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# THE USE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCHES OF SOUTH AFRICA.

S. Hutchinson.

As might be expected in a country with a Calvinist ethos, the Bible has been accorded a position of high respect in South African society and frequent appeals have been made to its authority. 80.2% of Afrikaans secondary school children are reported to read the Bible regularly.

As a general rule, however, intensely conservative views have dominated the scene, and critical scholarship has been viewed with suspicion. There has been a reluctance to accept the views of others, the work of foreign scholars often being dismissed lightly or vehemently rejected out of hand (as happened with e.g. Bultmann). In other cases (e.g. John Bright) their work has been taken over and incorporated in a largely reproductive way.

A characteristic trait of Afrikaner scholarship has been its attempt to use Scripture in defence of apartheid in both Church and state. It is in this area that dialogue has taken place with Churchmen of other traditions - mainly on the continent of Europe - but that process has now ceased. It was felt that little progress was being made.

This article looks at both the general use of Scripture in the Dutch Reformed Churches and its specific application in the apartheid debate, the latter being better understood in the light of the former.

## Three Reformed Churches

The English description "The Dutch Reformed Church" is usually applied in the South African context to the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk - usually abbreviated to NGK. There are, however, three Reformed Churches that are exclusively white in their membership and Afrikaner in their ethos.

The NGK is the largest and the oldest. The Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk (NHK) was established by the Transvaal Boers in 1840 after the NGK had hesitated to follow them in their Trek into the interior. A further secession from the NHK produced in turn the Gereformeerde

Kerk(GK), which is the most conservative and traditional in its customs and practices, e.g. the exclusive use of psalmody in worship.

The NHK is the most liberal of the three in the sense of its being, by South African standards, relatively open to, and tolerant of, critical scholarship, though paradoxically it is also the most intransigent in racial policy. In the pastoral letter of the NHK General Synod of 1973 it is officially stated that the limitation of membership to whites is not an interim measure but a "permanent and unchanging principle that is founded on Scripture," an assertion that is backed up by the claim that God is the maker of nations and the sovereign of history, and by appeals to Genesis 10 and Psalm 86:9, which are used out of context as "proof texts".

The NGKA, NGSK and "Reformed" "daughter churches," established as a result of NGK missionary activity, inspired by Andrew Murray and intended to cater for Blacks, "Coloureds" and Indians respectively, are quite separate. The NKG is very dependent through its black leadership on the parent NGK; the Reformed "Indian" Church is tiny, and only the NGSK of Dr. Allan Boesak shows much independence of thought.

In this article the NGK, the NHK and the GK will be referred to collectively as the "Dutch Reformed Churches", as they are white, Afrikaner and broadly similar to their approach to the use of Scripture. Except where specifically mentioned, no allusion is intended to Holland or to the non-white "daughter churches."

It is not suggested that the Dutch Reformed Churches are uniformly consistent in their approach to the Bible. There are differences both between the churches and within them. There are differing shades of opinion and the quality of the work varies. Nevertheless the amount of common ground is substantial.

A number of factors underlie this distinctive approach to Scripture: the Calvinistic heritage, the historical background in South Africa, local studies in general Biblical scholarship and an innate sympathy with fundamentalism.

The Calvinistic Heritage

Writing from Stellenbosch in the heart of Afrikanerdom in 1962 Prof. J.C.G. Kotze observed, "It is the eternal glory of Calvinism that, in its philosophy of life and the world, it always endeavours to think in terms of theology and not of anthropology..it is therefore characteristic of this school of thought that it repeatedly turns to the fundamental Scriptural principles and standards." (1)

An examination of the book, "Principle and Practice in Race Relations," will clarify the kind of Calvinism that is in vogue. While there are five direct quotations from the works of John Calvin, there are no less than twelve from Abraham Kuyper.

Kuyper (1837-1920) was both a prominent political leader in Holland, where he became prime minister, and a distinguished theologian in the tradition of the scholastic Calvinism that developed in the seventeenth century during and after the Synod of Dort.

In 1880 he started the orthodox "Free University" to teach the students his own distinctive brand of Calvinism and in 1886 he led a secession of 100,000 orthodox to form the Gereformeerde Kerk of the Netherlands. The theoretical basis of his political thought was the idea of the autonomy of the various social spheres, each of which had its own God-given rights.

He was sympathetic to the Boers. In his Stone Foundation Lectures on Calvinism he commended the struggle of the Boers in the Transvaal as "the heroism of old Calvinism (2) and asserted that "among the Kaffirs and Hottentots of Africa, even such a government as exists in Russia would be inconceivable." (3) His exposition of "unity" as the basic sin of Gen 11.1-9 is significant. "For in this very desire consisted the contumacy of the building of Babel's tower. Thus peoples and nations originated." (4) This exposition is basic to the Afrikaner case.

Kuyper's influence on the Dutch Reformed Churches was immense, and he is still quoted with respect as a commanding authority.

Kotze for example, arguing for the "rich diversity" of mankind in Scripture, appeals twice to Kuyper's "Het Calvinisme". "According to Scripture it cannot be doubted that God ordained such diversity and that this will remain to the end. Therefore we agree with A. Kuyper that the

demand today for a levelling down of the variety is in conflict with Scripture...."

".....He describes this unscriptural trend as an evil attempt which 'kills life by relegating it to uniformity...' as Kuyper clearly puts it 'There is no uniformity among people but pluriformity'"(5)

### Historical Background

Until 1829 the NGK recognised that racial separation was without biblical warrant. The Synod of that year declared that the administration of Holy Communion of colour or origin" was "an unshakeable principle based on the infallible Word of God, and that therefore all Christian communities and each individual Christian are obliged to think and act accordingly." (6)

By this stage separate congregations for "Coloureds" were already being formed, but as late as 1857 the NGK Synod reiterated that "it was desirable and Scriptural that, wherever possible, our members from among the heathen be received and incorporated in our existing congregations."

Under growing Afrikaner pressure, however, the 1857 Synod took the fateful step of passing a resolution which, for the first time, permitted separate services and buildings for whites and coloureds in the same parish.

At this stage it was pleaded (in the spirit of 1Cor.8) that this decision was concession to "the weakness of some." Leading Churchmen like Andrew Murray spoke out vehemently against what they perceived to be an unhealthy development.

With the passing of time, however, such separation became increasingly common until the earlier position of the Church was completely reversed and joint worship between the races was actively discouraged. It was at this stage that it began to be argued that apartheid was the answer to the country's problems and that determined and systematic attempts were made to provide a Scriptural justification for the position in which the NGK found itself. The practice came first, then the Biblical arguments and, finally, apartheid was passed on from church to state.

Ever since, the three churches have sought a biblical basis for their methods and policies. To list only the activities in the third quarter of this century, Synodical

meetings and conferences have been held to discuss the matter at Pretoria (1953), Johannesburg (1954), Potchefstroom (1958), Johannesburg (1959 and 1960), as well as special missionary conferences at Bloemfontein (1950) and Kroonstadt (1960), and an ongoing ad hoc study commission dating from 1956. An important report entitled "Race Relations in South Africa" was adopted by Synod in 1966.

"On all these occasions very particular attention was paid to light cast by the Word of God on our race relations." (7) The climax of this process was the publication in 1974 of the well-known and internationally studied Synodal Report which, in its English translation, bears the title "Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture." Before assessing it it is necessary to consider the general climate of Afrikaner biblical research.

#### Pretoria Symposium

The Institute for Theological Research in the University of South Africa took as the theme for its second symposium in 1979 the topic "Scripture and the use of Scripture." It dealt with a number of issues that are currently topical, including the impact of black theology.

Most relevant to the theme of this article was a paper by Prof. J.A. Loader (Dept of Semitic Languages, University of Pretoria) entitled "The Use of the Bible in Conventional South African Theology" - which was interpreted to mean the handling of the Bible within the three Afrikaans Churches. (8)

Loader provides a useful summary in English of Afrikaans books and articles in journals of theological research like Hervormde Teologiese Studies. A review of its contents shows what the current issues are (While the symposium itself took place five years after "Landman", much of the material considered pre-dated it.)

#### The Scopus Concept.

First is the scopus concept, looking for the central theme or "purpose" of the Bible. More work has been done on this line by biblical scholars in the GK and NGK traditions than by those in the NHK tradition.

Prominent among these is J.A. Heynes, who strongly

influenced the Report "Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture," known as the "Landman" Report after its chairman Ds W.A. Landman.

Heynes' writing is preoccupied with the quest for the scopus of the Bible, which he finds in the Kingdom of God. "The Kingdom is the centre of the Bible and the centre of this centre is Jesus Christ." He follows the consequences of this scopus theology to their logical conclusions and writes of "scopic" and "peripheral" authority, reliability etc.

Prof. A. König emphasises the age and the different interpretations of the concept since Augustine. He feels that the authority and inspiration of the Bible must be blurred where there is a lack of clarity concerning the scopus. The issue should not be narrowed to "God's purpose of salvation" but it should include his comprehensive purpose of creation."

J.T. du Fürstenberg thinks that the modern study of the Bible, with its concern for issues like context, historical setting and literary genres, is one of the prime causes of current interest in the biblical scopus.

He maintains that, in view of the variegated contents of the Bible, the scopus issue should be treated with due regard for the different nuances, and not in a unilinear way. While various qualifications exist, christological centrality is the dominating aspect arrived at by attending to the use of the Old Testament in the New. Therefore Christ is the centre of the whole Bible.

Loader concludes his review of this topic by accepting that the scopus idea is legitimate and necessary for reflection on the purpose and tendency of the Bible but he pleads for the concept not to be overstrained. Biblical literature is too complex in nature to be conceived of in terms of a unitary statement. He mentions the "danger of impoverishing the many-coloured face of the Bible by trying to harmonise its themes, tensions, theologies and counter-theologies into a central ordering concept. Rather the God of the Bible than any one of the themes in the Bible is its scopus."

#### The Authority of the Bible.

In the Afrikaans literature the authority of the Bible

is discussed but is often regarded unproblematically. It tends to be implied rather than considered in its own right.

Heynes is an exception. He pays extensive attention to the topic, and derives biblical authority from God's authority. He opposes the distinction - traditional since the seventeenth century - between "historical" and "normative" authority, arguing that this would mean treating the authority of the Bible as merely relative.

Instead he makes a complicated and rather forced distinction between "scopic authority", which works directly and confronts us with norms for obedience, and "peripheral authority" which works indirectly and confronts us with models for obedience.

This distinction enables him to maintain the infallibility of the Bible without having to resort to fundamentalism, but he fails to demonstrate a method by which we can determine what has peripheral authority and what has scopic authority.

Generally however the question of authority is not considered as thoroughly as this. The fact of biblical authority is just unproblematically accepted and implied throughout the literature.

In his summary Loader adds that, in this context, the problem of biblical authority is not analysed as a problem of ancient/modern but is rather related to the opposition of divine/human.

Similarly little or no attention is given to the consequence of modern linguistics for the study of the Bible. The study of literary structure and the like have yet to make any significant impact.

### Hermeneutics

On hermeneutics Loader suggests that this topic features mostly as a matter of the relation between the Testaments and as a Christological understanding of the Bible, though disapproval of Rudolf Bultmann is also a conspicuous feature.

The NHK theologian J.P. Oberholzer, for example, argues that the Old Testament testifies in its historical context to Christ. The two Testaments should be read in each other's light. First we have to determine what light

is shed by the whole of the Old Testament canon on the problems of a text within it, and next that of the New Testament. Great prominence is given to the use of the Old Testament in the New and quotations play the primary role.

The New Testament scholar, E.P. Groenewald, defines hermeneutics as the art of interpretation, "in other words it is equal to the totality of Christian theology, that is, as the exposition of the meaning of Holy Scripture for the present."

He surveys the so-called new hermeneutic of Fuchs and Ebeling, expressing appreciation for their idea of a "Sprachereignis" or "Wortgeschehen". The appealing word of a bygone situation retains its appeal. This word only effectively brings about contact between God and the human situation when it is accepted in faith. This contact takes place in Christ, which means that the new hermeneutic is a Christological matter.

### Fundamentalism

One of the most significant factors underlying the use of Scripture in the Afrikaans tradition is its sympathy with the fundamentalist position. This is seen particularly in material issued by scholars of reasonable standing but intended for popular and/or secular educational use.

James Barr identifies three distinctive marks of Anglo-American fundamentalism: (i) a strong emphasis on the infallibility of the Bible, usually connected with the doctrine of inspiration and understood as inerrancy; (ii) a strong hostility to the modern critical study of the Bible (iii) a conviction that those who do not share its viewpoint (i.e. critical scholars) are not true Christians (9).

Many of the controversies in this field tend to arise in an Old Testament context, probably because fundamentalist ideas of infallibility and inspiration work better when clear pictures can be formed of the "authors" of the various biblical books, and there are more problems of this type in the Old Testament than in the New.

The result is that concern about authorship figures prominently in fundamentalist thinking generally - and

S. African writers are no exception. Few Afrikaans scholars admit to being fundamentalists, but it is a fact that fundamentalism remains a powerful influence among a surprising number of them.

J.D. du Toit.

The name of Jakob David du Toit (1877-1953) is of basic importance for an appreciation of attitudes to Scripture in the Dutch Reformed Churches. An Afrikaner by birth, he spent a few years (1900-1903) in Kuyper's Free University and finally became Professor of Theology at Potchefstroom.

He was the compiler of the Afrikaans Psalter (1936) which is regarded as the finest poetic production of its type in the Dutch-Flemish-Afrikaans group of languages.

He played a major part in the translation of the Bible into Afrikaans which was completed in 1932. The significance of this becomes apparent when it is realised that in at least two of the passages traditionally quoted in support of apartheid (Deut. 32.8f; Acts 17.26) the case stands or falls according to the way the verse is translated (cf. the debate in other contexts over such translations as Isaiah 7.14 "Behold a virgin shall conceive...").

Du Toit not only had a major part in the 1932 Afrikaans translation, his influence was apparent in the later 1954 edition and still pervades current translations. In the 1974 Landman Report of the NGK in particular (as will be seen later) the traditional renderings are still adhered to. In the case of the Deuteronomy text, however, a certain qualification is added, "Although Deut. 32.8 has no firm interpretation (the text is subject to dispute) it nevertheless seems to indicate.."  
(10).

Another phenomenon exemplified by du Toit is the influence of "civil religion", which J.J. Burden defines as the religion of the man in the street, "those feelings, symbols and acts that bind a group together and are propagated by politicians with reference to the Bible"(11).

Du Toit was intensely patriotic. He served as a chaplain to the Boer army in the South African war, and love of his fatherland and admiration for its history

shine through clearly in his copious poetic productions, which by themselves give him a claim to fame as a man of letters.

While civil religion in the South African sense did not originate with Du Toit (A. Kuyper was not only a theologian but an eminent statesman and Prime Minister of Holland) it coloured his thinking and, as a result of his status, was bequeathed by him to later generations. Civil religion has clearly influenced the way Scripture has been used by Afrikaner apologists for the status quo in Church and state.

Du Toit's writings on biblical topics are marked by three main characteristics: (i) a vigorous exposition of his particular theory of the infallibility of the Bible (ii) an intense hostility to the critical approach to the study of the Bible (iii) specific condemnation of critical scholarship as apostasy and falsehood. These attitudes of his left a deep and widespread influence on all three Afrikaner Churches.

#### Die Verklardende Bybel

The results of these attitudes can be illustrated by reference to the "Verklarende Bybel", an important and popular Bible commentary. (The full title is "Die Afrikaanse Bybel met Verklarende Aantekeninge"). It is widely accepted as a standard work of reference and numbered among its contributors. theologians of all three Afrikaner Churches.

Some quotations from it (obtained through Loader's English summary cf. supra) show how it accommodates either the fundamentalist position or what Barr terms the "optimal conservative" - i.e. a basically fundamentalist position formulated in such a way that the author, if challenged, can maintain that he has left open the possibility of an alternative position.

In the introduction to Exodus, S.J. du Plessis (whose exposition of Gen. 10 as "differentiation of the human race into nations...as part of God-willed diversity" is cited with approval in the Landman Report)(12), says cautiously that "Moses could be the author."

He mentions passages that refer to Moses engaging in writing activities and presents this as an argument for the authorship of the Pentateuch by Moses. He does not state the arguments on the other side, contenting

himself by merely suggesting that he has given them consideration before making up his mind on the point, thereby implying that his own judgement is sound, and that the opinions of opposing scholars are wide of the mark. The animosity to the critical approach is obvious and the effect is to confirm the reader in a Totius-type fundamentalism.

On Deutero-Isaiah Prof. P.A. Verhoef writes that "some interpreters" ascribe Isaiah 40-66 to "a prophet" from exilic times. This studied vagueness leaves the average reader with the impression that the later dating is quite incorrect, as J.D. du Toit also believed.

In his introduction to Daniel, S. du Toit (son of J.F. du T.) states dogmatically that "the reliability and historical credibility of the book has been proved unequivocally (!)."

He further explains that his exposition takes as its starting point the assumption that what is encountered here is a straight forward historical account, thus showing little appreciation of the literary genres to be found in the book. In keeping with his tradition he gives the impression, without explicitly saying so, that "reliability" and "historical correctness" are interchangeable concepts.

To cite one final example of the Verklarende Bybel's approach, T.F.J. Dryer maintains that the book of Jonah reports an actual historical fact, and in support of this assertion advances three proofs:- (i) the mention of a prophet Jonah in II Kings 14-25, (ii) the Gospels, where Jesus' acceptance of the historicity of the book is regarded as normative, and (iii) the appeal to divine omnipotence (God can command a fish, therefore the book is a straight-forward historical account).

In this commentary, authorship and factual correctness are regarded as questions of paramount importance, while the critical problems are not brought to the reader's attention. Modern scholarship is either ignored or dismissed lightly, while it is repeatedly suggested (or implied) that learning is on the side of the contributor (cf. the craving for "intellectual respectability" mentioned by Barr). It is also suggested that "the witness of scripture itself" is on the side of such contributors over against the critical scholars.

While such ideas could be paralleled in the devotional writings of other traditions, the significance of these

articles is their relatively recent date and the academic standing of their authors. While the Verklarende Bybel is not an official production of the Afrikaans Churches, it must be taken as reflecting a major current of opinion within them.

### Scripture and Race Relations.

It is against this background of "optimal conservatism" that Dutch Reformed use of the Bible in questions of race relations is to be evaluated. All three Afrikaner Churches have pronounced repeatedly on the subject and, despite certain differences of tradition and emphasis in matters of race relations and theological scholarship, this has in practice made little difference to their use of Scripture, which J.J. Burden epitomised as "referential" (13).

Until about 1950 the usual approach was to argue that apartheid was directly derived from Scripture, and was thus a God-given policy. E.P. Groenewald writing in 1947 could comment with great certainty in "Apartheid and Guardianship in the Light of Holy Scripture"(14) that there are many statements in the Bible that give fixed principles with regard to race relations. He concluded that the Bible teaches the unity of mankind, but that God consciously divided mankind into races, peoples and tongues; that apartheid is the will of God and that it leads to national, social and religious apartheid, though there is a "spiritual" unity in Christ.

Since then, however, largely as a result of dialogue with (and pressure from) churches abroad and other churches within South Africa, the emphasis has changed. Recent productions are no longer simply an apology for all aspects of apartheid on biblical grounds.

Kotze's "Principles and Practices in Race Relations" published in 1962 marks one step along this road. "It is a cautious book. The author does his best not to repulse or embitter". "An honest search is made in it for fundamental Scriptural truths in so far as they touch human relations". (15) Nevertheless the change was sufficient for Die Kerkbode, the official organ of the NGK, to sound a warning note, "There is much in the book with which one can heartily agree....but in many respects it must be a confusing book to the ordinary reader" (16).

It was to be the forerunner of the Landman Report of 1974. Indeed one might at first glance assume that Landman was simply a re-working and updating of Kotze, but the relationship is not one of direct literary dependence. Kotze marks a stage in the development of the church tradition out of which both documents emerged.

### The Landman Report

The Landman Report, "Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture" to quote the exact title of the English translation - like most of these productions it originally appeared in Afrikaans - represents the official thinking of the NGK Church at the present time, though a revision is now in progress.

It consists of 66 propositions in bold type, which represent official policy, together with longer explanatory statements which were merely "noted" by the Synod. It has major sections on Scriptural data, the "horizontal" dimension of the Church's work, the Church and social justice, the Church and missions, and marriage, including mixed marriage. It is the first of these sections that is of immediate interest here.

The Report lays down for itself the following hermeneutic approach:- "We can only truly discern what the Scriptures teach on relations between races and peoples if we correctly interpret and utilize the Scriptures. The Bible was never intended to be used as a scientific text-book for sociology and anthropology. Also one must avoid the danger of allowing the "historic situation" to function as a hermeneutic principle according to which the Scriptures are interpreted...."

"The Bible must be interpreted in accordance with recognised, reformed, scientific hermeneutic principles in keeping with its actual intention - it is not a scientific text-book....The Scriptures must not be used biblicistically...In dealing with Scriptural data the Church will constantly have to be aware of the central theme of its preaching - i.e. the way of salvation in Christ and the coming of the Kingdom of God - and it will have to indicate and extol the norms that coincide with this theme in all spheres of life." (17)

William Vorster in a lengthy and unsympathic article gives a detailed analysis of these claims. (18). He

demonstrates that the Report fails to live up to its own claims. It does not define what "reformed, scientific ..... principles" are, and is inconsistent in that it does allow its own historic situation in South Africa to function as the hermeneutic principle according to which the Scriptures are interpreted. "Race" is read into the text and elevated to be a keynote of the Bible.

Despite professions to the contrary the use of the Bible does seem to be "biblicist", whether that undefined term is taken to mean "out of context" or is used as a euphemism for "fundamentalist."

Daniel von Allmen of the Swiss Federation of Protestant Churches, who produced a critical study of the Report entitled (in its English translation) "Theology - Advocate or Critic of Apartheid?" and whose tone is more fairminded and balanced than some reviews, queried whether "justice is done to these affirmations in the Report as a whole." (19) (It is much to be regretted that for some unexplained reason von Allmen decided that it was "inappropriate to examine in close detail the way in which the Bible is actually interpreted in the Report.")

#### The Basic Apartheid Texts

Over the years the Dutch Reformed Churches have habitually appealed to five main passages of Scripture in defence of their pro-apartheid position. The same basic texts re-appear in the Landman Report, along with over 40 others, most of which are cited incidentally and add little to the thrust of the argument. The classic proof texts are as follows:-

Gen.1.28 "And God blessed them and God said to them, Be fruitful and increase and fill the earth and subdue it." This is taken to imply that "ethnic diversity is in its very origin in accordance with the will of God for this dispensation" (20).

This illustrates the propensity of the Report (and the whole tradition which underlies it) to indulge in "eisegesis", and read into the text racial ideas which are simply not there on any objective reading.

The Report wrongly interprets this verse (and the parallels cited in Gen.9.1,7) as commands requiring human obedience, whereas "God blessed them and God said..." is merely a literal translation of the typical Hebrew idiom of parataxis. "Man received from the hand of God

also the blessing that empowers him to reproduce and multiply." (21).

Gen. 11.1-9, the story of the tower of Babel. In the entire history of DRC theologians about race relations this is the cardinal text. Leaving aside the question of whether it is literal history - as the Report seems to take for granted, referring to "the event itself," - two issues are raised here. What was the sin involved and what did God intend by his reaction to it?

The Report looking at this passage through the spectacles of its own preconceived ideology, sees the sin as being that of a defiance of God's "command" at creation (1.28) and to Noah (9.1-7) that mankind should divide into separate "volke" with different languages and therefore different cultures.

It further deduces that in re-establishing this process of differentiation, God now extended it by dividing mankind into different races as well, and on the basis it concludes that the policy of "autogenous development" is accorded a Scriptural basis.

In an interesting Freudian slip the Report quotes from S. du Toit's book "Revelation in the Old Testament" and uncritically accepts his allusion to "a division which resulted in continual tension and conflict among peoples, something which, according to the Scriptures, will endure to the very last." What Scriptures? (22)

Once again the Report, without any warrant from the text, extends it to race. Indeed it shows a degree of perversity in making race rather than language the fundamental issue. It uses the text to justify the separation of races whereas the separation of the various language groups is never mentioned. It further uses the text to attack marriages between different racial groups, but not between different language groups which would be a logical corollary.

Deut. 32.8-9, "When the Most High portioned out the nations when he dispersed the sons of mankind, he set the limits of the peoples according to the numbers of the sons of God (or "sons of Israel"), while the Lord's share was his own people, Jacob was the portion he allotted himself."

This is another basic text in NGK thinking. In the earlier report issued in 1966 (23) J.D. Vorster quoted it as decisive. The key to the interpretation of the text,

however, is the question of which reading should be adopted.

There are two possibilities (i) "sons of Israel", which is supported by A.V., R.V., R.S.V. marg., N.I.V. and significantly - Afrikaans 1032/3 and 1954, (ii) "sons of God," which is the rendering of R.S.V., N.E.B., and G.N.B., supported by LXX and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Von Rad thinks it "as good as certain" that this is the correct reading. (24)

The sense is then that God assigned one or other nation to every "heavenly being" as vice-regent but chose Israel as his own people over whom he would rule directly. The passage thus has nothing to do with "homelands" or event territories, but with God's election of Israel. Acts 2.5-11, the miracle of the tongues at Pentecost. In its fourth chapter, dealing with the Church and missionary work, the Report maintains that "the great language miracle of Whit Sunday confirms that it is the will of God that each man should hear of the great deeds of God in his own language...the Christian faith must be Africanised in Africa." (25)

While it is reasonable to argue that missionary work and Bible translation should be extended to as many languages as possible, there is no hint in Acts 2 that every person must hear the gospel in his own language only or that each language group must then form its own autonomous Church, which is what the NGK has done, establishing the NGKA for black Africans, the NGSK for "coloureds" and the "Reformed Church in Africa" for Indians. The Report misses the point that, in this reversal of Babel, converts from differing backgrounds were brought into the one Church.

Acts 17.16, (God) "made the entire human race from one (man) to dwell upon the face of the whole earth, having determined set seasons and the boundaries of their habitation."

The Report quotes this text with approval as again confirming its obsession with the idea that "diversity was implicit in the fact of creation," and that God appointed peoples their respective homelands. Once again a question of translation arises. Should "pan ethnos anthropon" be rendered "every nation of men" or "the whole human race?"

Landman ignores the context of Paul's argument. The Athenians claimed that they were "sprung from the soil of

Attica," and therefore superior to others. Against such ideas of racial superiority Paul asserts the fundamental unity of all men. As elsewhere, the interpretation is strained and partisan.

### Positive Points

Two positive points must be made. (i) Many sections of the Report, both in the parts dealing with Scriptural data and in the parts dealing with more general matters of social justice etc., are commendable. The Old Testament passages dealing with the foreigner or alien are honestly expounded, even if the lesson is not then applied to the Christian Church. It is recognised that "The Scriptures teach and uphold the essential unity of mankind and the primordial relatedness and fundamental equality of all peoples." (26) Most mainstream Christian readers would accept the majority of its statements, whether referring to Scripture or to matters of "social justice", and would welcome the softening (however slight) on mixed marriages, which are now rated as "high undesirable" rather than "impossible", and on mixed services, now (theoretically) possible "on occasions" if sanctioned by the local Church council. (ii) The "curse of Ham argument" is specifically rejected. "There is no Scriptural basis for relating the subordinate position of some present day peoples to the curse on Canaan." (27)

Peverse exposition of Gen. 9.25 had a marked and unfortunate influence on some Western thinking. One example (from the U.S.A.) should be given: "Ham was a word which meant black, not only referring to skin colour but also to the very disposition of his mind. He was characterized as having always been wicked ("cursed Ham" - not "cursed be Ham"), with violence of temper, exceedingly prone to acts of ferocity and cruelty, involving murder, wars, butcheries and even cannibalism, including beastly lusts and lasciviousness..... dishonesty, treachery, low-mindedness and malice" (28).

This approach, which must be mentioned in any consideration of the "Scriptural account of the origin of nations," has long been rejected by the Dutch Reformed Churches. "It is simply not true that Ham and all his descendants were for ever cursed." (29)

### Conclusions:

The use of Scripture in the Dutch Reformed Churches of South Africa has been influenced by the scholastic Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper and by their own ecclesiastical history.

The Pretoria Symposium of 1979 summarised recent Afrikaner studies on the "scopus" and authority of the Bible, hermeneutics etc. Despite a formal repudiation of fundamentalism and biblicism there has been a strong bias in the Afrikaner tradition towards "optimal conservatism."

The understanding of some texts with an alleged bearing on race relations has been strongly influenced by the historic situation. "Race" has often been "eisegeted" into Scripture, thus leaving an impression of racism.

The Landman Report presents a traditional exegesis in a somewhat muted form and thus marks a minor watershed in the development of biblical interpretation in the Afrikaner community. A revision of the Report is currently in hand and its publication is awaited with interest.

NOTES:

- (1) "Principle and Practice in Race Relations"  
J.C.G. Kotze (Stellenbosch) 1962 p.11
- (2) "Calvinism - Six Stone Foundation Lectures"  
Abraham Kuyper (Eerdmans) 1943 p.40
- (3) op. cit. p.84
- (4) op. cit. p.90
- (5) Kotze op.cit. p.70.f
- (6) cf. Douglas Baz. "The Bible and Apartheid" p.138  
apud "Apartheid is a Heresy" John de Gruchy and  
Charles Villa-Vicencio (eds). Lutterworth 1983
- (7) Kotze op.cit. p.13
- (8) "The Use of the Bible in Conventional South African  
Theology" in W.S. Vorster (ed) "Scripture and the  
use of Scripture" (Pretoria) 1979
- (9) "Fundamentalism." James Barr (London) 1977
- (10) "Human Relations and the South African Scene in  
the Light of Scripture" (The "Landman" Report)  
(Pretoria) 1976)
- (11) J.J. Burden in "Scripture and the Use of Scripture"  
W.S. Vorster (ed) p.25.
- (12) "Landman" p.13
- (13) J.J. Burden op.cit. p.25
- (14) cited by W.S. Vorster in "Apartheid is a Heresy" p.96
- (15) Kotze op.cit. p.8f.
- (16) cf. Kotze op.cit. p.9.
- (17) "Landman" p.9ff.

NOTES:

- (18) cf. "Apartheid is a Heresy" pp. 96-109.
- (19) "Theologie zwischen Rechtfertigung und Kritik der Apartheid" ("Theology - Advocate or Critic of Apartheid?") Daniel von Allmen (Berne 1977 p.7
- (20) "Landman" p.14
- (21) "Das Erste Buch Mose" Von Rad (Göttingen) 1964
- (22) "Landman" p.17
- (23) cf. D. Bax in "Apartheid is a Heresy" p.124
- (24) G. von Rad "Das Fünfte Buch Mose" (Göttingen 1964) p.140
- (25) "Landman" p.87
- (26) "Landman" p.13
- (27) "Landman" p.19
- (28) "Bible Defense of Slavery;" and Origin, Fortunes and History of the Negro Race. Josiah Priest (U.S.A.) 1852.
- (29) "Landman" p.19