


# Religious Afrikaners, irreligious in conflicts

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**Dates:**

Received: 27 July 2018

Accepted: 19 Mar. 2019

Published: 30 Apr. 2019

**How to cite this article:**

Oliver, E., 2019, 'Religious Afrikaners, irreligious in conflicts', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(1), a5204. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i1.5204>

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From the first days of their settlement at the southern part of Africa – from 1652 onwards – the European settlers distinguished themselves from the indigenous people groups by referring to themselves as 'Christians'. However, this Christian mindset came along with a unique stubbornness that could often be seen as contrary to their faith. This double mindset of the people (religious and stubborn) – of which a significant part was later called the Afrikaners – became the means by which they lived and operated, being called 'unconsciously religious'. This new nation in the Cape was born Protestant, which carried in itself the notion of factional and schismatic tendencies, with different Protestant churches being formed alongside the original church that came to South Africa. Being devoted Christians on the one hand, and radical individualists on the other, they were in almost constant conflict with the people groups around them and with the government. This article explains how the two characteristics of religion and obstinacy sparked schism and influenced external conflict situations during the formation years of the nation up to the end of the 19th century. The Afrikaners portrayed a mix between their religiosity and their stubbornness, in which they 'twisted religion to suit their purposes'. The consequences of this unholy bond are still haunting the Afrikaner nation today.

**Keywords:** Afrikaners; History; Religion; Calvinism; Schism; Conflict; Obstinacy; Groot Trek; Britain; White tribe.

## Introduction

The past does not change – it is our thoughts on it and our understanding or interpretations of it that change constantly because of the specific circumstances we are experiencing in all sectors of life. Müller (2004:211) argues that 'with historical memory, it is often the present that sets the agenda of what the past should look like'. When such a point of view 'becomes the official or dominant history it often takes on a totalitarian nature, making every conceivable effort to discredit other versions of the same history' (Müller 2004:211). Bosch (1986) states that:

... those who believe themselves to be the makers of history – easily and frequently fall victim to their own past and become prisoners of their own history. In this respect Afrikaners are by no means unique ... All of us are at the same time shapers and victims of history. (p. 23)

Identifying and categorising national character and behavioural trends is not only an interesting but also a difficult and risky task. National characteristics are complex, and the Afrikaner's strong individuality tends to negate general labels and tags. Furthermore, these characteristic trends can be seen either in a positive or in a negative way.<sup>1</sup>

However, since the earliest days of the settlement at the Cape, the people identified themselves as Christians (Gilliomiee 1975:3; Nepgen 1938:58).<sup>2</sup> Another trend that is immanent since the earliest settlement is the Afrikaner's obstinacy (Pont 1968:197; Wichmann 1941:2). This article aims to highlight only one of several possible megatrends<sup>3</sup> in the national character of the Afrikaner nation. Megatrends develop over several decades or, in this case, centuries, and therefore they have far-reaching effects on current and future character developments. Focusing on a few of the key moments in the short history of the Afrikaner nation, the megatrends of religion on the one hand and stubbornness on the other hand are linked to stimulate discussion and hopefully have a positive and formative effect on current and future Afrikaner behaviour.

1. Afrikaner identity tends to be like the two sides of one coin with the description depending on the person's point of view: Unconsciously religious or sectarian, conservative or narrow-minded, strongminded individualism or stubbornness, patriarchal or male dominant, cunning or dishonest, aggressive and arrogant or innovative (see also Oliver 2011:76–83).

2. For a summary of the main influences on the unique Afrikaner religion, see Oliver (2006).

3. Trend studies use cross-sections at two or more points in time to examine change or stability over time.

**Note:** Christina Landman Festschrift, sub-edited by Wessel Bentley (University of South Africa) and Victor S. Molobi (University of South Africa).

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Afrikaners need to be more aware of the positive effects their actions could have and also avoid repeating mistakes from the past in similar situations.

Twenty-five years into democracy, South Africans are still struggling to come to terms with their past, proving the statement correct that '[i]f history is a nightmare, it is because the past is not the past' (Ignatieff 2009:319).

During the last three decades, the pendulum has swung through from presenting the past through the eyes of 'apartheid' to picturing the past through the eyes of 'the struggle'. Both these presentations of the South African history are seriously flaunted, and these romanticised versions of the past are hampering the progression of democracy because current issues and problems are often blamed on either past events or the impact and consequences these events still seem to have on society. This focus on the wrongs from the past draws the attention away from seeking answers and solutions to current problems that are urgently needed to move the South African society forward in realising the promised prosperity for all in the democratic state.

Both these main lines (of apartheid and the struggle history)<sup>4</sup> often include a sense of 'holiness' because of their strong ties with theology and religion. The struggle-view of history was built upon Liberation Theology, Black Theology and Social Gospel, while the apartheid-view of history was constructed upon the 'chosen people' fundamentalism and Pietistic worldview of the Afrikaners. This 'holiness', associated with the historical lines, brings with it disparity and conflict as the one group easily tends to see the history of the other from a different perspective and would, for example, refer to it as a 'version of history that can only be described as a gross distortion' (Jaffer 2016). This research only focuses on the Afrikaner presentation of history, although it is acknowledged that the struggle historical line should also be revisited and presented from a more balanced point of view.

Part of the Afrikaner nation still clings to the 'holy history' version (cf. Van Jaarsveld 1971a) because 'some details ... conveniently [got] lost in the telling of history ... As such we have a romantic recreation of the past, rather than an authentic account of what really happened'. This is where history enters the arena of mythology (Müller 2004:205). Another group of Afrikaners moved away from the traditional portrayal of the ideal Afrikaners who tend to be strictly Calvinistic in religion and puritan in morals. These two contrasting views of South African history are adding to controversy and division, and therefore it is necessary to revisit Afrikaner history to bring a better understanding and a more balanced perspective through initiating cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957; Travis & Aronson 2007).

Historical research design and a descriptive method of trend research will be implemented to show that the controversial

<sup>4</sup>There is also a preceding history line to these two histories – that of the hunter-gatherers who were the first inhabitants of this part of Africa (cf. Adhikari 2010; Giliomee & Mbenga 2007; Meyer 2012).

character trends that the Afrikaner nation has developed during the formation years until the second Anglo-Boer War contributed to much of the trauma and losses they brought over themselves in handling both internal and external conflict situations. Looking back and acknowledging the lessons to be learned from history can assist the current generation to come to terms with the past and also to understand that the focus should be on seeking solutions and working collaboratively with others to make South Africa prosper in the hands of the rainbow nation.

Firstly, background information on the origin and religious birth of the Afrikaner nation and their characteristic obstinateness, that often stood in direct contrast to their religious core, is provided. These two opposing character trends of religion and stubbornness led to schism within the Afrikaner nation and caused great trouble for them during external conflict and character-challenging situations. A few important events in the history of the Afrikaner nation are mentioned to illustrate the devastating role this mindset played in their interactions with the conflict situations they encountered. The conflicts are divided into two main streams, namely, internal conflicts regarding religion and external conflicts where the Afrikaners used religion in matters that are normally not directly linked with it.

The article concludes that the negative use of these contradictory characteristics by the Afrikaner nation is the reason behind and the direct cause of inevitable derailing in the history of the Afrikaners. Lessons to be learned could pave the way forward for the white tribe of Africa.

## Background

### The origin of the Afrikaners

The people who came to South Africa were not a unified group, as the Dutch East India Company (DEIC) was not exclusive in recruiting its employees (Le May 1995:3). The only things the recruits had in common were their employer and the country to which they were sent to start a refreshment post. Van Jaarsveld calls Simon van der Stel – the 10th commander of the settlement at the Cape – the father of the Afrikaner nation (Van Jaarsveld 1971a:27) because he (officially) changed the refreshment post into a colony. This nation was a mixture (Combrink sa:224–225) of mainly Dutch (35%), German (34%) and French (13%) blood (Duvenage 1986:1). By 1685 people already spoke 'Afrikaans' (Van Jaarsveld 1971a:27). A new nation formed and as early as 1707, Hendrik Bibault already proclaimed: '*Ik ben een Africaander!*' [I am an Afrikaner!] (Le May 1995:4). The term *Afrikaner* is sometimes used synonymous with *Boer* [Farmer] (Ahlers 1954:16). Both Sparks (2003:69) and Cillie (1979) state that the Afrikaners became a 'white tribe of Africa', almost like the indigenous peoples of the country, as they mostly 'lived in partnership with their environment rather than trying to tame it as British imperialism would' (Combrink sa:221).

According to Paton (1979:18), two major conflict situations influenced the Afrikaners as an evolving nation that would

determine what they became. First are the encounters with other tribes and nations living in South Africa who were, like a huge portion of the Afrikaners, farming with cattle. This inter-ethnic pressure was a process rather than an event and it lasted the entire 18th century. The other conflict situation started in 1806 when the British annexed the Cape (for the second time) (Coetzee 1977:155). This lasted for more than 150 years until South Africa became a Republic in 1961.

Added to these prolonged external conflict situations, internal conflict also plagued the Afrikaners throughout their short history as a nation. Although the Afrikaner nation can be tagged as Calvinistic, the individual interpretations of their faith were, and still are, a major cause of internal conflict and schism. Afrikaner characteristics such as their strong-minded individualism and stubbornness and collectively labelled obstinacy also contributed to internal schism and division that led to many tragic events.

### The religion of the Afrikaners

During the 17th century, religious wars caused havoc in Europe. The Dutch wars of independence against Spain (1568–1648) coincided with the Protestant revolt against the Roman Catholic Church. As the ecclesiastical court at Batavia, that fell under the classis of Amsterdam, instructed the DEIC on matters of faith and polity (Hattersley 1969:57), the only religion recognised at the Cape was Calvinistic Protestantism up to 1795 (Davenport 1987:36; Van Staden 2014:76).

Meyer argues that the Afrikaners are the only nation that came into being as a Calvinistic nation (Meyer 1940:27). The words of Froude (1886:35) can be added: 'The Cape Dutchman, or Boer, as we call him, is a slow, good-humoured person, not given to politics, occupied much with his religion and his private affairs'.

Everything they did and said was linked to their religion (Nepgen 1938:58). Rose (1902) agrees:

Based far more upon the Old than the New Testament, it [*the religion of the Afrikaner*] is simply part and parcel of his daily life, and, personally, I could far more easily imagine a Boer dispensing with his breakfast than with his morning prayers, or with his supper than with his evening psalm singing. He is, so to say, unconsciously religious; it simply never enters into his head to be otherwise. (pp. 10–11)

Stockenström (1921:226) has the same conviction, stating that the Afrikaners were religious without even knowing it. Fuller (1908:36) adds: 'In character, he is different from all others: he maintains a kind of patriarchal religion'. Jeppe (1906), a contemporary of Fuller, writes:

The religious sentiment in the Boer has been often scoffed at; it certainly sometimes verges on chant, and naturally it is not equally sincere in all individuals; but upon the whole it is unfeigned and deep-seated. (p. 75)

The Bible, together with the Calvinistic faith, was the single most important factor shaping the life of the Afrikaners

(Booyens 1970:32; Nepgen 1938:58; Wichmann 1941:3). Calpin (1944:17) confirms that the 'Old Testament stands Bible to the Afrikaner; this nation has been described as the modern counterpart of an Old Testament tribe'. And from this, they 'have persuaded themselves by some wonderful mental process that they are God's chosen people' (Mackenzie 1899:158). This idea was already prevalent among the Voortrekkers, as well as in the language used at the 1837 Cape Synod regarding the Great Trek, expressing its concern over the 'departure into the desert, without a Moses or Aaron' (Giliomee 2003:162). The Great Trek leader, Gert Maritz, referred to Natal as the 'land overflowing with milk and honey' (Van Jaarsveld 1962:238), while M.W. Pretorius addressed the people as 'fathers of Israel' (Van Jaarsveld 1961:239). Through identification with the Old Testament patriarchs (Combrink sa:220), they applied the content of these biblical passages on their own life as they began to live as the chosen people of the Lord (Helberg 1984:7). This proved to be a constant cause of irritation to everybody who was not part of the Afrikaner nation. Afrikaners distanced themselves actively from people who were not part of this exclusive group (Stuart 1854:211), and this attitude contributed to the 'holier than thou' assumption that others had of the Afrikaners (Fuller 1908:164).

Sadly, the emphasis on religion also cultivated a schismatic tendency (Steyn 2006:674) and internal power struggles (Schutte 1943:30) within the Afrikaner nation.

### Typical Afrikaner obstinacy

Living in the southern part of Africa, thousands of miles away from Europe and in isolation for more than 200 years from the influences of the world (Booyens 1970:33), definitely had its impact on the Afrikaners and their national identity. As already indicated, their main characteristic was their Calvinistic religion and, in line with this, their conservatism. Everything that was intended to change or improve their way of life was frowned upon as either 'English' or the 'antichrist' (Weilbach & Du Plessis 1882:24).

Even in their daily life, the people were isolated from one another because they lived separately on large farms, with insufficient communication systems, poor roads and slow transportation (Booyens 1970:33). The positive outcome of the isolation was that the Afrikaners became independent, self-supportive and innovative (Froude 1886:37). They managed to keep their identity (culture, language, religion, world view, etc.) intact against the British Empire (while other colonised nations who were exposed to British rule changed their language and often also their culture). The negative outcome of this was a strong-minded individualism and stubbornness. It created the illusion that they did not need other people, that they refused to seek help or accept advice from others, or to follow instructions, often with devastating results. This characteristic stubbornness,<sup>5</sup> called *obsternaatheid*, sparked division internally (Wichmann 1941:2)

<sup>5</sup>Obstinacy can be seen as stubbornly refusing to change one's opinion or chosen course of action, despite advice or attempts from others to persuade one to do so.

and was the cause of many deaths in external conflict situations, as the tragic history of Italeni and numerous other events are proof of. On the contrary, these Afrikaners approached and handled life, including internal and external conflict situations, through religion-coloured lenses on the one hand, and with their obstinacy on the other hand.

## Internal conflicts

Although the priority and importance of religion is, just like in the rest of the fourth revolution world, moving from institutionalised to personal and private level, the schism in the Afrikaner church(es) is still tearing the nation apart. The reasons behind the various schisms were, and still are obstinacy, the conservative interpretation of faith where individuals and groups see themselves as 'owners' of the truth (Oliver 2007:34), or other reasons such as political motivations, language issues or power struggles.

The schisms commenced as soon as the government restrictions on religion were lifted in 1804 by governor De Mist. The first official split in the church happened when the church in the Cape, then under British rule, decided to conduct sermons in English (Engelbrecht 1953:32). By the end of 1842, the church in the Cape changed its name, and in 1862 they broke their ties with the Reformed Church in the Netherlands.

The English Methodist-orientated Church of the British was not acceptable for the Afrikaners (Engelbrecht 1953:62), and one of the reasons provided for the Great Trek into the interior of the country was specifically the Methodist Church and the influence of the missionaries. In February 1842, the Voortrekkers founded the first Church Council in Potchefstroom (Engelbrecht 1953:59), north of the Vaal River and outside British governance. However, already in 1854, the congregation of Lydenburg separated themselves from the ecclesiastical organisation of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR) (Engelbrecht 1953:105) and requested incorporation back into the Cape Synod. The Cape Supreme Court, however, judged that the Cape Church did not have any jurisdiction over the churches outside their official territory (Engelbrecht 1953:95).

During 1855 there was tension in the congregation of Rustenburg (also in the ZAR), about the singing of Evangelical hymns. The Evangelical hymns were introduced in the Netherlands in 1807 and in 1814 at the Cape. The group that opposed the singing of these hymns was led by Paul Kruger, who later became president of the ZAR (d'Assenville 2013:2; Engelbrecht 1953:96). In September 1857, this group was given permission by the House of Assembly of the ZAR to call their own pastor. In February 1859, the Dutch Reformed Church in the ZAR split when the Free Reformed Church was formed (Engelbrecht 1953:158).

A few years later, in 1865, Lion-Cachet created the next schism of the church in the ZAR by arguing that the name

*Hervormd* [Reformed] was illegal, and therefore the existence of the *Hervormde Church* was illegal (Engelbrecht 1953:286). There were then two Dutch Reformed Churches in the ZAR: The *Nederduitsch Hervormde Church* (hereafter referred to as the NH Church) and the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Church* (hereafter referred to as the DRC). All of these churches 'remained orthodox Calvinists by the Five Points (Articles) of Calvinism at the Synod of Dordrecht' (Picken 2012:183). In none of the separations could the author detect major religious motives such as the reasons for the Reformation. Personal interests, power struggles, the idea of 'owning' the truth, a fear for dominance by the British and other Afrikaners, and stubbornness gave rise to this situation.

It was again the political movements of the British that gave rise to the next chapter in the Afrikaner church history. The success of the first Anglo-Boer War (1880–1881) led to a short-lived feeling of national unity in the ZAR.

In 1879, at the 20th General Assembly of the NH Church in the ZAR, discussions on the issue of a church merger between the NH Church and the DRC in the ZAR started. Neither the Reformed Church nor the church in the Cape was mentioned there. On 31 October 1882, the two churches' commissions met to discuss the merger of the new United Church. The negotiations, as can be expected, were characterised by infighting, accusations and allegations from both sides (Engelbrecht 1953:287). The temporary name of the new church would be the *Nederduitse Hervormde of Gereformeerde Kerk* (Engelbrecht 1953:289; Van der Watt 1980:176). However, there were a few members of the Witfontein congregation (near Bronkhorstspuit) who refused to be part of the merger, naming themselves the *Nederduitsch Hervormde Gemeente der ZAR distrik Pretoria* – another split (Van der Watt 1980:176). By 1888, many former *Hervormde* members of the United Church returned to their former church (Van der Watt 1980:177,178) and by 1892, after a series of court rulings, the NH Church functioned next to the United Church in the ZAR (Van der Watt 1980:181).

In all of these events, it seems as if power struggles, stubbornness and the conviction that only certain groups 'own' the truth regarding religion could be the main reasons behind the conflicts. It seems as if the general priesthood of every believer was used by the Afrikaners as a war mechanism, and every individual used that to become a sharp-shooter: every Afrikaner had a 'gun', which was the Bible, while the 'bullets' were their own interpretation of the Bible. They 'shot' whoever tried to oppose their views and interpretations or criticise their doctrine. This attitude brought them close to being heretics. It also led to the Afrikaners not regarding people as equal. They suffered from the God-is-on-our-side syndrome that caused major divisions within the nation from the start of the 19th century up to this very day (examples are the church schisms, the actions of the so-called 'Bible bullies' [Oosthuizen 2018:167] and 'Church bullies' [Oosthuizen 2018:139]).

## External conflict

Although they were 'unconsciously religious', the Afrikaners tend to rebel against everything that did not fit into their particular mindset, including rebellion against the government. Because of their inherent religion, their faith was always drawn into their handling of external conflicts. Very early in their formation history, the Afrikaners, when in confrontation with Willem van der Stel (Ahlers 1954:15), stated:

We stand as one race, one people, with one faith, one privilege, one calling and one destiny; and together we will win the world for our one Lord Jesus Christ. (Burton 1927:22)

As with the internal conflicts, the Afrikaners saw themselves as the bearers of the truth and, because of them being the chosen people, saw their interpretation of the Bible as correct. One example where their unique interpretation of the Word of God differed from that of the government was during the Slachters' Nek rebellion of 1815. Frederik Bezuidenhout, a farmer on the eastern border of the Cape, mistreated one of his Khoi labourers and was summoned to appear before a magistrate's court. He refused arrest and was killed. His brother, Hans, organised a commando of rebels who met an armed force at Slachter's Nek, where most of them surrendered and Hans was killed (FAK 2017). Five of the leaders were sentenced to death. The hangman, who thought that only one man had to be hanged, had to use four old nooses. When these ropes broke, the Afrikaners immediately interpreted it as a sign of pardon by God and pleaded that the men should not be killed. The British did not see this in the same light as the Afrikaners did, and the men were hanged again, leaving the Afrikaners shocked and even more convinced that the God that the (Methodist) English preachers prayed to was not the same one they knew from their large Dutch Bibles. This event was drawn into the 'holy history' and victim history of the Afrikaner nation, and formed a well-known part of the traditional Afrikaner history.

When the English invasion of the Cape became permanent after 1814, the Afrikaners were very unhappy (Preston 1989:19). About 26 000 of them were permanently cut off from the Netherlands and forced to adapt to the laws of the new government. By 1834, when the sixth Xhosa war raged at the Fish River, Britain set the slaves free (cf. Davenport 1987:46–49) without compensation for those who could not travel to England, while prices for farm products were low. In line with the Old Testament analogy of the chosen people moving away from the oppressive government, about 20 groups of Afrikaners decided to move further inland – away from the British laws. According to Duvenage (1986:5), 15 000 (3000 households) of the 26 000 people left the Cape between 1835 and 1840. According to Storm (1989:15; cf. SAHO 2011), this was an indication that the 'majority' did not leave.

The disunity between the Afrikaners (those who stayed and those who trekked on the one hand, and among the different trek parties on the other hand) is normally not mentioned when Afrikaner historians refer to the Great Trek. Yet, history

itself bears testimony of the disunity, unwillingness to cooperate, power struggles and different religious views that caused 'fierce disagreements which resulted in trekker parties splitting off' (Combrink sa:222). The fact that all the Afrikaners were in the same conflict with the British, that all of them had the same aim (to get away from the British) and the same world view and religion, was not enough to keep them together. Even the ordaining of the missionary, Erasmus Smit, who migrated with the Voortrekkers, sparked controversy, conflict, and more schism among the Trekkers (Engelbrecht 1953:46).

Although scholars supply different reasons for trekking (cf. Giliomee 2003:144–149; Van Jaarsveld 1971b:54, 59, 70), most of the causes can be classified under one general heading, namely, 'dissatisfaction with British Rule' (McGill 1943:12). The final destination of the Great Trek also caused conflict as some of the people wanted to go to Natal, while others wanted to move north or even the northeast to link with the harbour in Mozambique. Once again the British government was the reason why most of the Afrikaners settled in the northern parts of the country (Tingay & Johnson 1978:46) as the British annexed Natal in 1842 after coal was discovered – a much needed treasure to keep the new fleet of steam ships afloat (Vivier, Loots & Grobler 1996:6).

Part of the 'holy history' tradition of the Great Trek is the battle at the Ncome River (later called Blood River) and the vow. Again the peoples' religion became part of the way they handled external conflict situations, while internal power struggles and personal bias (including questions about who should lead the battles, and who should be the religious leader) never ceased. Negotiations to buy land from the Zulu king, Dingaan, failed, and early in 1838 approximately 600 Voortrekkers were killed, including Retief and his men (Duvenage 1986:75).

Early in December 1838, Pretorius and his men made a vow to God that they would build a church, should they be victorious over the Zulus, and that they and their descendants would honour and celebrate that day on which they had the victory, as a Sunday (Duvenage 1986:146–148). On 16 December the battle took place and the day was celebrated in Natal till 1843 with the annexing of the land (Duvenage 1986:167). Only in 1864 the DRC in Natal again decided to celebrate the day as a Sabbath or Sunday (Duvenage 1986:167).

Interestingly, it was the actions of the British that brought the Afrikaners outside of Natal to renew the vow more than 40 years later. On 16 December 1880, Paul Kruger and the burghers of the ZAR renewed the vow by committing themselves to keep that day should the Lord give their land back to them. The troops of the ZAR and Orange Free State fought the British from 16 December 1880 to 27 February 1881 and were victorious. On 16 December 1881, the vow was celebrated at Paardekraal, but not in 1882 because of the smallpox epidemic. At the 1883 celebrations, the government decided to do the celebrations only every 5 years because of economic reasons (Suidlanders 2015).

It is clear that the Afrikaner nation's core was built around both the Christian religion and individual obstinacy that caused internal schism and triggered them to handle external conflict situations in such a way that both these trends became an inherent part of the Afrikaner nation during their foundational years, up to the end of the 19th century. The foundation was so strong that, after the Second Anglo-Boer War ended in 1904, the political leaders developed a specific paradigm for Afrikaner history, aiming to unite the people and to provide hope for the future. They portrayed Afrikaner identity as forged between the hammer of British imperialism and the anvil of black resistance (Hamerton-Kelly 1979:161) that fuelled similar actions (where religion and obstinacy dictated) in the 20th century (such as another Trek,<sup>6</sup> and more church schisms<sup>7</sup>).

## Conclusion

The Afrikaner nation was born and developed with Christianity as part of their DNA. They developed their own language, culture and worldview with such strong ties to their faith that more than 150 years of British colonisation could not turn them into British citizens. Countless losses of lives because of their 'my-way-is-the-only-way' attitude and their characteristic obstinacy could not alter their identity or actions over the past three-and-a-half centuries.

The 'white tribe of Africa' must see their history as it is and not as something they want it to be. They must acknowledge the fact that together with the 'unconscious' religion, they also bear the ever-present toxic seeds of schism. Their faith and obstinacy kept them standing against the British Empire, but it also brought them much trauma and both fair and unfair criticism because of their handling of racial and other issues. The Afrikaners have a Calvinist Protestant core, but it is also this core that prevents national unity to form. By acknowledging both the ups and downs of their history, cognitive dissonance can strengthen the self-knowledge of the Afrikaner and guide them to be more aware of the two major conflicting trends in their character that tend to be first and foremost in any character-challenging situation. Is it possible for Afrikaners to acknowledge other peoples' religious viewpoints? And is it possible for Afrikaners to survive as the white tribe of Africa by being true to their faith and their character?

## Acknowledgements

Prof. Christina Landman says things as she sees them, often in a controversial way. She is frequently (purposefully) misunderstood. She is not afraid to challenge traditions or to offer alternative perspectives. She is an activist for women

6. When the First World War broke out in 1914, again, like a hundred years earlier – in 1815 – an Afrikaner rebellion was suppressed forcefully by the government and some of the leaders were assassinated. Some Afrikaners again packed their wagons in the so-called Thirstland Trek (Stassen 2010). This time it was mostly members of the Reformed Church (Hatching 1975:27), who were very reminiscent of the division between the three churches, which 'caused distrust and political division among themselves' (Stassen 2010:42), who left.

7. Because of the divisions that apartheid caused, the DRC split in 1987 (Van der Merwe 2016). The NH Church also split in 2013 into a conservative and liberal church (Dreyer 2014; Ungerer 2017).

and, as a female theologian, an icon to many. This article reflects on the typical Afrikaner characteristics of strong faith and stubbornness that I have also observed in her during more than 12 years of working together. By combining these controversial characteristics in a positive and productive way, Prof. Landman can look back on a lifetime of work as a positive agent of change that the women of our country will honour for generations to come.

## Competing interests

The author declares that she has no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced her in writing this article.

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