

The fundamentalisation of Afrikaner Calvinism

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In 1948, the National Party, under Ds. D. F. Malan, a minister of religion turned politician, captured power in South Africa. The basis of its support were the Afrikaners, those descendants of European immigrants to South Africa who spoke their particular variety of Dutch, known as Afrikaans. They came to support Malan in 1948, in sufficient numbers to form a parliamentary majority. The reasons for this support (which did not in itself entail a particularly large electoral swing¹) are, naturally, complex, but they presumably include the acceptance not merely of that part of the party's programme which was known as apartheid and which, as is notorious, related to the domination of the South African blacks by the whites, but also of what has been called the 'civil religion' which was propagated by the National Party and its leader.² This was, and to a large extent has remained, of a fundamentalist Calvinist nature. In the event, of course, the requirements of government, and above all the requirements of the apartheid policy made the full implementation of a strict fundamentalist programme impossible. In recent years, it has even been the case that measures in such matters as divorce legislation were adopted despite their apparent inconsistency with fundamentalist tenets.³ Nevertheless, in general it is assumed that those Afrikaners, a considerable majority, who vote for the National party and who are also members of one of the three reformed churches which are almost exclusively Afrikaans, accept, at least passively, the fundamentalist Calvinist line of the National Party and the Afrikaner establishment.

This orientation has tended to lead to the assumption that the Afrikaners' Calvinism need only be explained as a primordial attachment. Both within the nationalist Afrikaner tradition and among many sociologists, the Afrikaner people's adherence to Calvinism is a given. From this, much else about modern South African society can be derived. However, as Dik van Arkel has shown in his analysis of the development of anti-Jewish stereotypes in Europe,⁴ what

sociologists take as givens can themselves be objects of historical research. The development of Afrikaner social and religious self-identity, or self-stereotype, it will be argued, is a historical construct of relatively recent date.⁵ In this way, this paper follows Van Arkel's challenge to any timeless and changeless vision of the world, while nevertheless attempting to discover the deeper regularities within that seeming variability.

In the 1960s, in particular, Weberian sociologists put forward a number of arguments on the basis of Afrikaner ideology which it is worth rehearsing. For theorists of this stamp, the Afrikaners formed what seemed like a considerable puzzle. Weber had argued that Calvinist religion had contributed to the establishment of a mentality conducive to capitalist individualism.⁶ Since capitalism inexorably meant modernity, this meant that Calvinism should have been accompanied with a positive appreciation of democracy, racial equality and economic rationality. Now, the Afrikaners gave every indication of being good Calvinists, but in no other way did they agree with the stereotype of modern men and women. Obviously their commitment to democracy and racial equality was far from optimal, and in general it was also thought that they exhibited excessively non-capitalist, non-rational economic behaviour. How was this dilemma – which of course I am exaggerating but not, I think, excessively – to be resolved?

One way would have been to abandon the modernisation theories as a whole. In the long term the problems of modernisation theory have led to such an approach, and in the short term it might have been possible to see the case of the Afrikaners as such an anomaly that, at any rate, the relation between Calvinism and modernity had to be abandoned. This sort of strategy, though recommended by philosophers, is, as we know, not a favoured one among academics. And in any case there was no need. It was possible to build up an argument in which, by the introduction of certain extraneous variables, a result diametrically opposed to Weber's could be arrived at from the same premisses and by means of very similar steps.

Weber, it will be recalled, postulated that the Calvinist doctrine of predestination created specific tensions within the psyches of its adherents which were conducive to individual, innovative, economic action.⁷ This, as he saw it, was what liberated Calvinists from the bonds of traditional organisations and propelled them towards a capitalist ethos. It did so because of the randomness of God's decision to save or to damn any particular man or woman. It might be thought that the uncertainty that this created as to their eventual fate would have doomed Calvinists to an insurmountable lassitude, to 'the apparently "more logical" consequence of fatalism', as Weber described it.⁸ This tenden-

cy was counteracted by the belief that man's purpose on earth was solely to glorify God by productive labour within a specific calling. Overriding all else was therefore the feeling that by success in the things of this world those chosen for bliss in the next might be recognised. In early modern Europe economic criteria were the most common.

What happens, though, if the society in which the Calvinists live provides some clear way to distinguish between the elect and the damned? In early modern Europe and colonial North America there were of course a number of such indications. In the imagination of the Calvinists there were those who were clearly under the sway of the devil – 'drunkards, morris-dancers, great-bellied wenches, good-humoured curates, murderers, sodomites, ribald minstrels, lenient magistrates, witches, epicurean bishops, Jesuit martyrs, Spanish dons',⁹ to quote a study of Puritanism in Elizabethan and Stuart Essex. The Puritans' campaign for the reformation of manners derived from this vision. In general 'the two-class distinction between the elect and the damned, the order of grace and the order of nature' were introduced by Calvinist conceptions of man and of order. Despite the sinfulness of all men and women as a result of the Fall, 'the elect has a social position of responsibility to implement the will of God in the world. In the order of nature God ordained that some should rule and some obey... and the order of grace never violates the order of nature. The conceptions obviously provide justification for inequality and the limitation of equality to the community of the elect in situations when such arrangements are deemed necessary or desirable'.¹⁰

This last passage was taken from an article which attempts to explain the racial attitudes, and also the economic ethos, of the Afrikaners. It is not difficult to see how the argument develops further. In a society in which a small number of Calvinists had founded their hegemony over imported, heathen slaves and were then confronted by an enormous mass of heathen Africans the steps which might be thought to lead them to the assumption that they were chosen, not as individuals but as a people, as a nation, are easy to reconstruct. The Afrikaners came to believe that they as a people were placed by God at the southern tip of Africa to fulfil his purpose – though there was naturally a certain, though surprisingly limited, disagreement as to what that purpose was. This has been a powerful ideology. It would be impossible, for instance, to understand fully the first nationalist prime minister of South Africa after 1948, D. F. Malan, or the major architect of apartheid, Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd, without accepting the sincerity of their conviction that this was the case. In time, the line of thought would undergo a subtle shift. Now, not only the Afrikaners but all nations, all the dozen or so nations of South



A farmer reads from his bible. Litho by Heinrich Egersdorfer (1853-1915).

Africa, are seen as having their God-given right to exist and flourish, since God has created them as distinct unities. This is the justification for apartheid which its founders developed. It is still maintained, although in the recent past it has tended to be the perquisite of the rightist opposition, not of the official Nationalist Party. Only a historiography which refused to take any ideas at all seriously, or to consider them to have any shaping power whatsoever, would fail to include this in an analysis of the formation of modern South Africa, even though only a true believer would consider it to be the only force behind its creation. And its relation to fundamentalist Calvinism is quite evident.

As a synchronic argument, this may do reasonably well. If, however, the attempt is made to investigate it historically then a number of very serious problems arise. First, and for present purposes least important, some of the

explananda disappear. While no-one would seriously argue that there has been any significant commitment to racial equality among mainstream Afrikaners of the twentieth century, their supposed aversion to rational economics and to capitalism turns out to be a myth, or, more precisely, a stereotype. It was developed mainly by the largely English-speaking mine-owners, factory-owners and financiers, and their intellectual adherents, as a defence against attacks by two of the groups which made up the Afrikaner nationalist coalition opposing them. These were the newly-proletarianised Afrikaner workers, in those very mines and factories, and those who attempted to build up an alternative basis for finance and, later, industrial capital. While it has also suited Afrikaner nationalist intellectuals to accept it, for purposes of their own which need not detain us here, it should also be pointed out that the record of the Afrikaner nationalist government since it came to power in 1948 does not suggest a very deep-seated aversion to capitalism. Even before then there are sufficient signs that major elements within Afrikanerdom throughout the twentieth century, including many of those hostile to so-called 'Randlord' rule, were essentially capitalist. Indeed it can be argued that such has been the case throughout the history of South Africa since its initial settlement from Europe.¹¹

There is, though, a second point which is considerably more important. In general it is argued that the Calvinist nationalism of the Afrikaners is something which goes right back to the beginnings of white settlement. The primitive Calvinism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was somehow preserved unaltered in South Africa. That Calvin, John Knox or Gomarus were none of them nationalist in the sense of Malan and Verwoerd is beside the point. The mental furniture of their time, it is claimed, survived unchanged in the interior of South Africa, to re-emerge in the industrial society of the twentieth century. To the nationalists, this is a consequence of the immutability of the *volk*, the people, as it was created by God.¹² To their critics, too often, it derived from some strange Rip-van-Winkle effect. The Afrikaners, as it were, had gone to sleep for two hundred years or so, and when they were awakened their fashion of thinking was hopelessly out-of-date.¹³ To both groups of commentators, the nature of the Afrikaner people from its foundation entailed its acceptance of an exclusivist, racist, national Calvinism.

Now, it is increasingly realised how recently created, how artificial are many of those elements of culture which seem to belong to the eternal order of things, whether they be Scots tartans or the ceremonial around the British monarchy.¹⁴ It should therefore not come as any surprise to learn that this form of political Calvinism, so often thought to have been brought to South Africa by Jan van Riebeeck in 1652, cannot actually be traced back before

the last decades of the nineteenth century, at the earliest. In a series of very important articles, André du Toit – not coincidentally an anti-nationalist Afrikaner – has shown that all the earlier examples of such thought which have been adduced do not in fact demonstrate any such thing.¹⁵ No Afrikaner has been found to claim that his was the chosen people until 1883; it did not become accepted by any significant group of intellectuals until the first decade of this century, when in the process of reconstruction from the defeats of the second Anglo-Boer war it was propagated by Potchefstroom theologians;¹⁶ and it was not widely accepted among Afrikaner nationalists until the 1930s. Before this, however, the Afrikaners' opponents did not infrequently assert that the Boers of the Transvaal held such a belief, but this was largely done to ridicule them. It was David Livingstone – who, it will be recalled, began his career in Africa as a missionary among those Tswana who were suffering raids from the Transvaal – who initiated this line of attack, and it was the prestige of his name, based on his later reputation as an explorer, which led to its dissemination. But for a long time it was not accepted, and indeed was on occasion specifically denied, by those to whom it was said to refer, including, for instance, François Lion Cachet, one of the leading *predikanten* in the Transvaal.¹⁷

Livingstone, incidentally, seems to have based his vision of the Afrikaners on two things, besides his general aversion for the Transvaal republic. These were, first, his encounters with a small sect, known as the *Jerusalemgangers* – 'those who are going to Jerusalem' – and, secondly, and paradoxically, his anti-semitism, which led him to make very unflattering comparisons (in private) such as 'The Boers are certainly remnants of the lost tribes of Israel. They speak of nothing but pounds, shillings, dollars, guilders, sheep and oxen. Their whole souls seem absorbed by this world's goods. Their talk is exactly what you overhear in the Jews of London'.¹⁸

At this point, the problem becomes evident. How was a line of thought which was originally used to ridicule the Afrikaners so internalised that it was accepted by a significant proportion of that people – I would not like to say how large that proportion was – and became something for politicians to conjure with? This question then breaks down into three others. First, what was the theological and theoretical justification for such an apparently arrogant claim? Secondly, what was the process whereby the line of thought became an integral part of nationalist ideology? And, thirdly, what was the religious background against which such a transformation was possible?

So, first, what was the theological justification for this line of thought? It derives, in very large measure, from the religious developments in the Protes-

tant Netherlands during the nineteenth century. Even though, in 1806, all formal political links between South Africa and the Netherlands were severed, in ecclesiastical matters the ties became stronger thereafter. For the purposes of this paper the various doctrinal and ecclesiastical divisions are not of great interest. Rather it is the main line of conflict with the principles of the Dutch state which concerns us. To reduce a complex movement to its symbolic personalities, this can be seen as being a matter of four men, the poet-theologians Willem Bilderdijk and Isaak da Costa, the historian and politician G. Groen van Prinsterer and, above all, the remarkable figure of Dr. Abraham Kuyper. Bilderdijk and Da Costa, early in the century, were the guiding lights of the *Réveil*, a movement for the Calvinist rechristianisation of the Netherlands following the religious slough of the eighteenth century and the secularisation of the *Bataafse tijd*, the Batavian time, as the era of the French Revolution was known in the Netherlands.¹⁹ Initially this was primarily a matter of the revival of the true Calvinist religion in individual consciousness, but it did lead to a number of institutional embodiments, notably the Utrecht student society, Sechor Dabar, of which many men who were to minister in South Africa were members.²⁰ In time, though, these newly confident Calvinists found it necessary to challenge the liberal fundamentals of the post-revolutionary Dutch state. The first moves in this direction came in mid-century, with Groen van Prinsterer leading the attack on the universalistic, secular structure of the Dutch education system.²¹ However, it reached its apogee in the last decades, with Abraham Kuyper.

Kuyper was a man of considerable eminence and talents. He was a minister of religion, and also a minister of the crown, ending his career as Prime Minister between 1901 and 1905. He was a founder of the Free University of Amsterdam – its name incidentally should not deceive the unwary, since its freedom is defined in an idiosyncratic, Calvinist way – and the founder of a political party, the Anti-Revolutionary Party – the revolution it was against, as should be obvious from the above, was the French Revolution – which long remained a considerable force in Dutch politics. He was a prolific writer of works which combined theology and politics and is one of the only two (or at most three) Dutch politicians of the past century and a half who are really worthy of attention outside the specific context of Netherlands politics.

Kuyper was faced, as a devout Calvinist, with the problem of developing a political theology suitable for believers in the secularised, liberal world of the Netherlands of his time. In his view, this required a certain readjustment of Calvinist thought away from the individual to the community of the believers, of the saved. Kuyper's arguments were based on the thesis, which

no Calvinist of any time would quarrel with, that the majesty and the sovereignty of God was all-pervasive and all-powerful. From this he continued by stressing what this entailed, namely that the Lord not only determined the salvation or the damnation of individuals but also the truly righteous form of society and of the individual institutions within it. There are within society a number of spheres – the family, education and so forth – which are the responsibility of the community of believers, since in such matters they are directly commanded by God, and no authority of humans, such as the state, may come between them and the dictates of the Almighty. The state is necessary – this is no call for anarchy or for theocracy – but only to regulate mechanically such things as the sinfulness of man made impossible to develop organically.²² Christians must therefore both struggle within the state for the achievement of a religious life, but at the same time they must stress the limitations of state power and the importance of control over crucial institutions of life.²³

It is easy to see how such an argument can be used as the basis of a Protestant politics – but at the same time how it can be used to justify coalitions with Catholics in government while ensuring the maximum of social separation. It is thus part of the reasoning behind the specific Dutch phenomenon of *verzuiling*, of the religious communities forming the pillars of separate society. On the other hand, translated to South Africa, where all the true believers were Afrikaners (though the converse was far from true) it is easy to see how it could become the basis of an Afrikaner nationalism. There were certainly enough contacts between Afrikaner intellectuals and Kuyper and his fellows in Holland to make this possible. Indeed, Kuyper himself wrote a pamphlet on South Africa during the Boer War which contains perhaps the clearest application of his political theology to the life of the Afrikaners.²⁴

This leads me on to my second question: namely how was this Christian nationalism accepted? It did not happen immediately. In the 1870s S.J. du Toit, who had been influenced by Kuyper, attempted to have such matters adopted as the programme of the main Afrikaner political party in the Cape. The result was that he lost any influence he may have had over the movement.²⁵ But by the 1930s it was sufficiently well established for even a well-known agnostic like J. B. M. Hertzog to consider it necessary to speak in such rhetoric.²⁶ How did this happen?

The easy answer to this question is to say that it was the result of the growth of Afrikaner nationalism. Such an answer is, however, a tautology, at least in part, since this political theology was, at the ideological level, Afrikaner nationalism. Like all such movements, the mobilisation of Afrikaners on an ethnic basis derived from a complex blend of material and ideological fac-

tors, which I do not intend to unravel here, especially since most authors have tended to stress one side or other of the balance too exclusively.²⁷ In brief, though, the main lines of the alliance were between those who, for some reason or other, considered themselves to have been disadvantaged by the establishment of the English-dominated mining industry and those who needed to find an explanation, and a salve, for the defeat of the Boer War. As a theology, an ideology, to strengthen the base of a political movement and to allow it simultaneously to expand, Kuyperian fundamentalism has few rivals. Propagated largely from the theological college – later university – of Potchefstroom, it found a resonance among many – by no means all, but many – Afrikaners in the first decades of this century. Christian nationalist fundamentalism allowed them both a fortress into which to retreat from the ideological pressures of the world of the mining magnates, and the perspective that it would be possible eventually to expand and take that world over.

So far, this argument has been relatively conventional. I have given it a few idiosyncratic twists, but in general what I have had to say would be generally recognised and, I think, accepted. Nevertheless, the realisation that the Christian national – or Kuyperian – variant of Afrikaner fundamentalism did not appear in any strength at the beginning of the twentieth century does leave a number of problems. It is all very well seeing an ideology introduced and seeing how it can act as a solution to many of the social and political problems with which a community is confronted. Such an essentially functionalist account may have a considerable degree of explanatory power, as functionalist accounts usually do; nevertheless it is insufficient as an explanation of the precise course of events. To understand the limitation, one has only to wonder why it was a variant of Calvinism which was so successful in political terms in South Africa, rather than, say, the functionally very similar forms of political Catholicism being developed at much the same time on the other side of the religious divide in the Netherlands – to say nothing, to take the point to the bounds of absurdity, of the potential attractiveness of Islam or Sikhism. The ludicrousness of such a counterfactual should make my point clear. Kuyperian fundamentalism could only gain a hold in South Africa because it was introduced no more than a minor variant on an established theological tradition. The dominant strain of Afrikaner theology was Calvinist fundamentalism long before it became nationalism. And it was not merely in terms of theology. The nineteenth century saw a steady increase in, if you like, the level of religiosity of the Afrikaners without which the Christian nationalist ideology would not have gained the hold it did, and such nationalism as there might have been would have taken a very different form. It is this

process that I now want to document, and, as far as possible, to explain.

The increase in the level of religious sentiment among the Afrikaners during the nineteenth century is of course in contrast to a very considerable malaise before 1800. As always, it is difficult to demonstrate the absence of something, especially something as intangible as religiosity, and especially in a situation, which was the case, when Christianity was the defining criterion for admission to white society. It is difficult to use statistics of, for instance, the number of parents who had their children baptised when there were people who were prepared – and found it necessary – to bribe a minister to baptise them.²⁸ Obviously in this case the rite is of social, not sacramental, significance. All the same the indications of a low level of interest are clear. There were very few, very widely spaced churches, so that many Boers lived at least one hundred and up to eight hundred miles from the nearest one. Even in Cape Town, among the high officials of the Company, there were few signs of deep Calvinist adherence. In 1714, François Valentijn, a clergyman in the employ of the Dutch East India Company, wrote of a sermon which he delivered there that the Church members totalled 40 men and 48 women only, including that of the return fleet, and it was entirely surprising that among those who approached the Table (to take communion) there was no member of the Council of Policy, and apparently also none that was a church member.

In the country districts, he reported, matters were worse.²⁹ Theological debate was at a minimum, primarily because the clergymen were the direct appointees of the Dutch East India Company, and were in any case few in number. The monopoly which the church held, at least until the 1780s, did not further discussion.³⁰ Furthermore, until the last years of the century there is no indication of any house-meetings, bible-study groups or such similar religious events outside the direct context of the church services. While all the whites seem to have been baptised, fewer than half of those who reached adulthood became members of the church. There is thus every reason to echo the words of the historian of the Stellenbosch parish – Stellenbosch was the most important of the country villages and churches – that the eighteenth century was a period of great religious decline.³¹

In a sense it is not surprising that the Calvinism of the Netherlands was not maintained in South Africa. In the first place, those who went to South Africa were the dregs of European society, ingested by the great maw of the Dutch East India Company with its insatiable appetite for manpower.³² Many of them, moreover, were not brought up in the Reformed religion, but as Lutherans or Catholics. These were not the sort of people who would have been assured of their salvation. It could be, of course, that their transition

from the destitution of a Company soldier to the relative prosperity of many Cape burghers might have made them especially receptive to the predestination aspects of John Calvin's teachings, but if this is so, there is no empirical confirmation of it. It is moreover unlikely, since Calvinism was a religion which required the weekly attendance of the faithful to hear the exposition of the word by a learned minister. Given the far-flung pattern of European settlement in the Cape Colony, such regular discipline was impossible.³³ In the course of the nineteenth century this changed. Historians and others are used to thinking in terms of centuries, and this is particularly tempting when dealing with colonial South Africa, since the government of the Cape Colony passed from the hands of the Dutch to the English around 1800. In religious matters, though, the first significant signs of change can be discerned somewhat earlier. In what follows I give an account, necessarily rather brief, of the transformation that occurred within Afrikaner religious experience first in the main line of religious life, and then of two fringe movements – the one somewhat lunatic, the other not.

The first stirrings of the new religious mentality were to be found in the 1770s, significantly in Cape Town. M. C. Vos, the first South African to be called to the ministry, relates in his autobiography that he had been connected to a bible-reading circle there in the 1770s.³⁴ Clearly, in the cosmopolitan world of the port town, developments in European sensibility, above all the increase of Pietism, would quickly find a hearing. This process was strengthened following the arrival in 1786 of Helperus Ritzema van Lier, a brilliant and very pious Dutch minister, whose prospects of achieving in the Netherlands the position his talents deserved were probably hindered by the fact that his father had previously taken off with the funds of Drenthe. Under Van Lier's influence, the religious life of Cape Town flourished, albeit temporarily.³⁵ Van Lier was a close cooperator of the missionaries following their arrival in 1795 in South Africa. But for her death his sister would have married J. J. Kicherer, one of the first batch of Dutch and London Missionary Society missionaries, and Machtelt Smith, his most prominent convert, was later to be a collaborator and friend of the LMS – to the extent that its superintendent, Dr. John Philip, wrote a memorial of her.³⁶ It was from this circle that the South African Missionary Society was founded,³⁷ and its influence spread into certain specific areas of the countryside, where European travellers of more rationalist stamp were later to complain of an excessive cloying piety.³⁸

This initial burst of religious enthusiasm did not cover the whole colony, by any means. It was far too much the consequence of a few individuals' personalities and did not have any institutional base. Moreover, it is difficult to

decide that any movement with its main base in Cape Town could have had great success in the very different world of the Cape countryside, or for that matter that it could have conquered the exceedingly heterogenous society of the port city.

In the course of the succeeding decades, though, what had at first been particular and specific to a few small areas of the colony became much more general. It is difficult to document this precisely, since the church history of the Afrikaners which exists has tended to concentrate on the formal, the institutional and the theological rather than on matters of religious mentality, and the archival and printed sources have not been investigated for this topic. Nevertheless, the picture which emerges seems quite clear. It is one of the steady rise in the extent of genuine commitment to the tenets of a fundamentalist, somewhat evangelical brand of Calvinism which culminated, at least for the time being, in a major outbreak of religious enthusiasm, in other words a revival, in the 1860s, but also in a whole series of acrimonious theological and ecclesiastical debates – which not infrequently ended in the state courts.³⁹ The revival in the Cape followed on similar outbursts of the Holy Spirit in North America and England. It found its main inspiration not in the formal services of the Church, but rather in the prayer-meetings which were held alongside them. In the past such movements had generally been disapproved by ministers who considered them a threat to the discipline of the Church.⁴⁰ As the rigid disciplinarian Calvinism was tempered by a more emotional Evangelicalism, these meetings, often beginning around Whitsun, inspired the cautious welcome of many ministers. Originally they attracted very few attenders. Now, suddenly, they became crammed and emotional gatherings, over which the ministers lost control. The uncertainty can be seen in the attitude towards the revival of the two Andrew Murrays, father and son, and both leading ministers in the Dutch Reformed Church at the Cape. The older Murray had for years been praying for such a revival, and had been carefully reading the accounts of similar upwellings in his native Scotland and elsewhere.⁴¹ When it finally came his son was at the heart of the movement, not surprisingly given his own powerful character and preaching. He would not for nothing become the leading figure in the Cape Church in the late nineteenth century. When the matter came to a head, he was profoundly ambivalent to the outburst of uncontrolled emotion. During one such meeting he tried to quell the uproar, first proclaiming 'I am your minister sent by God, Silence', and, when this failed, by storming out of the meeting shouting: 'God is a God of order, but this is disorder'.⁴² At least one young woman, shortly to become a missionary wife, was so overcome by the power of the praying

held at
Worcester (1860)
which had
been discussed
at a conference
in April 1860,

that she fell into what in many other cultures would be described as a trance.⁴³ The power of the Holy Spirit was so great that it crossed the social divides of Cape Society, and a number of so-called 'coloured' and African servants, who had originally believed that God was only for white people, were now for Christ.⁴⁴ In a wide sweep of the Cape Colony, starting in the core agricultural areas of the South-West Cape but spreading north and east through the Karoo, this wave of enthusiasm pulled men and women in. Not every parish was so affected, but nevertheless it took hold in at least twenty-five *gemeenten* in the Cape and the Orange Free State⁴⁵ and was a year or so later to spread to the farthest outposts of white settlements.⁴⁶ Andrew Murray senior, wrote that 'there has been a wonderful change brought about among us. In almost every house where you come the subject is the "opwekking" or the prayer meetings'. The atmosphere of these meetings can be gathered from this quotation from a contemporary newspaper: 'The congregation heard to their great consternation, many of their number pour out their hearts before the throne of God's grace. Penetrating, powerful and majestic, as a storm crashing through the trees, were prayers of some of those present. All those who heard them seem to have been moved to the core by these things, since this solemn meeting induced wonderment on every face'.⁴⁷

How had this transformation come about? As with all such developments, it was the outcome both of institutional, intellectual and theological developments and of subtle changes in the social structure of the Cape Colony – and as usual it is easy to see what the formal developments were and very difficult to do more than speculate, in the most general terms, on how the colony's general history might have increased the level of religiosity. Thus, to take the easy things first, the character of the Cape Church's leadership changed dramatically between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. The deadening hand of the Dutch East India Company was removed. There were now many more ministers in the colony, large numbers of them of Scots origin – the agreement of theological tradition between the Dutch and Scots churches made them attractive to a British government which was concerned to anglicise the Cape and which also paid their wages. They had not only been subject to the religious influences of their native land, but also, in most cases, had spent a few terms in the Netherlands during their training, most often at the University of Utrecht where they were almost all members of the student society *Sechor Dabar*, the most important organisation inspired by *Bilderdijk*, *Da Costa* and the *Réveil*. There were also an increasing number of South Africans who trained for the ministry in Europe, and who came under the same influences. It was this group of men who were instrumental

in bringing about the widespread shift in the religious attitudes of white South Africans. To use another Weberian metaphor, they were the virtuosi whose practice so increased the religious musicality of the Cape's inhabitants that they began to improvise to a degree which frightened the original conductors.⁴⁸

Two points need to be made on this. The first is that these ministers saw themselves as stout Calvinists. Their main theological battles were against the proponents of an Arminian liberalism (although there were those who considered their dogmas of salvation suspect)⁴⁹ and for the maintainance of true reformed religion. This was the main thrust of all Andrew Murray's theological writing – and of the combined efforts of the ministers to have a theological college established in the Cape, free from the dangerous liberal influences which were seen in mid-century as unduly influencing the life of the Dutch church.⁵⁰ Andrew Murray's predecessor as the most prominent figure in the Cape Church, Abraham Faure, was a man of much the same stamp. His theological education had been formed by his reading of the works of Jonathan Edwards, the leader of Great Revival in New England in the 1740s.⁵¹ His sermons were described by his nephew – a man who later became the leader of the liberals – as follows: 'The sermon ended with terrible threats of hell and damnation, the sufferings of the damned and the various chambers of hell were described in the fullest detail. I often felt sick with terror. Nor were these endless agonies to be the portion only of naked and godless sinners; even the best were in imminent peril for they might not belong to the elect and only the elect could escape the clutches of the Devil'.⁵²

They had no difficulty in reconciling these Calvinist predestinarian doctrines with active evangelical work. To the outsider, this may seem a puzzle, and it caused friction in the Church itself, but it is one which can, I think, be solved, at least in part, by consideration of the statement, made in fact by Helperus van Lier at the very beginning of the century, that 'all those who are destined for eternal life will believe'.⁵³ The consequence, it would seem, is that one must give the Almighty the chance to save, not only oneself, but also those of one's fellow men and women over whom one has influence.

The second point I wish to make is that this movement was virtually entirely non-political. There was a certain amount of gently-phrased disapproval of the Great Trek,⁵⁴ but apart from that direct involvement of the church in the political life of the colony was limited to matters which directly concerned them, such as the direct subsidy of the church by the state,⁵⁵ or to such terrible public scandals as the running of trains on Sunday.⁵⁶ The churchmen were not themselves apolitical. After the establishment of the Cape Parlia-

ment they attempted to ensure that their representatives were moral, God-fearing men. Candidates for Parliament might even be nominated by the Church Council.⁵⁷ Despite this, there was no Calvinist political programme. The Cape Parliament was entirely secular. The Cape Dutch Reformed Church propagated a universalist, not a nationalist faith, and one that was not concerned, in its essence, with the problems of this world.

To move from these discussions of the effect of the pastoral elite on the Cape to more general discussions of white South Africans' 'selective affinity'⁵⁸ for Calvinism is difficult. It is axiomatic that major religious changes are related in some way or other to shifts in the socio-economic structure, but it is very difficult to pin the precise relationship down, especially in the absence of any hard data on the lives of the people concerned, as individuals. Nevertheless, it would seem to be at least an arguable hypothesis that the steady increase in the density of commercialisation of colonial South Africa, which occurred during the nineteenth century, coupled with the need to recreate the patterns of social stratification in the aftermath of the abolition of slavery and during the process of conquest and subordination of the blacks, together challenged the existing social order and made many Afrikaners more receptive to this predestinarian, emotional form of religion. In general, an uncertainty as to one's place in this world makes one more concerned with one's place in the next – which, in the well-known Weberian feedback loop, may well do much to improve one's standing on this earth. Indeed, the recent outburst of fundamentalist Christianity in South Africa is driven on by the same impulses.⁵⁹

It is now necessary to make one last point on this nineteenth century background to the political Calvinism of the post-South African War. This article has been very largely about the great mass of white colonial South Africa, about the settled, commercial farmers who were in regular touch both with their *dominee*, their minister, and, through him, through the newspapers, through the merchants, with world events. In other words, it has not been about the Afrikaner frontiersmen, often transhumant and living far in the interior with rather minimal links to anyone else, or, in other words with the archetypical *voortrekkers* of the Great Trek and the early Transvaal. These people are said, in their isolation, to have had no intellectual resource except the Bible and to have built their own highly ideosyncratic fundamentalist Christianity on the basis of it alone. Such people certainly did exist. The most notable of these were the so-called *Jerusalem-gangers* – 'those who are going to Jerusalem' – with whom Livingstone came into conflict. This small and short-lived group has had an influence on the image of the Afrikaners out of all proportion to

their true importance. They were first noticed by the ecclesiastical establishment in 1838 in a very distant part of Swellendam parish.⁶⁰ There, they were said to have based their actions on the apocalyptic vision of the book of Joel. Here, it will be remembered, is the great prediction: 'And it shall come to pass that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions'. In the days after the Great Trek, this call to prophetic leadership was met. (Incidentally, the passage continues: 'and also upon your servants and upon your handmaids in those days, will I pour out my spirit' (Joel, 2, 28-9), but this does not seem to have taken root.) In addition, many of these men justified their resistance to the British by pointing to the marginalia in their Dutch editions of the Bible when the republicans of the seventeenth century had tried to make some political capital by equating the falling monarchies of the book of Revelation with, among others, the English. They were led by the 'prophet' Johan Enslin, who was to become the most obscure of the contenders for political leadership in the new Transvaal republic, and the 'prophetess' Mietje Gous. In the tumultuous years after the Great Trek, they initially hoped to continue their migration all the way to Jerusalem – they had maps of Africa, but did not fully understand the meaning of scale. Relatively quickly, though, they were absorbed into the more orthodox churches of the Transvaal.⁶¹ The prophetic tradition was unable to strike deep roots in Afrikaner consciousness, although, later, it would be an Afrikaner, P. Le Roux, who was at the basis of the African Zionist churches after 1905. Le Roux, incidentally, had in his early years been close to the elderly Andrew Murray, who, for a while, had been very interested in faith healing.⁶²

The group into which the *Jerusalemgangers* were absorbed was the *Gereformeerde Kerk*, better known as the Doppers. Once again they probably derived from the influence which one or two individuals could have on their neighbours in a relatively isolated community, this time in a small area of the north-east Cape, round modern Colesberg and Burgersdorp. In this case, though, the names of these putative virtuosi are unknown. It is however certain that, from the initial European settlement of the area in the last decades of the eighteenth century onwards, the general level of piety was considered to be greater there than elsewhere in the colony.⁶³ What is notable is that the historian of the Dopper could not find any specific signs of strict Calvinism in this area until somewhat later in the nineteenth century, after the establishment of regular church services in the area and the spread, not merely of Bibles, but also of a number of Dutch calvinist theological treatises.⁶⁴ These, together with the growth, for reasons which are far from clear, of a specific local con-

servative way of life, led in the 1850s and 1860s to a bitter ecclesiastical conflict. The initial issue was the legality of singing hymns in church, as opposed to a limitation to the psalms. Coupled with the intransigence of a peculiarly insensitive minister, this would lead to the secession of a fair number of the area's Afrikaners from the official Dutch Reformed Church and to the formation of the *Gereformeerde* or so-called Dopper church.⁶⁵ This did not remain a purely local group, largely because it found support among a number of Dutch ministers, from those churches in the Netherlands which had themselves split off from the main ecclesiastical establishment. These men, of whom Ds. Dirk Postma was the most prominent, took the Dopper principles into the Orange Free State and Transvaal, where the most important adherent was to be Paul Kruger.⁶⁶ In many ways, the importance of the Doppers for later South African history is that it was out of a development of their tradition that nationalist Calvinism developed in Potchefstroom after 1902, to be picked up as the twentieth century developed by theologians and politicians of other churches. The point has to be made that the theology and the practice of the Doppers before 1900 were in no way nationalist, those of the original core, round Colesberg, were indeed notable for their loyalty to the (British) Cape Colony, and in general did not trek to the new republics of the north. In the Republics, particularly the Transvaal, the adherence to political and religious factions did tend to be coterminous, and much of the political strife of the early years of the Transvaal was about the precise ecclesiastical arrangements to be established. Nevertheless, these conflicts were more about personalities and resources than about the details of theology, and there was no sense, even among the most fervent Calvinists that their was an exclusive, national religion. Postma even argued for the toleration of the Roman Catholics in the Transvaal, with the argument that a church could only be protected by the 'word of truth'.⁶⁷

The Doppers were renowned for their specific mode of dress, which may indeed have given them their name. With the enormous socio-economic and political changes since the late nineteenth century, this disappeared. There are no South African equivalents of the Amish. Similarly, the social content of the theology changed. After the ending of the Republics' independence in the Anglo-Boer War, it became increasingly nationalist. Modern Afrikaner theology is thus a reflection on the predicaments of Afrikaners in the twentieth century, and as such is potentially mutable as those predicaments change. Only in the most formal sense, of the continuity of church organisation and of the most basic theological tenets, does it go back to the early years of white settlement in South Africa.

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