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'A Policy of Sacrifice': G.B.A. Gerdener's Missionally Founded Racial Theory and the Religionization of Apartheid

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Abstract: In 1935 the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) accepted its federal mission policy which had racial segregation enshrined in it as a core and divinely sanctioned principle. As the foremost missiologist within South African church circles during the middle half of the 20th Century, Gustav Bernhard Augustus Gerdener was the chief formulator and disseminator of this policy. Convinced that the future fate of South Africa's multi-racial society rested squarely on evangelisation, white guardianship, and mission work, Gerdener lobbied for secular racial theory to be based on the formula of the DRC mission church. By 1946 this racial theory espoused by Gerdener, as well as the majority DRC, was internationally questioned by the post-World War Two onset of general human rights and rapid decolonialisation spearheaded by the newly constituted United Nations Organisation. This paper sets out to track the influence Gerdener had on the formulation of the DRC mission policy. It will make the case that as advocate of this policy and through his position as chairman of the DRC Federal Mission Council Gerdener played a critical role during the incubation years of the apartheid ideology leading up to the nationalist's political victory in 1948. Finally, it will aim to elucidate the justification for apartheid which Gerdener's racial theory afforded to a religious nation. A justification which formed the moral bedrock of South Africa's opposition to the broader international context of decolonialisation and advocacy of a domestic social system guised as one geared toward equal, albeit separate, development but which ultimately proved to be a new strain of colonialism.



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1. Introduction

"Apartheid is not the caricature which it is so often depicted as. On the contrary, for the non-white it means the building up of greater independence and their sense of self-respect, as well as the provision of ample opportunity for free development according to their own nature and abilities . . . And for both races it means peaceful relations towards one another and cooperation for their communal interests" (Malan 1964). In June 1948 D.F. Malan, who a few weeks prior successfully led the Afrikaner nationalists to a razor fine electoral victory over Jan Smut's United Party, used these words in a radio broadcast to define the new government's racial policy. Although the establishment of a system of total racial segregation across all facets of life was already a pertinent point within the 1934 action plan of the National Party (NP), apartheid as an ideology had begun crystallising in public and political discourse from the middle of the 1940s (Die Nasionale Party 1934). It was used in parliament for the first time in 1944 when Malan used it to describe his opposition party's policy as a professedly 'positive' alternative to traditional segregation (Giliomee 2012). The roots of this apartheid ideology were not, however, planted in political polemics but rather in the missiological circles of the Afrikaner's religious home; the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC).

Fifteen years before the term made its way into Parliament it was used for the first time by the minister J.C. du Plessis at a large DRC mission conference in Kroonstad. In

an anxious atmosphere, where the white church felt an increasing pressure to formulate a strategy to address the so-called 'native-question', du Plessis ascribed the church's spirit of apartheid to its conceptualisation of its mission task as having an evangelical as well as a cultural characteristic. Not only was the church to evangelise the heathen nations, but it was to do so with the intention of maintaining their cultural integrity which "matched with their nature and aptitude" (du Plessis 1929). Within a decade this idea of apartheid had gained such ideological weight that by 1938, at another DRC mission conference held in Bloemfontein, it was defined by the minister Johan Reyneke as a law whereby each nation was to keep to its own and develop along its own lines (Reyneke 1938).

The church's strategic response to the racial questions it faced was the formation of a mission policy which concurrently became the catalyst for the ideological expansion of apartheid within Afrikaner ecclesial circles. Initiated by the Free State DRC's acceptance of a mission policy in 1931, which was soon followed by the Cape Synod, the federal council of the DRC accepted a general mission policy in 1935. As its ideological foundation the policy rested on the principle of separate development. This policy sought to govern the mission work of the four DRCs in South Africa and marked the beginning of Gustav Bernhard Augustus Gerdener's rising influence in South African racial policies and politics.

Through his chairmanship of the DRC Native Affairs Commission, Gerdener played a pivotal role in the formulation of the 1935 federal mission policy. In 1942 he became the founding chairman of the DRC's Federal Mission Council (FMC) with his focus being the expansion of the mission policy which reached its most comprehensive form in 1947. Not only did the policy reflect Gerdener's personal missiology to a remarkable degree but he was also its foremost disseminator. By the mid 20th Century, Gerdener reached the peak of his public prestige and subsequently became the key figure linking the church and the state in terms of racial policy. This influence is earmarked through his ubiquitous positions as DRC minister, FMC chairman, editor of the mission journal *Op Die Horison*, being the sole ecclesial representative on the NP's Sauer commission (a political commission tasked with fleshing out the party's racial policy), chairman of the South African Bureau for Race Relations and professor at the Stellenbosch Seminary (Pienaar 2020).

Complicating the implementation of the Afrikaner nationalist's racial policy was the rapidly changing international landscape. The formation of the United Nations Organisation (UNO), in the wake of World War Two, and its ushering in of an international bill of rights placed South Africa in the crosshairs of a new international current of decolonialisation and the repudiation of white supremacy (Shearar 2011). Considering this mounting international pressure, Gerdener geared himself toward defending the policy of apartheid as an unquestionably Christian scheme. In his journal *Op Die Horison* he authored several counter arguments to the UNO's criticism that apartheid was discriminative by nature and stood in contradiction to the organisation's principles of fundamental human rights. Beginning from the premise that it was based not on mere skin colour, Gerdener argued that missional, cultural, and historical factors formed the basis of the apartheid solution. "But, if colour is paired with a different social structure, with a different language, tradition, and lifestyle, then the colour line is no longer an accident but is rather essential. Then it forms part of a determined *volk* grouping and it must then find a place in our nationhood. We further believe, then, that it is a God given characteristic . . . This is the position of the church . . . it is referred to comprehensively in our mission policy" (*Op Die Horison* 1939–1950, No.1 1947).

This research article aims to firstly track the formation and development of the DRC mission policy beginning by establishing the missiological ground in which it was rooted. Secondly, it will endeavour to show the influence which Gerdener had on this policy and the broadening of it into a comprehensive document which could easily be transplanted into a secular policy. Finally, and crucially, the case will be made that this mission policy served to provide the religious grounds for justifying a segregationist and discriminatory racial policy to a fundamentally religious Afrikaner society in the light of a decolonialising

world. The role which Gerdener played in this, and his advocacy of the mission policy as a secular solution to South Africa's problems, will be analysed.

2. Missiological-Evangelical Foreground

By the time apartheid had crystallised in the 1940s, the Reformed tradition was embodied by three mainstream denominations within the Afrikaner community; namely the Gereformeerde Kerk (GK), the Hervormde Kerk, and the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (referred to here as the Dutch Reformed Church). During the first half of the 20th Century a dichotomy of theological thought within this Reformed tradition can be discerned.

Neo-Calvinism first took root in South Africa at the start of the 20th Century and was primarily seated in the Gereformeerde Kerk and the accompanying Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education. It also found somewhat of an ideological home within the secret Afrikaner Broederbond, whose sphere of influence at this time was primarily restricted to the Transvaal and the Northern districts of South Africa. The doctrine of neo-Calvinism in South Africa was modelled around the philosophy of the anti-liberal Dutch theologian and politician who became the leader of the Anti-Revolutionary Party and eventual Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Abraham Kuyper. Buttressing Kuyper's theology was the idea that God was sovereign over every aspect of life and that subsequently every sphere of society had to fall under the authority of God. In his view Calvinists formed the core of the nation and, as a society within a society, had to bring all of life under the canopy of God. In so doing Kuyper separated the terrains of the institutional church and the state, by placing the responsibility on the community of Calvinists to infiltrate all facets of life (Bloomberg 1990). Neo-Calvinists shaped an ideology known as Christian-Nationalism which defined God as the natural divider of things and maintained two important tenets: firstly, it nestled the idea of a chosen nation with a sacred mission, and secondly, it emphasised authority while assimilating the glorification of God with the glorification of nation. It also pertinently upheld the belief that diversity of nations was divinely predestined. Through organisations such as the *Kristelik-Nasionale Bond van Calviniste in Suid-Afrika* (Christian-Nasional Bond of Calvinists in South Afrika) and the work of prominent professors such as J.D. du Toit, L.J. du Plessis, and H.G. Stoker, neo-Calvinism imposed itself on the broader fabric of Afrikaner religiosity. By 1940 neo-Calvinism could be discerned as the dominant theological rationale of not only the GK but also the DRC, with all but one Stellenbosch DRC Seminary professor openly ascribing to the doctrine (Elphick 2012).

Diametrically opposed to this new current of neo-Calvinism which had come to flood the DRC was the older pietist-evangelical and missional tradition of the Cape. Although the restricted scope of this article does not afford space for a thorough analysis of the intricacies of this tradition it will be of importance to briefly focus on certain threads which came together by the end of the 19th Century in South Africa. An awareness of this ideological well from which Gerdener drew may serve to inform our understanding of the significance he had on the formulation of the DRC mission and racial policies.

In the early 18th Century, a Lutheran pastor, Philip Jakob Spener, spearheaded the onset of a movement known as German Pietism. In opposition to the cold doctrinal theology which sought to remain relevant within the new epistemological scenery of an Enlightened Europe, German Pietism provided an alternative spirituality which emphasised a personal and living faith complimented with Biblical obedience and devotion. Profoundly inspired by this, another Lutheran, Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, subsequently founded a pietistic movement in 1722 which juxtaposed Lutheran Orthodoxy in several ways: discipline over doctrine, ecumenism over exclusivism, practice over theory, and evangelical urgency over egotistical ministry (Gonzalez 2010). Zinzendorf's movement, known as the Moravian Brotherhood, launched its South African mission work in 1737 and introduced with it its doctrine of pietistic evangelism into the DRC of the Cape. Although its philosophy of ministering to individuals no matter their race or social standing was controversial as it challenged the delicate social hierarchy of the Cape Dutch settlers, it found sympathy with

certain influential DRC ministers such as M.C. Vos who by the end of the Century injected a vigorous missionary zeal into his ministry (Gerdener 1951a).

Throughout the 1800s this pietism, which gravitated around the autonomy of the individual, underwent several changes. In Germany a school of thought emerged known as Romanticism in which theoreticians such as J.G. Herder and J.G. Fichte picked up on a concept of nationalism which emphasised the character and identity of a *volk* and understood it within a historical framework. This ideological development soon made its way into German missiological thinking. In contrast to the model espoused by Zinzendorf, and considering the increased pace of 19th Century colonialism, the goal of German mission work became defined as the planting of ethnically autonomous and indigenous churches (Bosch 1980).

Pietism and Romanticism would merge most profoundly in the Rhenish and Berlin mission societies, and specifically through the Rhenish missiologist Gustav Warneck. Often referred to as the father of Protestant missiology, Warneck understood the task of mission work to be the Christianisation of entire peoples as opposed to individual conversions. The intention of this *Volkchristianisierung* was to bring non-Christians to Jesus under a paternalistic banner without de-nationalising the indigenous character of the people. To achieve this Warneck posed a missional model which stated that newly converted indigenous people were to be incorporated into a missionally planted church which was then to be nurtured by European missionaries until they were deemed mature enough to gain independence and govern themselves (Kasdorf 1980). The understanding that indigenous mission churches should not be absorbed or assimilated into the Western church or culture but rather retain their national identity, which had to further be developed within their own historical, ethnic, and cultural orientation, soon became embedded within the South African DRC (Elphick 2012). This missiological formula, which taught that mission churches were to gradually become autonomous under paternalistic guidance, further structured along ethnicity and focused on preserving the 'national soul' of different peoples, would also noticeably pilot Gerdener's personal missiology.

These ideological currents, which were primarily playing out in Europe, came to a certain concrete expression in South Africa in 1859 when the DRC Seminary in Stellenbosch opened its doors after a tactical victory by the then considered orthodox group over the liberals. Its founding lecturers were part of a long tradition of ministers who received their theological training in Utrecht, Netherlands (Coertzen 2010). Others who cardinally influenced Gerdener such as Johannes du Plessis, Andrew Murray jnr, and J.I. Marais also stood in this tradition. During their studies in the Netherlands these men were influenced by the Réveil movement which opposed the liberal rationalism sweeping through Europe and called for a return to pure reformed faith and Calvinistic principles. In keeping with this Utrecht tradition, N.J. Hofmeyr, John Murray, and Andrew Murray brought with them an evangelical zeal and a bearing which positioned mission as an inescapable task of the church. Andrew Murray was further deeply influenced by American evangelicalism and took Afrikaner piety into a revivalist direction coupled with an ecumenical spirit (Elphick 2012). As a result, the pietism which Gerdener would be exposed to when entering the Seminary in 1902 was cast in a Reformed Calvinist mould and injected with an evangelical spirit stemming from the Dutch Réveil and American evangelical revivals.

From his birth, Gerdener was influenced by these missiological and theological currents. Not only was his mother the granddaughter of M.C. Vos (the minister mentioned above), but his father was also a Rhenish missionary. Gerdener spent his first ten years at the Rhenish mission station at Wupperthal in the Cederberg mountains before moving to Tulbagh in the Cape winelands district after his father's passing in 1891. These milieus in Gerdener's early upbringing left a lasting impression on him and would later form the chisel which shaped his theology and missiology. This is exemplified by the frequency with which Gerdener referred to his days at the mission station, and even later upholding the organisation of the mission stations as a model for how segregation could be implemented in a "healthy and Christian manner" (Op Die Horison 1939–1950, No.2 1939).

Whereas neo-Calvinists saw the Bible not only as the infallible word of God but also as a Christian-National textbook of sorts, Gerdener followed in the tradition of his mentor, Johannes du Plessis, who defined the Bible as missional in its very essence. Gerdener adhered to an image of God as a missiologist which resolved into the idea that God was the initiator of the missional task. To Gerdener, God was revealed as creator, reconciler, saviour, and exemplar which instilled his belief that the Christian church was fundamentally a missional one (Gerdener 1959). This contradicted the position of neo-Calvinist ministers such as Christiaan Rudolph Kotze, an influential proponent of Christian-Nationalism and Gerdener's contemporary in Bloemfontein, who lamented that mission work had only damaged South African racial relations by promoting equalisation. Further, Kotze's image of God was one who willed the separation of nations and who had sacredly selected the Afrikaner people as His chosen nation, who by remaining nationally exclusive and 'pure' were acting in obedience to God's will (Kotze 1938).

Another stark contradiction between the neo-Calvinist camp and the one represented by Gerdener surrounded ecumenicism. Influenced by the Cape evangelical tradition, Gerdener lobbied for inter-denominational and inter-church cooperation in his attempt to unite the Christian mission into a universal vehicle. "The closer co-ordination of the Christian forces of South Africa is a much needed ideal, with a view to the more effective propagation of the Gospel" (Gerdener 1950a). C.R. Kotze, on the other hand, went out of his way to resist co-operation between Afrikaans and English churches. This was largely the result of Christian-Nationalism's growing influence by the start of the 1940s which had increasingly appropriated a radicalised nationalist rhetoric into the religious discourse and consciousness of its Afrikaner adherents (Kotze 1939). For Gerdener, the value he placed on the cooperation between churches, naturally related to black and white cooperation in terms of finding a mutually beneficial racial solution. In this regard, Gerdener often lobbied for inter-racial discussion on mission and racial policy.

In terms of the influence which these two intellectual streams within the DRC played on the eventual apartheid policy is twofold. Firstly, it was within the Cape evangelical circles during the 1930s and early 1940s, in which Gerdener played a leading role, that apartheid found its ideological roots (Giliomee 2012). It was fundamentally this missionary leadership of the DRC which modernised, theologised, and streamlined the already prevalent segregationist thought into an ideology which appealed to the Afrikaner nationalist agenda. The missional model espoused by Warneck, of indigenous churches becoming independent separately from the white church, broadly formed the intellectual basis of this rationale. Secondly, the neo-Calvinist group had its greatest influence felt in the justification of apartheid, once the ideology had already been formulated. They took the lead in justifying apartheid biblically and provided a religious language for Afrikaners to understand their position within the greater divine scheme (Kotze 1948). From the mid 1940's the two doctrinal traditions drew closer together and as the debate began to centre ever more around the mission policy's appropriation of apartheid the neo-Calvinists began to incorporate the missional ideal of the Cape DRC into their conceptualisation of Christian-Nationalism (Elphick 2012). Serving the objective of this article the focal point will be on the incubation years of the apartheid ideology and the influence of the missional tradition thereupon, as espoused by Gerdener.

3. The Brewing of a Policy

Out of the mid-18th Century pioneering mission work of the Moravians sprouted an increase in international and domestic missionary activity in South Africa which by 1925 numbered forty-five independent bodies. With the intention of consolidating the resultantly fragmented character of the missionary operation in South Africa, several missionary conferences were organised by the 1880s. This tradition led to the first convention of the General Missionary Conferences (GMC) in 1904. The GMC was an ecumenically representative organ and resolved to meet on a regular basis to discuss missional matters in South Africa. Ideologically dominated by the missional leaders of the DRC, at this point in

the mould of the Cape pietist tradition and led by Johannes du Plessis, as well as the Scots, American, and Anglican societies, the GMC embodied a notably antithetical approach to racial policy than that which would define the Afrikaner DRC decades later. By its second convention the GMC moved to permit African attendees, although limited, and by the 1920s it openly supported the South African Native National Congress (the forerunner of the African National Congress) and vigorously lobbied the Union government to amend the 1913 Native Land Act (Elphick 2012). In 1936 the Christian Council of South Africa was founded and subsequently replaced the GMC as the authoritative body concerning ecumenical mission work in South Africa. This council built on the inclusive nature of the GMC and embodied a larger African membership. To the disappointment of Gerdener and despite his efforts, the DRC would reject all membership to the council.

Within this precursive period to the DRC mission policy, a fleeting mention should be made of the racial culture within the DRC itself. To square off the conflicting matters of missionary work and white based fear of social equalisation, N.J. Hofmeyr proposed a solution in which each church would consist of a minister and a missionary. His formula held that the minister would preach in the church, with coloured members in attendance, while a separate chapel would be used by the missionary for the dissemination of religious instruction specifically tailored to the needs of the coloured population. At the Cape DRC Synod of 1857, and although stating that it was scriptural and desirable to absorb heathen members into existing congregations, Andrew Murray spelled out a resolution which granted permission to congregants who sought to enjoy their Christian privileges in separate buildings. This resolution was accepted and although it did not blatantly sanction segregated parishes but rather permitted separate sacramental premises, it ultimately ushered in a culture of segregation within the DRC (Giliomee 2012). On a missional front this decision extinguished large portions of white angst as it removed the threat of social equalisation by providing a buffer of separatism between white and black and as a result black conversions and baptisms accelerated. By 1880 the DRC had links to 23 'non-white' congregations in the Cape and in 1881 the Synod took the decision to group them into a separate church which became known as the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. This separate church for African and coloured people was, however, of a paternalistic nature as it remained wholly under the control and dependence of the white DRC (Elphick 2012). A structure which resembled the ideology maintained by Gustav Warneck, and one championed by Gerdener as a means of justifying the DRC's missional identity as well as formalising the bedrock of the church's racial rationale going into the 20th Century.

In 1929 the Free State DRC held a conference in Kroonstad on the so-called 'native question' which had two important repercussions. On a general level it signified an awareness within the DRC that its missiological intentions and rationale had to find a more comprehensive expression. While on a more personal level it brought a task into Gerdener's life which would intimately involve him for at least two decades. The Kroonstad conference, dominated by the Free State mission secretary J.G. Strydom, was tainted with an atmosphere of anxiety brought about by a rising national awareness amongst black South Africans. Frustrated with the white paternalistic structures of mission churches which had made no actual room for black aspirations, many African members broke away and joined black independent churches such as the nationalistic Ethiopian church (de Gruchy 2004). This expression of black discontent was not limited to the church and began expressing itself in society through movements such as Clements Kadalie's Industrial and Commercial Workers Union. It was to this context that Strydom's paranoia for white survival against an unregulated black majority was directed. Serving his self-defensive motive of white preservation Strydom urged for complete segregation and argued that "the danger of black and white assimilation is removed through the correct evangelisation and correct education of the native. Through this each race generates self-respect and is bonded to his own nation" (Strydom 1929). At the same conference, the minister J.C. du Plessis delivered a paper in which he argued that the cause for black discontent was based on an insufficient mission policy as well as a general misunderstanding of the DRC's racial

intentions. In this same speech, in which du Plessis emphasised the urgency for the church to formulate a policy to consolidate DRC ideals and importantly one which could give council to secular racial relations, he defined the racial attitude of the Afrikaner DRC. “An explanation for the spirit of apartheid, which has always typified our behaviour, and which has led some of our members into misunderstanding, must be found in our fundamental conception of mission work and not in racial prejudice” (du Plessis 1929). The decision was made that a clearly formulated mission policy would be drafted and that in it the church’s position towards black people would be stipulated. The drafted policy was circulated and eventually accepted by the Free State Synod in 1931 (Lombard 1981).

In the same year that the Free State mission policy was accepted, a DRC mission conference was organised by the general mission commission of the Cape DRC and held in Uitenhage; a conference which at that point was the largest DRC mission conference to date. In a revealing paper delivered at the conference something of the church’s self-awareness at that time could be ascertained. The paper ascribed to the white DRC in South Africa an exceptional calling which it had towards the black and coloured populations and based this identity on three pillars. Firstly, the DRC was the only true South African church, secondly the DRC was the strongest and most numerous of all church societies, and finally the DRC understood the coloured and black populations far better than any other European organisation. From this stipulated identity the minister Johan Reyneke emphasised the need for a more comprehensive implementation of mission work. “Therefore, it is necessary that we as church put forth a clear mission policy, and that we follow a determined politics of mission” (Reyneke 1931). Soon after this the Cape DRC accepted its own internal mission policy.

By 1933 the Native Affairs Commission (NAC) of the DRC, of which Gerdener was a leading member, advised that for greater efficiency in dealing with broader racial policy uniformity had to be reached in the DRC’s position through the means of a common mission policy (Lombard 1981). In 1934, a Synodal sub-commission, in which Johan Reyneke played an influential role, was appointed, and tasked to work with Gerdener’s NAC in formulating a federal DRC mission policy. In 1935 the draft of this federal mission policy was accepted and distributed to the four DRC Synods.

The policies of the Free State and Cape DRCs represented something of the contrasting motivational contexts out of which they were formulated. The former resembled the acute fear of social equalisation within the Free State church. It dissected the spiritual from the temporal and argued that although the church recognised the spiritual equality of all souls it affirmed that this did not relate to social equality. This gave expression to an important avenue of thought within the DRC and one which would carry significant influence in the years to come: equality, but not equal rights. The policy rested on a fundamental principle of separate development and by using language, culture, and customs as determinants it emphasised that blacks were to develop on their own terrain apart from whites who was simultaneously confirmed as the chosen ruling race (Kgatla and Magwira 2015). Predictably, the Cape policy followed a more emphatic evangelical route on a paternalistic basis and was considerably vaguer on racial segregation. Apart from the three-self missional model, which maintained the aim as being the establishment of eventual independent, separate, and indigenous mission churches, the Cape policy bore little resemblance to that of its Northern brethren. The federal policy was in effect a compromise between the two policies with the fundamental elements reflecting, and to a remarkable degree following, those of Gerdener’s own missiology.

Comparable to the undercarriage which supported the frame of Gerdener’s missiology, the federal mission policy rested in the first instance on the biblical objective found in the great commission and the evangelical implications which went together with this. After affirming the arrival of white Christian settlers into Africa as the chosen bearers of the Gospel the policy zeroed in on the exclusive position of the Afrikaners. “We consider, therefore, that it is the special privilege and responsibility of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa—more than any other church or mission society—to bring the gospel

to the heathens of this land” ([DRC Mission Policy 1935](#)). Not only does this reflect the self-identification of the white DRC, as expressed during the Uitenhage conference, but simultaneously the increasing influence of Christian-Nationalism’s concept of a chosen nation divinely sanctioned.

From here the policy addressed practical social matters which were sub-divided into six sections. Gerdener ascribed the encroachment of church involvement in secular matters to the inevitable consequences which were coupled with evangelisation. “This announcement of the Gospel awakens ambitions and aspirations . . . this unfortunately also means that where the mission task exerts itself on the economic, cultural, social, and even political arenas of the mission community; the mission itself must consequently come into contact with the legislation and politics of the country” ([Gerdener 1951b](#)). With this rationale the 1935 policy stated that black aspirations, which were clearly already bubbling to the surface, were not to be suppressed but rather nudged into the ‘correct’ direction in the spirit of trusteeship, and that their unique nationalism had to be supported ([DRC Mission Policy 1935](#)). Regarding social equalising, the policy took a clearer stance than that of the Cape, but one less blunt than the Free State alternative. The principle of separate development remained the core of the policy which declared itself unequivocally against the idea of racial mixing and followed the tradition of equality without equal rights by stipulating that “each nation has the right to be itself and to develop and elevate itself. Where the church thus declares itself against social equality in the sense of disregarding race and colour difference between white and black in daily interactions, it wants to promote and encourage social differentiation as well as conscious or cultural segregation, to the benefit of both sections ([DRC Mission Policy 1935](#)). What this represented was the first concrete legislative step taken by the federal DRC in imposing its missional theories into secular society. It would also provide Gerdener with the theoretical framework from which to develop and flesh out his racial policy for South Africa.

4. The Federal Mission Council and the Religious Pseudo-Science of Race Policy

Taking place synchronously with the DRC’s crafting of a federal mission policy was the drafting of a constitution for the imminent Christian Council of South Africa (CCSA) which envisioned the Anglican, Methodist and DRC churches as its backbone. The hope was raised within DRC circles in which Gerdener moved that the constitution and the federal mission policy would be brought into a principle alignment to promote ecumenicism on the mission front. This hope would ultimately be rendered moot after the motion was forwarded for an autonomous mission council for Afrikaner churches at a DRC mission conference in 1938 ([Op Die Horison 1939–1950](#), No.2 1940). It is noteworthy that this decision took place in the year of the Afrikaner centenary commemoration of the Great Trek which electrified the current of nationalism within Afrikanerdom. This mission conference, held in Bloemfontein, was the same conference where the DRC church father, J.D. Kestell, introduced his salvation plan for the Afrikaner volk which would hold great significance for the plight of Afrikaner nationalism in years to come ([Op Die Horison 1939–1950](#), No.4 1950). The fact that the missional and racial policies of the CCSA and the Afrikaner missionaries could not be ideologically reconciled marked the start of the isolation of the Afrikaner DRC from the ecumenical English churches. An isolation which would endure for several decades. In 1940 the secretary of the NAC, J.H.M. Stofberg, issued a notice informing the Synods of the commission’s decision to form a federal council. By the following year the seal of approval was issued and the NAC, now chaired by Gerdener, was faced with the pragmatic question of structuring the proposed council.

In 1942 the constitution of the Federal Mission Council (FMC) was completed by the draft committee, of which Gerdener was also the chairman, and approved by the DRC. The constitution laid bare the nature of what the newly established council would be. It stipulated that the primary reason for the FMC’s existence was to consolidate and implement the federal mission policy of the DRC. However, clearly influenced by Gerdener’s perception of missiology’s social responsibilities, it continued to ascribe to

the body a wider jurisdictional authority in secular society than solely missional matters and maintained that the FMC had a role to play in the country's racial discourse ([FMC Constitution 1941](#)). In anticipation of the FMC, William Nicol, a voice for ecumenicism in the DRC and a colleague of Gerdener, stated that "our mission work also has a wider national intention and those who lead us should be in contact with all sorts of experts in our volk" ([Op Die Horison 1939–1950](#), No.3 1941). This reference to disciplinary experts hinted at the pseudo-scientific character which the FMC would embody in its racial investigations; an ideal which was already expressed at the 1938 conference ([Op Die Horison 1939–1950](#), No.3 1940). In April 1942 the FMC convened its first meeting, installed Gerdener as its chairman, and immediately moved to ensure the council's authority to act and speak on behalf of the church on secular matters involving mission work and especially on issues pertaining to "all law which affects the moral and spiritual wellbeing of the coloured and black" ([Federal Mission Council 1942–1949](#), 30 April 1942). As we focus on the influence which the mission policy had on the formation of the apartheid ideology, it is important to note that the management of the FMC was dominated by leaders of the Cape DRC and had Gerdener as its leader.

Also, in 1942 the FMC agreed that Gerdener's missional journal, *Op Die Horison* (ODH), would be the official mouthpiece of the FMC. As the founding editor of ODH, Gerdener stated that the organ would be set apart by its scientific approach to mission work and it would subsequently reflect all his tendencies as it concentrated on topics surrounding anthropology, religious history, and race relations. ODH took it upon itself to inform all DRC circles regarding mission, ward against any misinterpretation of the mission policy and to propagate said policy whilst remaining rooted in the Bible and DRC confessions ([Op Die Horison 1939–1950](#), No.1 1939). In certain aspects ODH was cautiously liberal for its time. It was unique amongst Afrikaner papers in that Gerdener afforded space to black and coloured individuals, although black authors were often published selectively and with a self-serving intention. "We want to know what blacks and coloureds envision for the future of their volk and what they think of the policy, legislation, and general action regarding race relations of the white . . . with the goal of finding a way which will be to the benefit of all" ([Op Die Horison 1939–1950](#), No.3 1942). This position pointed to Gerdener's idealistic tendencies in which he envisioned to bring all sections of South African society together in a mutual effort to find a just racial solution. In this same spirit Gerdener nurtured the hope that the FMC would refrain from becoming a self-absorbed white entity and argued that if its policy of separate development was to be taken seriously it would need to grant the black and coloured populations their independence at the appropriate time ([Op Die Horison 1939–1950](#), No.3 1940). Apart from ODH, Gerdener gained public access through the regular rubric, *Op Die Sendingfront*, in the federal DRC newspaper, *Die Kerkbode*, from 1946 ([Gerdener 1958](#)). The South African Broadcasting Company also afforded Gerdener a national platform through a regular radio broadcasting segment. As a result, by the mid 1940s Gerdener wielded exceptional influence within the religiosity of Afrikanerdom as he was simultaneously the chairman of the DRC's most copious missional body as well as its chief disseminator.

The principle of separate development formed the basis for all FMC operations as it was convinced that this was the only feasibly just solution to the racial problem. Permeating out of this principle the council approached its work on formulating a racial policy from a studious and so-called scientific angle, and within its first year a permanent sub-commission was established for racial matters ([Federal Mission Council 1942–1949](#), 31 March 1943). This pseudo-scientific character of the FMC is most visible in its formulation of racial theory, conceptualisation of blood mixture, and specifically in its dealings with the position of a coloured community in a future South Africa. Through several academic investigations launched in 1943 the FMC presented a report in which it demarcated three factors which most profoundly complicated the coloured question. It stated that in the first instance, contrary to African people, the coloured demographic had no heritage of their own and therefore had no independent identity. Secondly, the coloured population

shared a common language with the Afrikaners and coupled with that had white blood flowing through their veins. The final and most problematic matter, however, was the social proximity between the coloured and white people in the Western Cape which had led to economic interdependency ([Federal Mission Council Race-Relations Report 1944](#)). The FMC concluded that these factors had contributed to the tendency of gravitating towards 'whiteness' within coloured aspirations and to serve the church's uncompromising position against miscegenation a clear distinction had to be found between white and coloured ([Op Die Horison 1939–1950](#), No.3 1939).

The nationalist academic most obsessed with the topic of blood mixture was the Pretoria Sociologist Geoffrey Cronjé. Working within the paradigm, drawn out of 19th Century Afrikaner heritage, that blood carried a mystical characteristic within distinctive nations and influenced by racial theories put forth by the biologist Gerhardus Eloff, Cronjé's work focused on the threat which miscegenation held for the disappearance of the white race ([Furlong 1991](#)). In its investigations the FMC used a paper written by Cronjé which contended that through the convoluted course of cross-racial relations the possibility arose for tainted blood to infiltrate the pure European bloodline through coloured individuals who could superficially pass for white, and therefore concluded that the coloured person was the greatest threat to white racial purity ([Cronjé 1943](#)). On these grounds the FMC concluded that "we believe that our preservation as whites lies in racial apartheid, and it is therefore necessary" and in this respect justified that "the church will in a timely and untimely manner point out the dangers of blood mixing and the subsequent demise of the white race and in all seriousness will warn against it and promote the building of national pride" ([Federal Mission Council Race-Relations Report 1944](#)). Gerdener was further influenced by Cronjé's theory of autochthonous development in which he maintained that the consistent implementation of race apartheid would mitigate the existence of a superior position of one race group over another as there would be no horizontal division but rather a vertical one ([Furlong 1991](#)). Gerdener saw miscegenation as a social ill and rallied himself against the growth of a coloured population. "But what must be fought against is the unconscious bastardisation process, both in blood and culture" ([Op Die Horison 1939–1950](#), No.1 1947). This tendency to find and nurture a unique national identity for the coloured population, separated from that of blacks and whites, coincided with the rationale of the NP which had begun its work of classifying coloured people from the mid 1930s ([Giliomee 2012](#)).

Essential to the FMC's segregationist ideals was the oversight of education, a matter which already received a permanent commission at the founding meeting with J.G. Strydom as its convenor. The FMC accredited its authority on educational matters to the DRC's bulk standing within the Afrikaner population, as well as to its pioneering work in the education of South African black people as a home-grown mission entity. Thus, when the Union government moved to centralise native education under the exclusive authority of the government, the FMC presented a memorandum in 1944 with a counter measure. In it the FMC advocated for all native issues to be dealt with together and so argued for native education to be placed under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Native Affairs, as opposed to the Minister of Education. Its opposition to the position taken by the English Institute for Race-Relations, signified that the tension rested squarely on intended racial policy. The FMC's argument for native education to be administered by the Native Affairs Department served its agenda of a Christian-National education system and the preservation of an independent African nationalism separated from whites. "The danger of blatant imitation of European education will be prevented under the Minister of Native Affairs, where the building up of native education can be unobstructed . . . By placing native education under a separate department within the Native Affairs department doesn't mean the demoting of educational standards; but rather that African education must carry its own character" ([Federal Mission Council Memorandum 1944](#)). As a compromise the Minister of Education, J.H. Hofmeyr, agreed that a representative advisory body would be established to provide

council on matters of African education and financing; J.G. Strydom served on this body ([Federal Mission Council 1942–1949](#), September 1948).

In 1949, one year after the victory of the nationalists and four years before Hendrik Verwoerd rolled out his Bantu Education Act, the FMC presented an extensive memorandum to the Native Affairs Department spelling out the DRC's official position regarding educational policy. The opening statement of the memorandum summarised the intrinsic elements of the FMC's principle of Christian-National education in service of its overriding premise of separate development. "The purpose of native education should be the development and preparation of the Bantu youth on a Christian foundation, and in accordance with their own aptitude, abilities, and historical-national background, inside their own community, for useful citizenship within a progressive Bantu-community, which can functionally fit into the South African community as a whole" ([Federal Mission Council Memorandum 1949](#)). Gerdener further lobbied that this national character of native education be related to separate tertiary institutions for black and coloured students which was to foster their respective nationalities. The FMC also supported the principle of differentiated education for Africans. A principle already proposed by missionaries at the start of the Century which held that education should be pragmatically adapted to the perceived needs of African people ([Elphick 2012](#)). Not only were these proposals by the FMC brought before Verwoerd several times, but Gerdener was also part of the South African Institute for Race-Relation's eight-man commission on native education in 1949/51 which was led by the anthropologist Werner Eiselen, and which significantly influenced subsequent legislation ([Eiselen Commission 1949–1951](#)). Consequently, the infamous educational legislation which Verwoerd would later pass as Prime Minister would, to a certain extent, have been influenced by the FMC and the thoughts of Gerdener.

The greatest influence exerted by Gerdener through the FMC was his work in expanding the DRC mission policy and its construction of a comprehensive racial policy; one which incorporated all the strains referred to above. Although only slight changes were made to the policy, they fundamentally reflected Gerdener's personal missiology. The opening line based the revised policy on the same three-fold formula of God's decision, promise, and command which Gerdener had emphasised throughout his work and ministry. Further, the three major additions to the policy served his principles of paternalistic trusteeship, autochthonous development, and evangelism. Enshrined in the policy was that the church granted the coloured and black populations an equal education to that of whites, one which was however rooted in their own history, geared towards their unique future, and to be received in their own areas. In terms of the economic and social upliftment of the coloured and black populations, the policy ensured the church's support as it stipulated these to be the natural outgrowths of evangelism. Finally, under the 'social well-being' sub-heading of the policy, Gerdener included a paragraph which thoroughly reflected the core of his social segregationist system: "the policy of trusteeship, as is being practiced at present, must gradually transition to a policy of complete independence and self-determination for the coloured and native in their own community, school, and church. All differentiated treatment is still considered and intended by the DRC to promote life and independence" ([DRC Mission Policy 1945](#)). The use of the word differentiation in this statement reflected an important slant in Gerdener's thoughts pertaining to race-relations. In his defence of the policy, Gerdener distinguished between a discrimination *against* people, which he deemed as unjust, and a discrimination *between* people, which he conversely endorsed as a Christian and moral solution. According to his racial theory, a discrimination between people was a somewhat positive discrimination which differentiated between diverse nationalities and was necessary for the flourishing of all people and the promotion of equality within a heterogenous society such as South Africa. What this paragraph also clearly embodied was the missional tradition of Gerdener's Rhenish influences while exemplifying his attempt to craft a social policy for racial relations with this as the formula.

Gerdener's revised policy was accepted by the federal DRC and would serve to dictate DRC mission work until the re-unification of the four DRCs in 1962 ([Crafford 1982](#)).

With the policy firmly in place, Gerdener moved his focus to the defence of the policy's rationale of complete segregation on all terrains as a positive and just racial solution both to a domestic and increasingly hostile international audience. Consequently, the way for intimate DRC and state cooperation through the FMC and specifically through Gerdener who had now stepped more firmly into a political role, was paved.

5. A Policy of Sacrifice: Total Apartheid in a De-Colonialising World

In 1939 the University of the Witwatersrand professor of philosophy and a leading liberal intellectual, Alfred Hoernlé, delivered a speech in which he grappled with three possible paths for the future of the country's racial fabric. Disregarding the first two options of *parallelism* and *assimilation* as incompatible with the South African social landscape, Hoernlé surprisingly presented his final option of *total separation*, into what he called areas of liberty, as a truly liberal ideal (Elphick 2012). However, together with the liberal United Party MP, J.H. Hofmeyr, Hoernlé questioned the willingness of the white population to make the sacrifices mandatory for such a policy's triumph (Gerdener 1949). The sacrifices required were summed up by J.D. Rheinallt Jones of the liberal Institute for Race-Relations at a conference in Bloemfontein in 1949. His conditions for total segregation rested upon five points: (1) consensus had to be reached as to what areas would constitute the black and white states; (2) agreement would need to be reached as to what portion of the Union's national profits would be ascribed to the black states for their contributions; (3) a free economy would need to be instituted within the black areas as well as their ability to gather international funding for the building up of their states; (4) the right of free trade between white and black states had to be protected; and (5) the extent of political freedom within black states had to be defined (Op Die Horison 1939–1950, No.4 1949). Gerdener's support for total separation rested on his acceptance of it as a liberal idea which, to his mind, was genuinely nationalist and segregationist in principle and his stance tellingly escalated as the 1940s progressed. It was furthermore against this backdrop created by the liberal faction which he would formulate his defence of practical and total apartheid.

During the opening years of the 1940s Gerdener housed certain reservations towards a policy of total separation. In 1943 he criticised an article written by three Stellenbosch academics, in which they provided one of the first arguments for a totally segregated society on all levels, as underestimating the cardinal economic, political, and social complexities of the matter. At a volk congress held in Bloemfontein the following year, with the intention of consolidating the Afrikaner racial policy, the idea of apartheid as total segregation gained a more official character. Notably resembling the character of the FMC and its mission policy the volk congress ascribed its authority on racial matters to three fundamental elements. Firstly, it rooted its position religiously by stating the acceptance of the biblical interpretation that God had willed the diversity of nations and loathed uniformity. Secondly, it based its resolutions on a self-defined scientific foundation and finally, positioned the Afrikaner as the group who through its historical dealings best understood the black population and had portrayed its goodwill towards them. From a clearly defined Christian-National position, the congress mapped out its ideal for total apartheid in all spheres of life which it categorised socially, religiously, educationally, politically, and economically. Regarding the last mentioned, the congress took a sharp stand: "the congress feels compelled to seriously warn against the tendency of incorporating native areas into our industrial sectors on a large scale, which will lead to serious issues that will be entirely uncontrollable and which will completely thwart the realisation of the Afrikaner ideal of apartheid" (Op Die Horison 1939–1950, No.1 1945). In line with this tendency, Gerdener had retracted his previous reservations by 1947 and through the FMC actively advocated for the immediate implementation of formal and extensive residential segregation. The terms of these differentiated areas were stipulated by the FMC as "the white man has no civil right in native areas and the native also has no right in the white areas" (Federal Mission Council 1942–1949, September 1947).

The 1944 volk congress also initiated a debate within the DRC surrounding the biblical appropriation of apartheid. At the congress the neo-Calvinist J.D. du Toit provided the first public biblical defence of apartheid, and it was largely within this ideological fold that neo-Calvinists played their most influential role in the crystallisation of apartheid within the broader consciousness of Afrikanerdom. Appropriating biblical stories, such as Ezra and Nehemiah, within Afrikaner cultural parameters neo-Calvinist theologians contended racial apartheid to be a continuation of God's work throughout biblical history (Kotze 1948). In stead with his Cape evangelical tradition, Gerdener did not agree with the direct biblical justification of apartheid, but rather based his advocacy of the policy on historical and cultural grounds. He contended that segregation was no new feat and that it had already been a long-accepted principle in secular legislation and a well-entrenched policy within the DRC for almost a century. In terms of his religious appropriation of apartheid, Gerdener did not base racial differences on mere accident of pigment but rather on the essentials of culture. "No one would dare contend that someone is inferior just because his skin is darker in colour. But, if colour is paired with a different social structure, with a different language, tradition, and lifestyle, then a colour distinction is no longer an accident but an essential" (Op Die Horison 1939–1950, No.1 1947). Contrastingly to the neo-Calvinist position which emphasised a direct biblical justification, Gerdener framed apartheid within his missiological rationale and argued that "the final solution to the racial question can only be offered by [the missiological character of] Christianity" (Op Die Horison 1939–1950, No.3 1943).

As black dissatisfaction grew by the end of the decade a growing urgency for white preservation through the implementation of total segregation appeared from within the FMC. "If we do not hastily proceed along this direction [of apartheid], white civilisation will be doomed to miscegenation and degradation and, along with it, Christianity" (Federal Mission Council 1942–1949, September 1947). In a paper delivered to a brainstorming group on the 'native question' at the University of Stellenbosch in 1943 Gerdener stated that the crux of a racial policy rested on two questions: (1) Must South Africa remain a white man's country; and (2) if so, how can the black and coloured populations develop to their fullest expression? Stating that most white South Africans agreed that white preservation was crucial and by emphasising the social implications of mission work, which he had already embedded within the DRC mission policy, Gerdener moved to define Christian mission's organic characteristic of adaptability as the best suited means for finding a racial solution. His conclusions rested on the premise that the matter of race-relations was primarily an ethical-religious question and therefore mission, as a practical interpreter of the Christian message rather than academia, contained the seeds for a just policy. Gerdener positioned mission work as the only basis upon which white survival could be secured while at the same time protecting the cultural character of the black population in providing ample room for their development in separate terrains (Op Die Horison 1939–1950, No.3 1943). Echoed in Gerdener's rationale for finding a mutually beneficial racial solution were the thoughts espoused by the more liberal nationalist N.P. van Wyk Louw. In his plight for 'survival in justice' Van Wyk Louw injected an ethical dimension to the Afrikaner's talks of survival by arguing that national death was preferable over a nation's toil for mere survival at the expense of another ethnic group (Giliomee 2012).

With his conviction that mission work offered the means for a secular solution, Gerdener entered the political fray most vigorously by the middle of the 1940s. The NP accepted apartheid as its official policy in 1945 and in 1947 D.F. Malan convened an investigative commission, headed by Paul Sauer, with the task of clarifying apartheid by establishing a comprehensive racial policy (Koorts 2014). Not only was Gerdener the sole non-parliamentarian commission member, but the central section of the eventual report was a mission policy which he was clearly responsible for. The Sauer Report emphasised Christianity's missional responsibility towards black people and within the Warneck missional model stipulated the end goal as being the creation of indigenous self-sustaining churches (Giliomee 2012). Apart from his official involvement in the commission, Gerdener

also made use of his position as a leading mission strategist to push the FMC's racial agenda. In the months leading up to the 1948 election, with the NP policy still in incubation, Gerdener met directly with nationalist leadership. Amongst other topics, he lobbied for a racial policy to be set forth "with apartheid as one of the fundamental principles, and the survival of the white race in South Africa as its impetus" ([Federal Mission Council 1942–1949](#), September 1947). The FMC further lobbied the newly elected NP on several topics including the stamping out of communist influences, the establishment of more separate black and coloured towns, the abolishment of mixed marriages, and that "better proof will be given to the non-white that apartheid does not mean oppression . . . but rather to promote justice and fairness for each portion of society" ([Federal Mission Council Memorandum 1948](#)). Although sympathetic to the FMC's ideals, Malan rendered Gerdener's vision of total separation too idealistic and feasibly impossible to implement. Nevertheless, in a news article explaining the apartheid policy, six years into the NP's reign, Malan struck all the fundamental chords which Gerdener had been expounding as the foundation of his separatist vision. "Apartheid was based on what the Afrikaner believed to be his divine calling and privilege; to convert the heathen to Christianity without obliterating his national identity" ([Malan 1954](#)).

The third leg of Gerdener's tripod of influence on racial matters, which now spanned comprehensively across ecclesial and secular realms, came in 1948 when he became the founding chairman of the South African Bureau for Racial Affairs (SABRA). This racial think tank, established largely through the influence of the Broederbond, epitomised the fusion of racial and missional policy. The agenda of SABRA was made clear in its mission statement and profoundly mirrored Gerdener's own: "to strive for the separate development of, on the one hand the various non-whites, and on the other hand the white population groups in South Africa; to promote and propagate it and to safeguard the interest of these groups" ([SABRA Statute 1948](#)). SABRA critically cooperated with government departments on racial matters and was influential in the implementation of racial Acts such as the Group Areas Act in 1950. Consequently, Gerdener significantly interjected the essence of the DRC mission policy into the manifesto of the NP.

This urgency in South Africa for division was in stark contrast to a new global urgency for equality. Early in 1945 the United States of America, China, the USSR, and the United Kingdom invited 46 Allied governments to a conference in San Francisco to prepare a charter for what would eventually become the United Nations Organisation (UNO). Jan Smuts chaired the commission tasked with drawing up the final charter containing within it a preamble penned by Smuts himself. In the preamble Smuts sought to contrast the legalistic tone of the charter by providing a humanist response to the horrors brought about by the events of World War Two and in a determined effort to prevent a recurrence of such "fratricidal strife". Due to his efforts the opening of the UNO charter had enshrined in it the construct of human rights: "to re-establish faith in fundamental human rights . . . in the equal rights of men and women of nations large and small . . . for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples" ([Shearar 2011](#)). South Africa's early criticisms of the UNO's universal Declaration of Human Rights gravitated around the terminology espoused by the DRC already in 1929: equality, but not equal rights. At the discussion of the draft for example, the South African delegation led by Eric Louw opposed the first article by stating that although equality was universal with regard to fundamental freedoms this did not automatically relate to all rights pertaining to political, social, personal, or economic matters ([Shearar 2011](#)). Back in South Africa, under heavy attack from his political opponents, Smuts argued that he had only signed the charter due to its qualifying article which forbade the UNO from interfering with the domestic affairs of member states. However, the government and its opposition party found it nearly impossible to keep the UNO out of its affairs as South Africa's racial policy was firmly in the crosshairs; a process which began almost immediately ([Simpson 2021](#)).

Repercussions of the new international landscape were profoundly felt in South African domestic affairs, spearheaded by the South African Indian Congress (SAIC). In

resistance to the introduction of the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Bill tabled in March 1946 (which proposed restricting Asian land ownership and that Asian males in Natal and Transvaal would be represented in the House Assembly by three white males), the SAIC resolved to approach the UNO on the basis that the Act violated the premise of human rights in the Charter's preamble. During a total of six meetings held in November 1946 the South African delegate responded to the claims issued by the Indian government that South Africa's policy was founded primarily on racial discrimination. Arguing that due to the failure of the 'Capetown agreement' of 1927, which involved an agreement between the two governments to systematically repatriate most Indians residing in Natal, the Union faced a race-relations crisis as the white population felt increasingly threatened by the growing number of Indians. He contended that due to the pressure of public opinion an Act designed to control Indian land ownership and economic movement had to be implemented. The delegation continued that the Act rested not on discriminatory factors as it applied equally to Europeans encroaching on Indian areas as it did to Indians encroaching on white areas. Finally, after categorising the matter as being outside of the UNO's international scope and following the common Afrikaner rationale that South Africa faced a uniquely complex racial conundrum, the South African delegation focused on the fact that the organisation had not yet defined what constituted human rights and that their country's policy was in no such violation. "Up to the present there did not exist any internationally recognised formulation of such rights . . . Moreover, political rights and freedoms, in the view of the South African representative, were not fundamental . . . Equality in fundamental rights and freedoms could be assured in a multi-racial State only by a measure of discrimination in respect of non-fundamental rights" ([United Nations 1947](#)). Ultimately, the General Assembly voted that the treatment of Indians in South Africa had to be brought in conformity with the international provisions of the charter. What this contentious debate at the very first meeting of the UNO brought to the surface, however, were ideological patterns which would buttress the Afrikaner's apartheid policy for years to come. Ideological patterns which had been constructed within the missiological tradition of the DRC for almost a Century and had now clearly infiltrated and crystallised within the Afrikaner political consciousness.

Simultaneously with this, which led to a passive resistance campaign in Durban, a general strike was organised by the African Mine Workers' Union (an ANC organisation) after adopting a resolution referring to the UNO's prescribed minimum wage and further demanding adequate food for workers. In 1948 the first joint campaign between the ANC and the SAIC was forged and out of which was produced a People's Charter demanding a universal non-racial franchise and the adoption of the principles of the UNO. This position was radicalised in 1949 when Dr. James Moroka replaced the more moderate Alfred Xuma as leader of the ANC and incorporated a larger number of ANC Youth League members into the National Executive Committee ([Simpson 2021](#)).

Apartheid as an ideology would be tabled for the first time as a UNO General Assembly agenda point at its meeting of 1952. At this meeting, where the treatment of Indians in South Africa was still a heated topic, a memorandum was presented in which apartheid was defined as a "flagrant violation of the basic principles of human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the charter" and that the policy of apartheid "not only challenged all that the United Nations stood for but was contrary to specific and repeated recommendations in Assembly resolutions urging the ending of racial discrimination" ([United Nations 1952](#)). In defence of apartheid, the South African delegate followed the arguments of 1947 in claiming that the UNO was in an incompetent position to reprimand on South African racial matters, that it fell outside the scope of the UNO, and that South Africa's policies carried no threat to world peace. Contrary to this, the Indian representative stated that apartheid did carry international implications as all members of the UNO had pledged themselves to upholding the principles of the charter and so had to act on apartheid's clear violation thereof. Buffering this argument, the Norwegian delegate staunchly attacked the Group Areas Act which was largely carried out by Gerdener's SABRA and maintained that

it “appeared to justify the claim that the Act legalised actions which all Member States had pledged to abandon” (United Nations 1952). In stark contrast to the position of the NP, the UNO concluded that the only feasible means of attaining peaceful development, as well as respecting fundamental human rights in a multi-racial society was through ensuring equality before the law of all persons regardless of race, creed, or colour in all facets of life. The UNO then issued a request to the South African government to bring its policies into conformity with the charter; already the second official request issued by the UNO. Further complicating the racial policy of the nationalists was the United Party’s response to the Sauer Report through its own commission led by Henry Fagan in 1948. Contrast to the findings of the Sauer commission, the Fagan Report rejected the feasibility of total segregation and lobbied for an ‘in-between’ approach whereby whites and blacks would work side-by-side within an intertwined economy as mutual contributors to the same machine (Giliomee 2012).

In his response to these international events, Gerdener blamed the UNO of unfairly deliberating over the South African context and accused the body of not having the Afrikaner’s case investigated by an unbiased commission (referring to the UNO’s refusal to have the Indian question investigated by the International Court of Justice). Again, emphasising the unique context which the Union found itself in with its heterogenous social fabric, Gerdener ascribed the bulk of the UNO’s attack on South Africa to misunderstanding and ill-founded prejudice. In the chairman’s address of 1951 to SABRA, Gerdener elucidated a task which would increasingly dominate his focus: “Very often the world’s judgement is wrapped in ignorance and prejudice . . . it is in our common interest that we should get the facts right for ourselves and should strive to inform the world beyond our borders as best we can” (Gerdener 1951c). In an ODH editorial Gerdener plotted the church’s three step response to the UNO attacks. Firstly, the church had to fight the global misunderstanding of the DRC’s racial policy and specifically the false conclusions drawn surrounding the handling of black people by whites. Here, greater international publicity had to be afforded to the positivity of the apartheid ideal by both the government and the church. Secondly, the church was to take international criticism constructively and to actively strive to mitigate the tendencies of discrimination still found in some white citizens. Finally, within his missiological paradigm, Gerdener re-emphasised the need to bring the gospel to all national groups in South Africa. It was in this evangelisation task that he found the ultimate solution to the tension (Op Die Horison 1939–1950, No.1 1947).

In defence of what would later be defined by some scholars as a special kind of colonialism, and in rebuttal to the scepticism of the liberals, Gerdener structured his propagation of apartheid around religious parameters and on a supposed moralism. Economic aspects were the essential element confounding the practical implementation of the Afrikaner policy. By the 1940s the context of South African economy was earmarked by integration and inter-dependency. A supposed threat further compounded by the dramatic influx of black people into cities who had increasingly become the backbone of industrial growth. Gerdener feared that economic integration threatened the integrity of the entire apartheid policy, contending that it would eventually extend to social and political mixing. In response to the findings of the Fagan Report, and with an understanding that cheap black labour bolstered the white economy, Gerdener supported the concept of migrant labour which he believed overcame the conundrum and served both the ideals of apartheid and economic stability (chairman speech 1955). This idea was sounded by the MP J.G. Strijdom in 1947 when he argued that the only way to prevent a bloodbath in South African cities was through allowing black people into white areas as temporary workers (Simpson 2021). In a public report issued in 1950, SABRA management finally concluded that it saw no alternative to the policy of complete and utter segregation and called for the dismantling of economic interdependency. This position reflected the idealistic school within apartheid ideologues, whereby their theoretical solutions were far removed from the practical abilities and resources of government. An ambiguity which was also reflected in Gerdener’s personal notes: “on the other hand, we cannot amalgamate ourselves with the idea of one

hundred percent separation, meaning that our kitchen and farm, in our mines and factories, no non-white may be allowed. Such a view simply does not match the existing facts and needs" ([Op Die Horison 1939–1950](#), No.1 1947).

As he had introduced the racial question on moral grounds at the start of 1940, so too did he close it. In his bid for total apartheid, Gerdener argued that humanism outweighed economy and laid the precondition for its success at the feet of each white South African individual, and specifically the Afrikaner Christian. Convinced of the moral fibre within his position Gerdener stated that if apartheid was to fail "then it will not be due to the fact that Christianity has no solution, but rather that its adherents cannot, or do not want to, prove its solution" ([Op Die Horison 1939–1950](#), No.3 1943). Gerdener relied on the conscience of a religious Afrikaner nation to take the moral high ground and commit to his policy of sacrifice. "That the process of differential development will demand sacrifice speaks for itself . . . we will need to learn to do many of our henchman's chores ourselves" ([SABRA 1950](#)).

The fullest expression of Gerdener's call for total apartheid came at a Union wide church congress on the question of racial matters in 1950 which Gerdener organised and chaired. In his address to the congress Gerdener focused on the scriptural justification of apartheid. In avoiding direct biblical references, Gerdener instead highlighted biblical principles such as 'diversity within unity', 'calling' and 'predestination' which he argued were the foundations of his principle of separate development. In closing, Gerdener tied together all the arguments which constituted his racial idealism. "The apartheid policy which we stand for, and which is also reflected in the law of our country's government as established in 1936, is no static situation. It refers to a process of development, which each volk—on the purest and speediest way—can use to reach its own calling under God's gracious watch. It is the means to an end; that of an independent status. It aims to remove the possibility of friction, of unequal and unhealthy collision between the more and less developed. Only once the less developed reaches its own—on a church and religious level—will we be able to reach out the hand of communal religion" ([Gerdener 1950b](#)).

The final hurdle to Gerdener's grand idealistic vision of a totally segregation society would ultimately be its downfall. The prediction made by J.H. Hofmeyr of the Afrikaner's unwillingness to sacrifice proved prophetic. Although Gerdener's plan did not reach its fullest expression, it cannot be argued away that the racial principles which he proposed, through the DRC mission policy and the FMC, considerably shaped the Afrikaner's racial policy. A policy which buttressed a quasi-totalitarian system which legislatively dominated the country until 1994 and served to justify it to a religious Afrikaner nation. A conclusion already rendered by an American journalist who wrote in 1958, after investigating apartheid South Africa, that "a man named Gerdener had been the principal author of apartheid" ([Robert 1958](#)).

6. Conclusions

Having analysed the influence which Gerdener's individual ideology had on the mission and racial policy of South Africa, it is important to bear in mind that he formed part of the wider current of 20th Century Afrikaner nationalism. A current which had as its fundamental aim the perseverance of white domination, and specifically that of the Afrikaner people, above all else. Therefore, a reading of Gerdener's utopian vision, which claimed to be religiously sound, morally justifiable, and for the equal betterment of all portions of society, can by no means be used to nullify the grotesque injustices and pain caused by the apartheid system. In contrast, this article aims to inform our understanding of the past and draw attention to the ideological strains which were dominant during the formulation of apartheid.

As the leading mission strategist within the DRC by the middle of the 20th Century, G.B.A. Gerdener arguably played the biggest role in formulating and disseminating the church's racial policy. His ideal of separate development was profoundly reflected in the DRC mission policy, expanded through the FMC, transitioned into secular policy through

his leadership in several political bodies, and broadcasted domestically and abroad via significantly authoritative platforms. Further, as an authoritative voice within the DRC, and as a DRC minister, Gerdener gained a direct influence on the rationale of ordinary Afrikaner people at grass-root level and would have subsequently played a noteworthy role in forming their social consciousness.

Although Gerdener's idealistic vision of complete segregation was not implemented practically to its fullest extent, the moralistic-religious language he used to portray apartheid as a righteous solution served to justify it in the minds of a religious Afrikaner nation for decades. Without this justification it is hard to see how apartheid would have survived as a constitutional system for over forty years. Here, perhaps, lies the gravest danger in Gerdener's ideology. That it was able to justify the unjustifiable, draw upon deep seated fears of racial integration amongst most South African whites and manipulate the religiosity of a Christian nation into supporting a blatantly discriminatory system.

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