

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

After a short orientation in the form of a synopsis of Ben Marais' life, the nature of this study is considered, relating the theological and scientific orientation to biographies and church histories within church and general historiography. Provisional criticism against the study is also pondered upon. The premises serve as logical conclusions to the philosophical considerations in historiography and as orientation to the posed problem and formulation of the hypothesis. The reasons for the formulation of the title is only presented after the problem and hypothesis of the study has been treated because it contains terms and concepts that are more conclusive in nature than indicating a scope of study. Before concluding the introduction to the thesis, the methodology and procedure followed in the selection of material and the reasoning behind the presentation of the argument is presented.

The work and thoughts of Ben Marais, as a Church Historian, is alluded to during the course of the introduction, indicating his interests in such matters, as well as my own progression and engagement with his thought.

2. SYNOPSIS OF BEN MARAIS' LIFE

In the opening paragraph of *The Two Faces of Africa* (1964b:1), Ben Marais places his life in the greater African context, indicating in the contemporaneous publication how interwoven his own story is with that of Southern Africa. It is presented here as orientation to the short synopsis of his life (Marais 1964b:1):

“I begin this book on a very personal note. I write as an African, be it a white African. I can write in no other capacity. I belong to Africa. My own family emigrated to the Cape of Good Hope in 1688 as French Huguenots and my people have lived there ever since. It is our one and only homeland.”

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Barend Jacobus Marais was born on 26 April 1909, on a farm in the Steynsberg district of the Great Karoo. He died on 27 January 1999 in Pretoria. He suffered a stroke late in 1998 and never fully regained his strength.

He matriculated at the high school in Middelburg, Cape, in 1927. His uncle, Pieter Abraham Marais, sponsored his studies at the University of Stellenbosch. He obtained a B.A., a M.A. in Afrikaans and a M.A. in Philosophy. In June 1935, he left South Africa to study at Princeton, where he obtained a M.Th. in 1936. The title of his D.Phil. thesis, completed in 1944 at the University of Stellenbosch, was *Die Christelike Broederskapsleer en sy Toepassing in die Kerk van die Eerste Drie Eeue*.

During his university years at Stellenbosch he met Sibs Botha, originally from Kuruman. They married on 30 April 1939. Their daughter, Augusta (who married Koos Marais, brother of the Springbok rugby captain, Hannes Marais), was born on 27 May 1940.

In 1936 Ben Marais passed the Candidate Minister's Examination (Proponentseksamen) and became available for ministry in the NG Kerk family. He first assisted in the Riversdal congregation (Cape) and the Old Irene Church in Plein Street, Johannesburg, for several months before being called by the Ned. Herv. or Geref. Kerk Synod of Transvaal to serve as student chaplain (serving 7 institutions and more than 2000 students). The Pretoria East congregation of the Ned. Herv. or Geref. Kerk called him in 1940 as student chaplain and in 1949 as minister. He succeeded Dr W. Nicol, who left the ministry to become Administrator of the Transvaal. In 1953 Ben Marais became professor of the History of Christianity and Church Polity at the University of Pretoria, on the retirement of Professor D.J. Keet. He retired from this chair in June 1974 and was succeeded by the charismatic Dr P.B. van der Watt, who was then lecturing at the University of Stellenbosch. Instead of dedicating his life solely to his impressive rose garden and aloes and honorary duties at the university residence, Sonop Hostel, he also continued his academic career at the University of South Africa, retiring from academia in mid 1986.

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During his active ministry in the NG Kerk he attended several ecumenical and mission conferences, and toured extensively through America, Africa and Europe, meeting various and interesting people. He maintained correspondence with a few people from these meetings, for example, Visser't Hooft. Especially two such exchanges form a kernel to this study.

Ben Marais was predominantly a quiet man, though he was often heard whistling a tune in the passages of the faculty, often related to a sermon he was preparing. His outspokenness against the scriptural justification of the church's Mission Policy and Apartheid at the Transvaal Synod meetings of 1940, 1944, and 1948, earned him a curious place in the history of race relations and church politics. Furthermore, he was a revered radio personality and his articles often appeared in academic journals, newspapers and popular magazines. He is especially known for two, then controversial books, *Colour: Unsolved Problem of the West* (1952a) and *The Two Faces of Africa* (1964b) which contributed, along with other factors, to him experiencing a few lonely years in the 1960s and early 1970s.

I had the good fortune of meeting Ben Marais only once. Wearing the recommended tie, I was introduced to first his wife, Tannie Sibs, and his daughter, Augusta, and then to him. Professor J.W. (Hoffie) Hofmeyr, also in formal attire for the occasion, conducted the introductions. The study was well sunlit, though there were hardly any books left on the extensive shelves. An old acquaintance from the mission field was visiting. We drank tea and made small talk, my place in the order of things and the universe being established. That was hardly the moment to ask him any of the questions that were swelling in my thoughts. Ben Marais suffered a stroke a few weeks later, and I was refused access to him, instead drinking tea with his wife, who volunteered suitable and vital information. Ben Marais died some months later on 27 January 1999.

3. CHURCH HISTORIOGRAPHY

One of the principle questions on Church Historiography, marked by Ben Marais in his copy *On the Meaning of History* (1949), is: "Is there such a being as a 'Church Historian'?" A negative position to this question is taken in by P.G. Lindhart (Kraemer

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1949:9),² who asserts that there “is no Church Historian – there are, of course, Christians who are historians ... Philosophically speaking there is no apprehension possible, as there does not exist contemporaneity [sic] with the past. Theologically speaking it is impossible because Christianity is not concerned with the past nor with the future, but with the present moment which is eternity.” The positive assertion (Kraemer 1949:10), underlined in Ben Marais’ copy, says of the Church Historian:

“... His Christian faith includes a special understanding of God, man, life and the world, and therefore, provides him with a particular way of understanding and evaluating human situations, decisions and acts. It is just of these human situations, decisions and acts that the texture of history is made. This does neither mean that an historian, who is a Christian, is distinguished from other historians by being prophetic or moralising. Prophets are called, not made. Nevertheless, the historian-Christian ... ought at least to understand better and deeper the real meaning and prophetic interpretation of history, which is the Biblical way of interpretation, and be moulded by it.”

Eddie Brown, Emeritus Professor of Church History at the University of Stellenbosch and an old student of Ben Marais, wrote (Brown 1992b:488):

“A student who traces sources in archives and studies them thoroughly, Marais is not. For the new church historian it was all about historical perspective and grasping the contemporary situation the church of Christ found itself in. He did not lapse into apologetic and polemic practices in church history. It was liberating, because the three Afrikaans churches of reformed confession were at that time denying each other the right to exist. He directed the eyes of his students, church historically, towards a broader horizon.”

In response to a question (Hofmeyr Interview 1985) about the difference between the writing of denominational, confessional, and ecumenical Church History, Ben Marais answered that Church History was about the Church of Christ. He mentioned that the first requirement of Church History was the creation of a feeling for the big picture of the people of God, the universality. He maintained that the universality of the church had to be reflected in Church History. He wished that Church History would give expression to the reality that God was active in the world through the church. Therefore, according to Ben Marais, Church History always had to be considered in relation to what is generally called secular history.

² The particular copy that was consulted came from Ben Marais’ collection.

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a. Academic/Scientific Foundations of Study

The theoretic and philosophic understanding of Church History in relation to history, theology and scientific disciplines needs to be accounted for. The account will place this study's arrangement of biography within a broader scientific and church historical orientation.

The study on the life of Ben Marais under the banner of Church History is not *A Brief History of Time*, but a brief consideration of one man's life (elective) against a particular context. Where Hawkins' history (1998) is a scientific-mathematical attempt to consider the organisation and structure of the whole universe over the expanse of time and in its geographic extent, this biographically orientated study finds itself suspended between different traditions. Some of these traditions precede the scientific methodology and criteria associated with *A Brief History of Time*, the North-west European and Western understanding of history as a linear phenomenon (Judaean-Christian) while also drawing from cyclic, spiral and circular understandings of time. Alternatively, Church History also runs parallel to these traditions and is intrinsically both dependent and integral with them. On the other hand, Church History is connected to a consideration of history which is both religiously orientated and alternatively stands accountable to non-religious considerations.

While this study considers the subject Church History as more than the reflection on the collection of data from archives and interviews (primary sources) and the retelling of stories in adapted formats, it wishes to present an academic and scientific foundation, a theological contemplation and a historical orientation to the subject Church History, and to Ben Marais, a Church Historian.

b. Philosophy and History

Ben Marais' M.A. in Philosophy was titled: *Probleme van die Ontwikkeling van die Onsterflikheid in die Griekse Filosofie*.³ His D.Phil. was a philosophical contemplation on the universal concept "Christian brotherhood", considering the first three centuries of

³ "Problems of the Development of Immortality in Greek Philosophy".

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the Early Church, but with the then contemporary situation in the church and country in mind. Within these theses it is obvious that Ben Marais approached philosophic questions and contemporaneous issues with a historically orientated framework.

My own orientation is in Greek Philosophy. Though Plato did not discuss the art of history writing as such, what he says on opinion, truth and flattery in *Gorgias* is applicable to the writing of history. While writing *Gorgias* to attract students to philosophic education, he attacks rhetoric, which was flourishing and influential in the then forensic and political debates. He also asks questions about Truth and Right.

Socrates taunts Gorgias (*Gorgias* 459C) and in jest, illustrates, through reason, that rhetoric is a mere device and has its faults. That something is convincing or well said does not mean that it is the truth. Rhetoric could be compared to the art of writing history through an analogy that Plato draws between politics and medicine, justice and gymnastics (body and soul) (464). To what end is history written and practised? Would it be only to record events, as in a chronicle, or as in minutes of a meeting? Or, would it have a particular aim, as in persuading a particular point of view or cause? Or, would it reflect somehow on Truth? Or, is its aim the deconstruction, criticism and negation of an eventuality? How does it, the historian or history, consider the greater scheme of things?⁴

c. Church History and General History

The relation between secular or general history and church history is problematic to some and offers no problems to others.⁵ I find the relations quite complex.

i. Religious History and History

It could be argued that Church History, as expressing the history of the Christian Church, is a history of a religion, and could be understood in relation to General (secular) History by considering the relation between the other world religions and

⁴ It could be argued (Maritz 2000:221) that Plato developed his philosophy in support of his concerns for Athenian politics.

⁵ See Hofmeyr (1979:48-59) for a reflection on Ben Marais' contribution to Church History in perspective of the relation between the practice of general historiography and church historiography in South Africa.

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General History. This relation, then, between Church History and General History would be found to be closer than those of the other religions, such as Islam and Judaism. The North – Western orientation to World History would thus be greater influenced by Christianity than by the other religions due to the close relations between church and secular state from the 4th century until generally during the Enlightenment. Though, due to the peculiar nature of academia and church in South Africa, especially influenced by the Evangelical School through the Scottish ministers in the NG Kerk during the late 19th century, the concerns of the Enlightenment were not pronounced. This implies that the General History of Southern Africa was considered more through a Calvinistic perspective, with a providential orientation. Though, there was a time during the early 1900s that the historical critical schools⁶ prevalent at Utrecht were preferred to the Creation Ordinance School of Kuyper at the Free University of Amsterdam.⁷

The preferred reasoning in South African society, in short, required the justification or criticism of a political theory and model based on Scripture. More particularly for this study, this pious/secular rationale indicates the need to consider Ben Marais' attitude to other religions and to General History in order that his understanding of Church History, or History of Christianity can be better appreciated. For example, in *The Two Faces of Africa* Ben Marais reveals the close relation he draws between secular African and Christian history when he writes (1964b:201):

“Let us in conclusion have a closer look at the role the Christian community plays in present day Africa. We have deep concern about the future of the church in Africa. At many points there is stagnation where there was vigorous growth. Everywhere there is division. Islam is a vast threat, Communism and nationalism may increasingly challenge the Gospel and seek to lay hands on the deepest loyalties of African man which belong to God alone....”

The short quotation reveals at once Ben Marais' piety, also his concern for the Christian contribution to Africa, his aversion to Islam and communism and concern for nationalism challenging Christianity. Furthermore, his consideration of the then current situation in Africa through a “Rise and Fall model” – “stagnation ... growth” and a

⁶ Hoër Kritiek.

⁷ The emphasis move in popularity between the two schools of thought found J. du Plessis caught in the middle, which resulted in the Du Plessis Case. Du Plessis was a proponent of the historical critical school.

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“Unity Division model”. The unity is seen to be a solution and lies in the future.

Before criticising or negating this approach to General History, or even Church History, it is important to consider the relation between Church History and General History, and how history is understood in this study, in order to show how the particular influences on Ben Marais are understood.

ii. Understanding History

In African Church Historiography, Ogbu Kalu considers the concepts of Time, Space, Theme and African Initiative (2002:311-348). David Bebbington (1979) considers a Christian perspective on historical thought in his *Patterns in History*. Stanford (1994:243) indicates the weakness of working with patterns in history, while promoting relevant, functional, thematic analyses. Furthermore, does history have a providential base or a secular base? Church History would also like to distinguish a confessional base and for some also an Evangelical base. Then also, Max Weber, Wrede, Gadamer, Nietzsche, Herder, Von Humboldt, Vico, Von Ranke, Niebuhr, Dilthey, Hegel, Habermas, Latourette, Troeltsch, Collingwood, and others, have all contributed to understanding history, each one working in a different context, and each seeking different results. Not everyone is in consensus. Thus the question remains: How to understand “History”?

The following five-point model serves as a summary of this study’s orientation to history.

- Temporal understanding of history;
- Functionalist understanding of history;
- Understanding the Idea – History;
- Understanding through method;
- Understanding through the material.

Five different modes of understanding history are differentiated. It is contended that all histories contain aspects from each of the five modes, but that some histories exhibit emphasis differentiation. These modes pertain to both the writing and reading of history

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as well as to how it is interpreted and understood.

The following diagrammatic presentation is a simplified model, in summary form, expressing an understanding of history, based on these five modes. Aspects of the model are treated throughout the thesis, in structure, organisation and content.

1. Temporal understanding of history		
This mode of understanding history considers the concept “time”, also in its relation to “distance”. Aspects that are considered include: the structure of time; the practice of periodisation; and the establishing of patterns in history.		
On the structure of time	Cyclic – seasonal	e.g. Heraclitus; Natural Sciences
	Circular – always returns	e.g. Origen. The apokatastasis doctrine (the end will be as the beginning). Also Plato. E.g. in <i>Timaeus</i> (23B) the sentiment (culture, literacy, soul of a people) remaining young while floods and fires save the herdsmen and shepherds and destroys the cultivated in the valleys below. The herdsmen and shepherds in turn settle in the villages and the cycle of progress continues (Also <i>Crates</i> 109E-110A).
	Spiral – returns modified	e.g. Reinterpretation of historic imagery, Old Testament prophets and Apocalyptic Tradition.
	Linear – never returns	e.g. Judeo-Christian views on history.
On periodisation	Macro	Examples of macro periodisation models: 1. Ancient, Hellenistic, Medieval, Modern, Postmodern, Contemporary 2. Old Testament, New Testament, Church 3. The Father, the Son, the Spirit 4. According to Schools: Grammar, Historical, Structural The problem is that not one of these models is fully representative.
	Micro	Examples of micro periodisation models: 1. Patristic, Reformation, Post reformation (problem is not representative – e.g. Greek Orthodox Church did not partake in reformation) 2. French Revolution, Russian Revolution, Industrial Revolution 3. Renaissance, Enlightenment These models are useful when particular themes or interests are discussed.

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		<p>Comment: A particular example of periodisation that would have influenced Ben Marais' orientation to the history of Southern Africa is to be found in the history of the NG Kerk in South Africa: 1652 -1873 of A. Moorrees (1937). He divides the early history into three periods:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The church under the control of the Dutch East Company, but affiliated ecclesiastically to the Classis of Amsterdam – 1652-1804; 2. The church under the direct management of the State – 1804-1824; 3. Abatement of state management over the church – 1824-1862. <p>A further influence on Ben Marais, seen possibly in his 1959 publication providing an overview of Christianity over the centuries, is in the history of The Dutch Reformed Churches in Natal, Free State and Transvaal of Gerdener (1934). Of particular interest is Gerdener's use of battles and action reaction models in his periodisation.</p>
On Patterns	Life and Death	Closely related to Natural sciences – to biology
	Rise and Fall models	e.g. The Roman Empire
	Sequencing	e.g. Platonic political theory (<i>Laws</i> 832; <i>Epistle VII</i> : 326A). ⁸
2. Functionalist understanding of history		
<p>Indicating this mode as "Functionalist" is intentionally ambiguous, and wishes to relate the various structuralist schools as well as the questions on the function of history and history writing. Thus attention is given to the various reception theories, interest groups, as well as to the intention of the written history. Particular aspects, which make tabling easier, are considering history as fulfilling a need in the present, and justification of various issues.</p>		
History as fulfilling a need in the present	Gender Studies	e.g. Analysis of paternalistic language in the political and ecclesiastic documents covering the 20 th century, and following the subtle changes in emphasis.
	Race Studies	e.g. The history of Apartheid in South Africa
	Currents and Trends	e.g. Journalism; styles of recording histories
Justification	of ideology	e.g. National histories
	of cause or interest	e.g. Human Rights
	of movements	e.g. Pentecostalism
	of sentiment	e.g. anti Islamic or anti war or pro Empire or Establishment
	of point of view	e.g. reports on war and sport (esp. journalists: A great victory is a sad defeat!) regarding Church History: denominational, ecumenical, confessional. e.g. Ben Marais: "It is Church History that gives us insight into the universality of Jesus Christ" (Hofmeyr 1979:55).

⁸ It could be argued that the "irremediable degeneracy" of governments proposed by Plato, is the starting point of his political and social speculations. In this sequence Monarchy degenerates into Dictatorship, which is replaced by an Aristocracy. The Aristocracy degenerates into a Oligarchy (love for money) and is replaced by Democracy, which degenerates into mob rule, until a strong Monarch comes to the fore. The question is not necessarily for the best form, but for harmony, righteousness and justice (virtue).

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	of identity	e.g. of subjects: Old Testament, New Testament, Practical Theology, Church Doctrine, Psychology, Science, Church History; e.g. of nations: The Afrikaner nation, The English people, American society; e.g. of individuals: biography, autobiography. Look here at especially the Egyptian autobiographies.
	Regarding purpose	In different fields: e.g. education and training; information conveyance; manipulation of facts and people; elevation/regression of a state; entertainment purposes
	Regarding theme	Various possible themes: e.g. politics; economics; civilisation; nature; time; church – state relations
3. Understanding the Idea – History		
This mode is probably the most interesting, but at the same time most abstract. It asks central questions that have complex answers. Due to its philosophic nature, distinguishable schools of thought are also considered in this mode.		
	What is time?	
	What is truth?	
	What is relevant?	
	What is history?	
	Schools of thought	
4. Understanding through Method		
History could also be understood by the way in which it is presented, whether written or oral, and in the method of organising the history, or inquiry, which is determined as much, or more, by the way the mind works as by the formal schooling in History.		
	Format	Various options are possible: narrative; descriptive; poetic; analysis; essay
	Inquiry	Intuitive or mathematical – e.g. From Pascal: Deductive or inductive
5. Understanding through the material		
What material is covered in the history? What is emphasised and highlighted? What material is glossed over or neglected? Is the historian using original material (primary sources) or a reconstruction of the material (secondary sources)? Is the material religious or secular? Further distinctions could be: political, military, sport, art or culture. For the purpose of this study only the Religious and Secular are integrated into the mode, to save space and to consider what is appropriate for understanding how the central questions are answered.		
	Original material	
	Reconstruction	
	Religious or secular	

None of these five modes, the formulation of which is the result of structuralist thinking, could be considered in isolation and operate in tandem, though emphasis differentiation may occur, especially through the titling of the history: for example: *The Rise and Fall*

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*of the Roman Empire.*⁹

iii. Definition of History and Church History

This study, then, would be hesitant to formulate a definition of History and of Church History.¹⁰ Such definitions capture certain aspects or concerns, but cannot always fulfil the broader orientation. A historian's understanding of history is influenced by more factors than are exhibited within a single definition. In Church History, though, theological orientation is of particular concern.

d. Church History and Theology

Ben Marais was more an evangelically influenced church historian and ecumenical thinker than a theologian, although the theological principles he adhered to were rudimentary to his thought, attitudes and actions (Viljoen Interview 1985).

According to this study's understanding of tradition there were particularly four ecumenical Church Historians, Eusebius of Caesarea, Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret.¹¹ While the ecumenical Church Historians should be differentiated from the "national" Church Historians of the post reformation era, enlightenment and thereafter, their histories were not free of theological reflection. Furthermore, the roots of the written history of the church are to be found in the Scriptures. For example, Luke, the author of the Gospel Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, is known as the historian of the New Testament. In the Old Testament the Prophets form part of the writings known as "the Histories".

Ben Marais approached the subject Church History through Mission History. Latourette

⁹ The fall of the Roman Empire corresponds with the expansion of Christianity.

¹⁰ The name of the subject itself poses problems and accent differences, whether it is "Church History" or "History of Christianity". Further distinction can be made between the specific fields of interest. For example: The history of doctrine; the history of the interpretation of God's Word. Furthermore, definitions on Church History are influenced by world views and philosophy of life. To consider each of these aspects would be to draw the study in a direction it does not want to. It wishes to be predominantly biography orientated.

¹¹ Rufinus is not considered an ecumenical Church Historian by this study due to his strong orientation to the Latin Church.

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especially advocated this approach (Viljoen Interview 1986).¹² The reformation also played an important interpretative role in the Church Historical thinking of Ben Marais. Bainton influenced Ben Marais' thinking in this regard, as can be seen in *Die Kerk deur die Eeue* (1959a:109-115) where Ben Marais discusses Calvin in relation to Michael Servetus.¹³ The influence of doctrines and heresies and the development of the history of doctrines need to be related. For example: Calvin's *Institute* theology, which is based in essence on a Confession – the 12 Articles, pays particular attention to the Trinity due to the heresies of Servetus. Karl Barth, whose Theology also has a strong confessional orientation, was written under different circumstances. Thus, the particular theology of a church person can be seen to reflect on the church historical circumstances people find themselves in. See also Eusebius' introduction to his *Historia Ecclesiastica* on the person of Christ, where he places the history he is covering within a Christological context and thus within a broader framework.

As Calvin only fully formulated a doctrine on the Trinity in response to Michael Servetus, historic events influenced the development of doctrines. The students of doctrines have particular attitudes towards history. For the development of a doctrine, or teaching on the NG Kerk, or reformed understanding of race relations, under which Apartheid constitutes, the historic events of the 20th century need to be taken into consideration. This study serves then as one orientation to a person, Ben Marais, who influenced the NG Kerk's attitude towards Apartheid.

e. Hermeneutic Perspective

In South African NG Kerk academia, the concept "hermeneutics" was associated most strongly with the biblical disciplines (Kinghorn 1986:55). It is considered to be a technical, theological term that indicates the theory of the interpretation of Scripture, which is distinguished from exegesis, indicating the actual interpretation of specific

¹² The approach of Latourette is particularly evident in the six volume work on *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*. The subtitles of the books reveal his periodisation: *The First Five Centuries* (1937); *The Thousand Years of Uncertainty AD 500 – AD 1500* (1938); *Three Centuries of Advance AD 1500 – AD 1800* (1939); *The Great Century AD 1800 – AD 1914: Europe and the United States* (1941); *The Great Century in the Americas, Australasia and Africa* (1943); *The Great Century in Northern Africa and Asia* (1944).

¹³ Compare to Bainton's work on the relations between Calvin and Servetus (Bainton 1948: 141-149).

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texts.¹⁴ In this study it is considered more in its philosophic-historical orientation, in which the emphasis falls on meaning, representation, understanding, and interpretation of events and people's actions, how they are presented, and how they relate to the present, the future and the past.

The hermeneutic perspective in Church History is based on a inter-disciplinary understanding of Theology, in which the disciplines are seen to be inter-related.¹⁵ When he was questioned on the New Testament by John Eck during their debate on the primacy of Rome and the authority of the councils (*una interna et spiritualis communio fidelium* – Bakhuizen van den Brink & Dankbaar 1967:36), Martin Luther maintained the principle to place the Scriptures at the middle of the church's thought and actions. Borchardt (1984:13) indicates that the church has always been serious about the interpretation of the Scriptures. It has, however, not always been able to give an account of its ideologically biased reading.¹⁶

In short, it could be considered that Hermeneutics has to do with understanding and interpretation; the relating of the worlds to establish common ground to facilitate meaning. There is an inherently associated communication in progress. For the establishing of "original" circumstance of the "source", socio-political, economic individual and religious (in other words historical) background must be considered, as well as of the current reader and audience (receiver). Throughout the ages there has been a continual reinterpretation of Scripture in specific worlds for various reasons. This could be restored under *the History of Interpretation*.

¹⁴ Recently, hermeneutics has also been considered in Homiletics in a Hermeneutical-communicative sermon theory. See Vos (1996).

¹⁵ See esp. Boje (1991) who proposes a transcontextual approach to Church Historiography. He maintains (Boje 1991:iii): "The social sources of our inherited denominationalism are compounded by cultural, socio-economic and racial divisions in South Africa, with the result that cultural contextualization shades into ideological captivity. Thus our hermeneutic 'conversation' with the text is distorted by our context, and our isolation from each other precludes the corrective of intercontextual exchange." This applies equally to an inter-disciplinary dialogue.

¹⁶ It is interesting to note that the hermeneutic model of Ebeling (1947) – Church History is the History of the Interpretation of the Scriptures – and the elaboration of Pillay (1988:86) – "Church History is the history of Christian self-understanding which has been based largely on Scripture and the developing tradition" – places Church History, within a reformational framework, in the centre of Christian experience and Theology. See also Hofmeyr (1995:24-43) for further tendencies in South African Church History. Compare to Bebbington (1995: 57-70) who discusses the trends in British Church History, on the relations between General and Church History, from an Evangelical perspective.

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History of Doctrine considers the development of doctrine, the measure against which Scripture is read, and practices in the church organised and rationalised. Church History, then, is the “consultant” to which each of these interpreters turn when meeting a different world, thus covering the sources and the recipients, the periods and relations between, with an ecclesiastic situation-specific perspective. Church History, distinguished as an autonomous subject, has a common heritage with the various other theological disciplines.

Where it would be a trap to over-simplify the relations between the theological disciplines as: Church History asks the “To be” question; Church Doctrine, Theology the “I am” question; Practical Theology the “To do” question; the Biblical subjects consider “What is written”; and Missiology being different, contains a dimension in each of the others, it is plausible to distinguish between normative, contributing and applicatory subjects. Each use similar tools, though with different accentuation’s. Church History is considered to be a contributing subject which facilitates understanding and interpretation. In short, the disciplines need to understand each other’s questions.

In *The Two Faces of Africa* (1964b:68), Ben Marais expresses a practical approach to Church History, where he applies hermeneutical keys to the social problems of South Africa:

“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....”

This study considers Ben Marais to be one such beacon, that if listened to, may also enlighten upon other concerns the church faces.

The following premises for the study can be formulated:

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4. PREMISES

- **On character – personal development**

This study does not regard character development as a growth phenomenon. Rather, it considers character manifestation as an orientation to the understanding of characters. The importance of considering Ben Marais' youth and relating it to his later life is therefore emphasised. And reversibly, reconstructing his youth through the considerations on his later life manifestations and denials should be possible.

- **On the theological orientation of this study**

This study in Church History has a theological orientation even though it is dealing with secular issues. A biography on a churchman does not make it theological because of the designation – churchman. Rather, the contribution this study has to understanding a man, who is an important figure in the Race Relations debate in the church, makes the study serviceable to Theology.

In the modified words of Ben Marais (1946:113): Any attempt at reconstructing a person's life or social conditions, must conceptualise an idea of the purpose and meaning of the person's life. This, in turn, stands in relation to and is determined by the nature of the divinity that is believed in.

- **On the relation between biography and history as an academic study**

A biography on its own does not necessarily qualify it as an academic study. The ideal is to determine a balance between the particular and the general. The style of thinking and writing has a particular influence, whether it is narrative, cryptic, or analytic.

- **On the relation between Church History and Science**

Church History is not a pure science. Though, it does incorporate science and uses scientific methods, and considers the relations between Science and Church. Also, the tradition of Church History is far older than the enlightenment, modernism and post-modernism, and therefore in this study considerations from the older tradition are seen alongside recent trends and fashions.

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▪ On objectivity

Objectivity itself is a subjective orientation, albeit a cold one.

• On Ideologies

This study is particularly wary for it is easier to analyse and discuss the ideologies of others than ones own. Often one is not aware of ones own ideological bearings. Thus in considering Communism and Nationalism as ideologies in negative terms, their positive aspects – as ideologies – could well be overseen.

• On Religions

This study in Church History designates a particular orientation towards the Christian faith. Due to the study being on a churchman of the Reformed tradition, it has a Reformed bearing. Due to his attitude towards Judaism, Islam and African religions, and the constructional organisation of this study, it would have been outside the scope of this study to consider the historiography of the other religions in relation to Church History, as well as their considerations on the problems in the country.

▪ Selection and omission and organising of information and approach

An attempt is made to reflect effectively, using only as much material as is required for this study.

Since this study covers a broad study field, preference is given to material that relates to the life of Ben Marais, or helps to place his life in the context of 20th century South Africa. This study is organised around hermeneutical keys. These keys are not allegorical keys – in which distinction is made between different layers of meaning: For example – Literal, Figurative, and Moral levels of interpretation.

Information is considered and organised according to its contribution to clarify meaning and enhance an understanding of the subject. It is not only about reflection, representation and reconstruction of various possibilities.

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The posing of the problem, the formulation of the hypothesis and the development of the argument assists in the selection of the most appropriate material.

5. FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM

The formulation of a problem and hypothesis, and the proving or disproving of it, is a useful approach in structuring an argument. It helps in the formulation of a central theme and prevents too many side-tracks being developed.

a. Probing the Problems

The following general questions are asked:

- Why base a study on the life of Ben Marais?
- What happened during the 1930s to 1970s in South African politics and the NG Kerk? How was Ben Marais involved in these events? How did what happened affect him?
- Who was Ben Marais? Would it be best to approach a study on his life, by considering him in the categories: churchman; church critic; family man; lecturer; author; radio personality; or ecumenical figure?
- There is hardly any documentation on Ben Marais' childhood. What were the circumstances he grew up in? What early influences helped govern his later perspectives?¹⁷
- Are the decisions made in youth, in terms of thought processes and execution thereof not a blue print to later decisions that are made in life? How can a reflection be made on Ben Marais' youth from decisions and attitudes later in life?
- Ben Marais made calculated study, academic and ministerial decisions. What was the essence of these decisions?

¹⁷ Eddie Brown (1992:480) formulated a similar question (my translation): "Is it the Karoo that helped to make him human? Jovial, spontaneous and well liked ... an approachable open person, a person of broad horizons."

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b. Posing the Problem

The following question is central to this thesis:

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?

6. HYPOTHESIS

The following hypothesis is to be argued in this thesis.

a. Orientation to the Hypothesis

Borchardt (1966:vii) points out in the introduction to his doctoral thesis on Hilary of Poitiers: “Every struggle brings great men into prominence, because the slumbering powers inert in them are aroused to action.” This understanding of human nature is central to the study, where Ben Marais is considered a humble and conservative person who came into prominence because the political situation in the church roused him into action. Therefore, it would be possible to understand the complexities of South African nationalism and religion, politics and academia through a closer look at the life of Ben Marais. In this sense he may show similarities to other prophets of the 20th century in South Africa, for example, Desmond Tutu and Beyers Naudé.

b. Formulation of the 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, to present and future generations on relations between the affairs of faith, state and society.

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7. TITLE OF THE THESIS

The formulation of the title, *Ben Marais (1909-1999): the Influences on and Heritage of a South African Prophet during Two Periods of Transformation*, implies the thesis' bias concerning its approach and towards its findings. The following explanation is presented to indicate some of the complexities involved.

The beginning of the 20th century, the century Ben Marais lived in, would be easy to demarcate in one sense, the Anglo-Boer War, but the tensions between English and Afrikaner sentiments preceded this war, and only came to full blossom during the 1930s. Furthermore, reference to the 20th century in the title does not do justice to the growing tensions between the various forms of nationalism and the emergence of particular sentiments along the lines of race, language, class, socio-economic and imperial/colonial sentiments. The hazy area of post 1994 is still too young to fully determine the effects of the political changes on the various sentiments. Therefore, the demarcation at the close of the 20th century is open.

Different periods of transformation during the 20th century could be determined according to temporal considerations. For example (dates are approximates):

The unification of Southern Africa: 1901-1960

- 1901-1910: Afrikaner recovery and English strength
- 1901-1912: Indian consciousness and African questions
- 1910-1948: Rise of Afrikaner and African nationalism
- Decline of English nationalism

The division of South Africa: 1948-1994

- 1948-1970: Bloom of Afrikaner nationalism
- Refocus and regrouping of African nationalism
- 1960-1990: Rise of African nationalism

The isolation of South Africa: 1960-1994

The repair of South Africa: 1990-

While this study considers periodisation of the various forms of nationalism in thematic and not temporal terms, certain confusions are prone to manifest themselves. The two representative periods overlap, depending also on the periodisation policy. Temporal and thematic considerations have influenced the choice made for this study.

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The fact that the country still finds itself within the time and thought frames in which these two periods manifested themselves, makes the task of understanding it virtually impossible, unless they were seen in relation to each other. The two periods of transformation reflect on the rise and establishment of Afrikaner nationalism, and the rise and establishment of African nationalism. The people of the two periods share common dates (interpreted differently), common battles (most times on opposing sides but not always), and common religions – but not religious facilities, besides the forced and unforced differentiation in education, housing, political voice, employment and justice.

Concerning the biographic emphasis of this thesis, Ben Marais did not live through the whole century, 1909-1999. He was only active during a certain period, especially 1940s to 1970s. Thus, due to his inconsequential involvement in the various affairs, reference to the 20th century would be pretentious if not taken representatively.

It would be possible to consider “South African Social Revolution” as a periodisation option, but such a formulation would implicate an in-depth study on a far broader field and scale. However, when considered as a perspective on the selected periods of transformation, “South African Social Revolution”, presents some interesting possibilities.

From the various periodisation models that could be applied to the 20th century, considerations on nationalism are chosen to represent the socio-political developments in the country. To be specific – two periods of transformation (pre and post 1948) are considered. Though we are still within the transformation patterns, and the transformation is not yet complete – there being a third and possibly a fourth period of transformation within the greater pattern besides those that preceded – the idea “prophet” indicates an understanding of the openness in this pattern. The study wishes to concentrate on predominantly two periods of transformation in the country, though to do so in isolation would be restrictive.

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The mentioning of “South African” technically presupposes a post 1961 orientation to the study. Prior to the end of the Anglo-Boer War (1901), the geographic area, now known as South Africa consisted of two British colonies (Cape and Natal) and two Afrikaner republics (Orange Free State and Transvaal). In 1910 these four differently administered political states united to form the Union of South Africa. The Republic of South Africa only came into being in 1961.

8. METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

To approach Ben Marais’ life, use will be made of hermeneutic keys, which helps direct and structure the study as well as expounding insight. Rather than seeing the inherent restrictions in such an approach, the faculty of demarcation for a study of this scope is welcomed.

A serious consideration in this study is the fear and danger of repetition of facts and information. Caution needs to be practised so that different perspectives on the same events qualify the argument in the different chapters. For example, his travels are covered under his biography, under the factors that influenced him, and in the chapter that considers his contributions during these tours, especially at the conferences.

a. Organisation of Methodology

This study is predominantly a literary study, in which publications, as for example by the subject of this study – Ben Marais, are approached in the same light as primary texts. The distinctions between primary and secondary sources are also difficult to demarcate in terms of how they were treated for the canvassing of information and the way the information was used.

Interviews also played an integral role. Apart from the interviews conducted for the purposes of this study, other interviews, which had other aims, were consulted. This created the idea of organising the research as if in preparation for an interview with Ben Marais.

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b. Research Process

The research process has been multi-faceted. In essence it has been an attempt to work in concentric circles, starting from outside and moving inward, while having access to the kernel, through personal contact with Mrs. Sibs Marais. Thus it has been conducted in dialogue. Questions posed and hypotheses formulated were constantly tested for confirmation or rejection, which helped steer the study within a particular scope of questions and answers.

Due to the broad scope of the study, perhaps too much so, but essential for the line of thought followed, attention was not equally distributed between the different available sources.

c. Presentation of Results

The thesis is intended to grow from a central kernel, the biography of Ben Marais, outwards to the history of South Africa. Though, a particular thematic orientation to Ben Marais has also been identified as necessary to retain the scope of the study. Therefore, the particular event of Ben Marais' correspondence, and then with the general secretaries of the World Council of Churches has been chosen as orientation to Ben Marais' life. Ben Marais is then also seen as a plausible key or window to the history of the twentieth century in South Africa, where he was influenced by certain factors and made significant contributions through his prophetic voice.

Therefore, the chapters follow a pattern, as does the argument, where a balance is maintained between chronological and thematic organisation of research results. This has also influenced the application of different styles, ranging from description to analysis to commentary.

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9. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The following chapter overview provides a guide to how the argument in this thesis has been developed.

- **Chapter 1: Introduction**

A short orientating synopsis of Ben Marais' life precedes a consideration on the nature of this study. The theological and scientific orientation to biographies and church histories is related within the scope of church and general historiography. The study's premises conclude the philosophical considerations in historiography and introduce the posing of the problem and hypothesis formulation. The formulation of the title is then discussed, along with the methodology and procedure followed in the study.

- **Chapter 2: The Life of Ben Marais**

A biographic relation on the life of Ben Marais is presented. Special emphasis is placed on his childhood. The orientation to his life is taken from the point of his singular communications with the general secretaries of the World Council of Churches during the 1960s and 1970s. It is then suggested that Ben Marais could serve as a key to the history of South Africa.

- **Chapter 3: The Times of Ben Marais**

The biographic relation of Chapter 2 is set within particular climates experienced during the 20th century in South Africa. Thus, where Chapter 2 was more biographic, Chapter 3 is more contextual in nature. The context of the twentieth century Ben Marais knew is approached thematically, being designated under politics, culture, religion, academia, Theology and nationalism. The study is particularly interested in nationalism and in Ben Marais' understanding of its intricacies.

- **Chapter 4: Nationalism: The Two Periods of Transformation**

The considerations on nationalism are approached from a model of rise and fall, or growth and maturity. Thus, it is considered using the model of two periods of

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transformation. The various forms of nationalism prevalent in South Africa is discussed, and it is indicated how they are invariably related.

▪ **Chapter 5: Underlying Principles and Influential Presence**

A closer look at the underlying principles and influential presence of Ben Marais is made. Where Chapter 3 presents various climates, Chapter 5 considers the different perspectives on Ben Marais. This is done from personal, political, ecclesiastic and academic considerations.

▪ **Chapter 6: A Prophet for His Times, But for Others Too**

Chapter 6 deals predominantly with the legacy of Ben Marais. The incomplete pattern in the transformation and rise and fall of a nationalism serves as background to his prophetic voice, which is based as much on Ben Marais' underlying principles as it does on his analysis of the situation.

▪ **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

The Conclusion to the thesis presents a contemplative church historical consideration on the role and significance of Ben Marais. In short, it is found that he was not only a prophet for his times, but that he also adhered to certain principles that cannot be modified by either fashion or political model.

10. CONCLUSION

The reasons for the study and its importance were expressed in this chapter. Church History was presented as a subject and as home to this study within a theological frame. The study, based on a biographical analysis, finds itself suspended between various traditions. Scientific, general historic, theological and church historic traditions were briefly related to this study. The understanding of history was set out in the form of a 5-point model. The premises underlying the study follow, and serve as orientation to the probing and posing of the central questions. The formulation of the hypothesis the study wishes to argue, as well as the formulation of the title are presented before the procedures and methodology followed in the study and presentation of results in the thesis. In the next chapter, a closer look is given to the person, Ben Marais.