
Pro Rege

Volume 32 | Number 4

Article 6

June 2004

Afrikaners: Biography of a People (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

Van Der Slik, Jack (2004) "Afrikaners: Biography of a People (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 32: No. 4, 27 - 30.

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol32/iss4/6

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As much detail as we get into some aspects of Rienstra's life (including adventures in baby poop or depression after weeks of needy-baby syndrome), we don't see some of the daily struggles that should be there. For example, her husband makes her crazy sometimes, but what about the older kids, especially during the early, exhausting days of teaching a new baby to nurse and keep a livable schedule? Or, how do she and her husband manage the daily details of negotiating work schedules and other responsibilities? Even with these omissions, this book assures the reader—myself included—that being a professional, Christian woman

isn't straightforward for anyone. Rienstra doesn't offer easy answers but passes on her hard-won wisdom and wonder to those who accompany her. The reader walks alongside Rienstra, much as one would with an open, honest friend, and learns much from the fellowship.

Sherri Lantinga (lantinga@dordt.edu) won the race and now teaches psychology at Dordt College in Sioux Center, IA. She does the cleaning, and her husband Nick is in charge of food as they together raise three red-heads.

Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People. Cape Town, South Africa and Charlottesville, Virginia: Tafelberg Publishers and the University of Virginia Press, 2003. Xix+698 pp. Paper, R 295, \$39.50. ISBN:0-8139-2237-2. Reviewed by Jack R. Van Der Slik, Professor of Political Studies emeritus, University of Illinois at Springfield.*

For hyphenated Americans like myself who take pleasure and pride in the word Dutch as the leading word in such a construction, *The Afrikaners* will be an absorbing read. It is a saga of immense proportions that parades before the reader an engaging list of people, places, and concepts that are at once familiar, distant, foreboding, challenging, and distasteful. Among the people are Jan van Riebeeck, Andries Pretorius, Paul Kruger ("Oom Paul"), H. F. Verwoerd, Jan Smuts, Cecil Rhodes, Lord Kitchener, Abraham Kuyper, Joseph Chamberlain, several Bothas, F.W. De Klerk, and Nelson Mandela. Even if we do not know them all, we recognize them as players in a significant history that both imposed and endured great suffering. They played their parts in places with echoing names such as Cape Town, the Blood River, the Orange Free State, Zululand, Johannesburg, Witwatersrand, Kimberley, Bloemfontein, and Sharpeville. They forged a vocabulary that made known to us Hottentots, colored, trekboers, Broederbond, Voortrekkers, and apartheid.

My anticipation to read this book was whetted by a recent visit to South Africa. My maternal grandfather came with five children to this country after the turn of the last century. It was his second choice. His father forbade his earlier desire to go to South Africa to fight on the side of the Boers. My wife's paternal grandfather came here, but in the 1890s, during a wave of Dutch migration to South Africa, his older brother chose that destination. When we met our distant cousins, they immediately engaged our love, fellowship, and compassion. We could absorb only parts of the stories of their lives. This book fills out the picture of both their pride and their pain.

Hermann Giliomee's magnum opus is not called *The*

History of South Africa or *The Saving of a Beloved Country*, a play on the title of Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*. This book is *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*. I note the alternatives because a history would require a dispassionate description of popular movements and conflicts over a landmass that does not identify the author with the players. The other title would call for a subjective scrutiny that expresses emotional accord and slanted sensitivity. Giliomee has given us a book that is better than either of those. It is a cultural tapestry that identifies with a unique people but sees with analytical eyes the range of their aspirations, risk taking, victories, reversals, sins, and suffering.

One of the ideas that the book explains is the uniqueness of the Afrikaners. Of course, it can be argued that any particular people are special in some manner. Giliomee observes "a sense of being Afrikaners rather than being Dutch or French or German had crystallized by the end of the 18th century" (51). The "volk" spread east and north from the original Cape Town settlement, tending their livestock and finding farmland. They were people of limited culture and literacy. No Dutch language newspaper emerged until 1830, but its name helped affirm the identity of the community it served: *De Zuid-Afrikaan*. The Afrikaner identity was as much about what it was not as what it was. It, of course, was distant from that of the natives – Hottentots, Khoikhoi, Xhosa, Zulus, and others. It was different from that of the "colored," those people of mixed race emerging from early miscegenation in the Cape community. It contrasted sharply that of the English. Among the Afrikaners the English were occupiers who exuded an offensive air of superiority and cultural dominance. The legality of their occupation was by assignment from the

Congress of Vienna in 1815. By contrast, the early Afrikaners “were a rural, isolated, relatively backward people with only a few who received more than a rudimentary education” (195). However, they viewed themselves as permanent husbandmen of the land and the country. For the most part, the English did not. Despite what they might own in South Africa, they kept their ties to England as home. While Europeaness was the heritage of the Afrikaners, they identified with South Africa as their homeland. In the nineteenth century, they extended their reach and distribution by trekking north and east for land and agricultural opportunity. Remembered as the Voortrekkers, they suffered hardships of the trek and massacres at the hands of Zulu warriors.

A historical highlight of Afrikaner history was the Covenant of December 9, 1838, when the Afrikaners importuned God for a victory over their enemies and promised to commemorate the battle and build the church. On December 16, with roughly 500 on the Afrikaner side, led by Andries Pretorius, they fought ten to twelve thousand Zulu warriors. The Afrikaners won a great victory without a man killed but some 3000 Zulu dead: “Afrikaner nationalists of the next century considered Blood River the battle that ‘saved’ the trek and secured the victory of Christianity and ‘civilization’” (165).

British industrial imperialism prevailed after the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley and gold in Witwatersrand, extracting huge profits and, in the gold area, flooding a nascent Afrikaner republic with “diggers, prostitutes, gamblers, saloon keepers, washerwomen and domestic servants” (236). Despite having given the trekkers the right to form their own governments—Zuid Afrikaanische Republiek, ZAR, in 1852 and the Orange Free State, or OFS, in 1854—the influx of British immigrants and investors pursuing gold threatened to overrun the ZAR. The Afrikaners protected their independence with a restrictive franchise that kept voting rights from the Outlanders (Uitlanders) as well as the blacks and encouraged a new wave of immigrants from the Netherlands during the 1880s and 1890s. A tangle of rival interests eventually led to the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902, and the subjugation of the short-lived Afrikaner republics.

Despite the cruelty of the war and the decimation it brought upon the Afrikaners, Giliomee does not belabor that story (250-268). What is striking is that the Afrikaners came out of the war with leaders, such as Jan Smuts, who could forgive and forget, assume the posture of loyal British citizens, and yet solidify the Afrikaner identity with Christian schools in a Kuyperian response to the challenge of English education (268-272). By 1910, the Union of South Africa was formed

and the Dutch language put the Afrikaners on an equal official footing in governmental operations and education. Installed as head of the first government was Louis Botha, an Afrikaner.

That Dutch language has its own peculiar history in the story of Afrikaner culture. Having arisen as a spoken language, Afrikaans is often characterized as “mongrel Dutch,” a patois that mixes Dutch, German, French and local native dialects. English speakers scorned it as a public language “beneath contempt” (216). By the diligence of some who insisted that “We write as we speak” (217), the language took written form. The Dutch Reformed Church took part in the language controversy, initially opposing Afrikaans as a substitute for Dutch. But in 1916 its Federal Council commissioned a translation of the Bible into Afrikaans and in 1919 gave Afrikaans equal status with the Dutch language in the church. The first Afrikaans newspaper appeared in 1876. The substantial Dutch newspaper in Cape Town, *De Burger*, founded in 1915, became *Die Burger* in 1922, signaling the transition from Dutch to Afrikaans. In 1925 Afrikaans replaced Dutch as an official language, and in 1933 the Afrikaans Bible appeared to great acclaim (429).

After 1924, with the election of J. B. M. Herzog and the National Party, the country was almost continuously in the control of Afrikaner political majorities until the 1990s. During the 1930s, Afrikaners glorified the Boers’ fight against English imperialism and recalled the Great Trek of the century before with a reenactment: 100,000 Afrikaners celebrated the Blood River battle and laid the cornerstone for a huge Voortrekker monument on December 16, 1938. Despite Afrikaner resentment against the English upper hand in South Africa’s economy, the country supported the Allied cause in World War II. However, war fatigue and real or imagined victimization of the Afrikaners during the war led to a momentous National Party election victory in 1948. The political preeminence gained over the English and all other interests put in place a regime that would rule South Africa with a radical Afrikaner cultural agenda until the 1990s. It was an agenda that solidified and implemented apartheid.

As the sin of Adam and Eve has been in the world almost from the beginning, the evil that became apartheid was in South Africa from the earliest European presence. Jan van Riebeeck arrived in Table Bay with 90 mostly Dutch settlers in 1652. The first shipload of slaves arrived in 1658. Together they lived under the laws of the Netherlands States General and swore fealty to the Dutch East India Company in a two-tiered society: company officials and burghers above and indentured servants and slaves below. Their church was the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) of the

Netherlands homeland, and it was the only church at the Cape for more than a century (5). By 1790, when “a religious awakening swept over the colony” (42), the church was “largely a white church.” While Giliomee’s argument is too long to repeat here, he asserts that Reformed covenantal theology, articulated at the great Synod of Dorcht, made the baptism of children and slaves into the church the spiritual responsibility of family patriarchs. That authority became a mechanism for making and maintaining racial distinctions, exclusivity, and superiority: “Cape clergies...made no concerted effort to encourage the baptism of slaves. The clergy had to wait for fathers or heads of households to bring a child to the baptismal font” (44).

Children of color, legitimate or not, were rarely presented and less often accepted later as full members by profession of faith. There was little fervor for evangelizing either slaves or free blacks. By the end of the eighteenth century, “a few” DRC congregations had established separate chapels, or *gestichten*, where “colored Christians” worshipped. In 1824, when the DRC convened its first colonial synod, its regulations required that sacraments be administered to the “heathens” in separate congregations (100). The synod of 1857 resolved to “absorb members from the heathen population into existing congregations” but allowed for the “heathen” to exercise their privileges in separate buildings (125). In short, the church sanctioned second-class status for nonwhite believers as a way to avoid the strain of social leveling (*gelykstelling*) that equality in church would bring to everyday life. In 1880, the DRC acceded to a proposal from four “colored” chapels to form the Dutch Reformed Mission Church as an arm of the DRC (127). In 1910, the DRC in the Orange Free State used the Mission Church for “colored” as a model for a black daughter church—separate people, but all equal before God (456). By 1935, the Federal Council of the DRC called for Africans and “colored people” to receive assistance “into self-respecting Christian nations,” in effect, implementing apartheid ideology (459). In 1948, the DRC synod of Transvaal justified apartheid, starting from its mission’s policy; and by arguing a Kuyperian interpretation of the Genesis rendition of the Tower of Babel, it rationalized racial separation (463).

The 1948 elections put the National Party into power with overwhelming support from Afrikaners. If the apartheid plan was incomplete, the prevailing majority supported racial separation rather than integration. Five key bases were the following: “political apartheid restricting all power to whites, the enforced separation of existing communities, segregated education, protection for whites in the labor market, an influx control that restricted African movement into the cities.” However,

a sixth base, as Giliomee explains, was central: “the setting aside of special land areas called reserves for African residency, later renamed black or Bantu homelands, or Bantustans for short”(500). The plan had two kinds of supporters: “crude apartheid racists, [who] saw the policy as the ideal instrument to keep blacks and colored down” (513), and “apartheid theorists (some scholars call them apartheid idealists), [who] believed that apartheid offered more opportunities for the subordinates than they would get in a common system where they would suffer pervasive discrimination. Apartheid, the theorists believed, would provide a steadily expanding field of jobs serving in the subordinate communities” (514).

A program with sweeping implications, apartheid was effectuated in the next twenty years to separate and marginalize the lives and opportunities of the rapidly multiplying population of nonwhites. Initially prospering, the nation, particularly its white middle class, enjoyed an economic boom. However, the patterns of repression imposed upon nonwhites—the forced removal of “colored people” from District Six in Cape Town, making blacks into aliens denied land ownership or movement without passes, the Sharpeville massacre of 69 blacks in 1960—increasingly brought world condemnation upon the regime and its dominating white minority. Still, it was fueled by white resolve and rationalizations. As late as 1974, the synod of the Dutch Reformed Church accepted and endorsed the legitimacy of apartheid by reference to the Tower of Babel and its relevance for ethnic separation (559). World sanctions from outside and demographic pressures from within made repression a failing policy. The DRC articulated a New Testament view of race in its 1986 and 1990 synods, turning away from its support for apartheid (620-621). Eventually the white minority, 15 percent of the actual population in 1991, was led to accept the idea of power sharing.

If Richard Nixon, the credentialed opponent of communism, was the right leader to open American relations with Communist China, then F.W. De Klerk was the credentialed Afrikaner to negotiate a peaceful constitutional process that let blacks into the political system. In 1992 the white electorate was asked, “Do you endorse the continuation of the reform process “[...] which is aimed at a new Constitution through negotiation?” (633-634). With 87 percent voting, 69 percent voted yes. The eventual Constitution provided a parliamentary system with elections by proportional representation to a 400-member National Assembly that elects the president. Nine provinces have limited powers, and their provincial parliaments elect representatives to a national Council of Provinces.

While the initial Government of National Unity

begin in 1994 with Nelson Mandela as president and F.W. De Klerk as one of two deputy presidents, the country made the transition to majority control. The DRC added its voice to renunciations of apartheid before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (651). Eleven languages were given official status, including Afrikaans, but the very multiplicity of sanctioned languages makes likely the growing preeminence of English. In a pessimistic statement, Giliomee opines that "by 2000 it appeared as if Afrikaners had become a minority linguistic group rather than an organized ethnic group with myths of origin and kinship, capable of mobilization as a potent force" (665).

As a recent visitor to starkly beautiful South Africa, I can report that it is painful to hear distant cousins express their sense of loss when some of their children and grandchildren emigrate for economic opportunity to Europe, North America, Oceania, and other African nations. Their government bureaucracies, businesses,

and universities may not exclude according to color, language or, they think, standards of merit. They pay the bulk of the tax burden to enlarge economic opportunities for others and for the heavy cost of domestic security. In addition, they buy guns, electronic alarms, guard dogs, and protection systems for their homes, businesses, and automobiles. The representation of their interests in the political realm is destined to have minority status as long as their lives will last. Yet they do live under a rule of law with civil and religious liberties, entitled, if with little joy, to free speech and economic opportunity. They are educated, pragmatic, and resourceful. Moreover, they are as African as the people of color around them. The burden of the sins of their fathers and the tasks for integrating themselves into all aspects of their multicultural society rests upon them and their children. They may not overcome, but they need God's forgiveness and blessing to do more than survive.

Religion, Economics, and Public Policy by Andrew D. Walsh (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), xii + 158 pages \$67.95 cloth. Reviewed by Jonathan Warner, Professor of Economics, Dordt College.

Like many Christians, Andrew Walsh noticed early in life that people's religious values seem to make a difference to their views on public policy. In this book, he seeks to analyze the "culture wars"—the battle for the hearts and minds of America between, on the one hand, conservative, orthodox Christians and Jews and, on the other hand, nominal religionists whose views have been formed by secular (and often more liberal) elites. The former group shares a commitment to certain transcendent truths (the truths of religion), which they take to be a guide to morality and the way to live; the latter group does not. It is easy to see the way that this division works out politically: the former group tends to lean towards laissez-faire capitalism and the views of the Republican party; the latter tends to lean towards greater government intervention and the dogmas of the Democratic party.

Except, of course, this picture is an oversimplification. Not all evangelical Protestants vote Republican; nor do all secularists vote Democrat. Libertarians, whatever their religious beliefs, will tend to favour the small-government approach of the Republicans; African American Christians tend to vote Democrat.

Dr. Walsh's thesis is that the culture-wars hypothesis is too crude, especially in its analysis of social and economic policy. Is it really true that orthodox Christians inevitably find that their faith leads them to support free market economics, or that a loss of faith is associated with more sympathy for the role of government in the economy? Dr. Walsh answers this question by examin-

ing the history of relationships between religion and political economy. To illustrate his arguments, Dr. Walsh uses the second part of the book to examine the part played by religious groups in two of the policy debates of the mid-1990s: health-care reform (the defeat of "Hillarycare") and welfare reform (the 1996 amendment providing term limits for government-funded benefits). Walsh has relatively little to say on economics per se, focusing rather on the effects of religious belief on social policy. However, underlying social policy decisions are some assumptions about economics: as John Maynard Keynes once commented, "Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist" (*The General Theory* 383).

Evangelical Christianity has not always been a friend of the political right. Dr. Walsh's account of what he calls the "ironies of the twentieth century" starts with William Jennings Bryan, whose concern about the poor made him an icon of the Democratic party long before he became a martyr for the fundamentalist cause at the Scopes monkey trial. And yet, after the failure with the prohibition experiment, evangelical interest in politics waned until the rise of the new religious right of the Christian Coalition and Moral Majority in the 1980s. While Bryan would stress Jesus' compassion and concern for the poor (as expressed in the kingdom ethic of the Sermon on the Mount), the new Christian right stresses the need for responsibility and accountability. The sinful nature of mankind means that people will