

# The mission theology of P.S. Dreyer and his contribution to the Maranatha Reformed Church

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**Research Project Registration:****Project Leader:** Wim Dreyer**Project Number:** 77370920**Description:**

This research is part of the project, 'Being Church in the 21st Century', directed by Dr Wim Dreyer, Department of Systematic and Historical Theology, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria.

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**Dates:**

Received: 13 June 2023

Accepted: 12 Sept. 2023

Published: 04 Jan. 2024

**How to cite this article:**

Dreyer, W.A., 2024, 'The mission theology of P.S. Dreyer and his contribution to the Maranatha Reformed Church', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 80(2), a9114. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i2.9114>

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At the University of Pretoria, Historical Theology consists of various sub-disciplines, that is, History of Christianity, History of Doctrine, History of Theology, History of Missions, Church History, and Church Polity. This article is located in History of Missions, as a contribution to the centenary celebration of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC). The main focus of this contribution is an analysis of Prof. P.S. Dreyer's mission theology as reflected in his publications, and how it shaped the mission policy of the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NHKA) and the growth of the MRCC. For 35 years (1954–1989), Prof. Dreyer was a member and chairman of the Mission Board of the NHKA. As part-time Superintendent of Mission and chairman of the Board, he not only had many administrative and financial responsibilities, but he also played a role in the establishment of at least 60 congregations in black communities, as well as the theological education of more than 200 MRCC students and ministers. All of this was based on a clear understanding of the nature of the church, as well as the responsibility and calling of the church to proclaim Jesus Christ to all people.

**Contribution:** This article addressed the role of theology and individual theologians in the history of the church and mission in South Africa, and how it impacted upon the relationship between different race groups and the development of an indigenous Christianity.

**Keywords:** History of Mission; mission theology; Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ; Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika; P.S. Dreyer; H. Kraemer; theological education.

## Introduction and historical overview

During 2023, the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC) will celebrate its centenary. Over the past 100 years, the MRCC grew from a small mission station in Zululand, to an independent church with congregations all over South Africa; served by well-trained ministers and dedicated elders, deacons and church members. Several ministers of the MRCC completed their postgraduate studies and received appointments as professors and lecturers at the theological faculties of the University of South Africa (UNISA) and the University of Pretoria (UP).

The MRCC is one of the South African churches with roots in the reformed tradition. Since 1923, the histories of the MRCC and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NHKA) were (and still are) interwoven. The NHKA is one of the reformed churches in South Africa, with roots in the Dutch reformation. However, the NHKA does not understand itself as Calvinistic, but rather as reformational, influenced by the theologies of Calvin, Bullinger, Brunner, Barth, and even Luther. For many years, the MRCC was regarded as a mission church, supported by the NHKA. Ministers and members from both the MRCC and the NHKA contributed to the growth and development of the MRCC.

This contribution to the MRCC centenary will focus on the mission theology of Prof. P.S. Dreyer, an ordained minister of the NHKA and professor of philosophy at the University of Pretoria. The history of the MRCC, and the role Prof. Dreyer played in the growth of the MRCC, has been described before also (see Botha 1987; Jacobs 1992; Kern 2007; Van Tonder 1977; Van der Westhuizen 1981, 1990; Van Wyk 1986).

After World War II, the General Assembly of the NHKA appointed various committees with different names to oversee the mission work of the NHKA. Initially a committee for evangelism was appointed. Article VI of the revised Church Order of the NHKA of 1951 (NHKA 1951:28), made provision for a *Raad vir die Arbeid onder nie-Christelike Volke*. This changed to *Sendingraad* and still later to *Raad vir Apostolaat*. For the sake of brevity and clarity, 'Mission Board' will consistently

**Note:** Special Collection: Maranatha Christian Church Centenary Celebration, sub-edited by Matsobane Manala (University of South Africa).

refer to the various official committees responsible for mission. Dreyer played an important role in the life of the MRCC between 1954 and 1989 (Van Wyk 1986:600). He was appointed as chairman of the Mission Board of the NHKA in 1954: a position he held until 1989. For 35 years, he facilitated the mission work of the NHKA and MRCC through theological reflection, visionary leadership, and hands-on involvement. In the early years, as part-time Superintendent of Mission, he travelled across South Africa to supervise the establishment of new mission posts and congregations. During this time, 60 new congregations were established.

Dreyer also played an important role in the establishment of theological education for black ministers, all on a voluntary and part-time basis, while being a full-time academic employed by the University of Pretoria. More than 200 ministers and evangelists received theological education facilitated and funded by the NHKA. Dreyer, as negotiator on behalf of the NHKA, was instrumental in convincing the South African government to make provision for the theological education of black students (Van der Westhuizen 1990:45).

Already in 1930, Rev. S. Vermooten contacted the *Stoffberg Gedenkskool* (established 1908, closed 1959) to enquire whether joint theological education would be viable, which proved to be impossible at that stage (Van Tonder 1977:71). A plan to buy land at Lufafa in KwaZulu-Natal to establish a seminary, also came to nothing. During a meeting of the Mission Board (15 June 1945), a policy was formulated that made provision for: (1) an independent church in black communities; (2) ministry in these communities must be done by ministers from the various black communities who understand the language and customs; and (3) these ministers should have sound theological education (Van Wyk 1986:613). At the same meeting a letter was formulated, addressed to the University of Pretoria, to enquire whether training of Black evangelists would be possible, which the University of Pretoria rejected (Van Tonder 1977:72). For several years, nothing happened in terms of theological education and there was no growth in the number of congregations or mission posts.

In 1953, the Mission Board sent Pamowakle Zulu to be trained as a teacher, and then to return to Pretoria for training as an evangelist. The idea was to give him a formal education, and then 2 years of theological training the Mission Board would manage (Van Tonder 1977:73). The Mission Board appointed Dreyer to oversee the education of Zulu. In 1954, Dreyer was asked to enter into negotiations with the *Hervormde Kerk* in the Netherlands, as well as the Swiss Mission, to investigate possibilities of joint theological education. Both were unsuccessful (Van der Westhuizen 1990:45).

During 1956, Zulu completed his training as a teacher and his theological education became the next challenge. The Mission Board appointed Rev. W.J. Kemp as the first lecturer, but he declined the appointment. P.S. Dreyer was then appointed as the first (part-time) lecturer, which he accepted. Prof. B. Gemser,

B.J. Engelbrecht, H.P. Wolmarans and A.D. Pont also presented some lectures (Van Tonder 1977:74). Dreyer started to train Zulu at his home at 105 Lynnwood Road, right across from the main entrance of the University of Pretoria. At a later stage the lectures took place in Barton Keep, part of the central office of the NHKA in Pretoria. Rev. P. Zulu was the first to receive theological education under supervision of Dreyer, and ordained for ministry in KwaZulu-Natal in 1957 (Van Wyk 1986:617).

During 1957, Dreyer was appointed to a committee of the then National Party government, to advise government on the establishment of black universities, including theological education. This is, of course, the elephant in the room. The education of 'black students' at 'black universities' was part and parcel of apartheid policies. Currently, it is part of the discourse on colonialism, imperialism, racism and whiteness. Does this imply the MRCC is a 'child born in sin'? Was the mission policy as formulated by the NHKA, and the mission theology as articulated by P.S. Dreyer, the result of a society dominated by racial segregation, racism and whiteness? Or is there more to it?

During 1961, theological education gained some momentum with the appointment of emeritus Prof. H.P. Wolmarans at Turfloop, responsible for the training of ministers in conjunction with the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). The University of the North, generally known as 'Turfloop', was situated at Turfloop farm, about 40 km east of Pietersburg (Polokwane). The university was established in 1959 under the policy of separate, ethnically based institutions of higher learning. During 1979, after negotiations led by Dreyer, the *Hervormde Teologiese Opleiding* (HTO) was established as part of the Faculty of Theology at the University of the North (Jacobs 1992:5). Over time, several lecturers were appointed, all from the NHKA. These lecturers included: J.G. du Plessis, P.M. Venter, E. Engelbrecht, P.J.T. Koekemoer, S.J. Botha, and H.G. Van der Westhuizen. The curriculum included all the traditional theological subjects, as was the case with all theological faculties in that period. The theological education was structured over 5 years.

The education students received at the University of the North contributed to the steady growth of the church. By 1964, there were 23 congregations in the Transvaal, Free State and Natal, served by 15 ministers and evangelists. In 1977, when the MRCC (then still known as the *Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika*) became independent, the membership stood at 14270. During the General Assembly of 1980, it was reported that the membership stood at 16057. In 1991 the 5th General Assembly convened, and it was reported that membership had grown to 22939. By the end of Dreyer's term as chairman of the Mission Board in 1989, the number of congregations grew to 80 (Jacobs 1992:12–13).

With the intense political conflict during the early 1980s on the campus of the University of the North, including physical attacks on lecturers, the Mission Board decided

to move the HTO away from the University of the North. During 1986, a new campus was established in Hammanskraal. Again, Dreyer was the main negotiator and driving force behind the building of a campus and the relocation of the HTO professors from the University of the North to Hammanskraal. The NHKA funded the new campus and the salaries of five lecturers. Initially, Prof. S.J. Botha was the head of the Hammanskraal campus, followed by Prof. I.W.C. van Wyk. Van Wyk was appointed in 1996, and played a major role in the establishment of the Africa Institute for Missiology, and eventually the inclusion of MRCC students in the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria.

From this short introduction and historical overview, it is clear that the contribution of Prof. P.S. Dreyer should receive some attention during the centenary of the MRCC. The focus of this article is not so much on the historical development of the MRCC or Dreyer's practical mission work, but rather on his theology, which has received very little attention in the past. The sources for this research are Dreyer's published articles on mission.

## Short biographical sketch

The biographical information contained in this section comes from the handwritten *Memoirs* of Dreyer (1999), in possession of the author.

Petrus Secundus Dreyer was born on the 23rd November 1921 in Pietersburg (Polokwane). His family struggled financially, and he could not attend school. In 1930, his father received a government appointment as livestock inspector in the small Karoo towns of Pofadder, then Kenhardt, and finally at Williston. Dreyer started his formal education in 1931, at the age of nine. With assistance from the DRC of Williston, he then went to Stellenbosch where he matriculated in 1937, at the age of 16 (Dreyer 1999:35). With only 7 years of formal education behind him, Dreyer received a bursary from the NHKA to study theology at the University of Pretoria. In April 1937, he started with Greek, Hebrew, Latin, and Philosophy. At the age of 19, he completed his B.A. and 3 years later (1942), he finished his degree in theology. Because he was too young, the NHKA refused to ordain him as a minister. In 1945, he completed a M.A. in Philosophy with a thesis on Kantian ethics. In the same year, he was ordained as minister in the NHKA congregation of Witbank.

In 1947, he received a bursary to continue his research in the Netherlands. He departed for Groningen University in January 1948 (Duvenhage 2016:46). He studied under the supervision of Prof. Helmuth Plessner. Plessner instilled in Dreyer a lifelong appreciation for Kant's philosophy, anthropology and ethics. Under the guidance of Plessner, Dreyer completed the D.Phil (doctoral examination) in 1949. He also attended the very first General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) (Amsterdam 1948) as an observer. Karl Barth took part in the Amsterdam Assembly

where he delivered a speech, pleading for the renewal of the church as the living congregation of Jesus Christ.

Dreyer's lifelong appreciation for both philosophy and theology became grounded during his studies in Europe. At Groningen University, he not only attended lectures in the Department of Philosophy but also in the Faculty of Theology. He developed a special relationship with the famous Gerardus van der Leeuw and attended many of his lectures. He also travelled to Switzerland, where he attended Karl Barth's lectures for postgraduate students at the University of Basel. He also attended the lectures of Karl Jaspers (Philosophy) as well as Karl Ludwig Schmidt (New Testament). Barth's dialectical theology, as well as the theology of Emil Brunner, Oscar Cullman, G.C. Van Niftrik and the famous Dutch missiologist, Hendrik Kraemer, had a fundamental influence on his theological development (see below). German philosophy, as well as Swiss-Dutch dialectical theology became Dreyer's academic frame of reference.

Dreyer returned to South Africa in July 1950. He received a call to a NHKA congregation in Potchefstroom. In 1951 he completed a D.Phil thesis on the anthropology of Ludwig Feuerbach (Dreyer 1951) at the UP. In December 1958, he completed a D.D. thesis in Science of Religion and Missiology at UP (Dreyer 1958). He was appointed as a temporary lecturer in philosophy in 1951, and on the 17th of March 1954 the Senate of UP approved his appointment as full-time lecturer in the Department of Philosophy. A few years later he was promoted to full professor and head of the Department of Philosophy: a position he held until his retirement in 1986.

All through the 35 years of his academic career at the UP, Dreyer remained active in ministry. He continued his work as minister of the NHKA on a part-time basis, serving many congregations for shorter or longer periods. He played an important role in the leadership of the NHKA, serving on the executive for more than 30 years. He also served as editor of various publications, including *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*. He became involved with mission on his return from the Netherlands, and served as chairman of the Mission Board of the NHKA since 1957.

P.S. Dreyer passed away on the 1st of December 1999, at the age of 78. The evening before he died, he was preparing a study guide on Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. He remained a lifelong student of the Bible, never confusing the academic disciplines of philosophy and theology.

## Mission theology

When we examine Dreyer's publications, it is quite clear that he was influenced predominantly by Dutch theology of mission (*apostolaatsteologie*). He had an extensive private library available, including authors such as Kraemer (1947a, 1947b, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1960), Bavinck (1954), Hoekendijk (1948) and others. Looking at the dates of these publications,

it precedes the time Dreyer completed his Ph.D. in Science of Religion and Missiology (Dreyer 1958). One can assume that he used this literature as part of his Ph.D.

The Dutch scholars' publications on mission theology were very influential at the time, especially in the context of the first General Assembly of the WCC (Amsterdam 1948) and the struggle to find a new definition of mission, which continued until the International Missionary Conference of Willingen (1952). Willingen represents a paradigm shift in terms of our understanding of mission, not only in terms of the *missio Dei* but also the intrinsic bond between church and mission (see Nagy 2022). Dreyer studied in the Netherlands during a time when 'mission' was a central question in theology and the life of the church, and it left an indelible mark on his vision of the church.

The influence of the Dutch mission theology extended to South Africa, and played a fundamental role in changing South African scholars' understanding of mission. One example will suffice: In April 1958 a new series of theological studies appeared under the heading *Kerk en Wêreld: Teologiese Studies oor die Sending van die Kerk in die Wêreld* (Theological reflection of the Church's mission in the world), edited by D.J. Bosch, W.D. Jonker, A.S. van Niekerk and J.A. van Wyk, all eminent Dutch Reformed theologians. In the first edition, Van Wyk gave a very lucid and comprehensive appraisal of the Dutch *apostolaatsteologie* (see Van Wyk 1958). Van Wyk's point of departure is the work performed by the WCC (p. 5), Dutch theologians such as A.A. van Ruler, H. Kraemer, and J.C. Hoekendijk (pp. 6–7). Van Wyk points out that the Willingen Conference formulated the relationship between church and mission very carefully (p. 44), and especially Hoekendijk, who argued that the purpose of mission could never be the church, but rather the kingdom of God. Van Wyk (1958:63–65) concludes that Christ and the Holy Spirit is working in the world; the church is part of the kingdom of God; mission is essential to the church, not just a function of the church; and the church participates in the work of Christ. Although Van Wyk did not use the term *missio Dei* (it would only become influential later on), the basic understanding of *missio Dei* is already present in this publication.

Just a year earlier, in February 1957, Dreyer also published a small booklet with the title *Die Ned. Herv. Kerk en die Sending* (Dreyer 1957). It is by no means as extensive and as elaborate as the publication of Van Wyk, primarily because it was intended for distribution among church members to promote mission work in the church. However, it is clear from the content that the Dutch mission theology formed the basis of his theological reflection on church and mission. In the introduction (p. 5), Dreyer explicitly refers to the work of Bavinck as influential on his understanding of mission. When we look at the structure of Dreyer's publication, it follows Bavinck's *Inleiding tot de Zendingwetenschap* (1954). Both start out with an exposition of biblical texts relevant to mission, then address various questions pertaining to mission.

In his introduction, Dreyer (1957:5), reminds the reader that the church 'cannot and may not escape the responsibility' to do mission among 'people of colour'. This statement should be read within the context of apartheid, the classification and segregation of different ethnic groups and the practice of separate churches for different ethnic groups. Apartheid laws made it impossible to have integrated church membership, but to be honest, there wasn't much interest to unify black and white churches. Despite of racial prejudice and apartheid, it is quite remarkable how much effort and money were spent on reaching the indigenous, rural communities with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Dreyer (1957:7–13) reminds the reader that mission is an act of obedience to God, with reference to various texts in the Old and New Testaments. What is interesting, is his eschatological understanding of mission:

We live in the time between first and second coming of Christ... Our calling is to throw ourselves into the world to win the earth and its fullness for our God and Saviour... This is not done through our own abilities, but through Christ and the Holy Spirit, who alone can conquer the world. (p. 10)

In this section, it is clear that Dreyer understood mission in eschatological terms; the kingdom of God that is realised through the acts and power of God; and the responsibility of the church to participate in God's coming kingdom; called to ministry in this world. It is also clear, that the responsibility for mission lies with the church and is essential to the church. Dreyer (1957:22–24) comes back to the responsibility of the church, when he points out that the General Assembly of the NHKA adopted a resolution that clearly states that mission is the responsibility of the whole church.

Again, without using the term *missio Dei*, the fundamentals of the concept are already present, as a result of the Dutch *apostolaatsteologie* and knowledge of the events surrounding the WCC and Willingen. Although Dreyer's publication is very short (30 pages) and by no means comparable to the extensive work performed by missiologists in South Africa and the Netherlands, it is clear that he had extensive knowledge of the Dutch *apostolaatsteologie* and used selected themes from that. It should also be noticed, that he differed substantially from the European and ecumenical understanding of church and mission, given his positionality in terms of South Africa during the 1950s.

This becomes clear when Dreyer (1957:27–30) discusses the practical implementation of a mission policy, with the emphasis on theological education of black ministers, who would be able to work in rural communities. This approach was based on the assumption that knowledge of local language, customs and beliefs are essential to the effectiveness of mission. This mission policy led to the establishment of an indigenous, independent church. It is based on the assumption that mission could never depart from a position of power or the use of mission to transfer

Western culture to communities in Africa. It rests on a fundamental respect for indigenous language, cultures and beliefs.

This approach to mission is also evident in a later publication (Dreyer 1959) that appeared in *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* under the title *Ontwerp van 'n sendingbeleid* (Development of a mission policy). In this publication, he enters into a conversation with Hendrik Kraemer (Dreyer 1959:56). Why Kraemer? In the words of Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple (1881–1944):

[W]e have become accustomed to think of Dr. Hendrik Kraemer as one of the statesmen and seers of that enterprise [*mission*]. His range of knowledge is immense, and is illuminated by practical experience.... (Kraemer 1947a:xii)

Kraemer was, at the time Dreyer did his research on mission, one of the leading lights in Dutch mission theology, but also internationally.

Dreyer (1959:57) refers to the 1938 Tambaran consultation of the International Missionary Conference as a turning point in the understanding of mission *per se* as well as the practicalities of mission, *inter alia* through the contributions of Hendrik Kraemer. In 1936, Kraemer was invited to write a book in preparation for the Tambaram consultation (*The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*). The second edition appeared in 1947 (Kraemer 1947a). His views, to a large extent, were influenced by the theologies of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner.

In the first section (Dreyer 1959:56), he refers to the 'great Dutch missiologist' Hendrik Kraemer (1888–1956). In his discussion of Kraemer, he highlights the inherent polarity (dialectic) in Kraemer's missiology: Gospel and non-Christian beliefs; Gospel and culture; Church and world; Christ and the sinner. According to Kraemer, mission will become falsified and superficial if any of these polarities would be ignored. Dreyer agrees with Kraemer that Protestant missions during the 19th century neglected these polarities, with a negative impact on local customs and traditions. The colonial mindset of missionaries from the West negated the importance of indigenous culture and knowledge.

In Chapter IX of his *The Christian Message in a non-Christian World*, Kraemer (1947a:336–353) addressed the 'missionary approach' in Africa quite extensively. Kraemer (1947a) makes the following statement about mission in Africa:

The contrast of the political and economic interests of white and black people is particularly glaring, and hence the race problem has in Africa more bitter aspects than anywhere else. Christianity, which is largely identified by the African with Western civilisation, bears in consequence very distinctly the stamp of being the white man's religion, a foreign religion. The eyes of the thoughtful and imaginative missionary people have been opened in the last decades to the many precious values inherent in the ancestral African structure of life. (p. 337)

Kraemer puts his finger on the real challenge: The effects of colonialism and the relation between traditional beliefs and Christianity. He asks (Kraemer 1947a:337): 'What should be the leading ideas in our approach?' This is the question that Dreyer continually asked: What should NHKA's approach to mission be, in light of the political, economic, cultural and racial tensions? A point of departure is the fundamental respect for African cultures, languages, traditions, and religious beliefs. It is clear that Dreyer was very much influenced by Kraemer's thinking, as could be illustrated with a few examples.

Kraemer (1947a) refers to the 'progressive missionary thinking' in relation to Africa, as articulated by the 1926 missionary conference at Le Zoute. He formulates this as follows:

The necessity was deeply felt to make it clear that Christianity was not a white man's religion, but the religion of the African, and to free the missionary mind from its too sterile attitude towards the African and what he represents as to religious, moral and social values. Against this background we find that the recommendations of Le Zoute may be expressed as follows: The Gospel is the fulfilment of that toward which the Africans groped in the past, for the Divine Logos who lighteth every man has shone in the souls of Africans; hence, no destruction but systematic use of the African heritage is demanded. (p. 338)

This approach to mission in Africa, however, does not imply syncretism. Dreyer agrees with Kraemer's view that the greatest falsification of the gospel was a syncretistic approach to mission (Dreyer 1959:57), which departs from the assumption that there are common truths in all religions, and that all other religions should be regarded as a *praeparatio evangelii* (Kraemer 1947a:338), a sort of 'alternative Old Testament' preparing the way for the New Testament. In such an approach, Jesus Christ is just one redeemer among many. The unique revelation of God in and through Christ (Barth) moves to the background, while human ideals and religious experience (Schleiermacher) moves to the front. This critique shows a clear orientation towards Barthian theology.

A second form of syncretism and falsification of the gospel is to be found in the association of the gospel with (Western) culture. Dreyer is very critical of the idea that Christianity is part and parcel of Western culture, therefore mission has the obligation to transmit Western culture, traditions and religious convictions. If the purpose of mission was to 'civilise' the indigenous peoples and to assist them to attain an acceptable (Western) living standard, the whole enterprise was fundamentally flawed (Dreyer 1959:57–58). In such an approach, the gospel is identical to Western culture. The realisation that mission should and could not be about the transmission of Western culture, was an important consideration in formulating a mission policy and practice, because it rests on two false premises (Dreyer 1959:58). Firstly, it rests on the premise that indigenous culture is inferior and subservient to Western culture; secondly, it rests on the premise that all indigenous people will think that

Western civilisation is self-evidently 'higher', therefore attractive and something to aspire towards.

Dreyer (1959:59–61) points out that this myth of a superior Western civilisation and Church had been destroyed forcefully through various factors. Dreyer (1959:61–63) points out that concurrently with the re-appreciation of indigenous culture and values, the West lost faith in its own abilities and worth, carrying with it a feeling of guilt. It also impacted on the work of mission societies and churches. After the horrors of the World War II, the unprecedented acts of barbarism (for instance, the extermination camps in Germany and nuclear destruction of Japanese cities) and the realisation that colonialism and imperialism had cost the lives of millions of people in the Third World, the churches and mission societies were at a loss of how to continue. Dreyer (1959) is quite severe in his criticism of the post-war situation:

We [*the West*] have conquered the indigenous peoples of this world, we have destroyed (uitgeroei) them, we took their land, destroyed their value systems and stole their property, for the sake of material prosperity. We left them with nothing, all the wealth went to the West, and they were left with destruction, spiritual confusion, moral collapse.... (p. 62, translated by the author)

Dreyer concludes this section by describing the collapse of the mission enterprise. Mission had become impossible. This raises a fundamental question: How should the church proceed with mission, in obedience to the Great Commission of Matthew 28?

Dreyer (1959:63–66) proceeds with some basic principles that could underpin a new approach to mission, which could be summarised as follows:

- With reference to Kraemer, Dreyer underlines the importance of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, without falsifying it with a syncretistic approach towards indigenous belief systems or cultures, especially Western culture
- The dogma and confessions of the Church originated in a specific historical context, and although it remains important, should be recontextualised within the mission situation
- Missionaries should respect and have knowledge of indigenous knowledge systems, cultures and values; therefore, missionaries should be educated who could work among their own people. Interestingly enough, Dreyer started with extensive research of Zulu culture and religious beliefs, as well as the language. This project was performed in conjunction with lecturers at the University of Pretoria. An example of this research was published in 1965 (Dreyer 1965)
- This leads to the logical conclusion that indigenous churches should be established
- Mission and indigenous churches should be free from interference and manipulation by the State, funding churches or commercial entities

- There should be a realistic appreciation of diversity and various cultures, without falling back into racial or nationalistic prejudice.

This critical analysis and understanding of mission that Dreyer published in 1959 guided, to a large extent, the work he did in the mission field. He also took the trouble to study the religious beliefs, culture and language of the various ethnic groups. One example is his study of Zulu culture and beliefs (see Dreyer 1965). In this research, based on field work and oral tradition (Dreyer 1965:105), his philosophical background comes into play. This is evident in his discussion of the transcendental qualities of traditional religious beliefs within the Zulu culture, as well as the anthropomorphic qualities of supernatural beings and the intersection between natural and supra-natural beings (Dreyer 1965:103–104). With reference to classical philosophical anthropology (Dreyer 1965:103), he points out that culture is essential to human existence and that it should be discussed with respect and circumspection, especially when (for instance) Zulu traditional beliefs are brought into conversation with other traditional beliefs, for example, those of the Basotho (Dreyer 1965:104). It is clear that there are commonalities, but also great diversity, so that one cannot generalise by speaking of 'the Bantu (sic) religion', as if there is just one common belief system.

Dreyer gives quite an extensive overview of the Zulu concept of God, various divine powers (male and female), religious ceremonies, the role of the ancestors and many more. Because of limited space, I will only present his description of 'God'.

Dreyer mentions various names for 'God' under the Zulu, for instance, *uMvelinqangi* [the First One], *uSimakade* [the Eternal], and *uNkulunkulu* [the Great One] (see Dreyer 1965:106). These names are used differently in different areas. Over time, under the influence of Christianity, another name became more common, that is, *uThixo* [First and Exalted One]. Although God is perceived as exalted, the Zulu has always believed that God lives between people, but is also present in nature (Dreyer 1965:107). That is why God is aware of what people are doing and could manifest Godself in natural phenomena.

Traditionally, the Zulu had a fundamental understanding of sin and forgiveness, as well as the principle that people should live together in peace, living a good and decent life. Especially in times of drought and hardship they would pray 'Maye! Kwenzenjani baba, ngabe soneni phambi kwenu? Buyiselani ulaka lwenu emuva, ngoba nakhu siyaphela yindlala, izifo kanye nokufa imbala' (Dreyer 1965:107). In this prayer, the fathers (ancestors) are addressed as intermediaries to God. The relation between God and the people, and between people, could also be improved by maintaining the proper ceremonies, sacrifice and offerings.

For many, *uNkulunkulu*, refers to the first Ancestor, who had no father or mother, but who created the first people and in such a way created the continuum of descendants. He is worthy of praise and ceremonies (Dreyer 1965:108).

Dreyer mentions in passing that he tested the theory that his sources had some knowledge of the Scottish anthropologist Andrew Lang, who proposed in 1898 that the idea of a Supreme Being, the 'high God', or 'All Father' existed among some of the African tribes prior to their contact with Western peoples, and that *Urmonotheismus* (primitive monotheism) was the original religion of humankind (Dreyer 1965:110). However, none of the sources gave any indication of prior knowledge of the theories of Lang or any other Western theologian; insisting that the concept of 'God' as creator of humanity existed among the Zulu before the dawn of time, before any missionaries came to Zululand, and had been passed down from generation to generation. The fundamental difference with the Zulu understanding of God, according to various sources, is the fact that the Christian God revealed Himself, while in Zulu traditional belief God rarely reveals Godself.

In terms of the Zulu understanding of God, Dreyer (1965:110) comes to the conclusion that his sources are convinced that common ground between Christianity and traditional beliefs exists. The missionaries did not bring God to the Africa, God was already there. Those who converted to Christianity, believe that the Christian God is the Almighty and the highest God, but this does not imply that the divine beings, spirits and ancestors of the Zulus should be regarded as demonic. Whenever traditional beliefs and Christianity co-existed, churches would grow at a fast rate.

This knowledge of and fundamental respect for the indigenous culture, language and religious beliefs of the different ethnic groups of South Africa, was (to my opinion) the primary motivation for Dreyer to implement a policy of creating indigenous, independent churches. The establishment of separate ethnic churches was not the result of perverse racism (which would have made mission completely impossible), but of theological reflection on the question of enculturation and the relation between Christian faith and traditional beliefs. In this regard, it is quite interesting to follow Dreyer's *marginalia* in the publications of Kraemer (1947a, 1947b, 1956) where those questions are addressed. It could also be the reason why Dreyer was held in such high esteem in the rural communities he visited (even on horseback!), as well as successful church planting and the establishment of more than 60 congregations in a relatively short period.

## Concluding remarks

I once had the opportunity, during a December holiday at Buffalo Bay in the Western Cape, to have a long discussion with Prof. P.S. Dreyer about his role in the mission work of the NHKA. At one stage, during the conversation, he became very quiet. Eventually he remarked:

I often wondered, whether our approach to mission was right. But today I know, that we would not have been successful with our mission work if we did not do what we did.

I will never forget those words. It articulated something of his pragmatic approach to mission, based on theological reflection influenced by Kraemer and other Dutch missiologists.

The remark quoted here, also articulated in some way the opposition he had to overcome, from different groups. He had to find a way between the enthusiasts with unrealistic expectations of mission; those who decried the NHKA mission policy as racist; and those who tried to derail the mission to black communities.

The establishment of an indigenous, black church could be seen in a negative light. In the context of the period 1950–1990, the heyday of apartheid, driving an extensive mission project required courage, time, effort, and resources. The existence of the MRCC as an independent and indigenous church, is not the result of racism, but of theological reflection and the conviction that the gospel of Jesus Christ should be contextual. Mission and church should reflect a fundamental respect for the indigenous cultures, language and beliefs of all people, to become truly contextual (see for instance the discussion various contextual ecclesiologies in Kärkkäinen (2002:168–238)). It is apparent that the establishment of an independent, indigenous church was primarily driven by Dreyer's conviction that mission may never lose the fundamental respect for indigenous culture, language, and beliefs.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The author declares that no financial or personal relationships inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

### Author's contributions

W.A.D., is the sole author of this research article.

### Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

### Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

### Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

### Disclaimer

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