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# THE SPIRITUAL MENTALITY PROFILE OF FEMALE PIETISTS ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN FRONTIER, 1750-1860

## ABSTRACT

The reading of female religious literature on the South African frontier allows us to reconstruct important elements of a shared religious mentality profile of these pioneer female believers. Such a reconstruction of the religious mentality profile of pietistic women on the frontier reveals a number of important aspects for understanding their spiritual life: self-awakenings and conversions; self-purification; self-illumination and mystically tainted experiences; recollection and the experience of quiet; meditation, contemplation, ecstasy and rapture; spiritual desertion, and abandonment of the soul and the unitive life with God in Christ.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Research on Pietism in religious communities in Europe has flourished over the past few decades<sup>1</sup> and Pietism, as a religious phenomenon in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century South African communities, has also received increasing attention.<sup>2</sup> According to Strom (2002:536-554), scholarly interest in Pietism has increased significantly since 1970, and research on Pietism – once the distinct province of German church historians – has become increasingly international as well as interdisciplinary in scope, as Germanists, musicologists, and historians of Christianity explore the influence of this movement in Europe and the New World.

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1 See Durnbauch (2002); Lienhard (2002); Strom (2002).

2 See De Baar (1988; 1990; 1991); Landman (2009); Raath (2003; 2004); Schoeman (1997a; 1997b).

According to Wallmann (1990: 7), Pietism arose in the seventeenth century and came to full bloom in eighteenth-century continental European Protestantism as a religious renewal movement and represents, next to Anglo-Saxon Puritanism, the most significant religious movement of Protestantism since the Reformation. According to Wallmann, Pietism pressed for the individualisation and interiorisation of the religious life, developed new forms of personal piety and communal life, leading to sweeping reforms in theology and the church and left profound marks on the social and cultural life of the countries grasped by it. According to Brecht's (1993) description, Pietism is the most significant devotional movement (*Frömmigkeitsbewegung*) of Protestantism after the Reformation and, as such, is primarily a religious phenomenon. Brecht (1993:1) adds that its spatial, temporal, social, spiritual, churchly confessional, and theological range is astonishing and altogether constitutes its greatness as a historical subject. Johann Arndt (1555-1621),<sup>3</sup> a leading figure in German Pietism, emphasised repentance, evidence of rebirth, continuous spiritual growth, and the mystical union with Christ as the commonplaces of devotional Pietism (Lund 2011:11). Hope (1995:16) provides a more detailed account of the main features of mainstream pietistic spirituality:

Personal conversion; spiritual rebirth ... ; realization of human self-deception as an ever-present reality in an evil world; contrition (a restless heart leading to a willingness to open up to Christ's gracious influence); realization of a distinction between natural knowledge of God and Christ's gift of knowledge of salvation; constant daily effort of self-examination which admitted no excuses; humility ... as being able to call God 'Father' for the first time when kneeling; and forbearance in spiritual adversity, are intrinsic elements of a new 'lay' spirituality.

The German traveller, Hinrich Lichtenstein, during visits to the Cape interior in 1803 and 1804, described similar devotional practices among the lay people in the rural communities, adding that

(t)he propensity of the colonists to religious mysticism appears to me very sufficiently explained by the nature of the climate and their mode of living

and that this pietistic culture – parallel to that in Europe – was accompanied by an inclination to “visions and ecstasies” regarded by these believers to be “divine inspirations” (Lichtenstein 1928-1930:112).

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3 See Arndt's *The garden of paradise and Postilla* (with J.P. Spener's (1635-1705), Pia Desideria added as a preface.

Martin (2003) traces the rising interest in the role of women, in what came to be known generally as the Pietist movement, to the recent interest in the leading role of women in pietistic spirituality. She traces the active participation of women in this movement and the leading role they played to a number of factors: a weakening of the orthodoxy that had always limited women's participation; a levelling of class and other traditional hierarchies; widespread apocalyptic fears that created an "unusual crisis situation", negating, to some extent, taboos against women's active religious engagement, and, especially, a new emphasis on direct revelation from God, as something available to every human being who honestly sought it (Martin 2003:33-58). The last factor, in particular, provided the motivation for the research of this article into the specific features of female Pietism from 1750 to 1860. Although general traits of the pietistic spiritual culture of women believers in South Africa have been covered in scholarly research,<sup>4</sup> a deeper analysis of the typical features and importance of commonly held religious beliefs by women on the South African frontier during the Trekboer era and the Great Trek period remains outstanding.

The second motivating factor for this research surfaces from research on *la mentalité collective* as an important theme in historical and theological French scholarship since Braudel. Increasing interest in popular religious cultures reflects this search for the foundations of a collective mentality. Russell (2002:3) asserts that the collective mentality of common people can provide clues to the reasons for holding the same fundamental beliefs. Applying Russell's views to the religious trends of pioneer women on the frontier reveals elements of what could be called forms of a shared pioneer feminine Pietism<sup>5</sup> on the frontier. Flowing from the foregoing, this essay first investigates the basic elements of female spirituality on the South African frontier, in order to reconstruct the collective mentality profile of women believers in frontier religious communities from 1750 to 1860. For this purpose, the literary forms and contents of the mostly unpublished religious texts produced by feminine Pietists on the South African frontier from 1750-1860 are analysed.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, the following specific questions

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4 See, for example, Raath (2014: 95-116).

5 The term "Pietist" appears for the first time in a letter written in 1608 by Jakob Spener (1635-1705), in which he refers to its use as a term of abuse and derision. "Pietist" became a catchword soon thereafter when Joachim Feller (1628-1691) composed a poem (Lindberg 2005:3).

6 Latourette (1955:894) traces Pietism to the aftermath of the Thirty Years' War. It was primarily a religious awakening with its roots in the pre-war past: "To its contributions came from the mysticism which we met in pre-reformation Germany, from Luther, from English Puritanism, and possibly from the Anabaptists." For the pietistic spirituality on the South African frontier in the

surfacing in the context of pioneer women devotional texts are considered. To what extent did women believers on the frontier express their religious thought in typical pietistic mediums parallel to devotional spirituality in Europe at the time? Do the ego-texts of women believers reveal common traits reflective of a shared spiritual mentality?

## 2. THE SPIRITUAL MENTALITÉ COLLECTIVE OF PIONEER WOMEN ON THE FRONTIER

### 2.1 Self-awakenings and conversions

Pietistic religious culture in Germany was traditionally closely associated with the revival of mystical conversion spirituality. Already Philip Jacob Spener's Pietism was inseparably attached to mystically oriented spiritual sentiments of self-awakening and conversion (Wallmann 2010:40-41).<sup>7</sup> Similar tendencies surface in feminine spiritual texts on the South African frontier. The Trekboer spiritual text of Hendrina Cecilia Kruger's (born 1744) conversion provides a vivid example of feminine self-awakening spirituality. Her religious self-awakening was initiated by a vision she had while asleep (Kruger c. 1750-1830).<sup>8</sup> Two spirits appeared to her: one evil and the other beautiful and pure as crystal. The good spirit was symbolical of Christ clothed in purely white attire: "He (Jesus) was beautiful to my eyes / like crystal / white as wool and totally light / and moved on my friend's couch / I beheld it but I was not afraid" (verse 3).<sup>9</sup>

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first half of the nineteenth century, see Von Meyer (1840-1841:171). For more recent scholarship on the piety of frontier women, see Landman (1994; 2009).

- 7 Wallmann observes that conversion and self-awakening form the foundational principles from which Spener's Pietism should be approached: "Die Wiedergeburt habe die Rechtfertigung verdrängt und ersetzt. Nicht mehr aus die Tradition des orthodoxen Luthertums, sondern aus dem mystischen Spiritualismus müsse Speners Theologie und somit der von Spener geprägte Pietismus hergeleitet werden. 'Die Wiedergeburt ist das Grundthema der pietistischen Theologie, das ihr im wesentlichen der mystische Spiritualismus bereitgestellt hat'" (2010:40-41).
- 8 "Als ik op mijn leeger zijnde / en zoeten rust / al mijn zorgen op got lijden / van herten rust / een zoete rust alzo / genieten / wert ik uijt mijn slaep gewekt / zag ik ook met mijn gezigte / als twee geesten mij ontdekt" (verse 2). All translations of feminine ego-texts (both published and unpublished) from Dutch into English are by the author (AWGR). English translations are provided in paraphrased versions and the original Dutch extracts provided in the footnotes.
- 9 "Zeij was schoon en mijn gezigte / zooals christal / wet als wolle en het ligten / geheel en al / en een trippelt op het bedde / daer mijn vrient op lag en rust /

The evil spirit appeared to be the devil: “It seemed to me that/ his hair was like a woman’s / but who will trust this false friend (?) / his appearance was black / he is the reward of sin / bearing the wrath of God” (verse 6).<sup>10</sup>

The vision of these good and evil spirits had such an impact on her self-consciousness that it led her to consider the state of her own spirituality. This vision deepened her self-consciousness and self-understanding. It also made clear to her the spiritual battle between good and evil in her own life (Kruger c. 1750-1830).

Natural disasters and other cataclysmic events sparked off serious reflections by women on their spiritual wellbeing. In a poem circulating among feminine Pietists on the frontier, women believers such as Hendrina Cecilia Kruger regarded the earthquake that hit the Cape on Monday evening 4 December 1809 – the effects of which were experienced deep into the interior – as a warning by God to the entire population to repent and live a more committed spiritual life. She regarded this natural occurrence as the direct consequence of a lack of sincere spiritual commitment to God (Kruger c. 1750-1830).

The same earthquake also inspired Christiana Louisa Thom (1788-1816) to spiritual self-awakening and conversion. Mrs Thom, who was on a visit with a lady behind the Lion’s Head in Cape Town, and a far distance from other residences, had the most traumatic recollections of this event. Immediately behind the house where C.L. Thom visited, a mass of stone on the declivity of a hill near the house could any moment come rushing down onto the house, demolish it, and kill the occupants. From her diary, Christiana Thom’s husband, Reverend George Thom, recalls the terrifying consequences that could ensue and the effects these produced on the occupants of the house:

The mountains seemed about to be carried into the midst of the sea, and universal nature to be dissolved. The two females, overwhelmed with horror, ran to the place called *the Stoop*, or Veranda, and, with their slaves and Servants, fell prostrate before HIM, who ‘weigheth the mountains in scales, and the hills in balance,’ and most earnestly did they all supplicate that God for mercy, before whose tribunal they expected shortly to stand, and from whom, in a few moments, they might probably receive their everlasting destiny (Cobbin & Thom 1822:12).

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daer ik mijn gezigt na wende / en het was mij geen onrust.”

10 “Hij het lang haijr gelijk de vrouwen / Zoo als mij scheidt / Maer wie zouden op hem vertrouwen / Die valse vrint / Heij was swart en zijn vertooneng / Dog het was maer eenen scheidj / daer hij is der zonden looneng / Daer op got vertoonig zijn.”

Her self-awakening to God's majesty and power, led her to conversion – a most memorable event she always recalled with awe:

Thus did this event prove the means of shaking Mrs. T[hom]'s false hopes, of arousing her from a spiritual lethargy, and awakening those sensations of danger which ultimately led her to the only hope set before her in the Gospel. It was the tempest of Sinai, and the leading of her soul 'to the mount that might be touched, and which burned with fire,' before she reached the hill of Calvary, and received pardon and peace from the sight of the bleeding Saviour (Cobbin & Thom 1822:13).

A missionary report of 1806 records the "striking" conversion of a Boer woman at the Cape. Because she possessed no Bible, the missionary Van der Kemp gave her one, "which was sweeter to her than honey" (Schoeman 1995:26). Her change of heart brought her much grief and exposed her to much persecution from her own family:

Her father, husband, sister, relations, and the whole circle of her former acquaintance, united in insulting her in the most excruciating manner, and a plan was formed to remove her to some distant part of the Colony, that she may live out of danger of being more infected by the contagion of Bethelsdorp (Schoeman 1995:26).

The Voortrekker woman Susanna Smit's (born 1799) self-awakening occurred during and after the illness and death of her youngest son on 28 July 1837 during their journey into the interior – a time of great physical stress and spiritual distress for their family. The impact of her son's death was an extremely traumatic event and this added to her already stressful experiences on the burdensome trek. The self-awakening following upon her traumatic experience of her son's death, made such an impression on her that ten years later she still had visions commemorating the change in her spiritual life. She described her spiritual transformation as "my stately transition in the Lord" (Schoeman 1995:102). Ten years later she still had visions recalling her conversion: "... when my dearest child died, I was already subjected to the fear of God and expecting the day of judgement ... according to the dream the night of 24 August 1837 when I beheld the saviour ..." (cf. Schoeman 1995:160).<sup>11</sup>

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11 "Toen mijn dierbaar kind overleed, was ik reeds ... onder eene verschrikkelijke vrees voor God en een verwachting des oordeels over mijn zelve, zoo als blijkt uit mijne vorige schriften, volgens den tijd van den droom in den nacht van 24 Augustus 1837 dat ik den Verlosser in 't geloof in het oog kreeg, merkt op hoe nadrukkelijk het is dat ik juisch tien jaren na mijne statelijk overgang in den Heere deze droom van tien boomen (symbolic of ten years) kreeg."

Hester Venter (baptised 1750), a Trekboer girl, on a wagon trip from Cape Town to the frontier in December 1796, experienced her self-awakening while reading from the popular Dutch Second Reformation author Bernardus Smijtegelt (1853:8): “It pleased God to open my blind heart”. She described her conversion as an incident, which she experienced emotionally (“gevoeligen indruk en levendig inzien”) when she realised her own spiritual helplessness and sinfulness with no redemption except in the name of Jesus (“in den naam van Jezus Christus”) (Venter 1853:8). In the devotional book by Smytegelt (1665-1739), *Het gekrookte riet* (The broken reed), from which she was reading, much emphasis is laid on the practice of godliness, on the holy duties of Christians, on the life of God’s people and frames of their hearts, as well as their experiences of light and darkness, the leading and work of the Holy Spirit, and giving instructions and directions to the godly. Smytegelt (1744, I & II) listed no less than 296 marks of the godly life in his 145 sermons on Matthew 12:20-21.<sup>12</sup>

The religious ego-texts of women believers on the South African frontier reflect a strong inclination towards emphasising conversion as a fundamental element for holy living and sanctification. True conversion follows repentance and forgiveness of sins. In most of the ego-texts, conversion is ascribed to Christ, so that he alone may dwell and do all things in the pious soul.

## 2.2 Pietism and spiritual self-purification

The way to self-purification is through emptying the mind of the everyday chores, troubles and earthly longings to become detached from worldly matters and to attach to God, listen to His voice, and to be active for a living, personal God. Self-purification, therefore, means to open up to the voice and calling of God. In English Puritan Pietism, a seventeenth and early eighteenth-century movement that roughly paralleled Dutch Reformed Pietism, meditation formed an important part of the Christian’s everyday duties. Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) asserted that representing heavenly things in earthly terms, such as presenting the kingdom of heaven in terms of a banquet and union with Christ as a marriage, offered “a large field for our imagination to walk in ... with a great deal of spiritual *gain*” (Beeke 2004:77). On the Puritans’ emphasis on the need for meditation, Beeke (2004:78) (2004:78) observes that “the Puritans stressed the need for meditation”. Puritan authors wrote extensively on the requisites and

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12 Preceding her spiritual awakening, the dire circumstances on the frontier often brought her to the experience of God’s wrath, punishments for the sins of the Trekboers, repentance and acknowledgement of God’s providential government of their lives (Raath 2004:1454-1461).

rules for meditation, the frequency and time of meditation, preparation for meditation, and the guidelines for meditation (Beeke 2004:79). In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the works of many of these Puritan authors were translated into Dutch, thereby injecting a strong element of meditative spirituality into mainstream Dutch Reformed religious practices.

Self-purification and leading a holy life were standard themes in German and Dutch pietistic literature (cf. Homeyr 1989:18). Willem Teellinck (1579-1629) was noted for his emphasis on devotion and holiness. In his *Sleutel der devotie ons openend de deure des Hemels* (The key of devotion which opens to us the door of Heaven) (a work also circulating in the Cape interior), Teellinck explains “devotion” as commitment to God in Christ, which is man’s highest calling. The first section covers communion with, and love for Christ. The Christian “must receive, keep and increase in the communion and love of Christ” (1659-1664, 3:19). The Christian’s “regard and great desire for the Lord Jesus” will mortify all other lusts and desires (1659-1664, 3:14). Such a believer will be humble and volunteer “to suffer the Christian life”; he will serve the Lord alone, meditate on eternity, and practise the presence (*gemeynschap*) of Christ. In the second section of this work, Teellinck addresses the theme of self-denial: “How important it is, that the Christian must deny himself” (1659-1664, 3:72). The third section shows

how we must use all spiritual means, and especially heed well the movements of the Spirit, in order to deny ourselves, and to be one with Christ (1659-1664, 3:80).

The fourth section addresses the “modesty and lowliness, which one must observe in the use of the means to receive the gracious gifts of God” (1659-1664, 3:243).

Among the Dutch Second Reformation divines, Theodorus à Brakel (1608-1669) wrote the most extensive work on meditation and self-purification. His book *De trappen des geestelyken levens* (The steps of the spiritual life) (sixth edition 1733), was one of the most read works by the pioneers on the frontier. In the second part, he describes the steps to be followed by God’s children to grow in communion with God. Because the progress from one spiritual step to the next is a tiresome process, the devout should not become lazy or dejected. The third section deals with the enjoyment of the purified state. The unity with the utmost Good produces a heavenly light in which the believer can see God. He enjoys an indescribable sweetness and loveliness of seeing God. Brakel also describes the steps to attain the sweetness and enjoyment of God and he



uses bridal metaphors to describe the close union between God and the purified soul. The soul experiences ecstatic joy:

I am the Bride of Christ / it is sweet to my mouth/ then I drink from his voluptuousness / Psalm 36:9. How sweet to have intercourse with the Lord Jesus ... (T)his intercourse with the Lord Jesus Christ leads the believing soul so high in the Lord Christ because it rests in his sweet and lovely embrace / Cant. 2:3 (Brakel 1733:24).<sup>13</sup>

Awakening of the self through meditation creates a sincere longing for self-purification and unification with God. In hymn five of her devotional book, Hendrina Cecilia Kruger sings of the realization of her own sinful state and her longing for spiritual purity and casting off the bonds of sin as the outflow of her meditations (Kruger c. 1750-1830).

With a view to follow the example of Christ, Susanna Smit (c. 1842-1858) wrestles with sin and spiritual impurity. She constantly alludes to man's fall into sin, her own experience of sin, and the human battle to live a pure Christian life.

Purification is the true new birth and the new creature appears before God's countenance, pure and holy, cleaned and purified through the blood of Christ. The bridegroom takes the soul and marries himself to the soul with an eternal binding and attaches himself with firm bonds as with which a husband can attach himself to his wife. Similar to typical bridal images in mainstream European Pietism, women believers on the frontier expressed themselves in bridal metaphors – mostly from the bridal images in the Song of Songs.

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13 “Ende de Bruidt Christi: syn vrugt is mijn gehemelte soete, Cant. 2:3. dan drinkt sy uyt de beeken syn wellusten / Psal. 36:9. O soet geselschap / met Godt ende den Heere Jesu gemeynschap te hebben! Gelijk Christi geselschap de twee Discipulen na Emmaus gaende / haer herte brandende maekte ...” and “(D)ese gemeynschap met Godt ende Heere Jesu Christo / brengt een gelovige ziele wel zoo hoog in Godt en Christo / dat sy lieflijk in Godt en Christo rust met een soete ende lieflijke omhelsinghe / ende haer lieflyke leunt op haren liefsten / Cant. 8:5. ende seyt / ik hebbe grooten lust in syn schaduwe, ende sitter onder / ende syn vrucht is mijn gehemelte soete / Hy voert mij in ‘t Wyn-huys / ende de liefde is syn baniere over mij / Cant. 2:3, 4 / want haer Bruydegom Christus kuset haer dan met de kusse syns monts / Cant. 1:1, en sy is dan gesalft met vreugden-Olye / Ps. 45: 8 sy voelt dan dat talle hare sonden en de zwakheden zijn vergeven / ende dat sy in Christum volmaekt is / ende sy heft dan al rede in ‘t begin van de Hemel in haer herte / want die soete invloeyinge des H. Geestes is haer herte / ende wonderbare gerustigheit in de ziele is het begin van het koninkrijke Godts / Rom. 14:17.”

### 2.3 Self-illumination and mystical experiences

Alluding to the view that visions, revelations and ecstatic encounters were typical features of Pietist spirituality, the German Pietist Gerhard Tersteegen (1687-1769) expressed the status of extraordinary mystical experiences in German Pietism as follows: "Visions, revelations, remonstrances, prophecies and many other extraordinary things, a mystic may encounter without seeking them." He added, however,

... but they do not belong to the essentials of mysticism, indeed all experienced mystics provide very important memorials in respect of such extraordinary phenomena. Mystics are not gossips of superior spirituality ... They say little, they do and suffer much, they deny (themselves) everything, they pray without ceasing ... (Ward 2010:83).

Nowhere in the recorded pietistic experience of pious Boer women are mystical experiences in the form of auditory revelations, visions and dreams attributed more importance than other facets of experiential faith. In the context of their mystical experiences, it appears, first, that such supersensual intimations express themselves as forms of sensory automatism, over which the person has little or no command. Secondly, such supernatural experiences present themselves to the "human consciousness" as parts of experience rather than what Underhill (1961:268) calls "modes of interpretation". Underhill (1961:272) suggests that visions and voices may stand in the same relation to the mystically inclined as pictures, poems, and musical compositions stand to the painter, poet, and musician. Like the inspirations of the artist, mystically tainted experiences represent supernatural phenomena as

a constant and involuntary work of translation, by which Reality is interpreted in the terms of appearance [and] (i)n both a peculiar mental make-up to this result (Underhill 1961:272).

The pictorial and dramatic forms accompanying mystically tainted experiences should, therefore, not be regarded as objective realities, but as subjective experiences surging up without the intervention of the will, and placing themselves before the mind of the subject, translating to the conscious personality the suggestions of the subconscious, "permitting the continuous penetration of the conscious personality by these deeper activities" (Underhill 1961:273).

Hendrina Cecilia Kruger's dream of good and evil spirits is simply one instance of the visionary experiences normally associated with feminine pietism. In a dream, both the evil ways of the devil and the sanctifying

work of Christ were revealed to her, as a result of which she started on her religious awakening (Kruger c. 1750-1830).

Ecstatic intellectual and mystical dreams abound in Susanna Smit's spiritual diaries. Mystically inclined dreams producing ecstatic spiritual states are no exceptions to her spiritual experiences. On 19 May 1846, she records a wonderful dream of a pearl necklace (Smit 1:34 (19 May 1846)). Sometime later she writes about a dream she had as a girl of eight (Smit 23:23 (26 June 1846)). In this dream, she experienced the presence of Christ clothed in a blue cloak. This mystically tainted dream of Christ with the cloak repeats itself in different symbolic settings. On 5 May 1847, she records a dream of this mysterious man with the cloak (Smit 31:10 (5 May 1847)); on 20 September 1847, the man with the winter cloak appears again (Smit 34:3 (20 September 1847)), and the following month the man with the winter cloak again appears to her (Smit 36:7 (25 October 1847)).

Although less frequent than the auditory sensations recorded in the Sister-Books<sup>14</sup> of female mystics in fourteenth-century Germany, auditions recorded in the ego-texts of frontier women in the South African interior, 1760-1860, are no less concerned with heavenly messages and spiritual revelations. Although extraordinary experiences in the form of voices are not frequently recorded phenomena by frontier women in South Africa, Susanna Smit does record a voice speaking to her on 23 July 1847. She hears this voice repeating Matthew 24:19-34 (Smit 32:46 (23 July 1847)), and on 15/16 July 1850, a voice utters: "Manifesto regino!" She received this verbal communication after the British occupation of Natal and at a time that she and her husband (Reverend Erasmus Smit) experienced strong opposition and animosity from other Voortrekkers in the Reformed congregation and marginalisation in the community of Pietermaritzburg. Particularly revealing is verse 34 of the recited Bible text – an indication of the transposition of the Biblical text to her own personal circumstances: "Therefore behold, I send unto you Prophets, and Wise-men, and Scribes, and of the same (some) of the same ye shall scourge in your Synagogues, and shall persecute them from City to City."<sup>15</sup>

From a psychological point of view, Jung (1980:461) (1980:461) observes that in the

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14 These books were composed in Latin; others, in Middle High German, were written by Dominican nuns in the German-speaking countries during the first half of the fourteenth century.

15 The marginal note to this verse in the Dutch State Bible (1657) reads: "This word is here taken for true Teachers, such a scribe as Ezra was, Ezra 7. Ver. 6. Matth. 13.52."

history of prophecy psychic contents not infrequently come to consciousness in hallucinatory form, inducing the subject to say: "it occurred to me" or even "it was as though an inner voice said".

The high levels of devotional commitment by female practitioners on the South African frontier could arguably belong to this category of psychic phenomena.

## 2.4 Spiritual recollection and the experience of quiet

Most ego-texts of frontier women describe the religious state of spiritual recollection and rest of the souls in metaphors inclined to typical medieval bridal mysticism: usually Christ appears as the bridegroom to the longing soul (the bride). The rest of the soul is usually felt only in the loving embrace of Christ. In the devotional book from the Van der Walt family (watermark 1797), the author – probably a feminine writer – expresses this sincere longing for the love of, and rest in Christ:

I long for Jesus/ the world scares me/ what will I poor human do  
on earth/ I wish to forsake the world/ I wish to proceed to heaven  
(verse 1) (Van der Walt c. 1797).<sup>16</sup>

In the next verse, she sings of her freedom in Christ and her spiritual pleasure in her living with Jesus:

In spite of what the old dragon does / I am free in Jesus / I have life  
in Jesus / I long for Jesus / I am committed to Jesus / away with fear  
(verse 2) (Van der Walt c. 1797).<sup>17</sup>

She prays to Christ for remaining his own and to glorify Him:

My Jesus let me remain your property / let me remain attached to  
you / you are my loftiest pride / Oh Lord let me battle knightly may I  
please you and praise you eternally (verse 8) (Van der Walt c. 1797).<sup>18</sup>

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16 "Na Jesús ik verlangen / tot hem is maar mijn wens / de waarelt maak mij bange / wat sal ik armen mens / langer op aarden maaken / ik gaat ter engel baan / ik wil de waareld versaken / hemel warts treet ik aan."

17 "Trots sy dan ouden draken / trots sij waarld daarbij / trots al wat sij ook maaken / ik staen Jesús vrij / en jesús heb ik leven / en Jesús heb ik lust / aan hem ben ik gegeven / weg dan met onlúst"

18 "Mijn jesús laat mijn blijven / Úwe ijgendom alhier / Laat mij in úw beklyven / Gij sijt mijn hoogste cier / Mijn Godt laat mij hier strijden / En kampen redderlijk / Dat ik in úw verblijden / Úw loven eeuwiglijk."

In another hymn, the contemplative rest in Jesus is the focus of her meditations:

Oh loftiest preacher Jesus Lord / I sit at your feet / while I hear your servants / Give my soul perseverance / Let me praise you / Lord Jesus teach and purify me (verse 4) (Van der Walt c. 1797).<sup>19</sup>

In both European Pietism and devotional Pietism on the South African frontier, Jesus-centred bridal metaphors became the standard textual forms for expressing the peace, rest en quiet in Christ. In the Van der Walt devotional book, a feminine author writes of the urge to live in bridal bliss with Christ: “I long for Jesús / my dearest friend / Where does He go / where shall I find him?” (verse 1) (Van der Walt c. 1797)<sup>20</sup> and “My distressed and aggrieved soul / where is Jesus / I long for him day and night” (verse 2) (Van der Walt c. 1797).<sup>21</sup>

## 2.5 Meditation, contemplation, ecstasy, and rapture

Having meditated on her sinful state and personal suffering, Hendrina Cecilia Kruger had unspeakable joy in the assurance of Christ’s death on the Cross and contemplates the wonders of the third heaven – an allusion to St. Paul’s spiritual experiences:

I hear wonderful voices ring and in the third heaven sing / I am still here in this earthly park / but I also add my voice to theirs cheerfully / I sing hallelujah / praise and honour to the eternal Lord (verse 16) (Kruger c. 1750-1830).<sup>22</sup>

Strydom’s devotional book (written by Beatrix Nel (c. 1835)) also provides testimony of the Jesus-centred longing for the blissful life with Christ:

Lord thou do not console those who sleep / nor who can help themselves / they are lost sheep / I am also one of them / ... take me upon thy shoulders like a lost sheep (Strydom c. 1835).<sup>23</sup>

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19 “O hoogste leraar Jesús heer / ik sit my aan ú voeten neer / terwyl ik úwe knekten hoor / geef aan mijn Siel een lydsaam / dat my haar word úwe stemmesy / her Jesús leert en heylig mij.”

20 “Waar is Júsús mijn verlangen / Vriend en alder liefste mijn / Waarheyt en hij gewent sijn gangen / Waar mog hij te vinden sijn.”

21 “Mijn bedroefde siel doorgriefde / Vele sonder smart en klagt / Waar is Júsús al mijn leven / Hem begeer ik dag en nagt.”

22 “Maer mij dunk dat wondere dingen / en den derden hemel zingen / og ik was hier nog beneen / perk ik nog niet uijt getreen / wierde nogtans mee te zingen / opgewekt dat vreúg doet klinken / halelúja lof en eer / eeúwig leevendige heer.”

23 “Gij troost niet hun die slaapen / nog wie sig helpen kan / gij soek verlorene schapen / ik ben ook een daar van / mijn schadewe mag veroúdre / ik vrees voor

The self-composed hymns of the Voortrekker feminine Pietist, Anna Steenkamp (born 1797), reflect even stronger evidence of this type of Jesus-centred spirituality. Jesus calls the bride (the penitent soul) to serve him and to be joined in blissful unity: “Awake my bride whom I love / Awake my beautiful friend / Come with joy and serve me / because the winter is past” (verse 1) (Steenkamp c. 1843).<sup>24</sup> The end of her spiritual quest is to be united with Jesus in the heavenly Jerusalem and to be his bride (verse 2) (Steenkamp c. 1843).<sup>25</sup>

## 2.6 Spiritual desertion and abandonment of the soul

The early Dutch Pietist author, Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676), in his work *Spiritual desertion* (first published 1646, reprinted 1659), states that the immediate ends for which God sends desertion, or abandonment, are: that the believer may be tested and so become better known to himself and others; that the desire for grace and glory may increasingly be strengthened in him; that hidden sins may be uncovered and future sins prevented; that he be taught tenderness of conscience and a correct and precise observation of his conduct; that he become empty and poor of spirit; that he obtain an aversion to this world and to the pilgrim’s life; that he be weaned of external, earthly joy and consolation; that he learn to be fed with tears as the only delicacy of consolation when the Comforter is not present; that on account of these things he may cling to his God all the more firmly. “My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me” (Psalm 63:8) (Voetius [1659] 2003:40).

Johannes Hoornbeeck (1617-1666), following his mentor Voetius, believed that true theology should be practical, and that faith should result in disciplined, holy living. For these reasons, Hoornbeeck and Voetius were considered “precisionists” (*preciesen*) or “earnest ones” (*de ernstigen*) by their contemporaries. Detractors called them “sanctimonians” (*de fijnen*), but their teachings of pious living gave rise to a new spiritual culture. In addition, Hoornbeeck had a practical approach with regard to spiritual desertion. He taught that the breakdown of morality, natural disasters and the problem of indwelling sin are certain to generate feelings of spiritual abandonment. In all trials and depressions should move the heart more earnest commitment to God and to seek Him more earnestly:

Oh, what an inexpressible and abundant joy now overflows this heart after its trials and dryness! What a heavenly feeling now comes to the heart in this living experience of God’s return and the

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die tweede slegs / dús legt mijn op ú schouderen / als een gevondene schaaap.”

24 “Staet op mijn bruijd die ik beminne / Staet op mijn schooner mijn vriendinne / En kom met blijdschap dienen mij / Want siet de winter is voorbij.”

25 “In ‘t hemelsch Jerúsalem / En kroont uwe bruidegom.”

renewed embrace of its beloved Saviour, which it sought with such consuming oppression and towering fear – until the heart found him! 'Look! Your father and I anxiously sought you' (Luke 2:48). The heart is full, yes, it is spiritually drunk in this renewed wedding feast; there the souls eat good food and delights in the fatness (Hoornebeck [1659] 2003:174).

Another Second Reformation Pietist, Jean Taffin (c. 1528-1602), in his *Boetveerdigheydt des levens, in vier boecken t'samen vervat ... ende getrouwelijck uyt den Francoysen in de Nederlandtsche tale overgeset door Johannem Crucium ... Noch is hier by-gevoeght de Merckteekenken der kinderen Godts ... mitsgaeders een korte ende schooner onderwysinge inhoudende gewisse vertroostinghen in allerhande beswaernissen ende angst der consciencien, genomen uyt de boecken van Jan Espine* (1659) (Penitence of life, contained in four books ... together with the signs of God's children), reminds his readers that all suffering comes from a loving God. Doubtfulness is a sign of our fleshly desires:

'How is it apparent from this', our flesh asks, 'that we are God's children?' They plunder our goods and confiscate our properties. Our offices and positions are stripped from us. Men hound us from our fatherland, and we are driven from one country to another as if we were vagrants. We are hated by our parents, relatives, and friends and they drag us into prisons. We are mocked and hurled into the deepest misery. We are sheep slaughtered by the sword, the gallows, and the fire. We see nothing but the signs of God's wrath and curse upon us. ... They rejoice in their success, while we weep. We bow the head and bend the neck under the yoke of persecution. They increase in wealth, while we languish in poverty. They receive honor and power, but we are rejected as a rebellious, evil, and revolutionary people (Teellick [1659] 2003:80).

Teellinck ([1659] 2003:81) answers to these fleshly concerns:

That is our flesh talking! These complaints arise from ignorance or weakness. ... what is more, these sufferings have their source in God's love for us. Who will not agree with that as soon as he remembered that the plundering of our temporal goods produces eternal treasure in heaven and that the mockery and libel we endure here will be changed into glory. ... Far be it from us to be agitated and offended by oppression, since it serves as a sure proof that we are God's children.

The Dutch-Reformed divine, Wilhemus à Brakel (1635-1711), was one of the most authoritative sources on spiritual desertion. He defines spiritual desertion as the lengthy withholding and withdrawal of those normal

operations and influences of the Holy Spirit in the regenerate by which He illumines them, assures them of His favour, comforts them, fortifies them against sin and temptation, and renders them help in and deliverance from temporal trials. This causes them to be in darkness, weak in faith, disconsolate, to fall into sin, succumb to temptations, and to remain grieved and fretful in the bearing of a temporal cross (Brakel [1700] 1999, IV:172-173). Spiritual desertion is troubling to the believer, because the Father hides Himself, the Son departs and the Holy Spirit withdraws His influences. Brakel describes Jesus' departure in typical bridal metaphors:

(Y)our Bridegroom has departed. If one were to ask you, 'Why are you so sorrowful?', would you not answer, 'My Beloved who used to kiss me with the kisses of His mouth; under whose shadow I used to sit; who led me into the banqueting house; who waved His banner of love over me; who was all my delight; upon whom I used to lean as my Beloved; and of whom I used to boast, *His mouth is most sweet*: yea, He is altogether *lovely* (Song of Solomon 5:16) – He who is my Beloved and my friend has departed, and therefore I am so sorrowful' (Brakel [1700] 1999, IV:176).

In answer to the question why God allows His children to come into this condition, Brakel states that it is to the benefit of God's children – the true believers (Brakel [1700] 1999, IV:179-180).

On the frontier, the blissful company of Christ was often interrupted by cataclysmic natural disasters, attacks by hostile bands, and deaths of friends and family members. During a severe illness, Hendrina Cecilia Kruger was brought to a new realization of the life in Christ. In a self-composed hymn, she gives expression of her new life of devotion (hymn 9, verse 5) (Kruger c. 1750-1830). Suffering also made her realize her own ability to attain the state of grace (hymn 9, verse 5). In another hymn, she writes of her depressed thoughts as a consequence of Satan's assault on her spiritual life (Kruger c. 1750-1830). She is also awakened by thoughts of sin and, in her helpless state, she experiences states of emotional depression: "In the dark of night while I lay sick upon my couch / ... evil attacked me / (and my heart was) full of grief" (verse 1) (Kruger c. 1750-1830).<sup>26</sup>

Her spiritual dejectedness produces symptoms of physical suffering. For five days she lost her speech: "For five days I lay speechless / helpless

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26 "Ent duijster heeden van der nagt / als ik in swaare kranckheijt lag / qúamt mijen zoo onverwags / als ik het goede verwagte heen / en na gezontheit tragt zoo zeer / trof mij het qúat op dit keer / en na gezontheit tragt zoo zeer / trof mij het qúat op dit keer / mijn hert ... vol smert / was mijn klaagen / op mijn plaagen ... en mijn daagen / totdat quam de morgen waaken."



and without consolation / my enemy triumphed over me” (verse 8) (Kruger c. 1750-1830).<sup>27</sup>

In the devotional book of M.E. Rossouw, H.S. Hauptfleisch composed a spiritual poem of 85 verses on the tragic death of Anna Cillie (born Rossouw) who died on 11 July 1822, when the cart on which she was travelling slipped from a pont into a river. Her body was discovered five weeks later, having been severely disfigured by dogs (Rossouw c. 1820).

Susanna Smit’s religious diaries (1842-1858) record her spiritual battles with evil, attacks by Satan, fleshly thoughts, and conditions of depression. She interprets these phenomena as evidence of spiritual desertion and sufferings of body and soul in the quest for unification with God (Smit c. 1842-1858, 2:58; 4:48, 49; 10:30; 18:8; 21:28, 29; 21:48; 22:18; 28:10; 31:29; 32:23; 3242-43; 33:25; 33:38; 37:39).<sup>28</sup>

## 2.7 The unitive life with God in Christ

For the pious feminine believers on the frontier, the unification with God in the New Jerusalem is the final goal. In the heavenly city is rest, peace and quiet. This state of rest is attainable in the arms of Jesus and the spiritual unification with him. The pious rest in the union with Christ figures prominently in feminine devotional books of a pietistic nature. Hendrina Cecilia Kruger’s mystically tainted song on the New Jerusalem and the rest in Christ is a typical example of feminine pietistic texts on the frontier:

Oh Jerusalem thou art the home of all the pious / prepared for all the pious / Lord Jesus thou art my rest / Oh kiss me Lord / Lord Jesus my longing / Lord Jesus my rest / oh kiss me (verse 4)  
(Kruger c. 1750-1830).<sup>29</sup>

In her religious ego-text, Anna Steenkamp admonishes the careless and repentless to take note of God’s punishments after the above earthquake of 4 December 1809, the tremors of which were felt deep into the interior.

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27 “Ik was vif dagen spraake loos / van alle hulp en troost berooft / mijn vijant was oover mij verhoogt / triumpferende oover mij poogt / mijn hert - vol smert / vejrijg peijlen / vol onrúste ... mijn gedagten / daer ik nouweleijks mij van wagten.”

28 For Susanna Smit’s inclination to ascesis, see Raath (2003:121-150). It is concluded that the economic, political and ecclesiastical circumstances, in which she found herself, substantially contributed to her leanings towards solitary contemplation.

29 “Jerúzalem geij wooneng / voor alle de vroomen / bereijgt / Jerúzalem geij wooneng / Voor alle de vroomen bereijgt / Here Jezús mijn rust / Ag was ik eens van ú gekúst / Heere Jezús mijn lust / Heere Jezús mijn rust / ag was ik eens van ú gekúst.”

In a self-composed prayer, she prays for God's internal spiritual guidance through His Spirit:

We pray thee to strengthen us/ through your Holy Spirit/ working in us so that we may proceed along the right way (verse 2) (Steenkamp c. 1843).<sup>30</sup>

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Parallel to German and Dutch Pietism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, religious ego-texts by women believers on the frontier should, in general, be understood as a broad genre. These treatises display a clear consciousness of belonging to a type, a method, and a mode of literature (cf. Schoeman 1997a:24-47). These pietistic texts reflect a common experiential consciousness, the main components of which can broadly be categorised as self-awakenings and conversions; self-purification; illumination of the self and mystically tainted experiences; spiritual recollection and the experience of quiet; meditation, contemplation, ecstasy and rapture; spiritual desertion, abandonment, and the unitive life with God in Christ.

Feminine believers on the South African frontier reflect the same trends that produced the flowering of Pietism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe (particularly in Germany). The ego-texts produced by female authors in Trekboer and Voortrekker communities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, provide evidence that, living a relatively solitary and marginalised life on the frontier, the authors of these texts expressed their religious thoughts in pietistically inclined mediums.

A study of the ego-texts of these pioneer women reveals common traits reflective of their spiritual mentality profile in their quest for spiritual union with Christ. This does not imply, however, that all the authors covered in this study experienced their spiritual progress exactly in the same way or to the same measure as other women believers. On the positive side, it can be observed that Boer pioneer women on the frontier portray the religious culture in the interior and Pietism as a powerful spiritual source of their lives. Although their ego-texts reflect spiritual realities, which we can no longer grasp in all their detail, their literary experiences allow us to discern something of the image of a lived spiritual reality. As literary forms, these pietistic ego-texts are primarily spiritual treatises. Studying these spiritual treatises embedded in their particular historical settings provides us with

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30 "Wij bidden u wilt ons versterken / Door úwen hijligen geest voortaan / Die ons door zijn inwendig werken / Doe in rechte wegen gaan."

meanings and images for interpreting the female theology of women in South African pioneer communities parallel to European pietistic practices.

Pietistic female religious literature on the South African frontier allows us to reconstruct important elements of a shared religious mentality profile of pioneer female believers on the frontier. The longing of the human soul for accomplishing the unitive life with God in Christ and the flowering of a personal, mystically tainted, affective and individualistic spirituality testify to similar pietistic traits in German Pietism, Dutch Second Reformation and Puritan theological texts. The devotional mentality profile emanating from the mainly unpublished ego-texts of female believers on the South African frontier could more specifically be described as a spirituality of self-purification, self-illumination and mystically inclined experiences; a leaning towards religious recollection and the experience of quiet; practices of meditation and contemplation; the occasional experiences of ecstasy, rapture, spiritual desertion and abandonment of the soul, accompanied by a sincere longing for union with God in Christ.

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