


Martin Luther and Beyers Naudé: Driven by conscience

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When Martin Luther tore the church asunder after he attacked ecclesiastical corruption, he unwittingly prompted alternative Reformations in other localities that would metastasize throughout the world. This new freedom begun by Luther – the separation of powers, toleration and freedom of conscience centred on the individual – spread also to our remote corner of the world, South Africa. Half a millennium later, Beyers Naudé, an Afrikaner of Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk parsonage, and a theologian, threatened Afrikaner civil religion through his stand against apartheid. While there are many differences between these men, there was one characteristic which they both shared in the use of their consciences, which was closely connected to their respective Christian faiths. The aim of this article therefore is to show firstly how Luther and Naudé followed the dictates of their consciences which caused them to act against the apparent flow of history in response to the moral values in the societies they found themselves in. Secondly, it will show that with their enlarged sense of responsibility came consequences for both the immediate people surrounding them as well as the community at large. Without over-simplifying the connection between these two individuals in history, the article concludes that both Luther and Naudé are human beings with highly developed consciences, and while both were morally obliged to follow a judgement of conscience formed in good faith and both attained their highest ideals, following one's conscience is ambiguous because it may scandalise the consciences of those whose consciences are differently formed.

Introduction

Both Naudé and Luther are very controversial figures. Bainton (1950:21) says of Luther, who was named after a saint, that he was later 'to repudiate the cult of the saints' (Bainton 1950:21):

He who vowed to become a monk was later to renounce monasticism. A loyal son of the Catholic Church, he was later to shatter the structure of medieval Catholicism. A devoted servant of the pope, he was later to identify the Popes with Antichrist. (p. 22)

His followers hailed him as the prophet of the Lord and the deliverer of Germany. His opponents on the Catholic side called him the son of perdition and the demolisher of Christendom. The agrarian agitators branded him as the sycophant of the princes, and the radical sectaries compared him to Moses, who led the children of Israel out of Egypt and left them to perish in the wilderness. (p. 22)

Naudé, similarly, was placed in a 'seemingly contradictory position' (Pauw 2005:7). As an 'Afrikaner nationalist, a member of the Afrikaner Broederbond, and moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church [...] he had 'to make a decision between the position as director of the Christian Institute (CI) and the position as moderator of the Transvaal Synod. Naudé chose the former' (Pauw 2005:7). And as Tutu (2005) says:

It was a costly decision that he had made and the price he was to pay consisted of his being ostracized and vilified by his own Afrikaner community which regarded him as a traitor, a *verraaier*, a turncoat who had betrayed the *Volk*. (p. 49)

The examination of the notion of conscience should inevitably begin with Luther himself at the Diet of Worms. At this trial, Johann von Eck asked Luther the accused to: 'Lay aside your conscience, Martin; you must lay it aside because it is in error'. To which Luther (1958b) is reported to have responded:

My conscience is captive to the Word of God: I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen. (p. 130)

From this vignette of the exchange between Luther and von Eck, it is clear that Luther may be commended for the stand he took at the Diet of Worms, 'for both the personal courage it required'

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and for the implications it had for 'human freedom' and 'individual conscience', to the point where he is 'celebrated' as someone who typifies 'moral perfection: he is proclaimed a hero of the conscience, a man who could never act against conscience' (Baylor 1977:2).

The following piece is taken from a translation of the sermon Naudé preached on 22 September 1963 at the Aasvoëlkop Congregation in Johannesburg on the occasion of his decision to accept the directorship of the CI of Southern Africa. The text was from Acts 5:29: 'We must obey God rather than men':

Let every man be subject to the powers set over him, says Paul. However, when the will of man conflicts with the will of God, then man must realise; now I must obey God rather than man... But how does one know when it is God who speaks? Does conscience tell us? And do we know whether our conscience is always right? How did Peter know? How could he prove it? The fact was: he could not – he stood defenceless before his judges and before his people. The only anchor he had was the inner certainty of faith which God had given him through His Spirit – the certainty God gives to everyone who through conflict is prepared to come to total dependence on Him to be persuaded by Him to that obedience which He expects of us. (Naudé 2005a:26)

While controversial, both these men were very secure in their own internal beliefs and inner certainty to have acted on them. And like Bainton (1950:22) in his treatment of Luther who says that '... unless one recognises at the outset that Luther was above all else a man of religion', one's efforts to understand the man will not go far, as indeed will be the case for Naudé. However, what is conscience? And why is the modern notion of conscience different from the view of conscience held in the Middle Ages?

What is conscience?

The word 'conscience', which is derived from the Latin *conscientia*, originally included in its meaning what we now call 'consciousness' and 'self-consciousness' (Skorupski 2010:550). However, it is only in the 17th century that the word came to be complemented, in English, by these terms, and distinguished in meaning from them (Skorupski 2010:550). An example of this usage may be found in Luther's (1963) lectures on Galatians:

In affliction and in conflict of conscience it is the devil's habit to frighten us with the Law and to set against us the consciousness of sin, our wicked past, the wrath and judgment of God, hell and eternal death, so that thus he may drive us into despair, subject us to himself, and pluck us from Christ. (p. 10)

In this piece, the Latin word *conscientia* has the meaning 'consciousness' rather than the more specific meaning of 'conscience'¹. The term 'conscience' then acquired its 'specialised moral meaning, while its other meanings became obsolete' (Skorupski 2010:550). According to Andrew (2001:12), the word conscience is Western and 'almost exclusively' a Christian word. Moreover, 'there are no

1. Note from the editor, J. Pelikan, Luther's Works 1963:10.

Sanskrit, Chinese, or Japanese words for conscience'. Andrew (2001:12), however, admits that the 'Chinese *liang xing* and the Japanese *ryo shin*' which literally mean 'good heart' are used in lieu of the word conscience. Nevertheless, conscience as a concept is different in nature from heart and is obtained from the New Testament when Saint Paul 'developed the idea of conscience to distinguish his new faith in Christianity from his old belief in Judaism' (Andrew 2001:13). Luther (1963) himself says in his lectures on Galatians that there is a need:

to distinguish between the Law and the Gospel not only in words but in feeling and in experience; that is, let him distinguish well between these two in his heart and in his conscience. (p. 117)

Clearly, the heart and the conscience are seen as two separate faculties.

However, modern notions of conscience developed differently since the Middle Ages (Langston 2001:7). The view held today is from the aspect of psychology as an 'internal judge' which 'judges the worth of a person's actions and influences how a person behaves by making the person experience guilt whose conscience it is' (Langston 2001:7). But there is also a moral satisfaction or reward for those who obey their consciences (Kroy 1974:xi). Langston (2001:8) argues that 'in the Middle Ages, conscience was not seen as a faculty' but 'as an aspect of practical reason'.

This view of conscience changed with the Protestant Reformation when it became 'viewed as an entity that functioned as an internal (God-given) judge' (Langston 2001:8). The link between virtues and practical reason became distant (Langston 2001:8). And with the growth of 'faculty psychology', the notion of conscience 'became regarded as a faculty of the human mind on a par with the intellect, will, and memory', with its main function being to distinguish between proper and improper behaviour and to 'punish' offenders (Langston 2001:8). Langston (2001:8) observes that 'as attacks on belief in universal laws of moral behaviour grew', the prominence placed on a person's private conscience grew. And although, he continues, the individual may be attentive to the standpoint of others, the individual's power of conscience is the 'final judge' (Langston 2001:8).

Kroy (1974) emphasises the notion of conscience from the perspective of human beings as 'social beings', which means that they:

should be able to control their actions not only from the point of view of their own interests, but also from the point of view of the interest they may reasonably assign to other human beings. (p. 147)

However, 'the conscience seems to project one's interest on to others' and Kroy (1974) says that:

it compels one to consider one's actions from the point of view of other persons, and to give them up as immoral if they violate the interest of some other person – as one represents these interests – that is, on the assumption that they are the same as one's own interests. (p. 147)

But how does one make a distinction 'between what my conscience really tells me and what I think, however, sincerely, that it tells me'? (Skorupski 2010:551, question mine). According to Skorupski (2010:552), there are two conceptions of conscience:

1. self-judgement
2. as the, or a, source of moral knowledge.

In the first conception, 'conscience is the power of judging whether what we have done, or are thinking of doing, is in accordance with what we believe to be right' (Skorupski 2010:552). This notion of conscience does not tell us what is right as opposed to what is wrong. Knowledge of what is right is received by us in 'some other way' (Skorupski 2010:552). Such a conception of conscience coheres with the earlier notion of conscience that we now understand as (self) consciousness (Skorupski 2010):

For, on this conception, moral conscience is consciousness of one's moral convictions on the one hand and one's action on the other, and thus knowledge of whether one's actions accord with one's convictions. (p. 552)

The second conception of conscience, explains Skorupski (2010):

is thought of as the power of knowing what is right and wrong. It is the faculty of moral knowledge, the faculty whereby we know for ourselves what is right, without having to rely on the testimony of others. (p. 552)

This view of conscience pertains to the individual self where a person has discernment and can ascertain 'what is right and wrong' (Skorupski 2010:552). This may mean, says Skorupski (2010:552) 'that most people have to rely on others for their knowledge of right and wrong'. It is this conception of conscience that has, according to Skorupski (2010:555), 'come to be a dominant force in late-modern ethics. It is a conception of morality as autonomy, or personal integrity, as somehow bound up with one's self-identity'.

However, what if the person who is acting on his conscience is wrong? Skorupski (2010) says that the 'main case for toleration' must be that the person who is acting upon his conscience:

is acting from a moral conviction conscientiously arrived at, and is therefore blameless. Beyond that, there remains the importance of encouraging robust, sincere moral reflection. Still, mere sincerity does not make your action right – it does not even make it blameless. It may well be that you should have known better. This obviously applies to particularly outrageous moral convictions, such as the well-worn case of the sincere Nazi, or the ruthless political activist who does not hesitate to kill many people for his cause. With such people we feel that either they must have been capable of seeing that what they were doing was wrong, or that their moral powers are impaired. (p. 560)

Dinneen (1971:104) is more forthright in his view, arguing that while a person's conscience, and right to exercise it, cannot be denied – even if erroneous – conscience is fallible.

And therefore if conscience is fallible, how reliable is it and 'how can we be sure that it is ever right?' (Dinneen 1971:104). For Dinneen (1971:104), 'this is the old argument of skepticism' [*sic*]. We do indeed make mistakes, but we also recognise them and correct them. If conscience is an exercise of reason, it will come as no surprise that it fails to provide an automatic certain guide for many important and crucial issues, or even that it gives us little idea of the right alternative in complex cases' (Dinneen 1971:104). And, perhaps, Clarke (1971), writing about the mature² conscience, puts it well when he says that conscience:

is to be the light by which man guides himself in his actions, freely and responsibly, and as wisely as he can toward the fulfilment of his maturity, his self-realisation, his destiny, or his last end – however one wishes to put it in philosophical terms. It is thus at the core of the essential dignity of every human person as endowed with reason and free will. (p. 358)

To this end, Clarke (1971:359) lists the most fundamental attribute of a 'mature moral conscience' and 'the necessary condition' as 'the habit of making its moral judgments truly personal ones'. By this, he means:

that they proceed truly from within, from one's own moral convictions, according to one's own sincere judgment, in the light of one's own moral ideals and values freely and responsibly accepted as one's own: in a word, when the voice of my conscience is really the voice of my deepest and most authentic self speaking out to guide my actions. (p. 359)

This attribute of conscience in which individual good is attached is also inextricably linked to the 'good of the other person in ever-widening circles until his horizon of judgment finally takes in the entire human race as one and indivisible in interdependence, destiny, and happiness' (Clarke 1971:359). With regard to existence, 'this is a wisdom gained by experience and good living'. Philosophically speaking, 'it is rooted in the very nature of the person' who is inherently related to other persons (Clarke 1971:362). There is therefore for Clarke (1971) no awareness of the 'I' except in relation to a 'Thou' and a 'We', and consequently, no:

freedom of the person except in relation to the freedom of other persons; there is no authentic happiness or self-realisation of the individual self except in communion with other selves, including the ultimate Infinite Self of God Himself. (p. 362)

Furthermore, Christian conscience is not merely a matter of 'personal ideals' or 'social norms' (Cousins 1971:360–370). For the Christian, conscience and moral decisions are 'bound up with the mystery of Christ and the life of the Spirit' (Cousins 1971:360–370). 'His conscience', according to Cousins (1971:360–370), 'has its ontological roots and its ultimate meaning in the Trinitarian life' and a person's ultimate moral decisions are inextricably tied in with humanity's fall and redemption through Christ and 'the eschatological fulfilment

2. According to Clarke (1971), a mature person: is one who has reached a well-developed stage of self-awareness and self-possession, and has situated himself realistically in his thought and action within the real world in which he lives – i.e., within the human community of other human persons in a common world (p. 359).

of the kingdom' (Cousins 1971:360–370). The experience of a mature Christian conscience is one that conforms to the Spirit through Christ who is united with the Father (Cousins 1971:360–370).

Following Cousins (1971:374), the Christian conscience then is open to 'history and the Spirit' and is imbued with certain characteristic qualities. Cousins (1971:372–374) outlines three which I think are important to mention as they relate to Naudé and Luther, which will be discussed below. The first quality is a recognition of 'ambiguity and limitation':

Although the absolute ideal of the moral ought presses heavily upon him, the Christian realises that there is much he cannot achieve. For even in his most inspired prophetic moments, when he calls divine judgment on society, he will realise that he himself is not innocent and at that very moment may be the victim of illusion and pawn of evil. But he will not be discouraged, for he has confidence in the redemptive work of Christ and the power of the Spirit. (p. 374)

The second quality has to do with an awareness that maturity involves 'suffering' and that 'true spiritual growth takes place through the mystery of death and resurrection' (Cousins 1971:374). If, for example, argues Cousins (1971:374), 'a Christian feels constrained to protest against unjust institutions or warfare, he will not expect to be rewarded like the good little boy by his parents or like the adolescent who has won honours [*sic*] in school. He will rather expect to be persecuted – especially by those who represent justice. He will anticipate being rejected, reviled and punished. He realises that his efforts may fail or that they will bear fruit only in the next generation when his contribution is forgotten. He will accept all this gladly, for he knows that this is the way the Spirit works in history' (Cousins 1971:374).

The third feature of a mature conscience is a 'sense of responsibility'. Cousins (1971:375–376) says that as a person matures his 'responsibility enlarges' and that through the imparting and exchanging of information, the person is 'breaking out of his tribal consciousness into global community that is in an historical process'. And his most urgent moral question should not be merely 'What should I do here and now?' but 'What contribution can I make to the expansion of human freedom and moral consciousness in history?' Of course, as Cousins (1971:374) suggests, such a responsibility is both demanding and terrifying and if not rooted in 'hope', it could stop a person from pursuing his responsibility.

For Christians, then, conscience came to mean 'the God-given sense of right and wrong' which Christians held up as a 'mirror' to their 'innermost selves' (Andrew 2001:14). It was only after the Protestant Reformation though, Andrew (2001:14) argues, that the notion of conscience as a 'sense of individual subjective certainty' prevailed. However, the notion of conscience in Catholic theology is different from the Christian notion of conscience.

In the Catholic view, human beings are seen 'as included within a created and therefore radically intelligible universal order' (Dolan 1971:10). Dolan (1971:10) says that individual men and women share a common and intrinsic human nature and a common fate. However, '[f]or all the uniqueness of the person – its "incommunicability" and power of self-determination – the human nature in which that personality is rooted has its objective exigencies and conditions of development'. In so far as these depend for realisation on the use human makes of his characteristic power of freedom, they found an objective moral order mediated to him through what is called the natural moral law. This is not an extrinsically obtruded norm but one communicated to him as reason's own discernment of right and wrong. Thus, one comes to the classical definition of natural law as 'the rational creature's participation in the eternal law' (*participatio legis aeternae in rationali creatura*) – a participation by man as 'image of God' sharing in a finite analogous way God's own judgement' (Dolan 1971:10). Conscience, then, 'is simply the extension or application of this natural law to a particular act' (Dolan 1971:10).

What about individual conscience? Dolan (1971:10) argues that there is no place for 'secularist' or 'existential' ideas of self-determination 'where the individual conscience is considered the source of its own values and decrees and thus finally answerable only to itself', whereas the Catholic view of conscience 'stresses its function of registering the demands of an objective moral order and the prevailing importance of a right conscience over a peaceful one' (Dolan 1971:10).

There is, accordingly, a religious component in this notion of conscience (Dolan 1971). Therefore:

to act against conscience is not just to go against one's own better judgment or one's own system of values. It is to go against God's authority and therefore to sin. Hence the Catholic wariness of potentially mischievous expressions like 'rights of conscience,' 'right to dissent,' 'right to make up one's mind.' The conscience is not, properly speaking, a subject of rights, nor does it choose its positions. It is a surrogate – quasi ratio Dei. (p. 12)

So:

neither counsellor nor prelate, nor even the objective moral law itself, can supplant the individual conscience as the *immediate* norm of action, for there is no other way a man can judge his obligation than as he himself finally sees it when all the data are in. If it be his human act then his conscience must have the last word as ultimate subjective norm of morality. Yet this inviolable norm of action can be in error and, what is more aggravating, can be in doubt. (p. 12)

Luther and Naudé

Luther is reported to have responded when he appeared at the Diet of Worms:

Since then your serene Majesty and your Lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or

by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against my conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen. (Luther 1958b:112–113)

When Naudé preached his last sermon to his white congregation, he presented his choice 'between religious conviction and submission to ecclesiastical authority' (Walshe 1981:92).

What is the result when we dodge the Word? For quite some time one can successfully shy away from the appeal and the demand of the Word: apparently it does no damage, does not trouble the conscience, does not affect the church's service. But in fact there is a process of spiritual decline, of moral degeneration, of the disintegration of the Church, which sooner or later results in complete collapse. It is always so: no man, no community can withdraw any part of life from being subject to the Word without eventually finding the whole life ruined thereby (Naudé 2005:43).

Consequently the choice facing me is not primarily a choice between pastoral work and other Christian work or between the Church and *Pro Veritate*, or between the Church and the Institute. No, the choice goes much deeper: it is a choice between obedience in faith and subjection to the authority of the Church. And by unconditional obedience to the latter, I would save face but lose my soul (Naudé 2005:27).

From the above quotes, it is clear that both Luther and Naudé emphasised the importance of the Word of God in individual conscience. The utter inner certainty and conviction of these two men is palpable.

For Luther, the moral duty of correctness had pressed heavily upon him (Cousins 1971:374). Luther acted on his conscience in response to malpractices in the church at both the legal and ecclesiastical levels, which demonstrated his awareness of corruption in the church which simultaneously gnawed at both the root structures of the church as well as the core of people's spirituality. What Luther started here was really a continuation, perhaps, of what had been attempted earlier but was quelled. For despite the fate of his predecessors, 'Jan Hus (1369–1415) and John Wyclif (1384–1443)', among others, who had in the late medieval period made forceful calls for renewal and sought to return to Scripture as the central force of Christianity, and were repressed by the Church (Becker, Pfaff & Rubin 2016:8; Hendrix 2007:3), Luther's conscience had 'the last word' (Dolan 1971:12).

From the actions of these historic figures who attempted to change practices of the Catholic Church before Luther, it is clear that Luther was not beating an entirely new path. There had been trailblazers before him who demanded similar reforms. While these forerunners to the Reformation may not have been successful, their ideas certainly permeated the medieval atmosphere. If being burned at the stake was the fate of a person who dared challenge the establishment and

their views, how did Luther survive the wrath of the Catholic Church? Was he just lucky or was this providence?

For Luther, 'conscience cannot be sure if it is led by its own feeling, but only if it relies on the Word of God' (Andrew 2001:16). Writing about the relationship of the word, spirit and faith, Luther (1967:64) had this to say: 'The greatest gift is to have a conscience pacified by the Word. For this did God permit his Son to die, that we might have a good conscience'. Furthermore, Luther (1963:10) objected to the Catholic priesthood being 'instructors of consciences' since no one's conscience can be tutored or put right except through self-discipline.

'Therefore', he said:

I admonish you, especially those of you who are to become instructors of consciences, as well as each of you individually, that you exercise yourselves by study, by reading, by meditation, and by prayer, so that in temptation you will be able to instruct consciences, both by your own and others, console them, and take righteousness, in short, from Moses to Christ. In affliction and in conflict of conscience it is the devil's habit to frighten us with the Law and to set against us the consciousness of sin, our wicked past, the wrath and judgment of God, hell and eternal death, so that thus he may drive us into despair, subject us to himself, and pluck us from Christ ... You shall not touch my conscience ... In my conscience not the Law will reign, that hard tyrant and cruel disciplinarian, but Christ, the Son of God, the King of peace and righteousness ... (Luther 1963:10–11)

According to Andrew (2001:16), the prominence that Luther placed on the Bible has been recognised by Protestants as the distinguishing factor from those of Catholics. And, perhaps, the difference lies in the emphasis on authority; Protestants base their authority on the Bible, Catholics on the authority of the Church (Andrew 2001:16).

For Naudé, the decision to leave his congregation and join the CI was a major turning point in his career. The fundamental aim of the CI was to 'raise white consciousness', but this was not very successful; so the institute moved away from trying to persuade white people to change, and instead focused on what needed to be done to advance the black struggle for liberation (Walshe 1981:93). Naudé became a firm believer in black theology and black consciousness, and saw the need to encourage these movements (Walshe 1981:95). The institute, which had initially been treated by black people with the same suspicion they directed at most white organisations, began to be accepted by a wide range of black individuals and organisations, most prominently Steve Biko and Barney Pitsoana (Walshe 1981:94).

In this situation, the institute continued its efforts to wean Afrikanerdom from what Naudé saw as its idolatrous commitment to a dominant, privileged and separate future; but increasingly its energies, during the 1960s, were spent on expanding ecumenical and inter-racial commitments (Walshe 1981:92). In 1968, the CI collaborated with the

South African Council of Churches to produce 'A message to the people of South Africa', which declared apartheid to be contrary to the Word of God and a sin which 'limited a person's ability "to love his neighbour as himself"' (Walshe 1981:93). This was the start of a continuing process of collaboration with the South African Council of Churches, most particularly in the establishment of the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (SPRO-CAS), which ran from 1969 to 1973 (Walshe 1981:93–94). The project aimed to achieve a deeper understanding of the situation in South Africa, and to provide practical ways of tackling apartheid. As its work proceeded, its authors came increasingly to understand the structural elements of the economic and social situation, and how these undergirded the injustice of apartheid and the enormous poverty experienced by most black people (Walshe 1981:93).

Naudé's (2005) decision to leave the church was clearly a very difficult one for him to have made as he himself says:

As for myself, I have tried to find guidance for my own decision in other passages of Scripture and I have tried to find reasons which would enable me to sever my connection with *Pro Veritate* and the Christian Institute and continue peacefully and happily with my pastoral work. But time and again – sometimes with great conflict, fear and resistance in my heart – the Lord brought me back to this passage of Scripture, as if to say: whatever this text may mean for others, this is my answer for you: obey God rather than men! (p. 27)

The deep religious conviction and personal suffering which Naudé experienced is apparent in the passage above. And here, the 'terrors of the conscience' may be compared to Luther's (1963) as well, when he urged Christians to understand and exercise their consciences:

For there is no comfort of conscience so solid and certain as is this passive righteousness. But such is human weakness and misery that in terrors of conscience and in the danger of death we look at nothing except our own works, our worthiness, and the Law. For although the Law is the best of all things of the world, it still cannot bring peace to a terrified conscience but makes it even sadder and drives it to despair. (p. 4)

Naudé's decision to join the CI did not mean that he wanted to abandon being a 'minister of the Word' (Naudé 2005:27–28). If anything, he wanted to continue his practice as a minister. He felt that the decision of the Examining Commission was 'unreasonable and unjustified', which he prayed would be 'rescinded'. 'In the meantime there is only one way for me, to be obedient to God! This is God's Word and the Way for me. Therefore, I must go' (Naudé 2005:27–28).

However, while Luther and Naudé acted decisively following the dictates of their respective consciences, and have changed the course of history as it had affected them, not everyone has thought of these changes as desirable. And if Luther and Naudé were morally obliged to follow their consciences, does it scandalise the consciences of those that are formed differently (D'Arcy 1979:preface)?

What if, too, that conscience projects one's interests onto others and 'compels one to consider one's actions from the point of view of other persons ... on the assumption that they are the same as one's own interests?' (Kroy 1974:147, [question author's])

However, is this not the ambiguity of moral conscience proposed by Cousins? (1971:374). For, says Cousins (1971:374) about conscience, while 'it awakens man to his highest ideals, it stirs the law of sin within his members'.

According to Bainton (1950:21), Luther's tearing down of the Catholic Church was 'devastating because it reinforced disintegrations already in progress'. Political unities were already at the time breaking down and were replaced by nationalism when the Reformation dismantled the religious hold of Catholicism (Bainton 1950:21). 'Yet', argues Bainton (1950):

this paradoxical figure revived the Christian consciousness of Europe. In his day, as Catholic historians all agree, the popes of the renaissance were secularized [*sic*], flippant, frivolous, sensual, magnificent, and unscrupulous. The intelligentsia did not revolt against the Church because the Church was so much of their mind and mood as scarcely to warrant revolt. Politics were emancipated from any concern for the faith to such a degree that the Most Christian King of France and His Holiness the Pope did not disdain a military alliance with the Sultan against the Holy Roman Emperor. Luther changed all this. Religion became again a dominant factor even in politics for another century and a half. Men cared enough for the faith to die for it and to kill for it. (pp. 21–22)

Bainton paints a very positive portrait of Luther and gives him much credit. And yet he is aware that Luther was a very 'controversial figure in history' (Bainton 1950:22). Luther's Catholic opponents portrayed him as an altogether negative and evil force (Bainton 1950:22). Similarly, Erikson (1958:231) has argued that the special importance Luther placed on 'individual conscience' paved the way for the succession of 'concepts of equality, representation and self-determination' which became in succeeding 'secular revolutions and wars' the underpinning 'not of the dignity of some, but of the liberty of all'. However, Erikson (1958:252) too is critical when he makes a counter-statement to the virtues of Luther's conscience. While Luther tried to free, the individual conscience from the tyranny of the institution of the Catholic Church, ironically, 'helped to increase and refine authoritarianism'.

Naudé, in turn, who came to be viewed very positively by initially sceptical black theologians, was, on the other hand, reviled by leading members of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK), such as Treurnicht and Koot Vorster, who 'represented the views of the extreme right wing in the DRC in the 1960s' (Clur 1997:xiii, 108).

Luther moved from being a devout Catholic to rejecting some of its core doctrines, while Naudé, once a loyal minister of the main Afrikaner church, in time moved away

from the concerns of his own tribe and took a more global, mature understanding of the world and of the place of God's Word in it.

Conclusion

In this article, I set out to show how Luther and Naudé followed the dictates of their consciences which caused them to act against the apparent flow of history in response to the moral values in the societies they found themselves in. Luther and Naudé are human beings with highly developed consciences, and while both were morally obliged to follow their pressing consciences which they based on the Word of God, following their consciences had unintended consequences.

Luther instituted a new way of understanding conscience and acting on conscience to the extent he had to disobey the Catholic Church, and by so doing inaugurated the Protestant subjectivity of giving credence to self-determination – something that had not previously existed. Naudé, on the other hand, was not initiating a new view of conscience but continuing in Luther's tradition and, in doing so, being true to the original spirit of his Church. The NGK, on the other hand, in demanding that he submits to their authority, was behaving like the Catholic Church demanding that Luther submits to theirs.

The matter of conscience and its effects is a difficult matter in history. Whose conscience is right? Both Luther and Naudé may not have wanted to act against the dictates of their consciences because of the immense and unbearable weight of not acting. Both insisted that unless conscience is subject to the Word of God, it is not true obedience. How then does one know whether one is acting through the Word of God, especially when the Word of God does not stir the consciences of just anyone? Both Luther and Naudé stressed the importance of having a disciplined life in faith in order to discern how God may speak through his Word.

But why are only some chosen to exercise their consciences in this way? How is the clash between the authority of the Church and the individual's conscience to be resolved? Might it not be argued that the authority of the Church is the accumulated authority of many voices and many consciences while the individual acts upon his or her own subjective conscience? How, too, does one reconcile different interpretations of Scripture and know when one is coming to a correct decision? Perhaps these are questions for future articles.

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