrecy of the organisation. Ben Marais then suggested in a motion of principle that the Synod speak out against all secret societies, as for example also the Broederbond. Ben Marais' motion was not accepted. This synod was considered by him to be one of the lowest points in his life, because it initiated the years of his isolation (Meiring 1979:89).

**NG Kerk: Southern Transvaal Synod**

***1963: Stemming the Critical Voice***

Ben Marais reacted sharply in the press against the official decision that no member of the church was allowed to criticise any decisions of the synod, except through the official channels. He claimed the right to criticise because he fell outside the jurisdiction of the South Transvaal synod. This decision affected Beyers Naudé, who was then Moderator of the South Transvaal synod and editor of *Pro Veritate*.

## **NG Kerk: Northern Transvaal Synod**

### ***1970: Racial and Ecumenical Questions***

Ben Marais' questions at the Transvaal synod of 1970 contributed towards the formation of the Landman Commission, which was to conduct a comprehensive and in-depth study of racial and ecumenical questions and especially how they affected South Africa and the NG Kerk. Ben Marais was not part of this commission.

### ***iii. World Council of Churches***

It can be determined from the correspondence between Ben Marais and the secretaries of the World Council of Churches and from his service on various commissions and study groups of the World Council, that he was well respected. Particular attention is drawn to his speech at the meeting of the World Council of Churches held in Evanston, 1954. This speech served as an introduction to the Report (Commission V) on "The Church and Race". In the speech, Ben Marais presents a survey on the issues that were discussed by the commission. It is presented as a "consensus of opinion of the Commission as a whole and naturally not as the individual opinion of every member of all points" (1954a). From the contents of the survey it is evident that Ben Marais had a remarkable influence on the opinions, and the personal references make the report more sincere. Thus, when stating that it is possible to take the status quo for granted, he qualifies it with a reference to his own experience, which underlies one of the questions this thesis asks about him, and how he came to his insights. He says (1954a):

"When I was a boy in the Great Karoo in South Africa nobody in my vicinity ever questioned social segregation or segregation within the church. It was just accepted as a normal human and Christian relationship. Only in later years when I tried to relate this social heritage to the totality of my Christian thinking, deep doubts and questioning were born in my mind. It was no longer adequate to be told: 'He must be separate because he is black'...."

This insight, indicating that Ben Marais started questioning the status quo of segregated groups in South Africa when he was exposed to greater human and Christian relations (especially Tambaran, 1939). Before elaborating on the arguments proposed by

supporters of segregation in society and church and how these supporters base their policies of segregation on Scripture, and emphasising that it is not exclusively a colour problem, but that “a myriad of ethnic tensions” are involved, and drawing on lessons from the history of the church (brotherhood of believers of many nations), Ben Marais makes a call for repentance, which he repeats in his conclusion. In his call he beseeches (1954a):

“Perhaps we must all come with repentance for an often unchristian and unbrotherly attitude towards fellow Christian groups of another background, colour or race, or a spirit of censure towards and a lack of understanding of the often extremely complicated problems of these groups or churches who follow a course very different from our own. It is just possible that they are not primarily motivated by fear, pride, prejudice and selfishness. There is also a deep need for repentance among churches which profess integration as the Christian ideal, but often fail dismally in making it a reality in their own life and the constitution of their congregations....”

The words of Ben Marais call across the expanse of time. Visser’t Hooft (1979:178-181) draws specific attention to the bridging role Ben Marais played in the relations between the Reformed Churches in South Africa and the World Council of Churches.

He says (Visser’t Hooft (1979:179):

“Ben Marais’ grote bijdrage is juist geweest, dat hij in een land, dat door ligging en historie ertoe geneigd is te weinig aandacht te schenken aan de dynamische stromingen in de wereld, zijn landgenoten opgeroepen heeft om de vensters to openen en te leren wat in de wijde wereld aan het bewegen is. Dat betekent natuurlijk niet een karakterloze aanpassing aan alle mogelijke modestromingen. Maar het betekent wel een leren van die lessen, die de Heer van de Kerk aan andere delen van zijn kerk in onze tijd te leren geeft.”<sup>245</sup>

Visser’t Hooft then elaborates on three specific lessons that were learnt – the ecumenical, the prophetic and the ethical lessons.

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<sup>245</sup> “Ben Marais’ greatest contribution was that he, in a country that through location and history and which has a tendency to ignore the dynamic tendencies in the world, called his fellow citizen’s to open the windows and learn what is happening in the greater world. That would not mean a characterless alignment with all possible fashions. But it does mean learning from the lessons of the church, that the Lord of of the Church taught to other parts of his church in our times.”

#### *iv. Student Chaplaincy*

In the Ned Herv. or Geref. Kerk Jubilee Commemoration (Keet 1942), Ben Marais made a contribution to the church's ministry under students in South Africa. Most interesting, concerning his style of writing and use of the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular and plural, is that he refers to himself in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person (Keet 1942 323). The Commemoration is significant for various reasons. Apart from containing the history of the ministry under students and the nature thereof, and apart from containing contributions by noteworthy churchmen,<sup>246</sup> it reflects on a thematic approach to history as well as a chronological approach. The contents also reflect on what the principle concerns of the church were in the early 1940s. The commemoration – history of the church – is divided into 4 sections. The first three pertain to three distinguished periods in the history of the church,<sup>247</sup> and the fourth considers various activities of the church. His ministry with the students is the final chapter, and is preceded by chapters on poverty, mission work, education and training, state relations. These chapters have a strong historical orientation.

Thus, the ministry of Ben Marais as chaplain to the students in Transvaal could be seen within the context of the history of the NG Kerk, written from the perspective of the Ned Herv or Geref Kerk. Ben Marais also contributed to the documentation of this history, thus, it also testifies to his written legacy.

In his description of the ministry with students, Ben Marais (Keet 1942:323) mentions the problems faced by students, considering their moral and intellectual life, the development and maturing of personalities, the determination of values, their countless questions on life and insecurities. He also elaborates on the demands of the ministry, determining that it is very different from normal church ministry. It needs to be

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<sup>246</sup> D.J. Keet preceded Ben Marais as professor of Church History. Further noteworthy names are: W.J. Badenhorst; G.D. Worst; W. Nicol; J.R. Albertyn; J. Reyneke; P.F.D. Weiss; J.H.M. Stofberg; and A.H. Lugtenburg.

<sup>247</sup> First period 1842-1892: Wording en Worsteling; Second period 1892-1910: Reorganisasie en groei; Third period 1910-1942: Die kerk sedert die stigting van die Unie.

approached differently, where more time was required for personal contact and discussions groups.

The lack of time for personal contact, was identified by F.D. Moorrees, according to Ben Marais (Keet 1942:322), as a principle motivation for expanding the ministry with students to include more chaplains. F.D. Moorrees was responsible for students in Natal, the Free State and Transvaal. Moorrees thus experienced the same problem Ben Marais experienced when he travelled between Johannesburg, Heidelberg, Potchefstroom and Pretoria.

Ben Marais was also the first permanent chaplain of the church in Transvaal. He was called in September 1937 to replace Ds McDonald, who accepted a call to Cape Town – as Chaplain. Like Ds McDonald, Ben Marais was in service of the synod, and thus his status as minister was not clear. This changed during the Synod of 1940, when it was decided that the Chaplains would be called by congregations – thus giving them status of ministers. At the synod of 1940 it was decided to divide the chaplain responsibilities into two areas, the one being Pretoria and Potchefstroom, and the other Johannesburg and Heidelberg. Ben Marais received a calling to both, but accepted the calling to Pretoria, to Pretoria East congregation. This is interesting, because D.J. Keet was minister of the Pretoria East congregation before becoming professor of Theology, responsible for the history of Christianity, the same congregation W. Nicol, Moderator of the 1940 synod, was a minister, and the same congregation from which the ministry with students was organised.

### **b. Written Legacy**

Ben Marais was a prolific writer, writing for the press, academia, general public, and specialised interest groups. He wrote on various topics. Hofmeyr (1985) asked him about Church History publications and articles, and how he categorised *Colour: Unsolved Problem of the West* – possibly the publication he will be known best for. Ben Marais replied that he did not write much on Church History specifically – possibly due to the late introduction to the subject. He wrote more on Ecumenical relations, apart from *Die Kerk deur die Eeue*, which was not intended to be a Church History. Over his

written legacy, Ben emphasised, on an answer to the same question, that he taught the whole of the Church's History – thus from Early Church through to South African – and Ecumenism.

In an undated (possibly early 1980s?) open letter to the NG Kerk, Ben Marais calls the church to unity and reconciliation, a prominent theme of the late 1990s and early 2000s in the NG Kerk. In his introduction he writes:<sup>248</sup>

“We, ministers and unordained ministers<sup>249</sup> of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, express it as our conviction that true reconciliation between people and groups is the greatest single need in our country's society. We believe that the Church of Christ in South Africa has a unique role to play in this regard and then (1) by giving clearer manifestation to reconciliation and the unity of the Church, and (2) to practice its prophetic calling regarding society.”

In the open letter, Ben Marais elaborates on the themes of reconciliation and unity and on the prophetic calling of the church. He concludes with several points on the solidarity within the church. On the prophetic calling, Ben Marais wishes to make the church aware that it has a responsibility towards greater society, and not only internally within itself. This awareness of a calling to greater society is characteristic of Ben Marais' own prophetic ministry, here in an open letter, but elsewhere in his monographs and other written work..

### *i. Monographs*

#### ***Colour: Unsolved Problem of the West (1952a): the Bomb***

The first words of the book are provocative (Marais 1952a:1):

“This book deals with dynamite, because today the colour problem is dynamite.”

“We are entering the storm.”

“Calm wisdom and a sense of reality constitute a *sine qua non* if the future is to bring hope.”

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<sup>248</sup> My translation.

<sup>249</sup> Gelegitimeerdes.

The diverse reaction of the press to the book reflects the impact it had in the NG Kerk and broader community. Sandenbergh (1979:31-46) distinguishes between the reactions of the Afrikaans and English press.<sup>250</sup> One English reaction reads (Sandenbergh 1979:32):

“The book ... is an exposure of the ‘myths of race and blood’ and a beacon light for the safeguarding of Christian principles in this time of crisis in multi-racial South Africa.”

In contrast, the reaction of the Afrikaans press was predominantly negative. Sandenbergh (1979:35) draws particular attention to the positive review of Willem van Heerden, which appeared in *Dagbreek en Sondagnuus* (9 November 1952), and the negative review of T. Hanekom (Sandenbergh 1979:36), which appeared in *Die Kerkbode* of 10 December 1952. The review of Hanekom commences with the remark that he does not actually hold an objection against Ben Marais’ point of view<sup>251</sup> and diverts the attention away from its application to the South African crisis by emphasising its contribution in highlighting the problems in other countries.<sup>252</sup> The review then attacks the book on scientific grounds, questioning the methodology used and style of writing. The value of the book is depreciated with the observation that it is not an objective scientific thesis but a personal observation, subjective – “a description of a journey with a theme and an inclination”.<sup>253</sup> The first person narration, characteristic of Ben Marais, is criticised in the strongest terms.

A third review by A.B. du Preez that appeared in the Afrikaans press (*Die Kerkbode* 10 December 1952) is also treated by Sandenbergh (1979:45). This review claims that Ben Marais is unable to draw any feasible conclusions and is uncritical against international tendencies. What is most interesting, is Du Preez’s assertion (Sandenbergh 1979:46):

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<sup>250</sup> See *Die Transvaler* 18 November 1952; *Die Burger* 25 November 1952; and Bruwer (1953:28-36) for book reviews. See also *Die Voorligter* 16(1) 1953 for E.P. Groenewald’s criticism contrasted against a half page advertisement for the same book; and Coetzee (1953:145-149).

<sup>251</sup> “Ons wil dit voorop stel dat ons nie juis beswaar het teen dr Marais se standpunt en uiteindelijke slotsom nie.”

<sup>252</sup> “Daarin is die betekenis van hierdie boek ook geleë dat dit aan ons die geleentheid gee om te leer by die foute en suksesse van ander lande.”

<sup>253</sup> “... ‘n reisbeskrywing met ‘n tema en ‘n tendens.”

“We would have expected from dr Marais, as a theologian, a principled theological approach of the topic that recognises God as the author of race differences, and therefore not called upon us to delete race differences and national sentiments as if they were evil, but instead he approaches the topic from a purely humanistic point of view based on the authoritarian pronouncements of the science, as if it possesses an absoluteness that the science never can maintain.”<sup>254</sup>

Sandenbergh (1979:34) reflects on the reasons for this negativity, and uses the narration of Ben Marais (*Beeld* Interview 20 November 1974) to describe the situation. It could be concluded that an asserted effort was made to discredit the book. It can also be asserted that the book was not received favourably by all people, especially since it contended the then popular policies of segregation.

In *Colour: Unsolved Problem of the West* Ben Marais is attempting to warn his readers, South African as well as American and European, against two dangers. The first danger is the attempt to transfer and apply solutions of other countries to the problems in South Africa. The concern here is that the situations between the countries differ. The second danger is that South Africans ignore, or take no notice of the reaction of other countries to the problems in South Africa. This would be done through South Africans adopting the attitude that they can learn nothing from other countries about colour and racial relations, because South Africa’s position differs from that of other countries. While not trying to formulate a standpoint on the issues, he is attempting to be descriptive, thus promoting an understanding of the problems and issues involved.

*Colour: Unsolved Problem of the West* is about the colour problem central to 20<sup>th</sup> century South Africa, and considers the colour problems in United States and South America as an orientation to the problems in South Africa. The book wishes to warn against exploitation and discrimination, and Ben Marais (1952a:2) hope with the book is that it:

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<sup>254</sup> “Ons sou van dr Marais as teoloog ‘n prinsipiële teologiese benadering van die onderwerp verwag het wat veral God as outeur van die rasseverskille erken het, en ons mense daarom nie geroepe sou wees om alle rasseverskille en nasionale gevoelens uit te wis asof dit uit die bouse is nie, maar in plaas daarvan benader hy die onderwerp suiwer humanisties uitgaande van die outoritatiwe uitsprake van die wetenskap, asof dit ‘n absoluutheid besit wat die wetenskap nooit kan hê nie.”

## A PROPHET FOR HIS TIMES, BUT FOR OTHERS TOO

“... will play its part in encouraging that healthy, Christian and balanced approach whereby alone we will be enabled to avoid the worst dangers and chaos inherent in the colour problem, and to find a hopeful path for the future for the white as well as for the coloured groups of humanity.”

The book was not intended as a Church History. Certain parts are about the history of Afrikaans churches – especially about the synod of 1857. In Hofmeyr’s interview (1985) Ben Marais maintains that the book was written because he believed that they stood on the eve of a tremendous period of change and renewal. In Meiring’s interview (1979:83) he maintained that he wrote the book, not to provide solutions, but to question the traditional approaches and ease with which people accepted “the status quo in State and Church concerning race relations”. Many old colonial ideas for example on race relations were archaic, and he wished to prepare his reader to reconsider what the Christian message was on race and colour. He hoped that it could possibly make people think.

Dr W. Nicol recommended that Ben Marais should wait six months before publishing the book (see Meiring 1979:83). The book could have influenced his election to become professor. However, Ben Marais did not heed the advice, collecting his manuscript and approaching a publisher the very next day. He became a professor of Theology in spite of the publication of his book.

Ben Marais mentions in an interview (Viljoen 1986) that the book was a bomb that exploded in his face, ironic because of his reference to dynamite in the first few lines (1952a:1). He approached *Die Transvaler*, an Afrikaans daily, to enquire whether they would review it. He was asked: “Does it support Apartheid?” “No,” he replied. “Then we cannot touch it,” came the response (Viljoen 1986). Ben Marais had to have it translated into English to procure positive reaction.

It is interesting to note how Ben Marais integrated literary – library – and document research with interviews, empirical observations, perceptions and own point of view and impressions. He was open to change and influence during his study tour to the Americas, which preceded the publication of the book.

After drawing the historic lines from British colonialism (1952a:4-5) and the rise of nationalism in eastern countries after the second world war, Ben Marais indicates the shift of domination of one people over another. He considers the problem of race and colour a problem of human relations – formulated by him as “the problem of our century with regard to human relations is primarily the problem of race and colour” (1952a:14).

Chapter 2 of *Colour: Unsolved Problem of the West* wishes to end three myths. These myths are: the myth of blood; the myth of race; and the myth of harmful biological results of the crossing of races. Ben Marais openness and sincerity is quite visible where he asks the question (1952a:24): “Is Race a myth?” To which he answers: “There are those who think so”, and adds this footnote:

“I do not regard myself as being one of their number, although much that has been said and believed about ‘race’ rests purely on nonsense and myth.”

The above expressed openness and sincerity is coupled with very detailed historic research and a condensed style of argument in which he offers various voices the opportunity to express their point of view. He draws the lines of history of modern racial history in much the same fashion as he did in his two M.A. dissertations and Ph.D. in Philosophy. He considers (1952a:24) Arthur de Gobineau as the first to develop a history of modern racial history. De Gobineau was followed by H.S. Chamberlain in Germany and Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddart in the United States of America. These people were significant in contributing to race orientated ideologies in their respective countries in the years preceding the Second World War.

In *Colour: Unsolved Problem of the West*, Ben Marais shows an artistic flair, where he makes use of a pun within a metaphor (1952a:32):

“History resembles a horse race. The present backwardness of a race gives no indication of its real powers. In the long race of history one race is leading at one stage, another at another. The race is far from ended, and the position of the different participants will change repeatedly ... And although leadership changed, there was nevertheless an unbroken continuity in our civilization.”

In the above metaphor he is comparing history to a horse race. As a horse race has different stages, so also history. The horses are metaphorical representations of different groups of people. As different horses have different strengths, so different groups of people have different strengths, and some may feature at different times of the race. The pun is on the word “race” – literally indicating the competition between the horses in the one instance and the different types of horses in another. A subservient commentary on the nature of humans is made, in which their behaviour is compared to that of horses. The horse play with words illustrates the futility of leadership trying to control history.

The reference to history indicates a linear orientation, and is thematically conditioned to the continuance of civilisation without categorising it in any models of rise and fall, or growth and development. Though, the metaphor employed was not utilised to this purpose. An indication is given into Ben Marais’ historiographical orientation, where he uses metaphorical language to communicate his ideas.

In *Colour: Unsolved Problem of the West*, Ben Marais does not withhold either his opinion or his sentiment, stating (1952a:41) his reserves on blood mixing and race mixing, mentioning his motives for such being divergence in colour, background, civilisation and culture.

The greater parts of the book deal with the United States of America and South America, especially Brazil. He considers (1952a:71) segregation in the USA, providing a historic background and indicating the broad patterns of segregation. He focuses on the development of the slaves where they developed into fellow citizens, considering differentiation in education and the justification of the system and of discrimination. He discusses (1952a:97) the three options, segregation, integration, and amalgamation, before considering the “American Negro and Church” in Chapter 4. He develops his argument further in Chapter 5 (1952a:146) in which he looks at the then present state of affairs concerning colour and the American churches. In Chapter 6 (1952a:227) he discusses the reaction and progress of black Americans up to 1951. He then changes the focus, concentrating on “the Negro in Brazil” (1952a:254) in Chapters 7 and 8.

The focus in Chapter 9 (1952a:285) falls on the issues more affecting the church and people in South Africa. The chapter deals with racial segregation in the Bible and in the history of the Christian church.

Following his approach to history, Ben Marais starts his analysis of the colour problem and the church in South Africa with the early church, thus the source from which flowed the NG Kerk. He combines a reading from Scripture with readings from the Church Historian, Eusebius of Caesarea (1952a:285) and contemporary historians – Lataurette (1952:285). Ben Marais (1952a:285) reasons that even though the Christian church had members from different nations, races and even colours since its institution, the general principles of brotherhood always transcended the differences in race. He compares the NG Kerk attitude to that of the early church. This is to illustrate how far removed the church was from its orientating principles when he states that distinction on the basis of race or country is not written in the Bible. Furthermore, segregation is not a scriptural demand, nor is it found in the early or later church, “in the sense in which we understand it today” (1952a:285). Thus the problem of interpretation, of hermeneutics, of Scripture is approached through careful historical differentiation by Ben Marais. On a consideration of what the rightful grounds for exclusion and inclusion of members in to the early and New testament church were, Ben Marais, under influence of Bainton (Marais 1952a:286) maintains that the only qualification for admission or refusal in the church was faith.

The idea of a race or colour orientated church was a eighteenth century phenomenon, and Ben Marais traces this history in detail, indicating its roots in American slavery, and comparing to the situation in South Africa, where the colour question only became prominent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, due to different reasons.

At the time of writing, Ben Marais (1952a:292) maintained that it were possible to justify segregation in the church on practical grounds only, and not on Scripture. He emphasised (1952a:293) that it was not racial apartness that was emphasised in the Bible, but apartness of sin. Believers were not to mix with unbelievers. He considers the differentiation spoken about in the Bible in terms of religious differentiation, and argues

his point in detail.

In conclusion, before his two annexes, Ben Marais (1952a:298) brings the debate on Scripture, the history of the church and segregation to an end with a reference to the principle which governs his theological thinking, that of Christian brotherhood.

The two annexes (Chapter 10 & 11) are crucial to the compilation of the book, to his argument and also indicative of the influences on his thinking and the legacy of his thought.

Chapter 10 (1952a:30) contains the opinions of 13 well known church leaders from across the world. Ben Marais had posed 8 questions to 20 leaders and theologians from primarily the Calvinistic tradition. A few of the recipients were Lutherans. The respondents Ben named in the chapter are: G. Brillenburg Wurth (Kampen); J. Blouw (Dutch Missionary Board); K. Barth (Basle); E. Brunner (Zurich); F.J. Leenhardt (Geneve); J.H. Bavinck (Amsterdam); H. Berkhof (Driebergen); D. Bouma; W. Vischer (Montpellier); B. van der Sprenkel (Utrecht); N. Dahl (Oslo); S. Zwemer (Princeton); and K. Hartenstein (German mission leader).

The questions reveal Ben Marais thinking on the use and application of Scripture, the church and the colour problem. His main source for the formulation of the questions came from topical issues at synods and that which he had picked up in correspondence columns. Unfortunately Ben Marais did not comment on the responses, which he presented unaltered (1952a:300-319).

As a conclusion to the book, Ben Marais (1952a:300-325) formulated 44 theses which reveal a sensitivity to the colour problems and the parties involved, while also containing a strong prophetic voice.

The publication of the book influenced the election of the chair for the History of Christianity at the University of Pretoria. There were two strong candidates, Hanekom and Marais. The election was organised. There were 37 voters. Ben Marais won by one

vote, because an old classmate could not vote against him. Personal sentiment prevailed over ideological differences!

### ***The Two Faces of Africa (1964b): The Reactor***

The book consists out of four sections, their headings indicating clearly what the book is about: a prophetic orientation on problems and prospects – especially those of South Africa, concerning religion and ideology, as affecting the continent's past present and future. The four sections are: "Which road South Africa?"; "The Two faces of Africa"; "Africa: A cross road of religion and ideology"; and "The church in Africa: its history, problems and prospects".

The book expresses a specific orientation to history, where Ben Marais (1964b:3-4) states that it is "an age of universal history", indicating that he is considering the localised events and history in South Africa against a broader orientation, and he also mentions that it is a "chain of revolutions", thus indicating that he sees a common theme within his periodised 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ben Marais claimed (1964b:4) that the history of the world had become history, implying that no events could be considered in total isolation. Thus he was able to maintain (Marais 1964b:4):

"The representatives of East and West, of Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas are irrevocably linked in combined planning. The great barriers of thousands of years have been breached; strong and weak nations, the rich and the poor, the historically dominating as well as the subordinate groups have all been thrown together. They have become part of one world and their histories have become part of a single history."

The history of the problems on ideology, nationalism and religion are related to his own experiences and the history of the regions he grew up in (Marais 1964b:7):

"When I was a child in the Great Karoo in the heyday of colonialism in Africa hardly any questions were ever asked about matters of race or subject races. The Good God had set the patterns and ordained the white man boss. Then slowly through two world wars there was the dawn of a new day. The problem of races, of subject peoples or minorities, suddenly moved to the centre of the world's interest. It is occupying the minds of Africans to such an extent today that what happens in connection with the solution of America's race problem is of far more consequence to the African mind than all the untold millions America pours into Africa."

The race problem in South Africa is considered against the broader history of South Africa (Marais 1963:10), in which the land issues, legal issues and the problems of different peoples having to share the same geographic areas are touched upon. This serves as background to the question of what is understood under Apartheid (Marais 1964b:11) and consideration of the alternative models (Marais 1964b:12-15). In the comparison between Africa and United States, Ben Marais is particular in emphasising the differences between the two countries and the race problems of each (1964b:16). It is also inevitable that he would not have something to say about the threat of communism, interestingly, placing it in the context of Apartheid not fitting into predominantly accepted political thought of the twentieth century (1964b:17):

“Apartheid may not fit into twentieth century patterns; it may in an indirect way play into the hands of the Communists by antagonising all the coloured races of Africa and Asia; it may ultimately not succeed in giving real justice to the majority of Africans; it may within a decade break down completely under the pressures of a new day....”

Ben Marais presents a visionary view on the prospects of the political system, mentioning an actual concern – justice, as well as fears – the antagonised people, and also a fear current to the 1960s – Communism. He also refers to laws and important documents, thus offering credibility to his argument. Thus, the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 serves as orientation to the position of the hereditary tribal chiefs that benefited under the Apartheid regime (1964b:21). Further, he indicates his knowledge of the documents, their implications and how they were treated. For example, the Tomlinson Report of 1954, “the work of a strong and able commission appointed by the government for advice in the field of black-white relations in the socio-economic field” (1964b:22). Ben Marais indicates that even though the recommendations of this document were not accepted during the 1950s, it became the cornerstone of the implementation of separate development during the 1960s (1964b:22). Other important laws referred to are the Bantu Education Act of 1954; the Group Areas Act (1950) – which was considered to be “fully in accord with the strengthening of rural and tribal ties” (1964b:26); the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950; and the General Law Amendment Bill of 1963 – which allowed for a 90 day detention without trial (1964b:27).

The problem with Apartheid, it would appear from Ben Marais analysis, which is fully substantiated with statistical support, is in the urbanisation of people and the controlling thereof (1964b:26): “Of course the urban African is the real problem in terms of Apartheid or separate development.” Therefore, the pass books were required, and the strict access and residential controls. Ben Marais thus indicates that he has command of his subject and is in a position to make pronouncements, draw comparisons, and determine influences, the current state and make predictions on possible future scenarios.

It is also evident in the argument that Ben Marais had, at the time of writing (1963) not rejected the policy of Apartheid. In answer to the acceptability of the policy on Separate Development, he writes (1964b:31) that he “cannot raise moral or religious objection to separate development on the basis of territorial separation as such.” He substantiates his point of view by referring to Palestine, Ireland, India and Pakistan. He discusses the acceptability of the policy of Apartheid, asking, “How do Africans feel about it?” Thus indicating that his sensitivity towards reasoning without ideological bias. The factors favouring Apartheid (1964b:34) and the factors against Apartheid (1964b:42) are presented in factual fashion without any preferences being indicated. So also the treatment of alternatives to Separate Development (1964b:51) and alternative policies of the different political parties (1964b:57-66).

Ben Marais asks (1964b:62) whether the white electorate could consider any of these alternatives, and stresses “to what degree the possibility of making separate development a workable hypothesis poses a very real moral problem” (1964b:66). He argues emphatically (1964b:66):

“... if we are convinced that millions of Africans, for instance, are among us to stay, and many were born here, the question arises; may we still condone blatant discriminatory measures like job reservation on the strength of a political philosophy that, in terms of actual trends shows no possibility of being realised?”

To this question, in argument, he provides a prophetic answer, which – interestingly –

emphasises a topical issue of 2002: the question of land redistribution.<sup>255</sup> While indicating his understanding of topical issues of the post 1948 era, in which positions were reserved for particular people who exhibited the correct hereditary, political and cultural traits, he reasons (1964b:66):

“According to all present indications the non-whites will form a permanent majority in our midst, if there is not to be a radical redistribution of land – which the government categorically rejects. May we, in the light of these facts continue to condone discriminatory legislation like job reservation? If we are at once convinced on the strength of actual facts and trends that the non-whites will form a permanent majority of the population of so-called ‘white South Africa’ does it not become immoral to continue supporting certain steps or legislation based on a philosophy which clearly promises more than it can deliver?”

Ben Marais did not consider himself a prophet, rather his words are considered retrospectively, and his clear understanding of the situation, his analysis of the various aspects and his holistic – historic – grasp and foresight are seen to be those of a prophet.

He concludes his first part, “Which road South Africa”, with a general orientation so that the reader can know how the book’s argument is developing (1964b:68), showing that he is in control of his content and aware of the reader. He has a particular audience. This is done in the midst of prophetic words (1964b:68):

“I have touched on some aspects of the most complicated racial situation on earth. I have discussed some of the basic problems, trends and prospects of present-day South Africa. I am convinced that if and when South Africa finds a key to the solution of its problems that key will be transformed into a beacon of light for all of Southern Africa and for many other difficult human situations as well. Though I see vast storms gathering against our fair republic and I am deeply aware that fundamental adjustments will have to be made, I have solid faith in the future of South Africa and in that bitter day that is in store for all its peoples.”

Part 2 of *The Two Faces of Africa*, under the same heading as the title of the book, builds on the critical and statistically argued analysis of the political situation principally in South Africa in the early 1960s. In this sense, though he does regard other countries in Africa, the predominant focus on South Africa, disqualifies the book as a

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<sup>255</sup> See also Marais (1964b:72) on nationalism, land exploitation, expropriation of property in various African States.

reasonable account for the continent Africa as such. The considerations, though, and trends Ben Marais presents in Part 2, as a result of his study tour through Africa and his discussions with heads of state and government officials in the African countries he visited, contribute to his encasement of the South African social situation.

Ben Marais introduces and concludes Part 2 with a historiographical considerations. He commences: “One cannot be too dogmatic about the future of Africa. One must always reckon with the imponderables of history” (1964b:71). Apart from relating past and future, it can be seen that Ben Marais is hesitant, in his approach, to draw ideologically loaded conclusions. Rather, he wishes to present perspectives, as can be seen in the title of the book. He explains the title, considering the one face, the one perspective on Africa, as idealised – the bright side; the other perspective, the other face of Africa, as disillusioned – the dark side. Scepticism and optimism are both contained within the same reasoning (1964b:74).

In the conclusion of Part 2, Ben Marais regards the patterns of history where he wishes to compare also the situations in India (1940s) and South Africa (1960s), and personifies history as an observer – judge – of events and also as a role player (1964b:101):

“Now history is the judge and its verdict on India is, on the whole rather favourable in spite of the almost insoluble problems inherited by that country. The next five years in Africa may be very unsettled and even dangerous until new patterns take solid shape. After that may history once again confound the pessimists.”

In the build up to this optimistic conclusion, Ben Marais gives an empirically orientated treatment of selected features which constitute the two sides of the African picture (1964b:81-88). Consideration is given to: Living standards (1964b:85); Foreign Aid (1964b:88-91); African Socialism (1964b:91-93); Employment (1964b:93-94); Africanisation (1964b:94-97); Education (1964b:97-98); the danger of self aggrandisement and the new upper class (1964b:98-99); and, Pan Africanism versus Tribalism (1964b:99-100).

Most interesting is Ben Marais treatment of nationalism, where he considers

Africanisation as part of African Nationalism, on the one hand (1964b:94), and Pan Africanism as contrasting to tribalism on the other (1964b:99). The relations between tribalism and nationalism are explored more fully in Part 3 (1964b:110). A contributing factor to the tensions in Africa is that colonial borders cut across tribal groupings, and thus Ben Marais perceived anti-colonialism to identify strongly with the promotion of the unity of Africans.

While Part 2 draws far more on his travels through the African continent, it is very evident in his formulations that he maintains an affinity towards “Western” civilisation – equated to that which opposes communism (1964b:100). Africa is seen to be a buffer in the war between East and West (1964b:100):

“It seems to me that to us Westerners there is only one possible approach: We must accept African nationalism. We may try to guide it in different ways, but we should not refuse to recognise it or co-operate with it. To take a hostile or unfriendly attitude towards African nationalism could lead to only one result – the total alienation of Africa from the West and the handing over of this continent to the Communists.

If Africa goes communist, the world goes communist. It is the Great Power line-up between East and West.”

The concern for communism is predominant throughout the book.<sup>256</sup> The introduction to Part 3 is no exception (1964b:103), in which Islam joins Communism, Tribalism and other ideological “threats” to Africa. Part 3 is aptly titled “Africa: a crossroad of religion and ideology”.

The influences of Shillito’s *Nationalism: Man’s Other Religion*, while being evident throughout *The Two Faces of Africa*, is particularly transparent in the Part 3 of *The Two Faces of Africa*.<sup>257</sup> This pertains particularly to the consideration of Christianity’s “competition”, Islam and Communism (1964b:104 & 107). An aspect that Ben Marais adds though, indicating that he gave much consideration to the subject, is the addition of African religions and paganism (1964b:105 & 107) to the threats to Christianity in Africa. Paganism is related to tribalism, which is not to be confused with nationalism (1964b:110). Ben Marais draws particular attention to the prevailing confusions

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<sup>256</sup> See especially Marais (1964) 117-134.

<sup>257</sup> See Shillito (1933).

between nationalism and tribalism and the tensions between them (1964b:111):

“In every country in Africa some sort of tension is working up between tribalism and nationalism. Nationalism is the modern trend. Where the tribal loyalties become loose or obsolete, nationalism flourishes. Nationalism epitomises the new African’s desire to rediscover his dignity by projecting himself into the modern world. And in this process he must shed his rustic traditions and seize the alien instruments of Western culture ... Nation or race becomes a substitute for the tribe and the security he was assured as a member of his tribe, and which he loses in the process of individualisation which is taking place all over Africa. Into this vacuum, caused by the falling away of the collective security he experienced as member of the tribe, the race or nation moves in.”

Ben Marais understands the development of nationalism in Africa in sociological terms. Though, he is also apt at indicating the role Christianity played in developing African Nationalism: “Its stress on the inestimable value of every human soul and the brotherhood of all believers stimulated the African’s dream of equality” (1964b:112).

The discussion on tribalism Pan-Africanism (1964b: 112-117) leads on to a detailed excursion on the impact of communism on Africa (1964b:117-134). While Communism is seen as a movement that wishes to control the continent, the reasons for its successes and failures are explored, and the reason it poses such a threat to Christianity and the continent are elaborated upon.

Part 4, “The church in Africa: its history, problems and prospects”, at first glance could appear to be an addendum to a contemporaneous sociology book, but in matter of fact, the first three chapters are background to, and preparation for the fourth part. Where Ben Marais was in command of the subject and information conveyed in his arguments in the first three parts, he is most at home in part 4. His referencing becomes more precise, as does his formulations.

Ben Marais’ historical orientation, evident in his dissertations and thesis, is the first indication that the fourth part is to be distinguished from the foregoing. He commences (1964b:135):

“In spite of vital setbacks the church in Africa has a history of almost unequalled fascination, though tragedy has consistently dodged its steps”

Ben Marais traces the history of the church in Africa, mentioning also Christ's visit to Egypt, thus incorporating the New Testament also in his church history framework. He then relates the origin of separate nations to the early church. He considers the arguments of different church fathers, for example, those of Justine (1964b:138).

Justine is regarded where he considers the relations between nations, where the belief existed that God had fixed the boundaries of the separate nations according to the numbers of his angels. Ben Marais indicates how religion, Christian doctrine, was adapted to explain the phenomena of different nations in the *Apology* of Justine (1964b:138). In this illustration it is told how God made heaven and earth and assigned the things of earth to man, and appointed the angels to rule over man, emphasising the faithless angels who through their acts brought about confusion and sin, which led to different nations. Most important though, besides the different theories Ben Marais treats (1964b:139), is his assertion that the Christians described themselves as people who had forsaken the ancestral customs. Especially Origen is referred to, and his Africanhood is emphasised (1964b:139-141). Ben Marais continues to present a general history of the church of Africa (1964b:138-181), which expounds in his treatment of what he considers to be the most pressing problems of the church in Africa, which were discernible at the "All Africa Church Conference" that met in Kampala in 1963 (1964b:181). These are (1964b:181): the need for unity; the need for a better trained African ministry; African nationalism; the growing power of Islam; and, the threat of communism. The remainder of the book is devoted to a short treatment of these problems (1964b:181-205).

It is evident from the book that it is intended for an intellectually orientated church readership, principally international. The fact that it was published only in English should not deter from the fact that the book was written also to invoke reaction from his fellow NG Kerk theologians. In this sense, his statistical references and elaborate sociological treatment would emphasise his considering his colleagues to be narrow and self minded. It was thus that when Ds J.S. Gericke represented the NG Kerk at the international court in Den Haag (September 1965), and the books and other writings of Ben Marais and B.B. Keet were referred to during his questioning, he answered that the

NG Kerk did not share their points of view.

The book reviews of *The Two Faces of Africa* were predominantly English, and are considerably favourable, in contrast to the mixed reception *Colour: Unsolved Problem of the West* received a decade earlier. The review by Anthony Delius in his column in *The Cape Times* (15 June 1964) is interesting for the integration of his own criticism against the government's policies into his appraisal of Ben Marais:

“Public speakers in South Africa, whether on the platform, in Parliament, or over the air, hardly ever mention the word Africa without immediately associating it with ‘chaos’.

In this way we are doing to Africa, and its three dozen newly independent states, what both Government and Opposition claim the rest of the world is doing to South Africa – showing only its worst and gloomily sensational side.

It is difficult for the average citizen, who hasn't the time to read the voluminous reports on both sides of the question, to make his way through this welter of confusion and counter-confusion to something nearer reality. But now a short-cut to sanity in this subject is offered by the restless and farsighted Dr Ben Marais, who holds the chair of History of Christianity at Pretoria University.”

Due to his balanced approach, Ben Marais did not make himself available as a spokes person for either political parties or interest groups.<sup>258</sup>

### ***Die Kerk deur die Eeue:*<sup>259</sup> Battles of the Ages**

In the foreword, Ben Marais (1959a) states:

“What follows is *not* a Church History, but merely a few basic discussions on the great hours of the church, in its life and especially in its battles through the centuries. It wishes to do no more than to open a few windows, through which readers would be able to see something of the clouds and darkness, which the Christian church experienced on its long road, and of the changing nature of its battles. It is intentionally not chronological.”

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<sup>258</sup> See also, *Sunday Chronicle*, 21 June 1964; *The Cape Argus* 11 June 1964; *The Star*, 10 June 1964; *The Southern Cross*, 17 June 1964; *The Sunday Tribune*, 18 June 1964; *The Natal Mercury*, 25 June 1964; *Zionist Record and S.A. Jewish Chronicle*, 10 July 1964; *Jewish Affairs*, October 1964; and *Pretoria News*, 13 August 1964. Compare to his contribution in Hanekom (1952:304-341), titled “Die Kruis Onder die Suiderkruis: Die Sendingaksie van Ons Kerk” (The Cross under the Southern Cross: The Mission Movement of Our Church), which concludes with a call (Hanekom 1952:341; my translation): “Let us do more than yesterday and the day before, and in the midst of upcoming storms approach our duties and calling more purposefully than in the past. There will be many battles on the road, also disappointments....”

<sup>259</sup> The church through the ages.

The book is divided into four parts, the first three considering various battles, and the fourth considering “New Routes”, mission movements and the church’s pursuit for unity (ecumenism). The first set of battles, part 1, considers the exterior battles (Die stryd na buite), while the 2<sup>nd</sup> part looks at the internal battles (Die stryd na binne). The 3<sup>rd</sup> part concentrates on the reformation, on “key moments in the battle”, then considering Martin Luther, Calvin and the execution of Michael Servetus, and the tragedy of Bernardino Ochino. This study is particularly interested in Ben Marais writing on Bernardino Ochino (1959a:116-124), because it appears that Ben Marais found a persona in whom he saw a reflection of his own turmoil.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> part, various threats against the church are considered: the Graeco-Roman heathendom; the Eastern mystery religions Islam (and the crusades against Islam); the ancient – established – religions of the East; Communism; and Secularism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> part considers: the Arian controversy; monasticism; the Spanish Inquisition; Modernism; and the danger of religious freedom.<sup>260</sup> The book shows how Ben Marais is orientated towards threats. In the letters to the secretaries of the World Council of Churches these threats are formulated in observably passionate terms. It is therefore possible to determine that Ben Marais was most sincere in his concerns on Islam and Communism in his letters to Blake (1970) and Potter (1978?).

### **The Inspirational**

There is little semblance between his letters to the secretaries of the World Council of Churches and his devotional inspirational, collections of prayers and short messages, and recollections from his past, prepared for the general public. *’n Groet op die Pad* (1952a), and *Wit Huise van Herinnering* (1964c), like the numerous inspirational contributions in the newspapers and magazines (see Appendix), appear to be written by a different person. There is a similarity in style, the writing in the 1<sup>st</sup> person, but because the material is different and the intention with the writing is different, it is difficult to

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<sup>260</sup> Die Hedendaagse Gevaar van Godsdienstige Gelykskaking.

draw direct comparisons. It could be argued that Ben Marais could have used the Inspirational medium to promote his views on the justification of the Mission Policy and Apartheid on Scripture and his concerns over the World Council of Churches supporting the banned political organizations. Due to his not using this medium to pursue these topics it needs to be asked why he did not. In similar fashion to his not discussing political issues as part of his lesson programmes, and as he did not use the pulpit to discredit alternative points of view (e.g. J.D. Vorster), nor did he use devotional literature to promote his views. Through the inspirational literature, however, a picture of a very devout person can be drawn. His sincerity is greatly in evidence. The difference between his polemic writing and objections raised at official church meetings and communications with the World Council of Churches and his inspirational works, reflects upon the difference between his objections against the misappropriated justification of Apartheid on Scripture and his objections against the, in his view, inconceivable support for organizations against Apartheid, on the one hand, and his call for church unity and reconciliation and the resolvment, through dialogue, of the racial tensions in church and society.

### 3. DURING THE FIRST PERIOD OF TRANSFORMATION

In his extensive treatment on the NG Kerk and Apartheid, Kinghorn (1986:115) mentions two means in which the criticism of Ben Marais influenced the church. He was firstly successful in revealing the unacceptability of the use of Scripture by church exegetes to justify Apartheid. Though, the exponents of Apartheid turned around and superseded his protests by turning to more doctrinal issues. Secondly, his criticism contributed towards attention being focused on the church and on church structures.

### 4. IN THE SHADOW OF THE SECOND PERIOD OF TRANSFORMATION

The inherent flaws within the periodisation model used for this study, Rise and Fall, is quite apparent. The transformation process is not a closed circuit. Furthermore, within the history of South Africa it is not yet complete. The transformation process thus has a futuristic dimension, which will be reperiodised in future. The roots of this transformation process rests in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which in turn rests on events in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

According to Ben Marais, expressed in 1986 (Viljoen Interview 1986) the important questions that would need to be answered in future are:

1. The question of forgiveness. The problem he identifies is that people will have difficulty in acknowledging that they had made a mistake.
2. The question of principles. Ben Marais, living in the world of the church, considers the church as the people of God. This consideration predominates his thoughts on the subject.
3. Thus, on considering social issues, and on the relation between principles and reality, he argues from Scripture. The example he uses (Viljoen 1986) is the relation between the slave and free person in St Paul's writings. He mentions that St Paul had a sensitivity for the reality when he writes that the slave owner should accept the slave as his brother, while the ideal would be that there be no distinction between the free and the slave. Ben Marais encourages that the dynamic history of a people be kept in mind, and that there is often a tension between the practical and theoretical.
4. The fourth question is on the place and influence of Scripture in Society. This is a most important factor to Ben Marais, which, it appears, he makes applicable to people of all confessions and religious affiliations. Ben Marais maintains that it is necessary to argue from Scripture in order to effect a shift in people.

#### 5. APPRECIATION FOR BEN MARAIS

The appreciation expressed towards Ben Marais by his peers for his various contributions are well illustrated in the honorary doctorates he received, and in the letters of condolence received by his widow.

##### **a. The Honorary Doctorates**

Ben Marais received several honorary doctorates, D.Th. (University of South Africa) 1978, LL.D (Witwatersrand) 1983, D.Phil (Stellenbosch), and D.D. (University of Pretoria) 1988.

***The University of South Africa, 1979***

On 16 May 1979 Ben Marais received a honorary doctorate in Theology at Unisa. In the *Commendatio Unisa* (1979), the following motivation was given, which exemplifies his role as teacher, ecumenical theologian and prophet:

“More than any other theologian in this country, he endeavoured to make the church and his students aware of their Africa context, but also that the Body of Christ is not restricted to the Republic, to Africa, Europe or whatever country or continent. He is a creative theologian who aimed high and made his students conscious of the times in which they live, the need for the church in the world and their task as theologians across all borders. As an ecumenical theologian he has no comparison at home. There is no other professor of theology who endeavoured with so much courage during his academic career to allow the Word of God to follow its course in a time when politics and ideology threatened to impair thoughts. In many respects, like the caller in the desert, he was in front of his time, but this he was in conviction, and it was his privilege to see the desert flower.”

**b. The funeral letters**

The funeral letters, addressed to Mrs Sibs Marais are comparable (contrasting) to the hate letters and phone calls which they had received during the 1960s.

The funeral was held on Monday, 1 February 1999 in the Pretoria East Congregation of the NG Kerk. The church was filled to capacity and extra chairs had to be carried in: old students, friends, old colleagues, family, and some curious.

There were no condolences offered from the World Council of Churches. Neither were there any words of comfort from the president's office. However, there were numerous personal letters, and a few significant messages from synods and student groups. It would appear that students appreciated Ben Marais far more than either the international or national academia or race-relations politicians. The following letter and attachment were received from Sonop Residence (My translation):

***Sonop Council, University of Pretoria, 26 February 1999***

26 February

“Dear Tannie Sibis

The following motion of grief was unanimously accepted by the members of the Sonop Council on a meeting of the Sonop Council, held on 18 February 1999.

Kind regards  
(signed)  
Avrille Prinsloo  
(Secretary)

**Motion of grief**

**Prof. B.J. Marais      26 April 1909 – 27 January 1999**

It is with great sorrow that the Sonop Council takes note of the death of Prof. Ben Marais, in life a former chairman of the Sonop Council. With right, Prof Ben is considered the father of Sonop. We thank the Lord for the life of Prof. Ben who positively affected the development of so many Sonopians with goal-orientated leadership and compassionate service.

Prof J.J. de Beer  
Chairperson: Sonop Council  
18/02/1999”

A letter along a far more formal and removed vein, also in Afrikaans, was received from the House Committee of Wilgenhof House, University of Stellenbosch. Most interesting, is the fact that Ben Marais had kept contact with his old residence in Stellenbosch (My translation):

***From Wilgenhof House Committee, University of Stellenbosch, 11 February 1999***

“11 February 1999  
Dear Mrs S. Marais

On behalf of Wilgenhof I wish to convey our innermost sympathy on the passing away of your husband, Prof. Ben Marais.

Prof. Ben Marais will not only be remembered as a former Student Council chairperson, but also as someone who showed his devoted loyalty by being involved in the fund collection for the rebuilding of Wilgenhof in 1963. This project, which was considered impossible by outsiders, was the determining

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factor of Wilgenhof considering an amount of £15 000 had to be collected. Due to this special effort, Wilgenhof could commemorate its 95 years of existence. We plan to dedicate a special spot to Prof. Ben Marais in the archives, and would appreciate any memorabilia that would contribute towards this project.

Prof. Marais will always live in our memories. May the Lord be with you in these days.

Greetings

(signed)  
J.M. Erasmus  
Secretary”

***From The Club of Old Student Council Chairmen, 28 January 1999***

A third letter need not be quoted in full, but mention must be made that it emphasises the fact that Ben Marais’ world was orientated towards the world of students. The letter from the Club of Old Student Council Chairmen, in Afrikaans, places particular emphasis on how highly esteemed the person Ben Marais was, being the honorary president of the club – a remarkable achievement.

***From the Office of the General Synod, NG Kerk, 29 January 1999***

A letter of condolence was received from the Office of the General Synod of the NG Kerk. Ben Marais is described in the letter as one of the “Great men”<sup>261</sup> of the NG Kerk. Mention is made of his love for church history, the fact that he was a fearless and unmoveable fighter and a pioneer with vision, that he was a loyal churchman, further that he had a childlike faith in God and that he followed an exemplary Christian lifestyle.

Many more letters were received, all emphasising different aspects about Ben Marais. No hate mail was received, nor messages of ill-wishes.

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<sup>261</sup> Groot manne.

## 6. HERALDING THE RAINBOW AFTER THE STORMS: DESMOND TUTU

There were far more than three prophets in South Africa in the twentieth century. Mention could be made of Albert Luthuli, Trevor Hudleston, Beyers Naudé and Desmond Tutu. Where Beyers Naudé could be considered because of his close affinity, yet distant sentiment to Ben Marais, Desmond Tutu is considered because he comes from a different time frame, and also quite a different socio-political environment.

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Mpilo Tutu was honoured in 2002 at the University of Pretoria with a honorary doctorate in Divinity. In the argument he is remembered gratefully for his vast contribution to the church, academia, civil society and international politics.<sup>262</sup>

“Desmond Tutu was born in Klerksdorp in 1931, the son of a school teacher and a domestic worker. After matriculating from the Johannesburg Bantu High School, he enrolled for a teacher’s diploma at the Pretoria Bantu Normal College. He studied for his Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of South Africa. Thereafter, he taught at the Johannesburg Bantu High School as well as at the Munsieville High School, Krugersdorp.

In 1958, following the introduction of Bantu education, Desmond Tutu decided to enter the ministry in the Church of the Province of Southern Africa and became an ordinance at St Peter’s Theological College, Rosettenville. He received his Licence in Theology in 1960 and was ordained in 1961. Shortly afterwards, he went to study at the University of London where he obtained the Bachelor of Divinity Honours and Master of Theology degrees. In 1967 he returned to South Africa to join the staff of the Federal Theological Seminary at Fort Hare. In 1970 he was appointed lecturer in the Department of Theology at the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. After a further spell in England as associate director of the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches, and as Dean of St Mary’s Cathedral, Johannesburg, Desmond Tutu was elected Bishop of Lesotho (1975). By this time South Africa was in turmoil, finding itself in the wake of the Soweto uprising of 1976. Bishop Tutu was persuaded to leave the Diocese of Lesotho to become the General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches (SACC). Desmond Tutu became a national and international figure while holding this position (1978-1985).

Under the leadership of Desmond Tutu, the SACC developed into an important institution in the nation’s spiritual and political life, voicing the ideals and aspirations of millions of South African Christians, and effectively providing help to victims of Apartheid. Desmond Tutu was often embroiled in controversy as he spoke out against the injustices of the

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<sup>262</sup> For more detail on Desmond Tutu see Allen’s *The Essential Desmond Tutu* (1997) and Tutu’s *The Rainbow People of God* (1995).

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Apartheid system -- inevitably so, because by this time his voice had become synonymous with the crusade for justice and racial conciliation in South Africa. In 1984 his contribution to the cause of justice and reconciliation in South Africa was recognised when he received the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1985 Desmond Tutu was elected Bishop of Johannesburg, and in 1986 Archbishop of Cape Town. In 1987 he became President of the All Africa Conference of Churches, the same year he was also elected Fellow of Kings College, London, as well as Chancellor of the University of the Western Cape.

In 1995 President Nelson Mandela appointed Archbishop Tutu to chair South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, arguably his greatest challenge, recognising his moral leadership, his advocacy of social justice as well the role he played in terms of peace and reconciliation.

Archbishop Tutu is recipient of no less than 98 honorary degrees, holding fifty *honoris causa* doctorates, inter alia from the universities of Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge, Columbia, Emory, Aberdeen, Sydney, Fribourg, Cape Town, Witwatersrand and the University of South Africa. Over the years Desmond Tutu has written a number of books, chapters in books, and scholarly articles in many local and international magazines. The Association of Theological booksellers of the U.S.A. honoured his latest book, *No Future without Forgiveness* (1999), with the Book of the Year Award. Conversely, Tutu himself – regarding his person, his contribution to the ecumenical community as well as to society, his theology and especially his sermons – has been the object of numerous books and scholarly studies.”

It is particularly difficult to draw comparisons between Ben Marais and Desmond Tutu. It is important to mention though, that Ben Marais was critical of him for his support for the Programme against Apartheid, promoted by the World Council of Churches. Ben Marais, himself, acknowledges that he did not know him well and was critical towards Beyers Naudé for associating with him (Ope brief aan Beyers Naudé 1985b). This criticism must be seen in similar light to Ben Marais' forbearance about the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism (see correspondence with secretaries of World Council of Churches). Ben Marais was willing, though, to express in a postscript of the manuscript of his open letter to Beyers Naudé his gratitude on hearing that Desmond Tutu renounced violence as a means to bring about change.

## 7. CONCLUSION: BEN MARAIS THE PROPHET

Possibly the most conclusive testimony to Ben Marais was given by the Press, *Beeld*, on Thursday, 28 January 1999, prior to his funeral on Monday 1 February 1999. The obituary was written by Neels Jackson and was titled; “Ben Marais was an academically brilliant prophet with vision.”<sup>263</sup> He is described as one of the great figures of the NG Kerk who would be remembered as one of the earliest critics against Apartheid, as a well liked person, a prominent theologian, a formidable student chaplain, a significant ecumenical spirit and a loyal member of the church. The article touches upon some of the highlights of his life, mentioning his being chairman of the council of the men’s residence of the University of Pretoria, Sonop, for 26 years, and his involvement in sport, as well as when he first started questioning the church’s policy on race relations in 1934 while he was still a student at Stellenbosch, his public statements against Scriptural justification of Apartheid at the synods of 1940, 1944 and 1948, and his various publications. His years of isolation within the church is also mentioned as also ds Freek Swanepoel’s praise of him at the 1994 General Synod of the NG Kerk, as a “prophet within the walls of the city”.

On the road forward: Ben Marais expressed the wish that everybody in South Africa would be able to say, “This is my land” (Viljoen 1986).

To obtain this dream, the only route, expressed in 1986, was through negotiation. These negotiations were entered, and a relatively peaceful revolution took place in which it was made possible for all people, regardless of race, colour or class to participate in the affairs of the country, and to participate in the Lord’s Supper.

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<sup>263</sup> Ben Marais was ‘n akademies briljante profeet met visie.