



Reason's dead end in David Faure: why the Cape's earliest liberal minister embraced spiritualism

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Abstract

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This article deals with nineteenth-century liberal thought in the Cape Colony. It argues that both orthodox rationalism and liberal reason failed to provide the liberal minister the Rev. D. Faure with a satisfactory source and standard for theological thinking. As a basis for this conclusion serves the correspondence between Faure, the first liberal minister who was born in the Cape, and the Rev. Peter Huet. The latter initially was an evangelical preacher and poet. Towards the end of their respective ministries, however, both Faure and Huet evidence high hopes regarding communications with the spirits of deceased. This article concludes that although Faure tried his best to base his theological thinking on human reason only, he arrived at a dead end and revelation was desperately needed. His theological framework collapsing, Faure looked to spiritualism for answers. The collapse of his theological thinking reflects unpromisingly on the present New Reformation (Nuwe Hervorming) movement in South Africa.

Opsomming

Die doodloopstraat van die rede by David Faure: waarom die eerste liberale predikant wat aan die Kaap gebore is sy toevlug tot spiritisme geneem het

Hierdie artikel het die negentiende-eeuse liberale denke aan die Kaap as onderwerp. Dit toon aan dat ortodokse rasionalisme en liberale denke nie daarin kon slaag om die liberale predikant,

David Faure, te voorsien van 'n bevredigende basis en standaard vir teologiese denke nie. Die briefwisseling tussen Faure, die eerste liberale predikant, gebore in die Kaap, en die gewese evangeliese prediker en digter, ds. Peter Huet, dien as basis vir hierdie gevolgtrekking. Albei predikante het teen die einde van hulle bediening hoë verwagtings van kommunikasie met die geeste van afgestorwenes gekoester. Hierdie artikel toon aan dat alhoewel Faure sy bes probeer het om sy teologiese denke op die menslike rede alleen te baseer, hy in 'n doodloopstraat beland en desperaat op soek was na 'n openbaring. Toe sy teologiese raamwerk gedreig het om ineen te stort, het hy sy hoop op spiritisme gevestig vir antwoorde. Die ineenstorting van sy teologiese denke reflekteer ongunstig op die toekoms van die huidige Nuwe Hervorming-beweging in Suid-Afrika.

1. Early professional life

David P. Faure was born in colonial South Africa, but studied theology at the faculty of Leiden University in the Netherlands. Already in the Colony the seeds of theological liberalism were sown in his heart. This was encouraged by Dr. A.N.E. Changuion, who was one of its early proponents at the Cape who actively promoted modern theology with his fluent pen. Changuion was a Dutch born teacher in classical languages, who first taught at the Athenaeum and from 1842 at his Institute. D.P. Faure, J.J. Kotzé, S.P. Naude and H.C.V. Leibrandt were his pupils and would become leaders of the movement in the Cape.

When Faure arrived in Holland for his theological studies, he naturally embraced the teachings of Professor Scholten, an influential liberal church-leader and the famous author of an influential book on Dutch Reformed doctrine. Scholten was a master of using the traditional Christian terms and words, but he filled them with a new meaning. Denying God's miraculous involvement and historically authoritative revelation through the Bible, he introduced a new theology that emptied Christianity of its traditional core doctrines (Berkhof & De Jong, 1973:271; Van der Zee, s.a.: 222-223). This theological free-thinking is described as "liberal" as it frees man of the old restrictions associated with authoritative Divine revelation through all aspects of the Bible. This article will use the word *liberalism* and its twin *modern theology* in this Scholtian sense.

Although Scholten seems to have started out as a more or less conservative theologian in his first congregation Meerkerk, this soon changed. It may also have been that he kept up appearances to survive in a reformed working environment. In his Leiden years as pro-

fessor, however, Scholten openly discarded the possibility of special revelation and subsequently denied the main tenants of the Christian faith (Hanekom, 1951:53-55). It would take 200 years for the New Reformation movement in South Africa to catch up.

On his return to the Cape Colony as a ministerial candidate in the Dutch Reformed Church, Faure would walk in the footsteps of his liberal teachers.

His first sermon in the Grootte Kerk in 1866 would also prove his only one. Faure's preaching was received with stunning silence and the customary thanks and handshakes were not forthcoming. Not one of the elders or ministers came to greet or thank him after the service. Why not? In his sermon Faure had implicitly denied the divinity of Jesus Christ. He only spoke about the Lord as a human religious teacher, and carefully refrained from referring to Him as the Son of God.

Faure read the signs of the times in the Cape and concluded that his honest liberal feelings were not compatible with the Dutch Reformed Church in the Colony. The episode in the Grootte Kerk made it clear that the door to ministry in the DRC in South Africa was closed. This denomination was at that stage still committed to a literal approach of the Bible. Asking entry would only be asking for trouble (Morrees, 1937:976). As Faure contemplated other means of living, he commenced lecturing on modern theology in the Old Mutual Hall in Cape Town (Faure, 1868). A competitive series to counter these was delivered by the Rev. Andrew Murray (cf. Murray 1868 and 1942). Finally a Free Protestant Church was established (Du Plessis, 1920:241-242).

2. Faure and Huet

2.1 Unexpected friendship

So far the historical background. The story that craves the interest of this article begins in Anno Domini 1887 when an unexpected friendship shaped up. We find two theologians, Faure and Huet, involved in an important exchange of thought by letter. Both of them had consciously drifted away from their roots. It was not only Faure who had done away with the traditional approach of Christianity, but the formerly fervent evangelical preacher and poet, Huet, as well. Although Huet had been less pronounced about his changed convic-

tions, he had travelled a similar road towards liberal theology, ending up having high hopes of spiritualism.¹ The change that had taken place in Faure's friend was remarkable. Twenty years before Huet was a renowned adversary of liberal theology. He was widely known as a reformed evangelical. Spiritual revivals in 1860 and 1861 he publicly considered as a preparation for "the fierce battle against unbelief" (Huet, 1868a:4-5). With this he pointed to the struggle against liberal theologians, which had started at the 1862 synod of the Dutch Reformed Churches. Although initial concerns about liberal doctrine filter through as early as 1852 (*Acta Synodi 1852*, KKA, S1/9, p.1180; cf. Hanekom, 1951:157), and arguably even earlier, liberalism within the DRC in the Cape became an issue (with complaints against local ministers on synod level in 1862; Hanekom, 1951:252-253).

As a writer Huet built up quite a reputation. This would earn him numerous references in the standard dictionary of the Dutch language (*Handwoordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*). Also in his endeavours as a poet Huet took a strong stand against the liberal theologians. He even stated that "modern theology is unable to build up anything" (Huet, 1868a:30). He also composed this strikingly religious poem:

Consolation, consolation to my people // your guilt of sin has
been atoned // the Lamb who's body was broken // who's side a
spear had pierced // fulfilled all your punishment and strife.
(Huet, 1868b)

Twenty years later, by 1887, these eloquent words had become empty shells. By this time, Huet no longer lived in South Africa where he used to minister for a season. He had moved back to the Netherlands and by then lived in Goes, a town in the province of Zeeland.

2.2 Disillusioned with Christian faith

On the 24th of April 1887 Huet wrote a personal letter to Faure, which measured against his former standards, proved nothing less than shocking in the change of thought it revealed (Faure, 1907:30). This private correspondence shows that Huet had converted to

1 Oxford Dictionary (Hornby, 1989): *Spiritualism* is the belief in the possibility of receiving messages from the spirits of the dead, or practices based on this belief.

spiritualism, while outwardly continuing as a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church. This letter to Faure shows that Huet had given up his former theological standards by literally discarding the central beliefs of orthodox Christianity: the Trinity, the atonement by Christ and the Bible as the authoritative Word of God.

In Huet's mind it was the teachings of spiritualism that had led him to depart from his former orthodoxy. The Dutch minister wrote to his South African colleague:

The popular Trinitarian doctrine, the popular Atonement doctrine, the identification of the words 'Gods Word' and 'Scripture', to say nothing about the dogma of Predestination, I had gradually learnt to discard. But for the rest, my Spiritualism has not shaken my faith ... (Faure, 1907:130).

One year before his letter to Faure, Huet had revealed his feelings in the magazine *Het eeuwige leeven* (*Life Eternal*). This periodical was not really a surprising choice since Huet happened to be its editor. In *Het eeuwige leeven* Huet explained why he did not care for the traditional concept of revelation through the Bible any longer. He also tried to pave the way for his new insights for living. Huet proposed a mystical religion, devoid of doctrine. In his 1887 letter to Faure, the religious poet stated that the real thing that had always appealed to him was the so-called *unio mystica*, the mystical relation with God. One had to be in a relationship of life and love with Christ. "But this has nothing to do with religious systems or dogma's ... God and Religion are the same everywhere", according to Huet (Faure, 1907:131). The orthodox theologian had become a spiritualist, and perhaps to some extent a follower of Schleiermacher. To those ignorant of his dabbles in spiritualism, his departure from orthodox Christianity may have come as a surprise. For those who knew, the change in Huet wasn't a bolt from the blue at all.

2.3 Failing liberalism

In 1887 the two ministers meet at this station of spiritualism. Huet had lost his orthodoxy as a consequence of embracing spiritualism. Faure arrived at the same through using a slightly different route. It was his liberalism that had left him unfulfilled. As a result he started looking for answers in spiritualism. Now he felt that the ancestral and familiar spirits might shed light on questions that modern theology had never been able to meet satisfactorily.

Why had it failed to do so? What was lacking in the modern rational modernism that so many sons of the nineteenth century embraced?

To answer this question, one must have a look at Faure's view of God, revelation and its implications. This will become clear by taking a closer look at Faure's autobiography, written in the early years of the twentieth century.

3. Human reason

3.1 Reason replaced Bible

In Cape Town (1907) the first edition of the autobiography of the Rev. Faure was published, bearing the title "My life and times". These memoirs were fresh from the nineteenth century, characterised by an optimistic worldview and a profound belief in the ability of mankind to understand and control its world.

In 1907 Faure also reflects on what happened fifty years earlier, when he abandoned his more or less orthodox Christian upbringing during his studies in the Netherlands. He acknowledges the influence of "his" Professor J.H. Scholten (1811-1885) on the development of his thinking. Faure describes how he concluded that the Bible, the miracles, a personal God, the existence of the Holy Ghost and the divinity of Christ actually belonged to the realm of myth and fairy tales. Although he continued to allow that the Bible contained genuine expressions of Christian faith, these were of course limited by time and the cultural context that produced them. They had a certain value as human religious experience, but not as trustworthy revelation from the realms of glory. Scripture was an interesting source of religious information, but no longer a standard of truth (Rasker, 1974:117). Human reason demanded that place instead (Hanekom, 1951:32).

As a result Faure erased the supernatural from his Bible. The witness of the Holy Ghost was equalled to the voice of human reason. Scholten had added a check and balance by the sentence "in the morally pure person". In practice though, the distinction between source and standard became rather vague (Murray, 1868:8-9). Reasonable conscience was the new standard for truth. This is shown when Faure deals with anticipated objections against his dispensing with supernatural revelation:

'What a dangerous doctrine!', shouts or sighs one of my hearers. Must I believe that corrupted reason is my source for truth? No, my brother, you need not believe that. She is not the source of truth, but the instrument by which man learns to recognise the revelations of God, His outer revelation in nature

and history, His inner revelation right within you. Reason has the same relation to revealed truth, as the eye to the things it perceives. Just like the eye cannot see anything, if there is nothing to be seen, likewise reason is not able to recognize the truth, if it is not revealed to her by God. (Faure, 1868:37.)

3.2 “Law and Universe”

The obvious next step for Faure would have been to disconnect God from his rational views altogether. The foundation for his inclusion of the Biblical God lay in a concept of revelation now discarded. Both Scholten and his pupil, however, just stopped short of a worldview without God. Why? On a moral level He was still necessary. But for all practical purposes, God could be left out of the equation in formulating scientific theories. One sees the influence of the philosopher Wilhelm Kant and his critic of the practical reason.

God was reduced to a set of moral laws and a force of material causality in the universe. Consequently Faure did not hesitate to call Him “the reign of Law in the Universe” (Faure, 1907:128). The two capitals that he used are particularly striking: *Law* and *Universe*. They are a summary of his theology.

Did this by any chance satisfy Faure’s sense of theology and reason? Was this the outcome he had hoped for? At first glance the liberal minister certainly seemed happy enough. Although the evidence of real joy in his writings is not overwhelming, one could say that Faure defended his liberal position with intense commitment. It was with seemingly confident sarcasm that he ridiculed orthodoxy. Faure was dedicated. He had devoted his money, time and life to modern theology. But how sure was he really? His musings on the topic of spiritualism are revealing.

4. Failure of reason

4.1 Calling in spiritualism

Despite his very vocal support for theological liberalism, Faure still had not found what he was looking for. In 1907 Faure writes that his last religious hopes were now set on spiritualism:

I can see no reason why the adherents of the new school of thought should be prejudiced against Spiritualism; on the contrary, it would seem that they have every reason for wishing it to be true, to bestow their blessing upon it, and wishing it Godspeed. In the first place, it would supply absolute proof of

the immortality of the human soul, which proof cannot be, or rather has not yet been supplied from another source. (Faure, 1907:129.)

Behold the failure of mere human reason as the operational centre of theology! Faure was now in desperate need of revelation to silence his doubts about immortality.

4.2 Countering orthodox Christianity

Faure was forced to the conclusion that reason – left to itself – is not enough. Liberal theology had no proofs for the doctrines that she had left intact, the immortality of the soul being among these. Reason proved an incomplete foundation for the moral values and spiritual expectations that Faure continued to cherish. Consequently the committed rationalist admitted that some things need to be revealed to man in order to know for sure. Revelation was needed to silence reasonable doubts about immortality. Spiritualism should provide this. It would be the ultimate weapon against his old arch-enemies: the philosophy of materialism and Christian orthodoxy. Faure expected spiritualism to disprove both. It would show materialism that there is more to life than the here and now. On the other hand, Spiritualism would provide proof that the Biblical teachings about the afterlife are invalid, if spirits of dead declared that the orthodox tenants of reward and punishment and the presence of God in the afterlife were wrong.

We may have hope and faith in Immortality – as I trust we have – but that after death we retain our individuality, our self-consciousness, survive under new conditions, we cannot know, unless we know that at least one has actually returned from 'that bourne', whence Shakespeare believed 'no traveller returns'. (Faure, 1907:129.)

Thus Faure became a ship passing in the night, nearly touching the roots of the church that puts its trust in the One who actually did return. But the liberal minister was prejudiced as to the source of this revelation. He wanted proof for the immortality of the soul, but a priori excluded alleged supernatural revelations that are recorded in the Bible as reliable source. His heart was too prejudiced to arrive at the same conclusion as Peter: "To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." (John 6:68.) Faure had departed already.

4.3 Countering materialism

Modern theology had left Faure with lack of proof for its doctrines. This was particularly true in its inability to counter the philosophy of materialism. Taken to its logical conclusion, Faure considered that everything we think and do might as well be a temporarily result of matter only. If there are material causes only, no immortal human soul or God are required. Faure's rational theology could not offer anything to challenge this line of reasoning. Consequently he sincerely hoped that spiritualism would provide him with the necessary answers.

Spiritualism means death to materialism. If the truth of the Spiritualistic theory is established, Materialism has no *locus standi*, the theory that matter is but the manifestation of spirit, then becomes an axiom. (Faure, 1907:129.)

4.4 Impotence of modern theology

Faure's musings on spiritualism demonstrate something else. Ever since he returned from his *cum laude* examinations at Leiden University in 1866, the liberal minister had been confronted with orthodox Christianity in one way or another. Although trying very hard, he had never been able to deal it the final blow. At least to his mind he had not. In his appraisal of spiritualism towards the end of his life, Faure admits that modern theology alone was not strong and convincing enough to end orthodox Christianity and logically force its termination.

And, in the third place, the verification of Spiritualism, is death to orthodoxy. If the dead can return and communicate with their friends – entirely irrespective of the description they give of the future life – the orthodox views of heaven and hell, and the scheme of salvation of the popular theology, become demonstrably untenable. (Faure, 1907:129.)

5. Lectures on modern theology

5.1 Their background

Faure considered orthodoxy a threat to his religious system, so much that he could not keep quiet about it. This had been the case ever since his return to South Africa. He decided to introduce the intellectuals of the Cape Colony to modern theology by means of a series of lectures (Faure, 1907:36). For this purpose he rented the Old Mutual Hall in Cape Town, initially at his own expense. Happily,

this pursuit turned out to be a lucrative business. Through their response to the collections the Cape elite offered their appreciation also in a monetary fashion. By these Sunday lectures Faure revived and engaged theological thought in the Colony in a way that did not have its equal in its earlier history of the colony. Faure started his lectures in 1867. In March 1868 they were published in Dutch (Faure, 1868). An English translation followed in February 1869, with three added lectures about Easter, Ascension and Pentecost (Faure, 1869).

5.2 Doctrines not necessary for salvation

Faure taught that the traditional doctrines of Christianity are not necessary for salvation. About the life and resurrection of Jesus, and other things contained in the Apostolic Creed, the liberal minister stated:

Never did Jesus make man's salvation dependent on faith in doctrines like that, a child can understand this. According to Jesus, religion did not consist of belief in doctrines, whatever they may be, but of life; religion as he understood it, was a state of the heart, loving God and people. (Faure, 1868:288; translation from the Dutch original.)

The New Testament only provided us with nice illustrations for dogmatic and philosophical opinions of human reason. In Faure's case these were the principle of loving your neighbour with a few other virtues. Again this was not completely original as his tutor Scholten took a similar approach (Rasker, 1974:119).

5.3 Immortality soul maintained

In his address on Easter 1868, Faure still showed a firm belief in the immortality of the human soul. Faure compares this immortality with the "foolish" belief in a bodily resurrection.

We attach no value to the bodily resurrection of Jesus; nor do we believe that our dear ones, who are dead and gone, and that, that which constitutes our humanity, is immortal, and will live on in all eternity – this we do believe, this we believe as firmly as we believe in God, in a God not of the dead, but of the living. Death deprives us of nothing, save our material body – the spirit dies not ... Eternity is mine! (Faure, 1869:209.)

5.4 New theological standard

How did Faure's new theology – what he called the “eternal Bible” – function?

The two characteristics of the eternal Bible are, in the first place, that it must cover and include all truth which concerns the life and the welfare of man, and in the second place, it must be for ever being written and never completed. (Faure, 1893:57.)

This new “Bible” was as relative as the authority of human experience that was called in to support it. However, initially Faure wasn't able to quench his enthusiasm about this.

These are the real chapters of the eternal Bible which are being written age after age as the result of human experience – a Bible not yet complete, a Bible in which each new truth is a sentence, and each new grand discovery a chapter. (Faure, 1893:59.)

Although the concept of God was redefined, He was still necessary. Theology is supposed to be about God after all. Faure used the deity as the ultimate justification for the ever-changing courses of human reason, the ultimate divine stamp on human thinking.

Or would the good Father of us all have given us human reason in order to throw us in destruction? Then he would not be God, but the Devil. (Faure, 1868:38; translation from the Dutch original.)

5.5 Envisaging to “no longer walk with Jesus”

Fifty years later, Faure's hopes were set on spiritualism to prove what was precious and dear to him, as his liberal theology as such had not been able to. It was not as though Faure had not recognised the fallibility and limitations of human reason fifty years ago. He saw this problem at the time, but he had tried to make provision for its consequences by stressing the responsibility of the human conscience. This had failed, but the struggle as such wasn't new.

The 1868 lecture about Pentecost shows Faure's wrestling with orthodoxy and materialism at a very early stage in his ministry.

The revival must come, will assuredly come! And it is our task to bring it about! And if we do not lay the foundation of that new temple, it cannot, will not be constructed! Materialism will not build it: it will destroy all temples, old and new. Orthodoxy will

not construct that new one: it is satisfied with the old, and that is quite good enough. (Faure, 1869:230.)

Faure also states that to be filled with the Spirit, is to strive for human virtues. At that stage he still believed in a Supreme Being who actively provided moral guidance to his creatures.

But God planted a feeling in our inner man for everything that is true and good, and you must give heed to that voice of conscience, you cannot do otherwise. You cannot silence her, and if you listen to conscience, and follow its prescriptions, then you are guided by God Himself, then you walk on his hand, and He shall not mislead His child! (Faure, 1868:37-38; translation from the Dutch original.)

6. Disillusioned

6.1 Failed theology

Forty years later Faure was in grave doubt about most of these liberal doctrines so confidently asserted in his Mutual Hall lectures on modern theology. He now perceived that if moral and religious standards are founded on man, they should consequently change with culture and time. As he had discarded revealed truth, God was no longer a guarantee for the reliability of religious and moral statements. Everything had become subject to reasonable conscience and this conscience changed with circumstances. Faure initially used this to combat orthodoxy without realising that it would come back to haunt him. One day this line of thinking would shake the very foundations of his modern theology.

And as long as we have the conviction, as long as Jesus remains the supreme phenomenon in the religious realm, as long as Jesus remains the best that we know, for that long we will remain true to him, and will call ourselves Christians. If the time comes when it seems to us that we may find a better religion than his elsewhere; if a man stands up who appears to be a greater hero in religion than He was; then we shall go and no longer walk with Jesus ... (Faure, 1868:290; translation from the Dutch original.)

These words Faure spoke in Mutual Hall as well, a few weeks after his last formal lecture about modern theology. It is particularly remarkable that they were part of a sermon about John 6:66-69. The very thing that this passage condemns, the vast majority of Jesus' disciples leaving because they no longer considered Him a great hero in religion, is recommended by the *verbi divini* minister! If

circumstances and human reason press for it, we will no longer walk with Jesus and take the deserters of John 6 as our example! It is therefore not strange that the concept of Jesus left to Faure in 1907 no longer offered any certainty about eternal life (Faure, 1907:129). When reasonable conscience gets the position of a final authority, many things become relative.

6.2 The liberal lie

On the outside the liberal minister of the Free Protestant Church always remained optimistic about his modern theology. As late as 1893 he reassured others that reasonable conscience was surer than any other foundation.

Many who no longer found it possible to retain their religion's faith, if it had to be associated with and based on the theory that the Bible, and every word of the Bible, is the Word of God Himself, have been helped out of the difficulty, and their religion's faith now rests on a surer foundation which cannot be shaken. (Faure, 1893: preface.)

By 1907 Faure had come to realise that this was a lie. Against all initial expectation, this "surer foundation" than the Bible was now thoroughly shaken and Faure was desperately looking for answers.

6.3 Positive discrimination for spiritualism

It is quite remarkable that Faure eventually granted spiritualism all the supernatural room that he denied to Biblical Christianity. In what could be described as an almost desperate attempt to cling to spiritualism as a last resort for answers, Faure stated:

But the most determined foes of Spiritualism are to be found among the thoughtful men and women, who have discarded belief in the supernatural, and are fully persuaded of the stability of the laws of nature, which are never broken, and from which there is no departure. Belief in miracles they regard as childish, and their very faith in a God ruling the Universe would be shaken if they were convinced that the immutability and constancy of the laws of nature were fictions and fables. Now if it was certain that Spiritualistic phenomena were in reality infringements of natural law, they would have to be placed in the category of 'miracles', and believing, as I do, in the reign of Law in the Universe, which leaves no room for the miraculous, I would, without hesitation, reject the Spiritualistic theory. But the correct definition of a miracle is that it is a violation of the laws of nature known or unknown. Hence Spiritualistic phenomena,

however much they may conflict with known laws, may yet be subject to laws as yet unknown. (Faure, 1907:128-129.)

One has only to replace spiritualism with Biblical Christianity, to ascertain the logical fallacy in his thinking. It was clear that Faure was not prepared to give Christian orthodoxy the same chances as spiritualism. Nonetheless, a concept of revelation from the realms of the unknown was needed, as reason by itself was on a dead track. Mere human reason failed to prove immortality. Nor was it able to disprove the theory that everything visible and spiritual was just a result of material causes and circumstances.

In short, reason as the sole foundation for Faure's modern theology had arrived at a cul-de-sac. If only a spirit would return and give some revelation about a possible state after death, "then we shall go and no longer walk with Jesus" (Faure, 1868:290). While Faure kept up the appearances of confident liberal theology, reason guided him to a rather desperate philosophical position.

This led to logical fallacies in his theological thinking. Faure offered spiritualism room for revelation, but continued to deny this opportunity to Biblical Christianity. If this wasn't due to a logical fallacy, it must have been prejudice. Sometimes theological liberalism proves quite selective in considering to which voices she will lend a hearing. A man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest. It is particularly true of paradigms that derive their strength from political strength rather than from truth and conviction

Christian orthodoxy suggested that someone had actually returned from the death, providing many answers long ago. Faure, however, was no longer prepared to listen. It was a notorious woman who had visited him at Sanguion's school and at the theological faculty where he was supposed to be prepared for service in the ministry of Jesus Christ. She took Faure by the hand and quietly walked him away from his rightful Master. She resembled the ancient voice in Paradise that stimulated human reason as an independent authority: "Did God really say?" (Gen. 3:1; NIV). The reformer Martin Luther also knew her. He used to refer to her as "that old witch, Lady Reason".

7. Epilogue: Faure and the New Reformation

7.1 The New Reformation in South-Africa

The spiritual inheritors of Faure's are the theologians who recently presented themselves as the Nuwe Hervorming (New Reformation).

Many of Faure's prepositions about human reason and the invalidity of core Christian doctrines are shared. Like Faure, the Nuwe Hervorming doubts the Bible as the reliable and revealed Word of God, Jesus' Divine nature, the existence of the devil and the miracles described in the Bible. Prof Julian Müller writes:

Dit is binne hierdie vakuum dat die NH tot stand gekom het en vra na 'n nuwe spiritualiteit waarin vanselfsprekende dinge in die bestaande spiritualiteit bevraagteken word. Dinge soos die vasstelling van die kanon, die goddelike natuur van Jesus, die bestaan van die duiwel, die onwetenskaplike aansprake oor wonders en natuurverskynsels, ensovoorts. (Cf. Müller, 2003.)

7.2 Not a new reformation

The reader of this article will realise that this is almost a verbatim repetition of the correspondence between Faure and Huet in 1887! For those aware of this particular aspect of South Africa's religious history the Nuwe Hervorming is not a new reformation. On the contrary, it is substantially old: even in South African terms its main doctrines (that claim room for doubt or deny the authority of the Bible, Jesus' divinity and the historicity and possibility of miracles) date back to the 1860s. Christian theology in the Western church has seen the introduction of similar reinterpretation of its religious stories in its own ranks since the seventeenth century (Lambe, 1988:271-296), if Marcion and the Gnostic are not counted. Among the opponents of Christianity these reinterpretations have featured at least since the second century (Zuiddam, 1995:256-266).

While within the church Jesus was generally understood in terms of the Son of God incarnate, this has been radically reinterpreted not in the least during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Borg, 1991:1-21). It was no longer God Himself coming to earth, but only a special religious teacher emerging who was worthy of the title "Son of God". God expressed Himself in that way, according to the new idea, but it was no longer the pre-existent God taking on flesh. A virgin conception was a scientific impossibility and the resurrection of Jesus' body at Easter was subjected to radical spiritual reinterpretation as well. The Nuwe Hervorming is not a new reformation but the same old liberal story all over again by those who did not see the light two centuries ago and subsequently failed to be converted by Bultmann (Ogden, 1962:209-218) or Smith (1981) in the previous century. Even Spong (2002) could be hardly called original in his thinking (cf. Hoffmann, 1987:37; Van de Beek, 1991:54, 251).

7.3 Weak theological structure

Like Faure's theology and its European predecessors of earlier and successors of later date, the new reformation movement in South Africa is exposed to comparable weaknesses, For what reason? Because it shares the same foundation of human reason as the primary authority for religious and moral truth. Consequently those who embrace it and still continue to cherish doctrinal ideals or a moral sense of right and wrong will find out that this new building no longer supports these. Theirs is a philosophical structure that does not support metaphysical doctrine or morals of any sort. These are left-overs from the old era. For a time they can be accommodated, but the new structure of thought is not able to prove or positively sustain them. Consequently the new reformation is bound to produce a revival of agnosticism at best.

7.4 Negative bias

Die Nuwe Hervorming is not new but has been with us for centuries. This year we celebrate the 141st anniversary of the publication of the Faure lectures in Old Mutual Hall. The ideas are old; they have just not been popular in this country until quite recently. What is more, it is essentially a negative reformation, marked by abolishing doctrines and values; not by building new cathedrals. In this sense the followers of the Nuwe Hervorming resemble the ignorant mobs of old that destroyed the statues and shrines in the ancient chapels and cathedrals, boasting what a wonderful job they made of it.

Having negative ideals is not sufficient. At least the ignorant mobs of the first Reformation operated in a context of leading reformers who were less agnostic than those who presently pose as their successors. At least men like Luther and Calvin shared sustained moral and spiritual convictions that allowed them to condemn statues and some of the mob acted on that premise as well. At least they replaced what they destroyed with spiritual commitments that made a difference in the service to God. Significantly, like the old order, they firmly held to the concept of Divine truth and revelation (cf. Zuiddam, 2006:381-388). The new mob, however, lacks metaphysical reason for its actions. Spoken from the old paradigm: the movement is motivated by unbelief not by a metaphysically sustained faith.

This leaves their morals and doctrines ultimately without a theological basis in metaphysics. Though its proponents are most verbal, their views are no longer sustained by a supposed higher reality, a divine entity who speaks. Consequently their theology should not

claim a status greater than mere human religious opinions, how fascinating and interesting these might be.

7.5 What about God?

When all is said and done, the new reformers operate in a context of relativism, majority feelings, funding and peer pressure, but lack any foundation outside man. The creator is redefined as Mr. Natural Selection. If he exists at all, he resembles Faure's *Law and Universe*, as well as what Epicurus had to say on the subject thousands of years ago; in which case Marcion and the Gnostics were probably right in declaring that this god was the *demiurg* himself; and that the material world was a creation marked by his evilness. This legitimately poses the question to these new reformers: What do you still need God for? He is a mere rubber stamp of your religious imagination. Religion is just a creation of the complex human psyche. For that reason so many universities in the Western world, e.g. the University of Utrecht only recently, have closed their theological faculties altogether or reinvented them as departments of religious studies under the Humanities. In the new paradigm God is no longer an objective reality, but only dwells in the realm of our imagination.

7.6 Joining the choir

The life and times of Faure provide a stimulating example. His church no longer exists, but his thinking has been revived in a political context that supports secular humanism. It is easy to flow with the tide. At least the old reformers and the first proponents of liberal theology had the courage to stand up. The Nuwe Hervorming just joins in with the established choir of European and American theologians who have been saying these things long since and who control many of the professional organisations and scholarly publishers. Their (lack of) moral and theological convictions are encouraged by the new constitution and the present government, so in all respects, it is more profitable to sail with the wind.

The outcome of Faure's theological concepts suggests that these newly revived concepts are not likely to enhance the wellbeing of church and theology in South Africa two centuries later. And what about God himself? Perhaps we will still be able to serve the religious projections of the human mind, creating a god in our image.

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