



Peace-seeking Afrikaans editors in the apartheid era: Journalistic perspectives in a theological framework



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In this study, the ethical-journalistic contributions of five apartheid-era Afrikaans language newspaper editors are taken into review: Schalk Pienaar (*Die Beeld* and *Beeld*), Willem de Klerk (*Die Transvaler* and *Rapport*), Frits Gaum (*Die Kerkbode*), Doret Jansen (*Western Transvaal Record*) and Max Du Preez (*Vrye Weekblad*). Their ethical-journalistic contributions are described, keeping in mind the constraints within which they operated in these five diverse newspapers. Based on Christian historical-theological considerations, evaluative remarks are made, *en route* to promoting ethically sound journalism.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The use of central theological ideas and/or a theological framework to evaluate aspects of societal ethics in the practice of journalism, here more specifically in the history of Afrikaans journalism, is explored.

Keywords: ethical journalism; Christian evaluation; apartheid-era journalism; Schalk Pienaar; Willem de Klerk; Frits Gaum; Doret Jansen; Max Du Preez.

Introduction

In the decades before the demise of apartheid, the South African press, specifically the English-language newspapers, was at the forefront of the non-violent struggle for justice and freedom for all (see, e.g. Gibson 2007:60–64; Heard 1990:160–164; Manoim 1996; Mervis 1989:453–465; Shaw 1999:288–305; Tyson 1987, 1993). In contrast, the Afrikaans press mostly supported the National Party (NP), that is, the government of the day (see, e.g. Cillie 1992:457–486; Louw 2015:116–120; Richard 1986:97–105; Scholtz 2015:27–38).

However, some Afrikaans journalists had in many ways actively opposed some, though not all, of the apartheid laws and practices. This they at times did in a confrontational or adversarial manner; others chose what could be called a more careful or painstaking approach. This article takes note of five editor-journalists from both groups, indicating the diversity of their attempts at promoting peace in South Africa by means of their active support for a more just society. Schalk Pienaar (*Die Beeld* and *Beeld*), Willem de Klerk (*Die Transvaler* and *Rapport*), Frits Gaum (*Die Kerkbode*), Doret Jansen (*Western Transvaal Record* [WTR]) and Max Du Preez (*Vrye Weekblad*) practiced journalism which was not consistent with what is usually regarded as 'peace journalism', but it is demonstrable that they promoted peace in a fundamental way – each in their own way.

This aspect of peace can be founded on various philosophical or theological groundings. As we know from the work of, for instance, Carl Schmitt (1922 [1934], 1970 [2008]; cf. Lombaard 2019:1–6), there is no important political concept without its metaphysical parallel, which counterpart functions usually as implicit motivation or underlying support for modern political ideas and actions. In the case of South Africa, being such a highly religious country, which religiosity is most firmly established within the Christian traditions (with these demographic figures traced in the Froese editions from 1986 onwards), such implicit groundings (cf. Bailey 2012) can be sought within biblical-theological impulses towards peace and justice (a combination of concepts brought influentially into focus within the 1980s South African political context in Nolan 1982). In this contribution, therefore, the works of these five editor-journalists, taken together, are placed within a theological interpretative framework.

Four matters here outline the scene to be described below:

- The editors we focus on here may not necessarily be categorised as the 'best' or most progressive journalists of their time. The choice of these five rather represents a purposive sample of those Afrikaans journalists who took a specific stand and have thus contributed to the eventual change in the trajectory of South African politics. They worked for various media

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houses, edited a range of publications (dailies, Sunday papers, a community paper, a church weekly and an anti-establishment political weekly) and did so over a significant period of time.

- It must additionally be stressed that some of the publications they were associated with had long apartheid-supporting histories (see, e.g. Olivier 1998; Scholtz 2015). What is important here, although, as was stated above, is that these five editors each contributed significantly to a change in political direction at their respective publications, and thus with regard to Afrikaans journalism in general.
- Although we will focus on five editors and their publications and the role that they each played in preparing its (white) Afrikaans readers for fundamental political, social, cultural and theological changes, the contributions of other Afrikaans editors are naturally to be acknowledged too. Although contributions by some or all of the five editors may be regarded by critics as too little, too late, they did play a demonstrable role in preparing the stage for the incremental changes that predated the decisive announcement by President FW de Klerk on 02 February 1991.
- It must certainly be noted too that some Afrikaans-speaking journalists were also prominent as political reporters and as editors at anti-apartheid English newspapers.

As should be clear from these four points that this article acknowledges the complexity of the earlier journalistic landscape, along with the varied ways journalists attempted to influence the Afrikaans public, some of whom were also readers of the English language press. It was, after all, they (the white Afrikaans voting public) who had a decisive electoral say in ending the apartheid system, when they voted Yes to fundamental changes in a white-only referendum in 1992.

The selected editors are here not discussed in chronological order. We rather focus firstly on the journalist who, at face value, can be regarded as having been most closely associated with a form of peace journalism or developmental journalism, and we close with the most adversarial of the five editors, one who put his personal well-being on the line in order openly to confront the apartheid government and its repressive laws. The editors' work is briefly discussed within the said theoretical possibilities, followed by a theological perspective on their journalism as an interpretative framework.

The latter theological perspective will now be outlined.

The interpretative frame

The differing journalistic endeavours are below discussed and evaluated, particularly from the widely held theological view that peace cannot be achieved unless justice is prevalent in a society. The foundational Christian tenet of seeking peace through justice is thus firstly explored here, in order to form

an interpretative framework for evaluating these five editors' contributions to justice and peace in South Africa (which was part of the Nolan 1982 publication). This article therefore has a strong interdisciplinary flavour: the journalistic activities are contextualised within political developments but are interpreted in view of theologically informed perspectives.

Furthermore, the focus on these journalistic efforts is particularly relevant as a balancing counterpoint to the influential role Christians as individuals and the churches as institutions to a substantial extent played in the formulation and justification of apartheid, as was also the case with its rejection (e.g. variously, Du Toit 1959; Kinghorn 1986; Maimela 1987; Mbiti 1986; Moila 1991:25–36; Mosala 1987; Motlhabi 1987:1–14; Ngcokovane 1989; Serfontein 1982; Villa-Vicencio 1977, 1988). Whilst it seems all too often easy to sketch past eras monochromatically in the light of the central truths of the present, it is historiographically more honest to portray the diversity that was fully a part of a now bygone era (cf. Lombaard 2001:69–87), in trying to acknowledge something of the complexity of matters that had been at stake. Each period has its alternative trajectories of thoughts and actions, the textures of which may well have been repressed to a substantial extent by the dominant truths of that day. We should for the sake of both historical thoroughness and evaluative fairness not allow that such dominant truths are carried forward into our time, blinding us to the nuances of then and feeding only the dominant discourses of now.

Diversity is namely an important, central characteristic to all important matters related to religiosity. Only on the fringes of fundamentalisms, both religious and anti-religious, are monochromatic views held and held forth regarding matters of faith, past and present. Contestation is a natural corollary of importance, with as its alternatives suppression during the time history plays out and superficiality in later historiography. With important matters of faith and justice, how could that be different?

A few examples from the history of Christianity, briefly illustrated, will suffice to illustrate this diversity. These instances cannot at all be discussed in any depth here. They are chosen from research insights, here summarised, on different epochs relating to the Christian historical-theological stream, merely to give an indication that romanticised pasts of imagined unity within this religious identity, never existed. Rather, to take here one step further the conclusion in Lombaard 2011:13–14, firstly now quoted before elaborated upon:

- when, for instance, ancient Israel in the last half-millennium BCE tries to construct a larger than life Moses figure with which to attempt the unification of its various Yahwisms
- when, for instance, the Christian church in the first century CE tries to construct miracle stories around the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, in order to prove to their contemporaries that he is He

- when, for instance, the post-Constantinian church tries to construct a highly hierarchical view of God and of church in order to cast the Western world as an eternal city (state) of God
- when, for instance, the later Enlightenment European society (and all societies around the world touched by it) tries to construct a Christianity eminently suited to the rationality it holds so dear
- when, for instance, South American and African theologians since the middle of the 1900s try to construct a God that is less European and more revolutionary, which will destroy oppressive structures of society and bring greater freedom to the disempowered
- when, for instance, an artist or a preacher in our time tries to construct a Jesus who is HIV-positive, in order to say something meaningful about the major pandemic of our age then
- all those attempts are equally valid, inasmuch as they try to give expression to certain theological truths for that specific society within its particular time frame and then
- all those attempts are equally invalid, inasmuch as the (intentional or unintentional) endeavour to be contextually relevant renders theological truths that are highly meaningful within a circumscribed set of circumstances, but which are then elevated to the status of all-encompassing truths, so that they on their part become oppressive truths, forced onto contexts foreign to the value they had.

The last two bullets above, the conclusions, seek together to demonstrate from the foregoing that awareness of past contexts softens harsh truth claims from and on those areas, on the one hand. On the other hand, such awareness opens the eyes for the difficulties people in each age have in giving expression to convictions in the face of personal and social limitations. As valid as this is within the domain of religion, as valid is it within the domain of journalism.

These brief examples further serve to illustrate that through contestation emerges some sense of the 'good', with the latter understood both in its moral sense as the life-of-value as pursued in the philosophical traditions of the past three millennia in the Western-Christian tradition (cf. Dallmayr 2007), and in the sense of the concrete well-being of individuals and groups within society – a research theme of much currency in recent years (cf. eds. Miner & Dowson 2016). Seen from a perspectival distance, journalism and theology namely share the phenomenological trait that both pursue this 'good' in society. Precisely, this phenomenological trait held in common enables fruitful comparisons between, or coordination of, these two aspects of current human existence. The means by which journalism and theology respectively pursue this good in society are admittedly quite different. Furthermore, the respective objectives may not always coincide and may in fact be at odds with one another – with the latter that on its part constitutes yet another instance of contestation as a sign of diversity, which has been the essence of the argument immediately above, in pursuing

the good in society. This has in fact been institutionally recognised where students of journalism, theology and sociology had been trained together. As important for the purposes here, although, is that the phenomenological orientation just indicated facilitates an evaluative or interpretative framework from theology on journalistic activities. The broadly shared Western-Christian cultural-historical setting of these two aspects further enables such an interpretative framework.

With South Africa being both a highly religious and a highly diverse society, the contentious matters of race and rights, of politics and justice had, and will, with no surprise reflect different approaches to any matter. All the editors to be discussed below functioned within such a matrix of religious and political diversity, and reflected either purposely or less directly, via influence on *inter alia* their sense of justice, these impulses from faith. The ideals of value-free objectivity and of religion-free modernity (cf. Latour 1993:10–12, 46–48) were never part of the intellectual, professional and existential lifeworlds in which these editors worked. To be sure, a number of them had strong religious commitments, with two having been church pastors, one before and one during their respective editorships. To employ the framework of religious diversity in seeking justice and peace as a network of interpretation of these editors is therefore fully cogent.

The work of the said five editor-journalists is investigated here in light of the widely held tenant that peace is in final analysis only possible where a significant degree of justice prevails (König 2006:491; Nürnberger, Tooke & Domeris 1989:11; Van Wyk 2008:1175).

The peace referred to here is thus more than a superficial absence of conflict, but something deeper. It presupposes an active search for justice – even if it results in non-violent conflict, thus a contestation of ideas in search of truth.

One could argue that no peace is possible without some conflict of ideas, which is obviously prevalent in journalism. In fact, journalism sometimes provides the catalyst for such debates. Therefore, the search for peace through justice can be described as a manifestation of peace journalism.

However, could any journalism which did not fundamentally oppose apartheid in all its manifestations, in any way be equated with peace and justice? What are the implications of this for historiography? How should we assess the journalism of another era? We revisit these questions in the conclusion below.

The struggle for justice and peace: Five case studies

Doret Jansen

South Africa's first fully democratic elections in 1994 were preceded by widespread violence and uncertainty (Giliomee 2004:593–610). Newspaper headlines at the time reflected

this, for example, ANC beloof nog geweld (*ANC promises more violence*, *Beeld*, 13 April 1993). In the Klerksdorp–Orkney–Stilfontein–Hartbeesfontein area, the tension was also prevalent, but roleplayers experienced it differently (Koppejan 2005:130). In this context, the group editor of three community newspapers, Doret Jansen, promoted peace in her community by reporting positive news about the coming elections and about the community in general. She also actively participated in or supported various community initiatives (Koppejan 2005:134–135). Her contribution is thus placed towards the very end of the apartheid era, just before the April 1994 elections which elevated Nelson Mandela to the presidency of a fully democratic South Africa.

In several editorials in her flagship paper, *WTR* Jansen put forcefully forward her viewpoint that it was not sufficient merely to reflect her community in the newspaper (*WTR* 17–18 June 1993). She therefore encouraged her readers to become actively involved in the run-up to the elections (*WTR* 15–16 July 1993). She also requested leaders to ignore personal differences (*WTR* 05–06 August 1993), having the foresight to predict that the elections were not going to be perfect and that readers would have to accept this (*WTR* 31 December 1993). She also pleaded that both apartheid and the *one-settler, one-bullet* approach should make way for a spirit of reconciliation (*WTR* 14–15 April 1994).

In its reports, the *WTR* covered the Western Transvaal Peace Committee (*WTR* 13–14 May 1993) and other similar initiatives (e.g. *WTR* 17–18 June 1993; *WTR* 26–27 August 1993; *WTR* 31 March–01 April 1994). In special supplements, political parties' views were given air. Elements of nation-building could repeatedly be identified in the *WTR* reportage, reflecting Jansen's intuitive support for the development model for journalism (see McQuail 1987:119–121), thus a positive, constructive role within a precarious political climate.

In the two free newspapers, similar content was found. The supplements *Active Voice* and *Election '94* called on black readers to participate actively (Koppejan 2005:114–116). In news reports, the peace messages were given prominence, for example, an article titled 'Pray for peace' (*Lentswe* 27 Augustus 1993). However, both *Lentswe* and the *KR* carried no editorial comment, and therefore gave less editorial prominence to the elections, reflecting a careful strategy on the part of the editor in taking the various readerships into consideration. The readership of the *WTR* and *KR* would namely have included substantial constituencies with fears and misgivings about the dawning new South African era, whereas the typical reader of *Lentswe* would have expected to gain much in the new political dispensation.

As an experienced, multi-award-winning editor, Jansen understood the a-political tradition of community newspapers. She however also realised that, given the historic political moment in South Africa, the old approach would not be adequate. Whilst she shunned a party-political stance, she did choose sides – for peace via understanding and for

acceptance of a new dispensation which promised human rights and dignity for all, that is, in favour of justice.

After her untimely death in 2002, Jansen was hailed by all sectors of the community (*North West Record* 10–11 October; Monama 2002:4). Jansen certainly broke the mould of the 'neutral' local editor too afraid to get involved in socio-political developments.

Frits Gaum

Dr Frits Gaum worked as a pastor-journalist whilst editing the oldest Afrikaans publication, *Kerkbode*, from 1986 to 2004. Here, at the official newspaper of the largest church amongst Afrikaners, the Dutch Reformed Church (NG Kerk), he played a careful yet distinct role in promoting peace through justice. As 17th editor of the publication, Gaum offered qualified support to the fundamental changes that were sweeping the country during his editorship (Froneman 2015; Gaum 2004a:8; Olivier 1998:191–195, 219)

Gaum's position was in this respect unenviable, as his church was by no means a beacon of reform, housing as it did many supporters of the Conservative Party (later the Freedom Front) who rejected the 1994 constitution and what it entailed. However, Gaum insisted that he had the right to voice an opinion within the church (Gaum 2004b; Heyns 1989; Olivier 1998:215; Rosenfeld 2001). Late in the 1980s, he, for instance, criticised the state of emergency (Olivier 1998:203–206). However, as Rosenfeld (2001:107–117) argued, Gaum viewed the grievances of ordinary black people as something apart from the revolutionary forces (*Die Kerkbode* 22 April 1987 and 16 February 1990, as quoted by Rosenfeld 2002). Gaum later acknowledged that he had indeed viewed black people's needs and demands too theoretically. He was thus by no means another Beyers Naudé, who had broken with the church and Afrikaner establishment in the early 1960s and supported the liberation cause with great courage (cf. Villa-Vicencio 1996:218–231).

Gaum did however play a meaningful role in the slow move away from apartheid by the NG Kerk. After the general synod of 1990 and the Rustenburg church conference (cf. *NIR News* 1990), *Die Kerkbode* summarised the situation as follows: 'Now all concerned know: the official Dutch Reformed Church acknowledges that apartheid is a sin and it confesses as wrong its part in the implementation of the policy' (translated; *Die Kerkbode* 16 November 1990, as quoted by Olivier 1998:200). It was Gaum's task, as an editor of the official publication of the NG Kerk, to publicise the fact that a line had been drawn through the church's theological support of apartheid.

Gaum (1997) wrote on this in *Die verhaal van die Ned Geref Kerk se reis met apartheid, 1960–1994 (The story of the Dutch Reformed Church and its journey with apartheid, 1960–1994)*, which was submitted to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (Olivier 1998:200–201). However, the church did not officially

sanction this witness (Meiring 2003:250–207). In *DieKerkbode*, Gaum gave extensive coverage to the TRC and encouraged readers to take cognisance of what transpired at these sessions (see Thesnaar 2013:54–66).

Regarding structural unity within the family of Dutch Reformed churches (which was a matter which lay, in a strong sense, at the heart of the apartheid ideology or theology), Gaum took a strongly positive stance in favour of unity (Olivier 1998:208). He furthermore allowed space in *Die Kerkbode* for a long-running debate on the Belhar Confession (cf. eds. Plaatjies-Van Huffel & Modise 2017), which was closely related to the church unity issue (Olivier 1998:208, 209). Later Gaum would concede that this effort had been in vain (Gaum 2010:95–103).

Gaum also posed critical questions about the Day of the Covenant, for long an integral part of apartheid theology (cf. Coetzee 1984; Froneman 2015:125–150; Meyer & Naudé 1971), as it was commemorated as the day on which God gave a military victory to the Afrikaners (over the Zulus), thereby confirming the notion that the Afrikaner was blessed by God in a special way. This was increasingly being questioned by Afrikaner Christians. Later, when this commemoration was officially replaced by the Day of Reconciliation, Gaum accepted the new spirit of the day and articulated it in a manner fully at odds with his predecessors in that editor's chair (Froneman 2015:125–150).

Gaum (2010:95–103) later described his editorship as one in which (white) Afrikaners were bidding farewell to apartheid. The NG Kerk and its official newspaper, *DieKerkbode*, were now in a more accommodating phase and had therefore become reticent to make strong, 'final' pronouncements. Gaum himself contributed to this new approach, as his publication encouraged greater sensitivity and a genuine search for peace through justice.

Willem de Klerk

Willem (Wimpie) de Klerk became editor-in-chief of *Die Transvaler* in 1973. This daily newspaper was founded in 1937 in Johannesburg to promote Afrikaner nationalism as espoused by the NP (Muller 1990:492–495). De Klerk had been a philosophy professor and a pastor in the Gereformeerde Kerke (Reformed Churches) before he was head-hunted to take over the editorial leadership of *Die Transvaler* for its upcoming battle with *Beeld*, a new daily soon to be founded in Johannesburg (Scholtz, Du Plessis & De Beer 1992:304).

As editor of *Die Transvaler*, he soon took a critical line against certain policies of the Vorster government, particularly those pertaining to 'petty apartheid' (i.e. racial segregation in everyday life) and the political future of urban black people (i.e. those not accommodated in the ethnic 'homelands') (Botha 2012a). In a nutshell, De Klerk transformed the conservative *Transvaler* (founded by H.F. Verwoerd in 1937) into a much more liberal paper, whilst

also continuing his column in the more widely read *Rapport*, thus keeping his country-wide audience (Mouton 2002:144; Scholtz 1992a:267, 268).

Upon De Klerk's death in 2009, a senior Afrikaans journalist, Tim Du Plessis, noted that De Klerk had given 'gravitas' to *Die Transvaler*, which attracted readers (Du Plessis 2009). He was a 'wordsmith who had the knack of finding the right word or phrase'; with other leading editors such as Piet Cillie and Schalk Pienaar, De Klerk 'continuously challenged conceited Afrikaner nationalists' solutions' (Du Plessis 2009:7; translated).

De Klerk's views drew strong reaction, resulting in him being denigrated by critics within the NP (Richard 1986:105). He also endured the worst of times when it was found that his paper's circulation figures had been manipulated (Botha 2012a; Scholtz 1992b:291–292). He later resigned as editor of *Die Transvaler*, but was in 1983 appointed editor-in-chief of *Rapport*, a much larger newspaper (Scholtz 1992a:273). This restored him to an eminent position of influence, which he used to espouse his 'verligte' (liberal) views on various issues, including a new constitutional dispensation and the government's stance on the ANC (which was still banned at the time) (Botha 2012b).

On 07 July 1985, De Klerk wrote in *Rapport* that 'the apartheid policy was no basis on which to build the future' and that 'blacks had to be given participation from top to bottom' (*Rapport* 04 August 1985; translated). Given that government had just taken a major step by bringing mixed races and Indians into parliament, his criticism was telling, although hardly radical. This was exactly what the opposition Progressive Federal Party had earlier proposed, but De Klerk was now writing this in a government-supporting Afrikaans newspaper. As such it was ground-breaking and salient. Fortunately, *Rapport* had since its founding in 1970 been an independent newspaper, critical in style, as developed by its first editor, Willem Wepener (Scholtz 1992a:260, 261).

De Klerk's outspoken views resulted in tension between him and the board of directors. His position was not supported by somewhat weakening circulation figures. He later wrote that he experienced the pressure to be more supportive of the NP government as repulsive, impairing his credibility and obstructing him to do his job as editor (Botha 2012b). After four productive years, he resigned under huge pressure and took early retirement (Scholtz 1992a:274).

In 2000, he wrote a book, *Kroes, kras, kordaat*, leading to sharp criticism by a former member of his staff at *Die Transvaler*, Chris Louw. Louw's 'open letter' to De Klerk (which became known as the 'Boetmanbrief') challenged De Klerk for his moral and intellectual support of the NP, thereby contradicting the narrative of De Klerk being a thought leader. This resulted in a long polemic in Afrikaans newspapers (Louw 2001:7–35).

However, when De Klerk died in 2009, he was lauded for this contribution to the renewal of Afrikaans journalism. A former

colleague and editor, Harald Pakendorf, remarked: 'He prepared people to be more receptive of a new political approach' (*Beeld* 08 Augustus 2009; translated).

Schalk Pienaar

The Sunday newspaper *Die Beeld* was started in 1965 with Schalk Pienaar as editor. Pienaar's robust, confrontational journalism confirmed the worst fears of his conservative critics. He drew many readers, but also made a fair number of enemies, particularly amongst far-right Nationalists, some of whom later broke away from the ruling NP to form the Herstigte Nasionale Party (Serfontein 1970:219–230).

Writing in the first edition of the new paper, the senior political commentator of the Nasionale Pers group said that 'by serving the Afrikaner *Die Beeld* also endeavoured to serve all of South Africa and its people' (De Villiers 1992:242; translated). Given the strong apartheid sentiments still prevalent in 1965, this statement did not come across as obvious as it would seem today.

Pienaar's newspaper actively tried to broaden the minds of its white Afrikaans readers by challenging them in various ways. This included the introduction of English-speaking commentators such as Dennis Worrall (Pienaar 1979:82–85). The paper's political reporting was notably more critical in comparison to what Afrikaans readers had been used to with NP-supporting papers. Davis (1983:34) concludes in her study of *Die Beeld* that the paper precipitated the emancipation of Afrikaans journalism: 'It was the beginning of the end of subservient Afrikaans newspapers' (Davis 1983:34; translated). Pienaar's biographer, Alex Mouton, describes his role as meaningful but also acknowledges the role of colleagues (Mouton 2002:163).

The 1969 revolt as well as the 1982 breakaway by the Conservative Party were, in retrospect, necessary for later reforms to be accepted by the party, as the NP had thus shed its more conservative supporters (see Giliomee 2012:174–176). In this regard, Pienaar and his colleagues at other Afrikaans newspapers supported a break with orthodoxy, *en route* to the more fundamental shifts of the 1990s (see Mouton 2002:52; Richard 1986:97–102,111–114, 118–122).

Pienaar's contribution was more than only the practice of adversarial journalism, which had rarely been seen before in Afrikaans. His passion was to confront Afrikaners with 'hard truths and challenges' (Mouton 2002:110, 164; translated). This approach was also transplanted to the later daily newspaper called *Beeld*, which was also edited briefly by Pienaar (Mouton 2002:137–146). A former colleague points out that Pienaar chose to fight the injustices of apartheid from within, railing against 'despicable, crazy discrimination based on colour alone' (Holtzapfel 2016). However, Pienaar believed that ethnic homelands for black people were part of the solution, that is, 'grand apartheid' (Mouton 2002:110–112, 120). Notwithstanding this support for a policy that would later be totally discredited, he was a 'revolutionary'

editor (as described by an English-speaking editor fiercely opposed to apartheid) and a fighter for justice who made a significant contribution to the moral awakening of Afrikaans newspaper readers. For this, he was acknowledged by President Nelson Mandela, who conferred on him the Order of Ikhamanga in Silver (Mouton 2002:163–164; also see Scholtz et al. 1992:314; Serfontein 1970:221).

Max Du Preez

In the midst of a state of emergency in the 1980s, Max Du Preez and a small group of Afrikaans journalists turned their backs on the mainstream media and started an alternative weekly, *Vrye Weekblad* (Free Weekly) (Du Preez 2005:5, 2009:217–224). By the time the weekly closed its doors in 1994, South Africa had changed unrecognisably. In this transformation process, *Vrye Weekblad* not only played a role in uncovering some of the apartheid regime's dark secrets but was also symbolically important, as it fiercely opposed apartheid in the Afrikaans, the primary language of the government.

Du Preez started his career at the government-supporting newspapers *Die Burger* and *Beeld*, covering parliament and the road to independence in Namibia. He later moved to the more critical English-language *Financial Mail*, *Sunday Times* and *Business Day*. However, the restless Du Preez self-avowedly did not fit there either (Du Preez 2003:139).

Vrye Weekblad then became his vehicle to practice an adversarial, anti-establishment form of journalism, asking incisive questions about Afrikaner history and culture in a manner not seen before (Du Preez 2003:172, 173). Holy cows were slaughtered mercilessly, although not without some humour (Norton 2013).

Politically motivated violence and the 'hypocrisy and injustices of apartheid' featured strongly in *Vrye Weekblad* (Honiball 2013). Du Preez recalls that the apartheid state's assassinations came increasingly closer as he knew some of the victims. It became, in a way, his and *Vrye Weekblad*'s 'business' (Du Preez 2005:66). Apartheid 'death squads' were exposed, in particular the murder of anti-apartheid activists (cf. Du Preez 2005:38–47; Vrey 2013:33–35).

In doing so, *Vrye Weekblad* confronted its relatively small readership with brutal realities; however, these shocking reports could not be ignored by the mainstream press. Du Preez and his colleagues clearly believed that apartheid had to be exposed fully before there could be justice and peace, although no theological motivation should be attributed here.

Du Preez provocatively stated that he was not ashamed of calling himself an Afrikaner or Boer (*Vrye Weekblad* 30 May–06 June 1991). This said much about his free spirit, and his refusal to be placed in a traditional ethnic box: he was indeed unashamed of his roots, but certainly not in the

same way as right-wingers would cast themselves (Pretorius & Froneman 2018; Vrey 2013:31, 32).

Vrye Weekblad closed in 1994, as it was financially crippled by overseas funding for alternative, anti-apartheid publications drying up in the wake of the new democratic dispensation, as well as by a libel case finding that went against *Vrye Weekblad* (the publication was, however, vindicated, too late, in a subsequent court ruling) (Du Preez 2003:224–232).

Du Preez then moved to the national broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation, where he was involved in the investigative programme *Special assignment* as well as in coverage of the Truth and Reconciliation hearings. Eventually, his robust, uncompromising style did not sit well with the new managers who supported the African National Congress in a compliant manner and he was fired (Du Preez 2009:294–304).

Du Preez now became a respected writer and political commentator on various platforms and in newspapers, including *News24*, *Die Burger* and *Beeld*, publications he had left years ago, under the previous dispensation (Pretorius 2008:17–20; Retief 2015). In 2019, with the support of a major media house, he revived *Vrye Weekblad*, but now as an Internet publication.

His editorship of the original *Vrye Weekblad* will, however, remain a high point of his remarkable career of seeking justice (and peace) through journalism.

Some journalistic conclusions

The journalistic efforts described above entailed various approaches. This possibly resulted in some success, that is, a contribution to peace via justice-supporting journalism. How successful they were is not at issue here, but the manner in which they utilised their editorial positions for the greater good – efforts that can also be appreciated theologically.

Both Pienaar and Du Preez challenged the establishment with a combination of robust reporting and agitating comment. But whereas *Die Beeld* was a mass newspaper that had to balance its strong political thrust with (other) populist content, *Vrye Weekblad* had the freedom to be overtly political. Cultural issues more often than not also had a strong political dimension.

Die Beeld was published by Nasionale Pers and was thus linked strongly to the NP, its policies and its loyal Afrikaner supporters in the years 1965–1970. Pienaar did indeed challenge the conservative ('verkrampte') interpretation of Afrikaner nationalism but was still within the kraal. On the other hand, Du Preez was free of these restrictions, had a free-thinking readership and edited *Vrye Weekblad* 20 years later, thus at a stage when the apartheid dream had all but disintegrated and the Afrikaner establishment was fighting with its back against the wall.

Willem de Klerk was not a hands-on editor at *Die Transvaler* and *Rapport*, but his influence was marked. He was a thinker who carefully sought ways to reform grand apartheid to become a more just dispensation. As a commentator, he was certainly a leading voice, but he later acknowledged that his efforts to bring about peace through justice fell short. However, his role as political writer and editor cannot be ignored. In the same vein, another theologian, Frits Gaum, can be mentioned. As editor of *Die Kerkbode*, he had to be careful, but he questioned and was prepared to change.

Gaum's softer tone is echoed in the remarkable work done by Doret Jansen at the *WTR* (and sister papers). Jansen also encouraged dialogue but actively became involved in various community projects. Both Gaum and Jansen sought peace through justice, but Gaum could naturally write in another register and with a theological dimension not possible in a community paper.

Had De Klerk or Gaum been inclined to edit their publications with more anti-apartheid vigour, they would surely have been relieved of their duties promptly. As it was, De Klerk was fired – twice. Pienaar was in the fortunate position that his board of directors stood firmly behind him, but he would have been removed if he blatantly rejected apartheid outright.

Some theological conclusions

The diverse ways in which the editor-journalists reacted to the apartheid-era contexts within which they worked and the boundaries they sought to stretch, ought to be seen as a sign of their authenticity. Not speaking with a unified voice, but precisely the different ways by which and contexts within which they wrought their trade, show the validity of their enterprise; this, despite all manner of criticism that can, of course, be brought against them as individuals, as a group and as implicated perpetrators in the apartheid project.

Without arguing that their endeavours were thus only self-effacingly noble and free from self-interest or even forms of racism, we pose the further question: can we accuse without implying our own guilt, in similar and other ways too? It seems that whilst these editors may have been cased within the group-think and the contexts of their times, they did in some sense try to act prophetically, by promoting peace and justice – not as opposites, but conjointly – through the medium of their respective publications. Even Du Preez, who at first worked for apartheid-supporting papers and later for English-language papers that opposed apartheid, but whose owners and readers benefited to some extent from the apartheid state, was only more substantially freed to oppose apartheid with no holds barred when he founded his own paper. Even then, he had to deal with the financial realities of publishing a weekly, and with the legal framework, which consumed much of his resources.

As we saw indicated in briefest instances from the history of Christianity, each decision and utterance is fraught with

dangers, as much to the speakers themselves, directly and in their own time, as to us who may later from a different world (cf. Sparks 1994) seek to wrangle in our own image and mangle according to our particular ethical horizons their life's work. To judge harshly is all too easily done. To evaluate historically sensibly is a difficult undertaking, yet educationally more productive: more may be gleaned in reflection for our own practice in our own contexts.

A hermeneutical approach such as this could lead to the accusation that one somehow seeks to excuse those who did not do more against the apartheid project, as insiders – albeit to various degrees – in that socio-political system. To seek to understand however does not mean the same as seeking to offer justifications. As important for the purposes here is that the phenomenological orientation employed facilitates, as a next step, an evaluative or interpretative framework, such as that from theology, on journalistic activities. This approach could contribute in some measure to understanding responsible journalism in the apartheid era other than the brave anti-apartheid journalism practised by many journalists at their own peril.

Journalism remains, in conclusion, an art and craft that was (and is) by its very nature 'embedded', involved in a matrix of economic, ideological, legal and other contextual realities.

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Authors' contributions

J.D.F. conceptualised the article and wrote the journalistic-historical parts. C.J.L. provided the theological-interpretative framework. J.D.F. and C.J.L. together added the critical evaluations.

Ethical consideration

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