

‘Bearded men singing psalms’: The Work of DRC Ministers as Support Services during the South African War (1899-1902)

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Abstract

Considering the importance of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) to most facets of Boer life during the South African War (1899-1902), there has been surprisingly little inquiry into the roles played by DRC ministers in the (informal) network of Boer support services during this conflict. While some social historians and church historians have delved into the significance of religion to both the fighting men and civilians, the role of Boer religious leaders and specifically the work they performed during the war, are still largely overlooked. This article investigates how DRC ministers functioned as a form of informal support service, in the absence of a formal chaplaincy, and considers how their ability to serve both the spiritual and material needs of their congregants was directly impacted by the context in which they worked and their proximity to British oversight. To this end we use three case studies of DRC ministers who worked in three main areas impacted by the war: the Boer commandos in the field (J.D. Kestell), the British-controlled prisoner-of-war camps (A.F. Louw) and the concentration camps (A.D. Lückhoff).

Keywords: Dutch Reformed Church; field preachers; J.D. Kestell; A.F. Louw; A.D. Lückhoff; auxiliary support services; South African War; Anglo-Boer War, ministers.

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Opsomming

Die karige ondersoek na die rol wat die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) se veldpredikers tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog as 'n tipe (informele) hulpdiensnetwerk gespeel het is verbasend wanneer die belangrikheid van die NGK van Suid-Afrika met betrekking tot bykans alle fasette van die Boere se lewe in ag geneem word. Alhoewel sommige sosiale- en kerkhistorici reeds die belangrikheid van geloof vir beide Boerekrygers en burgers ondersoek het, word die rol wat die Boere se geestelike leiers gespeel het, sowel as ondersoek na die fisiese werk wat die geestelike leiers verrig het, grotendeels geïgnoreer. Hierdie artikel stel ondersoek in na die NGK kapelane se veelvuldige dienste tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog wat as 'n tipe informele hulpdiensnetwerk beskou kan word. Ons argumenteer dat die konteks waarin hul gearbei het, sowel as hul nabyheid aan Britse gesag, 'n noemenswaardige invloed uitgeoefen het op beide die geestelike en materiële dienste wat hulle aan hul gemeentelede kon verskaf. Om verteenwoordigend te wees van die drie hoof arenas van die oorlog, gebruik ons gevallestudies van drie NGK kapelane, naamlik: J.D. Kestell wat die kommando's in die veld vergesel het, ds. A.F. Louw in die St. Helena krygsgevangenskap en ds. A.D. Lückhoff in die Bethulie konsentrasiekamp.

Sleutelwoorde: Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk; veldpredikantsdiens; J.D. Kestell, A.F. Louw; A.D. Lückhoff; hulpdiensnetwerk; Suid-Afrikaanse Oorlog; Anglo-Boereoorlog; veldpredikers; dominees.

Introduction

In December 1900, ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)¹ in the Cape Colony sent a letter to the governor, Sir Alfred Milner, proclaiming their belief that the republican Boer cause was one driven by 'divine will'.² By this point in the South African War (1899-1902), British authorities already regarded clergymen with suspicion due to reports that they were using the pulpit to preach sedition.³ This letter would have done little to assuage British fears regarding the influence of DRC

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1. Alongside the DRC, there were two sister churches within the Reformed tradition: the *Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk*, the official state church of the Transvaal Republic was founded in approximately 1842, and the *Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika*, colloquially known as the *Doppers*, also founded in the Transvaal Republic in 1859. The focus of this article is on the ministers of the various synods of the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (DRC). P.J. Strauss. 'Die Naam "Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk"', *Acta Theologica*, 36, 1 (2016), 213-228; 'Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die NG Kerk', Gemeentegeskiedenis, accessed 14 July 2023, <https://www.gemeentegeskiedenis.co.za/oorsig-van-die-geskiedenis-van-die-ng-kerk/>.
 2. Archive for Contemporary Affairs, Bloemfontein (hereafter ACA), J.D. Kestell Collection (hereafter Kestell), PV 153, 2/2/1, Korrespondensie Algemeen, 1882 Okt. 16-1900 Des. 7, Letter to His Excellency the Governor, 7 December 1900.
 3. T. Pakenham, *The Boer War* (Johannesburg: Johnathan Ball Publishers, 1993), 486.

ministers on Cape Afrikaners' tenuous loyalty to the British Empire. Nor would the accompanying 'statement of wills', where they clearly expressed their condemnation of the war and, more specifically, the 'methods employed in carrying it on' by the British.⁴ Clearly, these Cape ministers aligned themselves with their republican brothers-in-psalms. DRC ministers from the Orange Free State and Transvaal Republics were similarly pro-Boer in their sentiments.⁵ In reference to personages provoking anti-British sentiments amongst the Boers, the British press mentioned '[t]he acts of the Dutch political leaders and predikants'⁶ in the same breath, signalling the importance attributed to the DRC clergymen and the supposed dangers they posed to the British cause in South Africa.

Boer ministers indisputably preached what British authorities would have regarded as sedition.⁷ From the Boer perspective, ministers were a moral driving force strengthening the war effort. However, their general work and support offered to congregants extended far beyond religious guidance or what would traditionally have been considered a *dominee's* (minister's) work. DRC ministers fulfilled a key role in the (informal) network of Boer support services during this conflict. The movement away from 'drum and trumpet' histories of war has highlighted the significance of those services deemed 'auxiliary' and how these services impacted the lived wartime experiences of both soldiers and civilians. This article investigates how DRC ministers functioned as a form of informal support service for the Boers in the absence of a formal chaplaincy⁸ and asks how their ability to serve both the spiritual *and* material needs of their congregants were directly impacted by the context in which they worked. To this end we use three case studies of DRC ministers who worked in three main areas impacted by the war: in the field with the Boer commandos (J.D. Kestell), the British-controlled prisoner-of-war camps (A.F. Louw), and the concentration camps (A.D. Lückhoff).

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4. ACA, Kestell, PV 153, 2/1/1, Letter to His Excellency the Governor, 7 December 1900.
 5. The Dutch Reformed Church was split into four regionally defined synods: The Synod of the Cape came into being in 1824; the Synod of the Republic of the Orange Free State was founded in 1864; the Natal Colony in 1864; and the Transvaal Republic in 1866. The first General Synod was only held in 1962. This means that at the time of the South African War there was no overarching governing body to issue an official statement about the Church's collective stance in terms of the conflict. Even at the regional synodal level it is difficult to determine any stance towards the war, since none of the synods could assemble during the war. However, a majority of individual ministers (and their congregants) were pro-Boer. See: V. Brümmer, 'Die Kaapse Kerk en die Boereoorlog', LitNet Akademies, accessed 27 October 2023, <https://www.litnet.co.za/die-kaapse-kerk-en-die-boereoorlog/>.
 6. M.C.E. van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell, 1854-1941: Outobiografies Beskryf*, (Bloemfontein: Oorlogsmuseum van die Boererepublieke, 1992), 94.
 7. R. Müller, 'Afrikaner Socio-theological Discourse in the Early Twentieth Century: War and Mission', *Historia*, 59, 2 (2014), 317.
 8. For background on the establishment of a South African military chaplaincy, see: L. Bredenkamp and A. Wessels, 'The Early History of South African Military Chaplaincy: A Case Study of the Variance Between British Imperialism and Afrikaner Nationalism, c. 1914-1973', *Journal for Contemporary History*, 39, 2 (2014), 60-80.

The Boers, as a people, are routinely described as ‘deeply religious’⁹ and ministers from the three reformed sister churches played a significant role in almost all facets of Boer life, culture, and politics. Writing for *Die Huisgenoot* in 1949, Afrikaans cultural historian Kotie Roodt described the interwoven nature of religiosity and the Boers as follows:

*Dwarsdeur sy geskiedenis het die Boer sy godsdiens met erns bejeën en met opregtheid probeer uitleef. Die Groot Trek is deur reisigers as ‘n ‘reisende bidstonde’ bestempel en die Republikeinse vegters as ‘psalmsingende’ baarddraers uitgekryt. [The Boers, throughout their history, regarded their religion with solemnity and tried to practise their beliefs with sincerity. The Great Trek was described by travellers as a ‘travelling prayer meeting’ and the republican fighters were derided as ‘psalm-singing bearded men’].*¹⁰

While the war disrupted church life, it did not halt its various activities.¹¹ In all contexts of the war, it seems, there was a re-invigoration of religious expression.¹² This is perhaps to be expected in the context of a near total war.¹³ For many Boers, the expression of a shared religion became the medium used to (re)assert their cultural identity, thereby disavowing British influence and domination. Positioned at the centre of this religious reawakening was the *dominee*: the ‘bearded man’ leading his congregants in the singing of psalms.

For republican burghers on commando, religion was one of the driving forces that kept men fighting.¹⁴ *Veldpredikers*¹⁵ used their sermons to motivate the burghers.¹⁶ Religion provided many with a sense of routine, moral support and

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9. A. Wohlberg and A. Wessels, ‘Religion and Recreation in the Merebank Concentration Camp’, *South African Journal of Cultural History*, 16, 2 (2002), 49; D. Britz, “‘Now, what has become of our prayers and supplications?’ Faith in an Anglo-Boer War Concentration Camp of 1901’, *Acta Academica*, 39, 3 (2007), 27.
 10. K. Roodt, ‘Die Godsdiens in die Krygsgevangenekampe’, *Die Huisgenoot*, 16 Januarie 1942, 7 and 47.
 11. J.M. Bezuidenhout, ‘n Kerkhistoriese Ondersoek na die Arbeid en Ervaring van die Ned. Geref. Kerk tydens die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog (1899-1902)’ (BDiv thesis, University of Pretoria, 1996), 52.
 12. R. Müller, ‘War, Exilic Pilgrimage and Mission: South Africa’s Dutch Reformed Church in the Early Twentieth Century’, *Studies in World Christianity*, 24, 1 (2018), 72; Wohlberg and Wessels, ‘Religion and Recreation’, 49; Britz, ‘Now, what has become of our prayers?’, 27; Bezuidenhout ‘n Kerkhistoriese Ondersoek’, 51, 54-55.
 13. A. Grundlingh, ‘War in Twentieth-Century Afrikaner Consciousness’, in *The Impact of the South African War*, eds D. Omissi and A.S. Thompson (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 23. Although, as pointed out by Grundlingh, the ‘totality’ of the South African War was not complete, the widespread impact of the conflict was felt by almost all aspects of society.
 14. F. Pretorius, ‘Waarom het die “Bittereinders” gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog van 1899-1902 op Kommando Gebly?’, *Historia*, 35, 1 (1990), 63.
 15. Translated literally as ‘field preachers’ or field chaplains.
 16. Bezuidenhout, ‘n Kerkhistoriese Ondersoek’, 50.

comfort during the chaos caused by the war; particularly for the men, women and children confined to prisoner of war (POW) and concentration camps. In both these contexts, the adherence to religious traditions became vital to establish a sense of normalcy amidst the turmoil of war.¹⁷

Considering the well-documented importance of religion to the Boers in general and during the war, the concomitant research pertaining to the significant influence of ministers from the reformed churches on the shaping of the socio-political and socio-cultural religious tenets underpinning Boer wartime society, should be extensive. However, the DRC ministers who served in the different contexts during the South African War and the work they performed have almost entirely been overlooked.¹⁸ While some studies have emerged from church history examining DRC ministers, these focus predominantly on the war's influence on their ministry or their theological point of view.¹⁹ There is minimal cross-pollination between theological and secular²⁰ historical discussions concerning the South African War. While the church historians highlight the spiritual aspects of the *dominees'* religious expression, the roles played by these ministers were arguably more significant since they provided other forms of support in many other aspects of the war. This role has been largely ignored or remains buried in decades-old Afrikaans-language theses not selected for digitisation by universities.²¹

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17. F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1991), 171; J.F. Potgieter, 'Die Militêre Kapelaan: Die Ontstaan en Ontwikkeling van die Amp, Taak en Organisasie van Militêre Kapelane in die Geskiedenis van die Christelike Kerk, met Besondere Verwysing na Suid-Afrika' (DDiv dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1971), 155; E. van Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War: A Social History* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2013), 270; Wohlberg and Wessels, 'Religion and Recreation', 65.
 18. J.H. Lourens, 'Die Geestelike Bearbeiding van die Lidmate van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk te Velde, in Krygsgevangenekampe en Konsentrasiekampe gedurende die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog (1899-1902): 'n Kerkhistoriese en Kerkregtelike Studie' (BDiv thesis, Universiteit van Stellenbosch, 1960), 112-119.
 19. See P.G.R. De Villiers, 'Reformed Spirituality in Action: The Diary of A.D. Lückhoff as Praxis', *HTS Teologiese Studies*, 67, 3 (2011); P.G.R De Villiers, 'Tranquillity in the Face of Death: Calvinist Spirituality in War', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 35, 2 (2009), 119-139; C. Pretorius, 'Die Rol van Predikante van Die Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika tydens Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog (1899-1902)', *HTS Teologiese Studies*, 57, 3/4 (2001), 1052-70; R.M. Britz, 'n (N.G.) Gemeente in "Het Kamp te Bloemfontein" gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1900-1903', *Acta Theologica*, 22, 1 (2003), 1-22; Britz, 'Now, what has become of our prayers', 21-44; D. Britz, 'The Life and Times of Christoph Sandrock, Missionary of the Berlin Mission Society during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) at Springfontein, South Africa', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 38, 2 (2012); Lourens, 'Die Geestelike Bearbeiding'.
 20. The word 'secular' is used here simply to differentiate between the research foci of these historical works.
 21. For example, J.F. Potgieter's dissertation 'Die Militêre Kapelaan' (University of Pretoria, 1971) has been described as 'groundbreaking research' by Bredenkamp and Wessels, and yet the University of Pretoria has not digitised this dissertation. See L.

To address the outlined paucity in historical studies pertaining to the South African War, this article examines the auxiliary role played by three DRC ministers during the war: J.D. Kestell's work as minister to the Boer commandos in the veld, A.D. Lückhoff's tenure as minister in the Bethulie concentration camp, and A.F. Louw's contributions to camp life for St. Helena POWs. We argue that the Boer ministers' work providing support services was directly impacted and shaped by the circumstances in which they operated. It is suggested that the setting in which they worked – as *veldpredikers*, or as ministers in the concentration camps or prisoner of war camps – determined much of the nature of the services they offered. Thus, *what* the ministers did during the war was essentially limited to what they were *able* to do and was directly influenced by their proximity to British oversight.

The lives and life-writing of three DRC ministers

The three ministers we have selected each published a form of life writing reflecting his war experiences.²² Lückhoff's Bethulie camp diary, *Woman's Endurance* (1904); Kestell's autobiographical reminiscences of his time with the Harrismith commando as a *veldprediker* in *Met de Boeren-commando's* (1903),²³ reworked from his war diary; and the epistolary efforts of *Ds. A.F. Louw op St. Helena: Briewe en Belewensisse* (1963) as well as his autobiography, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar* (1958), form the centre of this examination. Furthermore, there are extensive private collections available in archival holdings for the three chosen ministers which were used to supplement information available in their autobiographical texts.²⁴

John Daniel Kestell, born in Pietermaritzburg on 15 December 1854, was raised in an '*innige Christen*' [deeply Christian] Afrikaner environment.²⁵ He served as the chaplain to the Harrismith commando for the duration of the war. By the outbreak of the war, Kestell was already well established as a religious figure. At a relatively young age, he was given the moniker that he would carry with him for the

Bredenkamp and A. Wessels, 'n Historiese Perspektief op die Kapelaansvrou in die Suid-Afrikaanse Militêre Milieu, *New Contree*, 69 (2014), 121. Similarly, J.M. Bezuidenhout's very thorough BDiv thesis 'n Kerkhistoriese Ondersoek na die Arbeid en Ervaring van die Ned. Geref. Kerk tydens die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog' (1996), has no digital footprint on Google or WorldCat search engines.

22. For a thorough overview of life writing definitions, analysis, genres and interpretation, see S. Smith and J. Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.)

23. Published in English as J.D. Kestell *Through Shot and Flame. The Adventures and Experiences of J.D. Kestell. Chaplain to President Steyn and General Christian de Wet* (London: Methuen & Co., 1903).

24. Louw and Lückhoff's collections are housed at the Dutch Reformed Church Archives in Stellenbosch. Kestell's collection forms part of the holdings of the Archive of Contemporary Affairs in Bloemfontein.

25. 'Kestell, John Daniel', in *SA Biografiese Woordeboek*, Vol 1, ed W.J. de Kock (Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1968), 441.

rest of his life: *Vader Kestell* (Father Kestell). This honorary title reflected, according to Nienaber and others, the love and respect felt by the Afrikaners towards Kestell.²⁶ The title apparently references the fatherlike concern Kestell showed for the Afrikaners' '*stoflike en geestelike welvaart*' [physical and spiritual welfare].²⁷

After the war, Kestell dedicated the next 40 years of his life to the rebuilding of his *volk*, his people, on various fronts. He was moderator of the Free State synod during the 1914 rebellion; played a prominent role in the *Helpmekaarbeweging*²⁸ and was one of the founders of the *Reddingsdaadbond*.²⁹ He also helped to translate the Bible into Afrikaans; served as editor for several church magazines; and was rector of Grey College and Stellenbosch University.³⁰ The profound regard in which Kestell was held by his contemporaries was cemented in his final resting place: as a member of the triumvirate of the Free State, he is buried with President M.T. Steyn and General C.R. de Wet at the Women's Monument; the '*volksaltaar*' (nation's shrine) of the Afrikaners.³¹

Kestell kept an extensive diary while he was a *veldprediker* because he realised the importance of documenting the war and the possibility of publishing his war memoirs. However, he lost his first diary when taken prisoner and had to start afresh, even recalling and writing down the memories penned in the lost diary for record-keeping purposes. For fear of losing the second diary, he wore it in a sling on his person, even sleeping with the notebook to keep it safe.³² Although the veracity of recalled memories lost in the first diary, then rewritten in a second one, might be

26. See: P.B. van der Watt, 'Vader van sy Volk', *Voorligter*, October 1985; P.B. van der Watt, 'Vader van sy Volk – Ds. JD Kestell', *Die Kerkbode*, 2 January 1980; No Author, 'Vader Kestell het Beslis die Benaming Verdien', *Hoofstad*, 22 December 1976.

27. P.J. Nienaber, *Dr. J.D. Kestell: Vader van die Reddingsdaad*. (Bloemfontein, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth: Nasionale Pers Beperk, 1946), 170.

28. The *Helpmekaarbeweging* was a mutual aid association established in the wake of the 1914 Afrikaner rebellion. With branches in all provinces, it sought to raise funds to help the rebels pay the heavy fines they were burdened with following their actions. The scheme was hugely successful having raised sufficient funds to pay all fines and civil claims by 1917. See: A. Ehlers and D.J. van Zyl, 'Die Invloed van die Helpmekaarbeweging in Suid-Afrika, 1915-1920', *Historia*, 35, 1 (1990), 73-90; H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2003), 386.

29. Established in 1939, as part of an alliance between the Afrikaner Broederbond and Sanlam, the *Reddingsdaadbond* [Rescue Act Society] aimed to alleviate the plight of poor white Afrikaners. To this end funds were raised for investment in Afrikaner businesses, in line with Kestell's philosophy that 'a people rescues itself' Although not as successful in its financial aims as the *Helpmekaarbeweging*, both entities played significant roles in the economic mobilisation of the Afrikaner *volk*. See: H. Adam and H. Giliomee, *The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1979), 157-160; Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 436-438.

30. G.B.A. Gerdener, 'John Daniel Kestell (1941): Volksvader en Kerkvader', in *Bouers van Weleer* (Cape Town: NG Kerk-Uitgewers, 1951), 206.

31. Nienaber, *Dr. J.D. Kestell*, 170.

32. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 214.

called into question and the nature of penning one's memory with the intent to publish might further influence believability;³³ descriptions of the work he performed as *veldprediker* still provide valuable information. The diary not only gives insight into Kestell's work, but also provides a lens into how he envisioned himself and his role as *veldprediker* and sought to represent this to his readers.

Born in Colesberg in 1874, August Daniel Lückhoff³⁴ also came from a strongly religious background.³⁵ In 1896, Lückhoff enrolled for a theology course at Stellenbosch and was admitted to the ministry in 1900. His first practical experience as a minister came during the South African War. Between August and October 1901, the young candidate-minister served as chaplain to the Bethulie concentration camp in the Orange River Colony.³⁶ He only accepted his first official post in 1904. Shortly thereafter, the young minister was called to serve the church in a different capacity. From February 1905 to 1912, Lückhoff served on the Synodal Education Commission where his role was to help improve education in the Namaqualand region, as well as to give spiritual support to the people there.³⁷ Hereafter, Lückhoff's career was dedicated to charitable service. From 1916 until his retirement in 1943, he served as secretary for the church's *Algemene Armesorgkommissie* (General Poor Relief Commission). Lückhoff set up a multitude of charitable fund-raising schemes. He is

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33. B.J. Mandel, 'Full of Life Now', in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed J. Olney (Surrey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 49-50; see also J. Olney, *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
 34. Note that Lückhoff's surname is sometimes spelt without the umlaut as Luckhoff.
 35. Lückhoff – much like AF Louw – came from a line of religious ministers. His father, Anton Daniël Lückhoff, was also a Dutch Reformed Church minister and became well-known for his charitable efforts; so much so that he was known as '*die Filantroop van die Kerk*' [the philanthropist of the Church]. Both of Lückhoff's grandfathers were missionaries. His paternal grandfather – Paul Daniel Lückhoff – was one of the first four members of the Rhenish Mission Society to come to South Africa in 1829. Paul's wife, Johanna Susanna Albertyn, also hailed from a prominent *predikante* [ministers] family. Lückhoff's maternal grandfather was John A. Bailie, a Wesleyan missionary to Namaqualand. See: W.E. van Wyk, 'Die Bediening van Dr. AD Lückhoff as Armesorgsekreteraris van die Ned. Geref. Kerk, met Spesiale verwysing na die Noordweste 1916-1943' (Mtheo Thesis, Stellenbosch University, 1986), 7-9. Additionally, several members of the later generations of the Lückhoff family became ministers in the Dutch Reformed Church. See: 'Luckhoff-predikante' Gemeentegesiedenis, accessed 13 December 2022, <https://www.gemeentegesiedenis.co.za/luckhoff-predikante/>.
 36. The Boer Republic of the Orange Free State was occupied by British forces in 1900 and given the title Orange River Colony. The Boer burghers in the field would not, however, have acknowledged this imperial designation and continued to fight for the independence of the Orange Free State. In this article, we have chosen to maintain the contemporary political and ideological divisions by using both names, depending on context. Thus, for Kestell – as a vociferous supporter of the Boer cause – it is the Orange Free State, while for Lückhoff, working under British authority in the Bethulie concentration camp, it is Orange River Colony.
 37. B.P.J. Marchand, 'Namaqualand', *De Kerkbode*, 9 February 1905, 62; P. du Toit, 'Ds. A.D. Lückhoff tree af', *Die Kerkbode*, 20 October 1943, 559.

best remembered as the '*vader van die Noordweste*' (father of the Northwest) due to his work on the educational upliftment of poor (white) children in Namaqualand.

During his time at Bethulie, Lückhoff kept a diary, with the thought that in later years he might wish to 'recall [his] experiences in Camp'.³⁸ He describes it as 'simply a confidential talk to one's self of one's self', written without 'any regard to style, language, or form'.³⁹ It was only at the request of a friend that Lückhoff transcribed his scribbled notes and eventually decided to publish the diary. However, the staccato, 'haphazard', 'fragmented' almost 'incoherent' notes scribbled at the end of each day by the exhausted young parson is arguably more revealing of his mental state and the harrowing circumstances of camp life than a reworked autobiography would be.⁴⁰

Abraham Faure Louw (28 December 1866 - 16 August 1960), was born in Fauresmith in the Orange Free State. Louw spent most of his youth in Murraysburg but the family moved to Paarl when he was fifteen. He completed his schooling at Paarl Gymnasium and graduated with a BA degree from Victoria College. Louw worked as a chaplain in the Deadwood and Broad Bottom POW camps of St. Helena for two years, between 6 September 1900 and 20 August 1902. After the war he became the head of Het Zending Boeren Instituut in Worcester (1903-1906). He was recalled to serve Graaff-Reinet in 1908, but in 1912 became the first DRC general secretary of Missionary Work. Louw also worked as a minister in the Aberdeen (1917-1921), Bloemfontein Noord (1921-1928) and Stellenbosch (1928-1946) congregations. At the time of Louw's retirement at the age of almost 80, he had been in active DRC service for an unprecedented 52 years.⁴¹

Louw's St. Helena letters were published as a collection shortly after his death. He had written the letters during the war for the church publications *De Kerkbode* and *De Koningsbode*, intending to provide updates about the spiritual concerns of the POWs.⁴² The collection of letters also includes notes added by the compiler.⁴³ His autobiography, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, comprises six chapters out of the total 26 which deal with events on St. Helena.

Relying on biographical data and life-writing as source material to address the work performed by DRC ministers during the South African War adds 'layer[s] of

38. A.D. Lückhoff, *Woman's Endurance* (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2006), 1.

39. Lückhoff, *Woman's Endurance*, 1.

40. Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 266.

41. A.F. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar* (Cape Town: N.G. Kerk-Uitgewers, 1958), 265.

42. See Smith and Watson's summary of letters as vehicles for the circulation of information where 'social roles [are] enacted, relationships secured, often in a paradoxical mix of intimacy and formality'. Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 273.

43. A.F. Louw's son, Reverend Johan Louw.

complexity⁴⁴ to this historical investigation due to the ‘personal and individual nature’⁴⁵ of the documents. Paraphrasing and repurposing the words of Jake Hodder, the aim of the article is not to examine the ministers’ lives per se, but to examine ‘how those experiences can cast light on the wider social and cultural worlds that a life inhabits’.⁴⁶ From a methodological standpoint, examining individual lives to investigate historical events has merit since ‘[m]icrohistory and biography share the vantage of scrutinizing, challenging and possibly correcting established interpretations of human history in a scholarly way’⁴⁷ by highlighting a variety of sources often neglected by macro-historians. The lived experiences of these three ministers do not necessarily reflect a general *veldprediker* or South African War ‘chaplain’ experience, but offer a lens to provide a better understanding of Boer ministers’ work and how this work was impacted by the contexts in which they ministered – either under or free from British scrutiny and suspicion.

J.D. Kestell: A *bittereinder veldprediker* in a ‘holy war’

From 1894, John Daniel Kestell was the minister for the Harrismith congregation and when war broke out, he chose to follow his congregants on commando. According to his war memoir, Kestell was ‘very strongly affected’ by the reports of loss of life during three early battles.⁴⁸ After praying about the situation, he left to join them on 27 October 1899.⁴⁹ The Harrismith church council granted Kestell leave of absence and continued to pay his salary, at least for a few months.⁵⁰ Following the men of his congregation into the field as a roving field chaplain was, for Kestell and other *veldpredikers*, essentially a continuation of their work as ministers: administering to their congregants’ spiritual needs.⁵¹

44. J. Bornat, ‘Biographical Methods’, in *The Sage Handbook of Social Research Methods*, eds P. Alasuutari, L. Bickman and J. Brannen (London: Sage, 2008), 343.

45. Bornat, ‘Biographical Methods’, 343.

46. J. Hodder, ‘On Absence and Abundance: Biography as Method in Archival Research’, *Area*, 49, 4 (2017), 453.

47. H. Renders, B. de Haan and J. Harmsma, ‘Biography as a Critical Method in the Humanities and in Society’, Introductory chapter 1 in, *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History*, edited by Renders, de Haan and Harmsma (London: Routledge, 2016), 5.

48. In his war memoir, Kestell states that he ‘heard of the fight at Glencoe on the 20th October, at Elandsplaagte on the 21st, and at Rietfontein (Modderspruit) on the 24th’. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 12.

49. Van Schoor’s so-called ‘autobiographical description’ of Kestell’s life is technically a biography written in the first person. Van Schoor knew Kestell personally and utilised the extensive Kestell private collection housed at the Archive of Contemporary Affairs (Bloemfontein), as well as a variety of other sources, writing this biography by primarily adopting and reworking Kestell’s own published and unpublished autobiographical writing with minimal intervention in terms of style or word choice. See Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 10.

50. Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 80, 85-86.

51. Bezuidenhout, ‘’n Kerkhistoriese Ondersoek’, 47.

Kestell was attached to the Harrismith Commando until the war's end; one of only seven DRC chaplains to become a *bittereinder*.⁵² The length and breadth of his spiritual service during the war was, however, not limited to the men of his congregation. He acted as chaplain for a variety of field commandos due to wartime vicissitudes – including that of General C.R. de Wet. As his commando was passing through a town, Kestell would often preach Sunday sermons to the civilian populace.⁵³

Kestell opined that his most important role during the war was tending to the spiritual welfare of the Boers.⁵⁴ The main focus of his spiritual message was to promote what he envisaged as the Boers' 'sacred cause of [their] independence'.⁵⁵ Writing to his wife on 2 February 1900, in the aftermath of the Battle of Spioenkop, Kestell affirms his belief that God was on the Boer's side and had ensured their victory: '*En toch zeide God: Ik wil niet dat het Afrikaansche volk vertreden zou worden. En de vyanden hebben niets verwacht*' [And God said: I do not want the Afrikaner people to be trampled upon. And the enemies expected nothing].⁵⁶ According to Stauss, a trope in Kestell's sermons during the war was the firm belief that God would never abandon his people in their moment of need. He would deliver unto them victory over their enemies.⁵⁷ During battles, Kestell would offer words of encouragement to the 'terrified'⁵⁸ soldiers, trying to 'encourage' those who had become demoralised, bolstering their belief in the righteousness of the war.⁵⁹

The sincerity of his belief in the Boer cause is further reflected by the fact that Kestell remained with the Boers in the veld to the 'bitter end'.⁶⁰ From Kestell's reminiscences it appears as though he, like other DRC ministers, thought the British unjust and believed in the justness of the Boer Republics' cause.⁶¹ He saw the war as a 'holy' struggle against the 'extermination' of his people.⁶² In an open letter published in *De Express* on 24 October 1899, he writes that the Boers were ready to incur the cost of the war because 'we believe that we are a people destined to exist in South Africa by the grace of God [...] we as a people have a mission to fulfil in this country'.⁶³

One cannot fight a 'holy war' if the troops behave in an ungodly fashion, he believed. Kestell was deeply preoccupied with the morality of the fighting men in his

52. Bezuidenhout, 'n Kerkhistoriese Ondersoek', 42.

53. P. Strauss, 'J.D. Kestell as Veldprediker 1899-1902', *New Contree*, 79 (2017), 157.

54. Kestell quoted in Strauss, 'J.D. Kestell', 156.

55. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 13.

56. ACA, Kestell, P 153, 2/1/1, Letter addressed to 'Liewe Vrouwtje', 2 February 1900.

57. Strauss, 'J.D. Kestell', 157.

58. Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 76.

59. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 95.

60. Strauss, 'J.D. Kestell', 157.

61. Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 76.

62. Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 79-80.

63. Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 79-80.

commando. He relates that at the beginning of the war there was a tendency among the Boers to use coarse language and swear, display a general '*losbandigheid*' (immorality), and engage in some '*relletjies*' (quarrels), but shortly after the onset of the war, a 'new spirit' awaked in the burghers, leading to a 'desire for more religiosity'.⁶⁴ Of their own accord the Boers began to organise and participate in small '*bidstondes*' (prayer meetings).⁶⁵ Kestell elaborated on his spiritual work:

Although my heart and soul backed the cause of the Republics, I never lost sight of the fact that I was a servant of God. My most important job amongst the burgers was to strengthen their spiritual life. On Sundays I preached in multiple commandos and during the week, whenever possible, I led prayer meetings.⁶⁶

Kestell's steadfast provision of spiritual guidance to Boer commandos brought him into close contact with the Free State's republican leaders. Kestell became the confidant and advisor to both President M.T. Steyn and the chief-commandant of the Free State forces, General Christiaan de Wet.⁶⁷

Kestell's importance to the Free State leadership is reflected in Steyn's offer of a promotion to combat general of the Boer forces on 19 June 1900. Kestell declined, stating that his evangelical training and role as spiritual worker made him 'unfit' for military service.⁶⁸ In a letter to Steyn explaining his refusal, Kestell stated that his focus would remain on providing vigorous encouragement to the burghers to keep up the 'holy war'.⁶⁹ At no stage was Kestell armed during the course of the war; nor did he assist in any matters regarding military planning or manoeuvring.⁷⁰ It is clear that it was not Kestell's military contribution that made him, in Steyn's eyes, 'worth more than an entire commando'.⁷¹ Instead, as argued by Strauss, it was Kestell's continued support of the Boer cause on the spiritual front that made him such a valued asset.⁷²

Following Kestell's refusal of a generalship, President Steyn made the following statement: '*[V]an vandag af beskik ek in De Wet 'n generaal duisend op die krygsakker en in u, Dominee, 'n generaal duisend op die geestelike akker*' [From today, I have in De Wet a general extraordinaire on the war front and in you, Reverend, a general extraordinaire on the spiritual front].⁷³ It is as the spiritual leg of this Free State triumvirate that Kestell's wartime service would be best remembered in the

64. Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 85.

65. Prayer meetings dedicated to a specific subject. Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 85.

66. Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 76. [Translated by the authors]

67. Nienaber, *Dr. J.D. Kestell*, 53 & 56-58.

68. Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 88.

69. Kestell cited in Strauss, 'JD Kestell', 156.

70. Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 76.

71. Nienaber, *Dr. J.D. Kestell*, 56.

72. Strauss, 'J.D. Kestell', 156.

73. Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 89.

Afrikaans press following his death in February 1941.⁷⁴ However, in the English press, one particular, non-partisan action rings loudest.

In addition to his constant spiritual efforts, Kestell also tended to the physical needs of his flock. Throughout the war, and at various battles, Kestell performed voluntary first aid work during and after skirmishes. This is particularly evident in his efforts during the Battle of Wagon Hill in January 1900.⁷⁵ Kestell provided first aid to the wounded, bandaging wounds as well as he could and offering water. He relates that it was a horrible experience to run out of water due to the sheer number of wounded burghers the first aid workers had to care for, especially since wounded soldiers ‘begged’ for ‘a few drops of water’.⁷⁶ Kestell also helped to collect the bodies from the battlefields, bury the dead and perform funerary rites.⁷⁷ He read the Bible to the wounded; prayed with the dying; and offered words of comfort where he could in the aftermath of battle.⁷⁸

His ministrations to those in need were not restricted to the Boers. He offered whatever medical aid he could during the war, to both Boer and Bri, and from his writing it becomes apparent that he struggled to listen to the sounds of ‘pain’ coming from the wounded on the battlefield or to watch the ‘uncovered dead [lying] in the bright rays’ of the sun.⁷⁹ Many of Kestell’s obituaries and later his tributes in the English-language press laud his non-partisan devotion to the wounded.⁸⁰

Despite Kestell’s firm belief in the morality – if not the outright inviolability – of the Boer cause, he asserts that his animosity was directed at British imperial powers, not the English soldiers on the ground. In the aftermath of the Boer victory at Groenkop over Christmas 1901,⁸¹ Kestell writes:

Poor Tommy! - Yes, let me speak tenderly of him, however I might otherwise express myself when speaking in the abstract of the English people, or in the concrete of Chamberlain, Milner, and many officers of the British army [...] For many a Tommy the morning light did not dawn, and for not one of them came the enjoyment of his Christmas fare.⁸²

74. See: A. van der Merwe, ‘Vader (Dr.) John Daniel Kestell’, *Die Kerkbode*, 17 October 1973, 494; P.B. van der Watt, ‘Vader van sy Volk’, *Voorligter*, October 1985.

75. Referred to as the Battle of Platrand in Afrikaans.

76. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 50; *Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 84.

77. Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 84.

78. Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 76.

79. Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 83.

80. M. Smith, ‘A True Christian in the Field’, *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 March 1941, 8; No Author, ‘True Service to South Africa’, *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 March 1941, 6; No Author, ‘British Tribute to Boer Hero of S.A. War’, *South African Digest*, 19 February 1965.

81. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 575.

82. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 234.

Kestell's 'acts of humanity and devotion to a high sense of duty'⁸³ towards the British troops at Wagon Hill were widely recognised by the so-called 'Tommies' (British soldiers) and may, on one occasion, have saved his life. In early June 1901, Kestell and his teenage son Charlie⁸⁴ joined a laager of Boer civilians (primarily women and children) fleeing the destruction of their property by British forces in the Frankfort area. The laager was overcome by a British column and many were captured.⁸⁵ Kestell was also captured and kept as a prisoner of war for a few hours, during which he was reportedly 'struck in cold blood' on the back of his head 'with the metal head of [a British soldier's] horse-whip'.⁸⁶ The 'contempt' shown towards Kestell apparently vanished when an officer asked him if it had been he who had treated the British wounded at Wagon Hill. Kestell recounts that when he 'replied in the affirmative they were very friendly to [him]'.⁸⁷

Kestell's 'capture' only lasted a few hours before a small group of Boers, consisting of the personal guards of Steyn and De Wet, approached the regiment to free the burghers. According to Van Schoor's 'autobiographical description' of Kestell's life, Kestell immediately jumped into action during the skirmish and assisted the British doctor in treating the wounded, primarily enemy soldiers.⁸⁸

At the end of the war, Kestell acted as the secretary of state for the Orange Free State and, together with D.E. van Velden, kept the minutes of the meetings at the negotiations which led to peace on 31 May 1902.⁸⁹

The 'burdensome, wearying, saddening' work of A.D. Lückhoff

In 1901, shortly after returning from a six-month European tour, 27 year-old August Daniel Lückhoff (who was still only a candidate-minister) received a telegram from Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams,⁹⁰ the deputy administrator of the Orange River Colony

83. H.H.S Pearse, *Four Months Besieged: The Story of Ladysmith* (London: MacMillan, 1900), 207.

84. Charlie tragically died in the Tin Town Prisoner of War camp in Ladysmith shortly afterwards. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 211. Although the death of his son must have affected Kestell deeply, he only makes one direct mention of his personal thoughts on this tragedy in the memoir. Writing on 8 February 1902: 'A sword passed through my heart. – But this is not the place in which I must record personal experiences of this kind'. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 245.

85. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 177-179. The exact date when these events occurred are not clear in Kestell's memoir.

86. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 180.

87. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 180.

88. Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 107. Kestell's war memoir, however, only describes the skirmish between the opposing forces and makes no mention of his first aid efforts in this instance.

89. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 569; Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 344.

90. Misspelt in the diary as 'Gould'.

(ORC), asking him to serve as a minister in a concentration camp.⁹¹ The message was sent to Lückhoff via Reverend William Robertson, the co-ordinator of spiritual services to concentration camps in the ORC.⁹² Robertson's recruitment efforts appear to have been quite successful; according to a letter Robertson wrote to the *De Kerkbode*, most camps had ministers by mid-August 1901.⁹³

Lückhoff arrived at Bethulie Concentration Camp on 21 August 1901. There, in his words, he was confronted with 'dust; misery'.⁹⁴ At the time of his arrival, the camp was 'particularly demoralised'.⁹⁵ The camp had been established some four months prior in mid-April 1901 to accommodate the flood of roughly 1 500 refugees created by the clearing of Dewetsdorp and Reddersburg.⁹⁶ Bethulie camp was plagued by poor conditions from the start. Its location was low-lying, marshy and prone to flooding; deserving of its descriptive sobriquet *Moeraskamp* (swamp camp). Sanitation was woefully inadequate and its water source became polluted. Tents were few and most were in a poor condition.⁹⁷ In addition, the camp's population expanded rapidly. By October 1901, the population had increased to 4 813.⁹⁸

As in many concentration camps, poor conditions facilitated the rapid spread of disease. Between June and December 1901, the camp was beset by the outbreak of multiple diseases. When Lückhoff arrived at Bethulie in August, the camp was in the midst of a measles epidemic. This was compounded by the cold, late winter weather which led to many cases of pneumonia. By the end of August, according to Lückhoff, as many as 683 residents were sick.⁹⁹ September's heavy rain combined with warm weather, led to an outbreak of typhoid.¹⁰⁰ This peaked on 15 September

91. Lückhoff, *Woman's Endurance*, 1.

92. Lückhoff, *Woman's Endurance*, 1; W. Robertson, *Concentration Camps* (Bloemfontein: Argus, 1903), 3; Britz, 'Now, what has become of our prayers', 31.

93. W. Robertson, 'De Refugee Kampen', *De Kerkbode*, 22 August 1901, 475. In the letter, Robertson states that only three camps in the ORC – Vereeniging, Klerksdorp and Nijlstrom – were still without a minister. According to Potgieter, 'Die Militêre Kapelaan', 158, there was a total of 71 ministers from the Reformed Churches serving in concentration camps during the war.

94. Lückhoff, *Woman's Endurance*, 3.

95. E. van Heyningen, 'Costly Mythologies: The Concentration Camps of the South African War in Afrikaner Historiography', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34, 3 (2008), 508.

96. For a detailed history of the establishment of the Bethulie camp, see J.J.R. van Zyl 'Bethulie 1896-1907, met Spesifieke Verwysing na die Anglo-Boereoorlog' (PhD thesis, University of the Free State, 2019), 261-263.

97. Van Zyl, 'Bethulie 1896-1907'; and A.W.G Raath and R.M Louw, *Die Konsentrasiekamp te Bethulie gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902* (Bloemfontein: Oorlogsmuseum van die Boererepublieke, 1991), 16-17.

98. Van Zyl, 'Bethulie 1896-1907', 264.

99. Lückhoff, *Woman's Endurance*, 16. The exact population of the camp at this point is unclear, but Van Zyl, 'Bethulie 1896-1907', 290, puts the number of inhabitants at 2 733 in August 1901. This means that about a quarter of the population was sick.

100. Van Zyl, 'Bethulie 1896-1907', 274-276.

when there was a ‘very stormy night; soaking rains; morning whirlwind, frightful’ which caused the camp to flood.¹⁰¹ In his entry of 18 September, Lückhoff notes that there was ‘[t]oo much sickness about; fear the deterioration’.¹⁰² Lückhoff himself had to be hospitalised with ‘enteric fever’ (i.e. typhoid) on 1 November 1901, leading to the end of his tenure as camp chaplain.¹⁰³

On 19 September, Lückhoff writes: ‘I have been here just a month, and have, during that time, done nothing but visit [the] sick and dying’.¹⁰⁴ Similar conditions formed the bulk of Lückhoff’s pastoral work as chaplain. Almost every entry in the diary includes a list of the tents visited that day and often, a brief description of the dreadful conditions found there. On his tent visits, Lückhoff would pray with the inhabitants – often praying over an individual if illness had rendered the person unconscious – and he would read a passage from the Bible. Visits to the camp hospital followed the same format.

These tent and hospital visits were, in some ways, a continuation of the tradition of the *huisbesoek* [pastoral visitation]. Under normal circumstances, these pastoral visits functioned as a moment of direct contact between the minister and his congregants, allowing him to address the personal and spiritual needs of a congregant and their family. In his discussion of religious ministry in a concentration camp at Bloemfontein, Britz alludes to the fact that these tent visits were seen by some *dominees* as the ‘most important’ work they carried out in the camps.¹⁰⁵ However, the differences between the peacetime *huisbesoek* and the visitation of the sick and dying were stark for camp ministers. Rev. Ebbe Dommissie of the Springfontein camp, for example, wrote in August 1901:

*Gedurende die maand was daar natuurlik geen tyd voor huis- (tent)-bezoek, want van den morgen tot den avond weren wij bezig met zieken bezoek en met te bidden bij de stervenden. Voorwaar! een treurig werk, en iets dat seer vermoeiend is voor den geest [During the month, of course, there was no time for home (tent) visits, because from morning to evening we were busy visiting the sick and praying with the dying. Indeed! a sad work, and something very wearying to the mind].*¹⁰⁶

The difficulties of the seemingly never-ending cycle of tent visits were not, however, the only daily duties that made a deep impression on the young minister. The period from August to October 1901 – when Lückhoff served as Bethulie Camp’s chaplain –

101. Lückhoff, *Woman’s Endurance*, 31. The entry for the next day opens simply: ‘Monday, September 16. – Flood’.

102. Lückhoff, *Woman’s Endurance*, 37.

103. Lückhoff *Woman’s Endurance*, 65.

104. Lückhoff *Woman’s Endurance*, 37.

105. Britz, ‘n (N.G.) Gemeente’, 14.

106. E. Dommissie, ‘Het Kamp te Springfontein’, *De Kerkbode*, 22 August 1901, 476.

recorded the camp's highest death rates.¹⁰⁷ Funerals were held almost daily. This, at least, was a shared burden. Herman Becker (the minister from Bethulie town) and Lückhoff would take turns to conduct the funeral services. Lückhoff described these confrontations with death as 'most painful and wearying' and the delivery of the funeral address as a 'burden'.¹⁰⁸ The frequency of funerals meant that ministers were often unable to prepare adequately for services.¹⁰⁹ On 28 August, for example, Lückhoff laments about this 'most fatiguing duty' stating that 'there is no time for preparation except on the march to the burying ground. I am getting reckless, for I am forced absolutely to rely on impromptu grace'.¹¹⁰

In the face of sickness and death, Lückhoff struggled to perform a minister's quotidian duties. *Dominees* were expected to preach sermons, deliver the sacrament, visit congregants and the sick, teach catechism classes, marry couples, confirm members of the church, baptise the young and oversee the church council and the various church related activities administered by the council and its subcommittees.¹¹¹ Reading through his diary entries, it becomes clear that Lückhoff attempted to maintain a sense of normalcy in the face of such great upheaval. However, he judged his attempts as woefully unsuccessful. On 19 September, for example, he writes:

Concerned about Catechism class; there must be hundreds who ought to be confirmed. Concerned also about Sunday school. How are we to collect these thousands! If the sickness in camp would only decrease, what great things we could attempt.¹¹²

According to Britz, Lückhoff 'continuously hampered by the sense that his ministry was falling short',¹¹³ not only in the spiritual sense but also in terms of ministering to the direct, practical needs of his flock. Lückhoff made ongoing efforts to secure better rations for the camp inhabitants.¹¹⁴ In the light of these endeavours, he has been described as a 'practical person, who care[d] for his flock by challenging unjust actions that humiliate and dehumanise people'.¹¹⁵

107. Lückhoff, *Woman's Endurance*, 67; F. Pretorius, 'Introduction' in *Woman's Endurance*, vi; Van Zyl, 'Bethulie, 1896-1907', 293. At Lückhoff's arrival in August 1901, the camp at Bethulie, had the third highest death rate in the ORC (Van Zyl, 'Bethulie 1896-1907', 274).

108. Lückhoff, *Woman's Endurance*, 28.

109. Lückhoff, *Woman's Endurance*, 9.

110. Lückhoff, *Woman's Endurance*, 11.

111. Wohlberg and Wessels, 'Religion and Recreation', 64.

112. Lückhoff, *Woman's Endurance*, 37.

113. Britz, 'Now, what has become of our prayers', 37.

114. Lückhoff, *Woman's Endurance*, 26 & 31.

115. De Villiers, 'Reformed Spirituality in Action', 7.

The lack of adequate food rations was a major concern for him in the face of such widespread illness. He became desperate about the conditions:

Can a man (let alone a woman – breathe not of a child) remain healthy and strong on bread, meat (miserable half-pound), coffee, and condensed milk? And so, when a sickness comes there is nothing to fall back upon – no resistance. And with a wasted constitution who can battle against fever, pneumonia, and other things?¹¹⁶

Furthermore, Lückhoff endeavoured to procure other necessities for his congregants, such as candles;¹¹⁷ beds;¹¹⁸ and even wooden boards to make coffins.¹¹⁹ These efforts were, however, often stymied by British camp authorities.

Ministers in concentration camps had to restrict their activities to caring for the spiritual needs of their flock.¹²⁰ This was because British authorities suspected the Boer clergy of ‘preaching sedition’. This suspicion, according to Elizabeth van Heyningen, led to a restriction of ministers’ activities and how they were able to care for the needs of their ‘congregants’.¹²¹ Failure to toe the prescribed line could lead to dismissal – as Lückhoff knew all too well. A colleague of his, the Rev. J Steytler, had already been ‘sent away’ from a camp near Potchefstroom for ‘political reasons’.¹²² Similarly, Becker was banned from Bethulie Camp after a letter from a Boer woman to her family was discovered in his possession.¹²³ Lückhoff’s desire to tend to the spiritual needs of the camp inhabitants while at the same time easing their earthly hardships could not be reconciled in the face of British authority. Lückhoff described this as his ‘daily dilemma’. On 12 September, he outlines the choices before him: ‘Speak out and protest, and be removed or imprisoned – hold silence and act the coward, and remain in the work. And I chose the latter.’¹²⁴ This was not a decision that sat comfortably with the young *dominee*. A month later, after a meeting with the ‘inflexible’ superintendent of the camp, Lückhoff writes: ‘one has to stoop greatly during these days. It hurts, it humiliates, it chafes; and one needs extra grace’.¹²⁵

During October 1901, Lückhoff’s diary entries became infrequent and ended abruptly on 24 October. A week later, the young chaplain was admitted to the camp

116. Lückhoff, *Woman’s Endurance*, 54. See also, Van Zyl, ‘Bethulie 1896-1907’, 269.

117. Lückhoff, *Woman’s Endurance*, 9; 25; 28; 31; 53.

118. Lückhoff, *Woman’s Endurance*, 19; 33.

119. Lückhoff, *Woman’s Endurance*, 10; 12; 28; 46; 56.

120. Britz, ‘Now, what has become of our prayers’, 31; Wohlberg and Wessels, ‘Religion and Recreation’, 64.

121. Van Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps*, 271.

122. Lückhoff, *Woman’s Endurance*, 27.

123. De Villiers, ‘Reformed Spirituality in Action’, 7.

124. Lückhoff, *Woman’s Endurance*, 27.

125. Lückhoff, *Woman’s Endurance*, 58.

hospital with typhoid fever. It was, however, not only his physical health that had been affected by the constant, monotonous work of visiting the sick and burying the dead. From the beginning of the diary, on 23 August, the minister described his work as the ‘very hardest in whole world’.¹²⁶ By the end of September, the ‘monotony of sorrows and troubles’ had begun to take their toll. He writes: ‘... it is so terribly hard always to be ready and willing to listen and sympathise. One actually grows ‘dof’ (dull) from sheer weakness’.¹²⁷ His final entry reads:

Such a life here as ‘leeraart’ (chaplain) full of dull, oppressive, burdensome, wearying, saddening hours. O the monotony, the horrible monotony of my work. How welcome the hour of sunset! How blissful to lay me down to sleep! Thank God for his unspeakable gift of sleep – that period of forgetfulness, of rest, of void.¹²⁸

Lückhoff spent a month in the camp hospital. During this time, in his own words, he was ‘mentally affected’ and suffered a ‘case of mental delusion’;¹²⁹ believing that the Boers would win the war if he could only escape the camp.¹³⁰ By the new year, he was home in Durbanville where he would spend the next several months recuperating.

A.F. Louw’s service of ‘unrelenting love and zeal’ on St. Helena

Abraham Faure Louw, working as a young assistant minister in the Graaff-Reinet congregation,¹³¹ wrote to the chairman of the Cape DRC commission responsible for organising religious support to POWs, offering his services. Shortly afterwards, he received his summons and set sail on the *Galeka* for St. Helena on 18 August 1900.¹³² The church council initially gave Louw a four-month leave of absence, so a ‘disappointed’ Louw returned from his position in St. Helena to Cape Town in February 1901.¹³³ However, he was unable to rejoin his congregation in Graaff-Reinet since he had visited the Stormberg Boer Commando in the preceding year and risked ‘getting in trouble’ if he remained in South Africa.¹³⁴ Due to the threat of internment, two months after arriving back in Cape Town, he returned to his post in St. Helena.¹³⁵

126. Lückhoff, *Woman’s Endurance*, 4.

127. Lückhoff, *Woman’s Endurance*, 49. Insertions in original text.

128. Lückhoff, *Woman’s Endurance*, 65. Insertions in original text.

129. The last entry is Thursday, 24 October. Lückhoff, *Woman’s Endurance*, 66.

130. Lückhoff, *Woman’s Endurance*, 67.

131. He was legitimised as a DRC minister in 1894 and called to Graaff-Reinet as a candidate minister, and was finally ordained in 1895.

132. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 56.

133. A.F. Louw and J.K. Louw, *Ds. A.F. Louw op St. Helena: Briewe en Belewensisse* (Cape Town: N.G. Kerk-Uitgewers, 1963), 12. His return was delayed because he had to wait for his successor and a return ship.

134. Louw and Louw, *Ds. A.F. Louw*, 13.

135. Louw and Louw, *Ds. A.F. Louw*, 13-14.

Although Louw described his work as a POW camp chaplain as ‘enriching’,¹³⁶ living conditions in the St. Helena camps were poor. However, in comparison to the deprivations and suffering typifying the South African War concentration camps those of the POWs were far less distressing. For example, Louw explains that to ensure good hygienic practices, all tents, ‘huts, coffeehouses, clubhouses, schools, and the church buildings’ were regularly moved to new blocks in the Deadwood and Broadbottom camps.¹³⁷ There was a daily ambulance service for POWs in need of medical assistance travelling between the camps and the hospital at Jamestown. The Robertson congregation even paid the salaries of two nurses, at least for a period of three months, to work in the Cape Town holding camps before the POWs were shipped to St. Helena.¹³⁸ Despite these preventative measures, the camps were infested with fleas. According to Louw, these parasitic insects ‘harassed’ the inhabitants to a ‘nausea[ting]’ degree.¹³⁹ Sickness was also prevalent.¹⁴⁰

On St. Helena, camp hardships were ameliorated through the availability of provisions and the POWs’ ability to earn an income, however modest. POWs could apply for passes to leave the camps and work in the surrounding areas, described as a ‘blessed outcome’ by Louw.¹⁴¹ In addition to family members, various Cape DRC congregations¹⁴² and citizens of the Cape Colony sent money to St. Helena’s POWs. Louw was entrusted with transporting this money (around £80 or more) from Jamestown to Deadwood Camp with the accompanying list of recipients and amounts allocated to POWs. In the presence of Louw, the camp commander distributed the funds and essentially Louw became a banker of sorts.¹⁴³ POWs could thus at least afford to purchase provisions, and provisions were indeed available.

Louw was instrumental in procuring and ordering goods for the POWs. His cook turned personal secretary, Manie Potgieter,¹⁴⁴ compiled lists of supplies to order and, via Louw, these products were requested from England and the Netherlands. The most sought-after items reveal much about camp life and what Boer POWs considered as essentials. Louw writes that ‘Bibles, Hymn books and *Halleluya*’s and pocketknives’ topped the list of requested items.¹⁴⁵

136. Louw and Louw, *Ds A.F. Louw*, 14.

137. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 70.

138. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 65-67.

139. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 70.

140. Dysentery, beriberi and enteric fever were common diseases and there were some moderate outbreaks of chickenpox, measles and mumps.

141. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 90.

142. For example, the Ceres congregation held a church *basaar* [fête] to raise money for POWs. A total of sum of £850 was raised by the Ceres congregation: £400 was yielded by the bazaar; another £200 was generated through special door collections and £250 was personally collected in the community by Reverend W.A. Alheit. See Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 66.

143. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 66.

144. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 58.

145. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 67. Apparently, the singing of hymns and psalms was

The procurement of these provisions was not only necessary for physical survival, but also for psychological reasons. Boredom was a constant problem in the POW camps.¹⁴⁶ The men played cards, compiled camp newspapers, played sport, put on concerts, and took to artistic pursuits to while away the idle hours.¹⁴⁷ Clearly, religious books and the tools to create curios were uppermost in the Boer's thoughts: it was a way to break the monotony of camp life, practise their faith and earn an income.

The scope of Louw's religious work was extensive. Reportedly, he performed these duties with 'unrelenting love and zeal'.¹⁴⁸ Daily morning devotions and prayers were led between seven o'clock and seven thirty.¹⁴⁹ In the evenings, Louw held special services.¹⁵⁰ Generally speaking, two sermons were delivered every Sunday, and services were organised for children. Regular prayer meetings were also scheduled.¹⁵¹ Frequently, Louw travelled on an 'uncomfortable old nag'¹⁵² between Deadwood Camp, Broadbottom Camp and Jamestown (they were approximately 10 km apart), all in a single day, to hold his religious services for the camp inmates.

The desire to establish familiarity in abnormal circumstances was one of the driving forces behind the fervent outpouring of religious expression in the POW camps. A former St. Helena POW, Christiaan Rudolph Kotzé, explained that the church played the main role in general camp life on St. Helena and identified Louw as

a constant in the camps. Louw reports that the Boer's morning devotions caused consternation in the camp; concomitant to the reading of the Bible and prayers was the singing of psalms, waking camp inhabitants and keeping them awake. This eventually led to complaints to the camp commander from Boers who preferred to lie in. See Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 68.

146. B.S. Hewage, 'The Proteas Plucked for a Lotus Land: Ceylon's Boer Internment Experience, 1900–1902', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 50, 5 (2022), 927; S.A. Royle, 'St Helena as a Boer Prisoner of War Camp, 1900-2: Information from the Alice Stopford Green Papers', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 24, 1 (1998), 62; F. Pretorius, 'Boer Prisoner of War Art', *History Today*, accessed 14 July 2023, <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/boer-prisoner-war-art#:~:text=Fransjohan%20Pretorius%20explains%20why%20the,cultural%20history%20of%20the%20Afrikaner>.
147. See: Pretorius, 'Boer Prisoner of War Art'; F. van der Merwe, 'Sportontwikkeling onder Boerekrygsgevangenes tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog (1899-1902)', *South African Journal of Cultural History*, 12, 1 (1998); V.R. Heunis, 'Anglo-Boereoorlog Boerekrygsgevangenekuns, 1899-1902' (PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, 2019); S.P.R Oosthuizen, 'Die Beheer, Behandeling en Lewe van die Krygsgevangenes gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902' (DPhil dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 1975).
148. J.H.L. Schumann, *Ter Gedachtenis*, 23.
149. Louw and Louw, *Ds. A.F. Louw*, 78.
150. C.R. Kotzé, *My Ballingskap: St. Helena* (Bloemfontein: Nasionale Pers, 1942), 69.
151. Potgieter, 'Die Militêre Kapelaan', 155.
152. J.B. de Villiers, 'Toe Ds. A.F. Louw op St. Helena was', *Die Kerkbode*, 7 December 1960, 26.

central to all church-related activities.¹⁵³ This sentiment was echoed by numerous St. Helena POWs.¹⁵⁴ Louw expended most of his time administering to the spiritual needs of his congregants and acted as an overseer of other endeavours he helped to implement. Thus, his work largely (though not entirely) adhered to the typical duties of DRC *dominees* in early twentieth century South Africa.

Besides the busy daily schedule, travelling between the two camps and Jamestown to visit the sick, Louw organised many other religious activities. In 1900, coinciding with the *Dingaansdag* (Dingane's Day) celebrations in December, he held daily church services for an entire week.¹⁵⁵ In mid-1901, Louw planned and led 'ten days of prayer' and reported that it was a time of '*allerlieflikste verkwikking*' [the loveliest vivification].¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, Louw taught six catechism classes in the POW school. Initially, the circumstances were adverse because there was no proper building in which to teach. However, the church council decided to erect a suitable schoolroom and Louw volunteered to assist with its construction, which was duly completed in October 1900.¹⁵⁷

Roodt attributes the founding of schools in POW camps to the DRC ministers, stating that church workers realised that many of the Boers were illiterate, or that their reading skills were too weak to complete their catechism which meant they could not become members of the church. Schooling was required to improve the reading skills of potential church members, enabling them to complete their catechisms.¹⁵⁸

Reading Louw's letters and reminiscences, it becomes apparent that providing emotional support (a kind of *huisbesoek*) to POWs became one of his most important tasks, especially considering the frequent reports of the death of loved ones in South Africa arriving with each shipment of the post. Post days, eventually, were awaited with equal feelings of anticipation and trepidation.¹⁵⁹

153. Kotzé, *My Ballingskap*, 67.

154. In 1932, an unnamed POW wrote an article for *Die Huisgenoot*, stating that there was a real development and 'sense' of 'spirituality' that took hold of the camp and that the religious life on St. Helena made their exile bearable. P.O.W., 'Krygsgevangenes op St. Helena', *Die Huisgenoot*, 27 Mei 1931, 43 and 45. Dutch Reformed Church Archives, Stellenbosch (hereafter DRCA), Ds. A.F. Louw, Private collection (hereafter Louw), PPV 1646/3/10; De Villiers, 'Toe Ds. A.F. Louw op St. Helena was', 785.

155. Louw and Louw, *Ds. A.F. Louw*, 46.

156. Louw and Louw, *Ds. A.F. Louw*, 70.

157. Louw and Louw, *Ds. A.F. Louw*, 32-34.

158. Roodt, 'Die Godsdiens in die Krygsgevangenekampe', 7. According to J.H.L. Schumann, any knowledgeable person could work as a teacher in the camp, 'teaching' their subject for free to any interested POWs. Schumann, *Ter Gedachtenis*, 19. Translations of this text provided by the authors. Louw relates that in about April 1901, 280 young men received schooling in Broadbottom Camp and approximately 400 in Deadwood Camp. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 76.

159. Louw and Louw, *Ds. A.F. Louw*, 83.

The leadership provided by DRC ministers and their contributions to daily camp life was immeasurable.¹⁶⁰ Each camp, depending on which aspect of daily life was highlighted by the DRC minister assigned to that camp, developed its own unique character.¹⁶¹ Two of A.F. Louw's lifelong passions were mission work and youth education.¹⁶² These two passions converged in his involvement with the *Christelike Stewersvereniging* (CSV). The CSV 'functioned as an ecumenical transnational'¹⁶³ Christian organisation, the membership mostly comprised of young men,¹⁶⁴ at least on St. Helena. Louw served as an organising member and general manager of the CSV council. De Villiers states that the success of the religious and social work conducted by the CSV reached unprecedented heights on St. Helena. The CSV endeavoured to account for all aspects of life and leisure in the St. Helena camps and founded subcommittees for practically everything – even flower-arranging.¹⁶⁵ These subcommittees not only related to the evangelical drive seen in the camp but also spoke to the ongoing efforts to reduce boredom.

Furthermore, the CSV, with Louw's involvement, launched many successful projects to generate income for the Women and Orphans' Fund, offering financial relief to the many needy prisoners in the concentration camps. Apart from organising concerts, making and selling a variety of Boer curios, running successful pancake shops, they erected two rickety tea and coffee shops, selling drinks and cookies at 1d. Apparently these sales generated about £200.¹⁶⁶ Louw was again instrumental in the selling of curios by marketing such items in South Africa through the letters published in *De Kerkbode*. For example, he would market the 'brooches, pens, paperknives' and other items produced on St. Helena. These could be ordered through him by post and then resold at church bazaars.¹⁶⁷

160. Roodt, 'Die Godsdienst in die Krygsgevangenekampe', 7 and 47.

161. Roodt, 'Die Godsdienst in die Krygsgevangenekampe', 7.

162. No Author, 'Ds. A.F. Louw vandag 50 jaar predikant: Toegewyde lewe in diens van kerk en volk', *Die Burger*, 12 May 1945; De Villiers, 'Toe Ds. A.F. Louw op St. Helena was', 785; No Author, 'Ds. A.F. Louw', *Die Burger*, 17 August 1960, 10; J.G. Olivier, 'By die Heengaan van Wyle ds. A.F. Louw', *Die Kerkbode*, 14 September 1960, 396.

163. Müller, 'War, Exilic Pilgrimage and Mission', 73.

164. Photographs in A.F. Louw's private collection in the DRC Archives and a photo album gifted to him by the members of the CSV from St. Helena showing the activities of the CSV on the island, indicate that all the members are young.

165. Committees included a prayer committee, social committee, song committee, Sunday school committee, church door committee, flower committee, literature committee and a prisoners committee. Roodt, 'Die Godsdienst in die Krygsgevangenekampe', 47.

166. Roughly R400 000 in 2023 by a conservative estimate. De Villiers, 'Toe Ds. A.F. Louw op St. Helena was', 785. A notebook kept by J.B. de Villiers, the author of this *Kerkbode* article published shortly after Louw's death, is filed with A.F. Louw's private collection. Why Louw and not De Villiers kept this notebook is unclear (it might simply be a copy of the original) but indicates a close personal relationship between the two. DRCA, Louw, PPV 1646/2, J.B. de Villiers, Deadwood Kamp, St. Helena, 22 October 1901.

167. Louw and Louw, *Ds. A.F. Louw*, 77.

The importance of the letters Louw penned for *De Kerkbode* during the war was not limited to marketing St. Helena POWs' fundraising schemes or promoting subscriptions for St. Helena camp newspapers.¹⁶⁸ These letters (published and widely read throughout South Africa) raised awareness of the circumstances in the camps and provided updates about loved ones who were inmates. Louw wrote descriptions of the religious aspects of camp life and accounts of general camp life, often mentioning POWs by name, and thus helped to keep the families of the POWs informed of the circumstances on St. Helena. He therefore acted as a kind of witness to events,¹⁶⁹ and became an unofficial scribe or reporter of sorts keeping the colony abreast of St. Helena happenings.

Finally, a religious phenomenon particular to the POW camps was what Retief Müller calls, a 'mission fervour'. Louw was passionate about missionary work. He helped the CSV organise a Mission Conference on St. Helena which inspired many young men to dedicate their lives to missionary work.¹⁷⁰ One of the camp newspapers, *De Krijgsgevangene*, reported after the conclusion of the ten day-long mission conference: 'the crowds who attended the services are an eloquent testimony to the good work [...] done amongst us by the reverend gentlemen'.¹⁷¹

Louw, and other DRC ministers working in POW camps,¹⁷² were so successful in fostering this missionary zeal that the church decided to establish the *Het Zending Boeren Instituut* in Worcester. A total of 175 young men from the camps offered their services as missionaries and the institute was founded to train them.¹⁷³ The church asked Louw to become the head of the newly formed institute and he worked there from 1903 to 1906.¹⁷⁴ The work Louw performed for the institute can be regarded as a continuation of his work on St. Helena.¹⁷⁵

168. Louw also used his letters to market camp newspapers (*Kamp Kruimels* and *De Krijgsgevangene*), hoping to boost subscriptions from interested parties situated in the Cape Colony. See Louw and Louw, *Ds. A.F. Louw*, 77.

169. It is possible (though speculative) that these letters act as a kind of deterrent to unnecessary violence from camp guards because they knew he posted the letters to be published in a church magazine.

170. Müller, 'War, Exilic Pilgrimage and Mission', 72.

171. DRCA, Louw, PPV 1646/7/3, 'Broadbottom Echos', *De Krijgsgevangene*, 31 August 1901, 3.

172. 'Ds. A.F. Louw (93) Oorlede', *Die Burger*, 17 August 1960, 3.

173. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 126; Müller, 'War, Exilic Pilgrimage and Mission', 72.

174. It was also called the *Boere-Sendinginstituut* [Boer Mission Institute], or the Drostdy School because it was situated in the old Drostdy building in Worcester. In addition to religious studies, the candidate missionaries received schooling in a variety of trades (building, farming, basic architecture, plumbing, etcetera) equipping them for both missionary and trade work. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 123; DRCA, Louw, PPV 1647/5/2, *Het Boeren Opleiding School / Het Boeren Zending Instituut, Die Boere Sending Instituut te Worcester*, 1903.

175. Louw's private collection contains a folder of personal testimonies written by the young men relating how they came to be at Drostdy. DRCA, Louw, PPV 1647/6, *Het*

Louw was almost sent back to South Africa in proverbial chains after charges were laid against him by the British officer commanding troops (OCT). Apparently, in 1902 Louw made ‘*oproerige*’ (seditious) speeches in Jamestown and he also refused to preach to the 300 pro-British prisoners.¹⁷⁶ This group of so-called ‘Loyals’ were kept in a separate camp – known as Peace Camp – for safety-reasons.¹⁷⁷ However, Louw defended himself against these allegations and asserted that his Jamestown speeches were ‘simply evangelical speeches’ and that he did not preach to the Loyals for fear of angering the other POWs. Following this incident, Louw met with the church council, discussed the issue, and the council eventually granted him permission to preach in the Loyals’ camp.

Louw’s obituaries and tributes invariably refer to the fact that he was an ‘*alombeminde*’ [universally loved] minister and laud his work on St. Helena. J.B. de Villiers wrote the following of Louw after his death: ‘What he meant to each POW, no pen can describe’.¹⁷⁸

Toeing the line: Contrasting DRC ministers’ support services in the three areas of the South African War

The circumstances in which the three ministers operated had a clear impact on the support they offered their flock, not only as spiritual leaders, but as providers of other moral and physical support services. While each *dominee*’s experiences were undoubtedly unique, they can be seen as fairly representative. Kestell was described as ‘typical’.¹⁷⁹ Like many other Boer ministers, his decision to join the Harrismith commando as their *veldprediker* was not an abandonment of his congregation but a continuation of his pastoral care.

In the POW and concentration camps alike, religion was a cornerstone. Louw’s experiences on St. Helena – particularly in terms of the outpouring of revived religious expression – is characteristic of DRC ministers’ experiences in the POW camps.¹⁸⁰ Lückhoff’s brief tenure at Bethulie, however, coincided with a particularly dark period of the camp’s administration. As pointed out by Van Heyningen, Bethulie’s appalling conditions were not the norm.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, his experiences

Boeren Zending Instituut te Worcester, in Drostdy Gebou; Persoonlike Getuienisse van Drostdyers en uit die lewes van Krygsgevangenes op St. Helena, 1901-1903.

176. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 108-109. He was accused of other smaller infractions but for the purposes of this article, we are only focusing on the issues relevant to our argument, mentioned in-text above.

177. Royle, ‘St Helena as a Boer Prisoner of War Camp’, 58.

178. De Villiers, ‘Toe Ds. A.F. Louw op St. Helena was’, 785.

179. N. Hofmeyr cited in Bezuidenhout, ‘n Kerkhistoriese Ondersoek’, 40.

180. Oosthuizen, ‘Die Beheer, Behandeling en Lewe’, 352; Müller, ‘War, Exilic Pilgrimage and Mission’, 72.

181. Van Heyningen, ‘Costly Mythologies’, 508.

as camp minister illustrate the important role that ministers played both as spiritual leaders and campaigners for the betterment of the living conditions of their congregants. All three ministers reported a deepening of Boer spiritual life.

The commandos have been described as ‘roaming congregations in the field’.¹⁸² Kestell’s spiritual work included the quotidian duties of a minister. As the spiritual leg of the OFS triumvirate, the significance of his work extended beyond the deliverance of sermons. His ministry in the field was coloured by his belief in the righteous holiness of the Boer cause, and he bolstered the burghers with his politically charged sermons. Like many *dominees* and Boer burghers, Kestell conflated his ideas of Afrikaner nationalism with his religious beliefs, and invoked the image that Afrikaners were God’s chosen people in Africa.¹⁸³

Spiritual work formed the bulk of Louw’s ministry on St. Helena. His days were occupied from morning to evening with the various religious duties he undertook. In many POW camps there was a spiritual reawakening amongst the prisoners. According to Oosthuizen, the deepening of faith was due, in large part, to the sermons delivered by the ministers.¹⁸⁴ These sermons were not – as in the case of Kestell – messages used to inflame the POWs’ republican feelings, but instead written to bring hope, to gather the souls to God, and to evoke thankfulness for the grace and blessing of God while the Boers were in exile.¹⁸⁵

The inhabitants of Bethulie camp, as well as other concentration camps, had great need of spiritual succour.¹⁸⁶ Lückhoff tried to continue normal church services, set up prayer meetings and organise youth groups, but the daily aspects of his ministry were overshadowed by more pressing spiritual needs. Burying the dead demanded much of the young candidate-minister’s time. So too did visiting the sick and dying. Lückhoff’s spiritual work was arguably more arduous owing to the challenging environment in the camp but became more essential due to these circumstances. His greatest difficulty was simply reaching the many who were in need of spiritual support. The inability to administer to the congregants’ needs was not limited to this particular period of suffering Lückhoff experienced at Bethulie, but

182. Potgieter, ‘Die Militêre Kapelaan’, 147.

183. Most *dominees* and other lay preachers chose texts from the Old Testament, invoking the image of Israel as God’s chosen people and reworked the biblical message to suit their narrative. Bezuidenhout, ‘n Kerkhistoriese Ondersoek’, 74-77; F. Pretorius, ‘Reading Practices and Literacy of Boer Combatants in the South African War of 1899-1902’, *War in History*, 24, 3 (2017), 304-305; F. Pretorius, ‘Afrikaner Nationalism and the Burgher on Commando’, in *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899-1900*, eds G. Cuthbertson, A. Grundlingh and M-L Suttie (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), 70.

184. Oosthuizen, ‘Die Beheer, Behandeling en Lewe’, 352.

185. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 116; Louw and Louw, *Ds. A.F. Louw*, 89.

186. Wohlberg and Wessels, ‘Religion and Recreation’, 50.

appears to have been a general concern of DRC ministers at other concentration camps, due to the sheer size of the congregations to the number of ministers.¹⁸⁷

Whereas the war brought a reinvigoration of religious life for Boers, the ministers of the faith were themselves deeply challenged by their work and circumstances. According to Kestell's diary, he never lost his faith or questioned God during the war. He wrote that he sometimes sat in the evenings looking at the sky, contemplating 'God, the Incomprehensible, the Unsearchable', and relates in early December 1899:

I forgot in such moments that we were at war. I was deaf to the discordant sounds of the strife – the bursting of shells, and the whiz of bullets. It was as if I heard God speaking in the still small voice.¹⁸⁸

However, there were also times when he became despondent and lost hope (although not in God). Kestell relates that after the unconditional surrender of General Marthinus Prinsloo on 29 July 1900, he briefly lost the will to persevere:

[I]t grieved me that I, who had always spoken words of encouragement, should have shown signs of despondency; and I felt now that I ought to stand by those who wanted to continue the struggle, and remain with them till the end, come what may.¹⁸⁹

Though challenged and becoming 'despondent' at various times during the war, Kestell's perseverance to the bitter end illustrates his faithfulness to the Boers and his belief in their 'divine cause'. Commando life, though exhausting, demoralising and beset with danger, still offered Kestell the opportunity to unwind, reflect and pray and to wax lyrical in his diary.¹⁹⁰

The general tone permeating Louw's St. Helena letters and his autobiographical writing is one of hopefulness, joy, and humbleness for what he perceived as the grace of God. For example, his narration of the first time he led a service on St. Helena conveys his sense of duty and the importance of the task before him. As he put it: '*Ek was selde so aangedaan as toe ek die skare gesien en gehoor sing het en bedwing my gemoed met groot moeite*' [I have seldom been so affected as when I saw and heard the crowd sing, and with great difficulty I controlled my emotions].¹⁹¹

He approached his work as a calling and an honour. The young minister's recollections – although they tell of hardship and deprivation – do not contain overt

187. At the Merebank camp in Natal, for example, the ministers also struggled to 'successfully complete their daily and weekly tasks'. See Wohlberg and Wessels, 'Religion and Recreation', 50.

188. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 36-37.

189. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 95.

190. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 215.

191. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 59.

complaints. It appears as though hardships deepened his faith and that he faced them with resolve and ‘thankfulness’.¹⁹² Louw’s obituaries specifically mention the ever-present twinkle in his eye and his positive outlook on life.¹⁹³ It would appear that his personality prevented him from writing of his own concerns and possible despondency.

Lückhoff, by contrast, was burnt out within two months. At no stage did he lose his faith, but he struggled to cope with the work and wrestled with his experiences of camp life.¹⁹⁴ Writing on what he labels a ‘Sad and Gloomy day’, 10 October 1901, he says: ‘May God save me from sin of unbelief and doubt during these days!’¹⁹⁵ His experiences left him spiritually and mentally drained.¹⁹⁶ It was only in 1904 that Lückhoff accepted his first official calling as a minister to the Caledon congregation. He had been called to serve the Trompsburg congregation twice previously – but had refused each time.¹⁹⁷ Although he never disclosed the precise reason for his refusal, one can speculate that the delay in accepting a calling to a new congregation was influenced by his traumatic experiences at Bethulie.

Despite experiencing their own moments of doubt, the ministers did not hesitate in their efforts to provide encouragement to those in need. Writing at the end of the war, Kestell reflects on his role as a source of moral support for the Boers in the field:

I deemed it a sacred privilege to be, in my capacity as a minister of God’s word, with my people in the time of their greatest trouble; to bind up the broken-hearted, to encourage the despondent, to comfort the suffering.¹⁹⁸

Most of the moral support Louw offered was to the St. Helena POWs who grieved at the news of lost loved ones. However, to a marked degree, the work of Louw, other DRC ministers and missionaries in the POW camps involved organising activities to alleviate boredom and provide distractions. These religious events and other activities improved the overall wellbeing of the prisoners and lifted their spirits. Comparing the at times light-hearted activities on St. Helena (for example, theatrical

192. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 121. This does not mean that Louw’s faith was never challenged. He does include little snippets detailing his spiritual and physical challenges throughout his letters and autobiography, but most are scarce or related in a positive manner. Louw, *My Eerste Neëntig Jaar*, 73.

193. No Author, ‘Ds. AF Louw Vandag 50 jaar Predikant: Toegewyde Lewe in diens van Kerk en Volk’, *Die Burger*, 12 May 1945; De Villiers, ‘Toe Ds. A.F. Louw op St. Helena was’, 785; No Author, ‘Ds. A.F. Louw’, *Die Burger*, 17 August 1960, 10; J.G. Olivier, ‘By die Heengaan van Wyle ds. A.F. Louw’, *Die Kerkbode*, 14 September 1960, 396.

194. De Villiers, ‘Reformed Spirituality in Action’, 4.

195. Lückhoff, *Woman’s Endurance*, 57.

196. Van Wyk, ‘Die Bediening van Dr. AD Lückhoff’, 18.

197. Van Wyk, ‘Die Bediening van Dr. AD Lückhoff’, 21.

198. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 346.

pursuits involving Boers dressing as ‘pretty young things’),¹⁹⁹ to the seemingly never-ending tales of hardship and privation (as recorded in Lückhoff’s diary), at Bethulie, the contrast is particularly stark.

The place of religion in the concentration camps was central to maintain hope in strife. According to Wohlberg and Wessels, ‘[t]he belief that God was their personal God [...] gave them the strength to survive and to bear the hardships of the war, as well as to face the daily problems and sufferings in the camp’.²⁰⁰ Lückhoff’s attempts to keep up the spirits of the people (prayer groups, music, books etc.) were, however, overshadowed by his attempts to care for their physical well-being.

The woeful condition of the Bethulie concentration camp, during Lückhoff’s tenure, intensified the demands placed on all aspects of his work. In his official report on the concentration camps, published in 1903, Rev. William Robertson denies that the location of the camp at Bethulie was poor and that this facilitated the spread of disease. He maintains that ‘[t]he situation of the camp seemed healthy’²⁰¹ and cites a ‘medical man of acknowledged ability’ stating that the high rate of mortality at Bethulie was caused by the ‘great hardships and privations’ suffered by the inhabitants before their arrival at the camp.²⁰² While it is certainly true that many people were ill when they arrived, Lückhoff’s diary reveals that circumstances in the camp during his tenure – the lack of provisions, inadequate medical care and lack of proper sanitation – were extremely poor and thus contradicts Robertson’s so-called official account. When not occupied with visiting the sick or burying the dead, Lückhoff tried to procure the basic necessities for his congregants. Acting as nurse, he sometimes ‘distributed beef tea and Benger’s food’²⁰³ to those too feeble to care for themselves.

In contrast, alleviating physical hardships did not appear to be foremost in Louw’s concerns for his congregants. Similarly, Kestell’s diary records less in the way of physical suffering than the other two ministers. The greatest danger to Kestell’s congregation was direct injury due to battle; in such moments the *dominee* provided first-aid and water to the wounded on both sides.

As mentioned, the British authorities suspected that Boer *dominees* were preaching sedition and instilling hatred towards the British forces. At the conference held by DRC ministers at Stellenbosch in November 1900, the Cape *dominees* insisted that they were ‘well within [their] constitutional rights and privileges’ when they ‘gave utterance to [their] deep-felt convictions regarding the injustice of the war, or expressed

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199. W. van der Walt, ‘Seldsame Foto-album Bied Beeld oor Boer op St. Helena’, *Die Vaderland*, 1 March 1969, 5.
200. Wohlberg and Wessels, ‘Religion and Recreation’, 48-49.
201. Robertson, *Concentration Camps*, 6.
202. Robertson, *Concentration Camps*, 7.
203. Lückhoff, *Woman’s Endurance*, 6.

[their] sympathy with [their] kith and kin in the Republics'.²⁰⁴ The *dominees* then proceeded to catalogue their disapproval of the war, drafted an open letter intended for Alfred Milner, and continued to publicise the unmistakable pro-Boer content. *Dominees* had significant social, cultural, and political power in their communities and undoubtedly posed a threat to the British cause in the Republics and elsewhere in South Africa.²⁰⁵ The writings of Kestell, Louw and Lückhoff during and after the war reveal that they certainly harboured pro-Boer sentiments. The open expression of these sentiments, however, was determined by their proximity to British oversight.

British authorities and the English press were aware of the dangers posed by the *dominees* because of the potential influence they wielded. In August 1900 the editor of *The Harrismith News* condemned Kestell's actions and accused him of stirring up anti-British sentiment, not only among the Boer forces, but also among the civilian population. The editor could not understand Kestell's actions because he was a born as a 'Brit'.²⁰⁶ The article reads: '[W]e are quite within the bounds of moderation when we say that there are few predikants who have done more to mislead the Boer and to engender race hatred than the Rev. J.D. Kestell'.²⁰⁷ The editor goes on to say:

[A] minister of the Gospel is not supposed to be a politician, but the political parsons of the D.R.C. have allowed themselves to be carried away by hatred of everything British that they have become blinded to all sense of honour, truth and justice, and being blind guides they have with their power fallen into the ditch.²⁰⁸

Kestell chided the editor of the newspaper report for the 'inappropriate outburst'. Reading his autobiography, it becomes apparent that although Kestell might not have judged his own preaching and actions as seditious, the invading British forces were not mistaken in their suspicions of DRC ministers' pro-Boer sentiments and the sway they had within their communities to influence opinion.²⁰⁹ Writing at the end of the war, Kestell's *bittereinder* spirit was not quelled in defeat and he still believed in the holiness of the republican cause:

[A]lthough we are now under the British Empire, and as subjects of that Empire will bear ourselves peaceably, yet our own nationality will ever be something great and sacred to us. And we shall always consider it the greatest honour still to be known as Afrianders. [...] Thus, God has heard our prayer.²¹⁰

204. ACA, Kestell, PV 153, 2/1/1, Letter to His Excellency the Governor, 7 December 1900.

205. A.M. Grundlingh, *Die 'Hensoppers' en 'Joiners': Die Rasionaal en Verskynsel van Verraad* (Menlopark: Protea Boekhuis, 1999), 384.

206. His father, Charles Kestell, had been one of the so-called 1820 settlers.

207. Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 94.

208. Van Schoor, *John Daniel Kestell*, 94.

209. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 234.

210. Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 342.

In contrast to Kestell's open support for the Boer cause from the pulpit, Louw and Lückhoff had to be more circumspect about their personal feelings on the matter. Louw's visit to the Stormberg Boer Commando, his Jamestown speeches, and his reticence about preaching to the 'Loyals' were all instances when the young minister came under the scrutiny of the British authorities. Louw had to toe the line lest he end up in a POW camp himself. The head censor on St. Helena summarised the importance of the ministers to the Boers on 3 April 1902, stating: 'The Boer looks upon a parson as infallible, the pulpit has been, I am sorry to say, a place where disloyalty has been preached'.²¹¹ It is thus unsurprising that the British authorities monitored Louw and other ministers' actions closely because they were well-aware of the influence ministers exercised over their congregants.

Furthermore, the authorities endeavoured to ensure that ministers did not use their influence in the concentration camps to stir up anti-British sentiment. In early September 1901, Lückhoff almost lost his position due to letters he sent asking for more supplies and bemoaning his situation to his mother. Because of these letters, Lückhoff came under suspicion 'of interfering and working against the Superintendent'.²¹² On this 'bitter day', Lückhoff writes: 'there must be no suspicion, otherwise I cannot stay. This matter is a load upon my heart'.²¹³ The British, according to Wohlberg and Wessels, guarded against 'any mischievous teaching' by the camp ministers by providing them with relatively comfortable living quarters, better rations and 'an additional honorarium if good work was done and if they confined themselves to the spiritual requirements of the inhabitants'.²¹⁴ Lückhoff, like Louw, had to toe a fine line between helping his flock spiritually, mentally and physically without incurring the ire of the authorities. If he was seen to be overzealous towards his compatriots he might be dismissed and not be able to help at all, or even end up being imprisoned. Nevertheless, his diary entries reveal his pro-Boer sentiments, particularly in terms of his dislike for the camps *joiners*:

Boer khaki in camp to-day. Result of visit, about a dozen have joined forces of the English. Wonder if a worm wouldn't have more self-respect! Such characters make themselves despicable and contemptible in eyes of the English themselves. To us it brings deep-down humiliation. Can a man sink so low? Enough.²¹⁵

Conclusion

In all spheres of the war, DRC ministers were dedicated to address both the spiritual and material welfare of their congregants. In summary, depending on the situation,

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211. Oosthuizen, 'Die Beheer, Behandeling en Lewe', 315.
212. Lückhoff, *Woman's Endurance*, 17.
213. Lückhoff, *Woman's Endurance*, 17.
214. Wohlberg and Wessels, 'Religion and Recreation', 50.
215. Lückhoff, *Woman's Endurance*, 54.

they alleviated suffering (both mental and spiritual); and provided succour to the sick and wounded. If called upon, they became ambulance runners and where necessary ‘waterboys’. As vociferous republican advocates, they motivated the fighting burghers or Boer prisoners with their uplifting sermons and their words of encouragement. They organised daily prayer meetings, Sunday services, prayed with the sick and needy, buried the dead and led the funerary services. They organised mission conferences and a variety of religious activities. In the line of education, they offered schooling and catechism classes to prisoners and also advocated on their behalf to camp commanders. If need be, they became money-men and played a central role in the procurement of goods. Essentially, they did what they deemed necessary to provide for the varied needs of their congregants, becoming a vital support service during the South African War to the Boer community. However, as we have indicated, their proximity to British oversight and the area of the war where they worked significantly shaped the nature and type of services they rendered.

Finally, these ‘bearded men’ who led their congregants in the singing of psalms held a privileged position in early twentieth century Afrikaner society. In post-war South Africa, the esteem in which they were held, being regarded as infallible by their flock, perhaps, becomes more understandable if one accounts for their contributions in championing the Boers’ cause and providing for their needs on commando and in the POW and concentration camps. Research that examines the work and influence of DRC *dominees* (rather than the institution per se) deserves closer scrutiny by scholars of the South African War, Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid to examine how these ministers shaped public opinion, for better or worse.

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