

BEN MARAIS (1909-1999):

**THE INFLUENCES ON AND HERITAGE OF A SOUTH AFRICAN
PROPHET DURING TWO PERIODS OF TRANSFORMATION**

by

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SUMMARY

**Ben Marais (1909-1999): The Influences on and Heritage of a South African
Prophet during Two Periods of Transformation**

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This thesis in Church History presents a biographic study on the life of Ben Marais against the political and ecclesiastic background of South Africa of the 20th century. The significance of Ben Marais' life is approached through his correspondence with the secretaries of the World Council of Churches during the 1960s and 1970s. The letters, pertaining to the World Council of Churches financial and moral support for the organisations fighting against Apartheid, reflect on Ben Marais' involvement with the World Council and his particular concerns. Through a study on the life of Ben Marais insight can be gained into the thinking of the leadership of the NG Kerk. The study presents Ben Marais as a prophet who challenged the then popular tendencies in the NG Kerk theology on policy justification and on the relation between religion and nationalism.

The central question in this study asks, what led an ordinary man, of humble background, to the insights he reflected, and guided him through times of transparent opposition to maintain his belief in what was right and just? What was the essence of his theology and understanding of the South African problem? To what extent could the church leaders of the present, and the future learn from his example and life, in terms of the tribulations faced, different schools of thought, and sentiments, both nationalistic and spiritual?

SUMMARY

The study then wishes to test the following hypothesis: Ben Marais can be considered as one of the steadfast and humble prophets of the church in Southern Africa during the 20th century, who serves as an example of Christian Brotherhood, regardless of the perplexities, for present and future generations on relations between the affairs of faith, state and society.

The thesis presents a broader introduction on Church Historiography. Ben Marais' own historiographical reflection is considered. The approaches to history are summarised as background to the periodisation model adopted by the study. The study wishes to work with a thematic model set against a chronological framework. Sensitivity to geographical concerns is also expressed. Afrikaner Nationalism is not seen in isolation, but in relation to African, English and Indian Nationalism.

KEY WORDS

Ben Marais

Nationalism

Apartheid

Transformation

Prophet

Character formation

World Council of Churches

Policies of NG Kerk

Periodisation

Church Historiography

In memory of Oupa Flippie, Philippus Ludiwicus du Plessis,
whose faith, life, and devotion to the church remain an inspiration.

LETTER TO THE IMPLIED READER

Dear Reader¹

The presentation of a study on Ben Marais as an academic study could be either a straightforward task, concentrating on the biographic details of his life, considering the length and state of his hair, the style of his clothes, and a caricature of his love for gardening, or it could be conducted with a greater challenge in mind – though also in a condensed format as is possible. This challenge is not to be the last or authoritative voice on the subject, merely an echo. It implies that the study on the life of Ben Marais be considered within various contexts, while maintaining a central theme.

The first context of this study is this thesis, intended for degree purposes. Ben Marais was a Church historian. Thus I refer to him in the introductory section, reflecting on his methodology and understanding of church history. The second context of this study is the 20th century, the third is South Africa, the fourth Afrikanerdom and nationalism, and the fifth context is church and state relations. These contexts are difficult to demarcate, as well as being rather contrived, by own admission. They need to be understood in as much as they are of service to this study, in light of the various transformations that took place, and the perspective that is argued, not in all their complexities. For this reason, a more thorough introduction has been considered necessary.

To relate how Ben Marais was part of each of these contexts, hermeneutic keys are used. Ben Marais is also used as a hermeneutic key to South African church/state/culture relations during significant periods in the 20th century. The selection of details from his life, as well as themes from the contexts and the hermeneutic keys are made representatively because they best illustrate the points to be made, as well as giving best insight into the problems formulated and thus help to understand an ordinary but illustrious man.

¹ This letter has been formulated to indicate the presence of an implied reader, who is neither a Church Historian nor a Theologian, but rather a general historian.

LETTER TO THE IMPLIED READER

Ben Marais worked on so many topics and in so many contexts, that it would not be difficult to find myself thinking about these issues – often diverse. These issues could be seen as impulses (influences on and of) from Greek philosophy to Ecumenical relations to Nationalism to Church History to Scottish Evangelicals (also with a Scottish nationalism orientation).

In this regard, the current study is hardly an introduction to the man, Ben Marais (biographies are not always as popular as doctoral theses, while at the same time often being the best histories). Rather, it wishes to explore relations, draw comparisons, consider settings, and in line with African literary theory, indicate the change brought about by Ben Marais, to his contexts and to this study.

It is eventually hoped that this thesis does justice to Ben Marais, and to the study of Church History.

P.J. Maritz

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIC	African Independent Churches
ANC	African National Council
B.B.C.	British Broadcast Corporation
C.I.	Christian Institute
Di	Dominees, Reverends, plural form of Ds
Ds	Dominee, Reverend
F.A.K.	Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge
Maties	University of Stellenbosch
NCRV	Nederlands Christelike Radio Vereeniging, The Dutch Christian Radio Society
Ned. Herv. or Geref. Kerk	Nederduitsch Hervormd or Gereformeerde Kerk
NG Kerk	Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
PAC	Pan African Congress
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
S.A.C.C.	South African Council of Churches
SPROCAS	Study Project on Christianity in an Apartheid Society
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organization
Tuks (Tukkies)	University of Pretoria
WCC	World Council of Churches
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand
Unisa	University of South Africa
US SALEP	US SA Leader Exchange Programme

CONTENTS

Summary	v
KEY WORDS	vi
Letter to the Implied Reader	vi
Acknowledgements	viii
Abbreviations	ix
Contents.....	x
CHAPTER 1.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. SYNOPSIS OF BEN MARAIS' LIFE.....	1
3. CHURCH HISTORIOGRAPHY	3
a. Academic/Scientific Foundations of Study	5
b. Philosophy and History	5
c. Church History and General History	6
i. Religious History and History	6
ii. Understanding History	8
iii. Definition of History and Church History	12
d. Church History and Theology	12
e. Hermeneutic Perspective	13
4. PREMISES.....	16
5. FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM.....	18
a. Probing the Problems.....	18
b. Posing the Problem.....	19
6. HYPOTHESIS	19
a. Orientation to the Hypothesis	19
b. Formulation of the Hypothesis	19
7. TITLE OF THE THESIS	20
8. METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE	22
a. Organisation of Methodology	22
b. Research Process	23
c. Presentation of Results	23
9. CHAPTER OVERVIEW	24
10. CONCLUSION	25
CHAPTER 2.....	26
THE LIFE OF BEN MARAIS.....	26
1. INTRODUCTION.....	26
2. A KEY TO BEN MARAIS.....	27
a. Correspondence with the World Council of Churches	29
i. From Dr W.A. Visser't Hooft, 17 October 1956.....	29
ii. To the Secretary, World Council of Churches, 25 September 1964.....	31
iii. To Dr Potter, World Council of Churches, 1978(?).....	31
iv. To Dr E.C. Blake, World Council of Churches, 3 September 1970.....	33
v. From Dr E.C. Blake, World Council of Churches, 24 September 1970	35
b. Further Correspondence	35
i. From H.E. Pressley, 2 September 1981.....	36

CONTENTS

ii. From L.C. Malan, 10 April 1989	37
iii. From Eddie Brown, 21 September 1992	37
3. THE LIFE OF BEN MARAIS	37
a. A Sketch of Ben Marais' Life	39
i. From Farm to Town Boy	39
ii. Student Years: Balancing Acts	41
iii. The Fashionable Minister: Years in the Ministry	44
The University Chaplain/The Policy Protestor	44
The Minister of a Congregation and a World Traveller	49
iv. Whistling in the Faculties of Learning	50
Pretoria: 1953-1974: Contacts and Isolation	50
University of South Africa: 1975-1986: Years of Joy	60
v. More Time for the Garden and Grandchildren	62
b. Alternative Courses	63
c. Ben Marais as Key to His Times	64
4. CONCLUSION	65
CHAPTER 3	66
THE TIMES OF BEN MARAIS	66
1. INTRODUCTION	66
2. SOUTHERN AFRICA IN THE 20 TH CENTURY	66
a. Winds From the 19 th Century	67
i. The Clashes on the Eastern Frontier	68
ii. The English Politician and the Missionary from London	71
iii. The Weaker Brother	75
iv. Diamonds, Gold and Wealth	76
v. The Anglo-Boer War	77
b. Sunshine, Winds of Illness, Drought and Storms in the 20 th Century	79
i. Political Climates	81
Changing Allegiances	81
Communism	82
Isolation	85
Focus on Policies	87
ii. Social and Cultural Climates	89
iii. Ecclesiastic Climates	90
The World Council of Churches	91
The NG Kerk	95
The Ned. Herv. or Geref. Kerk	96
The English Speaking Churches	98
iv. Theological Climates	101
Applying the Ideas of Abraham Kuyper	101
The Du Plessis Case (1931)	102
The Theory of Mission	106
Justification of Apartheid on Scripture	110
Black Theology	114
The South African Social Revolution	115
3. HOW BEN MARAIS WEATHERED THE CLIMATES	117
4. CONCLUSION	119
CHAPTER 4	120

CONTENTS

NATIONALISM: TWO PERIODS OF TRANSFORMATION	120
1. INTRODUCTION	120
2. THE FIRST PERIOD OF TRANSFORMATION.....	120
3. THE SECOND PERIOD OF TRANSFORMATION.....	123
4. OVERLAP IN THE PERIODS OF TRANSFORMATION	124
5. THE VARIOUS FORMS OF NATIONALISM.....	124
6. THE TERM “NATIONALISM”	126
7. THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF NATIONALISM.....	128
a. Indian Nationalism.....	128
b. English Nationalism	131
c. Afrikaner Nationalism	132
d. African Nationalism	136
e. National Gods and Political Suppliants	140
i. Understanding Apartheid	141
In Theory and Practice.....	142
Two Reactions Against Apartheid.....	151
1. The Cottesloe Consultations: 7-14 December 1960.....	152
2. The Christian Institute (1963-1990).....	157
ii. Policy, Piety and Religious Control	159
8. EFFECT OF POLITICAL, CULTURAL AND NATIONALISTIC CLIMATES ON CHURCH AND THEOLOGY	160
9. CONCLUSION	160
CHAPTER 5.....	162
UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES AND INFLUENTIAL PRESENCE	162
1. INTRODUCTION.....	162
2. PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	164
a. Youth	164
b. Student Years.....	167
c. Marriage.....	168
3. TRAVELS	168
a. World Academic Tours.....	169
i. USA – Princeton 1934.....	169
ii. Travels to the Americas.....	169
b. African Information Tours	171
c. Conferences: Mission and Ecumenical Tours	171
4. FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES: INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE.....	174
a. A man of Controversies: Albert Luthuli.....	176
b. A Friend with a Different Temperament: Beyers Naudé	177
c. Justified Differences: E.P. Groenewald.....	181
d. A Contrasting Shepherd from the Other Fold: J.D. (Koot) Vorster	183
5. THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	186
6. STUDIES.....	187
a. Informal Studies.....	188
i. Nationalism: Man’s Other Religion (1933): E. Shillito	188
b. Formal Studies.....	199
i. M.A. in Afrikaans, Stellenbosch, 1932	199
ii. M.A. in Philosophy, Stellenbosch, 1935	202
iii. M.Th. in Theology, Princeton, 1936	205

CONTENTS

iv D.Phil. in Philosophy, Stellenbosch, 1946	205
7. PRINCIPLES	208
8. THE WORLD AT WAR	209
9. THE STUDENT ENVIRONMENT	210
10 CONCLUSION	210
CHAPTER 6.....	211
A PROPHET FOR HIS TIMES, BUT FOR OTHERS TOO	211
1. INTRODUCTION.....	211
2. THE LEGACY OF BEN MARAIS	212
a. Spoken Legacy.....	213
i. In the Classroom.....	213
ii. At the Synods	216
Ned. Herv. or Geref. Kerk of Transvaal	217
1940: Mission Policy	217
1944: Issuing Weapons.....	218
1948: Justification of Apartheid	218
1951: Confirming Scripture’s Stance on Apartheid	221
1954: Disappointing Notice.....	221
1957: Secret Societies.....	222
NG Kerk: Southern Transvaal Synod.....	222
1963: Stemming the Critical Voice	222
NG Kerk: Northern Transvaal Synod.....	223
1970: Racial and Ecumenical Questions	223
iii. World Council of Churches	223
iv. Student Chaplaincy.....	225
b. Written Legacy	226
i. Monographs.....	227
<i>Colour: Unsolved Problem of the West (1952a): the Bomb</i>	227
<i>The Two Faces of Africa (1964b): The Reactor</i>	235
<i>Die Kerk deur die Eeue: Battles of the Ages</i>	243
The Inspirational	244
3. DURING THE FIRST PERIOD OF TRANSFORMATION	245
4. IN THE SHADOW OF THE SECOND PERIOD OF TRANSFORMATION.....	245
5. APPRECIATION FOR BEN MARAIS	246
a. The Honorary Doctorates	246
The University of South Africa, 1979	247
b. The funeral letters.....	247
Sonop Council, University of Pretoria, 26 February 1999	248
From Wilgenhof House Committee, University of Stellenbosch, 11 February 1999.....	248
From The Club of Old Student Council Chairmen, 28 January 1999	249
From the Office of the General Synod, NG Kerk, 29 January 1999	249
6. HERALDING THE RAINBOW AFTER THE STORMS: DESMOND TUTU	250
7. CONCLUSION: BEN MARAIS THE PROPHET	252
CHAPTER 7.....	253
CONCLUSION	253
1. ANSWERING THE POSED PROBLEM	254
2. PROVING THE HYPOTHESIS	257

CONTENTS

3. METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE	257
4. CHAPTER OVERVIEW	258
5. REFLECTION	259
6. WHAT DID WE DO WITH OUR TROAS?	260
7. FINAL REMARK	261
BIBLIOGRAPHY	262
1. ANCIENT AND CLASSIC AUTHORS	262
2. WORKS BY BEN MARAIS	262
3. GENERAL AUTHORS	264
4. INTERVIEWS.....	273
5. SYNOD AGENDAS, REPORTS AND MINUTES.....	274
6. ARCHIVES.....	275
APPENDICES.....	277
APPENDIX A	277
SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY	277
APPENDIX B	281
OVERVIEW OF THE WRITTEN WORK BY BEN MARAIS	281
Monographs	281
Studies	281
MA in Afrikaans.....	281
MA in Philosophy.....	281
M.Th in Theology.....	281
D.Phil in Philosophy.....	281
Contributions in Ecclesiastic Magazines and Newspapers	282
Die Kerkbode.....	282
Die Voorligter.....	282
Op die Horison	283
Die Sendingblad	283
Articles in Theological Periodicals	283
Theologia Evangelica	283
Pro Veritate.....	283
Die Gereformeerde Vaandel.....	284
Nederduits Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif	284
Contributions in Daily Newspapers.....	284
The Star	284
Natal Daily News.....	285
Sunday Chronicle	285
Sunday Times	285
Cape Times.....	285
Cape Argus	285
Other Magazines, Periodicals and Newspapers.....	286
Oudstudent.....	286
Die Soeklig	286
Die Naweek	286
Inspan	286
NG Jaarboek	286
Die Koningsbode	286
Die Brandwag.....	286

CONTENTS

Naweekpos	286
Eternity	287
Dagbreek.....	287
Christianity today	287
Suid-Afrikaanse Stem.....	287
The Compass	287
Optima	287
Dagbreek en Landstem.....	287
Church of England Newspaper.....	287
Werda	287
Horison	288
Sondagblad se tydskrif	288
Christianity and crisis	288
Matieland.....	288
The Livingstonian.....	288
Tydskrif v Geesteswetenskap	288
The Christian Century	288
Christian Minister	288
News Check.....	288
Dagbreek en Sondagnuus	288
Deo Gloria	288
Koers.....	289
Koinonia – Jaarblad.....	289
Beacon	289
Lantern.....	289
Reformed & Presb World.....	289
Bul African Inst	289
Mankind.....	289
Taalgenoot.....	289
Die Volk	289
Hoofstad	289
Gedenkblad.....	289
Hoofstad	290
Rapport	290
Theologia Viatorum.....	290
Korrels	290
Beeld.....	290
Insig	290
Correspondence in the Press.....	290
Die Kerkbode.....	290
Die Transvaler	291
Dagbreek en Sondagnuus	291
Die Vaderland.....	291
Beeld.....	291
Hoofstad	291
Die Burger	291
Rapport	291
Insig	291

CONTENTS

Regulars	292
Dagbreek en Sondagnuus:	293
Die Huisgenoot	293
Die Perdeby	293
Other	294
Miscellaneous Contributions	294
Miscellaneous Texts: Articles, Lectures, Speeches	295
Afrikaans Texts	295
General	295
Afrikaans Texts Indicating Names of Newspapers	296
English Texts	296
General	296
English Texts Indicating Names of Newspapers	297
Eternity	297
The Star	297
British Weekly	297
The Sunday Chronicle	297
Christianity and Crisis	297
Radio Texts	297
Afrikaans radio	297
English radio	298
Sermon Texts	298
Specific Occasions	298
Unspecified	299
APPENDIX C	300
BACKGROUND MATERIAL	300
Background Material and Biographic Information	300