THE ORIGINS OF THE FREE PROTESTANT CHURCH IN SOUTH AFRICA: DAVID P FAURE *CONTRA* DUTCH REFORMED CALVINISM

Frederick Hale
University of Stellenbosch, South Africa

Abstract

The origins of the Free Protestant Church, subsequently also called the Unitarian Church, in the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope during the 1860s have almost completely escaped scholarly attention. The present article explores how, under the leadership primarily of David P Faure, a native of Stellenbosch who studied at the University of Leiden from 1861 until 1866, theological liberalism inspired by J H Scholten and other scholars was transplanted to the Cape during a time of intense strife within the Dutch Reformed Church. It is demonstrated that Faure initially sought to minister within that denomination, but in 1867 concluded that he was theologically incompatible with its leadership. He consequently began to proclaim the "Nieuwe Rigting" in a series of public lectures and, despite stiff opposition from Andrew Murray and other Dutch Reformed conservatives, in 1869 gathered an independent congregation which rejected doctrinal formulae and stressed the love of Christ as its cornerstone.

1 INTRODUCTION

The diminutive status of Unitarianism in South African church history is matched by its minuscule place in the religious historiography of the region. Since its planting in Cape Town as the "Free Protestant Church" during the theologically factious 1860s, it has never been represented by more than a tiny handful of congregations, never administered educational institutions, or published its own periodicals other than congregational newsletters. Moreover, the appeal of Unitarianism in South Africa, as elsewhere, has been largely to whites of higher-than-average incomes and levels of education, factors which have tended to keep this variety of organised religious life isolated from more conservative forms of Christianity and much of the public. Its disregard for and general rejection of confessional orthodoxy have removed it still further from what could be called (even by an inclusive definition) the mainstream of religious life in South Africa.

Not surprisingly, in general histories of Christianity in South Africa one will find only cursory mention of Unitarianism. In his brief survey of 1968, Peter Hinchliff limited his treatment of it to a mention of the fact that it attracted some members of the Dutch Reformed Church who had become disaffected by the strife in that denomination.[i] In his essay on "Christianity, imperialism and colonial warfare" in *A history of Christianity in South Africa*, edited by

G J Pillay and J W Hofmeyr in 1994, Gregor Cuthbertson devoted a paragraph to the efforts of the second Unitarian minister in Cape Town, Ramsden Palmforth, to avert the Second Anglo-Boer War in 1899, but did not deal with the origins of Unitarianism in the Cape.[ii] Three years later Rodney Davenport included one sentence on these beginnings in *Christianity in South Africa: A political, social, and cultural history,* which he and Richard Elphick co-edited, but he incorrectly gave the founding date of the Free Protestant Church as 1867.[iii] Church historian Kevin Roy did not mention Unitarianism or the Free Protestant Church in his survey history of 2000, *Zion City RSA. The story of the church in South Africa*.[iv] In his highly tendentious 1951 study of *Die liberale rigting in Suid-Afrika*, Tobias N Hanekom mentioned this body only in a secondary way in his section on mid-nineteenth-century liberalism in non-Dutch Reformed churches. German Lutheranism in Cape Town, he professed, was strongly affected by radical theological currents from Germany. One of its prominent pastors, W F Gohl, made his pulpit accessible to the Afrikaner who was in the process of introducing modernist theology to the Cape. Beyond this, however, Hanekom did not go in his study, which is primarily concerned with the strife in the Dutch Reformed churches.[v] South African Unitarians have rarely written anything of a scholarly nature about their spiritual heritage, and from outside the denomination there has been a general disregard of this tiny sect.

Nevertheless, the very fact that South African Unitarianism is part of an intercontinental religious fellowship which took on a particular manifestation in Cape Town and elsewhere merits attention. In the present article it is my intention to take initial steps towards redressing this *lacuna* in the historiography of religious life in South Africa by analysing how Unitarianism was brought from the Netherlands to the southern tip of the continent in the 1860s. Particular attention will be paid to how the principal human conduit, David P Faure, began as an unquestioning adherent of what he called the "blood and hell theology" of Calvinism but, while studying for the ministry at the University of Leiden, underwent a profound spiritual metamorphosis. After returning to Cape Town, he immediately became embroiled in theological disputes which prompted him to in effect leave the Dutch Reformed Church and establish the Free Protestant (and eventually Unitarian) Church in that city.

2 FAURE'S FORMATIVE YEARS IN THE DUTCH REFORMED TRADITION

Faure's life began on 11 November 1842 when he was born in Stellenbosch in a house which subsequently became the property of the Rhenish Missionary Society for use as a boarding school. He was, in his own words, "a Huguenot of the Huguenots", of almost entirely French ancestry. His father, Abraham Faure (1795-1868), had studied law at the University of Utrecht but returned in 1819 to the Cape and become the magistrate at Stellenbosch nine years later. However, the elder Faure's tenure in that capacity was brief, owing to the mishandling of a civil disturbance in 1831. He subsequently owned an auction business in Stellenbosch, but that failed in the mid-1840s, forcing the Faure family to move to Cape Town. Abraham Faure eventually practised law there in addition to his journalistic activities. David grew up in a modest house at the

corner of Castle and Bree Streets.[vi]

There is no demonstrable linkage between the ecclesiastical environment in which Faure was raised and his subsequent theological liberalism. Writing retrospectively, nearly four decades after effectively cutting his ties with his familial religious heritage, he recalled that at home he "received the ordinary religious education", attending services twice every Sunday, worshipping at the Dutch Reformed Church in Bree Street in the morning and at the same denomination's Great Church in Adderley Street in the evening. One locally prominent dominee, University of Utrecht *alumnus* Abraham Faure (1795-1875),[vii] had made a particularly memorable impression on him for preaching "unadulterated Calvinism, the blood and hell theology which is no longer heard". By his own testimony, David Faure and his relatives had accepted Calvinist orthodoxy unswervingly. He recalled that "doubts were foreign to us, the Bible and the creeds were simply accepted as infallible, because we had been taught to regard them as such, and we had never heard of anyone, within the Dutch Reformed Church, who denied it".[viii] This is, of course, a subjective observation which, if it correctly reflects Faure's perceptions from the mid-nineteenth century, indicates *inter alia* that the theological strife then current in the Dutch Reformed Church was not within his boyhood field of consciousness.

If Faure's memory was correct, as a teenager he had not been aware of the theological disputes which were under way in the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape before he sailed to the Netherlands in 1861. As early as 1854, N J Hofmeyr had published in the Cape his critical warning *Over het Hedendaagsche Liberalisme in de Gereformeerde Kerk in Holland*.[ix] As indicated below, by 1860 the tensions had become so great that a monthly periodical, *De Onderzoeker*, was established to support the denomination's liberal wing. From the outset it made numerous approving references to new theological trends in the Netherlands. Illustrating the point, the index to its first annual volume contains no fewer than twenty references to the prominent theologian Johannes Henricus Scholten of the University of Leiden, and two to the controversial young minister Johannes Cornelis Zaalberg of 's Gravenhage. The latter's controversial book of 1864, *De Godsdienst van Jezus en de moderne Rigting,*[x] soon became a focal point of debate in South Africa.

3 ENCOUNTERING LIBERAL THEOLOGICAL CURRENTS IN THE NETHERLANDS

Presumably Faure could have remained in the Cape and studied theology at the Dutch Reformed seminary at Stellenbosch, which had opened in 1859 under the leadership of orthodox theologians John Murray and Nicolaas Hofmeyr, as did dozens of other young men of his generation. Had he matriculated there, rather than following an older tradition of preparing for the ministry in the Netherlands, it is conceivable that the Free Protestant Church in Cape Town would not have developed.

Dutch Protestant theology experienced several different post-Enlightenment emphases during the nineteenth century. One of the most influential of these

was the rise of the so-called "Groningen school" (*de Groninger richting*), a post-orthodox movement which sought to infuse new life into what many observers regarded as moribund Calvinism, as an alternative to the rationalism which had taken a heavy toll on popular religious belief and practice. In brief, during the 1830s several young professors at the University of Groningen, under the leadership of Petrus Hofstede de Groot (1802-1886), believed that to a great extent conventional Reformed theology was out of touch with the needs of the times but thought that they could contribute to a "new construction" of it. They began to meet on Fridays to read the New Testament and discuss its implications for a renewal of theology. This led to the establishment of a theological society in 1835 and the launching of a periodical, *Waarheid in Liefde*, two years later. Their view of religion as such was taken from Benjamin Constant's (1767-1831) five-volume study of ancient religion, *De la religion* (1824-1831), in which this international Swiss philosopher had postulated that it had its source in innate religious feelings. Among the pivotal emphases of the Groningen renewal theologians were the belief that God had revealed himself in *all* of creation, though especially in Jesus Christ, so that humanity could be conformed to the divine image. In accordance with this broadened understanding of revelation, they contended that God has been active in all people, though most lucidly in Israel and the life of Jesus. They had little regard for orthodox Reformed Christology and believed that Jesus was and is both human and divine, though not with two natures, but one which merged them. The Groningen theologians also departed from orthodoxy in rejecting the substitutionary theory of the Atonement in favour of a subjective emphasis on salvation through the possible emulation of Jesus as God's model for humanity. They denied the infallibility of the Bible and attributed greater authority to New Testament than to the Old. Furthermore, they dismissed the doctrine of the Trinity but accepted the miracles of Jesus as signs of his divine mission in the world. As an underlying matter of principle, Hofstede de Groot and his colleagues opposed restrictions on doctrinal freedom and did not believe that teachers of theology should be required to subscribe to confessional standards.

Faure arrived in the Netherlands during what James Hutton MacKay retrospectively called the period of modernism in Dutch theology. According to his chronological framework, this had begun not later than 1860 and endured until the 1870s. Though brief, it was a seminal era in Dutch Protestant thought, marked by a great deal of theological activity and strife. Both biblical studies and systematic theology were profoundly affected, and a new field of theological enquiry, comparative religion, would emerge under the leadership of Cornelius Petrus Tiele (1830-1902), who became professor of the History of Religions at the University of Leiden in 1877. This discipline further challenged the traditionally accepted belief that Christianity was the unique path of salvation. There is no evidence that before Faure sailed away from Cape Town he had even heard of any of the theologians at the University of Leiden or was aware that they were involved in protracted disputes with conservative Calvinists, although the Dutch Reformed divines in the Cape were cognisant of the theological wars being waged in the Netherlands and beginning to be mirrored on their own turf.[xi]

In any case, by the early 1860s the University of Leiden had gained a

reputation as a centre of German-influenced theological liberalism, not least because of the prominence there of the controversial systematic theologian Johannes Henricus Scholten (1811-1885), "de geestelijke vader der moderne theologie" in the Netherlands. Like many other Continental Protestant theologians of his generation, he was never fully satisfied with conventional, supernaturalistic views of God, the miracles of Jesus, and other matters of contention. Nor was Scholten a devotee of supranaturalism, the position taken by such theologians as Friedrich August GottreuTholuck (1799-1877) and Johann August Wilhelm Neander (1789-1850), who accepted the possibility of forces which went beyond human understanding. Believing in the progressive advance of human knowledge, they argued that many events which in the past and even in the post-Enlightenment present seemed to be supernatural would one day be fully explicable in natural terms. Scholten's early sympathy for the "Groningen direction" soon yielded to a positive reappraisal of old Calvinism which, however, he sought to adapt to contemporary intellectual currents. His quest for a theologically viable merger of sixteenth-century orthodoxy and nineteenth-century modernism led to a fascination with much recent German thought, not least Hegelian idealism. In the end Scholten was strongly influenced by natural science and became an adherent of a deterministic, monistic *Weltanschauung* which left no room for the freedom of the will. After the middle of the nineteenth century he and his colleagues at the University of Leiden devoted much of their attention to historical criticism of the New Testament, creating a school of thought which to a great extent mirrored that associated with the University of Tübingen.[xii] One of Scholten's younger colleagues, moreover, Abraham Kuenen (1828-1891), since 1855 a professor of Old Testament, was in the process of publishing his three-volume *Historisch-kritisch onderzoek naar het onstaand en de verzameling van de boeken des Ouden Verbonds*[xiii] and would soon come under the influence of the liberal Anglican John Colenso's 1862 *Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined*, which denied much of the essential historicity of these six cornerstones of ancient Hebrew history.

Another younger colleague, Lodewijk Willem Ernst Rauwenhoff (1828-1889), had been appointed professor of Church History in 1860, a position he would occupy for more than two decades. Himself a graduate of the university, he had served as a minister for approximately eight years in Mijdrecht, Dort, and Leiden before returning to lecture. Rauwenhoff was in his time regarded as one of the most radical of Dutch Reformed theologians. He held no brief for orthodox theology. An advocate of the separation of church and state, Rauwenhoff accordingly believed that it was not the task of public universities to nurture the faith of their students, but rather to impart theological knowledge scientifically, in a manner not unlike the teaching of secular disciplines. His attitude towards church history was essentially that the facts of history have value only insofar as they have philosophical implications. While Faure studied under him, Rauwenhoff was writing parts of his three-volume *Geschiedenis van het Protestantisme*. In that study, he traced what he perceived as the evolution of Protestantism from the authoritarian orthodoxy of the Reformation to an individualistic religion which could be harmonised with modern science in post-Enlightenment society. Although Rauwenhoff remained a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, it is obvious that this radical religious thinker helped to prepare the ground for Faure's transition to

de facto Unitarianism.

More than four decades later, Faure recalled that upon his arrival in Leiden his "belief in the ancient creeds was still unshaken, simply because I had met with nothing that could shake it". His awakening in that city was both prompt and rude. "I was horrified when I first heard from older fellow students that the Bible was not infallible, was of human origin, and had to be read and judged as any other book," he recollected. Part of his theological education came from Dutch Reformed pulpits: "Long before I joined the theological classes I had heard enough from the pulpits to set me thinking. For in Holland ministers who have lost faith in the old creeds retain their position in the Church on the ground that in a Protestant Church free thought and free speech is not only in place, but is a sacred duty, and that religion is entirely independent on theological dogmas …" The consequences of Faure's exposure to modern theology propounded both from the lectern and the pulpit were far-reaching. "Gradually my views were transformed; one by one I found to be untenable, indefensible, founded on unreliable tradition, contrary to fact, baseless and untrue", he noted. Again, the evidence about how this surrendering of orthodoxy took place is scant, but Faure pointed to the decisive influence of Scholten, whose exodus from orthodoxy he detailed in his autobiography. Approximately midway through his studies in Leiden, Faure heard this theologian's lectures about the Gospel of John. "I had the advantage of witnessing the last blow administered to the old system, and the triumph of modern Biblical criticism, when Professor Scholten, [in] 1864, dealt with the Fourth Gospel, and demonstrated that it was an entirely unhistorical document", Faure recalled.[xiv]

What may have made at least as profound an impact on Faure's ethical formation during his years in Leiden as any of the Dutch theologians under whom he studied was his extensive reading of the works of the eminent Boston Unitarian Theodore Parker (1810-1860).[xv] He is remembered in American religious history chiefly as a radical thinker whose quest for the essential, moral religion of Jesus beneath layers of theological accretion was perhaps most succinctly expressed in his 1841 sermon, "A discourse on the transient and the permanent in Christianity". Parker emphasised that "true religion" or "the pure religion" which Jesus taught is eternal, but it is not immutable or objective. On the contrary, "the great truths of morality and religion, the deep sentiment of love to man and love to God, are perceived intuitively, and by instinct, as it were, though our theology be imperfect and miserable." By contrast, the words and concepts in which these are expressed are fallible and mutable, shifting with the spirit of the times and from person to person. [xvi]

Parker regarded the Bible as a product of human intellect and culture, not as an immutable revelation divinely and infallibly delivered from God to humanity. He particularly resented the defensiveness with which some people resisted nineteenth-century biblical criticism. "To disbelieve any of its statements, or even the common interpretation put upon those statements by the particular age or church in which the man belonged, was held to be infidelity, if not Atheism," Parker lamented. "An idolatrous regard for the imperfect scripture of God's word is the apple of Atalanta, which defeats theologians running for the

hand of Divine truth." But contemporary scholarship was coming to the aid of enlightened readers, he assured his audience in Boston:

> But modern criticism is fast breaking to pieces this idol which men have made out of the Scriptures. It has shown that here are the most different works thrown together; that their authors, wise as they sometimes were, pious as we feel often their spirit to have been, had only that inspiration which is common to other men equally pious and wise; that they were by no means infallible, but were mistaken in facts or in reasoning …[xvii]

The precise extent to which the young Faure, reading in Utrecht, became familiar with Parker's concerns in these areas is, however, probably impossible to ascertain. At any rate, Faure insisted later that it was considerable. He related how Rauwenhoff, his radical professor of Church History, had invited some of the theology students to participate in an informal, weekly debating society at which the thought of individual authors would be discussed. Because Faure could read English without difficulty, he was assigned to Parker. To prepare himself, the ambitious young student purchased Frances Power Cobbe's recently published fourteen-volume edition of Parker's works and also read John Weiss's two-volume biography of this "great religious and social reformer and heroic defender of the American slave".[xviii] Faure's interest in Parker continued long after he left Leiden. He later recalled that he had studied Parker's works "not only carefully, but with absorbing interest, an interest which did not flag when the work was done, but his stirring religious discourses, permeated with an ardent love of Liberty, Justice and Truth, constituted my mental pabulum for a long series of years". Long after returning to Cape Town, Faure described Parker as "an example of manliness, independence, devotion, uprightness and piety to an age consumed by selfishness, mammon worship and materialism – of the earth, earthly".[xix]

4 THE CHRISTIAN LANDSCAPE OF CAPE TOWN

The religious terrain of the Cape of Good Hope was already quite variegated when Faure returned, a theologically transformed man, in 1866. For two centuries, of course, the Dutch Reformed tradition had been the normative Christian home of the Afrikaners; in Cape Town and environs the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* had largely escaped the formal schisms which gave rise to the *Hervormde* and *Gereformeerde* branches elsewhere in southern Africa during the latter half of the nineteenth century. However, by the 1860s pietism and differing reactions to the modernising theological currents in the Netherlands had cracked the Calvinist monolith, as Hanekom and others have demonstrated.[xx] Nevertheless, the dominant presence of the Great Church on Adderley Street and other Dutch Reformed edifices in the city testified to the pervasive presence of this wing of Protestantism. Another important variety of Reformation Protestantism had become permanently structured in Cape Town in 1780 when the German Lutheran church in Strand Street was erected. Ironically enough, that venue's history would intersect with that of the Free Protestant Church, as will be shown shortly.

The transfer of the Cape from Dutch to British hegemony early in the nineteenth century had opened the door to considerable numbers of immigrants from the United Kingdom. Consequently, the Church of England soon became a visible presence in Cape Town. The first Anglican bishop in southern Africa, Robert Gray, was consecrated at Westminster Abbey in 1847 and assumed his duties in Cape Town the following year.[xxi] British Nonconformity followed hard on the heels of the Anglicans. Methodists were present in the city quite early in the nineteenth century and undertook missionary endeavours on a multiracial basis. The establishment of white settler congregations initially progressed slowly but accelerated after the 1840s.[xxii] Congregationalists and Presbyterians co-operated to found the "Union Church" in 1820, but its members who identified with the Presbyterian heritage withdrew to form their own church only four years later.[xxiii] Although individual Baptists were living in Cape Town by mid-century, as the eminent denominational historian Sydney Hudson-Reed emphasised, they did not constitute a formal congregation until considerably later.[xxiv] Other segments of the Protestant denominational cluster in the Cape, such as the Salvation Army and various Pentecostal churches, would arrive only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and thus did not form part of the religious landscape to which the liberalism which became Unitarianism was transplanted.

The Cape census of 1865 revealed nothing about religious affiliation. However, that of 1875 indicated that among the approximately 18 000 "European or White" people in Cape Town, the Dutch Reformed had a relative majority of 7 246, while there were 5 072 "Episcopalians" or Anglicans. The Roman Catholic Church claimed the loyalty of 1 834 Capetonians. The European population of the city then encompassed 1 349 Lutherans, 752 Wesleyans, 508 Presbyterians, and considerably smaller numbers of people belonging to other Christian denominations. Only two people identified themselves as Unitarians; the Free Protestant Church did not yet use that label.[xxv] All of this underscores the fact that among the Anglophone Capetonians denominational pluralism was a *fait accompli*, whereas their Afrikaans counterparts were generally within the Dutch Reformed fold, and within that localised tradition many members accepted theological pluralism, while others fought it tooth and nail.

What is even more relevant to the present study than denominational statistics, however, is the fact that the Dutch Reformed Church had experienced theological turmoil for several years before Faure's return to Cape Town, and it continued to bear the burden of public in-fighting long thereafter. Much of the protracted dispute focused on Thomas François Burgers, a young minister in Hanover, and his counterpart in Darling, Johannes Jacobus Kotzé, whom the Cape Synod had suspended for heterodoxy in 1862 and 1864, respectively. Both men had contested their suspensions in the civil courts and won their highly publicised cases and thus continued in the Dutch Reformed ministry, although Burgers's congregation suffered a schism in 1866, and not long thereafter he left the Cape and eventually became president of the South African Republic. Kotzé stayed in the pulpit at Darling until 1894 and was eventually buried from the Free Protestant Church in Cape Town. The Dutch-language religious and quasi-religious press in the city divided sharply on these and related theological

cases. *De Volksvriend* championed orthodoxy, while *Het Volksblad* became a mouthpiece for both ministers and laymen of liberal persuasion. Furthermore, in 1860 Leopold Marquard (1826-1897), a son of a German Lutheran missionary, who was one of Faure's secondary school teachers and a key member of the Free Protestant Church from its beginning, and who eventually married Faure's sister Dora, established the previously mentioned *De Onderzoeker* as an mouthpiece for theological liberalism. As part of its strategy for coping with the ongoing disputes, in 1862 the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape had implemented a mandatory *colloquium doctum* for all prospective ordinands as a means of weeding out those who, from a conservative doctrinal perspective, were theologically questionable.

5 THE BEGINNINGS OF FAURE'S PUBLIC MINISTRY

After returning to Cape Town in November 1866, Faure initially sought to minister within the Dutch Reformed Church, of which he was still a member. Yet virtually from the outset he seems to have understood that he would not be accepted without a struggle. Faure preached his first sermon in South Africa at the venerable Groote Kerk on Sunday evening, 25 November 1866. According to a report printed in the sympathetic *Het Volksblad* two days later, he assured the "talrijke en aandachtige gemeente" that he intended to preach "het zuivere Evangelie", but he realised that his understanding of it, namely that "die groote liefde Gods jegens den mensch, die hem bewegen moest om, volgens het eerste en het groote gebod, God lief tehebben boven alles [was] de hoofdzaak in de godsdienst van Jesus, in het leven van den Christen". Faure underscored his awareness that he would face stiff opposition by wrapping himself explicitly in the mantle of Martin Luther's famous dictum at the Diet of Worms: "Hier sta ik; ik kan niet anders, God helpe mij."[xxvi] Faure wrote in his autobiography that although he had not said anything heretical, in the eyes of the local Dutch Reformed ministerium he had committed a homiletic sin of omission by concentrating exclusively on the ethical commandment of Jesus while failing to mention "either His divinity or His blood", and his silence on these crucial doctrinal matters was "an unpardonable outrage". None of the ministers greeted him after the service, the last one at which Faure preached in a Dutch Reformed Church in Cape Town.[xxvii]

6 THE FINAL BREACH WITH THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH

Faure apparently recognised within weeks of his return to Cape Town, if he had not done so while in Leiden, that he and the leadership of the Cape Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church were incompatible. Nevertheless, he seems to have believed for several months that there was enough theological breadth in the denomination for him to find a niche within it. He consequently visited several towns up-country and was invited to preach in a few Dutch Reformed pulpits. Faure also proclaimed his understanding of the Gospel on three occasions at the Lutheran church in Strand Street, Cape Town, in late 1866 and early 1867.[xxviii]

His final breach with his birthright denomination was accelerated by a hostile encounter with the Dutch Reformed minister in Uitenhage, Abraham Steytler, at whose manse he was a guest, in May 1867. According to a contemporary report sent by one of this dominee's local allies (probably a member of the parish consistory), the two men had discussed theology at length on Saturday evening, and from their conversation it had become obvious to Steytler that Faure was theologically very liberal. In his sermon the following morning, Steytler had consequently preached strongly against liberalism. Faure had confronted him in the meeting room of the consistory after the service and, in the presence of several members of the council, accused him of making irresponsible accusations. He was especially irked by the charge that some theologians had adopted liberal theology to facilitate the justification of their own sins. Steytler had politely defended himself, whereupon the young guest had stormed out without greeting anyone.[xxix] After this unflattering account was published in *De Volksvriend*, Faure gave a somewhat different one, which placed himself into a more favourable light, in the pro-Liberal *Volksblad* approximately a week later. He pointed out that numerous scholars in the Netherlands had become liberals out of sincere conviction, not for reasons of moral expediency. Faure directly challenged his adversary in Uitenhage:

> Wie zijt gij, Heer Steytler, dat gij mannen als Scholten, Kuenen, Rauwenhoff, Reville en zoo vele anderen, op zulk eene wijze durft beoordeelen en veroordeelen? Zijt gij geleerder dan zij? Schrijf dan een boek en weerleg hen.[xxx]

7 PROCLAIMING MODERNISM PUBLICLY: FAURE'S LECTURES IN THE MUTUAL HALL

Faure later described the incident in Uitenhage as "the decisive step" on his path to an independent ministry.[xxxi] Several weeks after returning to Cape Town, he announced in the local press that beginning on Sunday morning, 4 August, he would hold a series of lectures in Cape Town's Mutual Hall. To be delivered in Dutch, they would squarely address the current dispute over liberalism. "Door deze Toespraken, zal aan allen, die er prijs op stellen om kennis te maken met de 'Nieuwe Rigting' op Theologisch en godsdienstig gebied, daartoe gelegenheid worden gegeven," Faure explained; "zoo zal ieder voor zichzelven kunnen oordeelen of die Rigting ongodsdienstigheid en onzedelijkheid in de hand werkt, zooals men bijna elken Zondag van af vele kansels hoord beweren".[xxxii]

According to contemporary reports, attendance at the lectures was quite high, although no figures appear to have been published. The series ran to thirteen presentations, which were subsequently published as *De moderne Theologie: Dertien toespraken*. An English version, expanded to sixteen chapters, was issued, also in Cape Town, the following year.[xxxiii] A detailed consideration of them lies outside the scope of the present article, but a few particularly revealing excerpts from the first two lectures indicate something of their general direction.

Faure insisted in his first lecture that his theology did not place him beyond the

pale of Christianity: “Niet dat ik geloof, dat ik met mijne gevoelens over God en godsdienst niet in de Christelijk Protestantsche kerk te huis behoor; verre van daar!” He stated that he could become a pastor in the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands and explained that if it were possible for him to do likewise in South Africa he would do so, but that the actions of the most recent Cape Synod made it impossible. Faure professed that he had been aware of this for four years.[xxxiv] It is thus conceivable that at an early point in his theological studies he had become aware that the beleaguered Cape Synod had instituted the *colloquium doctum*.

In his second lecture, “De menschelijke rede”, Faure laid the groundwork for his extensive use of rationalism, a *conditio sine qua non* of his theology. The human mind, he declared, was a gift from God, and the Bible, including the teachings of Jesus, underscored its importance to faith. Faure sought to appropriate Zwingli and Calvin for his rationalism through selective quotation. The Genevan Reformer seemed to provide especially potent ammunition for his campaign. Faure quoted him: “God heeft de ziel des menschen toegerust met een verstand, waardoor hij het goede van het kwade, het regtvaardige van het onregtvaardige, kan onderscheiden, en, *door de rede voorgelicht*, weten kan, wat hij doen en wat hij laten moet.” But in his own day, Faure reasoned, “de Protestantsche kerk niet langer een Protestantsche is” because it had adopted an authoritarian stance reminiscent of Roman Catholicism and was thus impeding the freedom of the mind to explore theological frontiers. He challenged his audience to defy the conservative spirit and examine their Bibles freely. Faure also exhorted the clergy to relent: “Terug priester! die den geest uitblusschen wil, omdat het over slaven ligt heerschen is.”[xxxv] In his remaining lectures, he heeded his own advice and analysed a broad range of topics in both the Old Testament and the New according to the principles of historical criticism he had learnt in Leiden.

The reaction to Faure came soon and swiftly. N J Hofmeyr delivered speeches against him and his liberalism in Stellenbosch, Cape Town, and elsewhere in the Cape. Some of these were published in 1868 as *Vier Leerredenen tegen De Hedendaagsche Dwaling op De zoogenaamde moderne Theologie*.[xxxvi] Direct opposition to Faure also came from the eminent Andrew Murray, the dominee at the Groote Kerk. The two men sparred in the secular and religious press of Cape Town in 1867 and 1868. Murray also delivered a series of thirteen lectures countering *De moderne theologie* and published them as *Het moderne Ongeloof*.[xxxvii] This counter-attack, in turn, stimulated Kotzé and Burgers, who only a few years earlier had appealed their suspensions by taking civil action against Murray and the Cape Synod, to write pseudonymously a book criticising *Het moderne Ongeloof*.[xxxviii] Owing to these verbal thrusts and parries, Faure remained in the Dutch Reformed limelight, even though he did not have a realistic chance of joining its ministerium, because the *colloquium doctum* posed an insurmountable hurdle.

8 ESTABLISHING THE FREE PROTESTANT CHURCH IN CAPE TOWN

Despite having to endure at times blistering hostility, Faure persisted with his

lectures in the Mutual Hall through 1868 and into the following year. By 1869 they were described in the local press as worship services. The size of his audiences appears to have been a significant factor prompting him to establish his ministry on a permanent basis. On 14 February 1869 Faure made a public announcement to that effect. As reported in *De Onderzoeker* later that month, owing to appeals made from numerous individuals, he had decided "eene vrije Protestantsche Kerk te stichten" and asked people who wished to become registered members thereof to apply to him.[xxxix] Uncertain how to proceed, especially with regard to the crucial question of whether the projected church should have a confession of faith, Faure wrote to one of his old mentors in Leiden, Rauwenhoff, for advice. That liberal church historian replied immediately and enthusiastically in October 1869 and urged him to found a church without adopting such a confessional statement until absolutely necessary.[xl]

Precisely when the Free Protestant Church was officially constituted may be impossible to ascertain because of certain major *lacunae* in its archivalia. In any case, by April 1869 adherents were addressing him as the "Leeraar der Vrije Protestantsche Kerk, Kaapstad". At that time a small cluster of them on behalf of many others sent Faure £233 in appreciation of his preaching in that city and Stellenbosch. They assured the young minister, "Wij slaan daarom met innig welgevallen uwe pogingen gade om den grondslag te leggen van eene Vrije Protestantsche Kerk."[xli] On 4 May 1869 it was reported in *Het Volksblad* that at the most recent monthly meeting of the Dutch Reformed Church Council in Cape Town five letters were considered from people wishing to cancel their membership in that denomination and become members of the Free Protestant Church.[xlii] A week later the same newspaper informed readers that on the previous Sunday Faure had introduced his first members at the packed Mutual Hall.[xliii]

That the Free Protestant Church was not founded until 1869 is historiographically significant, because the date of its founding has repeatedly been given as 4 August 1867. The article on the "Free Protestant (Unitarian) Church of South Africa" in the *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa*, for example, has perpetuated that error.[xliv] As we have seen, however, that date is when Faure began to hold public lectures on modern theology in the Mutual Hall, which should not be confused with the establishment of a church nearly two years later. What complicates matters is that within a few years thereafter Faure himself had begun to regard 4 August 1867 as the birth day of his church. Speaking at a memorial service on 3 August 1873 for his colleague and friend Pieter Carel Vintcent, who had established the Free Protestant Church in Graaff-Reinet, Faure found it remarkable that his own church had been founded on 4 August 1867 and Vintcent's precisely two years later.[xlv] The erroneous tradition has continued into the twenty-first century. As recently as 2007, two plaques mounted on the walls of the church in Hout Street, Cape Town, bore inscriptions that it had been founded in 1867.

9 FREE PROTESTANTISM IN STELLENBOSCH AND GRAAFF-REINET

Contrary to the assertion in the article about the "Free Protestant (Unitarian) Church of South Africa in the *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa* that it "never extended beyond Cape Town",[xlvi] there were short-lived Free Protestant congregations in both Stellenbosch and Graaff-Reinet, beginning in the 1860s. The work in the former city was led by Faure at the same time as he was lecturing at the Mutual Hall in Cape Town. No doubt aided by the completion of the railway line between that city and Stellenbosch in 1862, he commuted to his birthplace monthly to hold services in a house which belonged to an aunt, who bequeathed it to him in 1870. Faure continued to preach there regularly until he sold the property. The mundane factor of its sale terminated the Boland component of his ministry, which henceforth was concentrated exclusively in Cape Town.[xlvii]

The Free Protestant church in Graaff-Reinet endured considerably longer. Its founding minister was Vintcent, a native of Mossel Bay and contemporary of Faure who had been one of his schoolmates in Cape Town and had studied alongside him in Leiden but nearly succumbed to tuberculosis in that Dutch city.[xlviii] The two returned to Cape Town together in November 1866. After Vintcent's health improved he resumed his studies in Leiden and received a Doctorate of Divinity in 1868. This young graduate again landed in Cape Town in November 1868 and was heralded in the columns of *De Onderzoeker* as "Nieuw Bloed" who would further invigorate the Liberal Christian movement.[xlix] Vintcent began to preach independently in the city hall at Graaff-Reinet the following January, using Dutch and English alternately.[l] What led him to that town in the Karoo is unknown. By June 1872 the Free Protestant Church there had purchased a plot on which to construct a chapel, and three months later T F Burgers graced the cornerstone-laying ceremony with his presence.[li] Vintcent's death in July 1873 brought a temporary halt to the worship of the church there. After four years it resumed and was served sequentially by a former Dutch Reformed minister and a Unitarian from England until 1886, when the Free Protestant Church of Graaff-Reinet ceased to exist.[lii] Like his comrade Faure, Vintcent was a Mason, and after he died of tuberculosis in July 1873, he was buried in a Masonic rite in front of the chapel in Graaff-Reinet.[liii]

10 CONCLUSION

Faure would serve as the minister of the Free Protestant Church in Cape Town until 1897. During his nearly three years in its pulpit the congregation grew somewhat, and considerably more during the ministry of his successor, but quantitatively it never rivalled the several previously mentioned denominations in the city. Much of the historical significance of its origins certainly lies in its illustration of how nineteenth-century biblical criticism and other dimensions of theological liberalism which bedevilled the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape were not fully contained within that denomination but spilled over and, during a decade of ferment, resulted in the birth of another. Furthermore, although the "Unitarian" label was added to the Free Protestant Church during Faure's tenure as minister, and eventually relatively close ties with British Unitarianism were established (largely after an Englishman, Ramsden Balmforth, succeeded Faure in 1897 and continued to

serve the congregation until 1937), one finds here an example of a primarily Anglophone Unitarian church springing from intercontinental Dutch roots. The historiography of the Free Protestant Church is in its infancy, but the intriguing story of its genesis points to a radically nonconformist legacy which would manifest itself in increasingly liberal religious thought and, at times, dissenting opinions about social and political issues in South Africa. These matters await scholarly enquiry.

WORKS CONSULTED

Briggs, D R & Wing, J 1970. *The harvest and the hope: The story of congregationalism in Southern Africa*. Johannesburg: United Congregational Church of Southern Africa.

Cobbe, F P (ed) 1864. *The collected works of Theodore Parker*, Vol VIII. London: Trübner.

Collins, R E 1973. *Theodore Parker: American transcendentalist: A critical essay and a collection of his writings*. Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press.

Elphick, R & Davenport, R (eds) 1997. *Christianity in South Africa: A political, social, and cultural history*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Faure, D P 1907. *My life and times*. Cape Town: Juta.

Faure, D P 1869. *Modern theology*. Cape Town: Van de Sandt de Villiers.

Faure, D P 1868. *De moderne theologie: Dertien toespraken*. Kaapstad: Juta.

Hanekom, T N 1951. *Die liberale rigting in Suid-Afrika*. Stellenbosch: Die Christen Studentevereniging-Maatskappy van Suid-Afrika.

Hewson, L A 1951. *An introduction to South African Methodists*. Cape Town: Methodist Church Publishing House.

Hinchliff, P 1963. *The Anglican Church in South Africa*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.

Hinchliff, P 1968. *The church in South Africa*. London: SPCK.

Hofmeyr, J W & Pillay, G J (eds) 1994. *A history of Christianity in South Africa*. Pretoria: HAUM.

Hofmeyr, N J 1854. *Over het hedendaagsche liberalisme in de Gereformeerde Kerk in Holland*. N.p.: n.publ.

Hofmeyr, N J 1868. *Vier leerredenen tegen de hedendaagsche dwaling op de zoogenaamde moderne theologie*. Kaapstad: JH Hofmeijr & Co.

Hudson-Reed, S 1970. *By water and fire 1820-1877: An account of Baptist beginnings in Southern Africa, 1820-1877*. N.p., South African Baptist Press.

Hutchison, W R 1959. *The transcendentalist ministers: Church reform in the New England Renaissance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Kuenen, A 1861-1865. *Historisch-kritisch onderzoek naar het ontstaan en die verzameling van de boeken des Ouden Verbonds*. 3 volumes. Leiden: Akademische Boekhandel van P Engels.

MacKay, J H 1911. *Religious thought in Holland during the nineteenth century*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Results of a census of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, taken on the night of Sunday, the 7th of March, 875. Part I.–Supplementary Tables. Cape Town: Saul Solomon.

Roessingh, K H 1914. *De moderne theologie in Nederland, haar voorbereiding en eerste periode*. Groningen: Van der Kamp.

Roy, K 2000. *Zion City RSA. The story of the church in South Africa*. Cape Town: South African Baptist Historical Society.

Weiss, J 1863. *Life and correspondence of Theodore Parker*. 2 volumes. London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green.

Wurth, G B 1927. *Scholten als systematisch theoloog*. 's-Gravenhage: Drukkerij Van Haeringen.

"X. Y. Z." en "Herder" 1871. *Wederlegging van Ds A Murray's boek "Het moderne ongeloof*. Kaapstad: Van de Sandt de Villiers.

Zaalberg, J C 1864. *De Godsdienst van Jezus en de moderne rigting.* 's Gravenhage: HC Susan, CH Zoon.

ENDNOTES

1 Peter Hinchliff, *The church in South Africa* (London: SPCK, 1968), 83.

2 Greg C Cuthbertson, "Christianity, imperialism and colonial warfare", in J W Hofmeyr and G J Pillay (eds), *A history of Christianity in South Africa* (Pretoria: HAUM Tertiary, 1994), 156.

3 Rodney Davenport, "Settlement, conquest, and theological controversy: The churches of nineteenth-century European immigrants", in Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (eds), *Christianity in South Africa: A political, social, and cultural history* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 54.

iv Kevin Roy, *Zion City RSA. The story of the church in South Africa* (Cape Town: South African Baptist Historical Society, 2000).

v T N Hanekom, *Die liberale rigting in Suid-Afrika* (Stellenbosch: Die Christen-Studentevereniging-Maatskappy van Suid-Afrika, 1951), 252-254.

vi D P Faure, *My life and times* (Cape Town: J. C Juta & Co., 1907), 1-6.
vii The similarity in the names and birth years of this pastor and David P Faure's father is only coincidental.
viii Faure, *My life and times*, 21-22.
ix N J Hofmeyr, *Over het Hedendaagsche Liberalisme in de Gereformeerde Kerk in Holland* (n.p.: n.publ., 1854).
x J C Zaalberg, *De Godsdienst van Jezus en de moderne Rigting* ('s Gravenhage: H C Susan, C H Zoon, 1864).
xi James Hutton MacKay, *Religious thought in Holland during the nineteenth century* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), 133.
xii Gerrit Brillenburg Wurth, *Scholten als systematisch theoloog* ('s-Gravenhage: Drukkerij Van Haeringen, 1927). For the larger context of nineteenth-century Dutch theological liberalism to which Scholten contributed significantly, see K H Roessingh, *De moderne theologie in Nederland, haar voorbereiding en eerste periode* (Groningen: B van der Kamp, 1914).
xiii A Kuenen, *Historisch-kritisch onderzoek naar het ontstaan en die verzameling van de boeken des Ouden Verbonds*. 3 volumes (Leiden: Akademische Boekhandel van P Engels, 1861-1865.
xiv Faure, *My life and times*, 27.
xv For a particularly useful and incisive introduction to Parker, see William R. Hutchison, *The transcendentalist ministers: Church reform in the New England Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 98-136. Robert E Collins, *Theodore Parker: American transcendentalist: A critical essay and a collection of his writings* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1973) is another readable introduction.
xvi Theodore Parker, "A discourse on the transient and the permanent in Christianity", in Francis Power Cobbe (ed.), *The collected works of Theodore Parker*, Vol. VIII (London: Trübner & Co, 1864), 4-8.
xvii Parker, "A discourse on the transient and the permanent in Christianity", 12-13.
xviii John Weiss, *Life and correspondence of Theodore Parker*. 2 volumes (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1863).
xix Faure, *My life and times*, 28-29.
xx Hanekom, *Die liberal rigting in Suid-Afrika. 'n Kerkhistoriese studie*.
xxi Peter Hinchliff, *The Anglican Church in South Africa* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963), 27-31.
xxii L A Hewson, *An introduction to South African Methodists* (Cape Town: Methodist Church Publishing House, 1951), 35-40.
xxiii D Roy Briggs and Joseph Wing, *The harvest and the hope: The story of congregationalism in Southern Africa* (Johannesburg: United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, 1970), 38.
xxiv Sydney Hudson-Reed, *By water and fire 1820-1877: An account of Baptist beginnings in southern Africa, 1820-1877* (n.p.: South African Baptist Press, 1970), 47-49.
xxv *Results of a census of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, taken on the night of Sunday, the 7th of March, 875. Part I.-Supplementary Tables* (Cape Town: Saul Solomon and Co., Printers, 1878) 1878.
xxvi Untitled article, *Het Volksblad* (Cape Town), 27 November 1866, 2.
xxvii Faure, *My life and times*, 31.
xxviii Untitled announcement, *Het Volksblad*, 1 December 1866, p. 1; Faure, *My life and times*, 31, 36.
xxix Fermer Orthodox dan immer (Uitenhage) to *De Volksvriend*, 27 May 1867, in *De Volksvriend*, (Cape Town), 5 June 1867, 3.
xxx D P Faure (Cape Town) to *Het Volksblad*, 13 June 1867, in *Het Volksblad*, 15 June 1867, 2.
xxxi Faure, *My life and times*, 36.
xxxii "Kennisgeving", *Het Volksblad*, 1 August 1867, 1.
xxxiii D P Faure, *Modern theology* (Cape Town: Van de Sandt de Villiers & Co, 1869.
xxxiv D P Faure, *De moderne Theologie. Dertien toespraken* (Kaapstad: J.C. Juta, 1868), 14.
xxxv Faure, *De moderne theologie*, 28-29, 41.
xxxvi N J Hofmeyr, *Vier Leerredenen tegen De Hedendaagsche Dwaling op De zoogenaamde moderne Theologie* (Kaapstad: J H Hofmeijr & Co, 1868).
xxxvii Andrew Murray, *Het moderne ongeloof* (Kaapstad: J F Hofmeijr & Co, 1868).

xxxviii "X. Y. Z." en "Herder", *Wederlegging van Ds. A. Murray's boek "Het moderne ongeloof* (Kaapstad: Van de Sandt de Villiers & Co, 1871).
xxxix "Vrije Protestantsche Kerk", *De Onderzoeker*, X, no. 110 (25 February 1869), 24.
xl Faure, *My life and times*, 41-43.
xli John F Schutlz, et al (Cape Town) to D P Faure, 10 April 1869, in *De Onderzoeker*, X, no 112 (23 April 1869), 40.
xlii "Kerkeraadsvergadering", *Het Volksblad*, 4 May 1869, 2.
xliii "Voorstelling van jeugdige Leden in de Vrije Protestantsche Kerk", *Het Volksblad*, 11 May 1869, 2.
xliv "Free Protestant (Unitarian) Church of South Africa", *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa*, vol 5 (Cape Town: Nasionale Opvoedkundige Uitgewery Ltd, 1972), 34.
xlv National Library of South Africa, Cape Town, Special Collections, Free Protestant Church archives, MSC 34, box 1, folder 4, D P Faure, *The good and faithful servant* (Cape Town: Van de Sandt de Villiers & Co, 1873).
xlvi "Free Protestant (Unitarian) Church of South Africa", 34.
xlvii Faure, *My life and times*, 46-47.
xlviii Faure, *My life and times*, 50.
xlix "Nieuw Bloed", *De Onderzoeker*, IX, no 107 (24 November 1868), 110; "Gemengde Berichten", *De Onderzoeker*, IX, no 107 (24 November 1868), 116.
l "Vrije Prediking te Graaff-Reinet", *De Onderzoeker*, X, no 109 (28 January 1869), 75.
li "Gemengde Berichten", *De Onderzoeker*, XIII, no 150 (26 June 1872), 46; "Gemengde Berichten", *De Onderzoeker*, XIII, no 155 (25 November 1872), 91.
lii Faure, *My life and times*, 50.
liii National Library of South Africa, Cape Town, Special Collections, Free Protestant Church archives, MSC 34, box 1, folder 4, *In memoriam: Funeral service at the grave of the Rev P C Vintcent, D D, Minister of the Free Protestant Church, and Orator of the Lodge "De Vereeningen," Graaff Reinet, 26th July, 1873* (Graaff-Reinet: privately published [1873]).