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Religious Controversy in Comparative Context: Ulster, the Netherlands and South Africa in the 1920s

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Abstract
This article introduces a comparative element to the study of the fundamentalist–modernist controversies of the late 1920s, demonstrating that similar ideas are manifested differently in different spatial contexts. Although fundamentalism is primarily considered an American phenomenon, the article argues that the concerns animating fundamentalists in the United States also caused fierce debates elsewhere. It uses three heresy trials – in Belfast, Amsterdam and Stellenbosch – as case studies. In each case, the participants were part of an international Calvinist network, sharing the vast majority of their intellectual commitments and ecclesiastical structure. Yet these shared intellectual commitments did not result in the same outcomes when each group attempted to confront the idea of 'modernism' using their church disciplinary procedures. This study demonstrates that social and historical factors played a decisive role in the outcome of each trial. In Belfast, the violent legacy of the recent Irish War of Independence and partition of Ireland lent extra weight to calls for restraint and Protestant unity. In Amsterdam, the social structure of 'pillarisation' meant that debates were largely confined within one denomination, and so could be contested more fiercely. In Stellenbosch, meanwhile, the question of how the church should approach the fraught issue of race was the key factor.

I

The intellectual foundations of orthodox Christian thought were challenged on several fronts during the nineteenth century. Biblical criticism applied the techniques of literary scholarship to scripture, treating it as a collection of documents produced in different historical contexts. Discoveries in geology and biology questioned popularly held accounts of creation, and particularly the idea that humans had been specially created. The rise of scientific naturalism and materialist

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world-views meanwhile cast doubt on some of the Bible's supernatural claims.

These intellectual movements were so influential that existing theology had either to accommodate or refute them; they could not simply be ignored. Efforts such as the collection *Essays and Reviews* (1860) demonstrated that liberal theologians could incorporate biblical criticism in their work, while a series of 'lives' of Jesus from scholars such as David Strauss (1835) and Ernst Renan (1863) presented demythologised, historicised biographies. New liberal theologies, such as Ritschlianism, dispensed with metaphysics and considered religious claims to be epistemologically different from scientific claims, based instead on subjective value judgements. For conservative evangelicals, these attempts at accommodation went too far, requiring them to surrender crucial elements of their faith, which was intrinsically supernatural and understood the Bible as a divinely authored work. The article series *The Fundamentals* (1910–15), from which fundamentalism derives its name, was a response to these threats and was distributed free to Protestant ministers across the anglophone world.

In the fraught atmosphere following the First World War, fundamentalism acquired a social dimension, particularly in the United States, where the cultural ascendency of evangelicalism was under threat. Open conflict between fundamentalists and modernists erupted in 1922, when a sermon from Harry Emerson Fosdick in New York's First Presbyterian Church provocatively asked 'Shall the Fundamentalists Win?'[1] Yet it was at the infamous 'monkey trial' in Dayton, Tennessee in July 1925, when John Scopes was charged with teaching evolution, that the conflict dramatically entered public consciousness.[2] While Scopes lost the trial, it was fundamentalism that eventually lost in the court of public opinion. A brief flurry of scholarly attention recast fundamentalism as a backward, rural revolt against science and modernity.[3] This interpretation was reinforced in the popular imagination by the play and film *Inherit the Wind* (1955 and 1960 respectively), which used the trial as an allegory for McCarthyism. However, it was Richard Hofstadter's 1964 Pulitzer Prize-winning *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* that seemed to provide a definitive interpretation; fundamentalism was, as the title suggested, an anti-intellectual response to modernity by a community with backward agrarian values.

The Scopes trial hinged on the fairly straightforward factual question of whether or not Scopes had taught the theory of evolution by natural selection. As a result, the perception has emerged that the key issue at stake was evolution. Yet the Scopes case did not emerge *ex nihilo*; it was

[1] B. J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates* (New York, 1991).
[2] On the Scopes trial, see Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (New York, 2006).
[3] Stewart G. Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism* (New York, 1931).

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the end result of a decades-long clash between intellectual commitments. At stake was not just a biological theory but cultural authority, the role of religion in contemporary intellectual life and an entire system through which to make sense of the world.

These cultural values were not uniquely American. George Marsden, in his classic study of American fundamentalism, argued that ‘almost nowhere outside of America did this particular Protestant response to modernity play such a conspicuous and pervasive role in the culture’. Yet one exception, he suggested, might be Ulster.[4] Further, a volume edited by David Bebbington and David Ceri Jones has demonstrated that in Britain, fundamentalism was ‘much weaker than in the United States, but it was roughly parallel and displayed the same intellectual and social characteristics’.[5] Recent scholarship has also raised the question of whether neo-Calvinism in the Netherlands, as represented by statesman and theologian Abraham Kuyper, had a fundamentalist element.[6]

To explore these transnational connections, this article compares three Calvinist ‘heresy trials’ in the 1920s: of J. E. Davey in Belfast; of Johannes Geelkerken in the Amsterdam; and of Johannes du Plessis in Stellenbosch. In our analyses, we follow David Livingstone’s methodology in *Dealing with Darwin*, a study of ‘the different ways in which place, cultural politics, and rhetorical style matter in Darwinian deliberations among religious communities’.[7] Livingstone took ‘one spatially distributed but consciously self-identifying confessional family – Scottish Calvinists’ and traced how different geographies affected their engagement with evolution.[8] The Reformed/Presbyterian tradition allows a particularly effective case study for three reasons. First, as Livingstone demonstrated, it has a relatively cohesive set of intellectual commitments, and therefore theological disputes about the same issues having different outcomes in different locales are more likely to reflect specific social conditions than theological differences. This intellectual heritage included, particularly in the anglosphere, a shared philosophical tradition that incorporated the Baconian ideals of observation and inductive reasoning alongside the Common Sense school of Scottish direct realism, which emphasised the ability of the human mind to comprehend fundamental reality through direct sensory experience. However, Dutch neo-Calvinism offered an alternative epistemology that rejected the universal applicability of inductive reasoning and insisted that all but the most basic direct observations were mediated

[4] George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York, 2006), pp. 221, 320 n. 1.
[5] David Bebbington and David Ceri Jones, ‘Conclusion’ in Bebbington and Jones (eds), *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in the United Kingdom during the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 366–76, at p. 376.
[6] Tom Eric Krijger, ‘Was Abraham Kuyper een fundamentalist? Het neocalvinisme langs de fundamentalistische meetlat’, *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, 69/3 (2015), pp. 190–210.
[7] David N. Livingstone, *Dealing with Darwin: Place, Politics, and Rhetoric in Religious Engagements with Evolution* (Baltimore, 2014), p. 24.
[8] Ibid., p. 25.

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through presuppositions.[9] Second, Calvinism had from its inception an international outlook, with students often studying abroad at the theological colleges of sister churches, and by the 1920s had intellectual centres in the Netherlands, Scotland, Ireland and the United States.[10] Finally, Calvinist ecclesiology, with individual congregations governed by councils of elected elders, the session or consistory, organised into umbrella governing bodies, known as the presbytery or classis, meant that specific doctrinal grievances could be settled in a trial more readily than in many other denominations.

Indeed, the 1920s saw several Reformed denominations litigate the fundamentalist–modernist dispute through their internal disciplinary procedures. Crossing not only geographic but also linguistic divides, this article examines how Reformed communities in Northern Ireland, the Netherlands and South Africa confronted the apparent threat of modernist theology. Each trial features a Calvinist denomination with a strong confessional identity, but which was part of a pluralistic society. As with the Scopes case, more important than the precise technical issues on which each trial rested were wider, cultural questions and unresolved tensions between theological conservatives and modernists.[11]

In Belfast, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) was well established, the result of centuries of migration from Scotland. By the 1920s, however, there were only slightly more Presbyterians in the city than members of the Church of Ireland, while there was also a significant and growing Roman Catholic minority. The Netherlands also had three main denominations: the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church, NHK); the much smaller Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, GKN); and, as in Belfast, a growing Catholic population.[12] At the Cape Colony, Dutch settlers had brought their national church with them to Africa. The Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church, NGK) operated the theological college at Stellenbosch, where it was the largest denomination. However, two smaller denominations, the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (Dutch Reformed Church of Africa, NHK) and the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (Reformed Churches in South Africa, GKSA), had also emerged from the Dutch Reformed tradition, while British takeover of the colony had led to the establishment of an Anglican bishopric, alongside smaller numbers of nonconformist churches.

By comparing these Reformed communities, it is possible to unravel the ways in which groups with the same intellectual commitments tackled what were ostensibly the same problems. As Calvinists travelled from one

[9] Harriet A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 207–10.

[10] See Menna Prestwich (ed.), *International Calvinism, 1541–1715* (Oxford, 1985).

[11] See Andrew R. Holmes, *The Irish Presbyterian Mind: Conservative Theology, Evangelical Experience, and Modern Criticism, 1830–1930* (Oxford, 2018), esp. ch. 5.

[12] All translations from Dutch and Afrikaans are by the authors.

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part of their international network to another, they brought with them ideas that could be appropriated for different purposes. By examining this cross-pollination, it is possible to trace how these ideas were articulated and how they were used to confront the perceived threats of modernity in a variety of contexts. This makes clear that these concerns were expressed very differently in different locales, resulting in different outcomes in each trial.

II

The first heresy trial, in Belfast, was of J. E. Davey, and at its heart lay questions of identity. Irish Presbyterianism was a transatlantic denomination, influenced by and influential upon Presbyterians in Scotland and the United States. In 1926, at 33 per cent of the population, the PCI was Belfast's largest denomination, slightly larger than the Church of Ireland (30 per cent) and the Roman Catholic church (23 per cent).[13] Presbyterianism arrived in Ireland in the early seventeenth century, brought by Scottish soldiers involved in the Wars of the Three Kingdoms.[14] Although Irish Presbyterianism developed a distinct identity, it remained closed linked to the Church of Scotland; until 1815, its ministers were almost invariably educated in Scotland, and were required to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Kirk's doctrinal standard.[15] In 1840, various schisms were repaired with the formation of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland; the use of the preposition *in* rather than *of* further underlined the church's identity as one branch of a wider body.

While the PCI's roots lay in Scotland, Irish Presbyterians also played a formative role in America. In the early eighteenth century, Ulster-born Francis Makemie, the 'father of American Presbyterianism', invited Scottish and Irish ministers to tend to a growing number of Ulster migrants, many of whom had moved to avoid being disadvantaged by laws favouring the established, Episcopalian, Church of Ireland, whose adherents comprised perhaps an eighth of Ireland's population but dominated its political and economic spheres.[16] In the nineteenth century, this transatlantic relationship had deepened further, with the establishment of the College of New Jersey, later Princeton University, and its theological seminary. Princeton was dominated by Ulster Scots

[13] Figures from *Census of Northern Ireland 1926* (Belfast, 1928).

[14] S. J. Connolly, *Divided Kingdom: Ireland 1630–1800* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 72, 112–13.

[15] W. I. Hazlett, 'Students at Glasgow University from 1747 to 1768 connected with Ireland: an analytical probe', in William D. Patton (ed.), *Ebb and Flow: Essays in Church History in Honour of R. Finlay G. Holmes* (Belfast, 2002), pp. 20–49; Holmes, *Irish Presbyterian Mind*, p. 23.

[16] Sean Michael Lucas, 'Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Presbyterianism in North America', in Gary Scott Smith and P. C. Kemeny (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Presbyterianism* (Oxford, 2019), pp. 51–72, at p. 53–4; Boyd Stanley Schlenther, 'Religious faith and commercial empire', in P. J. Marshall (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 128–50, at pp. 137–9; Andrew R. Holmes, *The Shaping of Ulster Presbyterian Belief and Practice, 1770–1840* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 23–4; Ian McBride, *Scripture Politics* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 26–30.

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(or 'Scots-Irish') figures, and was the centre of political and religious life in the early United States.[17] The seminary, particularly under the leadership of the Ulster Scot Charles Hodge, was home to 'the Princeton theology': a distinctive blend of piety, belief in the inspiration of scripture, commitment to the Westminster Confession, and an epistemology based on Common Sense philosophy.[18]

The Princeton theology was not just influential in America; for Irish Presbyterians Princeton was the 'head-quarters of Presbyterianism in the world'.[19] This position was further underlined in 1868, when James McCosh, a Scot and one of the most renowned advocates of Common Sense, moved from Queen's College, Belfast to become president of the College of New Jersey.[20] Throughout the nineteenth century, hundreds of Irish Presbyterians were educated at Princeton, including Robert Watts, professor of theology at the PCI's Belfast seminary, Assembly's College, and an admirer of Hodge who hoped to make 'Belfast another Princeton'.[21] In this, he was fairly successful; despite strident debate over issues such as instrumental music, Irish Presbyterianism held fast to its theology and was relatively unscathed by the schisms and heresy trials that rocked Scotland during the nineteenth century. When John Macmillan, moderator of the General Assembly, was invited to Princeton Theological Seminary's centenary, he told the audience: 'If there is one Church of the Presbyterian order which more than any other loves Princeton Theology, it is the Irish Presbyterian Church'.[22]

That year, 1912, began a challenging period for Irish Presbyterians. The impending Home Rule Act promised a devolved legislature in Dublin, and the Protestant majority in Ulster, Ireland's industrial heartland, feared the social and religious implications of what it dubbed 'Rome Rule'.[23] Huge demonstrations and the threat of violence only dissipated with the outbreak of the Great War, and at its conclusion Ireland underwent another series of conflicts that concluded in 1922 with partition of the island into two states. With the formation of Northern Ireland, the island had for the first time a polity with a Protestant majority. Presbyterians,

[17] Mark Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768–1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Vancouver, 1989).
[18] Mark Noll, *The Princeton Theology, 1812–1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Warfield* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2001).
[19] James Gibson, 'Princeton Theological Seminary', *Evangelical Witness and Presbyterian Review*, 1 (1862), pp. 59–60.
[20] J. D. Hoeveler, *James McCosh and the Scottish Intellectual Tradition: From Glasgow to Princeton* (Princeton, 1981).
[21] Peter Wallace and Mark Noll, 'The students of Princeton Seminary, 1812 – 1929: a research note', *American Presbyterians*, 72/3 (1994), pp. 203–25, at p. 208; Robert Allen, *The Presbyterian College Belfast 1853–1953* (Belfast, 1954), p. 179.
[22] John Macmillan, 'Irish Presbyterianism and American', in B. B. Warfield, W. A. Armstrong and H. M. Robinson (eds), *The Centennial Celebration of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America at Princeton, New Jersey* (Princeton, 1912), pp. 499–525, at p. 517.
[23] See David Fitzpatrick, *Descendancy: Irish Protestant Histories Since 1795* (Cambridge, 2014), chs 6 and 7.

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as a minority within Ireland's Protestant minority, but a majority of the Ulster population, had previously occupied an uneasy political position; many of the leading figures of the United Irishmen who had attempted a revolution in 1798 had been Presbyterians. Yet they were now firmly part of Northern Ireland's political establishment, as underlined by its parliament meeting at Assembly's College while a legislature was built at Stormont.

These events added to the sense of existential crisis that swept across Europe and North America in the aftermath of the war, and which erupted theologically in the fundamentalist–modernist controversy. The difficulties inherent to reform of the PCI and meeting the challenges of post-war Northern Ireland were exacerbated by the replacement of almost the entire theological faculty at Assembly's College between 1915 and 1922. Among these new professors was James Ernest Davey, who was appointed professor of ecclesiastical history in 1917.

Davey, whose father Charles was a highly regarded evangelical, arrived with impeccable credentials, having studied at Cambridge, Edinburgh and Heidelberg, and who now held a fellowship at King's College, Cambridge.[24] Davey attempted to meet the social changes presented by modernism with a series of public lectures, outlining how he believed Christianity, and especially Presbyterianism, provided a sufficient, emotionally and intellectually satisfying solution to humanity's needs. These lectures were successful enough that they were published in book and pamphlet form.[25] Yet this intellectual approach brought Davey into conflict with other evangelicals who had adopted a different strategy in confronting the challenges of modernity. Davey was particularly critical of evangelists who used the fear of hell to apply emotional pressure on the audience and convince them to undergo conversion, which he traced back to the American revivalist Dwight L. Moody.[26] While Davey thought that this methodology reduced salvation to 'a fire insurance policy', supporters of the evangelist W. P. Nicholson saw Davey's lecture as a 'thinly-veiled attack'.[27]

Nicholson had been trained by lieutenants of Moody, first in Glasgow and then at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, where the dean was Reuben Archer Torrey, editor of *The Fundamentals*. In 1921, Nicholson had returned to Ulster and began a successful campaign among Ulster's industrial working class, preaching to huge crowds of textile and shipyard

[24] Holmes, *Irish Presbyterian Mind*, p. 198.
[25] J. E. Davey, *The Church and the Gospel: Two Lectures Delivered in the Chapel of the Assembly's College, Belfast* (Belfast, 1918); idem, *Our Faith in God through Jesus Christ: Four Apologetic Addresses* (New York, 1922); idem, *The Changing Vesture of the Faith: Studies in the Origin and Development of Christian Forms of Belief, Institution and Observance* (London, 1923).
[26] On Moody's influence on Ulster evangelicals, see Andrew R. Holmes and Stuart Mathieson, 'Dwight L. Moody in Ulster: evangelical unity, denominational identity, and the fundamentalist impulse', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (2021), DOI: 10.1017/S0022046920002560.
[27] 'Letters to the editor', *Northern Whig*, 13 Dec. 1922; 'Modern evangelists' methods', *Northern Whig*, 12 Dec. 1922.

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workers. Nicholson had imported both the grassroots methodology of American fundamentalism and some of its intellectual commitments, such as premillennialism and hostility towards evolution.[28] However, it was the emotional content of Nicholson's approach, and his ability to communicate effectively with working-class men, that was most successful. For Nicholson's supporters, Davey was an elitist and out of touch with those who most needed to be reached by evangelists, sparking a fierce debate in the local press.[29] One convert from Nicholson's campaign, William James Grier, was so enthused by the evangelist's preaching that he resolved to enter the ministry himself. However, rather than at Assembly's College, Grier instead sought training at Princeton, with its 'reputation for orthodoxy'.[30] At Princeton, Grier became deeply influenced by J. Gresham Machen, one of the chief protagonists in the fundamentalist–modernist controversy as it rocked the Presbyterian Church in America.[31]

Machen and Grier maintained correspondence after the latter returned to Belfast in 1925 for a compulsory year at Assembly's College. In one letter Grier related his fears about biblical criticism, claiming that 'young men who came up here strictly evangelical' had been 'blinded by this devil's doctrine'. By accepting this modernist technique, Grier believed that the PCI's professorial elite failed to represent rank-and-file Presbyterians. The young men converted during Nicholson's campaign, argued Grier, had no time for 'the atheism of the College (that is what it must logically amount to)'. Laymen, meanwhile, were 'disgusted with the modernism of the pulpit', and 'the Elder's Union is strongly against Modernism'. For Grier, this was part of a wider struggle between traditionalists and modernists, the masses and an elite.[32] Writing in support, Machen linked these struggles to the techniques employed by Nicholson, arguing that 'Modernism in your country involves opposition to the salvation of souls in a genuine revival'.[33]

Grier found a kindred spirit in James Hunter, a recently retired minister and supporter of Nicholson. Hunter had been on a committee which had considered relaxing the PCI's Formula of Subscription, a response to calls by the principal and students at Assembly's College. He therefore shared Grier's concerns that the college's professorial elite was damaging orthodox belief and undermining attempts to communicate with the wider populace. Grier preferred a secretive approach, while Hunter was

[28] Andrew R. Holmes, 'Revivalism in Ulster: W. P. Nicholson in context', in Bebbington and Ceri Jones (eds) *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism*, pp. 253–72.
[29] 'Letters to the editor', *Northern Whig*, 13 Dec. 1922; 'Letters to the editor', *Northern Whig*, 14 Dec. 1922; 'Letters to the editor', *Northern Whig*, 15 Dec. 1922.
[30] E. C. Brown, *By Honour and Dishonour: The Story of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church* (Belfast, 2016), p. 88.
[31] D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Baltimore, 1994).
[32] 'Letter from W. J. Grier to J. Gresham Machen, 4 Nov. 1925', J. Gresham Machen Papers. Series 1, Correspondence A-J (1925–1926). Montgomery Library at Westminster Theological Seminary [hereafter JGMP].
[33] 'Machen to Grier, 19 Nov. 1925', JGMP.

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less cautious and instead issued a series of pamphlets decrying the college as 'a Seed-bed of Rationalism'.[34] Machen, to whom Grier had sent copies of the pamphlets, found it 'very encouraging to learn that the standard of revolt against Modernist tyranny has been raised in Ireland'.[35]

A committee was convened to investigate claims made in the pamphlets that James Haire, the College's professor of systematic theology, taught that the Bible was not infallible. Despite evidence from Grier, who had studied under Haire, the theologian was exonerated. Undeterred, the campaign continued, and in May 1926 formed a grassroots support network, the Presbyterian Bible Standards League, and instituted a fund to send students to Princeton, where it was hoped they would have a theological education free from modernist thought.[36] Undeterred by the failure to have Haire censured, Hunter sought another decisive battle and on 7 December 1926 charges were brought against Davey at the Belfast Presbytery, for 'teaching doctrines contrary to the Word of God and the standards of the Church'.[37] Davey was accused of erroneous teaching about various doctrines, including substitutionary atonement, perfection, sin, the infallibility of the Bible, and the Trinity.[38] Davey's public lectures and notes taken by students were submitted as evidence, and Grier underwent a fraught cross-examination in which he was accused of misleading the tribunal by removing sections from his notebook.[39] Davey took a characteristically philosophical approach to his defence, noting that even Princeton theology had departed from the Westminster Confession and in fact admitted 'many apparent discrepancies in Scripture'. Davey also criticised the influence of American fundamentalism on the PCI, claiming that its true heritage lay 'with Scotland, our ecclesiastical mother' rather than 'with America and Princeton and Dayton'.[40]

Davey was acquitted on all charges by large margins, and Hunter immediately appealed to the General Assembly, which was meeting ten weeks later. Just days before this meeting, Belfast's press advertised the visit of 'The Great American Fundamentalist', J. Gresham Machen, to a series of Bible Standards League meetings at which he decried modernism, but was more circumspect in his criticism of the Belfast Presbytery.[41] At his trial, Davey had urged the presbytery to avoid the mistakes of American fundamentalists in relitigating nineteenth-century concerns, and at the appeal, prominent members of the church spoke in his defence, advocating restraint, unity, and against 'fighting over mere

[34] 'Grier to Machen, 3 Mar. 1926', JGMP; Brown, *Honour and Dishonour*, p. 112.
[35] 'Machen to Grier, 25 May 1926', JGMP.
[36] 'Grier to Machen, 21 June 1926', 'Machen to Grier, 9 July 1926', JGMP.
[37] *Record of the Trial of the Rev. Prof. J. E. Davey by the Belfast Presbytery* (Belfast, 1927), p. 1.
[38] *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland* (Belfast, 1927), p. 41.
[39] *Record of the Trial*, p. 61.
[40] Ibid., pp. 117, 118, 123.
[41] 'Bible Standards League', *Belfast News-Letter*, 27 May 1927; 'Bible Standards League', *Northern Whig*, 28 May 1927.

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words'.[42] Calls for unity were particularly potent given that sectarian conflict and partition were still fresh in the mind. As Steve Bruce notes of the socio-political context of the 1920s, 'there was little desire to create other divisions which felt that it had just survived a major crisis'.[43] When Davey again defended himself, he moved the discussion to the evangelical basis of his own faith. In this way, he cast himself as thoroughly modern, yet not a modernist.[44] By placing his own faith on a reassuringly evangelical foundation, he was able to link it to the emotional, yet respectable, nineteenth-century revivalist style that so many British and Irish evangelicals admired, one which avoided the militancy of American fundamentalism.

With the debate centring on issues of identity and evangelical unity, the debate about biblical criticism was sidelined, and Davey was again acquitted, by 707 votes to 82. The *Northern Whig* reported that the 'announcement, which completely vindicates Professor Davey, was received with enthusiasm'.[45] Hunter and Grier, with the backing of the Bible Standards League and prominent voices such as Machen, were understandably disappointed that this support was not reflected in the PCI. Hunter was censured by the General Assembly for discussing the trial in public before the appeal was heard and tendered his resignation in July; Grier followed in August, and the two eventually formed the new Irish Evangelical Church.[46]

III

The Davey trial had ostensibly put biblical criticism in the dock, but had ultimately centred on questions of identity and social cohesion. Between 1924 and 1926, the Netherlands were confronted with a similar conflict over the ideas of Jan Geelkerken, minister of the Amsterdam-South congregation of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN). The conflict revolved around Geelkerken's views on Genesis 2–3 and was portrayed in the media as a debate over whether the serpent in those verses had really spoken. Where Davey had been able to foreground his personal convictions and sidestep the direct theological controversy, Geelkerken was convicted by a special synod for refusing to endorse that the Eden story was a historical fact. While the PCI had balked at the link to American fundamentalism, Geelkerken's sympathiser and fellow minister J. J. Buskes described the outcome as a 'triumph of fundamentalism' in the GKN.[47]

[42] *Record of the Trial*, p. 205.
[43] Steve Bruce, *God Save Ulster: The Religion and Politics of Paisleyism* (Oxford, 1989), p. 25.
[44] *Record of the Trial*, pp. 190–2.
[45] 'Professor Davey vindicated', *Northern Whig*, 11 June 1927.
[46] Brown, *Honour and Dishonour*, pp. 226–8.
[47] J. J. Buskes, *Hoera voor het leven* (Amsterdam, 1959), p. 109; Krijger, 'Was Abraham Kuyper een Fundamentalist?', p. 209.

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The Geelkerken case must be understood in the pluralistic context of the Netherlands, in which neo-Calvinists were one of several subcultures. Although often seen as a historically Protestant country, since the Reformation it has been religiously mixed; the Dutch Republic lacked a strong centralised government and as a result religious conformity could not be effectively implemented. Although the 'privileged' Reformed Church was the only one to function as an established church in most of the Republic, there were large numbers of Catholics (well over a third of the population in 1809, in the first census), plus dissenting Protestant churches and Jews, together constituting 6 per cent of the population.[48]

In the nineteenth century, King William I of the new Kingdom of the Netherlands renamed the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (NHK), which lost its privileged position, but gained a new task: 'the promotion of Christian morals, the perseveration of order, and concord, and the cultivation of love for King and Fatherland'. The intellectual leaders of this tendency were university professors. However, while in Belfast the Presbyterian seminary's theological cohesion had helped to avoid schisms, in the Netherlands there was discontent. In 1834, the minister Hendrik de Cock was told by church leaders that he could not preach against certain colleagues who he believed held erroneous views. He and his congregation seceded from the NHK; in 1836, when these so-called *Afscheiding* (Secession) churches organised their first synod, there were approximately 130 churches.[49]

Princeton theology provided a reassuring framework that allowed Irish Presbyterians to avoid controversy, but in the NHK, from the 1850s onwards the radical 'Moderne theologie' (modernist theology) became dominant. This adapted Christian doctrines to modern science and to the historical-critical reading of the Bible, rejecting all supernatural beliefs and the image of a personal God who intervenes through miracles. One of its leading advocates was the Leiden theologian Abraham Kuenen, who became internationally renowned for his historical research on the Bible.[50]

Initially, orthodox ministers and theologians, whether in the churches of the *Afscheiding* or the NHK, did not have an academic alternative to modernist ideas. But from the 1870s, the theologian, journalist and politician Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) became the charismatic leader of this group, and his influence extended beyond the church and into wider society. Under Kuyper's leadership, orthodoxy experienced a revival, resulting in a world-view often denoted as 'neo-Calvinism', since

[48] J. C. Kennedy and J.P. Zwemer, 'Religion in the modern Netherlands and the problems of pluralism', *BMGN: Low Countries Historical Review*, 125/2–3 (2010), pp 237–68, at p. 241.

[49] George Harinck and Lodewijk Winkeler, 'The nineteenth century', in Herman J. Selderhuis (ed.), *Handbook of Dutch Church History* (Göttingen, 2014), pp. 441–524, at pp. 460–1.

[50] Harinck and Winkeler, 'The nineteenth century', p. 474; Tom-Eric Krijger, *The Eclipse of Liberal Protestantism in the Netherlands: Religious, Social, and International Perspectives on the Dutch Modernist Movement (1870–1940)* (Leiden, 2019), p. 45; Mirjam Buitenwerf-van der Molen, *God van vooruitgang: De popularisering van het modern-theologische gedachtegoed in Nederland (1857–1880)* (Hilversum, 2007), pp. 47–67.

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it was an attempt, in Kuyper's words, to bring traditional Calvinism 'in rapport with human consciousness as it had developed at the end of the nineteenth century'.[51]

Neo-Calvinism clearly arose as a reaction to modernist theology, and it positioned itself between other contemporary Protestant movements.[52] Neo-Calvinists strongly opposed the radical modernist view that the Bible only contains divine wisdom and not historical facts. Instead, they held a similar position to their colleagues in Ireland and Princeton; the Bible was infallible, and although it had been written by humans, divine inspiration prevented it from containing any errors. This concept of 'organic inspiration', as with the idea of verbal and plenary inspiration common to anglophone Calvinism, created space for both the human and the divine sides of the Bible, and helped to explain minor stylistic variances.[53]

Kuyper's offensive began in the church and theology, but it increasingly spread out across society and the neo-Calvinists established their own private schools, a political party, newspapers, and many other organisations and institutions, including the Vrije Universiteit (Free University) in Amsterdam, in 1880. In 1901 Kuyper became prime minister in a coalition cabinet of Calvinists and Roman Catholics, illustrating the increasing influence of confessional parties in Dutch politics, and of the orthodox groups in wider society. Ecclesiastically, most of Kuyper's supporters became members of the GKN, a 'free' church that was founded in 1892 as a merger of most of the *Afscheiding* congregations and of a group that had left the NHK in 1886 under Kuyper's leadership, the so-called *Doleantie*.[54] In the census of 1920, of the 6.8 million inhabitants of the Netherlands, 41 per cent belonged to the NHK, 36 per cent to the Roman Catholic Church and 8 per cent to the GKN.[55]

As with the PCI, the neo-Calvinists were part of several international networks, first and foremost of Dutch emigrants in the United States and South Africa. Kuyper, and the GKN's other leading theologian, Herman

[51] Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der heilige godgeleerdheid. Inleidend deel* (Kampen, 1908), p. vi; Cornelis Augustijn et al. (eds), *In rapport met de tijd. 100 jaar theologie aan de Vrije Universiteit 1880–1980* (Kampen, 1980). 'Neo-Calvinism' is used here for simplicity; the term dates from the 1890s but was not used until later to label Kuyper's movement.

[52] George Harinck, 'Twin sisters with a changing character: how Neo-Calvinists dealt with the modern discrepancy between the Bible and modern science', in Jitse M. van der Meer, and Scott Mandelbrote (eds), *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: 1700–Present*, II (Leiden, 2008), pp. 317–70, at pp. 342–3.

[53] Dirk van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek. Schriftbeschouwing en schriftgebruik in het dogmatisch werk van A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck en G.C. Berkouwer* (Kampen, 2003), pp. 20–174.

[54] On Kuyper and the emergence of Neo-Calvinism, see James Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2013); Arie L. Molendijk, 'Neo-Calvinist culture Protestantism: Abraham Kuyper's *Stone Lectures*', *Church History and Religious Culture*, 88/2 (2008), pp. 235–50; Jeroen Koch, *Abraham Kuyper: Een biografie* (Amsterdam, 2006); Johan Snel, *De zeven levens van Abraham Kuyper: Portret van een ongrijpbaar staatsman* (Amsterdam, 2020).

[55] *Volkstelling 31 december 1920: Aandeel van elk der voornaamste kerkelijke gezindten in het totaal der bevolking van iedere gemeente* (The Hague, 1923).

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Bavinck – from 1902 Kuyper's successor as professor of dogmatics at the Vrije Universiteit – were also in close contact with Presbyterians at Princeton Theological Seminary.[56] Neo-Calvinism stimulated a greater involvement in Dutch society for many ordinary Calvinists, whose establishment of their own organisations resulted in a vibrant subculture. Other groups in the country, such as Roman Catholics, socialists and, to a certain degree, liberals, followed their example, a process later called 'pillarisation' (*verzuiling*). Through pillarisation, different religious and ideological groups were to a certain extent shielded from each other and from modern influences, but, paradoxically, pillarisation was at the same time the route through which the modernisation of Dutch society took place: 'within the pillars' the questions of modernity were not shirked, but often fiercely discussed.[57]

Especially important for the development of neo-Calvinist theology, and discussions about science and biblical scholarship, was the Vrije Universiteit. Rather than a theological seminary or college, it was intended, according to Kuyper, to develop into a 'complete university' comparable to the other Dutch universities yet distinguished by its neo-Calvinist character. It aimed to develop a comprehensive 'Christian science' or 'Christian scholarship' since, according to the neo-Calvinists, the world-view of the modernists had resulted in a naturalistic science. The existence of the Vrije Universiteit endowed the questions of modern science and scholarship with a lasting relevance for the Dutch neo-Calvinists.[58]

These questions came to the fore during the 1920s, when a new generation of neo-Calvinists, the 'movement of the young' (*beweging der jongeren*), sought more interaction with modern culture. Some of its

[56] Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1998); Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, pp. 205–32; George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1991), pp. 122–52; George Harinck, *Varia Americana: In het spoor van Abraham Kuyper door de Verenigde Staten* (Amsterdam, 2016); George Harinck and James Eglinton, 'Herman Bavinck's "My journey to America"', *Dutch Crossing*, 41/2 (2017), pp. 180–93; James Eglinton, *Bavinck: A Critical Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2020) , pp. 219–54.

[57] On pillarization: Peter van Dam, *Staat van verzuiling: over een Nederlandse mythe* (Amsterdam, 2011); J. C. H. Blom, 'Pillarisation in perspective', *West European Politics*, 23/3 (2000), pp. 153–64; Piet de Rooy, 'Farewell to Pillarization', *The Netherlands Journal of Social Science*, 33/1 (1997), pp. 27–41.

[58] Arie van Deursen, *The Distinctive Character of the Free University in Amsterdam, 1880–2005: A Commemorative History* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2008); on the Neo-Calvinist view of science and scholarship in the late nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century context, see Ab Flipse, *Christelijke wetenschap. Nederlandse rooms-katholieken en gereformeerden over de natuurwetenschap, 1880–1940* (Hilversum, 2014); and Abraham C. Flipse, 'Shared principles, diverging paths: Neo-Calvinism, Neo-Thomism and the natural sciences, 1880–1960', in James Eglinton and George Harinck (eds), *Neo-Calvinism and Roman-Catholicism* (Leiden, forthcoming 2021). For systematic analyses of the Neo-Calvinist view of science see Jacob Klapwijk, 'Abraham Kuyper on science, theology and university', *Philosophia Reformata*, 78/1 (2013), pp. 18–46; Del Ratzsch, 'Abraham Kuyper's philosophy of science', in Jitse M. van der Meer (ed.), *Facets of Faith and Science*, II: *The Role of Beliefs in Mathematics and the Natural Sciences: An Augustinian Perspective* (Lanham, 1996), pp. 1–32.

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representatives collaborated with theologians from other denominations, and in journals and organisations that were not strictly neo-Calvinist.[59] Although the Netherlands had remained neutral in the First World War, historian George Harinck has demonstrated that it was not spared the cultural crisis that it spawned. Bavinck, sensitive to these changes in culture and society, had attempted to make space for reorientation in neo-Calvinist circles, but passed away in 1921.[60]

Johannes Gerardus (Jan) Geelkerken was part of this movement; he considered himself orthodox, yet tried to progress neo-Calvinist thought. Geelkerken had studied at the Vrije Universiteit and earned his PhD under Bavinck in 1911. From 1915 onwards he was the minister of the GKN congregation of Amsterdam-South. Although a gifted organiser, his heart lay in pastoral ministry. He had an ecumenical attitude and was, for example, an advocate of liturgical renewal, and in favour of singing hymns other than the Psalms in services.[61] Although not a hermeneutical scholar, from 1924 onwards he found himself in a conflict about exegetical matters, for which he was not very well prepared. As historian Arie van Deursen argues, the church case was therefore 'a conflict with the wrong man over the wrong question'.[62]

How did Geelkerken find himself in this situation? While it was Davey's public lectures that had led to his trial, for Geelkerken it was a sermon on 23 March 1924, in which he had suggested that parts of Genesis 2–3 may not be historical. A member of the congregation filed a complaint, and it was eventually escalated to the classis, or presbytery, of Amsterdam, and only ended at a special synod held in the provincial town of Assen in May 1926.[63]

Ultimately, the synod declared that chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis should be considered historical.[64] Although Geelkerken claimed that he personally did not doubt their historicity, he felt that leeway should be allowed within the GKN to interpret these chapters metaphorically and that the synod was restricting the doctrinal space that should exist. According to the synod, however, Geelkerken's position could be a first step to modernism. For them, the authority of scripture was at stake.[65]

Where Davey had avoided a direct theological question, for Geelkerken it was unavoidable. Unwilling to recant, he was condemned for his

[59] D. T. Kuiper, *De voormannen: Een sociaal-wetenschappelijke studie over ideologie, konflikt en kerngroepvorming binnen de gereformeerde wereld in Nederland tussen 1820 en 1930* (Meppel, 1972), pp. 252–92.

[60] Harinck, 'Twin sisters', pp. 346–57; idem, 'De kwestie-Geelkerken en de moderne cultuur', in Harinck (ed.), *De kwestie-Geelkerken: Een terugblik na 75 jaar* (Barneveld, 2001), pp. 69–86.

[61] Maarten J. Aalders, *Heeft de slang gesproken? Het strijdbare leven van dr. J.G. Geelkerken* (Amsterdam, 2013), pp. 39–128.

[62] Van Deursen, *The Distinctive Character*, p. 129; Aalders, *Heeft de slang gesproken?*, pp. 312–13.

[63] D. T. Kuiper, 'De kwestie-Geelkerken: een chronologisch overzicht', in Harinck (ed.), *De kwestie-Geelkerken*, pp. 11–41.

[64] *Acta der buitengewone generale synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland 1926* (Kampen, 1926), p. 82.

[65] Koert van Bekkum, '"Naar de klaarblijkelijke bedoeling zintuiglijk waarneembaar": de kwestie-Geelkerken in theologiehistorisch perspectief", in Harinck (ed.), *De kwestie-Geelkerken*, pp. 87–108.

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'deviation from doctrine' (*afwijking van de leer*).[66] While the traditionalists left the PCI, it was Geelkerken and his sympathisers who departed the GKN, forming a new denomination, the Gereformeerde Kerken in Hersteld Verband (Reformed Churches in Restored Union), which remained rather small before merging with the NKH in 1946. Among them were a number of critical 'youngsters', while others such as natural scientists who were wrestling with questions concerning creation and evolution also withdrew from public debate.[67]

At Assembly's College, the faculty had almost entirely been appointed in the decade before Davey's trial, and were broadly supportive of their colleague. Among the professors at the Vrije Universiteit, however, there was diversity of opinion. Some supported Geelkerken or thought that the controversy was irrelevant to the functioning of the university; others – including some leading theologians – supported the synod and were especially keen to preserve the neo-Calvinist heritage with as little change as possible. Ultimately, the university governors concurred with the synod, and so newly appointed professors had to agree with its strict interpretation.[68]

As with the Davey trial, the Geelkerken case raised the issue of identity and heritage. Where Irish Presbyterians had competing Scots and American influences, in the Netherlands the vital question was whether parties were entitled to invoke the views of Kuyper and Bavinck.[69] And while calls for cohesion meant that the PCI had avoided directly dealing with the issue of biblical criticism, the synod, by ruling on theology, had implicitly addressed other issues.[70] Koert van Bekkum argues that the Assen verdict represents a Rankean approach to historical certainty.[71] The verdict also included the phrase 'perceptible to the senses', linking its findings to the epistemology of anglophone evangelicals, who had developed their theology with appeals to empiricism and Common Sense, placing it on a rationalist, scientific footing. Among early twentieth-century fundamentalists, this led to a belief that the Bible was scientifically and historically accurate, which in turn stimulated them to hunt for empirical data to support their biblical viewpoint; this approach was the basis of what was later dubbed young-earth creationism. Crucially, this put the relationship between science and religion at risk.[72]

[66] *Acta der synode 1926*, p. 94.

[67] Maarten J. Aalders, *Een handjevol verkenners? Het Hersteld Verband opnieuw bekeken* (Barneveld, 2012); Flipse, *Christelijke wetenschap*, pp. 216–18; Hittjo Kruyswijk, *Baas in eigen Boek? Evolutietheorie en Schriftgezag bij de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (1881–1981)* (Hilversum, 2011), pp. 151–62

[68] Abraham C. Flipse, 'Against the science–religion conflict: the genesis of a Calvinist science faculty in the Netherlands in the early twentieth century', *Annals of Science*, 65/3 (2008), pp. 363–91.

[69] Dirk van Keulen, 'Strijd om een erfenis: het beroep op Kuyper en Bavinck in de kwestie-Geelkerken', in Harinck (ed.), *Kwestie-Geelkerken*, pp. 109–46.

[70] Harinck, 'Twin sisters', pp. 362–6; Harinck, 'De kwestie-Geelkerken en de moderne cultuur', pp. 81–3.

[71] Van Bekkum, 'Naar de klaarblijkelijke bedoeling', pp. 99–103.

[72] Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, pp. 173–9.

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IV

If Belfast was a modernist victory, and Assen a triumph for the traditionalists, the trial of Johannes du Plessis at Stellenbosch in South Africa was a score draw. The details of the case are inextricably bound up in South Africa's national and religious histories. Cape Town had been established as a provisioning station for trading ships of the Dutch East India Company on the arduous trek to the East Indies. In 1652, a formal colony was founded, and in 1665 its first Dutch Reformed consistory was formed, although many immigrants chafed in the tightly knit town and left to farm the Cape's rugged, undeveloped interior, becoming known as Boers (farmers). When the Edict of Nantes, guaranteeing legal toleration of French Protestants, was revoked in 1685, thousands of skilled Huguenots fled to neighbouring Protestant countries and their colonies, including the Cape, where they established a wine industry in the area east of Cape Town, centred on Stellenbosch.[73]

In 1692 there were only 856 Europeans in the Cape, meaning that French refugees comprised nearly a quarter of its settler population.[74] A law mandating Dutch as the official language of the colony, including worship, meant that Huguenots quickly assimilated into the Dutch Reformed Church; by 1852 sixteen of its twenty-six Cape-born ministers were of Huguenot descent, often with French names such as du Plessis and de Klerk.[75] Yet when Britain occupied the Cape in 1795, relations were more complicated. Although keen to develop the colony, it was less enthusiastic about continued eastward migration and its potential for conflict with indigenous Xhosa, and about slavery, the commercial bedrock of the colony. The Boers, for their part, were aggrieved at the imposition of British taxation, customs and language, and the abolition of slavery in 1834.[76]

These various national and religious heritages were a long-standing source of conflict. Although the Cape was quickly anglicised, the NGK remained a quasi-established church, funded through taxation. Yet Dutch ministers were reluctant to travel to a colony administered by a foreign power, and British authorities were similarly unenthused about their presence. The result was that Scottish Presbyterians, who were British but also sufficiently Calvinist, eventually formed a majority of the

[73] Johan Fourie and Dieter von Fintel, 'Settler skills and colonial development: the Huguenot winemakers in eighteenth-century Dutch South Africa', *Economic History Review*, 67/4 (2014), pp. 932–63.

[74] Pieter Coertzen, 'The Huguenots of South Africa in history and religious identity', *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif*, 52/1 (2011), pp. 45–57, at p. 46

[75] Charles Weiss, *History of the French Protestant Refugees, from the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes to Our Own Days*, trans. H. W. Herbert (New York, 1854), pp. 136–7; Coertzen, 'Huguenots of South Africa', p. 46.

[76] James Sturgis, 'Anglicisation at the Cape of Good Hope in the early nineteenth century', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 11/1 (1982), pp. 5–32; Vivian Bickford-Smith, 'Revisiting anglicisation in the nineteenth-century Cape Colony', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 31/2 (2003), pp. 82–95.

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NGK's ministers.[77] One particularly important example was Andrew Murray, whose father and namesake had ministered to Boers on the Cape Colony's loosely administered eastern fringe, and hosted visitors such as his fellow Scot, the missionary explorer David Livingstone.[78] After training in Aberdeen and Utrecht, the younger Murray was called to a congregation in Bloemfontein, administrative capital of the Orange Free State, a nominally independent republic established by Voortrekkers, Boer pioneers who had sought a nomadic lifestyle beyond the limits of British authority.[79] Tensions between the British colony and the Voortrekkers, who had established their own Dutch-speaking church, finally erupted in the Boer Wars (1880–1, 1899–1902), which entrenched both British control over the entire region and Boer resentment.[80]

Scholars have often used the distinctive social and religious identity of the Boers to explain racial issues in South Africa. Some, such as Randall Stokes, have suggested a distinctive South African Calvinist identity, which prioritised the *lekker lewe*, or good life. Stokes suggests that the 'essential elements of the *lekker lewe* were the Afrikaans language, the Calvinist faith, racial purity and white dominance, a minimum of formal authority, a pastoral livelihood, and a reliance on precedent in all things'.[81] Stokes argues that this concept was a crucial motivation for the Voortrekkers since it incorporated resistance to imperial authority, British customs, the English language and the abolition of slavery alongside a pastoral lifestyle. Indeed, cultural studies of Afrikaner history tend to emphasise the role of a Calvinist civil religion in the formation of a distinctive world-view.[82] However, André du Toit suggests that the relatively isolated conditions in which the Voortrekkers lived meant that they could have no sophisticated theology, making it questionable that there was any theological tradition at all, 'let alone such a systematic and sophisticated doctrine as that of Calvinism'.[83] Gerrit Schutte meanwhile argues that the 'image of the Afrikaner as a born Calvinist, moreover,

[77] John MacKenzie, 'The British world and the complexities of anglicisation: the Scots in Southern Africa in the nineteenth century', in Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *Britishness Abroad: Transnational Movements and Imperial Cultures* (Carlton, Victoria, 2007), pp. 109–30.

[78] 'Letter to Andrew Murray', 10 June 1847, MS. 10777, *Livingstone Online*. Adrian S. Wisnicki and Megan Ward, dirs. University of Maryland Libraries, <http://www.livingstoneonline.org> [accessed 23 Oct. 2020].

[79] Henk van Rinsum, *Sol Iustitiae en de Kaap: Een geschiedenis van de banden van de Utrechtse Universiteit met Zuid-Afrika* (Hilversum, 2006), pp. 39–44.

[80] John de Gruchy, 'Settler Christianity', in Martin Prozesky and John de Gruchy (eds), *Living Faiths in South Africa* (London, 1995), pp. 28–44, at p. 31.

[81] Randall G. Stokes, 'Afrikaner Calvinism and economic action: the Weberian thesis in South Africa', *American Journal of Sociology*, 81/1 (1975), pp. 62–81, at p. 68.

[82] Ibid.; see also Sheila Patterson, *The Last Trek: A Study of the Boer People and the Afrikaner Nation* (London, 1957); T. D. Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religio*n (Berkeley, 1975).

[83] André du Toit, 'Puritans in Africa? Afrikaner "Calvinism" and Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism in late nineteenth-century South Africa', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 27/2 (1985), pp. 209–40, at p. 212.

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is quite a recent historical myth – an invention of 19th/20th century Afrikaner nationalists'.[84]

The college at Stellenbosch, with professors educated in the Netherlands and Scotland, demonstrated that systematic Calvinist theology was taken seriously in some parts of South Africa, and that it was not entirely remote from European theological or intellectual trends. Indeed, the evangelical revivals that swept the transatlantic world in the mid-nineteenth century also affected the Cape, where Murray was a key figure in marshalling the enthusiasm that they generated.[85] Nor was the Cape spared the controversies generated by biblical criticism and Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*. David Livingstone has demonstrated that the colony's anglophone scientific community engaged in fierce debate over Darwin's theory, although its reception by Dutch speakers 'remains to be explored'.[86] Dutch speakers did engage in theological controversy, however, and in the 1860s two ministers who had been suspended from the NGK for rationalist and critical approaches to the Bible, J. J. Kotzé and T. F. Burgers, successfully appealed to the civil courts in Cape Town for redress.[87]

These trends culminated in the *kerksaak* (church case) of Johannes du Plessis, which began in 1928.[88] Du Plessis was appointed professor of missiology and New Testament at Stellenbosch in 1916, having studied at Cape Town, Halle and Edinburgh before his ordination in 1894. Subsequently he had undertaken a three-year journey through central Africa, worked as the NGK's mission secretary and edited *De Kerkbode*, the church's official periodical. Du Plessis drew heavily from the evangelical tradition within the NGK, authoring a sympathetic biography of Andrew Murray and several highly regarded works on mission.[89] Although du Plessis's area of expertise was missiology, at Stellenbosch he became increasingly interested in biblical criticism. Surprisingly for a disciple of the orthodox evangelical Murray, by 1923 du Plessis's theology had become decidedly liberal. He began publishing a monthly journal, *Het Zoeklicht* (*The Searchlight*), aimed at a theological audience, which attempted to harmonise rationalist and scientific approaches with biblical studies. Under du Plessis's editorship, *Zoeklicht* published considered,

[84] Gerrit Schutte, *A Family Feud: Afrikaner Nationalism and Dutch Neo-Calvinism* (Amsterdam, 2010), p. 3.

[85] Johannes du Plessis, *The Life of Andrew Murray of South Africa* (London, 1920), pp. 184–206; on the global revival: David Bebbington, *Victorian Religious Revivals: Culture and Piety in Local and Global Contexts* (Oxford, 2012).

[86] David N. Livingstone, 'Debating Darwin at the Cape', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 52 (2016), pp. 1–15, at p. 2.

[87] John M'Carter, *The Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa: With Notices of the Other Denominations. An Historical Sketch* (Edinburgh, 1869), pp. 47–76.

[88] Biographical details are taken from Willem Saayman, 'Johannes du Plessis', in Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1998), p. 190.

[89] Du Plessis, *Life of Andrew Murray*; idem, *A Thousand Miles in the Heart of Africa* (Edinburgh, 1905); idem, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa* (London, 1911); idem, *Thrice Through the Dark Continent: A Record of Journeyings Across Africa During the Years 1913–16* (London, 1917).

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and fairly sympathetic, treatments of biblical criticism, and discussed wider issues such as evolution.[90] Du Plessis authored several articles on topics such as the *Australopithecus Africanus* skull and the Scopes trial, taking a measured but generally supportive view of evolution.[91]

The extent to which such articles were considered controversial and modernist can be seen in the title of a rival journal, *Die Ou Paaie* (*The Old Paths*), launched in 1926. The title is particularly telling, as it used Afrikaans rather than the standard Dutch of *Zoeklicht*. Originally viewed as an inferior patois, Afrikaans had been given equal status alongside Dutch and English as official languages of South Africa in 1925, and its use reflected an increasingly self-confident, distinctive Afrikaner identity. In 1918 the various synods of the NGK had approved worship in Afrikaans alongside Dutch, and an Afrikaans Bible soon followed.[92] However, while the Afrikaners who read *Die Ou Paaie* rejected the Anglicised liberal cosmopolitanism of du Plessis, they were not isolationists. Its editor, Dwight Snyman, had studied theology at Princeton, where he, like Grier, had witnessed first-hand the struggles between liberals and conservatives.[93] Many Afrikaner theologians also studied in the Netherlands; by the 1920s most had been educated at the Vrije Universiteit. While some former Vrije Universiteit students, such as the later critic of apartheid, Bennie Keet, were influenced in a more progressive direction, du Plessis was concerned about their tendency towards conservative neo-Calvinism and a distinctively Kuyperian world-view.[94]

There were now, as Andrew Murray (grandson of his namesake) wrote in 1936, ‘two streams of Calvinism’ in the NGK. One was the Scottish, pietistic evangelical tradition to which du Plessis belonged, and the other a more confessional, legalistic neo-Calvinism. ‘A Kuyperian influence has become noticeable’, stated Murray, and ‘Stellenbosch has escaped the Scylla of Anglicisation only to steer straight into the Charybdis of Hollandisation (or rather, Kuyperisation)’.[95] The fierce debate between the two camps was initially waged in the pages of their respective journals. However, in March 1928, open warfare erupted when the curatorium of the Stellenbosch seminary, responding to complaints about du Plessis’s theological views, and unhappy with his response, brought charges of heresy at the Stellenbosch presbytery.[96]

[90] Andrew Nash, *The Dialectical Tradition in South Africa* (Abingdon, 2009), pp. 74–5.
[91] Jeffrey Lever, *Science, Evolution and Schooling in South Africa* (Cape Town, 2002), p. 22.
[92] Moodie, *Rise of Afrikanerdom*, p. 48.
[93] *The Catalogue of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church at Princeton, N. J. 1921–1922*. (Princeton, NJ, 1922), p. 24.
[94] Moodie, *Rise of Afrikanerdom*, p. 62; Schutte, *Family Feud*, pp. 62–4, 69–75; George Harinck, ‘Wipe out lines of division (not distinctions): Bennie Keet, Neo-Calvinism and the struggle against apartheid’, *Journal of Reformed Theology*, 11/1–2 (2017), pp. 81–98.
[95] Moodie, *Rise of Afrikanerdom*, pp. 66–70; Schutte, *Family Feud*, p. 69.
[96] Izak Spangenberg, ‘Darwin, Du Plessis, Dooie Seerolle en demokrasie: stroomversnellings in die studie van die Ou Testament in Suid-Afrika (1859–2009)’, *Old Testament Essays*, 22/3 (2009), pp. 662–76, at p. 667.

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As with the Davey and Geelkerken trials, this was ostensibly a theological debate: du Plessis was charged with accepting biblical criticism, and the initial verdict was an acquittal.[97] Presbyteries in the former Boer republics issued condemnations, and an extraordinary meeting of the Cape synod was convened, condemned higher criticism and evolution, and ordered the Stellenbosch presbytery to retry du Plessis. Thus began a struggle that would rage for four years. The embattled theologian was once again acquitted, but an appeal to the synod eventually resulted in him being dismissed in 1930.[98] It was now du Plessis's turn to appeal, and he turned to the civil authorities. The supreme court, following the precedent established by the Kotzé and Burgers cases, ruled that the synod had acted illegally and ordered that du Plessis be restored.[99] However, in 1932, yet another special synod was convened, at which all charges were withdrawn but du Plessis removed from his post 'to prevent friction'.[100]

V

What can three heresy trials tell historians about the interface of social, intellectual and religious cultures in the 1920s? Just as the decentralised authority of the American judicial and education systems made the Scopes trial possible, the particular structure of Calvinist churches meant that their doctrinal disputes were more likely to result in trials and public debate. In Tennessee, Scopes was charged with teaching evolution, but at stake was the cultural ascendancy of fundamentalism. Similarly, while these trials allowed specific concerns about the authority of the Bible to be articulated, they too reflected wider issues. Each of these rapidly modernising, increasingly pluralistic societies struggled to cope with upheaval and social change in the aftermath of the First World War. In 1918, the German sociologist Max Weber predicted that 'the fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the disenchantment of the world'.[101] Subsequent generations of sociologists, including Peter Berger and Steve Bruce, have developed Weber's disenchantment thesis into a master-narrative of secularisation that charts the gradual decline of religious authority in

[97] *Klag teen die H. Eerw. Professor Johannes du Plessis ingebring deur die Kuratorium van die Teologies Seminarium, Stellenbosch en die behandeling daarvan deur die H. Eerw. Ring van Stellenbosch in sy sitting te Caledon, op die 14e tot 16e Augustus 1928* (Stellenbosch, 1928).
[98] Nash, *Dialectical Tradition*, pp. 78–9; Richard Elphick, *The Equality of Believers, Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa* (Charlottesville, NC, 2012), pp. 207–8.
[99] 'Die Kerksaak tussen Prof. J. Du Plessis en die Ned. Geref. Kerk in Suid-Afrika. 'n Woordelike verslag van die verrigtinge, met die Uitspraak, in die Hooggeregshof, Kaapstad, November-Desember, 1931'. South Africa Supreme Court: Cape of Good Hope Provincial Division. 1932.
[100] Nash, *Dialectical Tradition*, p. 75.
[101] Max Weber, 'Wissenschaft als Beruf', in *Gesammlte Aufsaetze zur Wissenschaftslehr*e (Tübingen, 1922), pp. 524–55.

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the Western world.[102] Many secularisation narratives trace their origins to intellectual developments of the mid-nineteenth century such as geology and, especially, evolution. Yet, as Callum Brown has convincingly demonstrated, the effective secularisation of Britain happened not as a gradual decline but a precipitous drop, and in the 1960s. Far from accelerating the process of secularisation, the social circumstances of the 1920s in fact led to a sustained increase in church membership.[103] As these trials demonstrate, engagement with religious issues provided one avenue by which people could make sense of the horrors of war and refashion societies, and because this process was a means of dealing with societal issues specific social circumstances shaped the outcome in each trial. While questions about the authority of the Bible were the spark that ignited each case they were ultimately subordinated to other considerations.

Evolution is a particularly notable example of this process. The United Kingdom was home to the Victoria Institute, a forum for the discussion of science and religion and often considered the world's first anti-Darwinian organisation.[104] As recently as 1915, the biologist Ernest MacBride had warned the Institute against a strictly anti-evolutionary approach, urging them to 're-think the questions of religion and express them in modern terms, and they will gain a much wider circle of hearers'.[105] The sense that evolution was a settled matter, or at least one that it was unwise to protest openly, was demonstrated when the Canadian anti-evolutionist George McCready Price submitted an essay to the Institute's journal, which included an editorial note cautioning against 'a new crusade against Evolution'.[106] Price was, in the view of a member who had attended his subsequent lecture at the Institute, 'the proverbial bull in the china shop'.[107] After an embarrassing public debate against the rationalist philosopher Joseph McCabe and being labelled by the defence in the Scopes trial 'a mountebank and a pretender and not a geologist at all', Price and his beliefs were popularly considered backward and obscurantist.[108] The leading science periodical *Nature* had produced a special supplement to discuss American creationists,

[102] Peter Beger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY, 1967); Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Malden, MA, 2003).
[103] Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000* (London, 2001), esp. pp. 164–92.
[104] Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), pp. 165–6, 170–2; Joachim Allgaier, 'United Kingdom', in Stefaan Blancke, Hans Henrik Hjermitslev and Peter Kjærgaard (eds), *Creationism in Europe* (Baltimore, 2014), pp. 53–4; Stuart Mathieson, *Evangelicals and the Philosophy of Science: The Victoria Institute 1865–1939* (Abingdon, 2020).
[105] Ernest MacBride, 'The present position of the theory of organic evolution', *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* 47 (1915), pp. 93–125, at p. 124.
[106] George McCready Price, 'Geology in its relation to Scripture revelation', *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute*, 56 (1924), pp. 97–124.
[107] George McCready Price, 'Revelation and evolution: can they be harmonized?', *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* 57 (1925), pp. 167–90, at p. 183.
[108] Mathieson, *Evangelicals and the Philosophy of Science*, pp. 136–9, quote at p. 139.

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with leading religious figures such as E. W. Barnes, the bishop of Birmingham, decrying 'ignorant fanaticism' alongside commentary by leading biologists.

If the *Nature* supplement was, as Peter Bowler puts it, 'self-congratulatory, based on the assumption that such madness could never occur in the more mature climate prevailing on the other side of the Atlantic', it nevertheless reflected the fact that British evangelicals were unwilling to be publicly associated with anti-evolutionary beliefs and the ridicule that these could generate.[109] In Belfast, neither side was keen to introduce evolution into an already tense debate about modernism and biblical criticism. For Davey's opponents, their preferred Princeton theology risked having its intellectual respectability undermined by association with fundamentalism. Davey, by contrast, was able to point to Scotland and its tradition of believing criticism as a credible theological alternative. The key to Davey's success was avoiding a pitched battle over specifics, as the palpable sense of relief at the verdict demonstrates. In a society still bearing fresh scars from a series of wars, both global and local, political unrest and religious tension, there was little appetite for further conflict. Irish Presbyterians, for the first time part of the political establishment, saw little gain and much potential downside in fracturing Protestant unity.

In the Netherlands, however, where the neo-Calvinists had their own 'pillar', including a university with a distinctive view of science, the situation was different. Jan Ridderbos, one of the theological advisers of the GKN synod, had criticised Geelkerken's views because they could 'bring in the doctrine of evolution'.[110] Moreover, the theologians Valentijn Hepp and G. Ch. Aalders of the Vrije Universiteit, who had also advised the synod, addressed issues related to evolution and the age of the earth in the early 1930s: Hepp in a lecture series at Princeton in 1930 and Aalders in a commentary on Genesis published in 1932. Remarkably, in these they advanced the pseudoscientific 'flood theory' for the explanation of fossils, proposed by Price, whose works continued to be popular in the anti-evolutionist movement in the United States.[111]

Indeed, Dutch neo-Calvinists were well aware of the anglophone fundamentalist–modernist controversies. Both Aalders and Hepp were in contact with Calvinist fellow-believers in other countries. Aalders, who was the son of an English mother, grew up bilingually and therefore

[109] Peter Bowler, *Reconciling Science and Religion: The Debate in Early-Twentieth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 2001), p. 124.

[110] Jan Ridderbos, *Bezwaar en antwoord: Ds. Brussaards uiteenzetting van bezwaren tegen de beslissingen der synode en het antwoord van Prof. Ridderbos met repliek en dupliek* (Kampen, 1926), pp. 20, 50; Flipse, *Christelijke wetenschap*, pp. 159–60, 215; Aalders, *Heeft de slang gesproken?*, p. 310.

[111] Valentijn Hepp, *Calvinism and the Philosophy of Nature: The Stone Lectures Delivered at Princeton in 1930* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1930), pp. 183–223; G. Ch. Aalders, *De Goddelijke openbaring in de eerste drie hoofdstukken van Genesis* (Kampen, 1932), pp. 284–98; cf. Abraham C. Flipse, 'The origins of creationism in the Netherlands: the evolution debate among twentieth-century Dutch neo-Calvinists', *Church History*, 81/1 (2012), pp. 104–47, at pp. 125–6. Both Hepp and Aalders refer to George McCready Price, *The New Geology* (Mountain View, CA, 1923).

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often represented the GKN or the Vrije Universiteit abroad. Hepp cared for international students, mostly from the United States and South Africa, and undertook several international tours. In 1924, when visiting the United States, he launched the idea of an International Calvinist Federation.[112] The Dutch neo-Calvinist theologians therefore followed closely the fundamentalist-modernist struggle at Princeton, and sympathised with Machen's position, in which they recognised their own, as expressed by the Synod of Assen.[113]

It is also telling that in several Dutch newspapers the Geelkerken case was compared to the Scopes trial; it was even dubbed the 'Monkey trial in the Netherlands'.[114] In one moderate periodical, a commentator wondered whether there would be a place for Geelkerken and his like in the GKN, or if Geelkerken would suffer the fate of Scopes. Similarly, a modernist periodical drew parallels between the two cases.[115] These outsiders hoped that increasing liberal tendencies would emerge in neo-Calvinist circles, but to their sorrow they also observed that internationally the tendency was in the opposite direction. The outcome of the Geelkerken case thus may not have been a complete surprise to them.

With the verdict, the Synod of Assen, the leading neo-Calvinist theologians took a fundamentalist turn, choosing a stricter view of the Bible and a more critical stance towards the sciences inspired by the emerging young-earth creationist approach. As result of the pillarised structure of Dutch society, and the well-organised neo-Calvinist subculture, the affair largely remained an internal conflict. Within the GKN – increasingly a conservative minority church that clearly defined its positions towards the NKH and other denominations – an open discussion about biblical scholarship and the issue of creation and evolution debate was stifled for decades. Scientists with dissenting views were silenced, and only after the Second World War did they come increasingly to the fore.[116]

[112] Valentijn Hepp, *Internationaal Calvinisme* (Goes, 1929), p. 7.

[113] George Harinck, 'Valentijn Hepp in America: attempts at international exchange in the 1920s', in George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam (eds), *Sharing the Reformed Tradition. The Dutch-North American Exchange, 1846–1996*, (Amsterdam, 1996), pp. 115–38; George Harinck, '"Our history is not without parallels": reacties uit gereformeerde kring in Nederland op het ontstaan van Westminster Theological Seminary te Philadelphia', *Radix*, 23 (1997), pp. 44–67.

[114] 'Fundamentalisme in Amerika en Nederland I. Meester Scopes en ds. Geelkerken', *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 20 Oct. 1925; 'Fundamentalisme in Amerika en Nederland II. "Bryan is not dead"', *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 21 Oct. 1925. See also 'De "monkey trial" in Nederland', *Het Vaderland*, 8 Sept. 1925.

[115] 'Kroniek', *Stemmen voor waarheid en vrede*, 62/2 (1925), pp. 632–5. For Modernist views of Geelkerken and Scopes, see Krijger, *The Eclipse of Liberal Protestantism in the Netherlands*, pp. 219–20.

[116] Ab Flipse, '"Natuuronderzoekers dagen de kerk uit". Natuurwetenschappers, theologen en de kerken in de jaren vijftig', in George Harinck and Paul van Trigt (eds), *'In de vergifkast'? Protestantse organisaties tussen kerk en wereld in de jaren 1950* (Zoetermeer, 2013), pp. 119–37; Harry Cook and Abraham C. Flipse, 'Jan Lever: challenging the role of typological thinking in reformational views of biology', *Philosophia Reformata*, 82/1 (2017), pp. 3–25.

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At Stellenbosch, opponents of du Plessis saw the *kerksaak* as another Geelkerken case, and thus another potential victory, as Professor E. E. van Rooijen, explained to F. W. Grosheide of the Vrije Universiteit, his alma mater, in October 1928. 'Our Synod will meet in a few days', wrote van Rooijen, 'and it promises to become a South African Synod of Assen'.[117] Many contemporaries attributed the conservative tendency in the NGK to the influence of neo-Calvinism. Some du Plessis critics, particularly Snyman, were however obviously influenced by the combative approach of Princeton-style fundamentalism.[118] Moreover, in the Netherlands the opponents of Geelkerken had already embraced fundamentalist notions and mixed them with neo-Calvinist ideals. Du Plessis was thus confronted with a mix of Dutch neo-Calvinism and American fundamentalism. The case made less of an impression in Belfast, although the *Belfast Telegraph* did mention the trial and highlighted that du Plessis had called his accusers 'mouthpieces of Rome'. It also discussed the relationship between modernism, fundamentalism and Princeton theology, and noted that an esteemed American fundamentalist had described the biblical story of Jonah and the whale as allegorical.[119]

South Africa had only formally unified in 1910, and, like Northern Ireland, was recovering from both internal and international warfare. Yet where partition of Ireland had created a state in which Presbyterians were the largest single component of a Protestant majority, in South Africa the fault lines ran deeper. According to its first census in 1911, those of European descent comprised only a fifth of the South African population.[120] Yet this was not a homogeneous category. White South Africans were bitterly divided over the country's relationship to the British empire, language, and, especially, what was known as the native question. The formation of the Afrikaner Broederband (Afrikaner Brotherhood) in 1918 reflected these tensions. This exclusively white, Afrikaans, Calvinist social network provided an ideological framework through which its members could construct a cultural identity that could diminish Anglo influence, reassert Afrikaans and entrench white control of the state. One strain of this ideology cast Afrikaners as providentially placed, a pastoral *volk* of simple faith who were entitled to dominion of their lands.[121] Yet in his biography of Andrew Murray, du Plessis had explicitly denied that the Voortrekkers were religiously motivated, undercutting this narrative of a chosen people.[122] Rather than any particular doctrine, du Plessis therefore represented an urban, cosmopolitan, liberal, pietistic evangelical tendency

[117] Gerrit Schutte, *De Vrije Universiteit en Zuid-Afrika 1880–2005* (Zoetermeer, 2005), p. 188.
[118] Ibid., pp. 200–1.
[119] 'Cape heresy trial', *Belfast Telegraph*, 14 Sept. 1929.
[120] On the census, see Anthony J. Christopher, 'A South African Domesday Book: the first union census of 1911', *South African Geographical Journal*, 92 (2010), pp. 22–34.
[121] For a provocative exploration of this identity, see Donald Akenson, *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster* (Montreal, 1992).
[122] Du Plessis, *Life of Andrew Murray*, p. 105.

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at odds with the world-view of his rivals, which fused an Afrikaans identity, Kuyperian neo-Calvinism and American fundamentalism.

Evolution formed an important part of this dynamic, because by the 1920s serious tensions had erupted over race and the economy. Saul Dubow argues that 'empirically based science was frequently invoked as the most reasonable and disinterested way in which to approach questions of race'.[123] When prime minister Jan Smuts, a former Boer military leader, lost the 1924 election, he turned to academia, authoring a book that reflected an underlying positivist approach to evolution that saw the process as one of inevitable progression.[124] Yet if the underlying assumption was that progress was possible, most white South Africans did not consider the indigenous population to be their equals. Some liberals believed that non-whites could be 'developed', while many conservatives saw them as fixed on a lower trajectory on the evolutionary scale. The result was that the debate was recast into cultural rather than biological terms.[125]

Religion, already a cultural battleground, thus became another venue in which these concerns were thrashed out. Tensions over segregation were a long-standing issue in the NGK. At an 1857 synod it had permitted 'ten gevolge van de zwakheid van sommige' ('as a result of the weakness of some') whites, segregation between white and non-white congregations.[126] In 1926, du Plessis chaired an NGK committee on race, and his report espoused a more liberal, if patronising, view of South Africa's indigenous population derived from his missionary experience. Although du Plessis rejected the 'contemptuous language' of Afrikaners as a providentially chosen people, he viewed European South Africans as culturally superior to the indigenous population.[127] Non-white South Africans were 'minors', entitled to just guardianship during the long 'evolutionary process' of cultural development that would allow them eventually to flourish.[128] However, he still saw a justification for segregation in the interim: '[t]he South African Native has to pass in a century, or less, through an evolutionary process that for the European lasted a millennium' he wrote, 'and he cannot do so without some detriment to his intellectual and moral growth'.[129] Yet du Plessis could not support legislation that would entrench segregation. Non-whites, he argued, were not inherently inferior: they were less-developed. Whites, he argued, must 'look upon the Native peoples as a sacred trust. If they are minors, they are minors

[123] Saul Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge: Science, Sensibility, and White South Africa, 1820–2000* (Oxford, 2006), p. 203.
[124] Jan Smuts, *Evolution and Holism* (London, 1927).
[125] Saul Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919–36* (Basingstoke, 1989), pp. 34–6.
[126] *Handelingen der Negende Vergadering van de Synode der Gereformeerde Kerk van Zuid-Afrika* (Cape Town, 1857), p. 60.
[127] Johannes du Plessis, 'The South African problem: second paper', *International Review of Mission*, 15 (1926), pp. 363–75, at p. 367.
[128] Ibid., p. 371.
[129] Ibid., p. 368.

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whose interests we must have at heart'.[130] This brought him into conflict with the conservative Afrikaner element of the NGK, which supported the 'colour bar', a proposed restriction of jobs available to non-whites and legislation to codify non-whites as second-class citizens.[131] For the conservatives, then, du Plessis's heresy was not simply a matter of biblical interpretation; it was a rationalist, evolutionary world-view that did not treat the Afrikaners as a providentially chosen superior race, and which threatened to undermine their attempts to reorient society in their own image.

VI

The comparative study of these three cases illustrates two important points. While fundamentalism is often thought of as quintessentially American, other countries with significant Calvinist populations also underwent similar, if less public, disputes. Further, even though these communities shared so many of their intellectual commitments, the specific social contexts in which these debates were situated led to different outcomes as they grappled with the challenges of modernity, traditionalism and their confessional identities.

Importantly, each locale had to manage a pluralistic society. In Belfast, the PCI was one of three similarly sized denominations, but for the first time it was part of a Protestant majority state. The legacy of the Irish War of Independence, the resulting civil war and violent unrest, and partition all cast a long shadow. In this context, Davey's ability to present himself as a thoroughgoing evangelical allowed calls for Protestant unity to win out over narrower doctrinal or confessional concerns. In Amsterdam, the societal structure of *verzuiling* meant that the debates were mostly contained within the neo-Calvinist pillar, of which the GKN, being a relative homogeneous denomination, was part. By the 1920s the neo-Calvinists had become a well-established societal grouping, and so were confident that they could afford to take a more doctrinaire line within the church. In Stellenbosch, meanwhile, debate raged not only over competing British and Dutch heritages, but over a series of racial issues that would later be reflected in the apartheid policies of the South African state.

Indeed, heritage and identity were crucial components of each contest. While members of these denominations operated in international networks, and controversies erupted in part because of this international element, the question remained of where the intellectual roots of each denomination lay. The Vrije Universiteit, Utrecht, Princeton and the Scottish universities all offered possible sources of inspiration. This is also an important reminder that, while the reaction to the Scopes trial portrayed American fundamentalism as a rural, populist,

[130] Ibid., p. 369.
[131] Ibid., p. 373.

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anti-intellectual, and non-denominational movement, debates about modernism were being articulated with similar intensity within Calvinism. The three denominations in this study each had a distinct sense of their confessional identity, reflected in their doctrinal standards, and a well-defined theological heritage that stressed intellectual rigour. At the Davey trial, the PCI wrestled with existential questions. Was Belfast another Princeton, dedicated to inerrancy and a rationalist, Baconian epistemology, or was there room for an experiential Calvinism? Were such questions worth introducing another fault line in a society still reeling from a decade of social upheaval? In Amsterdam, the GKN also grappled with the authority of scripture and literalism, alongside the question of which of its factions could lay claim to the contested legacy of Kuyper and Bavinck. There, the issue of sense perception played a surprising role, but the confinement of debate to the neo-Calvinist pillar meant that the disputants did not have similar social implications to consider, and the result was a stricter interpretation of scripture. At Stellenbosch, meanwhile, exegesis and hermeneutics were debated, but at the heart of the matter was the identity of the NGK. Could the Scottish evangelical and Dutch neo-Calvinist streams coexist, and what were the implications for Afrikaners and the racial question?

Those who condemned the allegedly modernist views of Davey, Geelkerken and du Plessis did so because of a desire to stay on the 'old paths'. Yet they could no more escape modernity than those whom they denounced. Their inspiration often came from other parts of the transnational Calvinist network, whether they framed the conflict in their own country as a reprise of a conflict elsewhere, or borrowed ideas from foreign schools of thought. Ironically, by attempting to articulate traditional doctrine in twentieth-century terms, they too changed it. For historians, attempting to view fundamentalism, or indeed heresy trials, as a clash of free-floating theological commitments is to miss what they can illustrate about a culture, since, as these trials demonstrate, they are phenomena embedded within, reflective of and sensitive to specific socio-cultural contexts.

PEER REVIEW

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