

**J.P. Tyrone Savage**

**Student Number: SVGJAM001**

**Master of Social Science (MSocSc) by Research**

**Supervisor: Professor Charles Villa-Vicencio**

**Department of Religious Studies**

**University of Cape Town**

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**The Ambiguity of God**

**A Post-Colonial Inquiry**

**into**

**the Politics of Theistic Formulation**

**in South Africa**

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## Abstract

This thesis sets out to locate a post-apartheid perspective within what might be described as postcolonial Religious Studies, drawing on the genealogical method of Michel Foucault. Roughly stated, I understand the methodology to represent a shift away from preoccupation with the actual truth or otherwise of an idea, towards concern with the agitation - the discord, the discrepancies - that characterizes the appearance of an idea. Within the parameters, paradigms and possibilities imposed by this method, I inquire into the politics of theistic formulation in South Africa prior to the Union of South Africa (1910). Part One of the thesis discusses the politics of the advent of the Christian God in Southern Africa. In the three chapters that comprise this section, I situate colonial beliefs about God within colonialism as a discursive genre; in particular, evidence is provided of the deployment of religious (and in particular theistic) sensibility as a strategic category in the Othering discourse by which European expansion into Southern Africa was promulgated. Chapter Two opens by observing that colonial constructions of Otherness served not only to "erase" (Spivak) autochthonic identity, but also to eulogize and assert the colonial Self. Contextualizing my argument in the debate about the ambiguous effects of colonial missionary activities, I examine the mythically imbued, Othering discourse of Robert Moffat as a particularly conspicuous instance of the missionary qua colonial Self. Chapter Three gathers the concerns of Part One around the problem of theistic formulation in a colonial context, by discussing John Colenso's discovery of a theistic sensibility indigenous to autochthonic Africans as an example of a transgression of the Christian discourse that colonialism made function as truth. Part Two makes use of the categories established in Part One, and applies them to Afrikanerdom: its Othering in British colonial discourse; its religiously imbued, mythic history; and its beliefs in God. Having brought to theistic formulation a Foucauldian suspicion of systems of truth, my argument turns in Part Three to bring a particular theology, *theologia crucis*, alongside Foucault: accepting that the "dogmatic finitization" (Wolfhart Pannenberg) of Christian belief is inherently susceptible to the play of power, I observe that theistic formulation cast in terms of the cross - the "Crucified God" (Jürgen Moltmann) - holds a subversive potential in which may lie possibilities for an alternative to "truth".

*To Mai*

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## Preface

Who or what is God? Uttered through the ages, in countless, labyrinthine avenues of human life and thought, theistic formulation is situated in a particularly ultimate - if not altogether ethereal - dimension of human experience: a longing for meaningful existence, awe at the spectacle of beauty in the world, a desire conjured up by the intimate whisperings of a beyond, a need for truth. Yet meaning all this, discourse about God has also - and perhaps most conspicuously - meant conflict...

The thesis that follows is the product of persistent impressions of incongruity between Christian professions about God and the ambiguous effects of this "truth" in the world; and, as a consequence of this impression, a suspicion that the God of Christianity may actually be an eerily janus-faced figure. Situated at the symbolic threshold of sacred truth, his smile on those within is unconditional; yet to those outside the walls, another face is often apparent: a face marked by the hostile frown of a morality absolutized, by the lines of a Self defined as absolute and self-sufficient Truth, and by a determination to subjugate body and soul. Even a cursory glance at history will reveal that the figure of God has been at once inspiration and incitement; a summons to holiness as well as to a battlefield - to a front line zone in which violence is rendered sanctified and even imperative.

On one hand, Christian beliefs about God have engendered and informed an abundance of humane thought and movements: the development of democratic ideals in Europe, the abolition of slavery in America, Latin American confrontation of First World economic policies, the struggle against apartheid in South Africa - to cite but a few instances. Yet from Constantine to the Crusades, from the cross that marked the colonial mission station to contemporary, neo-colonial myths about

America as God-given and Africa as God-forsaken, other stories are evident - another type of narrative, testifying to a deeply disturbing inextricability between Christian confession and the subjugative praxis that accompanied it. Set in the context of such a mixed past, to believe in the God of Christianity nowadays may feel somewhat problematical: the very fabric of so much Christian discourse has been stretched and manipulated to fit a variety of political designs; overworked, turned inside-out over and over again to achieve ever new effects; and eventually torn through by hegemonic myth. Talk about God is not merely trite, or unfashionable; it has, for many, become somewhat exhausted.

South Africa is a case in point. Against a backdrop of teeming colonial myths about the advent of God and civilization in Africa as the beneficent work of altruistic Europeans, apartheid appeared: at once a gathering point for resistance to a colonialism that had found form in the quasi-British rule of Smuts, as well as a perverse and determined nostalgia for the colonial categories of an antiquated Europe. However multidimensional apartheid's oppression may have been, much of the system's *raison d'être* was - ostensibly - deeply imbued with religious vindication and godly motivation. Among other things, the apparently Calvinist belief in a mysterious divine sovereignty which had once served as solace amid Afrikaner suffering under British rule (while doubtless providing an alternative allegiance to the British sovereign), became a bulwark against the cries of human objection to biblically couched racial oppression.

Amid the conflict that emerged between the centrifugal forces of apartheid's theologies of oppression - seeking to sanctify and even to motivate apartheid - and the theologies of resistance, it became evident that theological sentiments were at once both a vivid reflection of existing power relations as well as an integral feature of their dynamics: whether providing political prerogative with the cloak of truth or

engendering space within which to challenge its hegemony; whether facilitating the promulgation of a new order or offering criteria with which to judge the old; whether motivating a particular political agenda or opposing it, the activities of theology formed an integral dimension in the conditions of "truth" that rendered apartheid's domination as well as reactions against it meaningful and effective. In such conditions, many a belief about the nature of God may seem - albeit somewhat ironically - to become both deeply ambiguous and more precious ...

It is amid the tensions generated by such a dilemma that I attempt, drawing on Michel Foucault's genealogical method, to introduce a suspicion: that *whatever is held as truth can be more keenly understood by looking not at what it affirms - not its seemingly positive content - but at who and how it excludes*. The Foucauldian method has little, it may be argued, to offer theology: it allows one to avoid any traffic with the actual content of Christian belief, opening up another avenue of inquiry altogether - an avenue that tends to blind-side Christianity by insisting on the significance of relations between what is avowed as truth and the traffic of power motivating such truth, designing it, benefiting from it: whose interests does a particular discourse serve? Under what constraints was it developed? What were the actual effects of its truth in the world? ... In the Foucauldian light that swings incessantly, torturously, between truth and power, Christian tradition's essential concern with the truth about God may lose its apparent morality, its heavenly luster ... Instead, it may even, on occasion, begin to appear as the favorite mask of self-interested politics in bed with what might be called *ecclesiofascism*.

However much a Foucauldian genealogical sensibility may tend to interrupt the melodies of truth - however convoluted and mercurial its tones - I would argue that it is precisely as belief about God recedes in this ambiguous, Foucauldian half-

light - precisely as the "fantastic reality of heaven" (Feuerbach) folds in upon itself, a figment of subjectivity absolutized to pernicious effect - that an aperture for thought opens: if theistic formulation is inextricably bound up in relations of power, then a viable theology is possible only in terms of confrontation with the fields of power that form the conditions of discourse. Not by feigning immunity from the conflictual, compromising conditions essential to the development of any truth; not by protestations of godly intentions; not by pretending that the Christian message has not been integrally involved in the most diabolic projects of human history, but rather by avowing and developing an interplay of Christian vision with the incessant operations of power in the concrete world of human affairs - herein may lie the possibility of developing a new "politics of truth" capable of "detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural within which it operates" (Foucault, in Rabinow 1984, 74-5).

Such a possibility emerged, I observe in this thesis, in the front line of the South African struggle against apartheid. Against the backdrop of confrontation with the religiously imbued coercion of apartheid - with an oppression ostensibly sanctioned and sanctified by God - counter-beliefs about God appeared: seemingly alternative formulations that often seemed to operate *from* Christian tradition rather than *within* it <sup>1</sup>, exhibiting a subversive energy and laying claim to a deeply Christian vision that has, through Christendom's two millennia of dominion, defined itself precisely through its opposition to the abuse of power. Inevitably inhibited by the sheer force of mainstream Christianity, such sentiment lurks continually in the shadowy yet surer depths of the counter-current ...

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<sup>1</sup> I draw here on a distinction developed by Charles Wood with reference to Gordon Kaufman's In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology (Modern Theology 10:2, April 1994).

The ultimate hope of the present thesis is that it may contribute to generating conditions by which a peculiarly Christian need may become felt for this obscured and distorted yet insurgent under-side within Christianity. Accordingly, my concluding chapter may seem to risk appearing as though an attempt to salvage theology from the devastations of postmodernity. Be that as it may: the defense of Christendom and its allies I leave to its partisans; my voice belongs rather among the cries of its victims. And it is precisely here - among the casualties of Christianity's colonizing truth - that a need to heal might engender a will to resist; and the resistance, a Will to Community ...

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If humanity can be understood, as Albert Camus once observed (Brée 1962, 58), as that force which cannot but resist gods and tyrants, then this thesis may be understood as an exercise in humanization. The project has enjoyed encouragement from a variety of quarters, and a few people in particular. The Centre for Science Development (HSRC, South Africa) provided much appreciated financial assistance; as I have noted in my acknowledgment, the opinions expressed in this document and the conclusions at which it arrives, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Centre for Science Development. John De Gruchy often provided a theological context to sentiments that seemed to traverse a weird zone running between passionate belief and ecclesial ostracism. I appreciated immensely the agitating, generous responsiveness of Steve Martin, which frequently challenged and informed an inchoate thought. I would also like to thank Jo, for having been willing to learn to live in the conflictual space that is my writing's condition of possibility. Finally, and above all, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my supervisor Charles Villa-Vicencio, through whose example I learned the value of resistance, and therein, gained the Will to Write.

## INTRODUCTION

### THE POLITICS OF TRUTH

### FOUCAULDIAN GENEALOGY

### AND

### SOUTH AFRICAN POST-COLONIALISM

... is postmodernity the pastime of an old man who scrounges in the garbage-heap of finality looking for leftovers, who brandishes unconsciousness, lapses, limits, confines, goulags, parataxes, non-senses, or paradoxes, and who turns this into the glory of his novelty, into his promise of change?

(Jean-Francois Lyotard)

Against the backdrop of an ambiguous past, Christian theistic formulation in contemporary South Africa finds itself in a zone, to draw on Hannah Arendt's words, largely "determined by things which are no longer and which are not yet" (Arendt 1961, 9): by a particular set of vicious conditions in which the multifarious figure of God developed a notorious, prolific ambiguity, and by the needs of the present season of renewal - for it is but early morning of the first day of South Africa's re-creation. In such a moment, it is precisely the discomfiting memory of the winter's nightmare that compels a restless need to go out into the spectacular sunlight of the burgeoning, spring day; and likewise, the agitation for a fuller tomorrow that acts upon the present, compelling a continual reformulation of the past that brought us to this moment ...

This Introduction sets out to locate my post-apartheid perspective within the emerging genre of post-colonial literary criticism and, more specifically, to elaborate the type of methodology with which I endeavor to confront the politics of theistic formulation: the "genealogical" method of Michel Foucault.

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Against preoccupation with the actual truth or otherwise of an idea, Michel Foucault prefers to chart the agitation - the discord, the discrepancies - that characterize the appearance of an idea, a method he describes (after Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals) as "genealogy". Very briefly described, Foucault's genealogical method insists that "power and knowledge directly imply one another" (Foucault, in Hall and Gieben 1992, 293): power

relations produce correlative bodies of discourse; and conversely, discourse inherently engenders power. In a certain light, the genealogical method may seem to resemble the suspicion of Marx, who observed that,

... [t]he ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas. (Karl Marx, in Miranda 1980, 280)

Foucault's famed and somewhat notorious comment that Marx was to the nineteenth century as a fish to water - unable to breathe in any other element! - does suggest a non-Marxian or perhaps a trans-Marxian dimension to the genealogical project. Among other things, Foucault insists that the complexity of relations between material conditions and ideas - of the interplay in which truth and force make each other possible and moreover necessary - cannot be reduced to a movement from material world to ideational. Neither a one-way nor even a two-way street, relations between discourse and power are something like a contemporary spaghetti juncture, exhibiting myriad points of entry and possible directions; lanes designated for the powerful, with restrictions placed on the slow; an occasional policeman introduced to regulate chaos within the designs of authority; and a continual ebb and flow of asymmetrical relations, incessantly asserted and constantly reformulated.

Il n'est pas possible que le pouvoir s'exerce sans savoir; il n'est pas possible que le savoir n'engendre pas de pouvoir. (Foucault, in Cooper 1981, frontispiece)

Roughly translated: the practice of power is impossible without the formation of a correlative knowledge<sup>2</sup>; neither can any knowledge be formulated without engendering power. In other words, power is facilitated and sustained by the promulgation of what becomes accepted as truth - by what Jean and John Comaroff have called "the moral suasion of the sign" (1988:6); and conversely, thoughts otherwise "unthinkable" become accepted, rational configurations as a result of the fields of power relations that form their context. Truth is an indispensable arrow in the quiver of power, and to affirm truth is to assert power; yet without relations of power, truth would be impossible, because it would be unnecessary: for "power and knowledge directly imply one another" (Foucault, in Hall and Gieben 1992, 293).

This concern with interchanges between is what is affirmed as truth (be it scientific knowledge, religious belief or seeming fact) and the conditions that facilitate it characterizes Foucauldian genealogy; and it is such an interest that forms the general parameters of my inquiry into ambiguities that pertain to theistic formulation in South Africa. Before

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<sup>2</sup> "*Savoir* has no direct equivalent in English. Its usual translation as "knowledge" fails to suggest the active dimension of the word, and "know-how" is preferred by some translators. In this thesis, I assume a measure of liberty in exploiting the possible meanings of *savoir* in a religious context to denote the activity of belief - what an adherent might call "truth".

moving on to the South African scenario, however, it may be useful to unpack what I mean - and what I do not mean - by the term "power".

In keeping with Foucault's own use of the term, I want in this thesis to get away as early as possible from singly negative connotations to the word: towards this end (and in the hope of publicizing Foucault to any willing victim!), I feature several quite substantial sections from a somewhat definitive moment in Foucault's development: the explication of his uses of the term "power", featured in the introductory volume to his final and unfinished work, The History of Sexuality:

By power, I do not mean ... a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule .... [nor do I] have in mind a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects, through successive derivations, pervade the entire social body ... these are only the terminal forms power takes (Foucault 1978, 92).

Neither governance nor the subjugation by one party of another constitutes power, according to Foucault; these are but the effects of power, its brief appearance in limited, particular forms. Rather,

... power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain

or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. **Power's condition of possibility ... must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point**, in a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and descendent forms would emanate; it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of its inequality, constantly engenders states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable. **Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere** (Foucault 1978, 92-3, emphasis mine).

Power understood thus is not unlike that depicted in Franz Kafka's The Castle. In this tale, an illusion is promulgated - or rather, an illusion promulgates itself - of a figure within the castle's labyrinth upon whom power is centralized and from whom (via subordinate bureaus), orders and mandates are received. Searching for the office occupied by this figure around which relations and operations within the castle are organized, the principle character of the novel is directed from one bureau to another, according to a diabolically reasonable, administrative logic. Eventually, however, he realizes that there is no such central office, nor any such chief of operations: their existence is but rumor; their power over the various bureaus, but the product of self-generating fears and intra-bureaucratic pressures and motivations - a proliferation of "immanent" force relations, in Foucault's terms, constituting their own organization as "the process which, through

ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them”; “as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus ... [and] in the various social hegemonies”. Understood thus, power is made possible not by “the primary existence of a central point, ... a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and descendent forms ... emanate”; rather, “it comes from everywhere”, says Foucault. Power is omnipresent because it is immanent.

Foucault goes on to advance a number of general propositions about power (Foucault 1978, 94ff.), among them the following; the emphases are mine:

Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; **power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations.**

**Relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are immanent in the latter;** they are the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums which occur in the latter, and conversely, they are the internal conditions of these differentiations; relations of power are not in superstructural positions ... ; **they have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play.**

These two propositions pertain to the paradoxical features of power outlined above, namely the omnipresence and the immanence of power. To this may be added a further paradox: power is at once mercurial and "productive" - continuously effecting the realization of its ever shifting designs, yet "... never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or a piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization" (Foucault, in Gordon 1980, 89). This "net" is no objectifiable structure, moreover, since power "only exists in action" (Foucault, in Gordon 1980, 89), and impressions that power is fixed or immobile are themselves mere effects of power - illusions induced by hegemonic design. Integrally bound up in relationships, power is "the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (Foucault 1976, 93). Foucault's general propositions continue:

Power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective ... they are imbued, through and through, with calculation: **there is no power that that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives. But this does not mean that it results from the choice or decision of an individual subject; let us rather look for the headquarters that presides over its rationality** ... the rationality of power is characterized by tactics that are often quite explicit at the restricted level where they are inscribed ..., tactics which, becoming connected to one another, attracting and propagating one another, but finding their base of support and their condition elsewhere, end by forming comprehensive systems: **the logic is perfectly clear, the aims decipherable, and yet it is often the case that no one is said**

**to have invented them, and few who can be said to have formulated them ....**

Roughly restated: though consciously calculated and directed, the practice of power is the product of much more than the decision-making of any individual human agent (the "subject"): such tactics, even when explicitly aimed at achieving certain ends, are chiefly a suggestion of deeper conditions that render their emergence possible and efficacious - of "the headquarters that presides over [their] rationality". Accordingly, human deliberation may lead to the conscious forming of "comprehensive systems", in which the logic is plain and the aims lucid, "yet it is often the case that no one is said to have invented them, and few who can be said to have formulated them ...." Even when heroic figures are featured as the architects of such a system, they appear so precisely because of their particular connection with the conditions in which they appeared.

Finally, the propositions Foucault articulates in the introductory volume to his History of Sexuality turn to the problem of resistance:

**Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.**

... there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix - no such duality .... [R]ather ...the manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production ... and institutions, are the basis for

wide-ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole .... bring[ing] about redistributions, realignments, homogenizations, serial arrangements, and convergences of the force relations. Major confrontations are the hegemonic effects that are sustained by all these confrontations.<sup>3</sup>

The exercise of power involves the "annexation" of counter-discourses as they develop (Harstock, in Nicholson 1990), not merely as a defensive or reactive mechanism but because the capacity to determine the nature and course of its opposition is itself a necessary function of power. Not only is power the precondition of resistance; without resistance, power lacks its essential object: resistance, insists Foucault, is power's "condition of possibility". Accordingly, power is precisely that condition within which and by which particular critiques become possible; and resistance is inextricably bound up in the paradigms of the power to which it is opposed. "To imagine another system," insists Foucault, "is to extend our participation in the present system" (in Megill 1985, 197-8): even alternative visions are induced by needs felt and made meaningful in relation to present forms of hegemony. In consequence, even thought that liberates eventually - inevitably - enslaves.

A second potentially problematical word encountered in Foucault is "discourse". The term "discourse" is irreplaceable not only because no other word has an equivalent meaning suggests its, but also because it has a

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<sup>3</sup> The proposal beginning "there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition..." occurs earlier in Foucault's propositions, but is featured here in order to gather his comments on the possibility of resistance.

suggestive power in the context of a particular debate: the "post-" literatures with which we are here concerned. To the latter, I turn in a moment; first, the meanings to which "discourse" most readily lends itself.

In its general usage, the term "discourse" may be understood to refer to "a particular set of conceptions about a subject" (De Kock 1996, 195). Hall and Gieben observe,

A discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about - i.e. a way of representing - a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. When statements about topic are made within a particular discourse, the discourse makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way. (Hall and Gieben 1992, 291)

Understood thus, discourse inherently lends itself to strategy in the form of "a common institutional ... or political drift or pattern" (Cousins and Hussain, in Hall and Gieben 1992, 291). Foucault highlights this possibility for political design in discourse by offsetting discourse from language, which he sees as enjoying "an autonomous and self-referring, yet expansive and world-creating existence - in short, language as the ontogenic work of art" (Megill 1985, 208). Allan Megill explains,

The mirror of language, which appears when language disappears and disappears when language appears, is discourse .... Discourse, for Foucault, is language from which all self-reference, all inner play, all metaphorical distortion are eliminated. The sole function of discourse is to serve as a transparent representation of

things and ideas standing outside it. Hence, language and discourse are totally antithetical. In language, the "direction of meaning" is entirely inward, for language recognizes itself as the world; in discourse, it is entirely outward, for discourse recognizes itself only as representing the world (Megill 1985, 208).

The meaning(s) of any discourse - and moreover, of discourse itself - shift continually according to the meaning invested in it, drawn from it, exploited therein ... Accordingly, Foucault is able to observe, in The Archaeology of Knowledge, his own development of the mercurial possibilities of the term:

... [I]nstead of gradually reducing the rather fluctuating meaning of the word "discourse", I believe that I have added to its meanings: treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements; and have I not allowed this same word "discourse", which should have served as a boundary around the term "statement", to vary as I shifted my analysis or its point of application, as the statement itself faded from view? (Foucault 1972, 80)

This mercurial proliferation of possible meanings signified by the term "discourse" is perhaps evocative of precisely that which offsets discourse from utterance as mere utterance: its ability to interact with the play of power. It is thus that "discourse" may be understood to denote "that language by which dominant groups within society constitute the field of

'truth' through the imposition of specific knowledges, disciplines and values" (Slemon 1987, 6) - to suggest, in Foucault's own words, a "regime of truth": "a circular relation [linking "truth"] with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it" (Foucault, in Rabinow 1984, 74, addition mine).

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Within the parameters, paradigms, and possibilities imposed by this theoretical apparatus, we turn to the politics of theistic formulation in South Africa. In the present interval aptly described as *post-apartheid*, in this early morning moment - with the terrors of apartheid's night over and the demands of the new day not yet defined - in these conditions of openness, may lie possibilities for "detaching the power of truth" from the forms of hegemony - social, economic, cultural, religious - within which it has traditionally operated (in Rabinow 1984, 75): if ever there was a moment in which to abandon the weapons of a "truth" that excludes - to throw the pangas of prejudice into the sea - that moment is now.

Leon de Kock, in the opening of Civilising Barbarians, observes the following:

In the wake of South Africa's supposed rebirth as a nation in 1994, it is perhaps apposite to consider what has been remembered and what forgotten, in the country's popularly imagined regeneration .... For the most part, ... the popular imagination seizes upon apartheid and its supposed birth in 1948 ... as an all-encompassing evil of the last resort in the

modern world, the apotheosis of colonial domination, transformed into the legislative fiat of a modern, if perverse, nation-state. In the remembered genealogy of the "new" South Africa, apartheid often figures as an incorporative, originary point of reference, while the finer distinctions of continuity and discontinuity between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, between colonialism in a past as strange as another country, and apartheid in the second half of this century, seem to have become so blurred as to be invisible (De Kock 1996, 1).

Or at least, the colonial experience tends to be understood *through* and even *in terms of* apartheid: the memory of yesterday's ordeal is at once given vivid form and distorted by the nightmare that followed.

It may be that, amid the accusations that have occurred in the aftermath of apartheid's demise, a defensive strategy is emerging within Afrikanerdom that attempts to deflect culpability onto a former enemy, the British. And it may be that apartheid by another name - or a variety of other names - was always latent in British colonialism. Be that as it may: neither De Kock's thesis (apparently) nor mine attempts to lessen or fragment any impression of apartheid's monstrosity - for it is out of the disturbance of precisely such impressions that these arguments have grown: in the latter, it has been the sheer incongruity - the multiple personalities - attached to the figure of a God scripturally defined as love, yet in practice deployed to undergird, sanctify and even to motivate the policies of apartheid.

It has been in attempting to come to terms with the ambiguous - and often hegemonic - effects of what is promulgated as truth, that much of my reading in that literature widely cast as “postcolonial” seemed to develop a particular resonance with many of the hopes and questions I would term “post-apartheid”. Leon de Kock expresses a similar suspicion, as follows:

The notion of decolonising knowledge, which is germane to theories based on the idea of postcolonialism, relies on an enquiry into Western ways of objectifying and domesticating its Others and their worlds from a central point of humanist influence (Europe). It involves the recognition that language was employed within larger configurations of power and influence, as discourse, to gain mastery over the worlds of Europe’s Others. “South Africa” is a case in point... (De Kock 1996, 6).

The opening section of the following chapter unpacks the problem of colonial discourse; suffice it here to introduce *post*-colonial discourse as “the massive intellectual, moral, and imaginative overhaul and deconstruction of Western representations of the non-Western world” (Said 1993, xxi) - “... the quintessential turn,” to draw on David Tracy’s phraseology, “of post-modernity itself - the turn to the other” (Tracy 1994, 108). Postcolonial discourse, in short, is the sound of autochthonic <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> My use of the term “autochthonic” is at once a reflection of a problem as well as a foray into attempting an answer: the nomenclature of peoples historically Othered - in colonial discourse, for example, in which “native” was to be deployed to connote subordination, or in the discourse of apartheid, in which “kaffir” functioned as a term of abuse

peoples, previously cast as Other by colonial “regimes of truth”, finding their own voice - “a *disidentificatory* self-expression,” on one hand, endeavoring to “dissolve the deeply embedded residues of colonist discourse which remain long after formal colonialism has departed” (De Kock 1996, 11) - as well as a discovery, on the other hand, of emerging possibilities: it is the sound (to adapt Arendt’s phraseology) of that which is “entirely determined by things which are no longer and which are not yet” (Arendt 1961, 9). And it is amid such voices - amid the insistent, angry cries of colonizing truth’s casualties - that I am wanting to create space within which to discuss possibilities for theistic formulation in post-apartheid South Africa.

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The thesis is divided into four sections: following the present introduction to the Foucauldian genealogical method I deploy, and to its possible pertinence for post-apartheid South Africa, I turn to explicitly address the politics of theistic formulation. Part One of the thesis discusses what I have entitled - with deliberate ambiguity - “The God of Colonialism”. In the three chapters that comprise this section, I situate colonial beliefs about God within the framework - within the discursive context - of colonial discourse.

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- has no ready, de-ideologized option. Occasionally, I have used “indigenous” to suggest a contrast with the importations of colonialism, though this risks dehumanizing those I mean to indicate as a form of life akin to plants. Perhaps the very distance of the ancient Greek “autochthonic” (roughly meaning, “earliest known inhabitants; that which springs from the land itself”) will render it somewhat innocuous - however artificial ... I follow De Kock (1996), among others, in this preference.

Endeavoring to debunk colonial mythic conceptions of God as a homogeneous entity of defined origin, Chapter One opens by observing what might be described as the politics of the advent of the Christian God in Africa: in short, that the God shipped in by Colonialism was a protean figure, infused with the pressures of political expedience and a galloping hegemony. After situating colonial theistic formulation within colonialism as a discursive genre - that is, as an instance of colonial discourse - I provide evidence of the deployment of religious (and in particular, theistic) sensibility as a strategic category in the Othering discourse by which European expansion into Southern Africa was promulgated; thus, as the chapter title suggests, I argue that very God of Christianity appeared to collude in colonial constructions of autochthonic Otherness.

Chapter Two opens by observing that colonial constructions of Otherness served not only as an "erasure" (Spivak) of autochthonic identity, but also as a somewhat eulogistic assertion of colonial belief in itself: "the colonial Self," I observe, "is but the inverted figure of the colonized Other, each discursive form but the reversible side of a single mask". Contextualizing my argument in the somewhat familiar debate about the ambiguous effects of colonial missionary activities, I examine the mythically imbued, Othering discourse of Robert Moffat as a particularly conspicuous instance of the missionary qua colonial Self. In addition to introducing myth as a discursive category - from which I draw in Part Two's discussion of the God of Afrikanerdom - this chapter endeavors to make manifest the confusion of Christian and colonial imperatives that marked the discourse of colonial mission qua colonial mission: imperial Christianity, I observe,

promulgated itself by depicting autochthonic identity as an antagonistic Other in grievous need of submission to the will of the God of Colonialism.

Chapter Three gathers the concerns of Part One around the problem of theistic formulation. In sharp contrast to Moffat, the figure of John Colenso, I observe, constitutes a (somewhat ambiguous) transgression of the Christian discourse that colonialism made function as truth. Colenso's discovery, in particular, of a theistic sensibility indigenous to autochthonic Africans entailed a violation of the discursive space colonialism sought to generate for a "subject people" (Bhabha): it constituted a challenge to the coercive God of Colonialism; yet Colenso remains a deeply ambiguous figure, I note, insofar as he conducted this attack in the name of the God of that very Colonialism.

Part Two makes use of the categories established in the Part One, the central concerns and sequence of its chapters forming a parallel with that of the first part: Chapter Four (the first of Part Two) draws on the notion of colonial discourse established in Chapter One, when it turns to the Othering of the Afrikaner; Chapter Five (the second of Part Two) employs the thoughts about myth elaborated in Chapter Two in its discussion of religiously imbued histories of Afrikanerdom under British Colonialism; and Chapter Six, like Chapter Three, gathers the section around the problem of theistic formulation.

Parts One and Two are thus designed as two instances of a sequence: the promulgation of Othering discourse as a strategy by which to generate space for a "subject people" (Bhabha); in this void, the appearance of a mythically imbued discourse; and the place of theistic formulation in this process. Within this framework, Parts One and Two together attempt to

suggest theistic conditions by which the colonizing, Othering politics that would eventually become apartheid could be rendered a Christian imperative.

Having brought to theistic formulation a Foucauldian suspicion of systems of truth (Parts One and Two), my argument seeks in Part Three to bring a particular theology, the theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*), alongside Foucault - alongside: in hearty agreement with his characteristic suspicion of truth's positive content; deploying his methodological weaponry against hegemonic theology and theological hegemony; and addressing the gaping nihilistic wound that marks his sentiment with possibilities for a resurrection of theistic formulation in terms of Christopraxis ...

Part Three begins by observing the problem a Foucauldian genealogical method poses for theology generally: what Wolfhart Pannenberg refers to as the "dogmatic finitization" of Christian belief is, I argue, inherently susceptible to the play of power: it is not by coincidence, nor as the result of ungodly intentions, but rather, I contend, as a result of its very claim to truth that Christianity invites in a crowd of complex imperatives and prerogatives: to defend and to define; to belong and to exclude; to promulgate and to Other ... In consequence, unless Christianity - as a system of truth - becomes "crucified to itself", it will remain incapable of developing conditions by which resistance may become possible amid the complex network of strategic relations that constitute human society.

While recognizing the disparate meanings of the cross in history, I argue that theistic formulation cast in terms of the cross - the "Crucified God" (Moltmann) - holds a subversive potential that constitutes an alternative to discursively oriented truth: God consummately manifest in a narrative of

agapeic (empathetic) identification with precisely that which is other than divinity - humanity. In answer to the question I pose in my Preface, "Who or what is God", I argue that the only conditions - the only medium - within which such a knowledge may become possible is agape (to draw on biblical diction): empathetic openness (in postmodern phraseology) to the Other.

Bringing a Foucauldian critique to theology and a theological critique to Foucault is perhaps an inherently problematical project. The novelty of the approach may appear somewhat pretentious to theologians, and archaic among those who - like Schleiermacher's "cultured despisers of Christianity" feel theology to be an outmoded concern; the strategies may appear crude; the conclusions will be premature: theologians may find its *modus operandi* unfair and unhelpful; at the opposite extreme, the secularists most familiar with Foucault might - wonder whether theology is even worthy of such interest; to such readers, the thesis may seem no more than an artifact of an obsolete discourse. It is precisely the transgressive space of this cultural ambiguity that I hope to exploit in this thesis ...

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## PART ONE

### THE GOD OF COLONIALISM

As explorer of the wilderness I have always thought myself an evangelist and endeavoured to bring to the heathen the gospel of the sparrow, which falls but falls with design. There are acts of justice, I tell them ..., and acts of injustice, and all bear their place in the economy of the whole. Have faith, be comforted, like the sparrow you are not forgotten.

Over them I then pronounced sentence of death.

(J. M. Coetzee, Dusklands)

## Chapter One

### Theistic Sensibility and Colonial Discourse

#### The Collusion of God

in

#### Colonial Constructions of Autochthonic Otherness

What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity (Foucault, in Rabinow 1984, 79).

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The quest for original truth is an illusion-ridden activity. Michel Foucault observed that projects to locate an ideal historical moment at which a particular vision occurs in its purest form generally reveal not fixed, perfect sources of truth, but struggle - dissension: conflict between proliferating designs of power, discourse marked by hegemonic undercurrents, as well as continual counter-actions. Like the quests of a certain late medieval figure named Quixote, such projects operate and are rendered meaningful thanks to a significant measure of faulty vision. For like the Don who perceived windmills as giants, inquiries into ideational origin tend to see truth of enormous proportions in structures which in fact comprise little more than an

illusory still center around which the winds of thought circulate and are signaled; winds from a vast element of incessant agitation in boundless space, their flux breathing momentarily in artificial structures of human creation.

The present section endeavors to provide a genealogy of the God conspicuously collaborative in the expansion of European interests into Southern Africa: the God who appeared but fractionally senior to the Queen; whose Cross appeared in reiterated, multicolored form in the flag of Great Britain, the Union Jack; whose glorious Kingdom did come - even in the dark Continent - but then appeared to leave, as the sun set on imperial Britain. Whatever its *actual* effects - whatever violations of human life and rights, whatever praxis its defense entailed - colonial ascendancy was morally supported - and even *required* - by God.

Yet this God, I shall argue, was a somewhat protean figure: though a condition integral to the process by which the Colonial project was realized, the advent of the Christian God in Africa had no prior existence above and beyond this world of forms, no appearance in a moment of stillness before the turbulence of history's tides, or - through special revelation to a few blessed enough to have been born British - *between* such tides; no, the coercive God of Colonialism was shipped in, a somewhat damaged figure infused with the pressures of political constraint, his prolific hegemony a product of relations within which states of power were engendered, defined and delimited. This God was a prolific power amid a proliferation of powers; omnipresent - not because he could encompass everything, but because belief in him could be exercised from innumerable positions and with a plethora of possible pernicious effects.

Our discussion of the advent of the Christian God in Africa begins by inquiring into those historical and discursive conditions by which such formulations - by which the trends and shifts in belief about God that attend this event - became "thinkable". Our task is not to provide a definitive picture of events: such projects I abandon in the belief that what actually happened is both hidden in and suggested by the continual - *conflictual* - shift of reconstruction, between the multiplicity of interests that have motivated both contemporaneous and ensuing accounts. Instead, I endeavor to chart the conflictual space developed by the advent of Colonialism in Southern Africa vis-à-vis our undergirding question: what is God?

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Colonial theistic trajectories - that is, the trends and shifts in beliefs about God that attend the promulgation of Colonialism - occur within the context of a particular discursive genre, namely colonial discourse. "Colonial discourse" signifies what Foucault would call a "regime of truth", founded on the problem of difference - be it ethnic, historical, social, or cultural: colonial discourse refers to a complex of ideas in which whatever is unlike the hegemon is systematically accentuated or denied, in order to bring it within the ambit of governance. In the words of Homi Bhabha,

... [The] predominant strategic function [of colonial discourse] is the creation of a space for "subject peoples" through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure / unpleasure is incited. It seeks authorization for its strategies by the

production of knowledges of colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest .... (Bhabha, in Thomas 1994, 40).

Colonial discourse is that system of truth by which the promulgation of colonial hegemony is rendered possible: comprehensible and practicable; morally authorized; logical and lucid - self-evident even; persuasively conceivable as necessary and benevolent, as a religious imperative - even as the Will of God. A condition of colonialism's possibility, colonial discourse itself only becomes possible as a result of particular conditions of power - a milieu of expanding material, discursive, political forces: a frontier. "A boundary," observes Martin Heidegger, "is not that at which something stops but ... that from which *something begins its presencing*" (in Bhabha 1994, 1). Viewed in such terms, the promulgation of colonial boundaries may be understood to suggest not a line or a limit, but "a zone of contact" (Lamar and Leonard 1981, 7); not a closed border, but an incessantly shifting liminality defined by the flux of interchange and conflict: a frontier represents an absence of fixity, an uncompleted encounter:

A frontier is a region of intercultural relations between intrusive and indigenous people. Those cultural relations, however, are also power relations. A frontier zone opens with the contact between two or more previously distinct societies and remains open as long as power relations are unstable and contested, with no one group or coalition able to establish dominance. A frontier zone closes

when a single political authority succeeds in establishing its hegemony over the area” (Lamar and Leonard 1981, 7).

Cast in this light, colonialism may be viewed not only as a particular historical moment in which European interests burst through familiar boundaries into a larger world, but also as a metaphor for violation and domination (Dirks 1995, 5) - for intrusion beyond established parameters into a domain of Otherness, for a seizure of that Other world, and for its translation into cartographies reflecting this transgression as discovery, as the spread of civilization, the extension of good will or even the establishment of God’s Will, “on earth as it is in heaven”.

Such cartography takes the form not only of maps indicating geographical possession, but also of discursive patterns upon which the designs and promulgation of colonial interests can be charted. Not least among such patterns has been the deployment of religious sensibility as an integral category in what has become termed “Othering” strategies: those methods by which indigenous Otherness can be cast in terms compatible with the hegemonic designs of the colonizing power.

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Colonial accounts of the interaction that occurred in the frontier generated by European expansion into Southern Africa exhibit a profusion of belief in the morality, religious sensibility and status of colonials as representatives of civilization; and attendant upon these utterances lauding the European self, is a prolific denunciation of indigenous Otherness: either

in terms of a “degeneracy paradigm” (Du Toit 1983)<sup>5</sup>; or as the bizarre (in which instance, it offered European audiences an alluring mixture of romance and repugnance); or - and not infrequently - as an inferior version of things European. Indigenous Africa, from its landscapes and weather to entire African peoples, was depicted in terms of lack: the bestial jabbering of Africans was no language; and their behavior evinced no suggestion of any guiding morality or rational faculty; nor could their superstitions be rightly called a religion - for it showed no sign of any theistic sensibility whatsoever.

In 1610, Pyrard de Laval observed that the Hottentots “live without law or religion, like animals .... The people who live along this coast are very brutish and savage, as stupid as can be and without intelligence.” (Raven-Hart 1967, 47). De Laval’s sentiments were reiterated in the decades that followed: “brutt and savadg, without Religion, without langaug, without Lawes or gouernment, without manners or humanittie”; “little or no religion”; “most miserable, destitute of Religion in any kind”; they “know noe kind of god or religion”; “no laws, policies, religions or ordinances can be discerned among them”; “without any Religion, Lawe, Arte or Civility”; “hideous Countenance, scarce any use of Reason, and less of Religion” (Raven-Hart 1967, 57, 60, 70, 77, 101, 128, 140, 156).

Such assertions were no mere observation of fact: indigenous lack of civilized morals and true religion was but the underside of colonial self-eulogy, excited and accentuated by the force it exerted over Otherness. Descriptions of African degeneracy operated reflexively, to reinforce

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<sup>5</sup> The paradigm would perhaps be better termed “civilization / degeneracy”, to suggest the promulgation in the discourse of mutually defining polarities.

“civilized” norms and attendant prerogatives; such notions formed, in Marxian phraseology, “the ideal expression of dominant material relationships”; in Foucauldian, a discursive strategy for the subjugation of indigenous bodies: an integral dimension of the process by which expanding European forces rendered themselves comprehensible as the salvific swell of Christian civilization.

... European commentators concluded that people so depraved and bestial as to lack religion had no right to possess such a land and agreed, in principle, as one journal recorded in 1612, that it was “a greatt pittie that such creattures as they bee should enjoy so sweett a countrey.” In Europe, the influential cosmographer Peter Heylen repeated this sentiment in 1621 by observing, “pity ‘tis that so beautiful and rich a country should be inhabited by so barbarous and rude a people.” As travelers found in other regions during the seventeenth century, most of the world was inhabited by people who appeared more bestial than human. Since animals had no recognized rights to life, liberty, or property, the “creatures” who occupied those rich and beautiful countries could be dispossessed or displaced with impunity. In the Cape, travel reports about the absence of religion among the Hottentots were a prelude to European settlement .... (Raven-Hart 1967, 58; Heylen 1677, 64).

David Chidester’s ironic tone may be faulted for suggesting an oversimplified picture. His insinuatively entitled Savage Systems is, however, but one of a number of works that chart a co-incidence of discoveries of indigenous religion with the closure of colonial hegemony in previously

contested frontiers, as open hostilities were superseded by the exigencies of trade and interdependency; and conversely, that colonial denial of religious and moral sensibility among Africans is generally indicative of a disputed frontier. Amid the shifting frontiers of the Cape, for example, a somewhat bewildering vacillation appears in colonial discourse between observations of an absence among Hottentots of any trace of religion (in the very early encounters; again in the 1680s, once the initial Dutch settlement began to expand; and even as late as the 1770s, amid the last throes of Hottentot resistance); and conversely, affirmations of a Hottentot religion as a frontier closed: amid the early proliferation of trade that followed the establishment of the Dutch station in 1652; for much of the eighteenth century, during which Hottentot resistance was contained; and in the nineteenth century amid Hottentot absorption into the mission stations (Chidester 1996, 23). The subtext to this process of alternate discovery and denial of indigenous religious sensibility is evident: it signaled "an intervention in the local frontier conflicts over land, trade, labor, and political autonomy" (Chidester 1996, 14).

To recognize the play of material exigencies in colonial attitudes to indigenous religious sensibilities - to avow colonial "discoveries" as a fiction contingent upon varying colonial interests - is, however, to observe only one side of the Foucauldian interplay. For the seemingly empirical truth of this often contradictory discourse itself served as an impetus for the expansion of the very material interests that had been its condition of possibility. Early colonial discovery / un-discovery of a lack of religious capacity among indigenous inhabitants of Africa may therefore be understood as constructions that at once participated in and promulgated a larger activity: the establishment and systematizing of mutually sustaining polarities in the

conflict zones engendered by European expansion into Southern Africa. These discursive paradigms operated reflexively to suggest and reinforce European norms in the face of what was unlike itself; and conversely, provided "a space for 'subject peoples' through the production of [particular] knowledges" (Bhabha). This process would find particularly conspicuous and somewhat diverse form in the missionary discourse of nineteenth century British colonialism.

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## Chapter Two

### Christian Colonialism and Colonizing Christianity

#### The Role of Myth

in

#### Missionary Constructions of the Colonial Self

There are two antagonistic forces now at work in this field of South Africa, already in stern contention for the mastery over the native races, sure to gather into yet greater strength and to close in yet deadlier struggle. These are the hosts of good and evil respectively. On the one side are ranged the following parties, viz.: (1) The truths and powers of Christ's Kingdom of grace ... (2) The elevating and stimulating powers of the Educational world, plied by enlightened, benevolent and earnest men. (3) The countless, nameless influences for good derived from continual friendly intercourse between the natives and a large community of civilized and Christian men. On the other side are ranged the principalities and powers of darkness .... [which include] the whole body of South African heathenism, with its gross superstitions, its idle habits, and coarse vices (John Buchanan, "Ultimate Usefulness", in De Kock 1996, 92).

The colonial Self is but the inverted figure of the colonized Other, each discursive form but the reversible side of a single mask... For in the space generated by colonial Othering strategies for a "subject people", another presence may be felt: a positive figure, amid the negativity of indigenous lack; an agent of light in the African darkness, generously there, expansive in the void; called there by God and invited by native need; there to fill the God-shaped, colonially identified vacuum.

The figure is that of a colonial missionary: an imperial functionary of seemingly altruistic disposition, in whom colonial and Christian imperatives and would find conspicuous - albeit often somewhat contradictory - form. John Philip, in the preface to his Researches in South Africa, is explicit about the mutual inextricability of Christian mission and colonial interest:

While our missionaries, beyond the borders of the colony of the Cape of Good Hope, are everywhere scattering the seeds of civilization, social order, and happiness, they are, by the most unexceptional means, extending British interests, British influence, and the British empire. Wherever the missionary places his standard among a savage tribe, their prejudices against the colonial government give way; their dependence upon the colony is increased by the creation of artificial wants; confidence is restored; intercourse with the colony is established; industry, trade and agriculture spring up; and every genuine convert from among them made to the Christian religion becomes an ally and friend of the colonial government (Philip 1828, ix-x).

Elsewhere, Philip would observe that the mission stations provided “the cheapest and best military posts that a wise government [could] employ to defend its frontiers against the predatory incursions of savage tribes” (Philip 1828, 227).

While serving to epitomize missionary implication in the Othering patterns of colonial discourse, the figure of John Philip is also typical among colonial missionaries for a somewhat contradictory reason: Philip frequently found himself castigated and ostracized by fellow colonials (among them, missionary colleagues) for championing the cause of indigenous Africans against colonial abuses; his argument, that missionary duty involved defending the weak against the strong - even if that meant “placing themselves at the head of one of the contending parties (Shaw, in Hastings 1985, 6). More than a conspicuous example of missionary embroilment in colonial Othering strategies, the figure of John Philip is illustrative of even notorious opposition among colonial missionaries *qua colonial missionaries* in the face of colonial abuses of autochthonic communities. The conscience of the colonies that provided the very conditions necessary to their mission, missionaries were often troubling and troublesome figures among their own kind: troublesome in their interference - whether collaborative or oppositional - in administrative affairs and the implementation of imperial policy; and troubling, in their moral heroics and physical marginality.

The following chapter of this thesis will examine one such figure, John Colenso, with particular regard to problems of theistic formulation. For the moment, however, suffice it to note that even among colonial missionary figures as disparate as Philip, Van der Kemp or a Robert Moffat - evidence

abounds of a dual allegiance resulting from their identification of Christianity with the norms of British civilization - from religious sensibilities to social decorum (Hetherington 1978, 112). "The missionaries," in Villa-Vicencio's words, "were the conscience of settlers and administrators alike, but always a conscience operating within the accepted structure of colonial domination .... They were trapped in the very structures they sought to redeem" (Villa-Vicencio 1988, 62). Similarly, James Cochrane observes:

Missionary enterprise, remaining always beyond radical self-criticism, could do no other than transmit the values and structures embodied in British imperial colonialist expansion without sufficient awareness to distinguish firmly between what was intrinsically worthwhile and what could lead to long-term destructive consequences for precisely those people whom they believed themselves to be championing (Cochrane 1987, 23).

The missionary debate is a familiar one, and it is not one that the present thesis pretends to hope to solve. It is, rather, in this portentous, mist-laden atmosphere, in this ominous zone where colonial expedience appears as though Christian imperative, that we inquire into depictions of the Self in colonial missionary discourse: having depicted colonial observations of indigenous lack as the underside of colonial self-eulogy, excited and accentuated by the force it exerted over Otherness, it behoves us to inquire into the terms by which the colonial Self promulgated itself: lured into the space - the void - generated by colonial Othering strategies for a "subject people", called by God to answer heathen need, the missionary would represent Truth: the epiphany of colonial Christianity; and, in consequence, the very epitome of Christian colonialism. For "conversion," in the words

of Greg Cuthbertson, was “the initial phase in the subversion of African societies by Europeans” (in Villa-Vicencio 1987, 17).

It is beyond the bounds of the present thesis to provide an extensive examination of the colonial Self, our endeavor here will limit itself to highlighting a particular instance of this mercurial but highly suggestive phenomenon: the self-portrayal of Robert Moffat in his Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa - this in the hope that the subject may prove itself worthy of further discussion, outside of this thesis.

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Leon De Kock, in a chapter entitled “Missionary Heroes” in his groundbreaking work, Civilising Barbarians, observes a literary dimension to Moffat’s self-perceptions: a romanticization, roughly stated, of his missionary activity in literary paradigms. Drawing on De Kock’s observations, it may be useful to situate Moffat’s discourse within a category frequently deployed in Religious Studies: myth.

Myth, notes John Cumpsty (1991, 78ff), may be roughly understood as “verbal symbol” (symbol in the form of words). What is symbol? According to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, symbol is a form of analogy that is “characterized by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal .... (partaking) of the reality which renders it intelligible” (Coleridge, in Abrams, 1981 196): through myth, somewhat less elegantly stated, particular details of concrete actuality come to suggest a larger picture, a meaning beyond the immediate, mundane world. Such meaning does not, moreover, function in terms of literal explanation, but may be “suffused with emotion,

... (arising) out of the depths of human experience where the barriers of objectivity are removed" (Fawcett 1970, 101). For myth is produced by the imagination in response to a particular situation (Hooke 1963, 11ff); its effects, rather than its literal truth, are significant.

How are mythic effects achieved? Firstly, notes Thomas Fawcett, in The Symbolic Language of Religion (1970, 102ff), by opening out in multiple directions, by evoking various applications, rather than containing a single meaning: mythological gods, for example, often have numerous functions and frequently possess several personalities. Secondly, the symbols of myth assume narrative form - as in parable, but with a complexity that pre-requires "spiritual perceptivity" (Fawcett 1970, 102) among its listeners. Thirdly, myth operates as metaphor, not as simile: its analogical character is sustained without being overtly signaled. This structure is not a failing, but the medium by which the myth confronts and addresses reality directly - removing "the barriers of objectivity" and unifying mythic truths with the experience, symbol with meaning - even, at times, in the face of contradictory evidence ... In Fawcett's words, "the existential meaning of the myth (is) not clothed in the symbol, but perceived through it" (Fawcett 1970, 103), and in the words of Frankfort et al: "The imagery is inseparable from the thought. It represents the form in which the experience has become conscious" (Frankfort and others 1946, 7).

Drawing this into the context of our Foucauldian hermeneutic, what significance might myth understood thus have for inquiries into relations between truth and power? Michel Foucault observes,

To describe a formulation qua statement does not consist in analysing the relations between the author and what he says (or wanted to say, or said without wanting to); but in determining what position can and must be occupied by any individual if he is to be subject to it (Foucault 1972b, 95-6<sup>6</sup>).

Against accusations of exhibiting the structuralist tendency of asserting the significance of the relation between a speaker and the content of what is said, Foucault insisted that such structures were inevitably somewhat mercurial: what could be observed, however, was the position someone would have to be adopting in making a particular statement - what position would be necessary in order for the utterance to be made.

Accordingly, in turning to examine the mythic dimensions of Moffat's self-portrayal, our concern is not with the truth or falsity of his statements - not, for example, with the factual accuracy (or otherwise) of his view of the land as accursed and its people as vicious - for myth, as we have noted, is a discursive genre in which "the barriers of objectivity" are lifted and the language "suffused with emotion" (Fawcett 1970, 101). Rather, in Moffat's imaginative pursuit after the Coleridgean "translucence of the eternal" in the mundane yet alluring particularity of indigenous Africa, we will endeavor to discern the position he is necessarily adopting in his mythically imbued portrayal of himself qua colonial missionary.

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<sup>6</sup> By "subject", Foucault is referring to what might more commonly be described as the author: Foucault's tendency to insist on the material and discursive constraints acting upon any speaker rendered the possibility of actually authoring a discourse problematical; any such discourse, Foucault believed, was virtually already uttered, rendering the speaker the subject of its demands rather than the creator or possessor of its contents.

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In the introduction to his Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa, Robert Moffat asserts the following:

... the Gospel of Christ is the only instrument which can civilize and save all kindred nations of the earth. This has been verified by the labours of Missionaries in South Africa, and we have only to publish it through the length and breadth of that great Continent, in order to elevate and cheer its degraded and sorrowing inhabitants, and introduce them to the fellowship of Civilized Nations (Moffat 1842, ii).

Moffat's perception of Africans as "degraded and sorrowing" was at once a product of inveterate Othering strategies by which European expansion into Southern Africa was promulgated, as well as a suggestion of the historical context - the *Zeitgeist* - from which he himself emerged: namely, "the spirit of industrious self-upliftment", in De Kock's words, which swept through early nineteenth century Britain, "as the Industrial Revolution transformed the human landscape" (De Kock 1996, 143). Noël Mostert, in his monumental epic of South Africa's creation, Frontiers, describes this atmosphere as follows:

Evangelical religion was to become the emotional accompaniment to emergent industrial Britain. It was a spiritual gale through the country after 1740, gathering power decade after decade, to

become an unprecedented outpouring of public feeling and emotional excitement (Mostert 1992, 283).

Our concern here is not with the manifold material prospects Southern Africa must have represented to the gaze of emerging British industrialism. It lies rather among the myths by which this gaze sought to realize the objects of its desire - with that expanding, colonizing hegemony that cast itself in magnanimous terms as Christian civilization; and with an evangelical élan that understood itself as the civilizing force of Christianity. Our discussion will focus on an integral aspect of Moffat's cosmology - that is, of his mythologized perception of the African environment - and the place of himself qua colonial missionary therein.

An integral tropic dimension of Moffat's cosmology is that of indigenous landscape as a hitherto barren wilderness (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991) - a wanton wasteland, "a most ungenial soil" (Moffat 1842, 31), in which seeds of Christian truth and labor are planted by the missionaries. This hardness, according to Moffat, was the result of sin:

As an inhabited country, it is scarcely possible to conceive one more destitute and miserable; and it is impossible to traverse its extensive plains, its rugged undulating surface, and to descend to the beds of waterless rivers, without viewing it as emphatically a "land of droughts," bearing the heavy curse of

"Man's first disobedience, and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste

Brought death into the world, and all our woe.”

(Moffat 1842, 66)

In such a setting, in which the African earth is itself resistant and its denizens hostile and savage, the mission station constitutes a haven of pastoral bliss:

The mission station in Kaffraria literally constitutes folds, surrounded by evil spirits, as well as by beasts of prey; and all that rally round our standard are like so many sheep gathered together out of the wilderness.

Innocuous though this pastoral sanctuary may seem, Moffat's idyll is but an epitome of colonial Othering strategy. Rendered meaningful and necessary precisely by the indigenous landscape it has infiltrated and cast as a dissolute, diabolic and vicious Other, Kaffraria is modeled on metropolitan morality - an alien import, and an indication more of conditions “back home” than of that and those it has Othered. Leon De Kock comments as follows:

Moffat envisioned the land as barren, heavily imbued with the consequence of sin, and peopled by immoral barbarians, in contrast to the paradisaical, fenced garden of Protestant industry and virtuous cultivation (De Kock 1996, 149).

The expedience of Moffat's Manichean cosmology is not limited to writing a job for himself. If evangelism did serve as what Mostert calls “the emotional accompaniment to emerging industrial Britain”, and if a consequence of these conditions was an ethically imbued “spirit of

industrious self-upliftment”, then it is perhaps inevitable that the likes of Moffat should have sought to affirm the value of work as an integral dimension of their gospel. But the extent to which such a message accorded with colonial projects would perhaps only become glaring as the exigencies of industrialism invaded colonial South Africa. In the years leading up to the discovery of gold on the Reef, The Christian Express, mouthpiece of the Lovedale missionaries, could affirm the utility of Christianity to the colonial project thus:

We believe Christianity will be a chief cause of [the natives’] becoming a working people ....

How this ... comes to be is twofold. Christianity creates needs. Generally speaking, every man will work just as much as he requires to do and not more. There will be a constant relation between the time a man works and his necessities ... If you want men to work, then, you must get them to need. Create need and you will supply stimulus to work; you enlist the worker’s own will on the side of labour. Few men anywhere, and certainly no heathen men, ever work for the mere pleasure of working.

Now, the speediest way of creating needs among these people is to Christianise them. As they become Christianised, they will want more clothing, better houses, furniture, books, education for their children, and a hundred other things which they do not have now and never have had. And all these things they can get by working, and only by working.

But Christianity also teaches the duty of working, and denounces idleness as a sin.

So to Christianise a Kaffir is the shortest way, and the surest, to make him put his hand steadily and willingly to the work that is waiting to be done. This will make it both his interest and his duty to work, will enlist, besides his bodily appetites, his home affections, his mental powers, and his conscience, on the side of industrious habits (The Christian Express 1878, 1-2).

The political expedience to the industrial British metropolis of converting lethargic and morally deficient Africans to a gospel that required industrious behavior is readily obvious. Colin Bundy, in The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry notes,

Missionary enterprise, ultimately, was concerned to transform social institutions and practices that were alien or incompatible with capitalist society into ones that were compatible, and hence to encourage a total change in the world-view of the people in whose midst they lived ... the mission societies and their most influential spokesmen sought consciously to restructure African society along lines that would attach them securely to the British capitalist economy (Bundy 1988, 37).

And among the conditions by which this imperative became possible - "thinkable", as legitimate and even morally necessary - was a perception of the land and its denizens as a vast lack ... Suffused with "agrarian metaphors" (Comaroff 1985, 138), the gaze of the missionary bent on Christianizing Africa,

... [had] searched in vain for recognizable margins and limits. In this void it was the very act of narration that imposed an order of space and time, making the metaphorical leap from these formless wastes to known cultural referents (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 175).

Thus the indigenous identity of the land and its various denizens could be “erased”, to use Spivak’s phraseology (Guha and Spivak 1988, 11), misrecognized and reconfigured - “textually objectified” (De Kock 1996, 143) - in deprecatory terms: an inferior version of the familiar; a deficient form of the Same, its lack biblically explicable: a landscape rude and inchoate, at once a sign of the God-forsakenness that is the consequence of sin, and the object of the missionary’s salvific gaze. And within this mythic scenario of appalling moral lack - this “evangelical environmental moral economy” (Grove 1989, 180) - the mytho-poetic missionary appeared, the emissary of God and imperial Britain.

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In a chapter of Civilizing Barbarians entitled “Missionary Heroes”, Leon De Kock notes that the transcultural encounter of Moffat, like that of many other colonial observers, often found “recoded” form in “the cramping confines of a tragic stereotype” (De Kock 1996, 144). In these transposed literary forms, accounts of the moral depravation of Africans, “... sunk into the lowest depths of ignorance, superstition, disorganization and debasement” (Moffat 1842, :2), denoted their need for salvation; and amid such tragic sinfulness, missionaries were portrayed as heavily mythologized

heroes of Christian truth and civilizations morals. In the introduction to his Missionary Labours and Scenes, Moffat sets out his intentions as follows:

[... to] show that, amid circumstantial differences there is a radical identity in the operations of human depravity, in Asia, in Polynesia, and in Africa; and that while the Gospel is the only, it is also the uniform remedy for the distress of a world convulsed by sin, and writhing with anguish. [This book] will present striking examples of the complete subjugation of some of the fiercest spirits that ever trod the burning sands of Africa, or shed the blood of her sable offspring (Moffat 1842, v).

De Kock observes a subtext in the passage, as follows:

The demands of Moffat's salvation narrative were, however, self-serving: others were written into a discursively constituted / erased subjectivity so that the missionary protagonist could present *himself* as an unquestionable hero of civilization. In Moffat's case, this heroism was a curious mix of self-aggrandisement and exotic fictionalising on the one hand, and self-abnegation, supported by postures of humility on the other.

This mixture of (heroic!) humility and unabashed heroism is evident when Moffat disclaims authorship of his narrative, describing himself rather as "a Witness, who most earnestly desires to establish and to enforce the claims of millions, for whom he has hitherto lived and laboured - whom he ardently loves, and with whom - all black, barbarous, and benighted as they are - he hopes to live, labour, and die" (Moffat 1842, v-vi). Thus Moffat's

mythic narrative constitutes an instance of what Mary Louise Pratt, in Imperial Eyes, terms the practices of “anti-conquest”: “strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony” (Pratt 1992, 7).

Moffat’s mythic eulogy of the colonial missionary in Africa is less subtle, however, when deployed in deferential allusion to his pantheon of heroic antecedents, such as pioneer missionary Johannes Van der Kemp:

Vanderkemp, who was a native of Holland, seemed, from his experience, natural firmness of character, and distinguished talents, prepared for the Herculean task, at once to force his way into the headquarters of the enemy, and raise the standard of the cross amidst a dense population of barbarians, the most powerful, warlike, and independent of all the tribes within or without the boundaries of the Cape Colony ... The party arrived at Graaf Reinet on June 29, after having, with their attendants and cattle, experienced many narrow escapes from lions, panthers, and other wild beasts, as well as from Bushmen and Hottentots, of character still more ferocious (Moffat 1842, 23).

Moffat’s description of Van der Kemp as possessing a “natural firmness of character” seems somewhat incongruous, given the reproach with which the figure of this trailblazing missionary would eventually be regarded - particularly among late- and neo-colonial scholars - for having married an autochthonic adolescent and for the “eccentricity” of his preference for indigenous garb to “civilized dress” (Shepherd 1940, 11-12). And to portray

the “Bushmen” (San) and the “Hottentots” (Khoikhoi) as “more ferocious” than wild beasts may, today, seem somewhat discrepant in light of subsequent scholarship that would depict the San and the Khoikhoi as mildly disposed hunter pastoralists (Mostert 1992, 22-39), prior to their encounter with European intrusions into Southern Africa.

Such possibilities were, however, inexpedient to Moffat’s mythologized narrative, and would have inevitably disrupted “the structural coherence of the romantically conceived quest / journey” (De Kock 1996, 147). Moffat’s missionary labors are conducted in an autochthonic setting that is, of necessity, a moral wasteland, the location of diabolic hostility - a mythic underworld, into which the colonial missionary, as one sent from a better world, could venture: a hero of Christian civilization, the herald of the civilizing force of Christianity; his expedition, in the words of John and Jean Comaroff,

... an odyssey of sacred and imaginative incorporation, bringing the ‘regions beyond’ under European gaze, .... extending the horizons of their European audience - and, with them, the conceptual frontiers of empire (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 172).

The Comaroffs go on to note that, by the late nineteenth century, stories concerned with missionary “labors and scenes” had evolved into a full-blown literary genre in Europe: it was, in short, “a literature of the imperial frontier, a colonizing discourse that titillated the Western imagination with glimpses of radical otherness - over which it simultaneously extended intellectual control” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 172). Such a

literature, I submit, featured a mythological dimension - a lifting of "the barriers of objectivity" amid the exigencies of colonialism's encounter with Southern Africa. And in this symbolically imbued discourse, the translucence of an imperial Christianity made itself manifest through and in an autochthonic particularity, rendering the reality of the latter intelligible only as a hostile Other in dire need of submitting itself to the will of the colonial God.

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## Chapter Three

### The Queen's Bishop amid Other Voices

### John Colenso and the Politics of an African God

No signs of Belief or Religion are to be found among them, ... it is for this reason they are called Cafres (Jodocus Hondius).

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In Chapter One, we noted that colonial affirmations of indigenous theistic sensibilities or apparent lack thereof occurred within a particular context, namely, the development of conditions designed to serve colonial interests - not least among which was the expansion of the colonial frontier, deeper and further into Southern Africa. It is in one such context that the figure of John Colenso (1814-1883) appears. Against the backdrop of the general weakening of indigenous power that resulted from the *mfecane*, the wars that led to Zulu ascendance, British propagandists were able to declare that the area that was to become Natal had been emptied of its previous

inhabitants; with this legitimization, British forces invaded the land, eventually declaring it the territory of the British crown in 1843:

It was asserted by Natal's settlers that the colony had been founded in a region devastated by Zulu raids - an empty land which, once it had been made safe by white initiative and sacrifice, attracted an African population in search of security from Zulu tyranny. This view was an exaggeration, made to justify Natal's policies towards its African inhabitants (Guy 1983, 40).

It is in the context of colonial expansion that reports about Zulu lack of religious sensibility begin to proliferate. The earliest recorded inquiry into Zulu religion to emerge from the frontier is that of Nathaniel Isaacs in the 1820's. Isaacs depicted the Zulu as heavily superstitious - a category that to his European audience suggested the very opposite of having religion: "superstitious" had connotations of heathenism, of a lack of education in matters of science and religion, of a need for the God freely colonial missionaries would bring. Above all, the designation "superstitious" was tantamount to a denial of religion, and as such, served to perpetuate colonial strategies of "erasure" (Spivak) - of misrecognizing and systematizing difference in a politically expedient "regime of truth".

Isaacs' account was followed by inquiries made the following decade by a retired military man-now missionary, Allen Gardiner. Unlike Isaacs, Gardiner observed multiple traces of religion - albeit among Zulus of a particular circumstance: most of Gardiner's encounters were with refugees from the *mfecane* with the exception of a group of Zulus who, having

resisted Dingane, were being retained in colonial custody until, in a gesture of British diplomacy, they would be handed over to the Zulu leader for execution; among these Africans, observed Gardiner, a knowledge of something like the Christian God was evident.

Gardiner's affirmation was, however, juxtaposed with his denial of any religious sensibility whatsoever among the Ngwane, on the open, northern frontier. Such a sharp contrast was perceived to be highly suggestive: belief in God among autochthonic Africans was, in fact, thanks to contact with the colony. Or at least, if the Zulu had ever possessed such sensibilities, it would be through the gracious mediation of the colony that this bliss could be recovered.

It is into such a context - in which God is at once colonial possession and prerogative, and theistic sensibility among Africans measured by the extent of their encounter with colonial beneficence - that John Colenso comes to Africa as bishop of the newly created diocese of Natal. Yearning after "the cheering, humanizing, satisfying feeling for the *actual* wants and sorrows of my fellow men" (in Guy 1983, 14), Colenso carried with him colonial ideals, a Coleridgean sentiment that "new truths could be confronted and welcomed, without loss of older meanings" (Willey 1956, 62), and the "humanitarian, Christian, universalism" (Guy 1983, 25) of Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-1872); and in addition, a narrative of Christopher Columbus. What Colenso encountered, however, during his ten-week, introductory excursion into the frontiers, would undercut colonial deployment of theistic sensibility as an Othering strategy: evidence of a supreme being indigenous to Zulu traditions - and this, from precisely where

he had also encountered “native barbarism in its purest form”: at the kraal of Pakade.

Missionary discourse in south-eastern Africa had, since Van der Kemp, generally used the Khoikhoi word *Uthixo* to signify the Christian God. This importation had, however, been vigorously resisted by Zulu converts, in response to which, missionaries had proposed a variety of neologistic: *uYehova*, *uDio* ... The Zulu supreme being Colenso encountered, on the other hand, enjoyed names indigenous to the Zulu: *uMvelinqangi* and *uNukulunkulu*. What these names signified, moreover, seemed to roughly correspond to “the very ideas contained in the Hebrew words Elohim and Jehovah” (Colenso 1855, 115). Colenso had unearthed what amounted to an autochthonic equivalent - or parallel, at least - to the God previously understood to be the property of the colony.

Colenso's discovery was, however, somewhat ambiguous: on one hand, it does represent a repudiation of established strategies by which colonial discourse sought to generate a space for “subject peoples”. But on the other hand, his “discovery” may be understood to have participated in and contributed to the shifts in colonial strategy that resulted from the establishment, in 1850, of colonial administration in the region: amid the rigors of a contested frontier, colonial accounts of the Zulu had denied autochthonic religious sensibilities; now, following British closure of the frontier, colonial policy was moving towards containment. In such a context, it was somewhat advantageous to have familiar terms with which to apprehend Zulu Otherness - albeit with a marked deficiency, or rather, *precisely with such an indication of lack*. To find similarities between the Zulus of Natal and the Jews of the Old Testament may seem somewhat

farfetched, but where comparisons were possible - in their pastoral lifestyles, for example, and in their warfaring dispositions - the category provided colonial Christians and administrators alike with familiar terms with which what had previously been cast as altogether "other" could now be affirmed - or at least negotiated.

Colenso's extensive morphological comparisons between Zulu religious practice and that of Old Testament Jews may thus be understood to have provided colonial hegemony a means by which to traverse and to chart autochthonic Otherness: amid the shifting exigencies of colonial expansion into Southern Africa, Colenso's transcultural excursion may be understood as having provided terms compatible with colonial design and a mutating, colonial Self. Yet its most conspicuous effect was to draw the ire of the colonial cloister at the Cape, who saw the comparison as primarily an affirmation of indigenous religious sensibilities - and this, as we have noted, implied a challenge to the colonial "regime of truth". For Colenso, moreover, the comparison was reciprocal; its impact, self-reflexive: his use of the Old Testament as model for understanding Zulus implied the possibility of examining the Old Testament in light of its living model, the Zulu; his discovery of an African God shed light on his own; and his encounter with African religious sensibilities, a shadow on the behavior of ecclesial peers in the colony.

Colenso's experiences among the Zulu also served as catalyst to a number of questions. Translation of Christianity's sacred text into the local language was, for Colenso, an integral aspect of Christian mission; yet the effect of this activity was essentially upon himself:

Here, ... amidst my work in this land, I have been brought face to face with the very questions which I then put by. While translating the story of the Flood, I have had a simple-minded but intelligent native, one with the docility of a child, but the reasoning powers of mature age, - look up, and ask, "is all that true? Do you really believe that all this happened thus?..." (Colenso 1862, I.5).

The question posed by William Ngidi, Colenso's assistant,

...(came to focus) a range of difficulties and problems which had been exercising Colenso's mind and conscience since he had been in Natal. It concentrated, on a single issue, problems which had arisen out of translation and teaching, of identifying the essence of the Christian message, of communicating this message in a different language to those who had no experience of it, or had experienced only a perversion of that message because of the inadequacies of contemporary Christian teaching (Guy 1983, 90).

Not only did Colenso begin to question the historicity of scripture; he also began to struggle with its very morality:

If a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand, he shall surely be punished. *Notwithstanding*, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished: for *he is his money*. Exodus xxi.20,21

I shall never forget the revulsion of feeling, with which a very intelligent Christian native (Ngidi), with whose help I was translating these words into the Zulu tongue, first heard them as words said to be uttered by the same great and gracious Being, whom I was teaching him to trust in and adore. His whole soul revolted against the notion, that the Great and Blessed God, the Merciful Father of all Mankind, would speak of a servant or maid as mere "money", and allow a horrible crime to go unpunished, because the victim of the brutal usage had survived a few hours. My own heart and conscience at the time fully sympathised with his (Colenso 1862, I.9).

Colenso's questioning found form in a commentary on the Pauline epistle to the Romans (1861), and then in the monumental study published between 1862 and 1879, The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined. Though akin to contemporary European developments in biblical scholarship, the publications led to accusations of heresy from the ecclesial authorities in the Cape. In 1863, Colenso was charged with heresy by a Court of Bishops in Cape Town, and found guilty on all nine counts. Yet,

For Colenso the trial at Capetown was not only a revealing example of the foolishness of [Bishop Robert] Gray and his advisers but also a public revelation of the extraordinary lengths to which they were prepared to go in order to impose their ideas of episcopal authority .... The biblical critic calling for reform became the bishop defending his rights as a member of the Church of England. **The clarity and pertinency of Colenso's reforming vision became obscured as the debate moved into**

**the confused and murky world where constitutional and ecclesiastical law meet** (Guy 1983, 143).

Cast as a troublesome skeptic, Colenso insisted that “he never suffered doubt and that his controversial views arose directly out of the practical problems raised by missionary teaching and had to be judged as such” (Guy 1983, 55); and the freedom with which he questioned the Bible was neither transgressive nor neoteric. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) had already, over twenty years before, challenged what he called the “bibliolator” for placing the sacred Christian text before God. It was echoing Coleridge and the sentiment of Maurice that Colenso confided in a letter to his wife Frances, “I think it quite possible to make an idol of the Bible .... Our faith is not (however) in the book, but in Him of whom the book speaks” (Guy 1983, 99).

In reaction to his condemnation as a heretic, Colenso appealed to the Privy Council in England. Though the Council ended by questioning the standing of both Gray in Cape Town and Colenso himself in Natal, it also found that Gray had no legal jurisdiction over Colenso. Colenso returned to his African diocese declaring himself “the Queen’s Bishop”. Nonetheless, Robert Gray excommunicated Colenso shortly afterwards, in January 1866.

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“The Queen’s Bishop”: the phrase is suggestive of Colenso’s twofold commitment to Christianity and colonialism. Though increasingly ostracized by ecclesial administration in the colony, it was yet Colenso’s declared mission to bring to the Zulu “that advanced Christianity to which we in

England have been brought through centuries of cultivation" (Colenso 1855, 16): the gaze of Colenso the colonial missionary saw Christian belief as inextricable from British imperial civilization. Jeff Guy observes:

Colenso did not want African freedom. He wanted British freedom for Africans. It was his explicit goal as a missionary to transform African life, to bring to it the benefits of British rule, the English church, British justice, British freedom. (Guy, in Hallencruetz and Palmberg 1991, 190).

Somewhat paradoxically, Colenso's belief in the ideals of Christian colonialism was bolstered by the contradictions posed by the versions of it that appeared in the Cape colony the realities of colonial Christianity. Yet the last decade of his life evinces stirrings of doubt in the veracity of British colonial power. Jeff Guy observes this increasingly political and comparatively neglected aspect of Colenso as follows :

...(For) a time in the 1870's, the forces for change were concentrated on Natal and the surrounding territories, and they violently disturbed the lives of the region's peoples. The effect of this on Colenso was marked. Up to this time, while not approving of all aspects of colonial policy he did not examine it too closely, nor oppose it with any vigour. But what Colenso saw in Natal in the early 1870's so offended him that he spent the rest of his life in arduous protest, not so much at the ends but at the means that were used to bring progress and change to south east Africa, and the violence and suffering inflicted upon the hundreds of thousands of people living around him. .... In the history of the

last ten years of Colenso's life we see **an intelligent and articulate man, drawing on nineteenth century liberal ideals, suddenly made aware that he was living in the midst of brutality and terror, brought into existence, not by the barbarians, but by the civilisers; his own contemporaries, peers and friends.** It is the tension created by Colenso's invocation of high liberal ideals against the realities of colonialism and imperialism which provides the dramatic context of Colenso's last decade (Guy 1983, 193-4; emphases mine).

It is within the tension of Colenso's latter years, within the pain of his recognizing a glaring contradiction between the discourse of Christian civilization and its praxis on the colonial frontier, that stirrings may be found of a seminal desire in Colenso for an autochthonic freedom. For in this particular imperial functionary of altruistic disposition - renamed *Sobantu* ("Father of the People") by the Zulu people of his diocese - in this instance of the colonial Self, an empathy had developed with the autochthonic Other it sought to colonize, in a transgression of that space generated for a "subject people": namely, the Christian discourse that colonialism made function as truth. Colenso's distinction derives from the challenge he posed to the Christianity of the God that appeared as a key collaborator in the coercive discourse of Colonialism; his ambiguity, that he conducted this attack in the colors of the God of that very Colonialism.

## PART TWO

### THE GOD OF AFRIKANERDOM

Why should Whites have been led to the southern tip of Africa three hundred years ago? .... Perhaps it was intended that we should have been planted here at the southern point within the crisis area so that from this resistance group might emanate the victory whereby all that has been built up since the days of Christ may be maintained for the good of all mankind.

(Verwoerd, Day of the Covenant, Blood River, 1958)

## Chapter Four

### Civilized African or Degenerate European?

#### The Othering of the Afrikaner in the Discourse of British Colonialism

It seemed as if they had been too much accustomed to live without respect for any earthly power to be easily brought back to a due respect for that under which they were now to live .... [T]heir wholly perverted ideas of right and wrong, their extravagant notions with regard to liberty, their total want of true religious principles, though making much external profession of piety, their perfect ignorance in short of all social duties, of all social virtues, had placed them in a most unfortunate situation both for themselves and for the government. The total seclusion of the colonists from general intercourse with the world, and with civilised life, their confinement to the little circle of their families, the easy manner in which the first necessities of our nature are satisfied, are very disadvantageous to them .... But what is most to be deprecated in the character of some among them, is the harshness with which they treat their slaves and Hottentots .... (Lichtenstein 1928, 463-4).

Having situated theistic formulation, as an integral dimension of colonial religious sensibility, within the Othering strategies that attended colonial expansion into Southern Africa, we turn now to observe that it was a particular instance of precisely such hegemony that provided conditions under which what might be described as the God of Afrikanerdom could take root and proliferate. Specifically, we will note how, even as early settlers themselves enjoyed - somewhat perniciously - the prerogatives that were their due as civilized, religious, God-serving Europeans in the diabolic and hostile world that was Africa, these very Othering strategies were turned against them: following the advent of British colonialism, early settlers - most of whom were of Dutch extraction, but who had long since developed an identity bound up in the African context they had Othered - found themselves susceptible to the Othering strategies of British colonial discourse - be it as dislocated Europeans or as anomalous Africans. In such a context, religious belief would become an increasingly complex dimension of the antagonism between ascendant colonizer and increasingly colonized settler. And under pressure of this conflict, the latter would go so far as to declare himself an "Afrikaner" and to develop a deeply religious mythology with which to answer British accusations of degenerate irreligiosity.

Afrikanerdom, according to the mythology within which it wrapped itself, originated with God, by God and for God: its suffering under imperial Britain was but the rebuke of a loving Father - the rod the sparing of which spoils the child; and the eventual promulgation of Afrikaner self-realization in the form of apartheid politics, but the result of Providential design. The present section endeavors to provide a genealogy of this God: the God collaborative in the politics of Afrikanerdom, intimately involved in the

evolution, establishment and entrenching of their nation - the God of Afrikanerdom.

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European expansion into Southern Africa, we have noted, was rendered possible - thinkable and morally imperative - by colonial discursive strategies that created "a space for 'subject peoples' through the production of [particular] knowledges" (Bhabha): specifically, an accentuation and exploitation of autochthonic Otherness as a deficient form of the colonial Self. In such a context, religious sensibility was cherished by the settlers:

Of all the elements in his social heritage, there was none to which the European of the frontier clung with greater fervour or which he prized so highly as his religion .... For the frontier farmer, religion was, first and foremost, a social fact - a jealously guarded group-privilege" (MacCrone 1937, 126-7).

Highlighting this phenomenon among the settlers of Dutch extraction, Afrikaner historian F. A. van Jaarsveld expresses a similar view:

It [religion] ... bound the community together, fostered its unity, secured it against miscegenation and degeneration and inspired it with courage to combat the British and barbarian alike. Above all, it was a civilizing influence that bestowed positive values, law and order on the community (Van Jaarsveld 1964, 10).

The exclusivity that was the outward face of this sense of belonging and the racism to which it gave rise is noted by MacCrone as follows:

... the intense and exclusive group consciousness of the frontier found expression in a consciousness of race and social supremacy which coincided almost uniformly with the distinctions based upon creed and colour. Christianity and skin-colour, membership of a particular group and social superiority, became so closely associated with one another that any one by itself could serve as a criterion of group membership. And conversely, the absence of any of these carried with it the stigma of religious, social, and racial inferiority which almost automatically excluded the individual so distinguished from membership of the group .... Of all these criteria, that of skin-colour was the most pervasive and the most consistent in its operation (MacCrone 1937, 130-1).

The political expedience of this sentiment is readily apparent: the frontier Afrikaner, observed a Governor Janssen, "call themselves 'people' and 'Christians,' and the Kaffirs and Hottentots they call 'heathen,' and thereby believe themselves entitled to everything." (Theal, Belangrijke historische Dokumenten, in Du Toit 1983, 931).

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Whether the early Afrikaners actually believed their seizure of indigenous property and prerogative over indigenous life and lives signified the promulgation of civilization or whether these frontiersmen represent a knowing, self-interested exploitation of colonial logic de guerre is obscured

by the methodological mists that pervade inquiries into any such liminal zone. What is clear, however, is that official accounts of frontier activities increasingly depict the Afrikaner frontiersmen themselves on the pejorative side of the civilization / degeneracy paradigm: having themselves enjoyed exclusive possession of the right to wield accusations of degeneracy and godlessness as defining features of indigenous Africans, the Afrikaners increasingly found themselves cast by colonial authorities as a degenerate species: morally deficient, lacking reason (a result, no doubt, of their inability to behave reasonably toward the newly arrived British rulers), religiously deviant - even dissolute - and without true knowledge of God.

By the turn of the eighteenth century, disparate lifestyles between frontiersmen, on the one hand, and the administration and more settled landholders of the Cape on the other, find form in terms of the civilization / degeneracy paradigm. The Burgher petition of 1784 deplores the menace of "a complete bastardization of morals from so primitive a lifestyle in the veld" among "a completely degenerate nation, which might become just as dangerous for the Colony as the Bushman-Hottentots now are" (Petition of the inhabitants to the Governor and Political Council of the Cape, February 17, 1784, in Beyers 1967, Appendix E). In this and similar documents,

... the assumption is ... that deviant frontier views and practices [among Afrikaners] must have resulted from the *absence* of traditional moral religious constraints.... Officials anticipated that the opportunities for unchecked, rapacious acquisition at the expense of weaker peoples would result in a general debasement and a blunting of moral sensitivity. In short, frontiersmen were in

danger of becoming a “degenerate” species of European. (Du Toit 1983, 932).

Against the backdrop of growing of anti-slavery sentiment in Europe, moreover, abuses of indigenous people by Afrikaners in the frontier became a particular preoccupation among European commentators. An early instance of this discursive shift is evident in John Barrow, An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa in the Years 1797 and 1798. Concerned with the situation of the Khoi, who he portrays as, “in their present condition, perhaps the most wretched of the human race, duped out of their possessions, their country, and finally out of liberty ... a state of existence to which that of slavery might bear the comparison of happiness”, Barrow castigates the Afrikaner frontiersman as “an inhuman and unfeeling peasantry, who having discovered themselves to be removed too great a distance from the seat of their former government to be awed by its authority, have exercised, in the most wanton and barbarous manner, an absolute power over these poor wretches, reduced to the necessity of depending upon them for a morsel of bread” (Barrow 1804, 136-7).

Commentaries by travelers such as Barrow served not only to highlight emerging European beliefs about the humanity of people indigenous to the colonies as well as the sheer inhumanity of the Afrikaner; the commentaries also functioned to reinforce associations of Europe with civilization: it is literally the physical distance of the Afrikaner frontiersman from the control of his “former government” that renders him susceptible to accusations of barbarism. A similar sentiment is expressed early the following century by H. Lichtenstein, in his discussion of the “rude and perverted ways of thinking” displayed by the citizens of Graaff Reinet:

It seemed as if they had been too much accustomed to live without respect for any earthly power to be easily brought back to a due respect for that under which they were now to live .... [T]heir wholly perverted ideas of right and wrong, their extravagant notions with regard to liberty, their total want of true religious principles, though making much external profession of piety, their perfect ignorance in short of all social duties, of all social virtues, had placed them in a most unfortunate situation both for themselves and for the government. The total seclusion of the colonists from general intercourse with the world, and with civilised life, their confinement to the little circle of their families, the easy manner in which the first necessities of our nature are satisfied, are very disadvantageous to them .... But what is most to be deprecated in the character of some among them, is the harshness with which they treat their slaves and Hottentots .... (Lichtenstein 1928, 463-4).

Similar sentiments are to be found in documents from the early years of British rule. Even attempts to move beyond the somewhat simplistic perceptions of previous generations tend to perpetuate the notion that distance from the supposedly humanizing constraints of civilization result in moral deterioration and a return to savagery; and to the influence of dislocation is frequently added the sins of the vanquished colonial rival. George Thompson, an early nineteenth century traveler in Southern Africa, observed the following:

That the backcountry boers of former times were many of them savage, indolent, and unprincipled as Mr Barrow had described, cannot be questioned .... But even the *Vee-boers* in general have many good and pleasing qualities, and their worst are, in my apprehension, clearly to be ascribed to the many disadvantageous circumstances under which they are placed, to their being thinly scattered over an immense territory, out of the reach of religious instruction, or moral restraint; to the vicious and corrupt character of the old Dutch government, by which the interests of the community were constantly sacrificed for those of the company and its servants; to the inefficient police, which not only allowed but encouraged and abetted a system of unrighteous aggression against the native tribes; and last, not least, to the influence of slavery, which, wherever it prevails, inevitably deteriorates and pollutes the whole mass of society (Thompson 1969, 87).

The co-occurrence in travelers' discourse of Afrikaner inhumanity with an appreciation of the humanity of populations indigenous to Southern Africa is at once ironic and portentous: a reflection of abolitionist sentiment in Europe, the extension of human rights to autochthonous populations in the colonies moreover functioned as a strategy by which Afrikaner frontiersmen of European extraction could be repudiated as renegades. The colonial polarities (civilized / degenerate, religious / superstitious, rational / without reason et cetera) that had rendered the early European settlement of Southern Africa not only morally acceptable but even a religio-moral imperative were now turned against those among the settlers who had, both geographically and morally, moved beyond the pale of European control.

Accordingly, reports about Afrikaner degeneracy and irreligiosity intensify around and following the advent of British rule at the Cape. A somewhat conspicuous example is that of John Philip's Researches in Africa (1828):

The secluded condition of the greater part of the South African farmers, the power thrown into their hands by the weakness of government, their situation in the midst of a population of slaves and Hottentots over whom they can tyrannize without control, is as unfavourable to the civilization of the farmers themselves, as it is to the happiness and improvement of those under them (Philip 1828, 33).

Philip's immensely influential Researches set out to raise "the voice of humanity" against "oppression, slavery and extermination"; his argument, that the driving force of Afrikaner degeneracy was wanton material interest: for "it is now universally admitted," argued Philip, "that it is the natural tendency of the exercise of uncontrolled authority to harden the heart, extinguish the moral sense, and give birth to every species of crime and calamity" (Philip 1828, I xiv, 86, 383, II:33) . The "controlling authority" endorsed by Philip, however, and which in turn facilitated and vindicated his humanitarianism, was imperial Britain. The preface to Philip's Researches, as we have already noted, is explicit:

While our missionaries, beyond the borders of the colony of the Cape of Good Hope, are everywhere scattering the seeds of civilization, social order, and happiness, they are, by the most

unexceptional means, extending British interests, British influence, and the British empire .... every genuine convert from among them made to the Christian religion becomes an ally and friend of the colonial government ( Philip 1828, I ix-x).

A similar ambiguity is evident in the work of David Livingstone, the missionary who, according to André du Toit, “almost singlehandedly reshaped everyone’s perceptions of early Afrikaner history” when, in his Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa (1858), he “initiated the shift from the degeneracy to the Calvinist paradigm in the literature on early Afrikaner politics and history” (Du Toit 1983, 939). Be that as it may: both paradigms are evident in Livingstone’s writings, frequently interwoven and mutually complimenting each other, and jointly contributing to the colonial mission polemic of Livingstone.

This polemic includes a patently theological legitimization of colonization, based on inter alia the “Divine Charter” of Genesis 1:28, in which man and woman are given the whole earth and tasked with its cultivation:

Such being the charter on which all primitive lands may be held, it seems plain to that man who subdues or cultivates a portion of the earth has a better title to it than he who only hunts over it. He bestows his labour upon it, and that is his property. Viewed in the light of the Divine and primitive charter, the rights of a civilised community, willing to toil the soil, are superior to those savages which derive a precarious subsistence from roots and wild beats; because the former are willing to enter into the Divine design to

render the earth productive of the greatest amount of good to the greatest possible number, and no man has the right to perpetuate a wilderness in any part of the world if his brother man needs it for subsistence (Livingstone, in Schapera 1974, 76).

The God-given “rights of a civilised community” to seize land from subsistence farmers could, moreover, readily be turned against the Afrikaner; Livingstone continues:

The encroachments of the Boer differ essentially from those of the Americans and other civilised communities, inasmuch as they cultivate less of the soil than do the aborigines whom they expel. Indeed, it is not land they seek to appropriate so much as cattle and slaves. (Livingstone, in Schapera 1974, 77).

The subtext is observed by André du Toit as follows:

Because of the charter’s emphasis on cultivation and the spread of commercial enterprise, ... Livingstone could use it to justify its own efforts in opening up a route into the heart of Africa but to deny this legitimation to the Trekker settlements in the Transvaal. Livingstone stressed that the Transvaal Boers were not agriculturalists but, like the blacks themselves, nomadic and extensive cattle farmers (Du Toit 1983, 940).

Accordingly, Afrikaner occlusion constituted “a direct challenge to a divinely ordained, civilizing mission by a people who themselves distinctly lacked any such legitimation” (Du Toit 1983, 941); without, in the Livingstonian gaze,

the justification enjoyed by British colonialism, yet the Afrikaner self-understanding was at the same time recognized even - and particularly - by Livingstone to be replete with religious sentiment:

They [the Boers] are all traditionally religious, tracing their descent from some of the best men (Huguenots and Dutch) the world ever saw. Hence they claim to themselves the title of "Christians," and all the colored race are "black property" or "creatures." They being the chosen people of God, the heathen are given to them for an inheritance, and they are the rod of divine vengeance on the heathen, as were the Jews of old (Livingstone 1857, 37).

It is to this heavily mythologized Afrikaner Self that we turn in the coming chapter.

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Whether the Afrikaner had in fact turned barbaric and irreligious, as the consensus of official reports and travelers' commentaries would seem to suggest, I leave to historians who still believe such knowledge is possible - the Foucauldian suspicion I am endeavoring to bring to these narratives suggests rather that what actually happened lies both hidden and hinted at in the continual shift of retrospective reconstruction, between the multiplicity of interests that motivated both contemporaneous accounts and contemporary. Our task here is rather to chart the play of power in the discursive trends and shifts that attend the events.

The proliferation of commentary that accompanied the advent and entrenchment of British colonialism in Southern Africa is marked by inter alia concomitant associations of British expansion with Christian mission, on the one hand, and, on the other, disavowals of the Afrikaner as morally dissolute and religiously in error. Against this, counter-mythologies would eventually be developed in which the Afrikaner frontiersman would be glamorized, and depicted in terms of fidelity, moreover, to the oppositional relations that had shaped early European settlement of Southern Africa, and to the moral / religious sentiments that vindicated these conquests: the Afrikaner would possess an original sense of European civilization as well as the benefits of true religion, uncorrupted by the Enlightenment liberalism that permeated the imperial paradigms of British colonialism. It was within these conditions of possibility - these constraints, these coercive and conducive influences - that the God of Afrikanerdom took root and flourished.

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## **Chapter Five**

### **Neo-Colonial Anachronism**

**or**

### **Afrikaner Counter-Colonialism?**

#### **The Covenantal Collaboration of God in the Mythic Discourse of Afrikanerdom**

Centuries ago from war torn Europe and bitter religious strife they came from various cultures, languages and persuasions to this southern tip of Africa - not to colonise or to exchange their merchandise in the first or final place, but to become what was called free-burgers. They "trekked" in search of peace and in search of freedom - over the ocean into what was from their point of view a wild and untamed country - to find freedom from oppression (Vryheidsfront 1996, 7).

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The histories of nineteenth century Afrikanerdom that at once proliferated in and contributed to the promulgation of the apartheid state enjoyed a somewhat mythic aura, imbued with a deeply religious message and a conspicuously Calvinist demeanor. Noting that, notwithstanding its

“pervasive presence” in the literature, “the content of the Calvinist paradigm of Afrikaner history has seldom been fully and explicitly indicated” (Du Toit 1983, 920-1), André Du Toit, among others, has sought to “de-mythologize” early Afrikaner history<sup>7</sup>: to show that portrayals of the Afrikaner in terms of Calvinist roots are anachronistic - an invention of subsequent interests. Du Toit calls the view he endeavors to debunk “the Calvinist paradigm”, and describes it as follows:

... it amounts to the view that the “seventeenth-century Calvinism” which the Afrikaner founding fathers derived from their countries of origin became fixed in the isolated frontier conditions of *trekboer* society and survived for generations in the form of a kind of “primitive Calvinism”; that in the first part of the nineteenth century, this gave rise to a nascent chosen people ideology among early Afrikaners, which provided much of the motivation for, as well as the self-understanding of, that central event in Afrikaner history, the Great Trek, while simultaneously serving to legitimate the conquest and subordination of indigenous peoples; and that, mediated in this way, an authentic tradition of Afrikaner Calvinism thus constitutes the root source of modern Afrikaner nationalism and the ideology of apartheid (Du Toit 1985, 209).

Otherwise stated, this view observes that the early settlers brought with them a religious disposition and a variety of traits peculiar to Calvinism,

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<sup>7</sup> See in particular, André Du Toit, “No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology” in The

and moreover, that theirs was a somewhat "original" Calvinism: a Calvinism that had not yet had to adjust to the problems posed by the European Enlightenment and by the Industrial Revolution. And in the frontier conditions generated by European expansion into Southern Africa, this early form of Calvinism became both a fossil of dated European religious sentiment as well as a weapon in the settlers' discursive armory.

Such, at least, has been the suspicion of a variety of commentators, in a variety of contexts. As far back at least as David Livingstone (in Schapera 1974), comparisons have proliferated between the Afrikaners and the New England Puritans - a somewhat tenuous parallel, perhaps, given the Dutch East India Company's patently material motivation in establishing a refreshment post at the Cape; yet the analogy would be credible enough in public imagination a century later for the likes of H. F. Verwoerd to exploit. Amid the heightening racial tensions that would eventually lead to the National Party's accession to power, I. D. MacCrone's Race Attitudes in South Africa appeared (1937), followed by C. W. de Kiewiet's A History of South Africa: Social and Economic (1941) - works that inquired into the Calvinist dimensions of Afrikanerdom's ascending hegemony. Sheila Patterson's The Last Trek: A Study of the Boer People and the Afrikaner Nation appeared in the late 1950s, and more recently - on the eve of the Soweto riots - Dunbar Moodie's The Rise of Afrikanerdom (1975) explored civil religious dimensions of Afrikaner politics. Amid these protests of the mid-1970s, Charles Villa-Vicencio (1977) drew on Peter Berger's notion of objectification to inquire into the role of Christian doctrine in the promulgation of apartheid's culture of hegemony.

Amid an increasing brazenness in apartheid policies, a suspicion developed that countered this prolific literature concerned with the Afrikanerdom's religious roots, namely, that the nationalist regime was not so much a "legatee of a fundamentalist Calvinist tradition", in Saul Dubow's words, as "a canny practitioner of Realpolitik", and that the ardent religiosity of Christian-nationalism was no more than an "exceptional episode in Afrikaner history" (Dubow 1992, 234-235). Similarly, Du Toit argued against the prevalence of a Calvinist paradigm among frontier Afrikaners, in favor of what he describes as "the degeneracy paradigm": the view that the dominant image in early depictions of the Boers was that of moral debasement rather than religious fervor. Though his extrication of moral from religious categories is left undefended, Du Toit's extensively researched iconoclasm constitutes, at the very least, a significant counter-measure against over-mythologized depictions of the Afrikaner. His location of the *origin* of the Calvinist paradigm with David Livingstone, on the other hand, is somewhat far-fetched.

What the present paper attempts derives from an impression that of more significance than the historical origin of Afrikanerdom's Calvinist demeanor or its validity or otherwise is the ways in which this element formed but a subtle reiteration of an inveterate colonial strategy: to describe the autochthonic reality it encountered in terms of an Other it could negotiate into a position of subjugation. And in developing this impression, it may be beneficial to subvert Du Toit's pejorative usage of the term "myth" as a synonym for a lack of historicity: to examine the events by which Afrikanerdom became explicable in terms of a Calvinist paradigm precisely as the promulgation of a mythically imbued mode of discourse.

The flourish of commentary that accompanied the advent of British colonialism in Southern Africa, we have noted, entailed not only a confusion of imperial imperative with Christian, but also, as though the reverse side of a single mask, a continual debunking of indigenous morals and religious sensibility. In this, the experience of the Dutch settlers become Boer and then Afrikaner was no exception; for these settlers of rival European extraction, of an antiquated religious sensibility - colonists themselves - yet had roots in Africa that could be traced back almost two centuries: the Afrikaner. And in these conditions, produced by British endeavors to gain a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within the expanding frontiers of Southern Africa (adapted from Weber, in Gerth et al, 1948:78), counter-myths would be developed, myths that glamorized the Afrikaner frontiersman and that - albeit paradoxically - accentuated the oppositional relations that had shaped early European settlement of Southern Africa: the Afrikaner would cast himself in terms of fidelity to an original sense of European civilization, as well as to true religion, uncorrupted by the Enlightenment liberalism that pervaded the sensibilities of his British persecutors.

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The chief sources for our inquiries into this mythically imbued narrative are the document released on the eve of the Anglo-Boer War: "n Eeu van Onreg" (*A Century of Injustice*), the Paardekraal speeches of Paul Kruger, and the archival findings of Dunbar Moodie (1975a; 1975b). Against early British portrayals of Afrikaners as secluded in the frontier without any central controlling authority, dispersed and feral, "n Eeu van

Onreg" suggests that the mostly Dutch settlers had developed into a nation well before the arrival of the British. "In the long quietude of the eighteenth century," writes de Kiewiet (in Du Toit 1983, 923) "the Boer race was formed". This supposed quietude - to be overwritten by reports of Afrikaner degeneration - was disrupted by the advent of British rule in 1806.

A number of British policies quickly drew the ire of the Afrikaner, though none so deeply as the colonial power's seemingly liberal attitude towards inhabitants indigenous to Southern Africa - amongst whom the Afrikaner was not counted. The establishment, for example, of the "Black Circuit", a circuit court designed to hear servants' complaints, led Afrikaners to feel themselves particular victims of British colonialism: "It was not so much love for the native," runs the "Eeu van Onreg" commentary, "that underlay the apparent negrophilistic policy as hatred and contempt of the Boer (Reitz 1900, 93).

Such comments would seem to confirm our earlier suspicion that abolitionist sentiment in Europe provided a discursive weapon by which British colonials could debunk the frontier Afrikaner. Yet however much hidden and distorted by ulterior interests, the issue of Afrikaner treatment of indigenous Africans would prove to be a persistent one - eventually finding its most conspicuous form in the policies of apartheid .... To this theme we return intermittently; for the present, suffice it to note that, of all the changes signified by the extension of British imperialism into South Africa, it was perhaps the intervention this event entailed in Afrikaner behavior toward people indigenous to Africa that most led to the impression among the Boers that "there was no security for life and property under the flag of a government which openly elected to uphold wrong" (Reitz 1900, 10).

A further factor contributing to Afrikaner discomfort was the Anglicization policy of Lord Charles Somerset, governor at the Cape from 1814 to 1826. Among other things, the policy led to the importation of Scottish ministers - of a staunch and vigorously evangelical stock - and to the reserving of all official posts for English-speakers. The effect was to estrange the Afrikaner, as the account in "n Eeu van Onreg" indicates:

Petitions in the language of the country and complaints about bitter grievances were not even acknowledged. The Boers were excluded from the juries because their knowledge of English was too faulty, and their causes and actions had to be determined by Englishmen with whom they had nothing in common (Reitz 1900, 10).

Violent reaction was not slow in coming:

No wonder that in 1815 a number of Boers were driven into rebellion, a rebellion [in which] six of the Boers were half hung up in the most inhuman way in the compulsory presence of their wives and children. Their death was truly horrible, for the gallows broke down before the end came; but they were hoisted up in the agony of dying, and strangled to death in the murderous tragedy of Slachter's Nek .... [I]t was at Slachter's Nek that the first blood-stained beacon was erected between Boer and Briton in South Africa (Reitz 1900, 5-6).

Afrikaner reaction posed little threat, however, to British imperial might. Wishing neither to succumb nor to entertain the prospect of a doomed challenge to British rule, the Afrikaner opted to head into the Northern frontier. The travails this expedition entailed would eventually form the heavily mythologized narrative known as the Great Trek:

... [Seeking] shelter in the unknown wilderness of the North... our people had to pursue their pilgrimage of martyrdom throughout South Africa, until every portion of that unhappy country ha[d] been painted red with blood, not so much of men capable of resistance as with that of or murdered and defenceless women and children (Reitz 1900, 92-3).

A "pilgrimage of martyrdom": whence this religious diction? Whence this vocabulary - this religious lens, through which the authors of "n Eeu van Onreg" would be able to depict the Trekkers' expedition as a religious quest, and their hardships as a persecution of the faithful? Sheila Patterson provides some suggestion:

It was the Old Testament and the doctrines of Calvin that moulded the Boer into the Afrikaner of today ... The doctrines which the Boers took with them on their long trek through the veld and the centuries were those of sixteenth century Calvinism, reduced to their simplest form in the memory of simple men with only the Bible to guide them (Patterson 1957, 177).

The discursive paradigms by which the Trekboers came to terms with their experience were biblical - drawn in particular from the Old Testament -

and those of an early form of Calvinism; the two sets of discourse would quickly become fossilized in the interior and gazed upon in adversity as a fount of wisdom .... To the Calvinist dimension of Afrikanerdom, we turn shortly; suffice it here to note Moodie's view that the Trekkers' movement away from the boundaries of the Cape entailed an ideological departure from the Cape Dutch Reformed orthodoxy. The Old Testament, on the other hand, became "a fount of analogies [rather] than a source of consistent interpretation" (Moodie 1975, 160): simplistic parallels were developed between the experiences of the Trekkers and those of the Old Testament Israelites. Thus Livingstone would be able to observe,

The idea ... is nearly universal among them, that they are the peculiar favourites of Heaven, - that they occupy exactly the same position in the Divine favour as the Israelites who were led through the Red Sea .... (Livingstone, in Schapera 1974, 19-20).

And in the words of Afrikaner historian F. A. van Jaarsveld,

The British administration had stood in the shoes of Pharaoh and oppressed them in Egypt - a country that they had to forsake to seek freedom. And so the exodus to the Promised Land was undertaken. The Voortrekkers and their descendants in their new home (Israel) felt that they were waging a struggle for survival against "Pharaoh" and "the black Canaanites" (Van Jaarsveld 1964, 9-10).

The Trekker formulation of Self was "as an instrument in God's hand to put an end to plunder, murder and violence among them [the indigenous

Africans] ... and promote the extension of Christian civilisation among thousands whose existence hitherto had been rooted in darkness" (Van Jaarsveld 1964, 16). Yet precisely as such an instrument, designed by God to end the murderous violence of indigenous peoples - precisely as the mechanism by which the light of Christian civilization would be spread among the ungodliness and degeneracy of Africa - the Trekkers themselves, moving into territories already occupied by Africans, became engaged in a fight for survival.

As the bands of wagons moved northwards, one group was attacked by Mzilikazi. The survivors prepared a *laager* at Vegkop (literally, "Battle Hill"), which they successfully defended during an attack by Matabele a fortnight afterwards: for (at least on this occasion) "God stood by the people and they called upon God and beat off their enemy" (in Moodie 1975a, 5). The assailants had however, seized the cattle of the Trekkers, rendering them immobilized, cut off and threatened by a dearth of supplies. Yet again, the prayers of the Volk were answered, when reinforcements arrived from another Trekker company and an expedition could be instigated "to pursue and punish the enemy and to redeem their past losses. God blessed them and they defeated their enemy" (Du Plessis, in Moodie 1975a, 6).

In search of fertile land and a link with the sea, the Trekkers moved eastwards into what is today Kwazulu-Natal, dispatching a small band, led by Piet Retief, to negotiate with Dingaan, the Zulu leader. Zulu response was to receive the payments made by Retief and his deputies for Zulu land, to put to death the Trekker commission and to invade the camps - the *laagers* - located in the foothills of what is today known as the Drakensberg: "The earth swarmed with thousands of enemies. No human help was possible and

even tiny children cried to the Lord and the voice of the people came up to God." (Du Plessis, in Moodie, 1975a, 6). Wide scale pillage occurred, however. Gustav Preller describes the scene as follows:

The grass was matted with the noble blood of women, girls, tiny babes. The wagons were smashed and burned, the earth white feathers from the bedding. Infants nursing at their mother's breast were pierced with tens of *assegaais* - so that both bodies were fixed together. Children were seized by the legs and the heads smashed against wagon wheels. Women's breasts were severed, their bodies mutilated and ravished. Vultures circled over the *laager* of yesterday; among the dead and the still-smoldering ashes wild animals prowled around - presently to gorge themselves on human flesh (Preller 1909, 152-3).

The providence of God left a few spared, however, to call for help from Trekkers bands elsewhere:

Those who survived immediately sent word to their brothers in the Colony and Free State ... Andries Pretorius arrived with his brave band to unite with them and punish the enemy and subjugate him. There followed the memorable battle of Blood River on December 16, 1838, where the solemn oath was sworn to celebrate that day each year to the glory of the Lord if He would grant them victory. And God gave them victory over thousands of enemies, and therein was God's hand seen again. The people were without hope before the advent of Pretorius; they lifted up their hands and salvation came (Du Plessis, in Moodie 1975a, 6-7).

A pivotal event in the narrative of Afrikaner survival, the clash would be remembered as the Battle of Blood River: an occasion of religiously imbued, martial heroism; a tale of mythic proportions; and a beacon for Afrikaner religious sensibilities. Not only would the Battle itself become a symbol of Afrikanerdom's defensibility vis-à-vis the diabolic hostility of autochthonic Africans; the oath of thanksgiving would serve to explain and to sanctify its martial ethic. A mythically hued occasion in itself - an event in which "the barriers of objectivity" had been removed and truth unified with experience, the Vow would be mythologized further into an integral element in the conditions whereby Afrikanerdom would endeavor to claim a monopoly on the legitimate use of force in South Africa. To the God with whom this covenant was established - to the God of Afrikanerdom - we turn in a moment, in the following chapter's discussion of Afrikanerdom and theistic formulation. Suffice it here to note the culmination of this process of mythologization, in the Paardekraal speeches of Paul Kruger, some fifty years later.

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The immediate aftermath of the religiously imbued Battle of Blood River was, according to "n Eeu van Onreg", a period of peace: "the territory had been purchased with our money and baptized with our blood" (Reitz 1900, 13). Settling in these eastern regions, the Trekboers established a republic, "[b]ut the republic was not permitted to remain long in peace. The Colonial Office was in pursuit" (Reitz 1900, 13). The British sought to annex the territory with the intention, according to "n Eeu van Onreg" (15), of crushing the Boers; the pretext was Afrikaner maltreatment of black

Africans. Again, the Afrikaner chose to relocate rather than succumb to British imperial rule.

The Boer women ... were not so easily to be deprived of their blood-bought freedom. [They] informed the British Commissioner that sooner than subject themselves to British domination, they would walk barefoot over the Drakensberg - to freedom or to death. And they were true to their word ... (Reitz 1900, 15).

The Trek resumed then, eventually leading to the establishment of the republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. But, in 1877, Britain again sought to annex the territory; and again, the imperial argument pointed to the injustices of Boer practices towards indigenous Africans. On this occasion, however, the Boers, according to "n Eeu van Onreg", had no option but force. The events that mark this shift are - tellingly - steeped in the imagery and diction of religious discourse. On December 16, 1880, at Paardekraal, the Vow was renewed.:

Each one of us, without any instructions from the leaders, picked up a stone and threw it upon [a pile] ... as a memorial between ourselves and the Lord. Thus was the vow of Blood River renewed .... There can be no greater miracles and wonders than in the War of Freedom .... God's hand was so evident that even blind heathen and unbelievers had to acknowledge that it was God's hand (Du Plessis, in Moodie 1975a, 7-8).

This spontaneous rite was matched by a growing reaffirmation of the mythic dimensions of Afrikaner history, a development that found conspicuous form in the Paardekraal speeches of Paul Kruger, president of the South African Republic from 1881 to 1900. The Covenant at Blood River became integral to Kruger's theology following its renewal at Paardekraal in 1880. At the 1891 commemoration, he would insist:

This is a religious festival. We must proclaim the deeds of the Lord .... All human glory must be banished. Let us not meet and use this occasion for anything else, for then this festival will become a worldly matter and God's anger will rest on us. We have not come here to discuss any other matters, but to proclaim the deeds of the Lord; to repay our covenants, and to speak of the Lord's great mercy towards us (Kruger, in Du Toit 1985, 223).

Kruger's evocation of the "sacred history" (Moodie 1975a, 26), notes Moodie, was formulated in terms of a cycle of transgression, retribution, and reconciliation (Moodie 1975a, 28), a pattern succinctly articulated in one of his preferred scriptures, Psalm 89:

If they violate my statutes  
and do not keep my commandments;  
Then I will punish their transgression with the rod  
and their iniquity with scourges;  
but I will not remove from him my steadfast love  
or be false to my faithfulness.  
I will not violate my covenant,

or alter the word that went forth from my lips.

(Psalm 89, 31-34)

The Afrikaner, observed Kruger, had been chosen by God to be His People (*volk*) and had been called out from the Cape Colony. Here - in the wilderness - they had experienced his loving chastisement: for "it [had been] necessary that the vine be pruned down to the stem so that it could bear good fruit" (Du Plessis, in Moodie 1975a, 26). With this elect, purified in the fire of Africa's hostility, God had established a Covenant; with these few, who would look to him with whom as their only hope and strength.

Kruger's speeches at Paardekraal depict the establishment of the Transvaal Republic as the culmination of this sequence of transgression, retribution and reconciliation: for, it had been in terms of this covenantal cycle between Afrikanerdom and its God that the Afrikaners' enemies had been defeated and "the trekkers [had] inhabited the land which God had given them in this rightful manner" (Du Plessis, in Moodie 1975a, 27). Dunbar Moodie comments: "...the Transvaal republic won back its freedom by armed force and the might of God" (Moodie 1975a, 8). The account in "n Eeu van Onreg" (32) of the founding of the Transvaal Republic likewise attributes the Afrikaner victory to God:

Trusting in the Almighty God of righteousness and justice, we [had] armed ourselves for an apparently hopeless struggle .... With God's all-powerful aid we gained the victory, and for a time at least it seemed as if our liberty was secure. At Bronkhorst Spruit, at Laing's Nek, at Ingogo, and at Majuba, God gave us

victory although in each case the British outnumbered us and were more powerfully armed than ourselves (Reitz 1900, 32).

The covenantal relationship between the God of Afrikanerdom and His *volk* was understood to be the condition that rendered the Afrikaner's survival possible, explicable and necessary. Accordingly, it was necessary to cultivate oneself in terms of the pact, and, in particular, to avoid invoking divine displeasure: for "just as firm as His promises are from generation to generation, so certain is the punishment also" (Du Plessis, in Moodie 1975a, 27), Kruger reminded the People of God.

Such was the biblically informed, mythically structured and imbued meaning of Afrikanerdom's sojourning history: precisely because they had been chosen of God, Afrikaners, like the Israelites of the Old Testament, had needed to undergo a process of purification - the narrative structure of which, in both instances, was a mythic journey - before eventually obtaining the land promised them by God. This eventuality was no cause for exultation in any human achievement, but for thanksgiving to God. And should Afrikanerdom transgress the covenantal alliance it enjoyed with its God, it would be sure to be smitten again in the African soil ... In the chapter that follows, the continuation of our chronology will observe precisely one such episode of retribution, and focuses on the impact the event would have on Afrikaner theistic formulation. Before that, however, it behooves us to examine the God of Afrikanerdom at the height of the latter's ascendancy.

## Chapter Six

### With God, By God and For God ...

#### The Politics of Afrikaner Theistic Formulation

Our history is the greatest masterpiece of the centuries. We hold this nationhood as our due for it was given us by the Architect of the universe. (His) aim was the formation of a new nation among the nations of the world. ... The last hundred years have witnessed a miracle behind which must lie a divine plan. Indeed, the history of the Afrikaner reveals a will and a determination which makes one feel that Afrikanerdom is not the work of men but the creation of God (Malan, in Pienaar 1964, 235-6).

No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of man more than those of the United States. Every step by which we have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token provincial agency (George Washington's inaugural address of 1789, in Villa-Vicencio 1977,7).

However much material incentive may have undergirded and even motivated the “discovery” and colonization of the land that Europeans would name America, significant differences are evident between, on one hand, the land that would establish itself as a haven for victims of religious persecution, and on the other, the refueling station for imperial projects that was the early *raison d’être* of the Cape of Good Hope <sup>8</sup>. Whatever the status of its historicity, depictions of early Boer religiosity, we have observed, have not infrequently functioned as politically expedient myth - as a counter-measure, in particular, to the Othering strategies of nineteenth century British colonialism, and more recently, as an integral element in the discourse that accompanied the entrenchment of apartheid - in the speeches of D.F. Malan and H.F. Verwoerd, for example.

The context within which this mythologization appeared, we have noted, was the frontier that resulted from European expansion into Southern Africa; for, as we have observed with Moodie:

When early Afrikaners moved into the South African interior, they trekked away from the Cape Dutch Reformed church and from Calvinist theology. Unlike the New England Puritans, theirs was no ‘errand into the wilderness’, guided and exhorted by ministers. They relied alone on their reading of the Bible, and especially on the Old Testament, as the source of interpretation for their experiences. Simple parallels were drawn between their

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<sup>8</sup> André du Toit notes that in Puritan New England, “... preconditions existed to sustain a vigorous theological tradition. Among the Puritans arriving in New England before 1640 were no fewer than 130 university graduates, 92 of them ministers” (Du Toit, 1985:211).

experiences and those of Israel in the Old Testament ... (Moodie 1975, 159).

The mythic fusion of inchoate Calvinist sentiment and intense biblicism that developed amid the rigors of the frontier constituted what Rosemary Ruether would call a "... deformation of biblical religion ... into forms and rituals that sacralize social oppression, the privileges of religious and social élites" (Ruether 1986, 26). Putting aside questions of whether biblical religion is itself not an instance of precisely such hegemony, our aim here has rather been to observe the conditions of possibility - the play of power, the constraints, the coercive and conducive influences - within which the God of Afrikanerdom took root and flourished. Our examination turns now to highlight elements in the content of Afrikaner theistic formulation that were at once a reflection and an agent of Afrikaner hegemony.

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In endeavoring to develop terms by which to explain the suffering it experienced as a result of the expansion of imperial British rule in Southern Africa, Afrikanerdom developed a conspicuous and somewhat Calvinist belief in the absolute sovereignty of God. The belief performed a twofold function of resignation and resistance: as resignation, it articulated a sigh of the oppressed - a relinquishment to God's at times unfathomable but indisputably sovereign Will; and as resistance, it represented deference to an authority higher and other than that of the temporal rulers, the British. For the God of Afrikanerdom was omnipotent: "watchful, effective, active ... engaged in ceaseless activity" (Calvin 1949, 3) - continually effecting the realization of his sovereign Will.

God is deemed omnipotent because, governing heaven and earth by his providence, he so regulates all things that nothing takes place without his deliberation ... God so attends to the regulation of individual events, that they all so proceed from his set plan, that nothing takes place by chance (Calvin 1949, 3-4).

It was, moreover, given the discursive condition of a God formulated as absolutely powerful and, in consequence, of a world that corresponds to the outworking of His sovereign Will, that Afrikaners could affirm the Calvinist belief in predestination; in Calvin's own words,

God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive into salvation, and those, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction (Calvin 1949, 7).

However unaccountable such divine sovereignty may seem, it should not be mistaken for injustice: "... for He is by definition righteous, but His righteousness is simply beyond our ken (Calvin 1949, 5).

Counterbalancing this disclaimer - and as an extension of God's sovereignty - was the doctrine of divine election, in terms of which Kruger had formulated Afrikaner history as a mytho-biblical narrative cycle of transgression, retribution, and reconciliation (Moodie 1975a, 28). To whom was Kruger referring when he spoke of "God's People"? The notion, observes Dunbar Moodie, draws on a distinction developed by Calvin between inward calling and outward: inward, in reference to the call to

salvation experienced by an individual; and outward, to suggest the “intermediate election” of a particular ethnic group (such as the Old Testament Jews), called to perform a special task - “one people is peculiarly chosen, while others are rejected” (Calvin 1949, 5). This outward call is “intermediate” in that it is no guarantor of salvation; for,

... where God has made a covenant of eternal life and calls any people unto himself, a special mode of election is [yet] employed for a part of them, so that he does not with indiscriminate grace elect all [from among that people]; ... to those with whom God makes a covenant, he does not at once give the spirit of regeneration that would enable them to persevere in the covenant to the very end [as he does with the individual]. Rather, the outward call, without the workings of inner grace, which might have availed to keep them, is intermediate between the rejection of mankind and the election of a meager number of the godly (Calvin 1949, 7; additions mine).

Kruger’s affirmation of God’s *Volk* is a designation of the outward type - of the *uitwendige roeping* rather than the *inwendige* - and refers, in short, to the people of the Transvaal Republic. Celebrating a somewhat Calvinistic divine magnanimity, Kruger declared that this calling applied to all Transvaalers: “the old inhabitants of the land, foreigners, new immigrants, yea even murderers and thieves” (Du Plessis, in Moodie 1975a, 31).

This inclusivity did not, however, apply to autochthonic Africans, who, according to Afrikaner myth, were as the nations of the Old Testament defined as being “without the law” (Van Jaarsveld 1963, 7); they were the

sons of Ham, destined to be but “hewers of wood and drawers of water” - the very antithesis of God’s Chosen. We have already noted that it was Boer attitudes to Africans that had been sharply criticized by early British rulers in the region, and that this standoff had led to Afrikaner migration into the hinterland. But even prior to the advent of British imperial rule at the Cape, a magistrate in Uitenhage was able to make the following complaint:

It is difficult and often impossible to get the colonists to understand that the Hottentots ought to be protected by the laws no less than themselves, and that the judge may make no distinction between them and the Hottentots. According to the unfortunate notion prevalent here, a heathen is not actually human, but at the same time he cannot really be classed among the animals. He is therefore a sort of creature not known elsewhere. His word can in no wise be believed, and only by violent measures can he be brought to do good and shun evil (Marais 1944, 73, n.61).

Not only did Afrikanerdom’s mythic notion of belonging function in terms of an avowed exclusion of autochthonic African peoples; following the miraculous victory against the British in 1881, it also became associated with a celebration of the independence of the Transvaal Republic - a sentiment which likewise entailed exclusion, in this case, an exclusion of British interference. The discovery in 1886 of gold on the Rand, however, provided British interest in the region with a new impetus, that initially culminated in the Jameson raid of 1895. The attack was not only unsuccessful; its effect was to rally Afrikaners throughout South Africa. In a newspaper as far afield as the Cape, sentiments such as the following were evoked:

The stab which was intended to paralyze Afrikanerdom once and for all in the Republics has sent an electric thrill direct to the national heart. Afrikanerdom has awakened to a sense of earnestness and consciousness which we have not observed since the heroic war for Liberty in 1881; ... now the psychological moment has arrived; now our people have awakened all over South Africa; a new glow illuminates our hearts; let us now lay the foundation stone of a real united South Africa on the soil of a pure and all-comprehensive national sentiment (Reitz 1900, 49-50).

Responding to the threat signaled by growing Afrikaner unity, the newly appointed governor of the Cape Colony, Sir Alfred Milner, developed "constitutional means" by which assert imperial authority and "to humiliate the South African Republic and to crush it into the dust" (Reitz 1900, 52). Upon the republics, he imposed demands designed to frustrate; the account provided by "n Eeu van Onreg" is tellingly couched in Old Testament terms:

Naboth's title to his vineyard [had to] be cancelled. The easiest way of securing that object ... was to prove that Naboth was a scoundrel and Ahab an angel (Reitz 1900, 91).

The negotiations that followed failed, and the Afrikaners declared war on October 11, 1899. The details of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) need not concern us here; suffice it to note that, following initial Boer successes, the overwhelming numbers of the British troops forced the Boers into retreat. By June 1900, both the Orange Free State and the Transvaal had fallen to the British; with the president of the latter, Paul Kruger, escaping to Europe. The

President of the Orange Free State, Martinus Steyn, remained in South Africa, however, in support of the guerrilla commandos, as the war continued. The Boer casualties included not only the soldiers but also, eventually, over twenty-six thousand women children.

Women and children who were found on the farms were driven into the so-called concentration camps ... [Other] fearful of falling into the hands of the British, fled barefoot and lacerated through the veld ... only to end up [likewise] at the murderous women's camps. Thousands of dwellings were burned down and everything on the farms was destroyed. Cattle were driven away or slaughtered in heaps ... Those were days of lamentation and bitterness. The suffering was indescribably great ... It was as though the people had been forsaken by God .... The moaning and weeping of sick mothers, the crying and pleading of little children dying of hunger in cold tents mounted up to heaven. But in vain ... (Smith 1917, 133-4).

It was as though the *Volk* had been abandoned by God: yet Kruger, who had gone into the War proclaiming the support of "a supreme commander of heaven and earth" (Krüger 1963, 244) and convinced that "God would not allow His church to be destroyed" (Krüger 1963, 248), would be able to re-work the defeat into the mythic narrative cycle of transgression, retribution, and reconciliation (Moodie 1975a, 28); referring to the Boers, he observed:

God will drive them into the dust and thereafter will rescue them with miracles. They live at a time when power is given to the beast to persecute the church of Christ" (Krüger 1963, 251).

The meeting in Vereniging to discuss the possibility of surrender was imbued with similarly religious sentiment. General de Wet, among others, insisted that the Boer could yet prevail; it was but a question of faith in the Covenantal collaboration of God:

The war is a matter of faith .... Let us again renew our covenant with God. If we fix our eyes on the past ... we have ground to continue in faith. The entire war has been a miracle, and without faith it would have been childish to commence the war .... Is our Faith, then, going to be so much weaker than that of our forefathers? (Kestell and van der Velden 1912, 91)

Though resigned to defeat, Schalk Burger was also able to find cause for hope: the divinely arranged, mytho-biblical cycle of transgression / retribution / reconciliation:

We were proud and despised the enemy and is it not perhaps God's will to humble us and cast down the pride in us by allowing us to be oppressed by the English people? The time will come when we shall again exist as a people (Kestell and van der Velden 1912, 77).

So dominant was the religious dimension to the discussion that General Hertzog felt compelled to object:

It grieves me that in every public meeting the question of religion is touched upon. It is continuously said that this or that is God's

finger. Now, although I also have my beliefs, I say that neither you nor I know in the least what is the finger of God! God has given us a reason and a conscience, and if these lead us we need not follow anything else ... (Kestell and van der Velden 1912, 175).

Hertzog remains the exception, however, that proves the norm: his was the only the voice, notes Dunbar Moodie, that expressed outright skepticism vis-à-vis the discourse of Afrikaner civil religion.

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Amid this fragmentation of its hegemony, the God of Afrikanerdom would yet persist - albeit in protean form - His *Volk* having been returned into the underside of the mytho-biblical cycle Kruger had outlined. Such had been the impact of the war, however, upon British governance in the region that within a decade Boer and Brit were united in what was termed the Union of South Africa. In one light, the event signaled a recognition of commonality - of Sameness; in another light, however, it represents the culmination of European Othering strategies in Southern Africa. For this Union, like the Covenantal God of Afrikanerdom and like the proselytizing God of Colonialism, functioned by exclusion: drawing various bands of settlers together, the Union of South Africa recognized only settlers of European origin - to the exclusion of precisely those South Africans autochthonic to the region. Herein lay the groundwork to the colonizing conditions that would become known as apartheid.

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## **PART THREE**

# **THE CRUCIFIED GOD AND THE POLITICS OF THE CROSS**

Christian theology ... is the voice of the Other through all those others who have tasted, prophetically and meditatively, the Infinite disclosed in the kenotic reality of Jesus Christ.

(David Tracy)

## Chapter Seven

### Crucifying Christianity

#### Christianity vis-à-vis the Theology Of The Cross

The history of Christianity is burdened by a great many dogmatic finitizations which lose sight of the provisionality and historical mutability of all forms of Christian life and thought...[the true ultimacy of which] is to be found in the historical openness made possible by Jesus (Wolfhart Pannenberg, in Hodgson and King 1985a, 374).

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"Thou alone, religion of the cross, dost join in one wreath the double palm of humility and power" (Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, in Moltmann 1974, 32). The sheer ambiguity, however, of the cross of Christianity is somewhat less restrained than Schiller's neat dichotomy suggests: restrict not the cross to a double palm - it is a prolific wilderness of meanings; not a wreath of public triumph, but a rod of subjugation; not a conjoining of contradiction, so much as a dispersion of ambiguous, mercurial effects. And it is precisely in the conditions imposed by the ever-shifting, incessantly proliferating web of meanings attached to the cross, that I wish to

conclude by suggesting the subversive potential of the Christian cross vis-à-vis the mutual inextricability of relations of truth and power.

Amid the proliferating, competing meanings of the Christian cross, amid their glut of "positive unconsciousness" (Foucault) - their active susceptibility to hegemonic design - it becomes evident that the cross, the keystone of Christian truth, enjoys no privileged immunity from the conflictual, compromising praxis that is truth's condition of possibility. From the military regalia of the Crusades to the façade of colonialism's mission station, the cross represents the assertion of Christianity's truth in the world. "Deus lo volt!" - "God wills it!": the cry that went up at Clermont in response to the Crusading imperative is all too familiar ...

Jurgen Moltmann, among many others, has insisted that the original meaning of the cross was, however, set in contradiction to hegemony:

... the cross was not the sign in which one conquered, a sign of triumph on churches, or an adornment on the Imperial Throne, nor was it the sign of orders and honours; it was a sign of contradiction and scandal, which quite often brought expulsion and death (Moltmann 1974, 34).

Whether the cross has ever enjoyed such an innocence is dubious, or at least, shrouded in the mists of Christianity's ambiguous history. Moreover, the very quest for original truth, as we noted earlier, has an illusory aura about it that not infrequently masks the designs of hegemony: to describe the cross in terms of its oppositional capabilities vis-à-vis the exercise of power may itself be somewhat suspect - a rhetorical design of insidious hegemony, that

masks a nostalgia for the mythic naiveté of early forms of Christianity gazed at from the comfortable distance of two millennia.

Whatever it may or may not have signified in these early days, the symbol of the cross has been marked by a variety of meanings since then. And amid its ecclesial usage, its deployment as a meaning-making weapon - even its vampire resistant properties! - amid such disparate, prolific meanings, the cross has also functioned as a symbol of ostracism. As a Roman form of execution, death by crucifixion was at once a systematically slow and brutal process, as well as a monumental declaration of exclusion: a symbol of public rejection by human society, by life itself, and by God. Accordingly, to willingly embrace the symbol, as early Christians did, was tantamount to a repudiation of social normality and dominant values; an intentional alienation from the moral structures and the very desires that give form to human society; a contradiction of its essential truth. In consequence, early Christianity was associated with irreligiosity and even atheism (Moltmann 1974, 33-4)!

Irreligious, perhaps, but the cross was not opposed to belief in God: on the contrary, it represented an alternative and altogether subversive notion of God - not the reflection or mythic formulation of dominant values or ideas, but their contradiction. Perhaps it has been one of the opponents of the theology of the cross who understood its revolutionary capabilities best: Friedrich Nietzsche, who was appalled at

... the gruesome superlative which lay for an antique taste in the paradoxical formula "god on the cross". Never and nowhere has there hitherto been a comparable boldness in inversion,

anything so fearsome, questioning and questionable, as this formula: it promised a revaluation of all antique values (Nietzsche 1972 III, 46).

To the theistic formulation of the cross, we turn in a moment; suffice it here to note that the cross begins by invoking a challenge to Christianity itself - to the "positive unconsciousness" that renders Christianity a "regime of truth". Notwithstanding that in this discursive regime, this system of truth, the cross is itself an integral dimension, the symbol of the cross is yet self-transcending, ever evoking more and other than the truths it seems to signify in any particular historical moment. And as such, it requires the same regenerative self-transcendence of Christianity: Christianity itself must be "crucified"; Christian truth must itself be subject to the cross: *crux probat omnia* (Luther, in Moltmann 1974, 7).

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Repudiating subjugative formulations of God, Jürgen Moltmann observes in the figure of a crucified God an alternative epistemology to that of the Platonic principle that "like is known only by like" (*similis a simili cognoscitur*), as follows:

If the principle of likeness is applied strictly, God is only known by God ... If like is only known by like, then the Son of God would have had to remain in heaven, because he would be unrecognizable by anything earthly....God is revealed as "God" in his opposite: godlessness and abandonment by God. His grace is revealed in sinners. His righteousness is revealed in the

unrighteous...and his gracious election of the damned. The epistemological principle of the theology of the cross can only be this dialectic principle: the deity of God is revealed in the paradox of the cross.... (Moltmann 1974, 27).

God formulated as at once ever Other yet everywhere discoverable through agapeic - empathetic - identification with precisely the otherness of others constitutes an aggressive alternative to the subjugative effects of truth qua truth. Herein lies the possibility of a new "politics of truth": in the praxis of confronting the hegemony of theistic formulation that is rendered tenable and even imperative by the diffuse networks of power relations within which truth operates; in the praxis, in other words, of agapeic solidarity with its victims. For agape constitutes a medium within which and by which we may know God (I John 4.8): not through the experience of power, except that power which is made manifest precisely and consummately through the cross - through an ability to relinquish power in solidarity with suffering; nor through the affirmation of truth, since it is the very claim to truth qua truth that invites in subjugative prerogatives - precisely the opposite of the agapeic cross that was Christ's defining hour. Rather,

at the moments of God's profoundest revelation there is always suffering .... God suffers with us - God suffers from us - God suffers for us: it is this experience of God that reveals the triune God" (Moltmann 1981, 4)

Such a God could not be regarded as "either *in* us or *over* us but always only *before* us" (Moltmann 1967, 16), a God who we could neither possess nor deploy as against Others - for such a God could be encountered only and

precisely in the Other - but a God who we would await in active hope (Moltmann 1967, 16). Await: but in the active hope that is a transgression (Tracy 1994, 109) of "truth" that subjugates; await, in the agapeic openness that is a doorway between a discursive universe shut in upon itself and to the Others outside.

In the vicious cycle of poverty it can be said: "God is not dead; he is bread." God is present as bread in that he is **the unconditional which draws near** (Moltmann 1974, 337; emphasis mine).

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