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THE PIETY OF AFRIKAANS WOMEN

Diaries of guilt

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Foreword

Feminism did not inspire me to write this book. I wrote it because I am angry. In the feminist interpretation of a text, anger is indeed a sound hermeneutic principle. But my anger is not in service of a theory. I am angry, and I am sad, especially when I look around me and I see Afrikaans women who are socially and politically enslaved by their piety. They are also enslaved by history and especially by history books portraying as the ultimate woman Racheltjie de Beer, who took off her clothes and died in the cold while her young brother warmly survived. I am intrigued by the way self-sacrifice has become synonymous with Afrikaans women while survival has become synonymous with the men. I am intrigued by the way female sacrifice has been focusing exclusively on the smaller circle of the family or in its extreme form only within the boundaries of the nation. And I am intrigued by the type of female piety used to enslave women to this type of ideology.

I am, of course, not angry at the women. I identify very strongly with those women whose diaries I have read. In a certain sense, their story is also my story: the story of a woman fervently seeking her God, pleading for religious answers to life's problems and losses. Albeit only a number of diaries have been used for the purposes of this book, I have read all those diaries of Dutch-Afrikaans women that I could find. In every single one of them, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, in diaries of women who never met, I experienced the same type of piety. It is a piety concealed by submission and guilt, yet there is a strong yearning to be freed from societal chains in order to be near God. This piety involves pleasing men, the nation, as well as a male God, but it is also a piety filled with visions of a loving Jesus taking women into his arms.

These women are my foremothers. They lived on border farms in the eighteenth-century Cape Colony; they formed part of the Great Trek; they clung to life in British concentration camps. They searched for religious comfort when their children and their other loved ones died. They had no theological training. Consequently they believed that they were guilty of causing their own misery and that they could change their

fortune by pleasing God. Furthermore, they were regarded by society as Eve and therefore as guilty of the misery of all society.

Now that Afrikaans women are beginning to undergo theological training, it is no longer possible to believe this pious but deadly lie.

This is my story of my foremothers' story. Now we are no longer storyless.

Introduction: The male Dutch connection

1.1 THE AFRIKAANS WOMEN IN GOD'S LIFE

Afrikaans society, like most societies, is divided into a male dominant culture and a female subculture. Writing from within a subculture means that one writes about one's private experiences, acknowledging that only the dominant culture is public, visible and audible.

During the past three centuries many Afrikaans women wrote in their personal diaries about God. These diaries, some in Dutch and others in Afrikaans, contain the religious history of women confined to a female subculture while piously believing in God as depicted by the male dominant culture.

In these diaries the women describe how they survived in the subculture through guilt fantasies, that is by making guilt the main characteristic of their relationship with God and men. By experiencing themselves as the religious guilty, they believed themselves wanted by God, and so overcame the isolation and loneliness of the female subculture. Understanding religion as 'guilt' allowed them personal involvement with God, as well as God's personal involvement with them.

1.2 AFRIKAANS WOMEN WRITING THEIR OWN RELIGIOUS HISTORY

The aim of this book is to write a religious history of Afrikaans women from their ego-texts, that is their diaries and letters. The only sources are

the writings of these women. Because these sources are scarce, this history is fragmented. Quite a few sources are available from the beginning of the nineteenth century, when men like J J Kicherer and John Philip edited the diaries of white women from wild Africa for the international market and placed their own names prominently on the front page. Sources therefore do exist although they are scarce. In modern church histories, however, female ego-texts have been left out of the story of Christianity in southern Africa.

Based upon these sources it will be argued that the type of piety these women preferred was in fact conditioned by the restricted social circumstances imposed upon them by their subculture. Their God is a personal God as restricted as they are themselves within their society.

Do not regard this as yet another book about Afrikaners and Calvinism. Local Calvinism was, of course, as sexist as it was racist. The Dutch-Afrikaans women on their farms, excluded from theological training, were not orthodox Calvinists, nor are today's Afrikaans women in the suburbs. I will attempt to show that while their husbands and their brothers were formulating biblical Calvinism and applying ideological Calvinism, these women were (and are) serving the personal God of eighteenth-century Dutch and English piety, often decades, even centuries, after Europe had outlived her pietists. They took this dated European piety with them on the Great Trek to survive, as they believed, the wars with the blacks. During the second half of the nineteenth century the Reverend Andrew Murray, a local prophet, rekindled this type of personal piety for Afrikaans women. The women took Murray's piety with them in their hearts and then (albeit partly) survived the British concentration camps. Although it was partly a male-formulated piety, it was attractive to these women because, on the one hand, it allowed them a personal relationship with God, which they were often denied with their husbands; on the other hand, because they were naturally proactive people, it afforded them the attraction of a life of individual holiness, self-sacrifice and service to God.

Therefore, this book is about the socio-political powerlessness of Afrikaans women and how they used their piety to empower themselves in their private lives. In the light of these preliminary presuppositions, I will attempt to argue that, because of the type of individualised piety these women believed in, it remained religious empowerment valid only within their own subculture.

These claims concerning Afrikaans women's religiosity will be substantiated from their diaries to show that they effected this empowerment

in two different ways. In the first place they believed in a demanding male God who wished to be pleased and empowered those who succeeded in doing so. In the second place they acquiesced in submissiveness to men in order to gain the favour of the male dominant culture. Thirdly and consequently, in competing for the favour of this dominant culture they were, and still are, disloyal to one another. In the fourth place, the restrictions in their subculture led them to be extremely suspicious of other cultures, especially British and black cultures. Ultimately it will be shown that this piety of self-hate and submissiveness enabled the men of the dominant culture to use female piety not only to keep women from participation in public life, but also to engage them, often unknowingly, in male nationalist struggles.

Furthermore, my postulate is that even after three hundred years Afrikaans women have not yet liberated themselves from this subculture. Suspicious of other cultures, they are restricted to pleasing their male dominant culture and their male God.

1.3 PREVIOUS HISTORIES OF AFRIKAANS WOMEN

In the past Afrikaans men have written histories of Afrikaans women. These histories were not written from female sources but from the antipathetical point of view of an Afrikaans male ideology towards women's suffrage. Within the 'women-friendliness of the patriarchate', Afrikaans women were convincingly indoctrinated by historical examples that the natural beauty of their souls rendered them unsuitable to vote.

Therefore, during the 1910s, when women elsewhere in the world were ready to emancipate themselves from the confinement of their subcultures, Afrikaans women were portrayed by the dominant male culture as pious martyrs and as fervent patriots; they were honoured for taking part in the religious activities of their subculture and simultaneously remaining passive and submissive to the male dominant culture.

1.3.1 *The martyr history of the National Women's Monument*

In 1913 the erection of the National Women's Monument outside Bloemfontein honoured the women and their children who suffered death during the South African War at the turn of the century. Thousands of women and children died of hunger and illness in confinement, in camps erected at the command of bachelor British generals. Their own sources testify to the fact that the suffering of these women was real and fierce.

However, martyrdom did not introduce Afrikaans women into the male dominant culture. This can be deduced from two booklets commemorating the erection of the National Women's Monument (see Cloete 1992:47–51). Both are entitled *Die Nasionale Vrouemonument* (The National Women's Monument). N J van der Merwe wrote one booklet in 1926, and 35 years later J J Oberholster (1961) wrote the second at a time when the *Heilsgeschiede* of the Afrikaans nation reached its peak.

From these booklets it is apparent that the Afrikaans women played no part in the planning, erection and inauguration of 'their' monument and not one of them was ever buried there. Since President Steyn initiated the project in 1906, only men have sat on the planning committees (Van der Merwe 1926:2–4). Because of his fundraising and his endeavours to find a suitable site for the monument, members of the City Council of Bloemfontein and even General Louis Botha criticised Steyn severely and accused him of instigating racial tension (in the context English–Afrikaner). However, Steyn convinced his committees and also the City Council of the legitimacy of his project and he made it blatantly clear that he was launching this project for the nation's sake (Oberholster 1961:11–13). Significantly the inauguration, executed within nationalist ideals, occurred on Dingaansdag, 16 December 1913. In his inauguration speech Steyn did not refer to the women's personal God, but instead to the national God, the Almighty God who rules over nations (Van der Merwe 1926:13). At this inauguration, only men spoke, with the exception of a speech by Emily Hobhouse read by Mrs Steyn. Ironically only men were buried at the foot of the Women's Monument: President Steyn, General Christiaan de Wet and Dr Kestell; the ashes of Emily Hobhouse were placed there, albeit for its international value. Mrs Steyn, however, received the dubious honour of being buried on top of her husband. Both these booklets, written decades after the inauguration, honour only the Afrikaans men involved in the erection of this monument. Afrikaans women were maltreated during the war by the British to achieve their war ideals; after the war their own men misused them to accomplish their nationalist ideals.

Martyrdom did not introduce Afrikaans women into the male dominant culture. On the contrary, because of this nationally honoured martyrdom, suffering became an inseparable part of the nature of these women. This can be seen from the histories of 'the Afrikaans woman' written by their own men in the decade after the erection of the monument.

I shall now deal with these histories and how they define the Afrikaans female subculture.

1.3.2 The patrio-religious history of Willem Postma

In the aftermath of the inauguration of the Women's Monument, two Afrikaans male historiographers, Willem Postma (1918) and Eric Stockenström (1921), praised the Afrikaans women for their patriotism and their religiosity. According to these histories, patriotism and religiosity, that is the exclusivist loyalty to the nation and to God, were inherent characteristics of 'the Afrikaans woman' inherited from her Dutch foremothers.

In 1918 Willem Postma, who was actively involved in initiating the Women's Monument, published *Die boervrou, moeder van haar volk* (Boer woman, mother of her nation) under the pseudonym of Dr O'Kulis, a name well known in Reformed circles. At his suggestion (Postma 1918: Voorwoord) the Afrikaans women raised money in order to pay him to write their history.

Postma identifies (at least) four areas in which the character of the Afrikaans woman excels within the boundaries of her subculture.

First, he admires her for her active and uncompromising patriotism. Like her Dutch foremothers who fought for the liberation of Haarlem under Kenau Hasselaar, the Afrikaans woman never turns back. She is vindictive and obstinate (Postma 1918:77). Even after the Boers were defeated by blacks at Blouwkrans (1918:60), she refused to turn back; she refused British rule in Natal (1918:61); she won the battle for the Boers at Amajuba (1918:61). The fact that the Afrikaans woman knows that she belongs to God's nation accounts for her second characteristic, her deep sense of religion.

The Afrikaans woman does not compromise her nation and she does not argue about her religion (Postma 1918:66). Her true religiosity is revealed by her role of martyr in her nation's history. For Postma the Afrikaans woman's third beautiful characteristic is her acceptance of martyrdom. Key events in her martyr history are Slagtersnek (1918:70, 115) and the Great Trek (1918:72, 119) when she suffered because of blacks, and the South African Wars (1918:88, 100) when she suffered because of the British.

In the fourth instance Postma praises the Afrikaner woman for her submissiveness. Even though she vigorously fights the enemy culture, she bows submissively in front of her own dominant culture. In private con-

versations and in politics she keeps in the background (1918:100), because the Bible tells her to do so.

Thus Postma reaches the *crux* of his historiography (1918:100) claiming that a woman with a history such as the one described, who was always her husband's loyal helper, is not interested in the vote. The Afrikaans woman has her own identity, shaped through the centuries, and she does not run after the foreign ideas of overseas women (1918:101, 163, 171). She listens to the Bible (1918:102). Finally Postma acknowledges the influence of Abraham Kuyper on his ideas (1918:158). Kuyper was his contemporary, a conservative, woman-unfriendly Dutch statesman who actively resisted women's suffrage in the Netherlands during the 1910s.

Postma introduces his history by identifying the Afrikaans woman with her Dutch foremothers who, centuries earlier, fought in the Eighty Years' War. He concludes by disassociating Afrikaans women from contemporary European feminism, referring them to the ideas of conservative Dutch men.

1.3.3 The ethico-religious history of Eric Stockenström

Three years after Postma's patriarchal women's history, Eric Stockenström published *Die vrou in die geskiedenis van die Hollands-Afrikaanse volk* (Woman in the history of the Dutch-Afrikaans nation). Stockenström repeats Postma's historiographical inconsistencies which are offensive to today's women historians. First, he (1921:13) exceeds Postma in his identification of the Afrikaners with the Dutch people. He places the origin of the Afrikaans nation in 1568, at the beginning of the Eighty Years' War of Dutch resistance against (Catholic) Spanish rule – a century before Van Riebeeck came to the Cape. This enables Stockenström (1921:14) to make an identification between the history of the Afrikaans women who were honoured by the Women's Monument in the twentieth century and the sixteenth-century Dutch women who fought with Kenau Hasselaar, albeit unknown to Afrikaans women. Like Postma, Stockenström writes a history of one woman whom he labels the Dutch-Afrikaans woman and who according to his perception has remained unchanged from the sixteenth century, who arrives in South Africa in the seventeenth, and from then on suffers and fights for the nation and for God, taking up her position behind man and God.

In the second place Stockenström, like Postma, attempts to convince the reader that Afrikaans women suffered extensively during the nine-

teenth century and especially so in the British concentration camps. However, like Postma he fails to convince the reader of his paradoxical ideology that martyrdom and social submissiveness go hand in hand; in other words, by suffering martyrdom at the hands of the enemy a woman enunciates that she is well adjusted in her female subculture.

Stockenström (1921:225–235) errs in the third place concerning the type of religion which kept these women going through their martyrdom. While quoting male sources only, Stockenström identifies Calvin, Knox and the Bible as the sources of their religiosity. The Calvinism and Biblicalism of their husbands might have prescribed these women's societal behaviour, yet from their diaries it is clear that they were indeed not primarily supported in their suffering by interpreting the Bible, because the dominant culture placed lay biblical interpretation under suspicion. Those Afrikaans women who could read preferred the Dutch pietists, whose books, when they could no longer find a European market, were shipped to South Africa at the end of the eighteenth century. Their husbands might have been praying to their national God in the midst of the wars, yet these women were praying to the nation's God who had become their personal God, the God who provided comfort amidst their personal sufferings.

The aim of Stockenström's history is to teach Afrikaans women the moral traditions of the foremothers. Stockenström expresses these ethics in political terms, linking the Afrikaans women's morals with the nationalist agenda: the women kept the nation white. This applies also to that part of the Dutch-Afrikaans nation that stayed in the Cape. Morality and racism, as combined Christian characteristics, were responsible for making the Afrikaans women great:

The Christian education enjoyed by the Dutch and French women and the religiosity with which they were inspired, preserved and strengthened their firm morality. They consequently exercised a strong, ennobling influence on their husbands. This is the reason why the Dutch-Afrikaans nation, as nation, remained a purely white race in the Cape Colony.

(Stockenström 1921:241; translated)

Religiosity and morals kept the nation white. The presupposition is that the Afrikaans women inherited their morals from the Dutch and French foremothers, albeit their religion was that of the forefathers:

It is an irrefutable fact that the Boer women, however simple they appeared to be, were truly inspired with a deep religiosity, and that they, through their far-reaching moral influence were, and still are, the reason why the Boer population of the Cape Colony has remained a white race and why even today the great majority have remained true to the church and religion of their fathers.

(Stockenström 1921:246; translated)

Religiosity and morals also kept them from integrating with the English:

If anyone should ask: 'But now what was actually the influence of the Boer woman on the history of the Cape Colony?' then we must answer that, in spite of the overwhelming indigenous influences, and no thanks to the attempt by the British since 1806 to Anglicise the Dutch population, the Boer women, through their religiosity, their sense of freedom, their love of their fatherland, their love for their nation and language have been the most powerful reason why the Dutch population at the Cape never became one with the English but they have remained to the present day the unique, pure nation that has come to be associated with the name 'Afrikaner boer'.

(Stockenström 1921:255; translated)

The main objection in terms of our topic against these histories of Postma and Stockenström is that the religiosity of Afrikaans women is described and prescribed in terms of a male ideology which treats nationalism and morality as the main components of religiosity. In the following chapters this objection will be worked out from the women's texts themselves, namely that their religiosity was of a personal nature aimed at survival in the subculture.

In this Introduction the claim in these histories concerning the historical link between Afrikaans and Dutch women will be explored.

1.4 THE DUTCH CONNECTION

At the beginning of the twentieth century male historians informed the Afrikaans women that they were, by descent and by nature, related to those Dutch women who 350 years earlier had fought for their nation and their religion. Afrikaans women were told that throughout their own history they had also acted within this sphere of religious patriotism.

Therefore, they were by nature opposed to their contemporaries, that is the European feminists of the twentieth century seeking female suffrage. Finally Afrikaans women were praised for upholding the morals of their (ancient) European foremothers which, together with the religion of their forefathers, they used as protection for their nation from all forms of integration.

One shall therefore investigate the actual Dutch influences on the religious self-concept of Afrikaans women. The thesis of this study is that the religiosity of Dutch women had very little influence upon Afrikaans women. The first Dutch woman who came to South Africa and who exercised influence on the piety of the local white society was Catharina Allegonda van Lier (1768–1801), whose own piety was dependent not upon Dutch sources, but rather on German pietists and English revivalists. Throughout the nineteenth century Afrikaans women fought the blacks and the British isolated from Dutch thought. This is especially true of the Dutch feminist thinking which swept across the Netherlands in the latter part of the nineteenth century while the Afrikaans women at that time pined away in British concentration camps.

Therefore, at the beginning of this century Afrikaans women were not influenced by Dutch women or feminists, but by the thoughts of Dutch men transmitted via the Afrikaans men of their dominant culture: the position their men accorded to these Afrikaans women, and which they accepted, was influenced by conservative Dutch men whose thoughts infiltrated the Afrikaans culture through those Afrikaans men who studied theology in the Netherlands and afterwards returned with the conservative ideas of Abraham Kuyper which they proceeded to prescribe to the women of their own subculture.

1.4.1 *The seventeenth century*

Almost like a good biblical story, the story of Christian women in South Africa commences with a Mary and an Eve. Maria van Riebeeck, the 'housewife' of Jan van Riebeeck, officially the first white settler in South Africa, is Mary. Born in 1629 in Rotterdam in the Netherlands, Maria van Riebeeck's father, Abraham Quevellerius, was the Reformed minister of Rotterdam from 1619. Apparently he was rather orthodox in his preaching, especially concerning the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, one of the hot issues at that time (Mees 1952:17ff). Her mother was born into an established, middle-class Dutch family (Mees 1952:19–20).

Maria van Riebeeck did not keep a diary of her arrival and of her residence in South Africa and the personal letters she wrote home to Rotterdam are no longer extant. It is assumed that the religious concepts conveyed at this first contact of a Dutch woman with South Africans were those of Dutch male orthodoxy of the seventeenth century: God chooses us; God civilises us; God sends us to hell with our cooperation. Probably under the compulsion of these concepts, Maria van Riebeeck effected the first conversion to Christianity amongst the local Khoi-khoi, namely her servant, Krotoa, renamed Eva, whose life subsequently displayed the influences of these religious concepts: as God's chosen she left the context of her tribe, only to die eventually in her own hell of prostitution and alcoholism.

While in South Africa primordial Christianity was going through its presumably 'orthodox' Mary-and-Eve phase, the Netherlands were already in the process of producing an early form of pious religious feminism with Anna Maria van Schurman (1607–1678) as main representative. In her 1638 thesis on the right of women to education, she argued that education would further the piety and morality of Christian women. Studying under the well-known pietist Gisbertus Voetius at Utrecht, she set an example by becoming the first female student at a Dutch university. She complemented her studies with her pious lifestyle, directed towards charity (Irwin 1977:50–51). In later life and as an act of utmost piety, she joined the sect of Jean de Labadie, a religious household in which women held a higher level of influence than in the mainline churches (De Baar 1987:11–43; Douma 1924).

The Labadists formed part of a pietist reaction in the Netherlands against contemporary orthodoxy. The pietism of the latter half of the seventeenth century manifested itself in different forms. In general it carried the characteristics of self-guilt, heavenly joy through continuous prayer, a pessimist view of humanity and the renouncement of everything natural and worldly (Roldanus 1938:67). Eventually these religious tendencies concerning pessimism and the emphasis of guilt became characteristic of the religious experience of Afrikaans women. Despite their isolation, these women radicalised the ideas, using as their sources not the Dutch women, but the male European pietists.

1.4.2 The eighteenth century

Maria van Riebeeck was accompanied by her two nieces when she arrived in the Cape. In 1688 the small Dutch female constituency at the Cape was enlarged by eight orphan girls, also from Rotterdam (Mees 1952:55). Small groups of orphan girls joined them during the remainder of the century. These women and their descendants apparently never formed part of any consciously literate tradition and no ego-texts of Dutch women writing from within the South African context are extant for the seventeenth century.

Two women were born in southern South Africa in the middle of the eighteenth century whose diaries reflect the religious experience and understanding of the Dutch South African women of that century. These women were Matilda Smith born in 1749, later a missionary in Bethelsdorp, and Hester Venter born in 1750, a farmer's wife in the Swellendam district. In 1786 Catharina Allegonda van Lier (1768–1801) came to the Cape with her brother, the Reverend Helperus Ritzema van Lier. Van Lier brought with her an eighteenth-century European tradition of writing down one's innermost spiritual experiences in diary form (Hanekom 1959:250). Eventually all three of these diaries were published, albeit post mortem, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Van Lier's diary, *Dagboek, gemeenzame brieven en eenzame overdenkingen*, appeared in 1804 under the editorship of the Reverend J J Kicherer; Matilda Smith's *Memoir* was published through the efforts of John Philip in 1824, and *De ondervindelijke bekeeringsweg Hester Venter* was published in 1852 with J D Ackerman as the editor.

Catharina Allegonda van Lier was 18 years old when she joined her brother, Helperus Ritzema van Lier (1764–1793), who accepted a call from the Reformed Church in the Cape. Helperus Ritzema van Lier was not influenced primarily by Dutch pietism, as his main sources were the English evangelicals James Hervey and John Newton (Hanekom 1959:104). His preaching centred on salvation, the good God and the positive in human nature. Like her brother, Van Lier was particularly attracted to contemporary English writers, especially John Newton (1725–1807) and his 'Cardiphonia', his 'Voices of the heart'. There were also a few contemporary Dutch poets who expressed depressing views on the negative abilities of human nature (Van Alphen and Van de Kastele) of whom she was fond, as well as a few German pietists who likewise expanded in detail on humanity's desperate need for salvation (De Brés and Duitsch).

Not only was she attracted to works different from those preferred by her brother, but those English authors they did share she read differently. She did not internalise their ideas on the blessed state of being under God's grace; she read Newton for his sure knowledge of people's guilt before the judging God. However, the influence of these works cannot fully account for the urge for religious self-chastisement and the fits of excessive guilt experienced by Van Lier according to her diary.

This diary (published in 1804) is characteristic of what eventually became the trademark of Afrikaans female piety: excessive feelings of guilt expressed in terms of a demanding God, a poor view of the self as well as of other people.

Hester Venter who, contrary to Van Lier, was South African born and married with ten children, lived a hazardous life on a farm. Van Lier, originally from the Netherlands, did not read mainly Dutch sources – the Dutch pietists at this time being out of fashion in the Netherlands as has been explained. Venter, on the other hand, at this time in South Africa received the books of all those Dutch pietists of whom the Dutch people had become tired. When a zealous bookseller sold her a copy of Bernardus Smijtegelt's *Het gekrookte riet*, she became a convert of pietism. However, it is significant that Venter and Van Lier displayed in their diaries the same pessimistic, guilt-ridden piety, although Venter was local, read Dutch sources, was married and led a difficult life. Van Lier was single and led a highly protected life, came from abroad and immersed herself mostly in English sources, and yet they introduced the same themes into the religious history of Dutch-Afrikaans women which were to become the *topoi* of their particular type of piety: an obsession with hell, Satan and personal sin, fantasies of God's physical presence and care, the experience of regular divine visions, the habitual reference to the self in humiliating language, the use of biblical verses as *deus ex machina*, and a strong suspicion of the threat of many personal enemies, including Satan and the heathen. In the chapter on the piety of these two women it will be attempted to demonstrate that the concurrence in the type of piety expressed by these two women should be attributed to the type of theologies to which they were exposed, and to an overwhelming extent to the restrictiveness both experienced in their female subculture.

In summation, therefore, guilt fantasies of Afrikaans women were first audibly expressed by Hester Venter and Catharina Allegonda van Lier. The fact that Van Lier's diary was reprinted four times during the fifty years after her death is indicative of the extent of her influence in her

own religious circle in the Cape. One of her close friends, who was, in fact, converted by Helperus Ritzema van Lier, was Matilda Smith.

The diary of Matilda Smith (1749–1821), a part-time missionary at Bethelsdorp, contains the same type of pessimistic view of the self and of other sinners as is found in the diaries of the two women discussed. In her diary she continually dwells upon her personal depressions because of her failure to live up to God's liking; at the same time there are her descriptions of her negative excitement caused by the sins of other Christians. Her diary differs from the other two especially in one important aspect: her adamant belief in the power of Christ to convert people and therefore her religious goodwill toward people of other races and cultures. Having worked with English-speaking people at Bethelsdorp amongst coloured people, she succeeded in breaking the barriers of her own culture, and to a certain extent of her female subculture.

1.4.3 The nineteenth century

(1) *Meanwhile in the Netherlands*

While these women wrote their diaries in South Africa, the Netherlands were experiencing the Réveil in which the Dutch women played a role of which the women in South Africa were (and still are) totally unaware.

According to modern research by Dutch feminists (De Bie & Fritschy 1985:30–58), although the Dutch Réveil entertained no feminist ideals, it did pave the way for the first wave of feminism which hit the Netherlands during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Through the insights of the Réveil, women engaged voluntarily and *en masse* in charitable work. They were empowered by a growing awareness of their ability to contribute to society even though still feeling comfortably Christianlike. Possible one of the best examples is Elizabeth Groen van Prinsterer-Van der Hoop (1807–1879), wife of Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801–1876) (Kluit 1950:202–205).

Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer played an important role in influencing Afrikaans males in South Africa with his conservative ideas concerning a Christian state. However, it is indeed doubtful whether the potential women's liberation initiated by his wife ever reached the female consciousness in the Cape. Local Afrikaans women were at that time preoccupied mainly with the problem of Satan-and-I.

(2) *Moving to the north*

During the 1830s Afrikaans women followed their husbands in the trek to the north, following a dream of white Afrikaner independency. An extant diary from a woman who lived through this movement, which eventually became known as the Great Trek, contains the same type of piety as that described above: a negative female self-image based on excessive personal guilt, a domineering male image of God as the strong man who has to be pleased, a simple view of Christ as a co-martyr, and an extremely negative view of the rest of humanity. Her diary also testifies to a longing for Jesus as lover. I refer you to the (unpublished) diary of Susanna Smit (1799–1863), sister of the Trek leader Gert Maritz and wife of the Trek missionary, Erasmus Smit.

Susanna Smit's diary is an excellent example of the results of severe subcultural restrictives imposed upon the religious mind. She was lonely and poor, yet she taught herself to read. The only sources available to her were the Bible, the *Leerreden* of Helperus Ritzema van Lier, *De Kerkbode* – and, of course, the works of representatives of the Second Reformation ('Nadere Reformasie'), of which Wilhelmus a'Brakel's (1635–1711) were locally the most popular. More than a century earlier, a'Brakel had written extensively and piously on faith as an act of the human will (Graafland 1961:190–199). Smit was subjected simultaneously to the influence of the sources of the Van Lier circle and the works of the Dutch pietists read by the local Dutch-Afrikaans women. Yet again it was the work of Wilhelmus a'Brakel that was read, while the work of his wife, Sara Nevius, remained unknown (see De Baar 1991) to the women of South Africa.

Within the minute space allowed to her by her subculture, Susanna Smit fantasised about hell as well as God's involvement with her in rescuing her daily from the threats of unbelievers. In her fantasies her personal religious guilt brought her nearer to God. She believed herself to be empowered by her attempts to please God.

When the piety of Susanna Smit is examined at a later stage in this book, the influence of the Afrikaans female subculture on her fantasies will also be examined by means of a comparison, inter alia, with the religious experiences related in the diaries of English women who lived in South Africa at that time and who, apparently, experienced more freedom in their subcultures. Available for comparison are the journals of Elizabeth Lees Price (Long 1956), who exchanged the hell-talk of her mother and father, Mary and Robert Moffat, for a positive view of God and people, black and white. Also extant are the letters of Frances Colenso, wife of the

(in)famous John Colenso. John Colenso and his wife based their missionary work on the assumption that, in the absence of hell, the divine light of God shines in all people independent of their culture (or subculture).

(3) War in the north

At the turn of the century the northern Afrikaners fought the British in what became known as the South African War. Part of this time, a large number of the Dutch-Afrikaans women were confined in British concentration camps where approximately 26 000 women and children died.

During and after these wars many diaries and memoirs were written by Afrikaans women. Some of these women carried with them to the camps an image of God created by the preaching of the Reverend Andrew Murray, a frequent traveller to the north. This belief encompassed a personal God who displays goodwill toward those people who obey his commands. In the subhuman circumstances of the camps, the belief of many women in their personal God underwent a change and they struggled with the possibility of an enraged national God who turned against them because of their sins. However, the concept of personal guilt remained uppermost in the religious thinking of Afrikaans women despite their circumstances. In addition, in this warlike atmosphere of suspicion and hatred against other cultures, the so-called enemy cultures fostered and grew in the religious thinking of Afrikaans women. The war diary of Alie Badenhorst will be analysed as an example.

1.4.4 The first two decades of the twentieth century

After the wars with Britain, the dominant Afrikaans male culture deemed it necessary to reconfirm the role of its women in a female subculture. This was done, as has been indicated at the beginning of the chapter, by presenting the history of these women as that of active patriots and passive martyrs. In other words, religious grounds were used to restrict women's activities to the subculture of their own nation.

Religion played an important role in this ideology, so that more than a history was needed to uphold it. It was necessary to create a theology as well. A patriarchal, nationalist theology was provided not by Dutch men who came to South Africa, but by those Afrikaans men who went to the Netherlands to study theology. There they met with the patriarchal theology of Abraham Kuyper (d 1921).

While Afrikaans women were first of all fighting for physical survival against the British, and then suffering at the hands of their own men who propagated an ideology of female subcultural confinement openly, the first feminist wave was sweeping across the Netherlands. Between 1894, with the establishment of the 'Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht' (Society for Women's Suffrage), and 1918, when Dutch women obtained the vote, there were numerous breakthroughs by women in the Netherlands in academic, economic and political spheres (Naber 1937/1985:189–201).

Prominent Christian men in the Netherlands reacted against the feminists' political claims. On this political level the name of Abraham Kuyper features prominently. Modern feminist research has concentrated on describing Kuyper's reaction against political feminism. Kuyper, in his notorious *De eerepositie der vrouw* (Woman's honorary position, 1914), and W Geesink, in his publications as professor of Theological Ethics at the University of Amsterdam (1890–1926), defend a conservative view concerning the inequality of women and men (Manenschijn 1987:20–22). Within Reformed circles, however, there was a cautious deviation from this view in favour of female political consciousness after women obtained the vote in 1918. This is especially observable in a later work of H Bavinck, *De vrouw in de hedendaagsche maatschappij* (Woman in contemporary society, 1918), and in the establishment of the 'Nederlandse Christen-vrouwenbond' (Dutch Christian Women's Society) in 1919 (Gerritsma 1987:79–83).

Unfortunately this reformed voice within Reformed thinking was not yet audible in South Africa. Here only the voice of Kuyper was heard and made audible by the Afrikaans males. In 1920 Dr J D du Toit, the Afrikaans theologian and the poet Totius, was a member of a commission of three men who presented a report to the Synod of the Reformed Church of South Africa (Die Gereformeerde Kerk van Suid-Afrika) regarding the vote of women in the church. The recommendation of this report was that as a matter of principle women should not be allowed to vote in the church. Based almost verbatim on Kuyper's *De eerepositie der vrouw*, this report was accepted by the Synod against women's suffrage, and they forthwith sent a copy to Parliament advising against women's suffrage on a national level.

Only one woman reacted against this decision from within Afrikaans Reformed circles, namely Marie du Toit (1880–1931), the sister of J D du Toit. In 1921, one year after the synodal decision against the vote for

women, she published the book *Vrou en feminist* (Woman and feminist). This was the first and the last time the term 'feminist' appeared in the title of a book written in Afrikaans. In her book Du Toit warned the Afrikaans women that the role they submissively accepted in their subculture was 'unnatural'. She described to them how many women across the globe had endeavoured to change their own subcultural roles and have subsequently managed to be introduced into the dominant culture.

Du Toit begged Afrikaans women to rid themselves of their guilt before God and to reread the life and work of Jesus Christ with reference to his attitude toward women. She beseeched them to rid themselves of their inherent sense of unworthiness regarding males, of their disloyalty towards their own sex and of their suspicions towards their fellow people, especially those of other nationalities.

Marie du Toit remained inaudible and her work was never read. In contemporary diaries of Afrikaans women the eighteenth-century themes of Catharina Allegonda van Lier and Hester Venter continued to prevail: guilt, self-degradation and suspicion.

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2

Catharina Allegonda van Lier (1768–1801): The Eve of our female sin

2.1 A FEMALE TRINITY: SIN, JESUS AND HELL

It was suggested in the introductory historical sketch that the type of piety which Dutch-Afrikaans women preferred allowed them, above all, to attack the self excessively. This chapter represents an attempt to analyse the religious consequences of this self-degradation according to the ego-texts of Catharina Allegonda van Lier, namely her *Dagboek, Gemeenzame Brieven en Eenzame Overdenkingen* (Diary, letters and lonely meditations, 1804). Three of the consequences of her self-attacking piety will be examined.

In the first instance, we shall look at how conscious Van Lier was of her own sin. She introduced to South Africa the European tradition of writing about religious experiences and thus became the epitomy of the local Eve of female insight into sin. As has been pointed out earlier, the Khoi-khoi Eva, a century and a half earlier, had been the first recipient of a Christian concept of sin, and she had been the first to exemplarise the consequences of female sin. Because this is a story about whites, we leave Eva and commence with the first published definition of the blackness of female sin, and thus honour Van Lier as the Eve of those Dutch-Afrikaans women who fantasised about sins they had never committed.

Thereafter the effects of a poor self-image on Van Lier's image of God will be examined. As a matter of course Van Lier believed in a male

God, who had to be pleased and who judged. Yet, she did not emphasise the maleness of the domineering Father to the same extent as later Afrikaans women. Unwell if not ill the greater part of her short life, she strongly tended towards the image of the healing Jesus. It should be noted, however, that in her letters to women friends she referred mainly to Jesus, whereas she preferred to refer to God in her letters to men.

In the third place the effect of pious self-hate on Van Lier's experience of Satan and hell warrants investigation. It will be seen that Van Lier attributed as much (if not more) power to Satan as to God/Jesus.

However, in the first place it is imperative to attempt to establish her social and religious circumstances. Because this is very difficult, the influence of her subculture on her religious experience will be deduced from the way in which she differed from her male sources and contemporaries.

2.2 VAN LIER AND THE MEN IN HER LIFE

The eighteen-year-old Catharina Allegonda van Lier came to the Cape with her brother Helperus Ritzema van Lier in 1786 (Hanekom 1959:119). They both died at an early age. Four years younger than her brother, she died at the age of thirty-three on 22 September 1801 (Kicherer in Van Lier 1804:III, V). In a letter dated 29 September 1801, a week after Van Lier's death, a friend, MES, related how Van Lier greeted everybody for the last time, thanked them for their love, and then called upon Jesus to separate her soul from her body (MES in Van Lier 1804:288).

Three sets of facts are known about Van Lier's short life. The first is that she was engaged to J J Kicherer and that she asked him to publish her diary after her death.

Kicherer himself gave this information in the introduction to her diary. It is, in fact, not clear when these things happened. It is not certain whether they happened at all. Kicherer was an ambitious man and when he came to the Cape in 1799 as a missionary for the London Missionary Society, Van Lier was already a 'spinster' according to the values of that time. She was in her thirties and seven years his senior. But she was from a prominent Dutch family and from a leading religious circle at the Cape.

It is possible that Kicherer claimed a betrothal for the sake of publicity when he published her diary. Nowhere else, not even in his own diary, is this betrothal mentioned. According to his diary, Kicherer (1805:10) came to the Cape in March 1799 as a missionary of the London Missionary Society. He departed from Cape Town for the Zak River in

May, 800 km from Van Lier in Cape Town. During the period preceding her death, Kicherer returned in February 1800 to Cape Town for one month only (Kicherer 1805:13, 41). During this month he preached in the Reformed Church where Van Lier's late brother had ministered. If they became engaged during this time, when did she ask him to publish her diary? From May 1800 to March 1802 he visited the Orange River for missionary purposes. In the middle of this period of ten months, Catharina A van Lier died. Three years later Kicherer took the honour for publishing her diary (with the help of the Reverend G Masman from Utrecht), claiming that she had commissioned him to do so, although neither of them had recorded these facts in their diaries when they were supposed to have happened.

This information is important, because I intend to argue in this book that even at this very early stage, men abused the piety of Dutch Afrikaans women to achieve international acclaim.

Catharina Van Lier was responsible for the disclosure of a second fact about her religious life: the inspiration to write her diary came from reading the religious self-revelations of other Christians in their ego-texts. Her reading matter included the autobiographies popular in her time, especially English and (translated) German ones. Reading *Een dagverhaal van eene Godvreezende Jufvrouw* (a diary of a Godfearing miss) published by John Newton (Van Lier 1804:1) inspired her to write her own diary. She also read James Hervey's letters to John Newton (Van Lier 1804:5, 8), and the autobiography of Solomon Duitsch, a Hungarian ex-Jew who converted to Christianity (Van Lier 1804:109, 111). She also revelled in the personal poetry of Van Alphen and Van de Kastele, her only genuine Dutch sources (Van Lier 1804:139).

This information is important, because I shall argue that although she did not read the Dutch pietists of the Second Reformation, Van Lier interpreted her sources in such a way that she came to the same understanding of sin and hell and self-hate as the Dutch pietists. Since the Dutch-Afrikaans women in South Africa read the Dutch pietists, it will be argued that the socially restricted role all these women had to play made them prone to a certain type of piety, one in which they feared many things and tried to please one specific image of God, and that they all felt bad about themselves as human beings.

Finally, it is important to note that Van Lier's diary did enjoy a relatively wide circle of readers. It was so popular in the small Cape community that within fifty years of her death it experienced a fourth

reprint (Hanekom 1959:12). This popularity was apparently restricted to the Cape, however, when it was published in the Netherlands, it received an extremely negative review in 1806 in the *Bibliotheek van theologische letterkunde* (1806:235–237). The reviewer was very obviously irritated with the work. He described it as uninteresting and consisting mainly of monotonous complaints centring on the author herself. The reviewer quite correctly identifies the sources and the religious expression of Van Lier's depression. The reviewer views the following sources as problematical, that is the pietist Salomon Duitsch, Van Lier's personal difficult social circumstances, and, last but not least, her alleged fiancé, Kicherer. The reviewer complains that Kicherer zealously attached his name to the printed diary, yet failed to provide the reader with a curriculum vitae of the woman. And, indeed, we concur that these are in fact the main sources which caused the monotonous melancholy of Catharina Allegonda van Lier. At the same time they caused her to interpret her religious experiences, unlike her brother, in a pietistic and not a revivalist way.

Kicherer therefore failed to attract popularity for himself in the Netherlands through his alleged fiancée. The only outcome of his endeavour was that Van Lier's type of pessimistic piety influenced white, and presumably especially female, religiosity at the Cape.

The influence of Van Lier's pessimistic piety in local Dutch circles was not restricted to the first fifty years following her death. Six of the seven verses of a poem from her own hand (published on pages 52 and 53 in her diary) made their way into the *Evangelische Gezangen* (1806). Apparently this was because of the influence of the Reverend G Masman, the co-publisher of her diary with Kicherer and a member of the Hymn Commission. The poem describes a state of mental misery and recommends that Christians should be content with their fate. In nineteenth-century South Africa this overtly pessimistic hymn was popular amongst Dutch-Afrikaners. It was frequently sung to a so-called 'liederwysie', that is an adapted tune resembling a popular folk song. According to Cillie (1982:108) this popular tune resembled the English 'Clementine'. Almost two and a half centuries later, in the mid-twentieth century, it was translated into Afrikaans by G B A Gerdener and became Hymn 28 of the *Afrikaanse Gesangeboek* (1944). This translation concurs with the original Dutch version in all its eighteenth-century pessimistic detail. When the words were reviewed more than thirty years later for the 1978 Hymn Book, the concept of 'fate' (*lot*) was deleted, however, and Van Lier's pessimism concerning the miserable plight of the Christian on earth was

toned down. The first verse of Van Lier's poem appears below in comparison with the two Afrikaans translations:

1806

Moet ik steeds met onspoed strijden,
'k Ben te vreden in mijn lot;
'k Hebb' een' Helper in min lijden,
Moet ik dan met onspoed strijden,
'k Ben te vreden in mijn lot:
o! Mijn redder is mijn God.

1944

Moet jy stry teen moeilikhede,
Christen, treur nie oor jou lot!
Krag ontvang jy op jou bede.
Moet jy stry teen moeilikhede,
Wees tevrede met jou lot,
Hy, jou Redder, is jou God!

1978

Moet jy stry teen moeilikhede,
kind van God, vertrou op Hom;
Hy gee krag op jou gebede;
Hy ken jou omstandighede.
Hy omskep die smart in vreug;
ons kan ons in Hom verheug.

For almost two centuries Van Lier's passive melancholy was accommodated in the piety of the Dutch-Afrikaners. An early commentator on the *Evangelische Gezangen*, A W Bransveld (18–:197), called Van Lier and her contribution to the hymn thesaurus 'bevindelijk', a typical word for characterising the pietism of the Dutch Second Reformation. And indeed, although she read few pietistic Dutch sources, Van Lier's piety aimed at making God part of the misery she experienced in her subculture.

2.2.1 The brother who loved people and the sister who hated herself

In 1786 the 22-year-old Helperus Ritzema van Lier (1764–1793) arrived in the Cape, having been called to minister to the Reformed congregation at the Cape of Good Hope. He was accompanied by his sister, Catharina Allegonda, who was to influence the piety at the Cape. His own religious contribution to his new context was a higher estimation of his soul than of his mind. He did not think of the soul in terms of the self-insult of the Dutch pietists and he never referred to the mind in his works. On the contrary, he believed in the happy union between the self, the soul and God as preached by contemporary English revivalists.

One of the English theologians who strongly influenced Helperus Ritzema van Lier (Hanekom 1959:107) was the Anglican Reverend John Newton (1725–1807). In a letter to John Newton, Van Lier looked from a religious point of view at his own history. Born in 1764 in Assen, Holland, of a family of prominent ministers, he became a Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Groningen in 1782. He had had no interest in theology but, according to Van Lier, God heeded the tears of his mother and converted him abruptly in the first place by saving him from drowning in icy water and in the second place by the death of his fiancée. Van Lier turned from his love of the natural sciences and, inspired by the glory of God, immersed himself in his newly formulated religious interpretation of life by developing a love for all people. To be able to practise this love as a minister, he consequently studied theology, accepted a call and was duly installed as a Reformed minister at the Cape in 1786 where he officiated for only six years, until his early death at the age of 28 in 1793.

In his *Leerreden* (Instructions), preached to his congregation at the Cape between 1789 and 1793, Van Lier verbalised his religious convictions using simple contrasts. He contrasted sin with the generous forgiveness through Jesus (Van Lier 1802:1, 12) and the delightful consequences of a religious life with the notorious outcome of sin. He rejected natural revelation through quick-witted reasoning in favour of the internal revelation of God's Spirit within the soul (1802:7).

The brother, who loved all people, preached this positive message to them. In her self-chastisement, however, his sister did not hear this message. In the light of our thesis concerning the influence of the female subculture on religious experience, it is interesting to compare the views on God, the self and other people, of two people influenced more or less

by the same religious sources, the one belonging to the dominant culture and the other to a subculture.

In the first place, Helperus R van Lier's message revolves around the unimportance of the negative side of religious reality. The powers outside the person, that is the powers of Satan, are rendered impotent by Jesus; the negative inclinations of sin and guilt within a person are eradicated by the same Jesus. In the contrast between sin and grace forgiveness and happiness reign.

Catharina van Lier's *Dagboek* (1804) displays the same simple contrasts between good and bad. Catharina, however, did not dogmatise the contrasts, unlike her brother, who was formally trained in theology. She 'experienced' the contrasts. The contrast between good and bad is described in terms of individualised, personal experience. Contrary to her brother, she strongly emphasised the *negative* experience. Satan becomes more important than Jesus. Personal sin gets a higher profile than divine forgiveness for all.

An excellent example is the following summary of her religious moods during her first week of diarising (1804:2–15). Her diary begins on a Sunday with the joy she experiences because of the nearness of God. Then Satan attacks, leaving her incapable of any good. On Monday her sinful nature gains the upper hand, until the Heavenly Bridegroom covers her with kisses from his mouth. On Tuesday she finds overwhelming reason to cry out: 'My sin is my burden!' On Wednesday she experiences grace. On Thursday she struggles with her haughty heart. On Friday she experiences guilt because of her complaints concerning divine providence. On Saturday her happiness is endless. On Sunday she cries about her own ingratitude. On Monday she loves God. On Tuesday she wakes up without enthusiasm for the Lord and cheers herself up by reading about the Lord's suffering. The dominant experience in Catharina van Lier's religion is self-hate, guilt and, consequently, depression.

In the second instance, according to the brother (Van Lier 1802:19, *passim*), religion is more than performing religious responsibilities. Of course, this he declared with the conviction that religion settles in the heart and does not adhere to orthodoxy and formalities. This is a tendency in the thinking of Helperus Ritzema Van Lier, namely to contrast plight and responsibility and the hardships of religion with the glory of God as well as to place moral responsibilities in a direct causal relationship with their joyful consequences.

His sister, who projected her physical hardships onto her religious experiences, believed in a kind of religion which made this possible. As is clearly seen in her hymn which was previously quoted, she refers to God's saving power, but not without emphasising the fate and fears of a Christian. While she does not reflect the revivalist joy of her brother, there is a pious acceptance of the paralysing agonies of life on earth.

A third and very important point: Helperus Ritzema Van Lier has a positive view of himself, of God and of his fellows. He harbours negative feelings (1802:47) about the 'natural person' who does not live according to God and his commandments. However, he describes in extravagant terms his good news concerning God's goodwill toward humankind. While he emphasises (1802:66 et seq) the goodness of God and the pleasure of communion with Him, he underplays as reasonable the wrath of God. He excludes other religions or human reason as means of gaining salvation, yet he has an extremely positive view of the ability of human nature to become one with Jesus (:18, *passim*). His Jesus-message is of an inclusive nature and it aims at reaching the learned as well as the simple, the rich and the poor (:15).

His sister, on the other hand, presents herself in her diary in a demonstratively negative light. 'Through God's grace,' she writes at the beginning of her diary (Van Lier 1804:3; translated), 'I have come to know myself as somebody who is completely guilty, who is a condemnable sinner, leprous from head to toe, incapable of any good, addicted to Satan' She sees God as demanding, and she emphasises the suffering Jesus. Christ is her personal Saviour, but first he had to suffer, a suffering for which she as a sinner is co-responsible. The Holy Spirit is the means by which God enlightens her to see herself as a sinner (e.g. Van Lier 1804:20). It must also be noted that Catharina van Lier seldom refers to other people and does so only when they have sinned excessively.

Truly, in Catharina Allegonda Van Lier the trinity of female piety emerged: a poor self-image, a view of a fearful God, and a negative view of other people.

2.2.2 *The adventurous boyfriend and his immobile fiancée*

While Catharina Van Lier was inspired in her religious self-expression by Wesley, Newton, Duitsch, Hervey, Van Alphen and Van de Kastelee, her fiancé, J J Kicherer, was enflamed for missionary work by reading the

travel accounts of Captain Cook (Kicherer 1805:II) who was not religious at all.

Of course, Van Lier and her alleged fiancé produced different kinds of diaries. Although Kicherer's 'diary' is a report to the London Missionary Society about his work in the South African 'mission field', it is about people and activities. In no way was religious self-reflection his primary aim. While his diary is about converts and missionary travels, Van Lier's is an ego-text. The author is concerned with herself only in a passive contemplation of her sinful nature.

The common denominator, however, is their extensive reference to God. The point of comparison is, therefore, their concept of God. On the one hand there is a missionary trail-blazer (Kicherer) and on the other hand somebody restricted to suburban and subcultural conditions (Van Lier). Kicherer's reference to God is mainly, almost exclusively, as Providence (*Voorzienigheid*, 1805:12, 29, 62, 65, etc). God is identified with the positive happenings in his life (e.g. 1805:22) and after successfully completing a journey or conversion he gives thanks to God as his providing Shepherd (e.g. :48, 62). In the missionary situation, Kicherer presents a slightly different view of God/Jesus. To the black people he introduced and presented God as the Almighty Highest Being, and he placed God in competition with the highest beings of the 'heathen' (e.g. Kicherer 1905:32), to whom he also emphasised the love of a Jesus Christ who actively effects conversion in the hearts of people (e.g. :71). Kicherer thus preached the Creator God and the loving Jesus to the so-called heathen. And it was to his personal God as Providence and Shepherd that he turned and gave credit for his personal successes and faith.

Kicherer, in other words, conceived of his personal God as an active God of the present.

This was not how his alleged fiancée back at the Cape experienced God. She perceived him as a static God who regulated her life through laws from the past. Unlike Kicherer, Van Lier does not refer to God as Providence, although once or twice she does acknowledge the providence of God (Van Lier 1804:11, 16). For her God is not so much present as He is in heaven (:22); God is her heavenly Father (:3, 17, 30, 48). Of course, He is on her side and, therefore, like Kicherer, she believed in a good God (:27, 36, 118, 120), albeit not explicitly a benevolent God.

Catharina Van Lier believed mainly in God as Judge.

God gave people laws (Van Lier 1804:3, 4, 10, 16, 63, 68 etc) and Jesus gave his blood (*het bloed van Jesus* :5, 14, 22, 56, 60, 65, 98 etc). Van Lier believed in the static God and the suffering Jesus of the past – and in the active presence of the Satan. In her first entry, she devised her own theology, namely that through God she came to the conviction of her own sinfulness and she also came to know Satan. On the other hand, through Satan, she was enlightened about God (:3).

The following is the crux of her view of God as the One who provides the laws and plans of salvation, and of Jesus as the One who effects this salvation:

I came to know the extent, holiness and excellence of the **Divine law**, God's strict righteousness and immaculate Holiness. Because of this His eyes are too pure to behold evil. I came to know this excellent road to salvation, for which I long, the excellent road for the salvation of Sinners. The Father has planned this in his endless love and wisdom, and You, my dear Saviour, have made it possible.

(Van Lier 1804:3, translated)

Jesus Christ makes his own demands, but his insistence on good works is gladly met by this woman who overcame her loneliness with the belief that to love only Jesus is not only appropriate but ensures a life in the hereafter devoid of any loneliness. A sermon on the Song of Songs (4:16) allows her to express her absolute commitment to Jesus in covertly physical terms:

I cannot deny – although I have to fight against my corrupted flesh – that the friendship of Jesus is more important to me than anything which the world can give. Yes, my soul wishes that I only have to love [*beminnen*] him, that I only have to serve and obey him, and that I may not lust after anyone else on earth.

(Van Lier 1804:85, translated)

2.2.3 The Amazing Grace of John Newton, and a wretch like she

Far more important than her 'fiancé' were the other men in Van Lier's life, those men whose diaries and letters she perused. Early on in her diary she twice mentions James Hervey (Van Lier 1804:5, 8) from whose work she deduces a view of a very stable God, a rock everlasting, yet a God who must be feared. She read Hervey's letters to John Wesley, as well as Hervey's 'Theron and Aspasio' which contains a dialogue between these

two characters. Their views on the righteousness of Christ's suffering and its legal obligations for Christians (Hervey 1765) were themes which Van Lier in her self-mage as a sinner found very attractive.

Van Lier, of course, was also acquainted with the work of Salomon Duitsch (1734–1795). According to her own claims (Van Lier 1804:109, 111) she identified very strongly with his idea of self-denial and unification with the crucified Christ. Her reviewer in the *Bibliotheek van theologische letterkunde* (1806:236) criticises her affinity with Duitsch, even though Van Lier mentions him only very late in her diary (1804:109, 111). Perhaps he was not a major influence on her way of thinking, yet it is nonetheless interesting to note her interpretation of his autobiography, *De wonderlijke leiding God met eenen blinden leidsman der blinden* (Duitsch 1883; God's wonderful guidance of a blind leader of the blind). Duitsch presents his autobiography as a 'Heilsgeschiede', a success story of his conversion from Judaism to Christianity. To Van Lier, however, it represented hints on Christian self-affliction, the loss of the self and the total identification with the suffering of Christ. Van Lier read Duitsch's 'Heilsgeschiede' as an 'Unheilsprophetie' for sinners.

But the man who caused her to become the mother of our female sin was John Newton (1725–1807), today famous as the composer of the song 'Amazing Grace'. Newton did not force Van Lier into this type of motherhood. Van Lier misinterpreted his words; she forced Newton to testify to the sinful nature of man or, more specifically, woman. According to Newton the almighty God caused everything, including suffering. Van Lier, however, was convinced that God caused her suffering because of her own sinful nature. Van Lier used the negative remarks on human nature in Newton's works out of context and as a source for her self-hate.

John Newton's 'Cardiphonia' (1840) consists of 156 letters, written to 24 different people of whom ten were women and four of these, like Van Lier, unmarried. John Newton had but one message for all these people. This was that God caused everything according to his will (Letter I to Mr B; Newton 1840:189) and that one should therefore remain completely dependent upon God (Letter I to Rev R; 1840:198). Newton's words reveal a deep sense of religious optimism (1840:198, 199): 'If the Lord keeps you sensible of your danger, and dependent upon him, you will walk safely The Lord ... will ... sweeten all your trials, and cause his light to shine upon your paths.'

The question is whether Newton formulated his message to women in a different way from men. Indeed. In his letters to men he discussed

matters of principle, the causes and the nature of a decline in grace (1840:129), the difference between acquired and experimental knowledge (:131), the doctrine of the Trinity (:169), the substance of a proper calling to the ministry (:235), and what one's view on justification ought to be (:260). To men he revealed in a formal way his views on the humane aspects of religion, such as the causes of suffering (:189) and the road of self-denial (:241). Indeed, to men he was formal and kept within the limitations of the 'right' type of dogmatics.

There are two dominant themes in his letters to women, however. The first theme is humility. Especially in letters to unmarried women he recommends the exchange of personal freedom for humility. He urged Miss F (Newton 1840:215) 'to be humble, and like a child, afraid of taking a step alone'. Miss Th he reprimanded for visiting a playhouse, expressing the hope that 'your humble and charitable construction of their mistake will not lead you to extenuate the evil of those diversions in themselves'. To Miss P (:300) he confessed 'our gracious Lord [who] is long suffering ... yet he will take methods both to shame and to humble us'. The Christian behaviour which Newton prescribed to women conditioned them for a lifetime in the female subculture.

While it abounds in his letters to women, humility is not a concept which is explicitly stated in Newton's letters to men.

The second theme which proliferates in Newton's letters to women is, of course, that of sin. 'Sin is the sickness of the soul' (Newton 1840:281) is more or less the message Newton had for men and even more so for women. However, he never referred to sin without immediately referring both men and women to the grace of Jesus Christ. Newton always saved his reader from despairing about a sinful nature. He emphasised security in Christ, the happiness received from God and the light which was always present in the dark. In the subcultural concept of humility expressed mainly toward women, and in the extra-cultural concept of sin also emphasised mainly towards women, Newton stressed salvation and recommended rejoicing.

However, in her subculture, Catharina Allegonda van Lier was unable to integrate these two aspects of religion. She found it difficult to recognise one's guilt and to know that it is graciously forgiven, to be miserable about evil abilities and to rejoice in God's affirmative action. As far as Van Lier was concerned, she was either ecstatically happy in her God or in the depths of depression because of her sinful nature.

This resulted from the fact that Van Lier was, within her social circumstances, brought to believe that she had an innately sinful nature. However, nowhere in her diary is Van Lier able to spell out her sins. The only sins she does name are doubt and unbelief, which are innate to every sinful nature.

Influenced extensively by her male sources, Van Lier was ultimately controlled by the mood in her female subculture. It was a mood of self-meditative depression, a 'zwaarmoedige, meditatiewe inslag' as Buijsters (1973:175) calls it.

2.2.4 Sinful nature or sinful culture?

As has been indicated previously, Catharina Allegonda van Lier believed strongly in the sinful *nature* of (wo)man, yet it was actually her *subculture* which should be blamed for her poor self-image. It is, of course, difficult to test such a thesis without the support of contemporary sources from the same subculture.

One other female ego-text from roughly the same period is still extant. In February 1810 Sophia Burgmann, who came as a missionary to South Africa, kept a diary (1813) of her voyage from the Netherlands to the Cape. From this diary her religious views can be deduced and compared with those of Van Lier. Sophia Elisabeth Henriëtte Burgmann-Albrecht (1767–1812) was born in Müllheim in the German Ruhr area. She came from good stock, as her father was a Lutheran pastor. From approximately 17 years of age, she was in the care of people in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. After having lived in Rotterdam for 24 years, at approximately 43 years old she left for the Cape (Burgmann 1813:99).

Inspired by the missionary fervour of the late eighteenth century, Burgmann offered her services to the Dutch Missionary Society and was duly accepted within the ranks of missionaries. She was sent off to South Africa in 1810, where she married Christian Albrecht, a German missionary in the service of the London Missionary Society. At the time of their marriage he worked amongst the Namaqua beyond the Orange River, in today's Namibia. It is important to note that Sophia Burgmann was not sent to the Cape to marry; she was acknowledged by the Dutch Missionary Society as a missionary in her own right (Schoeman 1992).

Sophia Burgmann-Albrecht survived only two years in southern Africa before she died in 1812.

What type of piety did Sophia Burgmann bring with her from the Netherlands? Did she believe in the innate sinfulness of (wo)men? According to her diary the answer is no. As a religious person, Burgmann appears to have led an independent and active life which, according to this thesis, probably influenced her piety decisively.

On 16 February 1810 Burgmann boarded the ship the *Ranger*, due for Cape Town. She has diarised how she had prayed to God for more than four years for this opportunity. With the euphoric optimism which characterises her diary, she testifies how she experienced God's support on the ship (1813:79) and the contentment she felt in her soul (1813:80) concerning her circumstances. It is noteworthy that she, still a spinster, also harboured fond thoughts concerning J J Kicherer, Van Lier's 'fiancé', while on her journey (1813:81). On board ship, she actively engaged in the aggressive distribution of Bibles and popular religious tractates ('tractaatjes') amongst the passengers and the crew.

Her piety consisted of a dependence upon God, accompanied by excessive thanksgiving for his support, as well as an unconditional belief in the omnipotence of God. She needed this type of piety on a ship battered by continuous storms. After the first storm she was asked about her feelings during the storm (1813:88, 91). Her answer was to the effect that her Anchor was not lodged in sand, but that she was anchored in the unchangeable God, who controls nature. According to her testimony God holds the ocean in his hand like a drop of water (1813:91). Van Lier and Burgmann believed in the same God, yet their beliefs differed because the demands of their (sub)cultures differed. Van Lier had been restricted physically and subculturally; Burgmann formed part of an active missionary culture. To understand their individual beliefs, the resemblances and differences should be examined.

Burgmann, like Van Lier, often needed support because of her physical circumstances (e.g. Burgmann 1813:94). The difference is that Burgmann did not relate calamities, like storms at sea, to her own sinful nature. In contrast to Van Lier, she saw God's sovereignty in overcoming ill-fortune, and not in God's wrath for her personal sins.

Burgmann and Van Lier both gave much thought to the suffering of Christ. The journey to Cape Town coincided with Easter and in her diary Burgmann often refers to her readings of the history of Christ's suffering (e.g. Burgmann 1813:107). Like Van Lier, she was also deeply concerned about sin and guilt, her own sin as well as that of others (e.g. Burgmann 1813:100, 103). However, she was not possessed with the idea of sin as the

main characteristic of an ahistorical human nature. To a far greater extent than Van Lier she emphasised the glory of effective and lasting forgiveness.

Burgmann firmly believed that she experienced the closeness of God's presence: '[H]et rollen des Donders in de Nachtelijke stilte was mij plegtig, als eene stemme Gods, en ik voelde mij tot Hem getrokken' (1813:105). This is far removed from Van Lier's (almost) physical yearning for the Jesus whom she visualised as the lover of the Song of Songs. Burgmann, on the other hand, translated her experience of the nearness of God into self-empowerment; therefore God is with her and near her in her missionary endeavours.

Finally it should be noted that the names Burgmann used for God were usually prescribed by her context in a particular era. God is her 'Raad, Helper, Trooster, Redder' (1813:124). Once again, these appellations were far removed from the male God who demanded from Van Lier a (wo)man's constant (and socially paralysing) confessions of guilt.

The comparison between Van Lier and Burgmann serves to underscore the role (sub)cultural context played within the subcultural parameters of female piety.

SUMMARY

In summation the contents of the piety Catharina Allegonda van Lier established at the Cape more or less encompassed the following: Because our sinful nature sides with Satan, we are captives in a world in total opposition to God's requirements. God wants us to alienate ourselves from our own nature. The tension between the nature of our world and the demands of God cannot be solved in the life on earth.

It is clear from her work that Catharina Allegonda van Lier was restricted by a subculture in which it was not possible to engage in much sin. Her concept of sin, and the sinful nature she attributed to herself, should therefore be seen as phantasms of her imagination, especially since she could never name these sins. From her diary it is clear that she see-sawed constantly between a fantasised sinful world of Satan, which she apparently experienced as very real, and the Godlike life she felt culturally obliged to follow.

The premise of this chapter is that Van Lier's ideas concerning sin and self-hate were primarily influenced by the isolation caused by her subculture, especially since she deviates quite extensively from the piety

of her sources. Furthermore, her subculture prescribed her piety because her view of God/Jesus/Satan and her self-image concurred with her personal circumstances, namely physical restrictedness and suburban inactivity.

It is no longer possible to determine how many other women were brought to the brink of depression by her pessimistic and self-afflicting piety and to what degree. Unfortunately the question concerning the extent of her influence on other women will, because of a lack of sources, always remain unanswered. The diary of Sophia Burgmann, however, who came from the same European context as Van Lier but who was not exposed to Van Lier's passive, subcultural isolation at the Cape, provides us with crucial data. Burgmann adhered to the same pietistic principles as Van Lier but her experience and context led her to verbalise this piety in an active and positive missionary approach.

On the other hand, another female ego-text extant from this period, written by a local Dutch South African woman, also subculturally restricted, displays the same type of self-afflicting piety as Van Lier's. This woman was Hester Venter. Van Lier and Venter had no contact and shared nothing but the same type of melancholic piety – and the fact that they belonged to a restricted female subculture.

We now turn to the unhappiness of the sin-happy Hester Venter.

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3

Hester Venter (b 1750): The woman who loved Jesus

3.1 BOER WOMEN THROUGH THE EYES OF EUROPEAN WOMEN

3.1.1 *Julie Philippe Augusta Uitenhage de Mist*

Information on rural Dutch women in South Africa at the beginning of the eighteenth century comes from a European Dutch woman touring the rural areas with her father at this time. In July 1802 the eighteen-year-old Julie Philippe Augusta Uitenhage de Mist sailed to the Cape of Good Hope with her father, the famous J A de Mist of the 1804 Cape Church Order. During 1803 she and her father undertook a tour of the interior. Augusta Uitenhage de Mist was charmed by the Boer women (De Mist 1954:27, 34, 37) and their orderliness, their prosperity and their friendliness. However, although they spoke the same language, De Mist did not record in her diary any conversation with Dutch women, only with Dutch men; the women remained in the background when conversations took place.

3.1.2 *Lady Anne Barnard*

Another female ego-text provides more information. Reflecting on her journeys through the rural areas around Cape Town between 1797 and 1801, Lady Anne Barnard remarked in her letters and diary on the Dutch Boer women she met on these journeys. Apparently the women were not very communicative and kept in the background. However, they were very hospitable and served excellent meals (Barnard 1924:176). The

women had many children, at least half a dozen each; they were strikingly overweight and fairly sloppy in appearance, she recorded, even the young women were without front teeth. Barnard found that these women had no interest in pleasing their husbands with their appearance, only with their cooking (1924:207, 222). Barnard did not want to paint these women in negative colours. She was puzzled by their reserved behaviour, although she complemented them upon their talents in home industries like the processing of food and the making of clothes (1924:235).

One remark in particular about a Boer woman summarises Lady Anne Barnard's general yet significant observations, namely the short description of a Boer woman in the Waggonmaker's Valley (Barnard 1924:53):

The *vrouw* sat like Charity tormented by a legion of devils.

This image of a woman trying to please while being tormented by mental depressions provides the best paradigm for understanding the piety of Hester Venter.

3.2 THE WOMAN WHO WAS BORN TO FALL IN LOVE WITH JESUS

While Catharina Allegonda van Lier expressed her disappointment in life by fantasising about sin, a local Dutch woman abandoned life for the love of Jesus.

3.2.1 How to become Jesus' mistress

Hester Venter was born in the middle of the eighteenth century. She was baptised on 1 February 1750 (De Villiers & Pama 1981:1007). She married Hendrik van der Walt in 1766 at the age of sixteen. He was the son of the first Van der Walt who came to South Africa and they farmed in the Swellendam district, second-generation white pioneers.

Hendrik van der Walt fathered ten children, but Hester Venter, who wrote her diary under her maiden name, refers (Venter 1852:4) only in brief terms to her husband without mentioning love. In 1796, three years after the birth of her tenth child, the 46-year-old Hester Venter fell in love with Jesus.

What triggered her romance with the divine? It was a Dutch pietist of the Second Reformation. According to Venter (1852:6), once on a visit to Cape Town, she entered a shop and asked the attendant to recommend a

book to read and he gave her a copy of one of the surplus books of the Dutch pietists that had been sent to South Africa. This book, or set of two books, was *Het gekrookte riet* (The broken reed, first published 1744) by Bernardus Smijtegelt (1665–1739), a prominent Dutch pietist of the Second Reformation. Copies of the 1744 publication of this set of books are still extant in the library of the University of Cape Town and in the public library in Middelburg in the Cape. This indicates that this book must have been fairly widely read in the Cape Colony (Van Zijl 1991:189).

3.2.2 Venter's encounter with a Dutch pietist

Hester Venter had very little formal schooling. In fact, as a child she had attended school only for three months, but her mother had taught her to read and to write (Venter 1852:1). Linguistically Venter's diary was unpublishable and therefore was rewritten (*overgeschreven*) by J D Ackerman in 1830 (Venter 1852:200). However, in spite of her linguistic disabilities, Venter was a prolific writer. Her published diary comprises 200 pages.

Unfortunately Venter does not appear to have been a prolific reader. Her memory of biblical content appears to have been the only source for her monotonous self-meditations. She confesses that she did not read all of Smijtegelt (Venter 1852:6). She does relate, however, that when she opened his book her eyes fell on a passage which changed her outlook on life from a fear of damnation to the acceptance of her fate. It is possible that Venter read only the full title of Smijtegelt's book, which reads as follows:

Het gekrookte riet, of Honderd vijf en veertig predikationen over Matth XII:20, 21 waarin een zwak en kleingeloovig Christen opgewekt en bestuurd wordt, om op den Heere Jezus te hopen, mitsgaders verscheidene gevallen en zwarigheden van het gemoed worden opgelost en beantwoord, tot derzulker vertroosting en aanmoediging, om met blijdschap, al strijdende, den weg des geloofs naar den hemel te bewandelen, en aan de eeuwige gelukzaligheid te zijner tijd deel te krijgen. (*The broken reed, or 145 sermons about Matthew 12:20,21, through which a weak Christian of little faith is revived and governed to hope in the Lord Jesus. Different difficulties and depressions of the mind are thus explained and answered for comfort and encouragement, so that with happiness, even though with a struggle, he may walk the path of faith to heaven and participate in eternal happiness.*)

Apparently Venter was attracted to this, or a similar, passage by the concept of hope in difficulty and a state of mental depression on the one

hand and, on the other, the concept that happiness accompanies struggle. These concepts appealed to her because she needed hope in the dangerous circumstances of a border situation and also because she needed support for the mental depression caused by her social isolation on the farm. She was also in need of a piety, not the type by means of which happiness could be achieved quite easily but a piety which demanded a struggle as well as a certain degree of achievement from her.

3.3 THE NICE WOMAN TORMENTED BY A LEGION OF DEVILS

3.3.1 Sin has no name

Her conversion through Smijtegelt did not cure Venter from her obsession with sin. According to her ego-text sinfulness was the best way in which to define herself.

Like Catharina Allegonda van Lier, Venter never defines her sins. They are nameless. Smijtegelt, for instance, provides lists of sins explicitly named, some so exclusive to the Dutch pietist mind, that a translation is impossible (e.g. Smijtegelt 1856:49): *hoogmoed, kleinmoed, menschenbehagers te zijn, vreesachtigheid, nijdigheid, geveinsdheid en gemaaktheid, gierigheid, ijdelheid, leugentaal, achterklap (Lev 17:16), zichselven te prijzen, toornig en boos te zijn zonder oorzaak, en wraakgierigheid.*

However, as far as Venter was concerned, 'sin' meant her sinful nature.

In what follows, four aspects of Venter's concept of herself as a sinner will be explored:

- Venter expressed her fears of physical danger in terms of religious anxiety.
- In her search for salvation from religious anxiety, she was, in fact, attempting to escape her own mental depression.
- Venter empowered herself with her belief in the God of sinners. She tried to escape from her fears and her depression by emphasising her own sinfulness as the cause of her problems.
- Sexual loneliness forced her to humble herself as a sinner before Jesus her saviour and lover.

3.3.2 Fear expressed as religious anxiety

Venter lived in dangerous circumstances on farms on the border of white habitation. At least one of her children had been murdered (Venter 1852:96) and several others died from diseases (:6, 94). She begins her diary by sketching her emotions before her conversion to pietism (1852:4–6): '[dat] ik voortliep van zonde tot zonde, en met snelle schreden naar de hel voortholde' (I proceeded from sin to more sin, speeding towards hell, 1852:4). 'Wanhoopt' (despair) and 'benaawdheid' (anxiety) constituted the main characteristics of her daily emotions.

Venter described her fear of her physical circumstances in religious language. By calling herself a 'helleprooi' (prey of hell) and dwelling on her fear that 'dat ik verloren zou gaan', she, in fact, used religious terms to express her fear of being murdered or of having a member of her family die of illness. However, conversion (through Smijtegelt) freed Venter from the fear of losing her sick daughter (Venter 1852:6). After reading a paragraph in Smijtegelt she accepted that her dying daughter would die happily. To her salvation in Christ meant salvation from fear of death.

3.3.3 Salvation from depression

To Venter salvation from sin also meant an escape from depression. When she did not accept the fate of her physical circumstances, the death and illness of herself and her family (Venter 1852:8), she convinced herself that she was guilty of sin. Suffering from depression on an isolated border farm without expecting divine salvation is a sin. In fact, Venter's state of mind seems to hover constantly between stages of religious anxiety or religious happiness (1852:8, 9):

Ik bleef in dien bekommerden staat de geheele maand, tot op den 28sten van die zelfde maand, toen de Heer zich aan mij ontdekte met een volle blijdschap. Het duurde bijna den halven dag, dat ik in zulk eene geestelijke blijdschap was met mijn ziele. Ja, ik was zoo onkundig in geestelijke zaken dat ik zelf niet wist in wat voor een blijkschap ik gekomen was. O ja, de geestelijke blijdschap was mij zoo zoet; en was zoo bedroefd, dat ik wer verduisterd werd. (*I have been in an anxious state all month until the 28th of the same month; until the Lord revealed full happiness to one such as me. This lasted almost half a day and I was in such spiritual joy in my soul. Yes, I was so ignorant about spiritual matters I myself did not know into what happiness I had*

come. O yes, spirituality was to me so sweet and I was so afflicted that I was again in darkness.)

Why did Venter identify sadness with sin and happiness with salvation? Why did she insist on emphasising her sinful nature? Once again taking her social circumstances into account, there may be two reasons: self-empowerment in her subculture and sexual loneliness.

3.3.4 Self-empowerment through sin

Venter overemphasises her sinfulness. Relating all the disasters which befell her to the consequences of her sinful nature, she placed herself in control and became the cause of all these calamities. Her own sinful nature caused her misfortune. God becomes involved with people because of their sin. Sin is the place where God and people meet in their fight against the enemy, whom Venter calls Satan, but whom she probably understood as death through illness or murder. She herself causes her misfortune, but God controls her fate and therefore she is able to accept her fate without fear.

3.3.5 Sexual isolation and Jesus

The second reason why Venter found it necessary to portray herself as a sinner is that by being a sinner she could draw Jesus closer to her. Sinners were so important to Jesus that he gave his life for them. Like Catharina Allegonda van Lier, Venter regarded Jesus as the lover in the Song of Songs (Venter 1852:15):

Ik vond hem, die mijne ziel lief heeft; ik hield hem vast; ik liet hem niet gaan (Hooglied iii:vers 4). Dan kuste hij ze niet alleen met de kussen van zijn mond, maar dan is het 'de Koning heeft mij gebragt in zijne binnenkameren'. (*I found him who loved my soul. I held fast to him. I did not let go of him. Then he kissed me, not only with kisses of his mouth, but the King took me into his inner room.*)

In a poem recorded in her diary, Jesus' suffering becomes an act of physical love. Her thoughts reveal a tendency to identify the physical with the spiritual, therefore Venter describes physical love as an act committed towards her soul (Venter 1852:142):

En de kus van zijn mond,
Vloeit uit Jezus offeranden,
Die mij heel en al verslond.

Ja, een liefde hemel vlam,
die mijn ziel geheel in nam,
Met een godlijk liefde oog,
Die mijn ziel geheel doorvloog;
Jezus had voor mij geleden.

(And the kiss of his mouth, flowed from the sacrifice of Jesus. I am wholly and altogether wasted. Yes, one love burnt in heaven and took possession of my soul. With one god-like love in view, my whole soul flees to him – Jesus having suffered for me.)

3.4 VENTER'S PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD/JESUS AND SATAN

Relationships with the divine are experienced but not explained in Venter's ego-text. She has no dogmatic explanation for the principles on which she based her relationship with God/Jesus and Satan; she simply describes her close experiences with the divine ones and with the evil one. These close experiences took on the form of visions and fantasies.

3.4.1 Trances

Het was mij alzoo ettelijke malen gebeurd dat ik met liefde getrokken werd, dat ik niet wist in welk eene zoete hemelsgestalte ik was (Venter 1852:11). *(It often happened to me that I was so overwhelmed with love, that I was configured into a heavenly being.)*

Venter often used words like these to describe her state of ecstasy while she experienced the proximity of God. One day she was actually four times in succession swept into these states of ecstasy (1852:13):

[T]oen (omtrent tien uur) stond mijn geest stil, doch in verrukking kwam ik weer bij. Toen het voor de tweede reis kwam werd ik bevreesd en dacht niet anders dan dat het sterven was; maar, om het lijden van den Heer Jezus, gaf ik mij gewillig over, al was het tot den dood toe. Het gebeurde mij tot vier keer dat ik in verrukking kwam, en zulk eene geestelijke blijdschap smaakte, met sterk geloof en vertrouwen op mijnen God en Zaligmaker, dat ik den Heere loven en danken en God verheerlijken moest. Ik leefde zoo in de nabijheid van den Heere Jezus, door zijne genade en door een vast geloof voor eenen tijd van drie weken; waarop ik weer in eene zware bestrijding raakte met den Satan, die mij gedurig betwistte dat in al mijn werk geene waarheid was. Ja, dit tastte niet alleen mijne ziel aan, maar ik

was krank naar ziel en licghaam. (*At that time, about ten o'clock, my soul stood still but I came to again, going into a trance. Then I had a second journey, which I had feared and thought that was nothing else but death, but with the guidance of the Lord Jesus, I gave myself over willingly, even if it was to death. It happened four times that I fell into a trance and taste such spiritual joy with a strong faith and trust in my God and Sanctifier that I praised and thanked the Lord and greatly glorified God. For a period of three weeks, I lived close to the Lord Jesus as a result of his grace and my firm faith. I was then involved in a difficult struggle in which Satan continually disputed with me that there was no truth in any of my work. Yes, it did not only touch my soul but I was sick in body and spirit.*)

A state of deep depression always accompanied these trances as can be seen from this quotation. She constantly described these depressions as the consciousness of personal sin (Venter 1852:11). Soon after experiencing the joy of Jesus' proximity, Venter would experience a mental lapse, which she called the sudden realisation of her sin:

Maar in zulke zoete gestalten kwamen mij weer mijn zonden voor't gezigt, en schenen zoo groot en zwaar voor den Heer dat ik dacht, nu zal de Heere niet weer naar mij omzien, ja, dat ik mijzelve voor een walglijk zondig monster aanmerkte voor den Heer met mijne zware zondenschuld. (*But in such a sweet way it came to me again that my sins were so big and heavy before that Lord that He will never again consider taking care of me. Yes, I saw myself as a despicable and sinful monster before the Lord with my heavy load of sin and guilt.*)

(Venter 1852:12)

3.4.2 Sin, physical pain and physical love

Hand in hand with this realisation of sin goes physical pain, such as heart palpitations (Venter 1852:12). Her struggle against Satan affected not only her soul. She wrote (1852:14), 'maar ik was krank naar ziel en licghaam' (but I was sick in body and mind).

The experience of Jesus' proximity, on the other hand, was accompanied by the sensation of love which she often describes in physical terms. 'My soul embraced the Lord lovingly' (Venter 1852:18) is often extended to an embracement of soul and body (:44):

Jezus lief, hier is mijn hart,
Jezus lief, hier is mijn ziel.
Jezus lief, hier is mijn ziel en licghaam beide.

*(Jesus love, here is my heart;
Jesus love, here is my soul;
Jesus love, here are both my body and soul.)*

The love Jesus displayed in his suffering is described in erotic terms in one of the many poems in her ego-text (:101–102):

*O Liefde, minne gloed,
Vloeit uit Jezus offerbloed
Door Jezus mond gekust
Was ik van eeuwigheid bemind
(O love, ardour of lust,
flowing from the sacrificial blood of Jesus,
Through a kiss from Jesus' mouth,
I was loved from eternity.)*

The image of the kissing Jesus abounds in Venter's mind and in her writing (:113):

*Gloeiende koolen van Christus liefde,
Mijn hart en ziel geheel doorgriefde,
In de kussen van uw mond,
Toen ik u mijn Jezues vond.
(Burning coals from Christ's love,
my heart and soul are completely pierced.
In the kisses from your mouth,
I find in you my Jesus.)*

An intertwining of love and thanksgiving towards the beloved Jesus takes place, to keep this love in a religious sphere (:109): 'door uwen geest gezuiverd, mijn lieve Jezus, mijn beminde God ... Heere, in hartsmeltende liefde en dankzegging voor uwe groote genade'.

3.4.3 The nearness of Satan

Venter, of course, also had a personal relationship with Satan. 'I not only have to fight my sin' (that is, her sinful nature), she said (Venter 1852:9); 'I have to fight Satan.' Satan, as was said before, it was who brought her to despair and darkness (e g 1852:9). In other words, Satan caused her depression.

According to Venter Satan attacked her personally and constantly (e g :12, 13). Satan wanted to deprive her of her joy in the proximity of Jesus, replacing it with loneliness and depression (e g :14). He attempted to convince her that there was no truth in her yearning for Jesus (e g :14).

Satan personally appeared to her pretending to be an angel (:14):

Het was in eene diepe verlatenheid voor mijne zielsgesteldheid, toen ik des avonds ging liggen, dat de Satan zich inwendig aan mijne ziel vertoonde, doch in de gedaante en met die werkzaamheid van een' engel des lichts. Ja, ik meende in het eerst dat het van den Heere kwam: maar spoedig bemerkte ik zijn booze pijlen. Het was alsof ik vast in een net getrokken was, en ik wist niet achterwaarts noch voorwaarts. (*There was a deep forlornness in my soul when I saw the evening light going; then Satan showed himself inwardly to my soul, but in the shape and with the reality of an angel of the light. Yes, at first I thought he came from the Lord, but I speedily perceived that it was really the form of the devil. It was as if I was drawn into a net and I could go neither backwards nor forwards.*)

The attacks by Satan brought Jesus closer to her. Jesus became the hero who saved her from Satan, from death and hell and, of course, from depression. She shared with Jesus a common enemy, and this brought them into closer proximity.

3.5 THE LETTERS OF MAGDALENA JONKER

The piety of Hester Venter as expressed in her diary can be compared to the contents of the letters Magdalena Jonker (1765–1831) wrote to women relatives during the same time. The comparison is relevant because of a possible accusation that the piety of Hester Venter was that of a neurotic single woman. The claim of this book is the opposite, namely that the piety of the women described here cannot be blamed on the mental state of sick individuals, but on the negative influence of the local Dutch-Afrikaans society on its female subculture.

Magdalena van Zyl married Johannes Jonker when she was eighteen years old. Like Hester Venter and her family, they farmed in the Swellendam district. Poverty forced them to leave this farm with their first eight children for another farm in the Roodezand district, where several more children were born and some died. Here also, her husband died. She died on 14 November 1831 aged 66. Her letters, together with a short biography, were published in *De Gereformeerde Kerkbode* (GK) during 1850 and 1851, probably by the Reverend Robertson. Jonker's piety is very similar to that of Venter, and the publication of her letters by a local (male) minister as instructive to a Dutch Reformed readership indicates that this type of female piety was acceptable in the male dominant culture.

Like Venter, Jonker received little formal education (GK 1850:119). Her favourite, if not only, book was, behold! *Smijtegelds Keurstoffe*. From this book her daughter read to her on her death bed (GK 1850:208). She became converted to this type of piety at the age of seventeen and the first thing she then noticed about herself was that she was 'een hoop vuilnis' (a heap of rubbish). God, she recognised, loved her not for herself but for His Spirit which He had placed inside her.

Jonker recalled (GK 1850:121) that it was her father who inflicted a terrible fear of God in her and that the only person who could comfort her from this fear was Jesus. She feared God especially when she was heart-broken and filled with disbelief every time one of her children died (GK 1850:132). Through these hardships she came to believe (by means of the Reverend M C Vos, who was ministering at Roodezand) that one suffered when one loved oneself more than the Lord (GK 1851:170). It was the Lord who showed her that her children were idols whom she loved more than Him (GK 1851:148). And when her husband died, it was Jesus who took his place. 'I can say with confidence,' she wrote to her sister (GK 1851:184), 'that Jesus is my husband and my bridegroom.'

Jonker seems to have shared the following with Venter: love for the Dutch pietist Bernardus Smijtegelt; the seeking of religious answers after the death of a child; the experiencing of a God who wanted to be obeyed unquestionably; depression after the death of a child, expressed as an attack by Satan; and comfort in the arms of Jesus as the substitute and eternal husband who will never go away.

SUMMARY

Two themes emphasised in Hester Venter's ego-text were to become prominent in the pious self-expression of Dutch-Afrikaans women. The first is the verbalisation of mental sadness and joy in terms of a religious consciousness of guilt and salvation.

Hester Venter underscored a second topos in the piety of Dutch-Afrikaans women, a topic already introduced by Catharina Allegonda van Lier and expressed in the letters of Magdalena Jonker, namely women's love for Jesus. Although they expressed it as a yearning for spiritual salvation, this love should be seen as a longing for salvation from the isolation reigning in their female subculture on the one hand and their physical isolation on the farms on the other.

This love for Jesus eventually became a prominent theme in the ego-texts of Dutch-Afrikaans women during the nineteenth century, when they trekked through black territory and when they were thrown into concentration camps by the British at the end of that century.

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4

Matilda Smith (1749–1821): Our virgin of grace

A product of the late eighteenth century, Matilda Smith was a contemporary of Catharina Allegonda van Lier and Hester Venter.

4.1 A MALE CONCEPT OF FEMALE PIETY

4.1.1 Female piety is like a peaceful river, without the depth of the ocean

In the introduction to the *Memoir of Mrs Matilda Smith*, Dr John Philip, of the London Missionary Society at Bethelsdorp, expressed the following views on the limitations of female piety. These views confirm the findings of this research regarding the ideological as well as the actual restrictedness of pious females:

In the economy of nature and grace, man and woman being differently constituted, are obviously intended to occupy different spheres of usefulness. The path of female piety is more limited, and therefore apparently less efficient than the laborious open road assigned to man.

(Philip in Smith 1824:133)

These restrictions on the usefulness of female piety are, of course, romanticised by John Philip (in Smith 1824:133):

The influence [of female piety] in society may be compared to the silent but fertilizing course of some peaceful river, which diffuses

blessings on all around, turning the wilderness into the Garden of Eden, and causing the desert to blossom as the rose, although it has not the depth, the extent, and the fame of the commanding ocean.

Thus wrote the man who published Matilda Smith's memoir: female piety is as fertile as a peaceful river, but lacks the depths, the extent and the fame of the commanding ocean.

4.1.2 Why should a man publish women's ego-texts?

Kicherer was suspected of publishing Van Lier's diary to have his own name on the front page, and there is the same suspicion regarding John Philip and Smith's memoirs. Philip's reference (Smith 1824:vii) to the many female biographies published in his time accentuates the fact that a lively market existed in Europe for this type of literature. By publishing Smith's memoir, Philip was attempting to explore this market.

Embarrassed because he was presenting a rather uneducated woman to his European audience, Philip explained that Smith had many 'native talents', and that her religiosity could be traced to the religious society to which she was exposed. 'We are not perhaps always aware how much of our piety we owe to the society in which we move,' he wrote prophetically with regard to our present thesis (Smith 1824:v). Philip consequently took pains to show how Smith behaved in terms of the piety in her female subculture and to point to the characteristics she shared with other pious females around the world whose diaries have been published.

According to Philip, Smith's work could be published because it testified to her missionary spirit and her compassion for the miseries and sufferings of the human race (Smith 1824:viii, ix). 'One of the most interesting aspects under which Mrs Smith is presented in the following pages is,' he boasted (:ix), 'that in which she is seen in her new field of labour, surrounded with her female attendants, imparting to their minds the elements of Christian instruction, whilst she is teaching them knitting, and sewing, and the common decencies of life.'

4.1.3 Matilda Smith as the ideal pious woman

The image which Philip wished to portray was that of Smith teaching black women to be useful and decent. In this, he claimed she was an example to missionary wives (Smith 1824:x): 'The character of Mrs. Smith forms a fine pattern for female imitation in general, and particularly to such as may become the wives of missionaries among the heathen.'

And indeed the life and piety of Smith fit well into the seclusions of what John Philip called the Garden of Eden, another name for the female subculture. During the first 37 years of her life Smith was intensely surrounded by death, losing as a result of illness eight of her nine children as well as two husbands. At this point she was converted by Helperus Ritzema van Lier. Although she had been a Christian, this conversion helped her to accept her fate with religious submissiveness. When her remaining daughter and her grandchild died, she committed herself to work full time at different missionary stations, especially Bethelsdorp, where her usefulness was directed at working with women.

It is to be noted, however, that there was a distinct difference between the piety of Smith and that of her female contemporaries, Van Lier and Venter, because after her conversion to pietism, Smith exchanged her mental depression and her self-hate for an active missionary life in which she exuded a positive view of God and her fellow people. Instead of mothering sin and guilt, she became our virgin of grace.

4.2 THE STORY OF HOW MATILDA SMITH CAME TO GRACE IN HER SUBCULTURE

4.2.1 *The vital statistics of a suffering woman*

Mrs Matilda Smith was born as Machteld Combrink (Kornbrink, according to John Philip) at the Cape of Good Hope, on 17 August 1749. She was baptised two weeks later, on 31 August 1749 (De Villiers & Pama 1981:154). Matilda is the English form of the name Machteld. Her father was German, her mother Dutch. Machteld Combrink married Johan(n) G J Grabe, who came to South Africa as a soldier. They were married in 1770 and he died a little more than five years later, in 1776. Three children were born during these five years; the two boys died and the girl reached marriageable age. Two years after Grabe's death, Matilda married Johannes C Smith (Schmidt), another soldier from Germany. They had six children, four daughters and two sons, who all died in infancy. This marriage lasted for nine years until the death of Smith's second husband in 1787. Smith was matriarch to a Dutch family and all her children bore Dutch names.

She wrote the part of her memoir which comprises the first 37 years of her life when she was 49 years old, after her 'conversion'. As should be expected, this history moves within the framework of 'before' and 'after' she discovered the truth of submitting herself to the will of God.

4.2.2 Smith looking back on the time before she was 'converted'

... I have not been incited to the following Memoir by human impulse, but by the actings of Divine Grace

(Smith 1824:7)

Thus Matilda Smith wrote at the beginning of her memoir, pointing to 'grace' as the main attribute of the Divine. In interpreting her *historia calamitatum*, her history of calamities, Smith saw 'grace' not as a spiritual attitude of God, but as his providence, his help in physical and earthly pain and sorrow. Throughout her memoir, Smith shows a preference for referring to God as 'Providence'.

Smith relates the numerous deaths of her children and husbands according to her simple system of belief: affliction is the result of sin and deliverance is achieved when God graciously grants forgiveness.

At the beginning of her memoir, Smith describes the causes of her own illness and her recovery when she was six years of age. At this point a woman of almost fifty years, she claimed to have experienced the connections between sin and illness, recovery and forgiveness at the age of six (Smith 1824:8):

Soon after my recovery, an uncle of mine asked me, 'How it happened that the Lord had laid this affliction so much heavier on me [it is, you] than on the remaining part of the family?' to which I answered, 'That my sins were more numerous'. – 'Well,' inquired he, 'what way will you take, to be delivered from your offences?' I replied, 'that I would pray to God for forgiveness.'

While she was still a small child, Smith was once saved from drowning and at another time from suffocation (1824:9). Looking back on her life, Smith interprets these close escapes from death in terms of divine grace and salvation from sin. She records (:9) that at the age of nine she was so much under the influence of the Bible that for her even bad weather was a pointer to Christ's coming judgement.

At the age of fifteen, the Bible was the main guide in her life (1824:9): 'I employed much of my time in reading the Bible, after which perusal, I could readily relate any event therein contained.' After her catechism she became a member of the Dutch Reformed Church in Cape Town. This was the year 1764 and the congregation was the same one in which Helperus Ritzema van Lier would become a minister twenty-two years later.

According to Smith her religious life during her late teens consisted mainly of studying the Bible, praying and fasting. This was not the correct way to achieve righteousness, Smith claimed (1824:10). To read the Bible filled her with a tremendous fear and 'I was afraid to close my eyes night and day' (:10). While reading about the Lord Jesus' suffering especially, she felt like a 'condemned criminal' (:10).

On 30 December 1770 at the age of twenty-two Smith married Grabe, a religious Lutheran. Her first son, Godfried Hermanus, who was born two years later, died after two months (Smith 1824:12). Smith attributed the misery she suffered during his short life and in mourning his death to her rebellious heart which did not want to 'bend with submission to the Divine Will' (:12). Only after she had accepted God's will did she awaken from her mental wretchedness, and did her body grow stronger daily (:13).

God then gave her a daughter, Maria Magdalena (Smith 1824:13), and this was the only one of her children who would live long enough to marry and have her own child. At this stage Matilda Smith's husband died, 'leaving me extremely ill, with one orphan child, and the expectation of another' (:14). Her second son, Jan Godfried Jacob, was born two months after his father's death. She experienced this early death as yet another of God's efforts to bend her stubborn heart.

Smith describes the rest of her so-called unconverted life in identical terms. Every time the divine will took away a child or afflicted her with illness she experienced it as an act of Providence in preparation for her conversion. In 1778, then 29 years of age, Mathilda married Johannes Caspar Smith. 'I declined the offer of the man of property, and chose him who had little or no possessions' (1824:17). The next year (1779) their twins were born, but both died within a few months. 'Yet the Lord in mercy enabled me to bow to his will' (:18). Another set of twins were born a year later (1783), but they too died after a few months.

Then Smith knew that her children were dying because of her sinfulness and unrighteousness. At first she suspected that her husband blamed the deaths on her sins alone, but he assured her that they were equally responsible: '[Y]our sins and mine have deserved the chastisements of the Lord' (1824:19). This burden of sin became so great a weight on her conscience that she fell into a state of severe depression after the birth of her ninth and last child, a daughter (1785). Of course, Smith described her depression, or rather her fear that this child would also die,

translated into religious terms, as anxiety over the whereabouts of the souls of her deceased children (1824:20):

[A]fter the birth of our next child, and on occasion of her temporary illness, I passed many months in a most wretched state, like one driven to and fro without a refuge, feeling the wrath of God upon my own soul, and awful apprehensions respecting the souls of my family - looking down, as it were, into the regions of eternal torment, and almost realizing in my own breast some of the feelings of the condemned.

It was the end of her child-bearing years and Smith's life was spent in anguish over the salvation of infants, of whom she had lost eight. In 1787, when Smith was 37 years old, her second husband died.

Smith then relates her meeting with the Reverend Helperus Ritzenma van Lier, the brother of Catharina Allegonda van Lier, minister to the Dutch Reformed congregation in Cape Town from 1786 until 1793. He had the answers to all her questions about life and death. He also introduced her to the writings of the English revivalists. On 8 April 1806 Smith entered the following in her diary: 'Providentially the second volume of Newton's Letters (Cardiphonia) fell at this time into my hands; and the first seven letters to the lady in distress were blessed to my comfort and edification' (:111).

A new phase in the life of Matilda Smith had begun.

4.2.3 *Conversion to mental peace through the Reverend H R van Lier*

Matilda Smith met the Reverend H R van Lier at the house of a relative (1824:22). 'I felt that his discourse was exceedingly well adapted to the state of my soul,' she wrote (:22). And indeed, the Reverend Van Lier brought comfort to the suffering woman. He told her that Jesus was available day and night to listen to her problems and her fears and he put her mind at ease about the fate of her deceased children and husbands: '[T]hus was I mercifully and lastingly released from the restless anxiety which on that subject had so long oppressed my spirit,' she testified (:28).

Van Lier's message allowed Smith to believe that Jesus had suffered for her personally, and that thought brought great security into her life:

O! I had peace with God – peace with my own conscience – peace with angels – peace with men – and in a word, peace with all created nature.

At the time of her 'conversion' three of Smith's children were still alive, the daughter from her first marriage, and two children from her second marriage. But these two girls, Elisabeth and Anna Catharina, also died. Smith, now converted to the comfort of God, reacted to yet another tragedy by confessing (:40): '[T]hus to a Christian, sorrows and bereavements are tokens of paternal favour.'

Smith's only surviving child married, gave birth to a son and died. Once again the newly converted Smith reacted joyfully (:45): 'Thus, through the grace of God, my dear daughter's death was, I trust, a happy one.'

Then her baby grandchild died. Her son-in-law married a niece of Smith, and the niece also died. The Reverend Helperus Ritzema van Lier died.

In reaction to all these tragedies Smith wrote in conclusion to this part of her life (:46): '[I] was strengthened, as heretofore, to bow with submission to the will of the Lord.'

4.2.4 Mental happiness through the Reverend M C Vos and Jesus' salvation

It was indeed a happy moment in the life of Matilda Smith when she became engaged in missionary work. She felt herself empowered ('strengthened', e.g. Smith 1824:57) by God, victorious over her depression, and also useful to God's church.

Initially, according to her narration, Providence called her to Roodezand, approximately 100 km from Cape Town, where the Reverend M C Vos was ministering. It was the same Reverend Vos whose influence over her was also attested to Magdalena Jonker.

Michiel Christiaan Vos (1759–1825) was born in Cape Town on 31 December 1759 'from European and Asian parents' (Vos 1911:1). Concerned about the souls of the slaves at the Cape, he sailed for the Netherlands in 1780 to study at his own expense to become a minister. However, once his studies had been completed he was not called to South Africa 'because he was considered to be a fanatic [*dweper*]' (Vos 1911:51). He ministered to various congregations in the Netherlands, describing him-

self as a disciple of Voetius' pietism (Vos 1911:51). Van Lier died and Vos was sent to the Cape, where he delivered his inaugural sermon on 8 March 1794, after which he started his career in Roodezand.

Vos and Helperus van Lier never exchanged religious ideas, but Vos's piety corresponds with Reverend Van Lier's. In the first instance the contrast between the wretchedness (*rampzaligheid*) of the godless and the blessedness (*gelukzaligheid*) of the believers is manipulated by an optimism concerning God's control of reality and his goodwill towards Vos personally (Vos 1911:9), that is an optimism that God's plan for Vos concurred with the actual route his history followed.

In the second place, according to Vos's positive view of God and himself, God is regarded as the *prima causa* of all occurrences, but a *prima causa* benevolent towards Vos and hostile towards his enemies. Vos projects the simple contrast between good and bad onto people: his friends are good believers, his enemies are bad sinners. 'The world does not like me, because I do not like the world,' is his explanation of people's reaction to his 'fanatic' religiosity (Vos 1911:48).

It is interesting to note in the third instance the reaction of women to Vos's preaching. In his 'Remarkable story' (1911) Vos often refers to women who became converts to piety because of one of his sermons. It is of special interest that these women apparently reacted to the negativity in his sermons of contrasts. One day while preaching in Amsterdam, a woman screamed loudly in the middle of his sermon: 'O my God, I am forever lost, forever lost!' (O God, ik ga eeuwig verloren, eeuwig verloren!) (Vos 1911:58 et seq). A second female reaction to his sermons is that women sought security in his messages. 'Now I know in whom I have placed my trust; now I am sure that my security lies with Jesus and that it safely awaits me there,' one woman confessed on behalf of herself and others after one of Vos's sermons (Vos 1911:57).

Apparently Smith fitted into this religious circle headed by the Reverend Vos. In her diary her moods and religious self-image are represented as dependence upon submission to God. Smith's submissiveness to God, however, is not only self-centred, but is also fixed on her service to her fellows. Honouring the pietist contrast between the heavenly and the earthly, the spiritual and the temporal, she tends to see the temporal needs of the hungry and the desolate as reminders of the wickedness of human nature and the wretchedness of the unsaved. Still clinging to the values of her subculture, that is submissiveness and overemphasis on sin, Smith was beginning to develop a social consciousness.

4.2.5 Bethelsdorp and Van der Kemp: escape from the female subculture?

In the middle of the year 1805 the local Dutch government exiled Dr Van der Kemp to Cape Town. On 30 November 1805 (Smith 1924:95) Matilda Smith left for Bethelsdorp to offer her assistance because a number of the mission station's ministers had been banished. There she worked for two years. 'I can say with truth, it is good for me to be here,' she wrote on 1 March 1806. During this time she apparently experienced a good relationship with God and with other people, especially with the black women. Her references to Satan are few and, unlike her contemporaries (discussed in the previous chapters), she did not enter into a physical relationship with Jesus.

Did Smith, therefore, during the time of her missionary activities, escape the restrictions of her female subculture? Did she in the first instance escape the exclusivism towards other races expected from South African Dutch women? Did she in the second place manage to get her mind off her own sinful nature in order to form a positive self-image, and in the third instance to obey God separate from his male characteristics?

On the issue of *racism* it should be noted that Smith did experience religious unity with the Khoi-khoi women she met and worked with. In 1797, on an excursion from Roodezand to the Moravian settlement at Genadendal, she met Lina (Vehettge Tekuie), the famous Khoi-khoi convert, and dreamed about the unification of nations:

We were also gratified in the sight of a Hottentot woman, named Lina, who had resided at this settlement from the arrival of the first Moravian, (no less than fifty years), her heart evidently overflowed with grateful affection towards a crucified Redeemer, whilst confessing his grace with her aged lips. In contemplating this venerable Hottentot – this sister and friend in Christ; the words of Isaiah, which describe the promulgation of the everlasting gospel, struck me forcibly – 'O may the happy time arrive, when all people and nations shall feel their hearts drawn together and united in the sacred fellowship of Christian love!'

(Smith 1824:53; see also 58, 90, 108)

Yet Enklaar (1988:164) in his study on Van der Kemp points out that Smith could not bring herself to free Alexander, her Christian slave. Enklaar furthermore argues that 'it is quite possible that Matilda Smith

eventually left [Bethelsdorp] because of Van der Kemp's disapproval of her conservatism regarding slavery'.

As far as her concept of *sin* is concerned, Smith did not place herself in such a close relationship with Satan as her female contemporaries and she did not allow Satan to victimise her to the same extent as her contemporaries. However, Smith regarded herself as a sinner and she did not hesitate to point out to others, especially the so-called 'heathen', that all are sinners by nature. Concerning the behaviour of other people she exclaimed: 'O how strong is the root of evil' (:64). Her own private prayer was (:64): 'Lord, I take shame to myself; O cleanse me in that fountain which thou hast opened for pollution and for sin.'

During this time of her life, when the consequences of death no longer threatened her and while she was 'useful' in missionary activities, Smith's *concept of God* changed. He changed from God as Providence, who cared for her in times of illness and death, to God the Father, who loved and blessed her as a father loves a child (e g :58):

In the evening, I was for some time prevented from retiring to confess my sins before the throne of grace; but at length these hinderances were removed, and the Lord permitted me, an unworthy sinner, to speak to him as a child speaketh to its compassionate parent; and thus I experienced the truth of that blessed declaration, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him'.

Smith, of course, wanted to please this Father (:62):

What blessed freedom did I consequently enjoy, in drawing nigh to God, as unto my reconciled father in Christ. I went up to his house, praying that I might be made useful in his service all the days of my life.

In 1808 Matilda Smith left Bethelsdorp and went back to Cape Town. In 1810 she launched 'The Cape Ladies' Society for the relief of the Poor' and in 1813 a 'Juvenile Missionary Society'. John Philip commented upon her work amongst the young as an interesting field of usefulness, 'peculiarly adapted to the female sex' (Smith 1824:135).

Matilda Smith could not escape the restrictions of her female sub-culture. Within her boundaries she made a remarkable contribution to religiosity at the Cape. She was, however, the co-founder of a type of female piety still prevalent among Afrikaans women. According to this piety God is viewed as the strong man, the One with power, whose

goodwill leads to improved spiritual experiences, the One who has to be pleased. This is a piety in which the self is seen mainly in terms of religious usefulness and service, and in which other people are seen as receiving the good news for spiritual freedom, even in the absence of social freedom.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the last three chapters that the foundation of the piety of Dutch-Afrikaans women was laid during the eighteenth century while many women suffered severe personal hardships, varying from restrictive physical and cultural circumstances in the suburbia of Cape Town (Van Lier) to isolation and the realities of illness, murder and death on border farms (Venter) and to exchanging family deaths for cultural-religious restrictiveness on the mission field (Smith).

Under these circumstances, the women read either the Dutch pietists of the seventeenth century or the English revivalists of the eighteenth century. Whatever their sources, they preferred a piety which could provide them with a means of survival in the dangerous and fearful circumstances in which they had placed themselves as white people in a black country. Dutch-Afrikaans female piety, therefore, started off as a piety in which white women empowered themselves through fear of God in times of illness and the murder of their loved ones. They also made themselves the *prima causa* of the calamities which befell them when they blamed their own sinful nature as the cause of disease. God is the blameless *secunda causa*, who afflicts sinners with bodily illness. God is, however, the *prima causa* in removing sin, and therefore of removing illness and side-stepping the coming death.

The Dutch-Afrikaans women of the eighteenth century empowered themselves by submitting their will to God in the belief that in doing so they were empowering themselves on a religious level to cope with the adversities of life. They were in fact adapting to the cultural restrictions of their female subculture whose main characteristic was submissiveness to the fate for which one is born.

Therefore, the piety of early Dutch-Afrikaans women empowered them to survive the hardships of their physical circumstances, simultaneously enslaving them within their female subculture in which submissiveness to God equalled submissiveness to a male dominant culture in which the maleness of God prescribed a negative self-image for women.

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5

Susanna Smit (1799–1863): Guilt fantasies and the Great Trek

5.1 MALE VIEWS ON THE FEMALE PIETY OF THE GREAT TREK

5.1.1 *Women on the Trek were illiterate instruments of God's guidance*

Willem Postma (1918) and Eric Stockenström (1921), as mentioned in the Introduction to this work, wrote histories of the Dutch-Afrikaans women as part of an ideological campaign against women's suffrage, coinciding roughly with the inauguration of the Women's National Monument. The historians wrote extensively on the virtues of the Boer women on the Great Trek.

Stockenström in particular emphasised the following characteristics of the Boer women on the Great Trek:

- The women were useful, that is in preparing food and ammunition (1921:71).
- The women were patriotic; they were eager and fervent to share the fate of their husbands (1921:70, 80).
- They were illiterate, and therefore natural and simple (1921:80).
- They were very moral (*zedelijk*; 1921:80, 81).
- They saved the men through God's guidance (1921:84).

- The women were willing to sacrifice everything for their freedom (1921:84).
- The women were fearless, mainly because of their faith in God (1921:92).

Stockenström refers extensively to the wife of the Reverend Erasmus Smit and her speech in 1834 when the Boer women confronted Henry Cloete, the English Commissioner in Natal, informing him that they would walk barefoot over the Drakensberg to reobtain their freedom from the English (1921:99):

Die vrou van Erasmus Smit het nie geaarsel om die verteenwoordiger van die Koningin van Engeland met sulke mannetaal toe te spreek nie. Die suigeling aan die bors van sulke vroue waaruit die vergadering bestaan het sou, waaragtig, g'n slawe wees nie! (*The wife of Erasmus Smit did not hesitate to address the representative of the Queen of England in male language like this. The infants at the breast of the type of women of which the congregation consisted would definitely not be slaves!*)

Although Stockenström did not know the name of Erasmus Smit's wife, he praises her as the ideal foremother of the Dutch-Afrikaners and he describes her as the average Dutch-Afrikaans woman.

The woman of whom he spoke was Susanna Smit. From her diary, as yet unpublished, it is clear that she did not fit into this picture of the Dutch-Afrikaans female which Stockenström erroneously presented to his twentieth-century audience.

Susanna Smit, sister of the Trek leader Gert Maritz and wife of the Boer missionary Erasmus Smit, was not illiterate, naïvely moral, fearless or merely a supporter of a male concept of national freedom, as Stockenström presented the Trek women.

5.1.2 The women were illiterate

In the 1930s fifteen neatly written numbers of Susanna Smit's diary were discovered in the attic of a house in Utrecht, Natal (Steenkamp 1939:68). That Smit was not illiterate is clear from her (as yet unpublished) diary written in fairly good Dutch, better than that of her husband. This is quite remarkable especially because it is suspected that she taught herself to read and write. Smit took many books with her on the Trek. Of course, these books were written mainly by the Dutch pietists whose work

flooded the South African market a century after they had been written. She also read the more familiar works of the English revivalists known at the Cape, such as John Newton. She names her sources as follows: 'Ab-rakel, Erschine, Mijstras, Emmens, Van der Groe, Newton, Herwij, Bores, Molenaar' (see Roodt-Coetzee 1961:38). According to Steenkamp's (1939:75) sources Smijtgelt was also available on the Great Trek. Smit read the hymns of Hieronymus van Alphen, Catharina Allegonda van Lier's most popular poet. She also read the 'Leerreden' of Helperus Ritzema van Lier and the *Kerkbode*, the official journal of the Dutch Reformed Church. However, her main reading matter was the Bible, especially the martyrdom of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Smit was not illiterate, but she was literate mainly in seventeenth-century pietism and in a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible.

There are other extant female sources which confirm the occurrence of literacy amongst women on the Great Trek. Mrs Joubert (1830-1916), wife of General Piet Joubert (see Streutker 1991), joined the Trek with her grandparents at the age of six. She related that, whenever the opportunity arose, the children (male and female) were taught how to read and write. The children could read well although writing was seldomly practised because of a scarcity of ink which they themselves had to prepare (Rompel-Koopman 1916:11-13). Furthermore another woman, Anna Steenkamp (1939:26), concluded her memoirs of the Great Trek by stating: '[Ik] bende maker en schrij[ver] [van deze] boek maar vol voute.' (*Although it is full of mistakes, I am the author of this book.*)

5.1.3 The women were moral

Smit led a moral (zedelijk) life, although it does not seem as if she had an alternative in the small trekking communities in which she was the wife of the minister. Yet she fantasised about Jesus as her lover, as the hero who saved her from her enemies. 'I am like a woman engaged to Christ, my fiancé,' she wrote. Although the fantasies also seem to have an aura of decency around them since Smit saw herself married to Christ, the language she used to describe this relationship is slightly erotic, like that of her foremothers, Van Lier and Venter:

Zoo zaag Messias liebreuid
vol liefdevuur in't rond
of zij ook elders hier of daar
een voetstap van hem vond.

Zij sweefde gedrongen door den min
 langs heuvel dal en woud
 en draagt een liefdebrand in d'zin
 die haar het hart benauwd
 Waar is mijn koning waar mijn vriend?
 Die mij hebt onder trouwd;
 Waar wandelt hij die mij bemind? Ik ben om hem benauwd.
*(The lily bride of the Messiah runs around aflame with love, looking for one
 of his footsteps. Drenched by love, I look on the mountain, in the valley and
 in the wood for my king and friend who has married me. Where is my
 beloved? I cannot bear to be without him.)*

5.1.4 The women were fearless because of their faith in God

Smit was never fearless. She did fear God's wrath. She also feared Satan. Like other Dutch-Afrikaans women in physically dangerous situations, she feared for her children, their safety and the whereabouts of the soul of her deceased son. She had nightmares, frightening visions of her son's soul in hell. She feared the Christ of Revelation and she feared that the English government would take away her husband's pension and that he would die, leaving her without a pension.

5.1.5 Such women did not want the vote

On the other hand Smit was not a submissive patriot who passed food and ammunition to a fighting husband. It would appear that she was physically as well as mentally his superior, especially because he was forced to leave various missionary sites because of poor human relations and his drinking problem. Susanna Smit eventually became famous because she uttered, on 5 August 1843, the famous words to the English Commissioner, Henry Cloete, that they would rather trek barefoot back over the Drakensberg than stay on under English rule.

In Afrikaner tradition these words have been attributed to the patriotic spirit of Boer women in general. However, since it has become known that they were spoken by Susanna Smit, more facts have come to light about her speech. According to women researchers (Roodt-Coetzee 1961:29; Cloete 1992:48) in her speech Smit referred negatively not only to English imperialism, but also to the patriarchal breach of promise amongst the Afrikaner men: the men promised the women suffrage in government

affairs as recompense for their contribution to the battles against the blacks. The Boer men did not keep their promise.

However, Susanna Smit's (partly) famous speech does not imply that she was a political leader of Boer women militantly seeking the vote. Neither Mrs Joubert nor Mrs Steenkamp refers to her in their memoirs, although they do make fond references to her husband. When the Boers eventually left Pietermaritzburg to flee English rule, Susanna Smit was one of those who remained behind. She stayed in Pietermaritzburg under British rule for the remainder of her life. Throughout the 25 years of her stay in Pietermaritzburg with her husband she suffered from the fear that the hated English government would terminate his pension. Bound by her husband and his pension, she was also bound by the financial and cultural restrictions of her subculture. When her husband decided to stay, she had to stay too.

In the next paragraph we shall look briefly at the history of Susanna Smit and at her view of the divine and the evil, of herself and of her fellow people. The findings of our research up to this stage suggest that female piety, in contrast to male pietist expression, favours a negative female self-image and, consequently, a domineering male image of God as well as an extremely negative view of other people. These findings, and the suggestion that female piety is the outflow of a restrictive female subculture, constitute a hermeneutical framework for interpreting the piety of Susanna Smit.

5.2 THE LIFE AND HELL OF SUSANNA SMIT

5.2.1 *Birth, childhood, marriage*

Susanna Catharina Maritz was born on 28 August 1799 in the district of Uitenhage where her parents farmed until 1811. Their farm was near Bethelsdorp, the mission station of the London Missionary Society where, amongst others, Matilda Smith and Erasmus Smit were missionaries. Matilda Smith, as was noted in the previous chapter, worked at Bethelsdorp from 1805 to 1808. During this time the very young (5–8 years old) Susanna Maritz met Matilda Smith who visited Susanna's mother as her friend in the faith. During this time the little girl also met Erasmus Smit who joined the LMS at Bethelsdorp in the same year as Matilda Smith. When Susanna was 13 years old, Erasmus Smit requested her hand in marriage and her mother granted the necessary permission. Erasmus was

Susanna's senior by 21 years. Her diary testifies that this unhappy marriage placed severe restrictions on her self-expression as a human being.

Immediately after their marriage in 1813, the LMS sent Erasmus Smit to Tooverberg (now Colesberg). During the next twenty years they moved several times to different mission stations, and usually Erasmus was asked to leave under humiliating circumstances. At Tooverberg their two children were born, George in 1814 and Salomon in 1816. In 1820 they were sent to Kookfontein (now Beaufort West). In 1822 Erasmus Smit broke away from the LMS and joined the Stellenbosch Missionary Society. He ministered at Stellenbosch for eight years. Erasmus Smit was never fully ordained and tension arose because he administered the sacraments. In 1830 Erasmus Smit left Stellenbosch to teach at Olifantshoek (now Alexandria, south of Grahamstown). In 1837 the 59-year-old Erasmus Smit and the 38-year-old Susanna joined the Great Trek with their son Salomon, leaving George in Uitenhage. The family were very poor and they trekked in a wagon borrowed from Gert Maritz. Their son Salomon died on the trek on 28 July 1837. Erasmus and Susanna Smit eventually spent their last years in Pietermaritzburg (Roodt-Coetzee 1961:31–32; De Villiers 1976: 731–732).

5.2.2 Writing a diary in Pietermaritzburg

The town of Pietermaritzburg was established by the Boers in 1838, and in January 1839 Susanna settled there with Erasmus Smit. Her husband hoped to become the Boers' official minister but he was forced to retire in 1841, although he lived in Pietermaritzburg with his wife until 1863, when Susanna died in her sixties, only eight days before the death of the husband to whom she had remained loyal although she had detested him every day since she married him as a child.

The part of her diary still extant was written in Pietermaritzburg between 1842 and 1858. It comprises 24 booklets of folio sheets, of which 15 are extant, joined in the middle with cotton. The original is in the State Archives in Pietermaritzburg (De Villiers 1976:730; Roodt-Coetzee 1961:30).

Susanna came to Pietermaritzburg when she was almost forty years old, and she considered herself to be old and dying. In that part of her (unpublished) diary written in Natal, she expresses her terrible fears of hell and she considers her miserable life to be God's punishment because she did not subject herself fully to God. Every now and then her self-chas-

tisement was interrupted, however, by a vision of the heavenly bliss awaiting her in the life hereafter. Susanna Smit did not experience life as a balance of contrasts between good and evil, with God leading the blessed to the right way of life. In her diary she contrasted this life completely negatively to the afterlife, which she regarded as her only escape from the restrictions of her subcultural misery.

The hypothesis of this study is that Smit read mainly pietist sources because they were available in the Cape Colony and because the contents appealed to her circumstances, and that she interpreted these sources according to the demands of survival in her subculture. There are, however, two questions pertaining to this hypothesis, namely: 'What did her female subculture look like?' The second question, which has already been partially answered, is 'What were her sources?'

5.2.3 The sources for Smit's conviction that life was hell

As has already been noted, Smit read mainly the Dutch pietists of the seventeenth century. Like her foremothers she was inclined to listen to their message of sin, guilt, hell and damnation. In the second place, Smit read Helperus Ritzema van Lier. Of course, she was particularly fond of his sermons on the suffering of Christ. She recalls in her diary that a woman friend visited her and that they cried after having read one such sermon on Jesus' martyrdom.

In the third instance it is to be noted that, orally, Susanna Smit was exposed mainly to the theology of her husband, although it is not easy to determine the extent of this influence. Erasmus Smit did not include the contents of his sermons in his journal (Preller & Scholtz 1988) but referred only to the verses from Scripture on which he preached. However, it is known that when training as a missionary, Erasmus Smit (De Jongh 1977:14) was primarily exposed to the thoughts, the preaching and the missionary example of Moravian missionaries. They taught, inter alia, the infallibility of Scriptures and the wrath of God for personal sins, that is all thoughts and deeds not in accordance with the letter of the Bible. This may have been a third possible source for Smit's constant fear of the hell for which the main source, as in the case of her foremothers, appears to be her own life: physical danger, emotional unfulfilment, poverty – and the death of a child.

5.2.4 *How limited was Susanna Smit's subculture?*

Smit's fear of hell, her overdeveloped sense of sin and her aggressive self-hate should be blamed on her personal circumstances in her subculture and on the influence her sources exercised on her. Can this hypothesis be tested against the ego-texts of other contemporary (white) South African women?

(1) Mary Moffat was also restricted to hell-fear

Mary Moffat (1795–1871), a contemporary of Susanna Smit (1799–1863), worked as a missionary with her husband, Robert Moffat, far north in Kuruman, and she displays the same fondness of hell-fear as Smit. Poverty, physical danger, deaths of children and a cultural belief in a divinely standardised role for women bonded Moffat and Smit in their thoughts on hell, sin and damnation. As a child Moffat, an Englishwoman, attended a Moravian school in England, and as a grown-up lived in a country surrounded by hell (Dickson 1989:44). Moffat proves that fear of hell was not restricted to subcultures in the Dutch-Afrikaans society.

(2) Frances Colenso liberated herself from hell

Frances Colenso (1816–1893), the wife of the famous bishop of Natal, John Colenso, on the other hand had been exposed to intellectual thinking and historical criticism since her youth. While Susanna Smit was living in a tattered and leaking little house in Pietermaritzburg, dividing her anxieties between fear of God's wrath and fear of hell, Frances Colenso was living in comparative luxury in Bishopstowe outside Pietermaritzburg. Before marrying John Colenso, Frances Bunyon-Colenso was influenced quite extensively by a stream in English religious thought based on the theology of F D Maurice (1805–1872). He preached that God, who was universally present in all people, had already redeemed the whole of humanity through Christ. As a result Frances Colenso and her husband showed a definite resistance to threatening the 'heathen' with hell and eternal punishment. Hell-talk did not feature in Frances Colenso's personal thinking. In her letters to friends in England there is a total absence of traditional damnation: she does not even refer to her greatest enemies in terms of hell and judgement (Rees 1958).

Intellectual restrictiveness and physical powerlessness, then, are possible causes of the fears of Smit (and Moffat) which she expressed in terms of hell-fear. To prove this hypothesis, there is extant a non-Dutch

source on Boer women who settled further north after the Trek, albeit slightly later than Smit.

(3) *Elizabeth Lees Price testifies to the restrictions of Boer women*

Elizabeth Lees Price (1839–1919), wife of Roger Price and sister-in-law of David Livingstone, in her letters written in the 1860s from the northern interior, describes the Boers she and her husband met on their missionary travels. According to her the Boer men were dishonest, coarse and inhuman in their treatment of non-Boers. Her sympathies are with their wives, however, when she describes a typical Boer *noï* as 'Square – huge – coarse and uneducated ... but very kind and willing to help others' – and very motherly, even to black children (Long 1956:257). She notices that Boer women were very precise in whatever they did (Long 1956:252, 253), but she pities their restricted unvaried lives. Elizabeth complains that she is easily bored should she have to stay over on a Boer farm, 'for there is so little to interest one after one has once studied bread-making, etc' (Long 1956:253).

Elizabeth is particularly sympathetic towards their Boer neighbours' 'poor poverty-stricken thin weather-beaten wives' (Long 1956:269). These Boer women did some needlework for Elizabeth in return for some 'useful articles'. 'I think I never saw white people in Africa so poor. They are brown and weather-beaten as gipsies, and wear rags such as few of the women of this place who dress, would wear' (Long 1956:269).

The women described by Elizabeth Lees Price were of one generation later than Susanna Smit. Tradition describes Smit as 'heavily built' (Brink 1990:276), but as a foremother she belonged to the class and race of women described by Elizabeth Lees Price as culturally restricted and poverty-stricken. Susanna Smit apparently led the same impoverished and limited life. According to her own testimony, she was caught in a subculture of very little self-expression. Eventually her close experience of hell and her constant depressions because of feelings of guilt became the main features of self-expression in her ego-text.

Susanna Smit is a prime example of the influence of the doctrines of hell and *sola scriptura* on the uneducated mind of a person who forms part of a severely restricted subculture, and is exposed mainly to a hell-orientated, pietist form of religious expression.

5.3 SUSANNA SMIT'S EXPERIENCE OF GOD

5.3.1 *God the Father*

As in the case of those foremothers already discussed, the most important 'theological' question of the eighteenth-century Dutch-Afrikaans women was 'What happened to my dead child's soul?' Because they were not trained theologically, these women could not depend on books to provide answers. The religious books they did read, those by the Dutch pietists, did not teach them their piety, but they did support a piety already formed by everyday circumstances. These women were dependent upon a personal relationship with God to provide them with answers to their questions about death, salvation and damnation. Often these answers became quite personal, when God became personally involved through visions. God usually appeared as the Father in these visions, overtly powerful and male. It is therefore to be expected that Susanna Smit's vision of hell and an angry God was related to her burning question concerning the salvation of her deceased child's soul.

As has already been indicated, Susanna and Erasmus Smit had two children. While George, who eventually survived his parents, remained in the Cape when his parents moved northwards with the Boers, the other son, Salomon, went with his parents and died of fever on trek on 28 July 1837.

Seven years later, on the night of 5/6 May 1844, Smit wrote in her diary that she saw the soul of her dead son sinking away into eternity, 'gansch misvormd in stuiptrekkingen der helle'. Frightened out of her wits, she prayed for a sign to indicate whether her son's soul was with God or with Satan. Suddenly she realised that she had tempted God, and she visualised him pointing her out to his Son, struck down in her arrogance. But her Saviour, Jesus Christ, picked her up, 'bemorst met bloed en sluk'. She regained her calm in total acceptance of God's will. She reached for her folder of Bible verses and extracted Mark 4:40 with the message 'Why are you frightened? Where is your faith?' Knowing that this should bring comfort, she started crying because she still had no certainty concerning the fate of her son's soul. She thought about her child when still alive and searched for proof that he was saved. She did recall that he had asked her once, three months before his death, how he could be certain that he would be reborn. She had answered that God led the reborn and revealed his will through dreams and other types of consciousness ('dromen en gewaarwordingen'). She told him true Christians never experience peace, not in

this world, nor in God, until they have left the world behind. She recalled that it was the fear of hell on his face at that time which convinced her that he was near the Kingdom of God. He then told her how he thought about hell and judgement even as a small child while playing with his friends, and that he met the Lord in a bush at the river when he was fifteen. Remembering this, Smit related a new vision ('een geestelijk gezicht') of her son in heaven, dressed in white and singing with thousands of other young men in a choir but with their backs turned to her.

From this description, which contains characteristics typical of her experiences throughout her journal, Smit's relationship with God the Father can be deduced. This relationship was indeed very close because Smit experienced God's will directly through visions. She did not allow God to comfort her in an easy way, however. When the chance for comfort arose, and reference was made to the mercy of God, she discovered something wrong in her behaviour towards God and envisaged God's wrath. For Susanna Smit God was very close, as well as being very demanding and threatening. She saw herself as a child of God the Father, a child who loved but also feared her father. She constantly felt guilty of unacceptable behaviour, that she had insulted her Father, humiliated her Saviour and saddened the Holy Spirit.

Believing in this Father whom it was almost impossible to please, Smit was not to be comforted and she hated herself. Time and again she fell into deep depression.

5.3.2 *The Son of God*

In her ego-text Smit displays different concepts of Jesus Christ. These concepts may appear incoherent yet coherent with the needs of her personal circumstances. We have already come across two of these concepts. In the first instance, Smit clings strongly to Jesus as her Bridegroom, as we have seen earlier. It is in Jesus the Lover that she finds comfort. Secondly, she identifies strongly with the suffering Christ. On the one hand she feels guilty for having been the cause of his suffering but, on the other, it is a source of comfort to her that her pain can be comparable to that of the son of God.

Smit experienced the Son as more forgiving, more 'saving', than the Father even though this forgiveness comprises a future salvation commencing only after this life of hell. On 22 May 1844, a few weeks after this vision of hell, Smit relates a conversation in which her sister's child had

told her aunt of her fear of Jesus. When Smit asked why, the child answered that it was because of the passage in Revelation describing the Lord's eyes as flames, and as a sinner she could not pray to him. On the other hand, the child was afraid that if she did not pray, she would go to hell and she wanted to know from Smit whether, if she prayed until the end of her life, the Lord would accept her as his child. Smit answered the child in the affirmative, because it was written in the Bible that Christ shall find those who continue praying. Smit proceeded to comfort herself with the idea of future righteousness through Christ.

According to Smit's fundamentalist reading of the Bible, comfort in Christ lies in the future. She used the Bible constantly and exclusively as if it contained magic words that would issue a warning, incite guilt and concentrate her attention on future bliss. Even biblical 'history' is seen as a reference to Smit's own spiritual life. II Samuel 1:23, for instance, concerning the war between the Philistines and Israel, is understood (Saturday 1 June 1844) as an attack by Satan through the Philistines of hell on Smit personally. This interpretation caused her great anxiety ('angst') but eventually she found comfort in the identification of her own pain with that of the suffering Jesus.

The moment Smit felt comforted, she immediately experienced guilt. She felt responsible for Jesus' suffering by being ungrateful and neglecting his love. To visualise the suffering Jesus, Smit read one of Helperus Ritzema van Lier's sermons (1806:8) on Isaiah 53:3 ('He was despised'), written approximately fifty years earlier. While reading she cried, convinced by the sermon that she was co-responsible for the suffering of Jesus.

Smit felt guilty towards the divine who comforted her. In the sociology of the female subcultural experience, this guilt can be explained as the coherent fantasies of a strong woman with a wish to participate in life, but who could only fantasise about pleasing the divine. In her visions Smit was the one trying to please the Father; she was the one reaching out to Jesus the Bridegroom. This initiative towards male figures was not allowed within her female subculture. She therefore formulated her religious experiences in terms of guilt and rejection.

5.3.3 *The Spirit of God*

The wind lashing against her small hut, damaging trees, breaking young plants, tearing down fruit, reminded Susanna Smit of God's Holy Spirit

(Thursday, 16 February 1843). The Spirit of God blows whenever it wishes, but it can be heard mingled with the tears and the sighs of the penitent struck down by the divine wind. The Spirit of God tears down sinful fruit and leaves sinners damaged and 'ontzied'. But Smit believed that the heavenly farmer will water the penitent with pure water streaming from his throne and remove them from the terrible bush where they are tormented by his own spirit to transplant them in his inner garden. The Spirit lashes out at sinners, so that sinners as well as pietists suffer, although those who fear God will be blessed.

Not even the Spirit of God can comfort this world. Again, Smit refers to the Spirit in coherent ambivalence: on the one hand the Spirit rejects her as a sinner; on the other, the Spirit is very involved with her as the penitent who knows her guilt. As a sinner who humbles herself, the Spirit of God takes notice of her.

5.4 SUSANNA SMIT'S CONCEPT OF HERSELF

Susanna Smit used the following images to refer to herself: a pitiful worm ('ellendig worm', 8 Mei 1844), a frog ('een schurf pad'), a sick dog ('een kranken hond', 3 January 1848), an unworthy dog ('een onwaardige hondjie', 29 May 1851). She preferred in particular to refer to herself as a worm.

It is of special interest that in her journal Smit attributed to herself the leading role as the guilty party using descriptions of spiritual temptation. Her descriptions of how she was tempted and how she had been saved time and again usually contain three scenes: the enemy attacks her, the Lord saves her, and she takes all the guilt upon herself for whatever may have happened. Smit played the leading role in all the described scenes. On 17 February 1843, for instance, she described one of her guilt fantasies in biblical imagery: pagans pestered her with their merchandise, and when she did not heed them, they attacked her with stout sticks hitting her on the arm, disarming her and she had to flee. Robbers carried her off and left her in the middle of the broad road. Then the Lord appeared as a hero rushing to her aid. Her description reads: 'myn lieve Heer dat ziende snelt toe en den bozen rot vliegt als door een bliksem getroffen naar hunne holen en spelonken'.

Smit had this to say to her hero who had saved her: 'Lord, I am guilty' ('Nu Heere ik ben schuldig'). Part of a subculture with no active role allocated to her in real life, Susanna Smit escaped into a world of fantasies in which she became so important because of her sins that earth

and heaven were brought into motion to tempt her but also to save her. As a sinner, a 'lowly worm', Smit believed that she was noticed by the men of this world and the (male) Lord of heavens. Together they play-acted and she performed the leading role. To Susanna Smit this was the only way to participate from a crippled subculture in 'life'.

To retain her important role as sinner, Smit believed that to earthly sinners redemption could only be temporary (see 6 June 1845). This view coloured her interpretation of reality, visions and dreams (albeit she experienced them as very real) as well as her role as part of these realities. On Saturday 20 September 1845, she remembered the vision of a lion coming through a door to attack her, but an Angel prevented it. The lion wanted to devour her, but the Angel had the power to control it. Instead of deriving any comfort from this vision, Smit became convinced that the vision announced impending disaster. She accepted this implication, because she regarded herself as a worm, but God is almighty and has the freedom to do with her whatever He pleased.

In order to achieve a measure of status Susanna Smit regarded herself as lowly and demeaned herself in front of God.

5.5 SUSANNA SMIT'S CONCEPT OF HER FELLOW PEOPLE

Susanna Smit may have called herself a worm, but she regarded other people as wolves and buffaloes, godless sinners in need of Christ's redemption. Her journals are a flight into her own psyche and she seldom referred to anybody but herself. When she did refer to other people, however, it was because she experienced them as her enemies (see for example 24 February 1851).

Smit led a lonely life as a missionary's wife. Because of her husband's poor social relationships she led an isolated life even amongst the Boers. She took it upon herself to teach children to read and write, but from time to time parents removed their children from her classes. This Smit attributed to the sinful nature of people. She continually displayed mistrust and enmity towards other people, but she, in fact, was unable to communicate with them in a meaningful way. Her fiery speech to the British Commissioner in 1843, for instance, was more an outcry against her own subcultural restrictiveness than the words of a female leader amongst women.

Apparently Smit could not even communicate meaningfully with the Boer men from her dominant male culture. The only successful com-

munication according to her journals was with women from her immediate family, sisters or nieces. Her male neighbour called her an old bitch and Smit records that he had said 'zy is toen zy te Stellenbosch woonde zulk een loederbeest geweest' (21 February 1851). She used her religion as protection against him: How dare he call her names when she has feared and served the Lord since her eighth year?

Susanna Smit, therefore, had been socially isolated throughout her life. On Thursday, 2 July 1846, even though she was living amongst 'her own people', she recorded that nobody cared enough to enquire about her and her husband and whether they were able to survive ('geen mensch vraagt ons hoe gaat het, of waarvan leeft gy'). This caused Susanna's self-isolation. Yet, she often yearned to be alone, like a poor bird on a dry piece of wood. This may be a reference to her impoverished social circumstances and she yearned for silence ('Zo zat ik als een arme vogel op een droge stomp, hygende naar stilte', 30 January 1848). Her self-isolation served as protection against the insults of other people, but it also resulted in self-upliftment into a supernatural sphere.

Despite her social and self-isolation, Susanna Smit held important views on the behaviour of people who regarded themselves as superior. She criticised on religious grounds their attitudes and behaviour as well as her own. When she read *De Kerkbode* she was appalled that ministers continually referred to themselves with titles of honour ('By elken regel den naam Wel en Hoog Eerw niet vergeten', 14 June 1850). She remarked that this was not the way of Jesus or his disciples ('Waar vind men toch den Hoog Eerw Jesus, den Hoog Eerw Petrus, Paulus, Johannes?'). Furthermore, in her interpretation of Ephesians 5, she acknowledged the right of wives to resist their husbands should they act like sinners (23 March 1846).

Susanna Smit's most valuable contribution to the religious criticism of power relationships was derived from her own experience with one of her servants, the black woman Maria. On 24 May 1844 Smit writes that Maria had been reprimanded by Erasmus Smit for not doing her job properly and that Maria quite openly had made fun of him. This caused Smit to fly into a temper and she called the black woman 'you black offspring of Satan!' ('swarte Sathans telg'). Smit describes her fear because of her outburst. Maria might have been God's chosen; God might be her Father. How could she (Smit) call her the offspring of Satan? Smit wanted to send Maria away (isolate her), but then she remembered that she had raised Maria like a mother and therefore God would demand Maria's soul

from her. She felt so guilty that long after this had happened she was still plagued with nightmares. She had recurrent dreams that God called her a 'bastaard', that He rejected her as His child because she had called one of his children the child of Satan.

CONCLUSION

Susanna Smit belonged to the subculture of a dominant culture infamous for its racism, sexism and authoritarianism. According to her diary, she held important ideas on all these issues. She honoured the soul of a black woman; she publicly voiced the political rights of women to co-government of the people; she criticised the hierarchy of the Christian community. Susanna Smit had a message for this culture about the isolation, the pain, the rights of the subjugated.

She never delivered this message, and she could not communicate it effectively. There may be two reasons for this: because she was speaking from within a female subculture, she was not heard. In the second place she was unable to energise these insights because of the type of piety she internalised, a piety which centred on fear of the divine, a too personal and individualised relationship with the divine, and a very poor and paralyzing self-image.

Smit was unable to communicate the message of her own pain or that of others to her people. Instead, she escaped into visions in which she formed part of the heavenly society. The most striking of her visions is perhaps the following because of the time at which it occurred: On Tuesday, 16 June 1846, Smit recorded a vision she had while her husband led the morning service ('huisgodsdienst'). She saw five choirs of heavenly beings in white, the women playing on golden zithers, the men singing. In the language of Revelation 20 she described the glory of the physical beauty as well as the beauty of the music of these people. However, at the very moment when she wanted to join them in their singing, her husband announced the song to be sung at the closure of the morning service and the vision disappeared. Once again she had been rejected.

Her captivity in a severely restricted subculture caused Susanna Smit to reveal certain psychotic abuses of religion: she found power in guilt and she used her personal relationship with God against people who did not like her. She escaped reality by means of religious visions in which she was empowered, not according to the view of this world but according to that of the life to come.

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6

Tant Alie of the Transvaal (1866–1908): God's wife in the concentration camp

6.1 MALE VIEWS ON FEMALE MARTYRDOM: CONTINUED

According to Postma and Stockenström, the next important event in the martyr history of Dutch-Afrikaans women after the Great Trek was the South African War between the Boers and Britain, 1899 to 1902.

Two aspects of the way in which Postma and Stockenström record the history of the women in the British concentration camps should be seriously questioned. In the first place these historians romanticise the Boer women as passive martyrs. These women are depicted as helpless victims at the mercy of the British and they are praised for their passive acceptance of their role as martyrs of the nation, a romantic role for smiling heroines. In the second instance these historians overemphasise the international outcry against atrocities committed against Boer women in the camps.

From the Boer women's ego-texts, compiled by E Neethling in a publication *Vergeten?* (1917; and *Should we forget?* 1902), it is clear that these male presentations were far removed from the actual experiences of these women.

6.1.1 *Women in the romantic role of passive martyrs*

There was nothing romantic to these women who were chased and imprisoned by the British for their participation in (what they believed to be) an unrighteous war aimed at enslaving them. One of these women, for instance, did not regard it as romantic to be imprisoned and taken to a concentration camp to find that of her surviving children, her 13-year-old son had turned grey (Neethling 1917:79). Boer men, however, preferred to tell female martyr stories in a soap-story way. Even Jan Smuts often told the story of the woman who stood outside her house while a British officer was burning it down; the woman sang 'Praise the Lord' and the British officer had tears in his eyes, but he was under orders to continue (Neethling 1917:80). This occurrence of passive piety on the side of the woman Smuts called 'zoo verheven schoon' (so exaltedly beautiful) and he regarded it as a sign of hope for the future of the nation.

These women do not narrate their own stories as a history of passive suffering, however. They tell tragic stories of horrendous atrocities committed against them, but they also testify to an active past: their flight from dangerous situations, their resistance against camp authorities, their persistence in the struggle for physical and mental survival in the camps – and their actual participation in the fighting (see Pretorius 1988, Warwick 1980, Spies 1977). For their resistance they were imprisoned or punished with detention. There was nothing romantic about active participation in a cruel war.

6.1.2 *Women in the international power game*

As has been indicated in the Introduction to this book, the fate of the Boer women during the war was used by their own men to gain international sympathy for the case of the Boers against the British. In speeches and writings covering events such as the erection of the National Women's Monument, much was said by Boer men on behalf of the women; often these Boer men referred to God on behalf of the women in a way which suggested that both sexes believed in the national God of the Boers. At the inauguration of the National Women's Monument, President M T Steyn said: 'Wat was de kracht die van de zwakke vrouwen zulke heldinnen maakte? Het was dat vast vertrouwen op de Almachtige, die het lot der volkeren bestiert' (What was this power which turned weak women into heroines? It was the firm belief in the Almighty who guides the fate of nations. Neethling 1917:62).

However, from the Boer women's ego-texts it is apparent that those who lived to tell their stories did not survive because of international attention or because they trusted in the protection of a national God. Ironically enough, they survived because of their staunch belief in a personal God. True to the piety of their foremothers, in times of pain they found comfort and acceptance in their personal God; 'Bij onze lieve Heer was het anders besloten, daarom moeten wij tevreden wezen' (Our Lord has decided differently, therefore we must be contented. Martha Kriel in Neethling 1917:15). The submissiveness which their piety required was to the male God in heaven: 'O, had ik niet een Vader in de hemel op Wie ik vertrouwde, was ik al lang van druk bezweken, maar ik wist, dat Hij mij zou leiden op Zijn eigen weg' (If it was not for my Father in Heaven in whom I trusted, I would have died long ago; but I know that He shall lead me on his way. Anna Louw in Neethling 1917:43). God, the Father, is in control; He is the Strong Man.

This submissiveness to the divine will was, of course, inherited from their foremothers, but during the last part of the nineteenth century Afrikaans women's image of their personal God was strengthened by the teaching of Andrew Murray. These women felt at ease within his teaching: on the one hand he provided for active people who wanted to please God through their actions; on the other he preached submission to the will of the strong, benevolent God when things do not turn out right. In this respect it is good to listen to the voice of one of the women from the Murray circle, that of Susanna Maria Murray (née Kriel, 1873-1962). She narrates in her diary, *Uit die dagboek van 'n predikantsvrou, 16 Mei 1900 tot 12 Januarie 1906* (From the diary of a minister's wife, 16 May 1900 to 12 January 1906) the following story her mother told her. Again the scene is that of a mother with her personal God at a death bed (s a:39):

She was telling me the other day of how, shortly after Father's death, she was standing one night beside her sleeping bairns and her heart was full of fears and anxiety. She wept and cried out: 'Oh God, how can I bring them up alone?' and suddenly it was as if she heard His voice: 'It is not My will that one of these little ones shall perish.' It brought comfort to her soul and many a day since then those words have strengthened her faith.

The war diary of Alie Badenhorst provides an excellent example of a woman who reacted actively to the challenge to survive in a war situation and who engaged her personal God in her struggle for survival.

6.2 THE LIFE AND WORK OF TANT ALIE OF THE TRANSVAAL

6.2.1 The Tante and the war

Alie Badenhorst (1866–1908) was in her early thirties during the South African War of 1899–1902. During this war she commenced writing her autobiography covering the period from her early childhood in the 1870s until her husband's return from exile on 3 July 1902. Although only 33 years old at the outbreak of the war, she referred to herself as 'Tante' because she was married.

6.2.2 The women who wrote about the war

Badenhorst's diary, written in local Dutch, was first published in English and later in Afrikaans. The English translation was by Emily Hobhouse and it was published in London in 1923 under the title *Tant Alie of Transvaal: her diary 1880–1902*. The Afrikaans edition, published in 1939, was edited by the famous MER (1875–1975) and called *Tant Alie van Transvaal: die dagboek van Alie Badenhorst*. This is only one of several ego-texts of women's war memoirs published after the war. *Should we forget* by E Neethling (1902), *Camp diary of Henrietta E A Armstrong* (Van Rensburg 1980), as well as *Het concentratie-kamp van Irène* (1905) and *The petticoat commando* (1912) of Johanna Brandt are other well-known examples. Badenhorst's diary deserves special attention because it is the only diary in which a woman explicitly and consistently interprets her war experiences in terms of her piety.

6.2.3 The English Tant' Alie

In her introduction Emily Hobhouse calls Alie Badenhorst's diary a 'Peace Document'. Hobhouse claims that, influenced by a speech on pacifism by Lloyd George, she decided to take upon herself the difficult task of deciphering and translating Badenhorst's manuscript, a task which took her twenty years. Olive Schreiner allegedly offered to write a preface to the English edition of Badenhorst's diary (Badenhorst 1923:8), but she had died by the time it was ready for publication. Schreiner is reported to have said that the diary was a 'human document' and that she thought it to be 'wonderful'.

6.2.4 *The Afrikaans Tan' Alie*

In the early 1920s the English edition was presented to the outside world as the work of a pacifist Boer woman who fell prey to the horrors of British imperialism. When the Afrikaans edition was published in the late 1930s, it was directed towards the Afrikaner nation as a call to strengthen themselves through the blood of their martyrs. Initially it was President Reitz himself who endeavoured to translate Badenhorst's Dutch into Afrikaans. The work was finished by M E Rothmann and her work is gratefully acknowledged in the Introduction to the Afrikaans edition by the wife of President M T Steyn on behalf of the Afrikaans nation.

6.2.5 *The contextualised Tan' Alie*

Badenhorst's diary has therefore been presented in two contrasting contexts: Hobhouse read and presented Badenhorst's text as the work of a pacifist, who was against the imperialism of nations. MER and Steyn presented the same diary as a text to be read for building the Afrikaner nation. To understand Badenhorst's concept of God, her historical and ideological context needs to be analysed. In the first place she was a convert of Andrew Murray, bound by the restrictions of her female subculture. She endured severe physical suffering during the war and as a result died of heart failure, yet she managed to write down her memories in such a fashion that they could be interpreted as a 'Peace Document' as well as a document offering hope for an emerging nationalism. This leads to the supposition that she experienced God as a saving God, a comforting God who empowered her, and also a God who was not to be blamed for the war, who visited her regularly, a God whom she lost during the war but found again in time of peace.

6.3 THE STRICT BUT SAVING PERSONAL GOD OF ANDREW MURRAY

Alie Badenhorst, then still Alie de Wet, was 17 years old when she came under the influence of Andrew Murray (Badenhorst 1923:41–54) in 1883 when Murray preached in the Potchefstroom district and the young woman was visiting her sister. At that time Badenhorst was experiencing difficulties in her private life. She had broken off her engagement to Karel Moller against her own wishes because of societal pressure. Andrew Murray's simple message of absolute opposites enabled her to identify her previous life with her ex-fiancé as a life belonging to Satan, and her life to

come with Frikkie Badenhorst as a life in Christ. She met Frikkie Badenhorst, her sister's neighbour, at the time of her conversion to Murrayism. She married him three years later.

6.3.1 *The strict but saving God*

The God whom Badenhorst met through Andrew Murray was a God of integrated opposites: He saved people yet demanded their dependence upon him. He freely gave salvation and demanded legalistic holiness in return (Basson 1990:1–37).

Badenhorst was a Christian before she converted to Andrew Murray's concept of God. She had been confirmed in the church before her conversion. She was a fun-loving person, and was judged by society for drinking too much gingerbeer on the day of her confirmation and for kissing a number of men (Badenhorst 1923:22–27). This led to bad feelings between herself and Karel Moller, her fiancé. When she left to visit her sister, she met Andrew Murray, abandoned her old lifestyle (which included Karel Moller) and started a new life with a new boyfriend and a Murrayist God and lifestyle. After her conversion Badenhorst abandoned all frivolity, virginal though it was. She avoided all parties, even wedding feasts, and decided to limit herself to marriage (Badenhorst 1923:55–61).

6.3.2 *The personal God*

Murray's God was a personal God who demanded personal commitment. He focused on the individual's personal relationship with his Creator to whom he or she is committed by free will and whom he or she wishes to please. Murray's message implied the personal involvement of the individual with God, as well as God's personal involvement with the individual (Van Zyl 1989:6–12, 74).

Badenhorst's concept and experience of her personal God can be deduced from the description she gives of her struggle to deal with this new concept of God introduced by Murray (Badenhorst 1923:44–45):

That night the struggle was in my soul, and still I found no peace. Satan would not let me go. He whispered to me that if I were converted I could have no more pleasures but must put them all aside. Then, too, what would the people at home think of me? I feared they would mock at me. Here then were two spirits that fought within me, Christ and Satan; and what had Satan to offer me? Nothing but Eternal Fire while Christ offered me Eternal Life. He

gave his blood for me and yet I was in doubt. I was weary of the struggle, but next day during the service all at once it became clear to me – Christ is everything; I am nothing. It was to me as if I saw Heaven open and the Spirit of God light upon me, as in silence I yielded myself to Him. Then a great peace filled my heart.

When the church was empty Ds. Murray came to me and said: 'How is it with you my daughter? Have you found peace?'

I answered: 'God has taken me to Himself and I feel happy.'

It was this concept of God, to whom Badenhorst was personally attached and who was personally involved with her, which was the most prominent and consistent vision of the divine in the diary of Alie Badenhorst.

6.4 THE RIGHTEOUS GOD OF PEACE

Badenhorst spent the next fifteen years after her conversion peacefully, mainly as a young married mother. She writes very little about these years, although she (Badenhorst 1923:62–70) briefly sketches the main events of more than a decade.

She married Frikkie Badenhorst in February 1886, at the age of 19/20 years. Twenty months later (October 1887) a son was born who died seven days later. A few months afterwards (February 1888), after two years of marriage, she adopted an orphaned girl aged eleven. Two years later (in 1890) the first of her own five sons was born.

A few political events took place. In 1895 the Boers made war against Malapoch, the leader of a black tribe, and forced him to surrender by cutting off his drinking water. The same year the Jameson Raid occurred and a few years later the Boers made a successful onslaught on another black leader, M'Pefu.

The Badenhorst family was not directly involved in any of these events, and during this time Alie Badenhorst experienced God as a God of peace. The righteousness of God was presupposed and there was no reason to question whether God caused the wars. Badenhorst accepted that God's sympathy lay with the Boers and she was obviously convinced that cutting off the blacks' drinking water, or driving them into the mountains to die of hunger, as she earlier related, was not the same as putting (white) women and children into concentration camps to die of deprivation.

6.5 THE COMFORTING GOD OF THE WAR

In October 1899 war broke out with Britain and in the course of the next year Alie Badenhorst experienced another side of God which she had not met in her previous contexts. As a teenager she experienced God as her spiritual saviour; as a young mother God was her peace-loving guardian; now she expanded her knowledge of God and he became the Comforting Father and (later) her Helping Husband.

During the first months of the war, while still on her farm, Badenhorst looked upon God as her guardian and helper. During this time she remained loyal to her conversion to Andrew Murray's concept of God as the One who cared personally for her children's wellbeing. At this time, of course, personal salvation was contextualised by Badenhorst: her personal Saviour became her personal Helper during a time of war, fear, anxiety and loneliness. In Badenhorst's diary, God was presupposed to be the national God, and God as the warrior God and as the public God became subthemes with her main view of God still that of the personal God. Her doubts began in the concentration camp, but it was a temporary rejection of her personal God. Alie Badenhorst wrote the full story of her war tribulations within this concept of the personally present, and later absent, God.

During the first part of the war Badenhorst's personal relationship with God was strengthened by her reaching out to God in prayer, and God reaching out to her in dreams and divine visitations. The first part of her war memoirs should therefore be retold within these categories of divine support, human prayer and divine visitation. Alie Badenhorst, like her pious foremothers, received personal visits from God in visions. And, as with her foremothers, these visions occurred when the life of a member of the family was concerned.

6.5.1 God the Supporter

When Badenhorst's husband was called to the war (November 1899), she was confident that God would not forsake her in her trial (Badenhorst 1923:76). When he came back a week later for a short visit, she already knew that she would not see him for the rest of the war. During that week God had visited her with this news but He also promised her His support in the absence of her husband (Badenhorst 1923:80). On her birthday (14 December 1899), the first in fourteen years without her husband, Badenhorst (1923:93) prayed to her masculine God to become even more

male as her Protector: 'My Father, you promised to be my helper, my father, my supporter!' When news came of battles won by the Boers, it was as her protector that she honoured the national God: 'How marvellously has God stood by us! Surely He heard my prayers O God is truly good to us, He commands even the elements to work for us' (1923:97, 98; 1939:98, 100). When bad tidings were received, the personal God was called upon to help the nation: 'I will trust in my God. He alone can help us' (1923:93).

6.5.2 *The God of personal prayers*

Christmas 1899 came and still there was no sign of peace. New Year's Day came, bringing a new year and a new century. Badenhorst remembered how she woke her husband on previous New Year's Days with the wish that he would spend his life in God's service during the year. That year she prayed a prayer of dependence on God her Father. In the English edition Emily Hobhouse reduced Badenhorst's prayers to a few words or a few sentences and the reader is therefore referred to the Afrikaans version. Badenhorst's declaration on New Year's Day 1900 of dependence on One who was within her while the one alongside her was in the war is of significance here and is quoted in full (1939:110):

Laat my nie alleen nie, want die las is vir my te swaar. O, seën ons hierdie jaar! Ag, Vader, U sien alles; u sien ook my en my angstige hart! Ag, dit is my so bang om die hart; wees U my Rots en Toevlug in hierdie tyd van nood. Want Here, ek voel of daar vreeslike dae in hierdie jaar oor my sal gaan. Laat my tog sê: U wil geskied! Laat my met vertrouë sê: Leef ek of sterf ek, ek is die Heer syne. Leer my om U vir hierdie jaar wat voorlê, te vertrou! Neem my vermoëde hoof in U hande en ondersteun my krag met die Uwe. Amen.

That day she also confessed to a visitor that the omniscient God was not the cause of their suffering: it was known only to God what suffering awaited them (1923:105). Like her foremothers, Badenhorst was submissive and loyal in her piety: God was not the cause of the war and she chose to accept his will in not putting an end to the suffering.

6.5.3 *The God who came to visit*

A month later, on the first Sunday of February 1900, Badenhorst received a visit from a messenger from God (1923:130). She was not sure whether she was awake or asleep, but she knew that this divine man had also

visited her fifteen years before, demanding that she choose between two men, Karel Moller and Frikkie Badenhorst. This time the messenger laid upon her the task of choosing Frikkie Badenhorst's fate: 'What do you desire most for your husband: death, wounds or imprisonment?' Badenhorst, of course, chose exile. Badenhorst wrote her diary after the events which she recorded had occurred and therefore she presents the outcome of events as effected by God's will as well as by her personal choice after God himself had informed her of the possibilities. Once again like her foremothers, Badenhorst sees herself as the supplementary cause of her own misery.

The news arrived that General Cronjé and 1 300 men (including Badenhorst's husband) were surrounded by British Troops (Badenhorst 1923:124–133). During the months to come, while she and other women anxiously awaited news of the fate of their loved ones, the pact she made with her guardian God kept her going: her husband would not be killed or wounded. A sermon by the Reverend Winter, the local minister, blaming this setback on the personal sins of people (1923:132), provided Badenhorst with an attractive interpretation of the events: she was forced to make a choice concerning her husband's fate because she was a sinful person. Badenhorst's view of God, and its paradoxical consequences, is apparent from her interpretation of God's role in these traumatic experiences: on the one hand God was her Comforter. That she could deduce because He personally involved her in and informed her about her husband's fate. On the other hand, yet simultaneously, God had to be acquitted of any suspicion that He was responsible for this trauma: her personal sins caused the misfortune of General Cronjé and his men; her choice sent her husband into exile. God was still her God. He did not declare war against her. He answered her prayers. He protected her husband against the 160 canons fired at him (1923:136; 1939:158): 'Hoe teer het God nie vir my gesorg nie? Onder rampe en leed was Hy steeds aan my sy' (1939:159).

6.6 GOD THE FATHER; GOD THE HUSBAND

As her circumstances deteriorated, Badenhorst moved closer towards God and, as she believed in paradoxical rationalisation, God moved closer towards her. Her husband's imprisonment in Simon's Town was a sign of God's love, because God created circumstances in which He could reveal his care for her (1923:142; 1939:167). The more terrified she became, the more she believed that God forgave her sins (1923:163); the worse the

news from the battlefield became, the more she believed that 'God is the same yesterday and today and for ever. His power will go before us' (1923:163). When all her sons (aged between six and twelve at this stage) became seriously ill with measles – and her sister's child died – she acknowledged that her husband was not there, 'but my Heavenly Father was near me, watching unseen. I felt His Presence and His promise' (1923:166).

6.6.1 *A child to God the Father*

In many events at this time Badenhorst saw the wondrous, helping hand of God: a charge against her of owning a gun was dropped, and at a crucial stage of her children's illnesses the pharmacist arrived unexpectedly (1923:167). Badenhorst did not play a passive role in all these wonders: by the time that the pharmacist had appeared, she had already saved the children with the right treatment. There are descriptions of her many heroic deeds in which she saved her family from famine and death: once she rode on horseback to the English camp and demanded her cattle back, and the British returned the cattle they had stolen. Another time she went into town to buy provisions and to get care for a sick child, and she beguiled and impressed the British, and showed great courage (1923:200–205).

6.6.2 *Dependency on God the Husband*

In spite of her activities, Badenhorst led a religious life of utter dependence upon God. Therefore when God's messenger appeared to her again with the message that she would have to suffer even more before there could be peace, she accepted His word that God's grace is sufficient (1923:169). When she heard of the deaths of more and more family and friends, Alie Badenhorst no longer prayed to God the Father alone, but to God the Husband: 'Father, Thou has promised to be a husband to me, be near me now,' she prayed (1923:176).

Badenhorst's birthday and Christmas came around a second time with her husband in exile. The year 1901 dawned. That year Badenhorst would stop praying to her personal God, and she would no longer receive visits from God's messenger. In the new year the British troops came and they plundered and destroyed her farm. On 15 April 1901 Badenhorst and her children were taken from their farm in the Potchefstroom district to

the concentration camp in Klerksdorp where they were to stay for the next fourteen months under subhuman conditions.

6.7 THE ABSENT GOD OF HELL

Badenhorst wrote the first part of her diary *ex eventu*. This enabled her to romanticise some of the events and to evaluate God's participation in these events in the light of later, more positive occurrences. However, her concentration camp experiences she dealt with at the scene and she referred to God in the midst of her bitterness.

6.7.1 The flight of the personal God

Badenhorst experienced the journey to the concentration camp as a humiliating experience. The first information she received and recorded on circumstances in the camp came from a local friend, Maria Conradie: 'Alie, I do not want to tell you, but it seems to me as if God Himself has forsaken those who are there' (1923:213). This idea of God-forsakenness concurred with her first reaction to conditions in the camp, a reaction which introduced a new but growing theme in her religious experience, namely that of God the Punisher:

It seemed in truth as if God's hand were too heavy upon us, both man and beast. O God, dost Thou strive with us in Thine anger and chastise us in Thy wrath. Be merciful and wipe us not off from the face of the earth.

(Badenhorst 1923:214)

As early as April, the month in which Badenhorst and her family were forced into the camp, it was evident that her personal prayers had to make way for prayer meetings and for the communal singing of war songs. In the midst of the joint suffering of war victims, Badenhorst turned from a personal to a national God.

6.7.2 The end of divine visitations

In May Badenhorst's dreams commenced again, but they were no longer dreams containing messages from God. They became nightmares reflecting her daily misery. These dreams were no longer prophecies consoling her about the future. They became forebodings of imminent catastrophes:

It is the 31st of May. Last night I had a dreadful night, though why I cannot say. It was in my dream as if someone cried to me for help

and I could not help, but wept because I felt so powerless. Distress awakened me. It was long before I could sleep again, and then the same horrid dream was repeated. It roused me, and I lay thinking over all the misery of this past month; wondering if there were more to come. There was left but this one day of May, and now this dream!

(Badenhorst 1923:221)

Badenhorst was not so much inactive and passive in the camp as she was powerless. The dream just described confirms this. Badenhorst (1923: 228) describes the position of the captured women as one of utter powerlessness. En route to the camp they were used as buffers against Boer attacks, shot at by their own men. When the Boers stole their cattle back from the British, or when a train was derailed and robbed by the Boers (as happened in June), the already meagre rations of the women and children were cut down even more.

6.7.3 The flight of the powerful God

When Badenhorst realised she was powerless, she began to doubt the power of God. Previously she had had confidence in God's will, now she had to be reminded of divine fate, at least once by the British themselves. In July, while already suffering from a severe cough, she contracted jaundice. She was visited by the major. He advised her to accept God's will for health reasons. According to Badenhorst (1923:230–231) the conversation went as follows:

'Mrs. Badenhorst, the doctors say that I must tell you that you are badly over-worried, and that this worry is the cause that your lungs do not come right. You must then try to make yourself content with the will of God. He has done everything for you; don't you believe so?'

I said: 'Yes, all has been taken away from me and then it is hard always to feel content.'

He went on: 'But think, God can make all things come right.'

In this state of doubt in the power of God, Badenhorst became so ill that she thought that her 'last hour had come'. She left a message for her husband with her son, that she was going to Jesus and that she would wait there for him. In her presumed last hour Badenhorst did not refer to God the Strong One, the powerful Father in heaven but, the only time in her diary, to Jesus (1923:234).

It was night and it was day. And Badenhorst survived. August came.

6.7.4 *The flight of the male God*

During this time Badenhorst lost faith in the traditionally male attributes of God, as well as in the humanity in general of the males of her day. The British generals who initiated the idea of the concentration camps were bachelors, and according to Badenhorst the camp superintendent was 'an old bachelor ... sickly and irritable' (1923:237), a sadist who provided them with sufficient medicine and insufficient food. The camp superintendent appointed a man as sexton to supervise the burying of the dead and he forbade the mothers to carry the corpses of their own children to their graves. This was an act so inhuman that Badenhorst lamented with the mothers: 'O Lord, hast Thou forsaken us?' (1923:240; 1939:288). With the corpses piled up out of reach in a big tent, it was difficult to keep the pigs from chewing the bodies of the dead children.

In August (1901) 180 people died in this camp.

6.7.5 *The flight of God the Supporter*

September 1901 came and many women and children were loaded onto open trucks in pouring rain and sent to another camp in Natal. One woman asked: 'What think you, can I hope to get my sick child alive to Natal?' and Badenhorst (1923:246) answered doubtfully: 'The Lord is mighty, but to me it seems impossible.'

A number of mothers were separated from their children on these trucks and others had to leave without being allowed to bury their dead children. In the camp it was soaking wet:

The camp was a terrible sight. In the morning, the dead bodies had to be drawn out from under the fallen tents; then mothers sought refuge for the living, leaving their little corpses behind.

(Badenhorst 1923:248)

Looking at the camp, Badenhorst did not pray to God her Helper, but remembered that the Bible says: 'There was no one to help us' (1939:297). Once again she was tormented by bad dreams.

That September 142 people died in the camp, including her brother-in-law. Early in October she had another bad dream and her mother-in-law died. The death toll that month was 164 (1923:251–264).

6.7.6 The end of prayer

She would never forget November 1901 because of the horror of uncontrolled death all around her (1923:265-275). She stood next to the bed of a child in the throes of death, whose mother had died the previous week and the sister that morning:

[T]here was not a tear in my own eyes, for weep I could no more. I stood beside her and watched till a stupefying grief overwhelmed my soul. More than once I lamented like the Prophet (Lam 3:1): 'I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath.'

(Badenhorst 1923:274)

Badenhorst could no longer pray. She identified with the lamenting Jeremiah and the suffering Christ (1923:277): 'I will take up my cross and try to bear it after Christ'

In December when the camp superintendent died she rejoiced with the other women. One hundred and sixty-two women and children also died that month.

6.8 THE RETURN OF THE PERSONAL GOD

1 January 1902. A new, more humane camp superintendent arrived, and Badenhorst's belief in the goodwill of her personal God returned, but the relationship was no longer naïve. She demanded answers from God (1923:285): 'Lord, canst Thou not give me light? Wherefore must we suffer so long?' Because God had also restored his personal relationship with Badenhorst, He answered her question: 'Because of your murmuring and your sins.' This convinced Badenhorst that God had remained the same during the war; she had changed. Her anger towards her personal God, whom she had believed had left her, became, once she had found Him again, anger against herself; and she begged God's forgiveness because by sinning against Him, she had caused her own suffering.

In May only 14 people died in the camp. In June 1902 peace was declared.

Badenhorst's post-war personal relationship with God is best described by her reaction to her destroyed house and the loss of all their stock. 'O God, O God, wherefore hast Thou tried us so sorely; was there then no might left in Thine arm to strike for us?' she asked God the Punisher (1923:315-316). However, she repented immediately and she turned her clenched fist away from God towards herself, placing the

omniscient and benevolent God once again in control: 'O God, make me content, teach me to bow to Thy will. Thou knowest my unruly heart.'

When her husband disembarked from the train, after two and a half years in exile, Badenhorst's relationship with the personal God was fully restored: 'How good was God who so graciously heard our prayers' (1923:318; 1939:376).

CONCLUSION

Alie Badenhorst took control of her everyday life. Even when confronted by a situation of utter powerlessness in the concentration camp, she actively practised her piety. However, her own powerlessness influenced her relationship with her personal God. Because of the intensity of this personal relationship, her concept of God changed according to her personal circumstances.

As a teenager she deliberately chose, as preached by the Reverend Andrew Murray, God as her personal Saviour. This choice of a new concept of God coincided with her personal need to break with old friends and contexts. During the first 15 years of her marriage and early motherhood, Badenhorst experienced God as the God of peace. During this time it was possible for her to presuppose that God was on her side against the blacks and the British. This view changed somewhat when the war with Britain broke out in 1899 and Badenhorst's circumstances forced her to place new demands on her relationship with God. While her husband was imprisoned, Badenhorst depended upon God as her protector, as her substitute husband. When her circumstances on the farm became worse and far more dangerous, Badenhorst grew closer to her personal God, but when she and her children were imprisoned, she crossed that barrier where she was able to rely on God's protection and goodwill. For a while the concept of a national God siding with the nation but punishing her for her personal sins dominated Badenhorst's religious experience. The end of the war allowed her to enter once again into a personal relationship with God, and to place the blame for the war on her personal sins.

Women like Alie Badenhorst were tricked into bowing before a national God when the men used their women's piety as a political weapon in the years after the war.

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Johanna Brandt (1876–1964): *Visions of the cosmic God*

7.1 WHERE HAD ALL THE WOMEN GONE?

The war was over. From the year 1906 the Afrikaans men planned the erection of a monument for their women with, as was earlier suggested, an eye upon an international audience. In this process the primarily personal God to whom these women were indebted for their survival was replaced by a national God. Nationalist men turned the women's piety into a national strategy.

The Afrikaans women, apparently content with the events surrounding the erection of a monument in their honour and the dishonouring of their God, came in their thousands and in subcultural bliss to the inauguration of their monument. It was a national event and not a subcultural event for women only, therefore men and women were present. MER, a well-known Afrikaans woman author of the first half of the twentieth century, narrates in her autobiography, *My beskeie deel* (My humble contribution, Rothmann 1972:171), that it seemed like a sea of people spilling over the mountains around the monument.

Were there no alternative voices amongst Afrikaner women during a time when their foremothers in Europe were obtaining the vote against the male nationalisation of womanhood? Were there no voices challenging the values of the Afrikaans female subculture and the prescriptions of its male dominant culture?

Indeed, there was the voice of Marie du Toit (1880–1931), the sister of the Afrikaans poet Totius. In a book published in 1921, *Vrou en feminist*, Du Toit challenged the position of the Reformed Church against women's suffrage. Her contribution will be discussed in the next chapter. But there was also Johanna Brandt.

7.2 THE ALTERNATIVE VOICE OF JOHANNA BRANDT

7.2.1 Johanna Brandt: prophet turned feminist

Brandt was the wife of a high-ranking minister in the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk, another Afrikaans Reformed church. Her life and writings can be roughly divided into three periods in which she developed from conservatism and nationalism to a cosmic and feminist view of society.

(1) Conservative beginnings

Born in 1876, Johanna Brandt-Van Warmelo was 16 years old when her father, the Reverend N J van Warmelo, died. The next ten years she lived with her mother in Harmony, a small estate in Sunnyside, Pretoria. Her relationship with her mother was very close, and during the South African War (1899–1902) they both engaged in spying for and in hiding Boers at Harmony. At the end of the war, Johanna left for Holland where she married the Reverend L E Brandt, her brother's former roommate (Van der Merwe 1989). On their return to South Africa in 1904, she wrote two books, her war memoirs, *Het concentratie-kamp van Irène* (1905) and *The petticoat commando* (1912). These books were very conservative and exclusive in view of what she produced later. In these books she did not refer to God and concentrated on the nationalist acts and ideals of the Afrikaner nation. The contents of her writings were soon to change, however.

(2) Metamorphosis at forty

In 1916, when Brandt turned forty, her mother died, and because of their close relationship, Brandt believed that she received divine visions at her mother's death bed. She experienced these visions as hope for the future and they also provided meaning for her mother's death. Consequently, Brandt wrote a book, *The Millennium* (1918), based on these visions. In this book equality between the sexes and harmony between warring partners are presented as positive alternatives for humanity to prepare itself for the second coming of the Lord.

At this time Brandt's husband was ministering to a congregation of the Reformed Church (Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk) in Johannesburg. She was popular in the congregation because of her active engagement in the upliftment of poor people. Because she was a woman, however, her church did not pay much attention to her 'heretical' writings. They did ask her husband to dissociate himself from her views, which he did. At this time the Reverend Brandt was the chairman of the General Assembly of his church. This position, the highest in the church, he held for 21 years (1916-1937).

(3) *Radical at sixty*

In the years to come, Johanna Brandt, like many other talented women captured in a female subculture, turned radical in her views. Receiving no recognition for her work, at the age of fifty she left her husband and seven children in South Africa, and departed for Europe and America in 1927. She developed a grape cure in 1925 with which she treated her own cancer. In America recognition came in the form of an honorary doctorate from the American School of Neuropathy (Botes 1989:469). She returned in 1929 to South Africa on the eve of the Great Depression.

During the early 1930s Johanna Brandt, now nearing sixty, wrote her theology of hope amidst this Great Depression. In her book, *The paraclete, or coming world mother* (1936), she reinterpreted her 1916 visions in the light of her concern for an impoverished local society and a war-torn international society. With the help of the works of Anna Kingsford (d 1888), English feminist and co-founder of the Hermetic Society in Britain, Brandt announced in her book that the second coming of God to this world would be in the form of a woman, a Mother who would heal the world and save it from the violence which ensued from its male leaders' insatiable lust for power. Published in 1936, this book contains many of the elements of modern feminist theology in its concern for the political, social and physical exploitation of the world.

Brandt's life can therefore be summarised as follows. As a young woman her ego-texts testified to narrow nationalist views. As a woman of forty, her personal God visited her and told her to go to the people, to tell South Africa that he was everybody's God and that he desired harmony. When Brandt was sixty, she addressed the whole world, challenging the male-dominant culture which brought the world to its knees. She told a humanity in need of care that their mother was coming to comfort them.

The major events of her life and her spiritual development will now be dealt with in greater detail.

7.2.2 God visits a potential Afrikaans feminist

It was December 1916 and three years after the power of the national God was acknowledged by the inauguration of the National Women's Monument. Johanna Brandt sat next to her dying mother's bed in Harmony in Pretoria and, she later claimed, received a personal visit from a Messenger of God. This Messenger empowered her to spread the message that the God of all Christians was returning to earth, and that He had chosen to come to South Africa. Brandt claims in her book *The Millennium* that God revealed the events surrounding the divine coming to her in four visions. These visions occurred to her a week after the Messenger's first visit.

Divine appearances are not, of course, a new phenomenon within the tradition of Afrikaans female piety. Brandt linked these visions with the death of her mother, a very traumatic event in her life. Once again this fits historical female piety: the personal commitment to God at the time of the death of a relative. Hester Venter received personal comfort from God whose presence she experienced when her children died; it was her concern for the souls of her deceased children and husbands which eventually strengthened the personal relationship between Matilda Smith and God; Susanna Smit came to know God's will personally through visions of hell and heaven after the death of her son.

A week after the death of her mother, Brandt received the following four visions (Brandt 1918:103–111). In the first vision she saw her whole life in one flash, but it was not clear in which direction it was moving. In the second vision she saw her children, sitting around her in full harmonious bliss. They were all together in her late mother's house, Harmony. From this centre of human happiness the whole world was to move towards the ideal of harmony in human relations. In the third vision she saw the battlefields of Europe, and how Light slowly conquered Darkness. The fourth vision revealed to her the future of South Africa. A tornado of violence swept over the country. However, the Messenger posed to her an alternative to the coming disaster: the nation should unite politically; people should forget political and personal differences and work towards righteousness. The coming destruction of the land would then be averted.

7.2.3 Criticism and hope from suburbia

In these visions a suburban harmonious lifestyle is juxtaposed with contemporary miseries in Europe and South Africa, together with a prophecy that harmony will be victorious once the nation has rid itself of political and social iniquities. Three years after the covert call upon the international community at the National Women's Monument to acknowledge the righteousness of the Afrikaans nation, an Afrikaans woman criticised national and international discord and disharmony, and personal lust for money and gold, as male yearnings causing wars.

Brandt, a daughter of the war period, inherited both the personal God of her foremothers and Andrew Murray, and the national God of post-war revenge. Her own contribution was to return the international God, that God who stands for socio-political righteousness, to South Africa.

How should this alternative voice of Johanna Brandt be understood? She had been exposed through her journeys, contacts and books to a variety of cultures as well as to experiences which transcended the restrictions of her subculture, and, therefore, at first she expressed her cosmic visions within the values of her own Afrikaans female subculture. But what did Brandt still have in common with her subculture at this stage, and to what extent did she deviate from it?

These questions can best be answered by narrating her biography in terms of Willem Postma's view of Afrikaner womanhood published in the same year as Brandt's *The Millennium*.

7.3 BRANDT'S HISTORY IN TERMS OF CONTEMPORARY MALE CONCEPTS OF WOMANHOOD

Brandt published her interpretation of her visions in *The Millennium* in 1918, the same year in which Willem Postma, under the pseudonym of Dr O'Kulis, published his prescriptive history of Afrikaans women, *Die boer-vrou, moeder van haar volk* (Boer woman, mother of her nation). This book represents his attempt to construct a uniform 'Afrikaans woman' attributed with the conflicting characteristics of active patriotism, unquestioning religiosity, passive martyrdom and social submissiveness.

7.3.1 *Afrikaans women are active patriots and passive martyrs*

According to Postma and Stockenström Afrikaans women were active patriots who supported their husbands in their battles against the blacks. At the outbreak of the South African War, when the women were left without their husbands, Postma and Stockenström turned these same women whom they had previously presented as active patriots into passive martyrs.

(1) *The traditional Brandt-Van Warmelo and the war*

After the Reverend Van Warmelo died in 1892, Johanna's mother, Mrs Van Warmelo, bought Harmony, a neglected property in Sunnyside in Pretoria where, throughout the war, she stayed alone with her daughter Johanna (Hansie). Brandt (1912:4, 5) describes her mother as a pioneer, a voortrekker, actively involved in conquering the country for local whites. Johanna and her mother did not become passive at the outbreak of the war in 1899. On the contrary, they were patriots who helped the Boer spies to infiltrate Pretoria, which was in British hands during the war (see Roberts 1991). For a short period of two months Johanna was a nurse in the Irene concentration camp. During the final months of the war, Johanna left the country because of mental and physical ill health. In Holland she met her husband-to-be, the Reverend L E Brandt, whom she married in 1902 at the age of 26. She had met him in 1897 when she and her mother visited her brother who was studying theology in the Netherlands. Soon she heard voices calling her back to South Africa and she convinced her husband to go back home: 'In all the world there is no pain to be compared with the pain of being born a patriot; but a patriot in exile – may Heaven protect me from the tragedy of such a fate' (Brandt 1912:374).

(2) *Brandt not passive but still traditional*

Johanna Brandt was 36 years old when in 1912 she wrote *The petticoat commando* on her war memories. At that time she was apparently still that type of Afrikaans woman who fitted well into those categories prescribed by Postma and subscribed to by her female subculture. She did not play the role of a passive martyr during the war, but she conformed to the image of the historical Afrikaner woman who was both defiant of the enemy and accommodating to the men of her own nation. Johanna Brandt remained extremely fond of and to a great extent dependent on her husband all her life. Yet her views of women and their role in the dominant culture were soon to change.

7.3.2 Afrikaans women accept the religion of their fathers

Postma and Stockenström also claimed that Afrikaans women accepted the Calvinist religion of their forefathers without questioning it at all.

(1) *Visions and social consciousness at forty*

As has been emphasised earlier, Brandt was forty years old when, in 1916, she received a visionary warning from God that the future of the world was dependent upon her. These visionary experiences of God, and the age at which Brandt received these visions, are not foreign to Afrikaans female piety. Hester Venter experienced the proximity of God in her early forties; Matilda Smith was almost forty when God called her to the mission field; Marie du Toit was forty when she wrote *Vrou en feminist*. Even English-speaking South African women like Frances Colenso and Elizabeth Lees Price reached the age of forty before they became aware of God's presence and acquired a growing insight into the social iniquities to which their fellow people were exposed.

(2) *Visions of the national God for white people*

It is clear from the visions Brandt received in 1916 that she was still heiress to the religion of her fathers and their concept of a national God. The God who sent a Messenger to her had a fixation with South Africa. According to her visions God's second coming was not only at hand, but He would be coming to South Africa.

This God's attention was directed not only towards South Africa, but in particular towards the whites of South Africa. As an accompaniment to her book *The Millennium* (1918a) Brandt wrote and feverishly distributed pamphlets amongst South African blacks in Zulu, Sotho and Xhosa. In one pamphlet, 'The Millennium. A prophetic message to the native tribes of South Africa', Brandt informed black people that she had been visited by God's Messenger who had revealed the future to her: after the last tribulations, God will come to South Africa and the Millennium will dawn upon this country (and through it, on the world).

The aim of this pamphlet was twofold. On the one hand she wished to warn black people not to take advantage of the disasters which were going to befall the whites:

It was revealed to me by the Messenger of the Lord that the perils in store for South Africa, would be a thousand times more severe if the Native tribes mixed themselves up in them They must not fight among themselves, they must not go forth to steal and murder.

When human beings are scattered homeless over the land, and when the elements rage, when the mighty roar of destruction shakes the very earth, they must remain as quiet as possible and only protect themselves.

(Brandt 1918a:20)

On the other hand, albeit in the patriarchal fashion of the 1920s, Brandt assured the blacks that the coming of God would also be to their benefit:

The Christ is coming to give the undeveloped races a very special push upward, and that is one of the reasons why South Africa has been chosen as an instrument in preparing the world.

(Brandt 1918a:20)

(3) *Being ecumenical and criticising the nation*

On the one hand, it would appear as if in 1918 Brandt was still clinging to the national God of her forefathers. On the other hand, however, Brandt showed remarkable frankness and insight into the iniquities of her nation even at this time, that is three years after she was co-honoured as a martyr of a righteous nation at the inauguration of the Women's Monument. In an 'Appeal to South Africa' made in *The Millennium*, she addresses not only discord in the male dominant culture, but also disharmony on a racial, gender and ecclesiastical level:

This, then, is the cry, oh, South Africa, which I would sound from border to border of our vast-continent – *sink your racial animosities, bury your political differences*, put aside your personal grievances, and join hands, every one of you, **men, women and children of every race and class and creed**, join hands and present an undivided front to the approaching enemy.

(Brandt 1918:111)

The enemy was not the enemy against whom the national God of her fathers had directed himself. The enemy was a society warring against itself.

Furthermore, when Brandt formed The World Harmony Movement in Pretoria in 1916, she defined it as 'A Universal Peace Movement, non-political, non-racial, non-sectarian, having for its basic principle the establishment of Universal Brotherhood through International Friendship' (*The Order of Harmony, aims, objects and principles*).

With this embryonic ecumenical view of non-racism Brandt was indeed already moving away from the religion of her fathers and her husband.

(4) Brandt and the religion of her father/husband

Brandt was loyal to her husband and in her writings she always referred lovingly to him. He consoled her when she was exhausted after her vision, she reveals in *The Millennium*. In *The paraclete* she expresses her appreciation for his respectful albeit disapproving attitude towards her prophecies of the coming World Mother. But Brandt was moving beyond the mainline theology for which her husband was honoured and for which he had been known since his student days (see Botes 1989:passim). After the publication of *The Millennium* (1918) the Church Council of the Johannesburg congregation, where her husband was ministering, appointed a commission to talk to Ms Brandt about her views. She stood by her point and the commission accepted that this was her own point of view (Botes 1989:390). Her husband was not suspected of heterodoxy. In 1933, however, the Turffontein Church Council called upon the Reverend Brandt to retire as their minister. This was not because of his wife's writings, but because it had come to light that she had undergone adult baptism 16 years earlier (Botes 1989:496).

In summary: Since 1916, Johanna Brandt, then in her early forties, while still honouring God's special interest in the Afrikaans nation, had incorporated ecumenical and non-racial elements into her religious message to humankind. During this time she also underwent adult baptism. Officially her church took little notice of her message which displayed a developed social consciousness. In 1933, aged almost sixty, she was officially condemned not for her writings but for being rebaptised.

After this official rejection, Johanna Brandt turned radical.

7.3.3 Afrikaner women submissive to their dominant culture

Johanna Brandt was a woman of sixty when her book *The paraclete or coming world mother* was published in 1936. This book marks a distinctive radicalisation in her socio-political thinking.

In this book Brandt specifies that when God comes to earth a second time, it will be in the form of a woman. She claims that the message of this book was revealed to her directly and in a divine manner. Although she

does not acknowledge external influences on her thinking, she does refer to the work of Anna Kingsford and her attraction to Kingsford's ideas.

Dr Anna Kingsford (1846–1888), a nineteenth-century British scholar and supporter of 'vegetarianism and antivivisectionism' (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1963:695), founded the Hermetic Society in 1884. Two of her books, *Perfect way: the finding of Christ* and *Perfect way in diet*, are even today being reprinted (Kingsford 1986; 1989; 1991). Brandt quotes Kingsford's feminist insight, namely that the suppression of the femininity of God is because of 'a priesthood desirous of preserving a purely Masculine Conception of the Godhead' (Kingsford in Brandt 1936:32).

No attempt will be made in this study to analyse the hermetic, theosophical and other non- and quasi-Christian influences on Brandt's thinking. Although here Brandt has been placed within the tradition of Afrikaans female piety which highly honoured divine visitations, she should also be seen as a precursor of a religious tradition yet to come. Therefore an attempt will be made to highlight her embryonic feminist theology with special reference to the social implications of her piety. In *The paraclete* Brandt entertained at least three views which would eventually become central social issues in the feminist theology of the last part of the twentieth century, namely the femininity of God, eco-feminism and the hermeneutics of female religious interpretation.

(1) *The motherhood of God*

By the time the ageing Brandt published the *The paraclete or coming world mother* (1936) she was convinced that the time had come for God to reveal God's feminine side to humanity. Internationally the emancipation of women (though not of Afrikaans women) was in the air; across the globe male leadership had led humanity into desolation and destruction. Human society was ready to accept the motherhood of God.

This is Brandt's message cast in the language of modern feminist theology. Brandt, however, presented her message in another form.

In the first place, as said before, Brandt claimed divine revelation as the source of her foreknowledge which was, as we have seen, a yearning often detected in Afrikaans female piety. She could even provide a specific date for the vision. The coming of the World Mother was initially revealed to Brandt in 1916, but for nine years she did not understand it (Brandt 1936:29), 'until in December, 1925, again in Pretoria, the City of Harmony, the Mother came in great power and glory and explained much to me'. From that day Brandt no longer called on the name of Christ because, in

spite of her Reformed background and affinities which she explained in detail, 'it was always the Mother Who responded to my cry'.

However, Brandt insisted that her message was biblical, in fact neo-biblical. 'The Mother said that I would have to get a new Bible in which every reference to the Holy Spirit, or Holy Ghost, or Comforter, would denote Her Feminine Gender' (Brandt 1936:30). Her message was to retain its Christian character.

In the final instance Brandt placed her distinctly international message within the suburban view of family life prevalent in her subculture. The result was a Trinity which consisted of a typical suburban family, though equal in rank (Brandt 1936:9):

We find then that in the Trinity as in the material Universe and in every earthly home, there is no masculine without the feminine, no positive without the negative. We cannot have a Father in Heaven without a Mother. God the Father is the Creator; God the Mother is the Holy Spirit, the Comforter of the World; and God the Son is the only-begotten Child of the Father and Mother God, our Elder Brother and Representative in our Heavenly Home, endowed with the qualities and attributes of both Father and Mother.

This relationship within the members of the Trinity which Brandt claimed was revealed to her convinced her that 'we are justified in believing that the equality of the sexes will establish harmony on earth' (Brandt 1936:10). Her message had social implications. The accusation against modern feminists that they adapt the divine to fit their social needs Brandt diverted since she claimed to have moved from the divine to the societal.

In spite of some prominent suburban and subcultural features, Brandt's message was no longer one of submissiveness to the male-dominant culture. She became a prophet to the whole of society, a society larger than Afrikanerdom and broader than masculinity. She abandoned the personal God inherited from her mothers, and the national God inherited from her fathers; she now proclaimed the Cosmic Mother, with a distinct social message to humankind.

The Aquarian Age, the Age of Woman, according to Brandt, follows naturally on the Piscean Age, ushered in by Jesus Christ two thousand years ago (Brandt 1936:12, 14). This is manifested in society (1936:19): 'The world-wide movement for the emancipation of woman is explained by the fact that humanity has entered the sign of water.'

The Age of Woman will be a corrective to the age of male misgovernment (1936:20):

Since the Fall man has governed the world. It has been a one-sided government, indeed, a mis-government from first to last. By brute force or violence he has crushed his weaker fellows in his insatiable lust for power, holding the woman meanwhile under the subjection of his will and desire. Now comes the Aquarian Age with its new gospel of motherly love and the essentially womanly qualities of intuition and imagination.

Brandt predicts that men would not accept this challenge to their exclusive power without fighting back, and (1936:20):

the baser elements in man will be lashed into fierce opposition against this unexpected influence which, he feels instinctively, will undermine and overthrow his supremacy.

Women's credibility will lie in the fact that they are empowered by the divine. This will threaten men (1936:20):

As long as it apparently was the world of a band of hysterical women he could afford to smile with superior good-nature, but when he realises that there is a mighty, spiritual force behind it, and that 'the band of hysterical women' is inspired, he will be roused into dangerous action.

Divine intervention is needed to help during the transitional period when humanity will grow into the balance between the sexes. This would indicate that the time is ripe for the appearance of the Mother (1936:21):

It will not be Jesus. It will not be the Messiah of the Jews. It will not be one of the prophets of the past.

It will be the first appearance of the Paraclete, the Comforter. The Outpouring of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost was the beginning, not the end of the manifestation of the Motherhood of God.

(2) Eco-feminism

Modern eco-feminism reacts against man seeing himself as 'lord of creation'. Feminism, and eco-feminism in particular, criticises male supremacy which claims absolute possession not only of women, but also of nature.

Brandt criticises the social and political supremacy of men as unnatural. The perfect balance between the sexes is the natural position

towards which we should move (1936:6, 9), just as the Aquarian Age follows naturally upon the Piscean Age (1936:12).

Brandt, as we have seen, was concerned about the wars and destruction which ensued from male leadership and she preached the coming of the Mother God as a time in which we have to prepare the world for her coming. It is not the task of the Divine to save the world; 'the obligation has been laid on us to make this world a fit habitation for God' (Brandt 1936:25).

Brandt saw signs of the coming Mother God not only in the women's emancipation movement of her time, but 'still more so in the Return to Nature Movement' (1936:36). She was not so informed as modern feminists concerning the violence against natural ecosystems. Brandt concentrated on what today is only one aspect of eco-feminism: the self-development of the human (mind and) body. 'We must learn the secrets of self-healing, self-analysis, self-reform, self-discipline and self-expression' (1936:38). The motivation is religious: The Spirit dwells within us (1936:38). We are potential gods (1936:39). We have to find Divinity within ourselves (1936:40).

The teaching of self-healing which the Mother God will bring to us is, according to Brandt, woman's work. She describes this in a rather mundane way: 'Is it not the woman, the mother, whose hand prepares the innumerable dishes and delicacies that tempt the palate and lead to overindulgence? Truly, nations are made and unmade in the kitchen' (1936:60).

The salvation of the world and of our bodies is in our own hands, especially in the hands of women. The coming Mother God will be only a transitory figure to help us into the New Age. Brandt does not differ much from the piety of her foremothers when she attributes contemporary world disasters to our own sins (1936:70, 71): the World Mother tells us that we are to blame poverty, vice and disease on our own sins. The Mother of the World tells us that war will be averted only when we stop the sin of manufacturing arms. We are causing our own destruction through our own wrongdoing.

However, Brandt differs from her foremothers' concept of sin in two ways. Unlike her foremothers, Brandt does not refer to sins in a vague spiritual way; she calls them by name: we cause war through the sin of making arms; we sin when we cause the deterioration of our bodies by eating the wrong food. Brandt, furthermore, differs from her foremothers

in the formulation of a solution for our sins. Their solution would have been a return to the male God in guilt and self-hate. According to Brandt we should return to what is natural, to what the Divine teaches us about self-healing. We must first of all heal ourselves before we can heal the world.

(3) Feminine religious understanding

When we stand on holy ground, we are justified in launching our own investigations into matters and we have the right to make known our deductions, Brandt (1936:3) told her readers and especially the 'Mothers of the New Age, in whose hands the splendid future lies' and to whom, incidentally, she dedicates her book. For Brandt feminine religious understanding is based, on the one hand, on intuition and inspiration, and on the other, on observation and purely logical reasoning (1936:3).

In other words, Brandt preceded a modern feminist position which views (female) experience as an important preliminary phase to scientific thinking. According to this insight, it was natural for Brandt to ask questions about divine healing after she had experienced the death of her mother. We have seen that questions surrounding the deaths of their beloved ones caused Dutch-Afrikaans women in the past to ask religious questions about life and death.

Like modern feminists, Brandt placed a high value on the ability of women to grasp religious truths. Men, she related (1936:51), were unwilling to accept her message of the new age of equality with women. On the other hand, '[t]he women of the world are going to grasp at this great new truth eagerly'.

But Brandt was mistaken. Afrikaans women were not then, and still are not, willing to accept the ideas of the femininity of God, of self-healing and of the value of their own religious understanding.

CONCLUSION

Johanna Brandt's contribution to the liberation of Afrikaans women – although they did not accept that liberation – was to replace the personal God to whom these women felt attracted, as well as the national God they were inclined to share with men after the war, with the cosmic God. Brandt presented to her audience a God who would bring balance between sexes, restore nature, wipe out violence and war, a cosmic God for all races, sexes and age-groups.

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8

Marie du Toit (1880–1931): The first muted Afrikaans feminist

8.1 THE PLOT AGAINST WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

It was said in the Introduction that the Afrikaans women of the early twentieth century (that is the first generation post-war women whose mothers were honoured by the erection of the National Women's Monument) stood ignorantly under the deliberate influence not of the Dutch feminists, but of the conservative women-unfriendliness of the Dutch statesman and theologian Abraham Kuyper. His ideas were brought to South Africa by those Afrikaans men who studied theology in the Netherlands after the war.

Was there a reason why, during the 1910s, the Afrikaans men were at great pains to emphatically romanticise submissiveness and inassertiveness as the main characteristics of Afrikaner womanhood? Several men wrote the history of Afrikaans women as an embodiment of these values in the late 1910s (Postma 1918 and Stockenström 1921). In these histories the piety of Afrikaans women was used to alienate them from possible political ideals. The women were told that, according to biblical examples, they should accept the natural place God gave them in family life.

The reason for typifying Afrikaans women as naturally apolitical is that at that time women in Europe were obtaining the vote. The Afrikaans men who erected a Women's Monument as a political platform for them-

selves were adamant that they must keep these women from obtaining public power. For instance, in the case of Postma, the same man who feverishly planned the erection of the National Women's Monument wrote the history of Afrikaans women as a testimony against women's suffrage.

8.2 CONSERVATIVE HOLLAND TO THE RESCUE

In 1894 the 'Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht' (The Association for Women's Suffrage) was founded. After a fierce struggle Dutch women obtained the vote in 1918 (as told by Naber 1937/1985). Leading the forces against women's suffrage in the Netherlands was Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) who published a book *De eerepositie der vrouw* (Woman's position of honour) in 1914. This book is a compilation of articles originally published in the *Standdaard* on women's socio-political position. The *Standdaard* was the official paper of the ultra-conservative Anti-revolutionary Party in the Netherlands headed by Kuyper. Kuyper was of the opinion that it was unnatural for women to bring out an individual vote; as it was ordained in the Bible, the head of the family ('gesinshoof') should vote on behalf of the whole family.

The prominent Dutch theologians W Geesink (see Manenschijn 1987:20–22) and H Bavink supported Kuyper in his ideas on the natural position of women aside from politics (see Gerritsma 1987:79–83). Kuyper himself was building on the ideas of his predecessor, Groen van Prinsterer (1801–1876), and their ideas were eventually to determine the political future of Afrikaans women.

A leading role in the apolitisation of Afrikaans women in the ecclesiastical sphere was played by J D du Toit, known as Totius, who studied in the Netherlands and on his return fathered local Kuyperianism. In the late 1910s the Synod of the Reformed Church in South Africa (Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika) appointed a commission of three men to investigate women's suffrage in the church. This commission, headed by J D du Toit, advised the 1920 synod of this church against allowing women to vote in the church. The Synod decided in 1920 'om altyd te protesteer teen Vroue Stemreg op grond van Gods Woord' (always to protest against women's suffrage on the grounds of God's Word; *Handelinge van die Sinode* 1920:37). The Synod at once sent a copy of its decisions to Parliament to advise the government against women's suffrage in general.

J D du Toit's commission presented its recommendation in seven points, all directly dependent on Kuyper's book *Woman's honorary position*. Only one voice was raised in favour of women suffrage. One year after the synodical decision, in 1921, Marie du Toit, the sister of J D du Toit, wrote a book of protest against the position of the church on women's right to vote. In this book she presented arguments against each of the seven points put forward by the Synod in suppression of women's suffrage.

8.3 THE ONLY FEMINIST BOOK IN AFRIKAANS

Maria Magdalena du Toit was born in 1880 as the youngest child of S J du Toit's first marriage. She died in 1931 in Potchefstroom at the house of her brother, J D du Toit, with whom she had a good relationship in spite of their difference on political views concerning women. She left all her money to him (Testament, Transvaal Archives). She suffered from tuberculosis and died at the age of fifty years (Sterfkennisgewing, Transvaal Archives). She was unmarried and, before she fell ill, she was a teacher in Bloemfontein.

When Marie du Toit's book *Vrou en feminist* (Woman and feminist) (1921) used the word 'feminis(t)' in its title, it was the first, and also the very last, time this word occurred in the title of an Afrikaans book. Amongst the Afrikaans women of her time she was alone in pleading for women's suffrage. She was soon forgotten and the book she wrote is known to very few Afrikaans women.

Central to her thinking stood the question: What is a natural life-style for a woman? Du Toit regarded the socio-political restrictions laid on womanhood as far as clothing, the vote and other forms of self-expression, as unnatural – and unbiblical, since Jesus Christ wished women to be free human beings.

The question, what is natural to women, is significant within South African Calvinism because, on the one hand, it encourages people to rid themselves of their natural sinfulness; on the other hand, local Calvinism, quoting Kuyper, encourages women to stay within the natural boundaries of womanhood, which is restricted to the personal sphere of their homes.

Du Toit attempts to answer this question with common-sense feminism. She claims that common sense should lead to acknowledging women's natural role in society and politics.

8.4 HOW TO BE A NATURAL WOMAN

8.4.1 *Is it natural for women to be political beings?*

The first point accepted in 1920 by the Synod of the Reformed Church in South Africa (*Handelinge van die Sinode van die Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika* 1920:81–82) states that women may not vote because that would open up the possibility of women participating in government. I Timothy 2:12, it is argued, prohibits women from governing; Genesis 2:18 places woman in an inferior position to man as his helper.

In this argument the Synod depends upon the distinction made by Kuyper between the inferior position of women in public life and the honorary position attributed to them in the private life of the family (Kuyper 1914:48).

Du Toit (1921:139) rejects this distinction between the private and public spheres of life. She claims that this distinction is not biblical but paternalistic. Men cannot decide for women on their right to vote. Women should make their own decisions about their participation in public life (Du Toit 1921:12). Du Toit finds an analogy in slavery. Nobody can decide for a slave whether or not he/she wants to be free. Ultimately the question should be: What does the slave think about freedom? Du Toit then invites men to put themselves in the place of women and look, from their point of view, at the suffering caused by their lack of freedom.

8.4.2 *Are women by nature politically different?*

The Synod of the Reformed Church in South Africa was quite explicit in its view that women are inferior to men in public life. They stated that women are politically inferior because God made them different and the Bible is forced to speak in support of this ideology: by nature, woman has received a 'gentle and quiet spirit' from God (I Pt 3:4) to prepare her for private life within the family (as the woman in Proverbs 31:10–31).

This point of view came from Kuyper's ideology that female political participation is, in the first place, against the will of God and, in the second place, against the nature of woman. The natural woman, according to Kuyper, is shy and passive (1914:34, 35); her bones are weaker than those of a man; although she can shout louder than a man, her physical abilities are limited (:37). The strength of a man settles in his head and chest, while a woman is strong only in her lower body; few women possess a natural or developed sharpness of brain (:38). Kuyper acknow-

ledged that behind his attack on women lay the fear that women would have the majority vote in politics: during his time there were 28 000 more women than men in the Netherlands (:27).

Du Toit was appalled by low-level presentations of the natural woman such as the one just described and the influence they exercised on Afrikaans men's views on women. She claims (1921:55–62) that the differences between 'natural woman' and 'natural man' are minor; the differences between men and women are not innate but social. Du Toit, obviously very well read, quotes numerous instances of intellectually brilliant women throughout history (:66).

Du Toit (1921:20) also expresses her shame that there is no substance to the male fear that a majority of women will dominate the political scene. She regrets that women are not loyal to one another. The reason for this she ascribes to the fact that women have a poor self-image and do not believe that something great can come from themselves and that they do not allow other women any greatness. According to Du Toit (:118) society can benefit from women combining their private and public lives. She quotes Jan Smuts who said that social legislation was in need of women's insight into social matters. Women's experience of social problems was to become publicly aired.

8.4.3 Can the natural woman be an individual?

According to the Synod God did not create women as individuals but as part of a family. The women's suffrage movement, presupposing the individual right of women to vote, is therefore sinful and against God's will. It is not Christian teaching, but the ideology of the French Revolution which emphasises the individuality of people.

The words of Kuyper echo throughout this statement of the Synod. It was Kuyper who attributed (1914:23) women's yearning for the vote to the false individualism of the French Revolution which, of course, occurred more than a century before the women's suffrage movement.

Du Toit's answer to that (1921:75) is that women's suffering, and not the French Revolution, is the source of their struggle: she does not need the French Revolution to point out to her how women suffer because of their alleged inferiority. She does not echo the ideas of the French Revolution; she says only what is in her heart.

Du Toit exposes a fundamental difference between the male and female religious thinking of her time. Male theology centred on principles

while women's argumentation was based on experience. People, and not abstractions and dogmas, formed the centre of women's interpretation of the will of God. Du Toit's point of view was that women's worldwide struggle for the vote was not because they had been seduced into individualism or because they were driven by an unchristian thirst for power; women simply wished to address the needs of women, black and white.

8.4.4 Is a woman by nature able to make her own decisions?

The Synod of the Reformed Church in South Africa also claimed that the vote for women was foreign to the Christian character of the Afrikaans nation. We shall remember that during this time Postma and Stockenström described the history of Afrikaans women as the history of women who kept the nature of the nation intact and protected it against foreign influences.

The Synod, following Kuyper, treated women as types. The standard type (the natural) of woman lives, and wants to live, according to the role defined for her by God and men, they claimed. The only other type of woman left is the woman who is influenced by revolutionaries.

Du Toit rebels against the presupposition that women ignorantly fall prey to the 'unnatural' ideas of the French Revolution and the English suffragettes. Throughout her book she takes pains to describe women not only as intelligent but also as living beings, who do not unthinkingly belong to a prescribed type, but who have a contribution to make to the contexts to which they belong.

8.4.5 Can it be natural for a woman to be a feminist?

The Synod finally determined that married women may take on private positions only; widows, however, may vote and therefore perform public duties; unmarried women may not vote but may perform specific social duties in society to earn a living. Belonging to this trend of thinking is a concession made by Kuyper that feminism is allowed in the private sphere in which women must liberate themselves from laws and practices which oppress them in their private lives.

Du Toit regards these distinctions as completely illogical (1921:140–141). How can political life be too rough for a married woman while it is accessible for a widow? Why may widows participate in political life but not unmarried women? Du Toit (1921:41) refers to the political force of the

so-called 'surplus women' in Europe during wartime and the contribution they made to public life.

Du Toit's view of feminism differs vastly from that of Kuyper and she does not share his fears of political feminism. Du Toit is convinced that feminism should have a social agenda which must be addressed on a political level. Political feminism should put the following social issues on the public agenda (1921:43):

- equal education possibilities for girls and boys;
- laws which allow married women to have a say over their children;
- the abolishment of what Du Toit calls female 'slave trade', that is the exploitation of the female work force;
- state subsidy for needy mothers;
- equal pay for equal work.

CONCLUSION

In the first and last book written in Afrikaans on feminism, Marie du Toit reacted in 1921 to the view of women used by conservatives, and especially by the Synod of the Reformed Church in South Africa, to suppress any possibility of a women's suffrage movement locally.

She presented a new and challenging view of women to her readers, a view with which she wanted to energise Afrikaans Christian women:

- Neither Jesus Christ nor nature restricts women to a private life. Men will keep women from public life as long as women allow them to do so.
- Women are needed in public life because their insight into social problems can alleviate the suffering of people through legislation.
- Women's contribution to theology is that they place people and their experiences, and not principles which claim a divine origin, in the centre.
- Women's history testifies that they can make intelligent decisions during times when society is in need of independent and bold insights from individuals.
- Women are needed in public life not only as individuals but as a group. The agenda for political feminism should aim at the im-

provement of the plight of those who are oppressed, poor and muted.

History was to make Marie du Toit the first muted feminist amongst Afrikaans women. Neither her church nor her society was to take any notice of her insight into women's social inequality and personal suffering.

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The piety of Afrikaans women: A summary

At the beginning of the nineteenth century diaries of a number of Dutch-Afrikaans women were published by certain men for a European audience. While the men benefited from these publications, they relegated female piety to a secondary place in their own writings. According to John Philip, for instance, the piety of women is strong and peaceful but without depth.

This was the beginning of a history in which the male dominant culture used the piety of the female subculture against itself. On the one hand, the piety prescribed to Afrikaans women was employed to keep them from occupying executive offices in church and state on religious grounds. On the other hand, the piety of these women, without exception portrayed as the piety of selfless people inclined towards martyrdom, was misused by their men to attain international attention. The culmination of this history was the erection of the National Women's Monument when the God honoured by these women became nationalised.

From the beginning Dutch-Afrikaans women did not believe in a national God, but in a very personal God. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries their circumstances caused the loss of many of their children through natural and unnatural deaths. Therefore, the theological question uppermost in their minds concerned the fate of the souls of their deceased beloveds. Because they were theologically untrained, and because there were no books that stood between them and God, they believed that God visited them personally with the required relevant answers and comfort. All the women discussed in this book, from Hester Venter on her border farm in the late 1700s to Johanna Brandt in the suburbs of the Transvaal in the twentieth century, describe the visions in which God gave them answers concerning the death of a beloved one and comforted them.

These women developed their belief in a personal God according to the demands of the restricted circumstances of their female subculture. Powerless as females, all the women, with the exception of Johanna Brandt in her later years, believed in a very male God, a powerful masculine figure in whom they could find refuge in times of death and danger. There was a God who was not easy to please, but a God who noticed sinners. These women, therefore, excelled in self-humiliation and in self-hate to please their demanding male God. This poor self-image came not only from their God but also from the men of their dominant culture. It developed amongst these women into a negative view of all people. Later, when their God became nationalised, it progressed and developed into a mistrust towards people of other cultures.

In the late 1700s, when the Dutch-Afrikaans women had already adapted God to serve as their Saviour in their subcultural circumstances, a number of books did appear on the scene and were read by these women. The works of the Dutch pietists of the Second Reformation, no longer read in the Netherlands, reached the South African market. These books formed the reading matter of the women right through the 1800s and even accompanied them on the Great Trek. Pietist theology, with its strong emphasis on personal sins, supported the women's belief that God was blameless and that everything, including all misfortune, should be blamed on their personal sins. The death of their children, their loneliness and depressions on the Great Trek, even their suffering in the British concentration camps, the women blamed upon themselves. Their belief in a punishing God caused these women to fall prey to guilt fantasies accompanied by excessive confessions of their sins to God in order to be saved by him from the arms of the enemy (Satan). In these fantasies God was often visualised on a horse rescuing in true heroic fashion the woman in jeopardy. Also playing an important role in these guilt fantasies was Jesus, seen as the lover of the Song of Songs. The Dutch-Afrikaans women of the eighteenth and nineteenth century who have been discussed were all kissed and loved by Jesus. In more decent dreams they eventually married him.

Therefore, in a subculture in which women had little value and even hated themselves, Dutch-Afrikaans women believed that they caused all the disasters which befell them. Privately they survived by means of their fantasy concerning a strong God who took a personal interest in them and a Jesus who loved them as tenderly as their husbands should have done.

Apart from the erection of the National Women's Monument as a male effort to win international sympathy for the nation, the late 1910s also saw the publication of Willem Postma and Eric Stockenström's histories of Afrikaans women. These histories clearly defined in paradoxical terms the parameters of the Afrikaans female subculture. In times of conflict the Afrikaans woman should stand aggressively behind her husband against the enemy, as she did during the wars against the blacks. Without a husband, as in the British concentration camps, she should be heroic in her passive martyrdom. However, whatever the case may be, an Afrikaans woman should accept the religion of her fathers without question: submission to the men of her own nation without any aspiration toward public office and power.

In 1921 Marie du Toit reacted against a synodical decision of her church to disallow women to vote in church affairs. She dismantled the social stereotyping of women as male insensitivity towards women's suffering and restrictiveness. She emphasised women's natural abilities, as well as divine consent for women to participate in politics.

In 1936 Johanna Brandt expressed her hopes that God will come back to earth as a Mother to save the world from war and the lust for money. Brandt prophesied that God the Mother will help women to develop themselves, thereby empowering them to restore harmony on earth.

This prophecy has not yet come true for Afrikaans women who still choose to restrict themselves to a subculture in which they are disloyal to themselves, to their sex and to the motherhood of God which dwells in them.