

CHAPTER 5

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES AND INFLUENTIAL PRESENCE

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter various influences on Ben Marais are considered. Several issues come to light in his letter to Blake (1970, 24 September), which indicates the presence of diverse influences. The essence of these influences helped form his principles, and was present in his early childhood, and is founded in his deep-rooted faith in God, and was formed by his personal studies and influenced by the people he met. Furthermore, Ben Marais was influential within the circles he moved, and while being part of these circles, was also detached from them.

Ben Marais was a child and a product of his times. Many of the influences on him and his attitudes were formed and channelled by the media. As Pillay (1993) formulates the situation in the foreword to his biography on Albert Luthuli:

“The racially based ideology that has structured South African society ... was maintained in many ways, one of which was the controlling of the freedom of speech and the flow of information. Even the nature and scope of ostensibly ‘scientific research’ did not escape influence. Inevitably, over a period this South African society has become divided against itself: ‘us’ versus ‘them’; ‘maintainers of law and order’ versus ‘communists’, ‘believers’, ‘secularists’ and so on. These categories bedevilled the recording of South African history....

... Indeed, the struggle made strange bed-fellows: Christians, Hindus, Muslims and Jews, communists, pacifists, African nationalists, feminists, trade-unionists, Pan-Africanists, English liberals and human rights activists among others.”

Communism, Mohammedanism (Islam),¹⁸³ and modernism, were external threats, threatening the world of Ben Marais. These threats were, interestingly, used by the media to consolidate the Afrikaner people, and, like many Afrikaner people, Ben Marais

¹⁸³ Ben Marais referred to Islam as Mohammedanism.

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saw them in a negative light, these labels were of less importance to many people involved in the struggle against injustices in South Africa. Thus also, Ben Marais would have been concerned about the source of financial support for the Christian Institute and the application of W.C.C. funds, due to associations with communism and violence, while also advocating for negotiations to bring about equality.

Eddie Brown (1992b:480) asks the question: Was it or was it not the Karoo that helped to make him a person ... “jovial, spontaneous and pleasant ... an approachable open person, a person of wide horizons”? Also, during his early youth the Swart Griep, the Black Flu (influenza), claimed the lives of countless people. How did his early exposure to death help form his person?

During his student years – the depression and the Du Plessis Case were major events (Meiring 1979;79), the one social, the other theological. After the Du Plessis Case there was an aggressive reaction against critical thinking. How did the Du Plessis Case influence Ben Marais’ theological thinking? How did the “arm blanke vraagstuk”¹⁸⁴ influence him? Further, what was the influence of Afrikaner pietism and evangelicalism (Scottish, German, Dutch and American) on his thought?

What did Ben Marais read? Who did he meet? What experiences influenced him? Significant, influencing factors, based on his life’s experiences and personality, are considered to determine who Ben Marais was, which influenced his actions. The various considerations are structured as follows, building on insights gained in the previous chapters. The first section considers his life chronologically, under the headings: youth; student years; marriage; and, in the ministry and faculties. The following sections consider particular influential experiences, his travels and conferences attended and significant people he met and knew who helped form his thinking.

¹⁸⁴ Poor white question.

2. PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS

How did it come that a man coming from a pietistic, conservative background was able to detach himself from his peers' ideological and religious thinking – while remaining friendly with them – and proceed in the direction he did? Looking at his life chronologically, the gradual development of his thinking is detectable, as well as the presence of firm principles, many of which were imprinted during his youth. It is contended that the development of his thinking was evolutionary, supported by life experiences and measured against his principles – Christian and based on Scripture, while the essence of his personality, which remained constant, channelled the development of his thought.

a. Youth

During a video interview with Ben Marais, which commemorated his 11th year at Unisa and his being 77 years old, Abraham Viljoen (1986) asked him about important influences from his youth. Viljoen mentioned the significance Psychology and the Behavioural Sciences place on development during the formative early years. Interestingly, Ben Marais indicated displeasure with the question, negating the importance of his early years. He mentioned his conservative, rural Afrikaner background – the thought world of the Afrikaner of the Eastern Cape – making it sound on the one hand, a world away from the world of academia and the contemporary issues of church, politics and race, and on the other, making it sound as if his early experiences were less influential than his studies and experiences at university, his tours abroad and into Africa, and the people he met and knew. He mentions that his later insights were not from childhood, but picked up along the way. This is referring to the first two decades of the twentieth century. However, his mother, Tant' Lizzie (Elizabeth Magdalena Botha),¹⁸⁵ was English orientated, having studied in Stellenbosch. Her father had been a gunsmith in the Cape, before selling his business and moving out to the frontier. The relations between the political parties (South African Party & National

¹⁸⁵ Elizabeth is a family name, coming from the Murdocks.

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Party) were tense. The Marais family – Afrikaners – were known to support the South African Party (Aucamp, Interview 17 September 2002). Thus, political disputes, conflict and tension resolution would have been primary concerns to the family.

This study wishes to emphasise the importance of his youth, his formative years, the years during which his basic tenants of dealing with problems and new ideas were formed. His personality also manifested itself during his youth.

In the Viljoen interview (1986) Ben Marais mentions a few influences. These influences are not explored, only stated in brief. The first influence he mentions is his parents. He does not elaborate, neither does he mention his mother's death, nor of the circumstances under which they had to leave the farm. He mentions that he learned to love and appreciate all, which was rather general. Secondly, he mentions his uncles. The one uncle, was a founder member of the National Party, another, was a Manie Maritz rebel, a further two were Botha-Smuts supporters. He learned, within his broader family, how to deal with people who differ from each other. This would be an important consideration in his later ecumenical thinking.

Ben Marais' mother died shortly after the birth of Mara in 1917. She had been bleeding and the doctor was not capable of helping. The traumatic experience of his mother's death, and the subsequent breaking up of the family (Mara and Melvina went to live with family) must have left a mark on the then eight year old Ben. His father mourned his wife's death, and according to Pieter Marais, Ben Marais' nephew (Interview 20 September 2002), he never came out of the mourning, part of the reason he sold the farm and moved to Middelburg. Charles, Ben Marais' brother, stated that he wished to become a doctor after experiencing the trauma caused by the incompetent doctor. This he did.

The circumstances surrounding and under which Ben Marais' mother died, and the subsequent manner in which the Marais family dealt with it – most certainly governed by their religious convictions – would have affected the way Ben Marais would deal with loss, incompetence and trauma. On the one hand this experience, along with losing

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his elder brother, Pieter, the following year (1918), and his father's inability to cope with the death, would explain to a large degree why Ben Marais never spoke much about his youth. According to Alida Hattingh, a younger cousin of Ben Marais (Interview 17 September 2002), Ben Marais father, Oom Willie, was a quite person who did not have much to say. Apparently he drank aloe juice every Saturday, claiming that it was good for his health. Jean Du Plessis, Ben Marais' nephew (Interview 04 October 2002), claimed that his grandfather never came out of mourning after his wife's death. Jean Du Plessis told of how his grandfather was a broken man in old age and had difficulty in recognising his daughter, Mara – Jean Du Plessis' mother. The reference in *Wit Huise van Herinneringe* to the nameless elder brother whom he accompanied to the veld, could in all probability have been Pieter. On the other, Ben Marais' instance on not provoking animosity could also be ascribed to these events. Thus, the tolerance that Ben Marais exhibited towards others could be attributed to the way in which he dealt with the traumas surrounding the family traumas between 1917 and 1918.

It is also told (C. Du Plessis Interview 12 September 2002) that Ben Marais was an active and inquisitive child. The story is told that he once, at the age of two, poured sand into the butter machine. Apart from this causing much distress and fury, the way in which he was punished would also have contributed to the manner in which he acted towards those who wronged him. The self discipline taught in the Marais household, the openness between the siblings and the religiously determined disciplining would have contributed towards and accentuated the manner in which Ben Marais dealt with disputes, he talked about it. This fact is exhibited in Ben Marais writing to the secretaries of the World Council of Churches, voicing his concerns at the synods, and is substantiated by the fact that the Marais family is known for being verbal about injustices and involving themselves in causes they deem worthy (J. du Plessis Interview 04 October 2002).

Many of the personality traits exhibited in Ben Marais were also present in his siblings and other close family, making it most probable that a common orientation would have contributed towards his attitudes. Ben Marais was thus not a unique individual, but rather a person who acted according to the behavioural patterns imprinted upon him

during his youth.

Education played an important role in the Marais' household. Before taking over the responsibility of caring for the younger children after her mother's death, Johanna had studied to become a teacher. Ben Marais' mother had received tertiary education in Stellenbosch, and his father was involved in the farm school on Mooihoek. One of the reasons why the family moved to Middelburg in 1922 was due to the high school. In the early 1920s it was the largest school in the Cape Province.

English was the language of the British government and proponents of Afrikaans were aspiring for its official recognition and for its use as the medium of instruction in schools. Ben Marais was part of one of the first groups to receive tuition in Afrikaans. The Marais family was not anti-English, as were many Afrikaners in the post Anglo-Boer War era in the Middelburg district. The Afrikaner and English farmers had got on very well before the Anglo-Boer war, and many had inter-married. In Middelburg, though, a large Town Guard, stationed at Grootfontein had to be deployed after the war to maintain the peace.

There were religious revivals in Middelburg during the 1920s. These could have contributed towards Ben Marais becoming aware of his calling to become a minister. He does not mention these revivals anywhere, but the coincidence is very big.

b. Student Years

The leadership skills of Ben Marais were well groomed at Stellenbosch. While race was not a controversial issue during the late 1920s and early 1930s, he developed his skills as a journalist and spokesperson, as well as a historical-philosophical line of inquiry. In his chairmanship of the men's residence, Wilgenhof, and of the Student Representative Council, he had developed into a strong leader. The Du Plessis Case took place during his student years, and in his experience of this, he developed an aptness at discerning the various issues, and striving to understand the underlying principles, and to measure these against the religious principles as he determined them from Scripture (Meiring 1979:79).

c. Marriage

Ben Marais' wife, Sibs (born Botha) was always very supporting of her husband. In the early years of his ministry as chaplain at the University of Pretoria, she was involved in his activities, conducting the sensitive room visitations in the women's residences. She was also engaged in her own activities, besides being a proficient flower arranger, she was involved in the S.A. Vrouefederasie¹⁸⁶ and Mission activities of the NG Kerk.¹⁸⁷ She held leadership positions and was well respected by Ben Marais' students and colleagues.

It would be impossible to analyse the role that Sibs Marais played in the life of Ben Marais. She (S. Marais 2000) often gives the impression that she learnt much from him, concerning humbleness and dealing with victimisation and isolation, but due to her loyalty and encouragement, and excellent taste in clothes and dress, Ben Marais was able to weather the worst storms he experienced as a result of the stand he took against the discriminatory policies of the NG Kerk and its grounds of justification.

3. TRAVELS

Ben Marais was a world traveller, as far as and as long as his South African passport would allow him. His first long journey would have been to Stellenbosch in 1928. This would have been a major event in his life. His subsequent international travels were either study or conference orientated. His extended lecture tours through the United States of America also afforded him time to study societal issues in the Americas.

Once a year, at Christmas time, when they were in the country, the Marais family made a pilgrimage to Kleinmond, where they rested. In the early years of his ministry as chaplain in service of the synod of the Ned. Herv. or Geref. Kerk, Ben Marais spent many hours on the road, travelling between the various tertiary institutions in Transvaal. It is not sure how much rest these travels afforded him, or preparation time, but it is known that due to the tremendous work load, a second minister was called to serve as

¹⁸⁶ S.A. Women's Federation.

¹⁸⁷ See Sibs Marais' publication, *Hulle het die Driwwe Oopgemaak* (1977) for an example of her involvement in the mission activities of the church.

chaplain alongside Ben Marais, and their positions were better constituted.

a. World Academic Tours

Certain highlights of Ben Marais' world academic tours can be made to illustrate how these had left an impression on him.

i. USA – Princeton 1934

Ben Marais' first international contact came when he travelled to Princeton under the auspices of furthering his studies. He would have been 25 years old. Although he would most certainly have had further opportunities of pursuing formal post graduate studies abroad, he returned home, to be a minister of the church.

In 1936, on his way back to SA he toured through Europe. Of special note is his visit to Nazi-Germany, where he came under the impression how the voice of one man, with an ideology behind him, could lead a whole nation astray (Viljoen Interview 1986).

ii. Travels to the Americas

Ben Marais' tour to and study especially in the southern states of the United States led to the writing of *Colour: Unsolved Problem of the West* in 1952 on the eve of his nomination for the chair in the History of Christianity at the University of Pretoria.

In 1951, Ben Marais travelled through the West Indian Islands and South America – especially Brazil – on a Carnegie Scholarship. In Brazil he had access to the universities of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo through Dr Rudolfo Anders. Here Ben Marais studied Anthropology and South American Race Issues.

The same year, 1951, Ben Marais was invited by the World Federation of Christian Student Societies to visit the various universities in South America. Ben Marais was to organise the Federation's work at these institutions (*Vaderland* 28 July 1951).

In December 1960, Ben Marais left for the USA on a lecture tour. En route he visited the two Congos in Central Africa. He also visited Nigeria for a month and spent a few

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days in Amsterdam. The tour was organised by the “Cultural Exchange Program of the US Department of State”. He visited 20 universities and colleges, addressing students on the race problems in South Africa and other issues on Africa, especially on the Congo. He also visited the South and studied the relations between the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches.

Then, a few years later, on 16 January 1964, Ben Marais departed on a 10 week lecturing tour to the USA. The tour was arranged by the Cultural Events Program of the Danforth Foundation in conjunction with the Association of American Colleges. He visited about 10 tertiary institutions and presented lectures on Africa and Southern Africa. His themes – indicative of his primary concerns – included: “Which road South Africa?”; “The two faces of Africa”; “Africa – battlefield of religion and ideology”; “The Christian Church in Africa – historical problems and prospects”; and “Political loyalty and Christian practice in a multi-racial society”.

A few years later again, and Ben Marais left South Africa for a 10 week lecture tour through the USA on 20 September 1968. He was invited by the Danforth Foundation’s Arts Program of the Association of American Colleges. His lectures were mainly on “The African dream – a realistic assessment”.

On completion of the lecture tour he remained in the USA for a further three months to study the role of the American churches in the socio-economic sphere and their theological motivation and approach. He was invited by US SALEP Exchange Program, US-SA (Leader Exchange Program Incorporated). He spent three weeks of these three months in “Indian Country” in Arizona and New Mexico.

The significance of these tours is the wealth of insight he gained, though he went to lecture he also found time to experience and to digest and determine differences between the social problems in the different countries. These differences were especially pronounced during his tours through Africa, where he became very aware of his prejudices as a white Western orientated Afrikaner (E.G. in *The Two Faces of Africa*).

b. African Information Tours

Ben Marais wrote *The Two Faces of Africa* after his tour through Africa in 1960. He made extensive contact with political leaders and attempted to contextualise the problems and issues facing the continent through his orientation to South Africa. He toured Africa in 1960-61, 1964 and 1968, as well as in 1953, when he delivered a sermon at a congregation in Lusaka: “The just shall live by the faith”.

He experienced the awakening in Africa, the time of hope of the early 60s, and the feelings of despair of the late 60s. Against this, he experienced how disjointed South Africa had become. In the Viljoen interview (1986) Ben Marais makes special mention of his meeting with Banda in 1964. Ben Marais asked him about the anti-white/anti-missionary statements he had made in public. Banda had replied, according to Ben Marais (Viljoen 1986) that because he had been absent from the country (Malawi) for 17 years while he lived in Scotland, he had to take a strong position to prove himself as a capable leader. Secondly, on the missionaries, Banda mentioned that he had great reverence for missionaries – he had strong personal ties with the missions in Malawi – but that particular NG Kerk missionaries had abused their positions and had encouraged the people in their congregations not to vote for him, Banda.

The tours of Ben Marais were romantically modelled on the 1914 Mission tour of J. du Plessis through Africa (S Marais 2000). This is also perceptible in Ben Marais concerns and topics of interest during his African tours, history, mission and topical issues. Ben Marais interests in mission and in ecumenical relations were channelled through his travels abroad to attend international mission and ecumenical conferences.

c. Conferences: Mission and Ecumenical Tours

More than his attendance in 1936 of the “Conference of Student Volunteer (Missionary) Movement” held at Indianapolis, and the 1938 New Delhi Mission conference, the journey to the 1939 Tambaram Conference made a profound impact on Ben Marais (Meiring 1979:81).

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At the Tambaram Conference, Ben Marais made contact with many Christians from different parts of the world, and came under the impression that Christianity is an international affair and is not restricted to any isolated and elite group.¹⁸⁸ The conference took place just before the outbreak of World War II and race relations were talked about in great depth. Ben Marais heard an attack on South African race attitudes for the first time at this conference. His experiences at Tambaram stimulated him to pursue doctoral studies on race relations within the church in the context of Christian brotherhood.

Of particular note, in the midst of the summer heat – when the South African delegation was returning to South Africa, Ben Marais became aware of the prejudices against people of other race groups. Albert Luthuli was also on the ship. They were in different classes, race determined, and when they wished to go up onto the deck for a breath of fresh air, a sailor said to Ben Marais and Albert Luthuli: “You white you alright, you black you stay back.” This phrase had a paramount effect on Ben Marais.

Ben Marais, en route to the United States in 1950 to study at Yale University, attended the Reformed Ecumenical Synod in Edinburgh. He was requested to do so by the Central Committee of the Transvaal Synod. At the synod in Edinburgh, Ben Marais presented the South African issue on behalf of the Afrikaans churches, and became aware of the growing hostile attitudes towards the NG Kerk. He attended a series of conferences, each contributing to his awareness of the lack of discrepancy in the social orientated policies of the NG Kerk. In 1950 he attended the Conference of the World Council of Churches at Toronto as an observer, as requested by the central commission of the synod of the Ned. Herv. or Geref. Kerk van Transvaal. He so impressed them with the way in which he presented his arguments on the race issues that he was asked to serve as a member of the central committee. Ben Marais was approached by Visser’t Hooft to talk about South Africa and answer vital questions (Meiring 1979:86). Thus, his influential presence was felt at the highest levels.

¹⁸⁸ “Christendom is ‘n wêreldverskynsel en is nie beperk tot net ‘n geslote en uitgesoekte groep mense nie.”

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In consequence, in August 1953 he travelled to Geneva, where the World Council of Churches' study group "Church and Race" met. This was a preparing meeting for the World Council of Churches meeting in Evanston, which was to be held in 1954. This is noteworthy, considering his involvement in the structures of the conference during the 1950s, his subsequent isolation from the activities of the World Council of Churches in the early 1960s, the changing attitudes within the World Council of Churches towards the 1970s, and the subsequent reducing of influence of Ben Marais in the World Council of Churches to open letters addressed to the general secretaries of the Ecumenical body. In 1954 in preparation of the Evanston Conference, interestingly, Ben Marais helped to prepare a report on opinions: "The Churches Amid Racial and Ethnic Tensions" (Brown 1992b:488). Dr Visser't Hooft had let him know in October 1952 that he had been nominated to serve on the Study Committee for Race Relations of the World Council of Churches. Ben Marais also attended the Conference of Christian Youth of the USA in Evanston, 1954. He spoke on "Race tension in South Africa".

Though not abroad, but of significance, on 6 August 1958, Ben Marais attended the Reformed Ecumenical Council in Potchefstroom as a delegate of the Northern Transvaal Synod of the NG Kerk. Thus, even in the isolation he experienced as a result of the queries he made and his outspokenness on government and church policies, Ben Marais was still highly esteemed in ecumenical circles within the NG Kerk.

Ben Marais made many contacts during his tours. Apart from many of these people influencing his opinions and points of view, there were also friends, and other people who helped him formulate his points of concern more clearly. Simultaneously, in the biographies of influential people of similar standing – in varying degrees – to Ben Marais, as either ministers or theologians or on points of digression, interesting perspectives on the person and work of Ben Marais can be revealed.

4. FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES: INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE

During his interview with Ben Marais, Hofmeyr (1985; see also Meiring 1979:90-91) asked him who the major influences on his life were. To this Ben Marais answered first of all Berkhof, who was involved in Church History and in Systematic Theology. Ben

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Marais had contact with him through the World Council of Churches, in India, Europe and Canada. Ben Marais appreciated his broad approach to many questions. A second person mentioned was Bakhuizen van den Brink, the Dutch Church Historian, whom he once met. Furthermore, Stephen Neill, who was not principally a Church Historian, but whom Ben Marais claimed had made a major effect on him. Ben Marais mentioned to Hofmeyr that Neill was a versatile person, and that he was more at home in Mission History. During the same interview, the two Americans – Latourette and Bainton,¹⁸⁹ were mentioned as major influences, and two South Africans, Van Jaarsveld, and Herman Giliomee, for opening new roads which was necessary.

The list of people who influenced Ben Marais' though could be divided between those with whom he found affinity, and with those whose ideas he used to better formulate his own. Ben Marais did not believe in maintaining enemy relations, he rather learned from those who differed from him, and used the opportunity to better formulate his own thoughts. A similar principle could, for example, be found in the *Institutes of the Christian Faith*, in which Calvin develops his doctrinal thought in reaction to particular heresies. If one person could be mentioned who made life difficult for Ben Marais, then the name of A.B. du Preez could well serve a good purpose. Ben Marais makes a reference to him in his autobiographical notes prepared for the University of Pretoria Archives (1976), though without indicating any sense of their strained relations. Ben Marais is providing short character sketches of a few of the older professors at the University of Pretoria (1976), then of A.B. du Preez he writes:¹⁹⁰

“Prof A.B. du Preez was of a different stroke – dogmatic and self assured. He knew precisely. On one occasion in his dogmatics class he was busy discussing man being created in the image of God. He then used a very risky example. Man looks up – he is directed to community with God. Animals, on the other hand, are matter, of the earth with their view downwards.¹⁹¹ That is when Willem van Eeden, one of the most comical students we ever had, stood up and asked, ‘But professor, what about a chicken?’ The class had finished!!”

¹⁸⁹ Ben Marais and Ronald Bainton were in correspondence, Ben Marais often receiving advice (letters in Pretoria Archives).

¹⁹⁰ My translation.

¹⁹¹ Die mens sou sy aangesig na bo hê – hy is op gemeenskap met God aangewys. Die dier daarteen is aards, van die aarde met sy aangesig na benede.

Several influential people, who are not necessarily the same as determined by Ben Marais himself, have been identified. The treatment given of these people in this thesis has been individualised, and is intentionally constructed and presented to highlight different characteristics of Ben Marais' relations with his contemporaries. More could have been chosen, but it has been determined to restrict to the necessary to avoid duplication and to highlight particular aspects, which would be lost in an exhaustive study.

a. A man of Controversies: Albert Luthuli

Ben Marais claims to have known Albert Luthuli well, and had both great respect for him as well as being disappointed by some associations he made (Viljoen 1986). Criticism by Marais against Albert Luthuli might be too harsh.

John Albert Mavumbi Luthuli was born in 1898 in former Rhodesia, and died, under mysterious circumstances, when a train struck him down on 21 July 1967.

According to Pillay (1993:28), Zulu tradition and Christianity were the two forces that moulded Albert Luthuli's thinking. He was also similar to Ghandi, first by his advocating of non-violence, and secondly by his practising some of the key injunctions of the Sermon on the Mount. Different to Ghandi, though, Albert Luthuli's socio-political work was an extension of his Christianity. It was because he was a Christian that he felt he "could not obey laws which affronted his essential dignity" (Pillay 1993:28).

Albert Luthuli was a lay preacher, a school teacher, a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize (1961), President-General of the African National Congress, and a Chieftain of the Zulu people.

His statement, "The road to freedom is via the cross", was a response to his dismissal as chief after he refused to choose between his membership of the ANC and his Chieftainship (Pillay 1993:46-50). He said of the ANC (Pillay 1993:49):

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“The African National Congress, its non-violent Passive Resistance Campaign, may have nuisance value to the government but it is not subversive, since it does not seek to overthrow the form and machinery of the state, but only urges the inclusion of all sections of the community in a partnership with the government of the country on the basis of equality.”

He continues (Pillay 1993:49):

“Laws and conditions that tend to debase human personality – a God-given force – be they brought about by the state or other individuals, must be relentlessly opposed in the spirit of defiance shown by St Peter when he said to the rulers of his day: Shall we obey God or man? No one can deny that in so far as non-whites are concerned in the Union of South Africa, laws and conditions that debase human personality abound. Any chief worthy of his position must fight fearlessly against such debasing conditions and laws....”

It is interesting to note how strong the similarities are between Albert Luthuli and Mahatma Gandhi, and it is not difficult to discern who had influenced whom. It is also of particular interest, as a point of contrast, that as churchmen, Ben Marais refused to become politically involved, while Albert Luthuli did, though, it must also be emphasised that Albert Luthuli was a chief of a discriminated against people, while Ben Marais was a protected minister serving in the community of the discriminating people.

b. A Friend with a Different Temperament: Beyers Naudé

The name of Beyers Naudé (10 May 1915) is often heard in association with Ben Marais. Comparisons, often over-simplified, between the two are often made. For example: where Ben Marais remained within the church and the church structures, Beyers Naudé left the structures of the white NG Kerk; where Beyers Naudé was better known internationally, Ben Marais was working more locally. The fact is that Ben Marais travelled abroad extensively, but in a different time frame. It is true that Beyers Naudé left the structures of the NG Kerk to become a member of the Reformed Church of Africa, but this is not an intrinsic difference, rather, it is indicative of a different temperament and personality to Ben Marais.

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The references in the autobiography to Ben Marais are rather aloof (Naudé 1995:38-39), almost creating the impression that they hardly knew each other.¹⁹² Though, it must be remembered that the autobiography is, in large parts, a personal treatment of the Christian Institute, with whom Beyers Naudé is intrinsically associated.

Ben Marais was disappointed in Beyers Naudé on numerous occasions. The first was in Beyers Naudé not supporting him stronger at the synods on the positions of Apartheid (Naudé 1995:38-39; S Marais 2000). Further disappointments were on the alleged leaking of Broederbond secrets, breaking with the church, and, on the Christian Institute activities, regarding its friends and associates. Ben Marais especially had concern over the source of funds (Viljoen Interview 1986), reminiscent of his correspondence with the general secretaries of the World Council of Churches.

An interesting photo (Naudé 1995:inter64-65) indicates a different sentiment. The photograph depicts the house committee of Wilgenhof residence of 1935. Beyers Naudé can be seen front row far right, and next to him Ben Marais. Next to Ben Marais' name, in brackets, stands "primarius, 1932 tot Junie 1935",¹⁹³ indicating a deep rooted respect which could be traced to their student years. Beyers Naudé was a freshman when Ben Marais was in his final year. Alongside Ben Marais sits the chairperson, who took over from Ben Marais in June 1935, when he left for Princeton. The chairperson was Danie Craven. Alongside Danie Craven sat Hubert Coetzee, and behind stood Amie Visser, Dick Nel and Thomas de Jongh van Arkel.

Apart from Ben Marais and Beyers Naudé sporting similar hairstyles (middle path – in later years Ben Marais' was hard to detect while Beyers retained a fuller crop of hair, combed straight back), they shared many student interests. The most notable being journalism, though Beyers Naudé was never as accredited as Ben Marais. Another common interest was the hiking club, of which Ben Marais was the chairperson. A

¹⁹² Ben Marais was also a founding member of the Christian Institute, but resigned after it became politicised, as he saw it. This is an interesting turn of events, since as Ben Marais was disappointed in Beyers Naudé not supporting him at the synods and on the publication of his *Colour: Unsolved Crisis of the West* (1952) (Naudé 1995:38-39), so Ben Marais did not support Beyers Naudé in his endeavours against the Apartheid policies through the Christian Institute.

¹⁹³ Chairman 1932 to June 1935.

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further strong association was a deep respect for Professors J. du Plessis and B.B. Keet. Beyers Naudé (1995:28) is rather negating towards other professors of the seminary.

A further difference was their attitudes towards their calling to the ministry. While Beyers Naudé went to study under pressure of his determined mother (Naudé 1995:25-26), rather wanting to become a lawyer, Ben Marais was known to practice hymns in the loft of their house on Saturday afternoons during his school years – because he was preparing to become a minister (C. Du Plessis Interview 12 October 2002). Beyers Naudé only developed a sense of his calling at a later stage, almost indicative of his gradual realisation the ailments in the NG Kerk compared to the more clear cut determination by Ben Marais (Naudé 1995:38-39). Of particular interest in this regard is their diverse backgrounds. The father of Beyers Naudé was a founding member of the Afrikaner Broederbond, was a close friend of the rebel General Christian Frederick Beyers (after whom Beyers Naudé was named) and General Jan Kemp, who featured strongly in the Anglo Boer war and protested through military action against the Botha government in 1914 for fighting against the Germans in German South West Africa, while the family of Ben Marais were known to be supporters of Jan Smuts and General Botha. It is almost more significant that Beyers Naudé came to different insights from Ben Marais.

Schalk Pienaar, who was considered a controversial and unconventional journalist and political commentator (Mouton 2002),¹⁹⁴ criticised Afrikaners who were leaving the fold, laager, and joining forces with foreign pressure groups in 1974. This made him unpopular with many Afrikaners. Pienaar's aggression was especially directed against Beyers Naudé, who was receiving a hero's welcome in the Netherlands (It needs to be remembered that Ben Marais had just resigned from the Faculty of Theology of the University of Pretoria). According to Mouton (2002:150), Pienaar's argument was that Beyers Naudé's solidarity with foreign pressure groups was a barrier on the road of internal reform (*Beeld* 11 October 1974). He later wrote (*Beeld* 15 October 1974) that

¹⁹⁴ Schalk Pienaar was the establishing editor of *Die Beeld*, one of the forerunners of the Sunday Newspaper *Rapport*, and chief editor of *Beeld*. He is considered (Mouton 2002) for bringing injustices to the fore, and for his many conflicts with Afrikaner establishment, including Verwoerd, and for the development of an independent Afrikaans newspaper that criticised the policies of the National Party, while he remained a member of the party.

there was a fine line between criticism and disloyalty and that Beyers Naudé had crossed the line and was unpatriotic. Mouton (2002:150) then indicates that Pienaar referred to General Koos de la Rey, who is pointed out as an example of a critical Afrikaner who disagreed with President Paul Kruger's policies, but who fought to the very end – for the cause of the Afrikaner. In his attempts to highlight Beyers Naudé's faults, *Beeld* (19, 20, 21 Oct. 1974) published three long consecutive articles by Ben Marais, who Mouton (2002:151) considers to be an enlightened theologian. Ben Marais is portrayed also as having undergone ill treatment, being belittled and being seen as an deserter,¹⁹⁵ communist and liberal due to his standpoint that there were no Biblical grounds for the justification of Apartheid – but as Mouton (2002:151) emphasises, Ben Marais never turned his back on either his church or his people, nor did he become embittered. I believe these differentiations contributed to heightening the strains in the friendship between Ben Marais and Beyers Naudé.

The one particular aspect of the autobiography of Beyers Naudé that needs to be mentioned, and which contributes towards a better understanding of Ben Marais, is the fact that Ben Marais wrote the foreword to the autobiography (Naudé 1995). In the foreword Ben Marais writes in characteristic personal style, building in humour – a jest on the nature of autobiographies, his student years – and his personal acquaintance with Beyers Naudé (“from the first day he was a student”), the significance of this autobiography in the history of South Africa, his own involvement in the struggles and hints at the differences between himself and Beyers Naudé. Most important, though is the feeling of reconciliation between these two friends who misunderstood each other, I believe, as expressed in the recommendation given by Ben Marais (Naudé 1995:9).¹⁹⁶

“Humans disrupt, but God resolves.¹⁹⁷ Who would be able to say who judged correctly? ... Here we have an interesting and important book that every South African must read, can benefit from, and enjoy. Thank God for what happened in 1994! We are on the road together in grateful appreciation for people like Beyers Naudé for their courage, insight and determination despite their hardships and unmentionable discrediting.

May the Lord be with him on his road forward. Our nation in all its shades needs such people in our times.”

¹⁹⁵ Verraaiër.

¹⁹⁶ My translation.

¹⁹⁷ Die mens wik, maar God beskik. Ben Marais had a poetic flair!

The open letter¹⁹⁸ Ben Marais wrote to Beyers Naudé while they were still estranged reflects on their differences and contains specific historical references and interpretations. This letter could well have served as key to Ben Marais, in which he discusses approaches to effecting reform in the country, rejecting Beyers Naudé's call for civil disobedience. Ben Marais rather continues to set his hope in the power of the gospel and Christian conviction, and believes that the initiative for change must be taken by the government.¹⁹⁹ The letter has a significant hand-written postscript dated 26 July 1985, in which Ben Marais expresses his happiness that Desmond Tutu had rejected violence – in the letter Ben Marais questions Beyers Naudé's association with Desmond Tutu (he mentions that he knows little about him).

c. Justified Differences: E.P. Groenewald

The differences between Ben Marais and E.P. Groenewald came to a head in the 1948 synod of the Ned Herv. or Geref. Kerk. They were later to be colleagues at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Pretoria!

Evert Philippus Groenewald (2 June 1905- 22 August 2002) came from the Southern Cape, born in the district of George (Van der Watt 1989:82). After completing his studies at Stellenbosch (1929) he obtained his D.Th in 1932 at the Free University of Amsterdam. He was called to the chair in New Testament in 1937, and retired in 1970.

In 1947, E.P. Groenewald had been commissioned to prepare a report, under the auspices of the Commission for Current Affairs²⁰⁰ of the Council of Churches.²⁰¹ The title of the report, which is treated here due to the implied differences between E.P. Groenewald, and the resulting years of subdued tension, could be rendered as

¹⁹⁸ Pretoria Archives, a shortened version was published in *Rapport* 28 July 1985.

¹⁹⁹ “Laat ons druk op regeringsinstansies en kerklike instansies volhou om ‘n beter en meer regverdige Suid-Afrika vir almal te skep, maar laat ons maar versigtig wees met oproepe tot burgerlike ongehoorsaamheid, veral in ‘n tyd waar chaos reeds oral heers. Ek weet jy sien dit as ‘n moontlike pad tot vrede – maar ek betwyfel dit. Ek het nog nooit gewanhoop aan die krag van die evangelie en van Christelike oorrading by enige mensegroep nie. Die sleutel lê by ons blankes. Dramatiese aksie is nodig van regeringskant (Ope Brief aan Beyers Naudé, 19 July 1985 – Pretoria Archives).

²⁰⁰ Kommissie vir Aktuele Vraagstukke.

²⁰¹ Raad van Kerke.

“Apartheid (separateness) of the nations and their calling to serve each other’.²⁰² The Council accepted the report in its entirety. The report correlated strongly with E.P. Groenewald’s treated chapter in the publication of Cronjé (1947). According to the report, Scripture taught about the unity of humanity as well as the differentiation of race and nations. Important is the assertion that the establishment of separate national churches is scripturally justified, and out of the “rich variety of nations that serve one God together, his Name is honoured all the more”²⁰³ (*Handelinge van die Raad van Kerke* 1947:56). While the report could not present direct proof from Scripture in support of guardianship, two principles of Scripture gave guidelines. That is, the relation between authority and piety, and responsibility towards fellow humans. Furthermore, “According to the Council of God it often happened that one nation was sometimes subject to another nation. In such a case, the stronger and higher developed has a responsibility towards the weaker” (Lombard 1981:80). The report was presented to the synod of the Ned. Herv. or Geref. Kerk with a few modifications.

The tensions were taut, E.P. Groenewald felt personally offended when the report was referred back to the Commission of Current affairs, under the recommendation of Ben Marais. Ironically, as Lombard (1981:81) points out, the synod took note of the report with appreciation. The ground for the referral back to the commission for revision were (*Handelinge van die Sinode van die Ned Herv of Geref Kerk* 1948:369), “taking into consideration the seriousness of this problem and the large degrees of difference between the grounds here given”. A new approach was suggested by the protagonist, Ben Marais, from a different point of view implying that the church is forced²⁰⁴ into the policy of Apartheid in the interest of the Kingdom of God and the future existence of Christianity in South Africa (Ibid).

The reaction of E.P. Groenewald the next day concerns this study most. He experienced the referral back for review as a personal rejection of his ability as an exegete (sic) as a professor in New Testament Studies of the University of Pretoria.

²⁰² Die Apartheid van die Nasies en hul roeping teenoor mekaar.

²⁰³ My dynamic translation.

²⁰⁴ Gedwing word.

Though the objections of Ben Marais were superseded by the synod, in a special session, the offence taken by E.P. Groenewald characterised his attitude towards Ben Marais throughout the remainder of their association. Principle differences need to be pointed out. While both churchmen were sincere in their search for truth and in the execution of the will of God, they were very different concerning their orientation towards the establishment, on the one hand, and in the way they viewed reality. As has been indicated, the early and formative years of Ben Marais played a particularly strong role in helping him to have clarity in matters of the day.

d. A Contrasting Shepherd from the Other Fold: J.D. (Koot) Vorster

It would be pretentious to seek how Jacobus Daniël Vorster influenced Ben Marais. It is, however, illuminating to compare these two formidable and very different men of the church. They were both born in 1909, both into large families, in the North Eastern Cape (Koot Vorster was born in Jamestown, and interestingly is buried in Steynsburg,²⁰⁵ where Ben Marais was born), and were at Stellenbosch at the corresponding time. Yet, two more comparable and opposing personalities in the NG Kerk during the 20th century, concerning conviction, dignity and interests would be difficult to find. Though, significantly, two noteworthy politicians of South Africa who had very different sentiments – but also many similarities, Jan Smuts and D.F. Malan, grew up on farms that were a few miles apart near the two towns Riebeeck-Kasteel.²⁰⁶

Through a closer look at Koot Vorster, something of Ben Marais can be understood. While a whole study could be based on a comparison between Ben Marais and Koot Vorster, this study refers to a few brief points in order to indicate the intricacies of personality, experiences, influences and background, and how these affected the church. This study does not wish to emphasise either the similarities or differences between the two persons to either praise the one or denote the other, rather the intention is to exemplify the differences to highlight certain characteristics of Ben Marais.

²⁰⁵ The inscription in Afrikaans on J.D. Vorster's tombstone comes from Isaiah 51:1: "Look at the rock from which you were hewn" – "Aanskou die rots waaruit julle gekap is".

²⁰⁶ It is of interest that D.F. Malan was a minister in the NG Kerk before entering politics and Jan Smuts started studying to become a minister of the NG Kerk before switching to Law. They both studied at Stellenbosch. The close relations between church and state are thus emphasised in this comparison.

In his comprehensive study on the influences that played a role in the development of J.D. Vorster, Louw (1994) considers not only the rock and vegetation types of the region his subject grew up in, but also genetic and inherited considerations,²⁰⁷ schooling, his student years and his prison term. J.D. Vorster is also considered in relation to his brother, the Prime Minister of South Africa, John Vorster. Louw (1994) indicates that they shared the same political views.

Rather pondering on the aloes of the Karoo, family trees and the personalities of forefathers, which are significant as formative influences, this study will consider the indicative activities of these two polarised contemporaries, Koot Vorster and Ben Marais, when they were students. By considering the activities of Koot Vorster, immediate parallels to the already discussed activities of Ben Marais, can be made. The broader content of Koot Vorster's activities can be mentioned, where he served: as a promoter of Afrikanerdom, and in the church as Actuary of the Synod of the Cape NG Kerk, later as moderator of the same synod; as minister of a congregation in Cape Town;²⁰⁸ as an activist in 1939 against military support for the Allies in the 2nd World War and subsequent imprisonment; as a religious consultant to his brother and other members of parliament; as a scholar in church law and capable administrator; and as political proponent for separate amenities and development – Apartheid.

Koot Vorster was the leader of the "Oupajane",²⁰⁹ the conservative student group who opposed Prof. J. du Plessis in the Du Plessis Case. Ben Marais was one of Du Plessis' supporters. In the incomplete, unfinished and unpublished manuscript of his autobiography (1986), Koot Vorster discusses his involvement in the Du Plessis Case. The discussion on this also has bearing on his attitudes as a student, which, significantly were characteristic of his activities throughout his life. Most significant is his steadfast attitude of aggression towards the English people and their language, in which medium he was forced to receive instruction at school (Vorster 1986:3). In the following extract it is explicitly apparent how his refined wit, acuteness for detail and love for his

²⁰⁷ According to J.D. Vorster (1986): 47% Dutch, 27% German and 24 % French.

²⁰⁸ Nieuwe Kerk Gemeente – New Church Congregation.

²⁰⁹ The Old road users.

Afrikaner nation characterised his public picture (Vorster 1986:4):²¹⁰

“... Years later I was grateful that Milner ensured that I could talk a bit of English, when I was called to continue the same old battle²¹¹ in different countries against other enemies and in other terrains through other means. When I once achieved a victory because I could speak a little English, I almost forgave Milner, and years later, when I read the story of his end, I almost developed a movement against the tsetse fly that had executed Milner. Sometimes it also led to entertaining incidents that was most rewarding. On one occasion the B.B.C. phoned from London to ask whether I would be prepared to answer a few questions for a programme in England via the SABC. The two principle questions were venomous and accusing. ‘Do you and your brother regard the blacks as equals or inferior?’ Our man behind the glass was anxious. Since I learned and knew this story from youth, I answered without hesitance: ‘Equal but different.’ From behind the glass I could perceive a sigh of relief, not hear but see. The second question was worse: To what do you ascribe the fact that you and your brother are so national? It left a warm feeling in the heart to say, ‘Man, it has been a long time since one of you asked me that’, and then I answered: ‘For three reasons: i. My father taught us that we are Afrikaners and must be proud of that; ii. from war veterans I learned how our small nation fought to the death, sometimes martyrdom, against gold thieves, and that made us national’; and iii. in your Anglicising process I had to write out thousands of lines: I must speak English at school, and that made me a rebel.’ That answer evoked a startled comment, ‘Oh that is very interesting,’ and brought me £30 into the pocket!”

Like Ben Marais, Koot Vorster’s journey to Stellenbosch in 1928 was a new experience. He was overwhelmed by the number of students, their intelligence and their conversations (Vorster 1986:8). Koot Vorster (Ibid) mentions that fortunately he found residence in a boarding house where theological students, P. De Vos Grobbelaar and H.J. C. Snyders, helped him during the Du Plessis Case. They helped him “to hold on to the Word of God and to retain the faith in Jesus Christ and not like some of my class mates and contemporaries to throw everything overboard” (Vorster 1986:8). Ben Marais would have been one of these class-mates! He soon overcame his disorientation in the Du Plessis Case, and in his own version of the events – traced to the time before he was called as professor of Theology, and when the church was concerned about his radicalisation. According to Vorster’s version (1986:9-10), the church had no option but to act against Du Plessis, and was correct in doing so.

²¹⁰ My translation.

²¹¹ He was involved in a fist cuff with a English boy at school (Vorster 1986:3).

Koot Vorster attended the sessions of the open meetings (started on 11 September 1929) that was investigating the allegations against Du Plessis. He was shocked at the teachings of Du Plessis, and was more surprised when the Presbytery found him innocent. Vorster (1096:10) also relates how he became involved in a dispute with a minister about issues relating to the Case, and was asked by elders to take action, but how he declined due to the fact that he was a “small town boy”.

Significant in his involvement in the Du Plessis Case is that his future interest in Church Law would have been stimulated, also due to the fact that he placed particular emphasis on the procedures of the synod, the court sessions and the verdict (Vorster 1986), even though it is hopelessly one-sided and Du Plessis is deemed and accused as an heretic. Vorster and Marais would have debated against each other on the case, but considering the fact that both were freshmen, their arguments would not have been their own but those of their seniors, and with whom they found affinity, ever the conservative or the intellectually acute.

5. THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Similar to Calvin only fully developing a doctrine of the Trinity in his *Institutes of the Christian Faith*, so Ben Marais only needed to fully develop his theological understanding on social issues, being political policies and scriptural justification thereof. However, the theological orientation to develop the theological thinking in the case of both Calvin and Ben Marais were present, as was the case also with St Augustine and his thinking on *The City of God*, Athanasius and his assertions of orthodoxy against Arius, and Martin Luther on the malpractices in the church. In no way is a comparison between Ben Marais and the theological champions intended, rather, it wishes to be pointed out that Ben Marais, as a Church Historian, followed a similar programme, and asked what the basic principles – tenets – were. Thus, as Calvin worked from the tenet of the 12 Articles, and Athanasius from the confession that God is One, and Martin Luther from the inability of man to contribute towards his own grace (Romans 1:17), and Augustine from the sovereignty of God, so Ben Marais orientated his theological reflection on his interpretation of Scripture. But so, too, did the

proponents and advocates of Apartheid! Rather than develop a confessional Theology about race relations, Ben Marais applied particular theological principles that he derived from Scripture (Viljoen Interview 1986).

Ben Marais also distanced himself from certain theological schools and influences. On the question (Viljoen Interview 1986): What Theology made the development of Apartheid ideology possible? Ben Marais mentions five factors: Isolation; Race problems; interpretation of Kuypertian Theology (“In ons isolement lê ons kragt”²¹² – applied to church and national identity); the history; and fundamentalism. Ben Marais was hesitant to add Calvinism as a theological influence, because in his comparison to the Southern States of U.S.A. he identified similar tendencies on race relations, but that the churches there were not necessarily Calvinistic. Ben Marais was thus hesitant to pin point any factors on the label of Calvinism.

6. STUDIES

Ben Marais’ preparation did not begin when he went to Stellenbosch, according to C. Du Plessis (Interview 12 September 2002) he used to learn the church’s hymn’s in the house’s loft. Interestingly, Ben Marais was not known to be able to hold a tune (P.A. Marais Interview 17 December 2002), but that he often hummed and whistled hymns associated with the topics of the sermons he was preparing. He had a photographic memory (P.A. Marais 20 September 2002), which would have enabled him to recall facts and information with ease. Besides this, from his experiences and successes as a journalist at university, it is obvious that he was multi-talented, having the talent also to express his thoughts, and not needing to be taught to do so.

In this section, distinction is made between two types of literary study Ben Marais undertook. The first illustrates how a book, which he claimed to have influenced his thought, and the second illustrates how his formal studies contributed towards his forming as a Church Historian and his formidable pronouncements in the church.

²¹² “Our Strength rests in our isolation.”

a. Informal Studies

The book by B.B. Keet, *Whither South Africa?* appeared in January 1956. Ben Marais was able to identify with the book, and drew much encouragement from it. Some years earlier, when he was a student, he read E. Shillito's *Nationalism: Man's Other Religion*.

i. *Nationalism: Man's Other Religion* (1933): E. Shillito

In the front of his copy, which he first read in 1933, Ben Marais had written:

“Gaan my nasionalisme my godsdiens bepaal, of gaan my godsdiens my nasionalisme bepaal.”²¹³

Ben Marais was a student in the post “Great War” (1914-1918) era. Though South Africa was not as directly involved, as were the European sovereign states, South Africans were involved. The volunteers from the regions where Ben Marais grew up, found themselves fighting in German South West Africa, either for or against the Boer general, Manie Maritz. One of the questions being asked within the general state of nationalistic disillusionment, more abroad than in South Africa, was the question on the relation between nationalism and religion. Ben Marais read one such book – written by an American – that was determined to make sense out of the general state of disillusionment by trying to establish patterns in history, and tracing the build up to the catastrophic war in 1914. It claims to “provide a serious call to the reader to consider afresh this alternative way offered to the spirit of man along with the perils to which it leads” (Shillito 1933: Preface). This alternative way was to treat Nationalism as a Religion. Ben Marais was able to apply what he read to the South African situation, and thus the book profoundly influenced his thought, that he was able to distinguish between matters of religion and matters of nationalism and patriotism. The book also promoted his sense for ecumenism (Viljoen Interview, 1986).

Nationalism: Man's Other Religion (1933) consists of six chapters, each with accompanying illustrative sketches, of which it is suggested, “are meant to gather up the main themes of the book in a historic scene or myth”. The contents of the book reflect greatly on Ben Marais own forbearing on the state of affairs in South Africa on the

²¹³ “Will my nationalism determine my religion or will my religion determine my nationalism.”

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relations between church, state and culture, and on the relations between the various race groups.

The first chapter, “Man’s other religion” considers the essential theoretic framework for considering nationalism in the same light as religion. The author’s evangelical orientation is determined indirectly through the allusions made, the structure given to reality and the perceptions on history and relation to Scriptures. The accompanying sketch gives a brief, history of Karl Marx. The book rejects communism as a determined alternative to Christianity and Nationalism (1933:105).

The book claims that “the problems of communism and nationalism may be treated as political; but the strength of communism and nationalism does not lie in their political theories, but in their powers to fill the place of a religion” (1933:2). Communism is understood to be a “godless church, filled with a religious passion, possessed by a desire to banish the God, whom man had made out of his dreams” (1933:2). Nationalism is then discussed as an alternative to Christianity. This influence on Ben Marais is clearly visible where he considers the church as an alternative to nationalism (*The Two Faces of Africa*).

By religion the book means “the reference of all things human to one master –interest which has been found by most religious people in the mind and will of God; but there can be objects of worship and devotion other than a personal God” (1933:1). The book discusses how, in earlier times within the tribal system, there was a close relation between the tribe’s defence and its religion, and that as time went on, the religious aspects were eroded and the tribal – nationalistic – interests became revered, resulting in “many altars being dedicated to *Patria*, and among the worshipers are men of every creed. Thus, the commonality of nationalism across creeds, races, and across time is established. This would make it possible for Ben Marais to consider Race problems in The Americas, and to – draw parallels and differences with the situation in South Africa, because he first tried to establish communality and differences.

An important question is: How would Ben Marais have read the book, against his

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pietistic, evangelical Afrikaner background, on the one hand, and his schooling in Greek Philosophy on the other? It is my belief that he would have read it analytically, but not critically. The reason for this is the fact that the language would have been quite familiar to him. For example, the book's call to repent (1933:4), which I experience as manipulative, reasons:

“Nationalism is another religion which offers itself to the hungry soul of man. In face of it the church must repent. No serious call can ever be made which does not begin with the demand that men must everywhere and always adjust their minds to reality, and this is an essential part of what is meant by repentance.”

Reality is perceived from a 1930s middle class American point of view. As substantiation to his argument on “adjusting” in the face of changing reality, the book refers to Alaric (1933:5), when he attacked Rome in 410AD, and “when the men were blind” when he stood at the gates. The book claims that the Romans should have adapted to the new reality, then they would have been saved. Furthermore, the French nobles “living a life of wit and elegance till the eve of Revolution” (1933:5) are referred to along with the “Russian aristocracy [who] never dreamed of being driven out into exile” (1933:5). On the one hand, Ben Marais' noble French heritage²¹⁴ would have inspired him to associate with the reasoning, perceiving the patterns in history, along with the reference to the ill fate of the Russian aristocracy, at the hand of the feared communism. The book could be argued to be propagandistic.

Though, if read analytically, it is possible to perceive the dangers of nationalism in South African society. The moral drawn by the book, states clearly (1933:6), “The moral of history is plain, if others were blind to the signs of the times, we too may be blind.” In this assertion there may also be truth for the current reader, not only for Ben Marais. This relates to Ben Marais as a prophet, though, not self perceived, but made applicable to him (1933:6):

“Those who prophesy disaster, if something is not done, are called Cassandras or Jeremiahs. But Cassandra was right, Troy did fall. And Jeremiah was right, Jerusalem was captured....”

²¹⁴ His forefather, Charles Marais, a Huguenot, was a French nobleman.

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Within this realism, the “real world” according to the book (1933:6), there is an altar, and on the altar is an inscription: “To Fatherland”. Also, the church is silent (1933:7): it has either nothing to say, or it is afraid to speak. Ben Marais was one person who decided that he would not be afraid to speak. Also, he had much to say. He would have found the words, “The world is listening for any voice that can speak with authority” (1933:7) inspiring. Though, Hitler also spoke with authority, some years later, and was able to capture the psyche of a nation.

Simultaneously, and related, the book indicates a sensitivity to direct application of Scripture on 20th century society (1933:11). This hermeneutic principle would have made Ben Marais weary also of Scriptural justifications of societal practices and norms. Thus (1933:11):

“The church cannot give the precise witness which the faithful servants of God gave in Asia Minor in the days when the Apocalypse was written; it can but adjust its thought and action to the spiritual situation which it inherits in the 20th century.”

The realism for the church lies in the fact that “the Kingdom of God is at hand” (1933:8). Thus implicating that within biblical imagery, nationalism is imbedded, while also needing to be reinterpreted for the reality of the 20th century. The difference between nationalism and realism is considered by the book in very simplistic terms in the basic model (1933:9): “Nationalism has to do with the outward and temporal affairs; Religion is inward and spiritual.” The book then determines that the church has been at once a divine and a human society, that it fulfils an eternal purpose, but in time. This substantiates Ben Marais seeking the resolving of nationalistic differences within the structures of the church (*The Two Faces of Africa*).

While the book frequently refers to nationalism, it gives different senses to it. One of the more important references, places it in a historic context that being the disillusionment with nationalism experienced after the Great War (1933:13). The book refers to nationalism as “the mind and action of those who believe in a sovereign state above which there can be no higher power” (1933:13). The book draws the history of sovereign states in Europe over four centuries, though also being weary to indicate it as a human phenomenon affecting all of mankind. To this effect he quotes Gokhale, an

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Indian nationalist, who would have expressed the creed of nationalism: Love of country must so fill the heart that all else shall appear of little moment by its side.” This would have horrified Ben Marais, who insisted that he was a Christian before he was an Afrikaner (Viljoen Interview, 1986).

A look at nationalism from a different angle sees it being compared to patriotism (1933:16). In this comparison the book finds patriotism to be contrary to nationalism. The book reasons, “Not to condemn, but to save patriotism the church has come. Nationalism unchecked will make an end of the nation” (1933:17).

On a different point, but also akin to the times, the book discusses Islam, though it sees it not as a threat (1933:15). Ben Marais, who – as expressed in the correspondence with the World Council of Churches – was well aware of Islam, considered the religion a daunting threat over the church. The book is very naïve in calling Islam “a faith for the man in the desert” (1933:14), and negates it by considering it an “ancient protest against superstition” (1933:14). One could as easily classify Christianity as such. Much of the tension between Christianity and Islam can be detected in the book’s attitude towards Islam, where cultural bias most certainly plays a role, even as the book sweepingly claims that Islam, “in its positive teachings, it is out of touch with modern knowledge” (1933:14). This knowledge is culturally determined, and the modern is considered more affluent than the traditional, and the book appears to claim to have access to this knowledge. This comes across as quite arrogant. However, a person reading the book, and sympathising in a similar cause might not necessarily find alarming fault with such an attitude. The book thus emphasises internal threats far more than external.

At the end of Chapter 1 a short historic sketch is given on Karl Marx, emphasising strongly his work in the library. On the one hand, Karl Marx was confronting the reality of his day, the poverty, abuse and maltreatment experienced and the silence of the church. On the other, the book makes Carl Marx irrelevant through the one-sided treatment of his history, thus also neutralising effectively the threat that communism supposedly held. The book concludes on Karl Marx (1933:25):

“Still the same stream enters the British Museum. It is possible that among the living readers there is one whose studies will be among the forces which

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are for the rising and falling of the nations.”

Ben Marais would not have been so arrogant as to consider that his writings would determine the rise and fall of a nation. Rather, in retrospect, it must be claimed that his teachings and understanding of reality, as also influenced by this book, influenced later generations to effectively take steps to change negative policies within the church.

The second chapter, “Where the streams meet”, takes a closer look at the contemporary world in the context of the Great War. The two streams distinguished by the book are, firstly, nature, and secondly, man’s spirit (1933:27). This distinction is most certainly not as profound in the 21st century as it was during the 1930s. Drawing from the theory considered in Chapter 1, the book claims that man must adjust to the new reality as it has come to be known (1933:27). Thus, repentance is an adjustment to the new facts (1833:27).

The book considers the Great War to be an “explosion to which four centuries of nationalism in Europe led” (1933:28). Apart from establishing an European orientation to World War I and viewing the war as a conflict of established nationalisms, the book tries to understand the war within a broader historic context, as Ben Marais also tried to understand the race problems in South Africa against a broader historic framework.

It could be considered to be rather more idealistic than practical, and considered from a middle-class American perspective, but the book’s propagation for moving from nationalism to internationalism (1933:28-29) reiterates the move from a focus on individual nationalisms to the interaction between nations, which, interestingly, corresponds to the rising emphasis being placed on ecumenism. One post war movement, identified in the book, is akin to such a movement away from nationalism towards internationalism, as seen in the formation of the League of Nations, the Pact of Paris, and different meetings and conferences on science, medicine, commerce and finance. This movement implies a dogmatic denial of traditional groupings (1933:29-30). A second post war movement, identified in the book (1933:30), is reflected in the outbursts of nationalism and concerns “the revival of the idea of the sovereign state” (1933:30). The reason for this, according to the argument in the book, is that “in times

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of uncertainty man turns inwards and finds sanctuary in the narrower limits of the own country” (1933:30). This predicament could have been an encouragement for Ben Marais to seek dialogue and establish relations with others, and to consider the arguments of others (S Marais Interview 2000).

In the second chapter it is claimed that “a nation is a nation chiefly by virtue of its memories” (1933:31). The book distinguishes political and economic situations that need to be considered within this memory of a nation, apart from the dominant religion, which each nation has (1933:31). Also within the historic orientation to nationalism, the book considers various archetypes of nationalism (1933:32-42), which is brought strongly into the context of renaissance and the awakening spirit of new knowledge that replaces old religions and signifies the rise (dawn) of national consciousness (1933:43).

The short historic sketch at the end of Chapter 2 is devoted to Sun-Yet-Sen’s will (1933:44-50). The will is seen to be an important document for the Chinese nationalists, where it calls for the continuation of the work started by the political activist.

In Chapter 3 the theme of the altar is referred to once more, “The revival of an ancient altar”. The altar, which is dedicated to *Patra*, Fatherland, is an “altar that has been revived and rededicated, but it is the same altar before which man has bowed in many ages and in many lands” (1933:51). The book reasons that in early history the name of the god and the name of the tribe were linked. Devotion to *Patria* came to have a sacred value, and “when the gods vanish in the mists, the nation remains to take over the entire loyalty, and to fill the empty place in the heart of the people” (1933:51).

In the build up of the argument, the book first presents examples of nationalisms from Scripture and from the Highlands of Scotland (1933:52-69), colouring the history of Israel in nationalistic terms, then it suggests that the church is the new Israel in nationalistic terms. The church is seen as “a spiritual race, an elect people, its members went out to do what Israel, as a dedicated people, might have done” (1933:67). A critical question is asked in this regard, “Is the nation to live for itself or give itself to the Kingdom of God” (1933:68). This is then drawn to the book’s contention that *The*

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City of God of St Augustine is seen as the place in which all the nations bring their honours (1933:68). Thus, the book considers the future of nationalisms in an eschatological framework, where St Augustine's City of God is seen to be akin to a International meeting place of different nations. The book points out that Augustine developed the City of God to stand against the City of Earth (1933:69), which is at once temporal, decadent and on which one cannot trust. Thus, it appears that the book supports the idea that St Augustine wrote *The City of God* in his bereavement and while experiencing disillusionment at Alaric's invasion of Rome.

This then, is what the biographic sketch at the end of Chapter 3 covers, when St Augustine heard of the fall of Rome. As alternative to the temporal, earthly, refuge is sought in the spiritual: "Babylon would always fall. But the City of God could not perish. The king of that city is Truth, its laws Love, its direction is Eternity" (1933:76).

In Chapter 4 the book considers the development of the nationalistically orientated sovereign states of Europe. This is accomplished in "The Shadow of Machiavelli". Niccolo Machiavelli, a Florentine who wrote in Italy in the 16th century, is considered to have influenced European political thought. The book in question is *Concerning Principalities* (1532), also referred to as *The Prince*. The book, which was not intended for publication, interprets changes in the spirit of man which were to be operative for four centuries in Europe (1933:81). *The Prince*, intended to serve as a series of instructions to the "most magnificent Lorenzo de 'Medici" (1933:94), is important for its underlying theory of state. The ordering of the state is described with the assumption that this is the character with which practical men must deal. There is thus little room for the spiritual guidance of the church in public life. The book (1933) thus sees a general attitude towards the nation-state logically expressed in Machiavelli, and believes that this attitude has been the assumption of civilised communities for centuries (1933:81).

The book presents an interesting periodisation model (1933:80). In this model St Augustine is seen as an important moment in European political thought with his development of the eschatological City of God. The first period, then, leads up to the

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16th century, in which Martin Luther and Machiaveli respectively signify the Reformation and the Renaissance. These two events, the reformation and the renaissance are considered parallel by the book, and together form the onset of the second phase of the development of the sovereign states in Europe. The second phase lasted until after the Great War, from whence the 3rd phase proceeded. Thus, the relations between church and state are pertinent to the development of nationalism in Europe. The book offers several examples (1933:84-104), such as Hildebrand's sentence over Henry in 1076 (1933:84). The reformation is given an interesting political interpretation.

A further example presented by the book (1933:97) that has a parallel in South African history, and thus would have been interesting to Ben Marais, concerns Cardinal Richelieu. The Cardinal encouraged Protestant powers to fight against a Catholic State which posed a political danger to France. Nationalism thus prevailed over religion. In the annals of South African history, in the late 18th century, when the Cape was governed by the Dutch East Company, Roman Catholics were not allowed to celebrate Mass on land, and were generally not welcomed by the Protestants. Many of these sailors were French. Several years later, when the Cape settlers felt that the Protestant English posed a threat to their safety, the Catholic French sailors were welcome in the Cape (Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:10) Thus, in times of distress nationalistic concerns over rode religious differences. As Cardinal Richelieu's attitude led to the development of the idea of sovereign states – in which no allegiance was owed to any higher power (1933:97), so, in contrast, the religious powers continued to be influential in South African society well into the 20th century. Within the parallel there is a difference, indicating how difficult it is to draw direct lines between European and South African societies. One reason for the disassociation was the influence of the Scottish evangelical orientated ministers who served in the Cape NG Kerk during the 19th century, and the interpretation of Scripture – Romans 13.

The third chapter concludes with the consideration of three main alternatives for the spirit of man. While being rather simplistic, regarding Communism as the worship of the proletariat and Nationalism as the worship of the Sovereign State, and Christianity

being the other alternative, the book's assertion that "man has always been a worshiper" is quite useful (1933:105). It would have promoted the idea of remaining within the church and challenging the status quo from within the church and refusing to become politically active in the thought and actions of Ben Marais.

The historic sketch at the end of Chapter 3, "Machiavelli writes *The Prince*", is very informative, apart from substantiating the book's premises on the relation between religion and nationalism. The book presents influential leaders that read the book (in the library – akin to Karl Marx) (1933:106). From *The Prince*, according to the book (1933:110), it is possible to discern how the lines of the renaissance, religion and nationalism interplayed. Leaders, such as Richelieu, Napoleon and Bismark would have read in *The Prince* (1933:110): "Clear intelligence backed by unsparing will, unflinched energy, remorseless vigour, the brain to plan and the hand to strive – here is the salvation of states." Religion is seen to be good – but should not be allowed to dominate, while political language is shrouded in religious terms. The sovereign states are seen to be each an end in itself – each the sole guide of its own life; "and in statesmanship everything would be justifiable which was needed to preserve or further the state" (1933:110).

The last two chapters, "Education for life in the nation", and "A large upper room furnished", appear to be more dogmatic, disclosing the author's unprecedented sentiments on the subject. The book, though, approaches the subject through a referral to the Chinese national Sun-Yat-Sen, thus Christianising global trends. The observations in these chapters would have had particular significance to Ben Marais' thoughts on ecumenism.

In Chapter 5, Sun-Yat-Sen is quoted, where it is claimed that a society must first be national before it can be a society internationally (1933:113). The state of being "international" can be achieved through two means: through the process of promoting international order, thus fellowship between existing nationalities; or through the process of ending all former groupings, the process of denationalisation (1933:114). Thus the two alternatives presented are anarchy and internationalism, where Education,

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through History (manipulated) is shown to work in the model of love and hate – hatred for the other and love for the own (1933:120). The book wishes to promote positive nationalism – patriotism (1933:21), and concludes the chapter on an inspired observation (1933:136): “The key to the future is in the satchel of the school boy.”

“The Sketch” at the end of Chapter 5 presents two aged Maratha Indians from the same village in discussion. The one was a Christian teacher and the other a politician, and they were comparing what each had done, and not done for India.

The final chapter, “A large upper room furnished”, reasons that the church faces a new task in each generation, where no exact parallel can be found in the past (1933:147). In the analysis of the post great war problem, the book tries to indicate the duty of the church. Counsel is offered to the church, which covers positive and negative assertions (1933:148).

The book presents three positive points of counsel, namely, 1. that the church must assert firmly its catholicity, in the sense of being international; 2. that a new emphasis needs to be placed on the application of Christian faith (the book mentions the meeting at Stockholm 1925 and the derived English orientated “Life and Work” and European orientated “Ecumenical Conferences”, as well as a renewed missionary enterprise); 3. that the church should be a living witness (related to the idea that man has more in common than what divides). The negative orientated counsel suggests that the church should refuse to be chaplain to the modern state (1933:148). The disillusionment following the 1st World War is very apparent. A mixed society, like The United States of America, of which the author is a member, would have experienced the relations between churches and states in a different light to their allies and opponents across the Atlantic.

The counsel is followed by several excursions on what the author perceives the church should and should not be, should and should not do (1933:151-166). The primary focus is to seek peace in the world and reunion of the church. This assertion is rather ironically expressed in a publication of the early 1930s, considering the build up of

national powers in Europe, which would lead to the 2nd World War.

The final excursion in the book, following Chapter 6, “The upper room”, contains a strong reference to where the Last Supper was eaten. The vision is explored where different people from different nations share a common meal.

This vision is contrary to the NG Kerk’s assertion and practice of separate Eucharist, church services and churches! It would have implored Ben Marais to consider carefully the church’s doctrines on unity and community and the justification of its controversial doctrines.

A discussion on his masters and doctoral studies indicates, firstly how his interests and thoughts developed, and secondly how his formal studies influenced his thoughts. It is also evident from an extended consideration of a book that he claimed (Viljoen Interview 1986) had greatly influenced him, how his informal studies also influenced his thoughts. Ben Marais was not only active in the church, though, he also had interests in sports bodies and in student affairs. The question is, to what extent his involvement in these activities influenced his thoughts and pronouncements?

b. Formal Studies

Ben Marais’ undergraduate studies are not discussed as a separate category. Rather, focus falls on his postgraduate studies, where influences on him, and the development of his thoughts are more clearly discernible.

i. M.A. in Afrikaans, Stellenbosch, 1932

Ben Marais’ MA dissertation in Afrikaans, completed in September 1932, is probably the most informative about the way he thought and about his academic and creative development. The dissertation reveals artistry with words and concepts and clarity of thought. The ability to convey difficult ideas in a simplified form, very evident in his latter writing, is very fresh and evident in this dissertation.

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The title²¹⁵ indicates that the study Ben Marais undertook was about the literary styles introduced by the Dutchman Arthur van Schendel who is identified with Romanticism of the 18th century. The argument is well presented and poetically articulated through descriptive language and images.

He begins his argument on renewal with a metaphor in which he compares the renewal in literature to the rejuvenation in the four seasons (1932:i).²¹⁶

“The spring comes forth from the winter and the autumn ... ‘It is a new spring!’ But it is only new because it is born from another season. If the winter also had spring buds, if the veld were also green and the aroma of flowers in the white moonlight dwindled through the valley, then spring would not have been new, because an own beauty and an own gleam it would not have had.”

In a further metaphor employed by Ben Marais (1932:iv) he describes his discussion on literary art – new style forms – against “the background and broad rivers from which this art stream flows clearly into sight.”²¹⁷ Ben Marais discussion of the renewal of a literary school and of style and art is compared to the flowing of a river, emphasising his orientation to literary history and to the relation between his argument and his subject on the one hand, and the relation between the different fashions in literary schools on the other. He then states (1932:iv) that he is to be writing about Romanticism in general and about style in more detail.

In the subsequent chapters of the dissertation, Ben Marais discusses Romanticism in literature, Dutch Romantics and its development, style in general, Arthur van Schendel’s contribution, his collections of stories, and travel stories. He concludes with a chapter on the new work of van Schendel.

Though the study is in Dutch and Afrikaans literature, Ben Marais methodology, arguments and conclusions reveals much about his own personality, style and academic

²¹⁵ *Die Romantikus Arthur van Schendel as Stylvernuwer.*

²¹⁶ “Die lente kom uit die winter en die herfs ... Dis ‘n nuwe lente! Maar nuut is dit alleen omdat dit uit ‘n ander jaargety gebore is. As die winter ook lentebotsels gehad het, as die velde ook groen was en die geur van blomme in die wit maanskyn deur die vlakke gedwaal het, sou die lente nie nuut gewees het nie, want ‘n eie skoonheid en ‘n eie glans sou dit nie gehad het nie.”

²¹⁷ “... en breë riviere waaruit hierdie kunsstroom kom helder in die gesig te kry nie.”

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development and perception on reality. He distinguishes art into two categories (1932:1): Realism – those that are determined by the deed, reality and the present; and Romanticism – those that build on the dream. He elaborates on Romanticism, calling it the art that reaches in the distance, a flight to the world of dreams, of thought, a search for foreign things, for the supernatural, for the mysterious. All which is compared to the youth. Romanticism is thus defined as (1932:2):

“Die oneindigheidsgeroep wat die eindige van sy moeisame knelters losmaak.”²¹⁸

On reading the dissertation it becomes apparent that Ben Marais could be considered a Romanticist. This is especially true considering his remark that Romantics are often the great lonely people in life. His years of isolation and his intense experience of loneliness during this period comes to mind. It would thus appear that Ben Marais was prepared for such a life. It is not sure to what extent Ben Marais could have drawn on past experiences from his youth – these years are shrouded in mystery. As a Romanticist, though, Ben Marais would not have considered himself withdrawn, since he states (1932:4).²¹⁹

“The true Romanticist does not stand outside of reality and is not eager to avoid reality in his art, does not stand outside and lose from real life.”

A further surprising revelation in the dissertation is found in his commentary on Bosboom-Toussaint and Van Lennop concerning the relationship between author and work, an aspect for which Ben Marais is well known. In his commentary he accuses these historical novelists of (1932:8).²²⁰

“... little emotion and little warmth of the internal. Theirs were the general – though sometimes refined – but still almost colourless historical documents – deep personal accents were absent.”

The personal touch in especially Ben Marais’ devotional writing, and also evident in his two books *The Two Faces of Africa* and *Colour: Unsolved Problem of the West*, could be traced to his grooming as a student of Dutch Romanticism. Style, also, is evidently a

²¹⁸ “The eternal call that releases the boundry from its barriers.”

²¹⁹ Die ware Romantikus staan nie buite die realiteit en trag ook nie om in sy kuns die realiteit te ontwyk nie, staan nie buite en los van die reële lewe nie.

²²⁰ Min hartstogtelikheid en min warmte of innigheid. Dit was die breë – wel fyn soms – maar tog byna kleurlose historiese dokumente – diep persoonlike aksent was daar nie.

personal matter, as Ben Marais remarks (1932:25):²²¹

“The style thus of the times and school of thought plus the style determined by individual abilities and personality, thus form style in its broadest sense.”

The development of the personal style of Ben Marais – his involvement in the subject of his study and his characteristic first person reference reflects at once on his warm personality and on his aesthetic appreciation of the beautiful (1932:31).²²²

“I read my first sketch in the evening – when the aroma of his first dawn blossoms wakened my heart to new life.”

Ben Marais study in Dutch Romanticism certainly influences his writing style and approach to life in general. However, his M.A. dissertation in Philosophy appears foreign to his style, considering his dissertation on Arthur van Schendel and his later writings.

ii. M.A. in Philosophy, Stellenbosch, 1935

The dissertation, *Die Ontwikkeling van die Probleem van die Onsterflikheid in die Griekse Filosofie*,²²³ provides a framework within which Ben Marais’ philosophical approaches to questions and problems and his historical orientation is illustrated quite clearly. It is thus evident that his studies in philosophy clearly influenced his latter work.

The dissertation follows a historical argument, with a first chapter considering the problem of immortality. The next chapters consider, in order, the Homeric era, the early philosophers, the anthropological era of the Greek Philosophy, and the Hellenistic-Roman philosophers. He then draws a conclusion.

The dissertation closes with a reference to Plotinus on the death of philosophy – intuitive doctrine, which Ben Marais related to the springboard of Christianity (1935:103). It is thus possible to discern how Ben Marais was taught on the

²²¹ Die style dus van die tyd of rigting plus die styl wat op individuele aanleg en persoonlikheid berus, maak dus styl in sy wydste betekenis uit.

²²² Dit was in die aand dat ek my eerste skets geles het – dat die geur van sy eerste môrebloesem my hart tot nuwe lewe gewek het.

²²³ The development of the problem of immortality in Greek Philosophy.

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periodisation of schools of thought, of which the Christian thinkers formed an important part. It is interesting, though, that Christianity was already flourishing when Plotinus, a contemporary of Origen (3rd century AD) was active. Ben Marais argued (1935:103):

“Christianity was at the door – the nations were ready for it, with the mysticism of Plotinus Greek Philosophy which disappeared from the scene.”

Thus, from the historic periodisation of his material, and the positioning of the schools of thought, it is possible to see that Ben Marais’ orientation to Greek Philosophy was retrospective, from a Christian point of view. Christian doctrine was thus his hermeneutical key to understanding philosophic concepts.

The bibliography, at the front of the dissertation contains only 35 titles, but contains a balance between primary and secondary sources.

The text is error ridden, and the personal style, writing in first person is well developed. He thus says, “That is why we talk today...”²²⁴ (1935:9), using the royal plural in an argumentative mode. The frequent reference to and occurrence of “*volk*” is quite alarming for a study on immortality.

The argument of the dissertation commences with a quotation of Pascal, the source of which he does not indicate (it is definitely through a secondary reference). The quotation serves no other purpose than to elevate the status of the argument through a reference to a well known name. For that matter, it could have been Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas or Nietzsche. Ben Marais uses the words of Pascal to good effect (1935:1):

“The immortality of the soul is an issue that affects us intimately ... what our final purpose should be.”²²⁵

Ben Marais continues, in own pen, to provide an elaboration on this statement with an interesting reference to death. Personally as a child, he had to deal with death under very strenuous conditions, when first his mother, and then his eldest brother died. He

²²⁴ Daarom praat ons vandag.

²²⁵ Die onsterflikheid van die siel is ‘n saak wat ons so intiem raak ... wat ons finale doel moet wees.

writes in his thesis (1935:1):

“Death is a sombre reality. It comes to everyone. But whether there is a life after death, is the question that thinkers throughout the centuries of darkness have struggled with.”²²⁶

The pre-Christian era could be depicted as the dark era, and the era of Christianity as the era of light. Though, even then the problem would remain the restriction of perspective: the living can only learn about the conditions of the deceased through the veils of death – assuming that Scripture provides a divinely ordained account of what truly happens after death. The problem of immortality would then be resolved in Christianity – in the faith in life after death (1935:7).

The concept of immortality – depending on faith, Ben Marais argues (1935:2) is to be differentiated from nation to nation (volk) and from century to century – as well as amongst individuals within a nation or time frame. Also, that where there was faith in immortality, there was also denial and disbelief (1935:3). This is an important consideration, that Ben Marais had realised early in his academic development that an argument could be argued from the point of view of both the advocators and oppressors. Thus when a one sided argument was presented, he would invariably have asked for alternative points of view. This is quite evident in his opposition to scriptural justification of Apartheid.

Ben Marais’ power of discernment is formulated in his observation that ideas must be distinguished continuously (1935:4). This is especially important in his understanding and application of history – the concept of inter-relation – in which the old and the new are related and set apart from each other. He constantly differentiates between earlier concepts and the contemporaneous views (1935:9).

Before entering a detailed discussion on the different philosophers’ view points on immortality (1935:25-102), Ben Marais concludes his discussion on the role the mystery religions played in influencing Greek concepts of immortality in Greek thought (1935:24).

²²⁶ My translation.

Though it might well be possible to critically question Ben Marais' periodisation and prominence given to Christian doctrine, it is significant to see in this dissertation a historic awareness and frame of reference. At this point in his academic career, he did not see himself as a historian. He had first specialised in Afrikaans, where his historical awareness almost prevailed over his under-developed poetic abilities, and here, in his masters dissertation in philosophy, it is more evident, also his search for basic principles according to which he could organise his arguments.

iii. M.Th. in Theology, Princeton, 1936

His Masters degree in Theology at Princeton University was completed under the guidance of Samuel Zwemmer. He was highly commended as a student and was well respected by his fellow students.

Unfortunately a copy of the dissertation could not be traced, but it is known that it contains views that were groomed at Stellenbosch that he expanded upon (Viljoen Interview 1986). The fact that the title is very similar (*Die Godsidee by die Grieke: Probleme van die Ontwikkeling in die Onsterflikheid van die Griekse Filosofie*),²²⁷ and considering the limited time spent on it, are indicators that it would have contained much of the same material.

iv D.Phil. in Philosophy, Stellenbosch, 1946

Ben Marais completed his D.Phil with the title: *Die Christelike Broederskapsleer en sy Toepassing in die Kerk van die Eerste Drie Eeue*, in 1944 at the University of Stellenbosch, under Prof. B.B. Keet's guidance. Interestingly, J.D. Vorster completed his D.Th. in Church Law also under Professor B.B. Keet! Ben Marais thesis consists of two volumes. Volume One contains sections A and B while section two contains section C and the bibliography. The thesis is dedicated to his father, "in thankful

²²⁷ The exact English title is unknown, though a possible rendition could be: *The idea of God in Greek thought: problems in the development of immortality in Greek Philosophy* – the dissertation was most probably written in English.

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recognition”.²²⁸ He had first enrolled in 1944, with Brunner, professor of Philosophy, as his promoter.

The central question Ben Marais asks is: How did the Early Church approach the issues of race and nationalism?

The thesis is philosophical and considers the mystery religions, Judaism in the Diaspora, Stoic philosophy, and the background of Christianity. He is looking for insight into the Early Church as an ecumenical community. First he considers the spiritual and cultural milieu in which Christianity developed. He looks particularly at the general trends prevalent in the Mediterranean world in the centuries prior to the birth of Christ. In the second section he considers the principles of the doctrine of brotherhood and its social implications. In the third section he looks at how the doctrine of brotherhood was applied in the early church.

Ben Marais’ periodisation of the early church as covering only the first three centuries is significant. The problems experienced by the church when it became state church and further institutionalised were thus not covered in the thesis, problems which are central and comparative to the predicaments the church found itself in during the 20th century in South Africa. It appears that Ben Marais is doing this deliberately to work with the often idealised early church as reference for his argument.

Ben Marais (1946:iv) sub-divides the period into four sub-periods, which in turn reveals his orientation to conflict: (30-110BC) The apostolic era; (110-180BC) the era of the early apologists; (180-250BC) The era of the great thinkers; (250-313BC) The era of final battle.

Ben Marais wanted to make the doctrine of brotherhood, which underlies and is one of the basic principles in Ben Marais’ theology, and which is prevalent in the Early Church, applicable to the current situation in South Africa. The doctrine of brotherhood was determined by the nature of God and the value of humankind. Therefore, the church

²²⁸ Dankbare erkentlikheid.

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and Christians had a social responsibility that should be exercised in specific contexts and situations. He also determined that Christians were in a new relation, a brotherhood. Furthermore, Ben Marais applied the doctrine to race relations in the last chapter of the thesis. Here, he reasoned that because Christianity was universal in nature, and because Christian brotherhood transcends race differences, expression to these facts had to be made in church and society, which also, could not ignore the “concrete situation” nor the “real historical conditions”. The thesis was an aid to the question whether there were scriptural grounds for separate churches.

The influence of the doctorate and his reasoning in it is clearly discernible in *Two faces of Africa*, in which Ben Marais foresees national differences being nullified through the church. Ironically, the NG Kerk contributed towards accentuating nationalistic differences.

Ben Marais delivered a speech at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Stellenbosch on race justification and Scripture (*Op die Horizon* IX, 1947:66), which was a direct result of his thesis. On a closer reading of the thesis it is apparent that the contemporary situation in South Africa had a far greater influence on his reasoning and organisation of his thoughts than did his study of the Greek philosophers, Scripture and the Early Church.

Alternatively, his awareness of the greater world, of history and different schools of thought and ideologies, would have enabled him to place the narrow ideologically orientated situation in South Africa in perspective. This is apparent where he considers (Marais 1946:21) the variety and strength of the streams that flowed together, resulting in the state of humanity changing, as the organisation of the world changed the character of the nations changed also. In the old world of the Greek civilisation Ben Marais saw the development of the cosmopolitan society growing in accordance to the broadening of horizons, of prospects that improved, of the appreciation of virtues, while the restrictive militarism and patriotism fell into disfavour, interestingly, resulting in one empire, one predominate language and one civilisation. Though the old world was not as uniform as Ben Marais attempts to argue, the influence of Western philosophy on

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his thinking is quite apparent, where the continuation of civilisation, of the outflow of western civilisation from Greek origin through to Western European civilisation is both natural and uncomplicated.

Ben Marais was not exposed to other views, and therefore had to develop most of his thoughts in isolation.

7. PRINCIPLES

What were the principles that governed Ben Marais' thoughts and actions? These principles were grained into his person before he went to university, and each new experience he underwent, or alternative point of view he was confronted with, or action he had to take or was tempted to take were measured against these principles.

The most important factor in Ben Marais life, his primary principle was faith in God. Other things were secondary.

Thus, to maintain that "Christianity Transcends Race" as a principle is secondary. This was used as a title of an article Ben Marais prepared for the World Council of Churches in which he maintains that one could make practical arrangements but could not exclude any one on any grounds. Though, it is derived from his primary principle.

It could be maintained that the doctrine of Christian brotherhood was a principle which governed Ben Marais' actions and thoughts on segregation and Apartheid. However, in his doctoral thesis (1946:90) he considers the principles of this doctrine, and uses the words of J.H. Oldham (1935:337) to formulate the principle governing his principle of the doctrine of Christian brotherhood:

"The ultimate question which determines the character of man or of a civilization is the kind of God that a man worships or that men collectively worship."

It is thus quite understandable why Ben Marais' thesis in Philosophy was orientated towards Christianity, and why he did not find it necessary to qualify himself. Ben Marais' principles rest in his 'concept of God' as in the Old and New Testament. Thus

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ethics were related to his concept of God (Marais 1946:83). He was an evangelical who was philosophically schooled.

Two further principles need to be mentioned here, since at once they indicate the influences on his thought, and how they determined his actions. The first concerns the unity of mankind and is a culmination of Acts 17:26, and Berkhoff's *Reformed Dogmatics* as read in Ben Marais doctoral thesis (1946:114):

“The human race is... a unity. Not only do we share the same human nature, but through Adam there is also a genetic and genealogical unity between all people.”

The second principle is an understanding of the unity of humanity in sin, and in the brotherhood of salvation (Marais 1946:119), and this principle is governed by God's relation to mankind. To formulate his ideas, Ben Marais uses the words of Emil Brunner (Marais 1946:120):

“Fellowship with God creates fellowship with man, and genuine human fellowship is only possible as it is based upon fellowship with God. Thus human fellowship rests upon the same foundation as fellowship between man and God.”

While Ben Marais could not accept statements he did not agree with, and therefore could never have become a political activist, it is apparent that he had a network of principles. The question is, what principles led him to write the letters to the General Secretaries of the World Council of Churches because they were supporting militarised opponents of Apartheid?

The answer is possibly to be found in the admixture of principles and personality.

8. THE WORLD AT WAR

Especially World War II and the students hoping Nazi Germany would win. Question: Was it more to do with anti English sentiment or with the National Social ideology of the Nazis?

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES AND INFLUENTIAL PRESENCE

In Viljoen's interview with Ben Marais (1986), Ben Marais claims that the lesson of World War II was not learned, that it passed by. He makes an interesting point that South Africa was then busy establishing itself in world affairs. The attitudes to nationalism in South Africa were contrary to international sentiment after the war.

9. THE STUDENT ENVIRONMENT

Ben Marais spent most of his adult life in the company of students.

In Viljoen's interview with Ben Marais (1986), Ben Marais briefly mentioned the differences between the universities of Pretoria and South Africa. He appreciated the personal contact with students at Pretoria, and the intellectual contact at Unisa between the staff. He found the exchange of ideas from different traditions very enriching, contributing to his notion that Church History should be more ecumenical and not denominationally orientated.

10 CONCLUSION

This chapter has indicated that various impulses on Nationalism covering the two periods of transformation influenced the thinking of Ben Marais.

A closer look at the underlying principles and influential presence of Ben Marais has been made. Where Chapter 3 presented various climates, Chapter 5 considered more detailed perspectives on Ben Marais. This was accomplished through personal, political, church and academic considerations. It has been indicated that Ben Marais was able to distinguish himself from his peers through his persistent insistence on adhering to the principles that were established in his youth.

In the following chapter, Ben Marais will be considered a prophet, who used his influential presence to resolve the church's dilemma concerning race relations.