

**Early church settlements in the ZAR:  
a comparison of parish life in the Dutch Reformed Church in Rustenburg and the  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa in Kroondal, 1840–1899**

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*Abstract*

The migration of Europeans to the interior of South Africa during the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to the founding of different churches in the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR). A unique situation developed in the Rustenburg region, where the Dutch Reformed Church and the Lutheran Church Kroondal were founded a few kilometres apart. The aim of this article is to review the beginnings of each congregation and to compare parish life in the first few years in order to show that the two churches, although arising from two different traditions, did not focus exclusively on their own development; from the outset, missionary work played an important part in church life.

**Introduction**

Founded in 1852, the town of Rustenburg and the surrounding district became the backdrop for the development of two different churches with a very similar mission. The Lutheran and Dutch Reformed churches were established within 10 kilometres of each other in what was then the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR). The ZAR (later Transvaal) was an independent republic that came into being in 1852 following the Sand River Convention. To understand and compare the founding and the history of these two churches and to review their mission, it is important to return to the migration of white farmers from the Cape colony.

*The migration of Europeans to the interior: the Dutch and the Germans arrive in the Rustenburg region*

The refreshment station founded by Jan van Riebeeck at the Cape in 1652 gradually grew, and by the time of the second British annexation in 1806 it was a colony comprising 26 720 whites, 29 256 slaves and 17 657 Khoikhoi.<sup>1</sup>

The number of inhabitants grew steadily, and by the time slavery was abolished in 1834 there were 39 000 slaves and 65 000 whites in the colony, the white population having been increased through the immigration scheme that culminated in the arrival of the British settlers in 1820.

People did not only join the colony, however. The abolition of slavery, the frontier wars and the lack of agricultural land saw farmers migrate from the Cape from 1835. Between 10 000 and 15 000 farmers left the colony in what became known as the Great Trek.<sup>2</sup> Some of these farmers, under the leadership of Hendrik Potgieter, travelled to the region of the Cashan hills, later to be named Rustenburg.<sup>3</sup>

The Great Trek drew its name not from the number of people who took part in it, but because of the far-reaching implications it had. With the passage of time, the Trek came to be regarded as an Afrikaner national movement, and the great majority of the Afrikaner people were later to identify themselves with its ideals.<sup>4</sup> This migration of the Voortrekkers<sup>5</sup> significantly influenced the historical development of the interior of South Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> JW Hofmeyr and Gerald J Pillay, *History of Christianity in South Africa* vol 1 (Pretoria: Haum Tertiary, 1994), 4. The term “Khoikhoi” means “men of men” and was a preferred name of the original inhabitants of the Eastern Cape region and the rest of Southern Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Gerhardus DJ Duvenage, *Van Tarka na die Transgariëp* (Pretoria: Academia, 1981), 128–138.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Rosenthal, *Rustenburg Romance: The History of a Voortrekker town* (Johannesburg: Perskor, 1979), 16.

<sup>4</sup> Hofmeyr, 34.

<sup>5</sup> Although the people who left the Cape referred to themselves as emigrants, the terms “Voortrekkers” and “The Great Trek” became widely accepted the 1870s. Johannes T du Bruyn, Die Groot Trek, in Trewhella Cameron and Burridge Spies (eds), *Nuwe Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika in Woord en Beeld* (Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau, 1986), 127–139.

In 1830, four years before the official start of the trek, about a dozen frontier farmers from the East Riet River in what was then the Somerset district undertook a remarkable hunting expedition to the present Botswana and the erstwhile North Western Transvaal (today the province known as North West). On their return, members of the expedition reported favourably on farming opportunities in the interior.<sup>6</sup> The first farmers moved into the Rustenburg district in the early 1840s. One of them was Paul Kruger,<sup>7</sup> who established the farm Boekenhoutskloof in 1842. Dutch-speaking Voortrekkers were not the only people to emigrate to the district of Rustenburg, however. Two German families, the Van Helsdingens and the Riekerts, began farming on the farm Kronendal in 1850.<sup>8</sup> The German community was strengthened by the arrival of missionaries of the Hermannsburg Missionary Society, which began its activities in 1857. Building schools before churches, they founded a missionary school, Morgenzonne, near Rustenburg.<sup>9</sup> This provided the foundation for the establishment of a Lutheran church at Kroondal.

Although the founding of the Dutch Reformed and Lutheran churches was a positive development for the white European emigrants, it also had a significant influence on the local population of the area.<sup>10</sup> In order to understand the developments in these two churches and the way in which they undertook their missionary work, it is important to examine what was taking place in the Transvaal at the time.

### *The socio-political context of the ZAR*

While the Voortrekkers' missionary work was influenced by their native policy, their native policy was a direct result of their experiences in the Cape Colony and Natal. The abolition of slavery, the frontier wars on the eastern border of the Cape colony and the war with the Zulus in Natal all played a significant role. The Voortrekkers came from a society in which white Europeans were the masters and the indigenous Africans the slaves, and this provided the blueprint for society in an independent Boer republic. The Boers in the Transvaal were determined to maintain their independence from Britain and to prohibit equality between races.<sup>11</sup> This was made law<sup>12</sup> in 1855, when the "Nieuwe Wetten voor de Maatschappij der Hollandsche Afrikanen benoorden de Vaal rivier" was proclaimed. It was also stipulated in the Constitution of 1858, which read as follows: "Het volk wil gene gelijkstelling van gekleurden met blanken ingezetenen toestaan, noch in Kerk, noch in Staat." Although the Boers were against equality between black and white, they were in favour of missionary work among the black population. In the same "Nieuwe Wetten" of 1855, Article 10 stipulated that the government supported the expansion of Christianity among the black heathen.<sup>13</sup> This is confirmed by the acceptance of the "Reglement ter regeling van de Verkondiging des Evangelies onder Heidensche bevolking der S.A. Republiek" on 24 September 1860. The 15 articles stipulated that the government had the right to make laws for indigenous peoples and that missionaries had to adhere to the laws; that mission stations could be founded only once the necessary permission had been obtained from government; that the government must not interfere with the proclamation of the gospel and that the government was responsible for the protection of missionaries.<sup>14</sup>

It is clear that inequality between white and black and the way in which missionary work was regulated by the government set the pattern for society in the Transvaal. This pattern is reflected in the parish life and missionary work of the Dutch Reformed church in Rustenburg and the Evangelical Lutheran church in Kroondal, and became particularly evident in the case of the *oorlamse*,<sup>15</sup> people who had been captured as young children by Boer commandoes during raids on independent African chiefdoms that generally were not yet fully under Boer control. That these children were captured to provide labour is confirmed by Manson and Mbenga, who state:

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<sup>6</sup> Nico A Coetzee, *Die Geskiedenis van Rustenburg ongeveer 1840–1940* (Pretoria: V&R, 1997), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Kruger became president of the ZAR, an office he held from 1883 to 1902.

<sup>8</sup> Reinhard Muhl, *Die Vorgeschichte in 100 Jahre: Deutsche Ev Lutherse gemeente Kroondal SA* (Kroondal: Stupps, 1996), 7. Coetzee, 470.

<sup>9</sup> The history of the people of Welgeval and the *oorlamse* confirms this statement. See also B Tema, *The People of Welgeval* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Dion Crafford, *Aan God die Dank* (Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel, 1982), 134.

<sup>11</sup> Crafford, 134.

<sup>12</sup> Crafford, 134.

<sup>13</sup> Crafford, 135.

<sup>14</sup> In the Transvaal, *oorlamse* blacks were black Africans who, as *inboekelinge*, had grown to adulthood in rural Boer households, where they had acquired Dutch, a variety of skills, and often Christianity. *Oorlams* (meaning "clever", or "trained") was commonly understood in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to mean "civilised", that is, following the Boer ways. Fred Morton, Family memory and historical fiction: Botlhale Tema's *The People of Welgeval*. *South African Historical Journal*, (2010), 62(2), 328.

On arrival in the 1840s, in what was to become the Transvaal, the Voortrekkers complained about what they perceived to be an acute shortage of labour and turned to coercion by demanding, for example, tribute labour from African chiefs in whose territory they hunted for ivory.<sup>16</sup>

The children were brought up on Boer farms and became skilled farm labourers, living on the fringe of the Boer farms as *inboekelinge*.<sup>17</sup> Severed from their geographical and family roots, they remained working on their masters' farms after being manumitted at the age of 21. In the Rustenburg and Pilanesberg areas, they often settled as tenants on missionary-owned land, or bought their own farms and settled as peasant producers.<sup>18</sup>

A comparison of the parish life of the Lutheran and Dutch Reformed churches would be incomplete without an understanding of how this background influenced the founding and early development of the churches. This will become more evident from a study of the early beginnings of the two congregations.

### **The Dutch Reformed Church in Rustenburg, 1850**

#### *Early beginnings*

The first congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church in the ZAR was founded in Potchefstroom in 1842. Farmers living in the Rustenburg district were among the first members of this congregation. Distance made attending church services difficult, however, and members soon began to speak about establishing their own congregation in the Rustenburg area.<sup>19</sup>

The outcome was the holding of the first Dutch Reformed Church service in the Rustenburg district, led on 19 December 1848 on the farm Hekpoort by PE Faure and W Robertson, who had been sent as a deputation by the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape.<sup>20</sup>

They reported that on their arrival, a great number of ox wagons were already present, with more wagons and riders on horseback approaching from all directions. At the start of the service, 209 wagons were counted. A temporary building had been erected on the farm before the arrival of the ministers, and at every service and prayer meeting the building was so full that a number of people had to sit outside. Over the two days, six prayer meetings were held, Holy Communion was celebrated, 235 children were baptised and 107 new members were confirmed.<sup>21</sup> The deputation reported that if they had known about the large population in the district, they would have stayed 14 days.<sup>22</sup>

At the end of 1849, the Rev A Murray junior became minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in Bloemfontein, and subsequently took the congregations in the ZAR under his wing. During his first visit to the ZAR, Murray realised that the people behind the Magaliesberg, the range of mountains separating the Rustenburg district from Potchefstroom, constituted a separate community, and that a new congregation had to be formed. He wrote about them: "Nowhere else have I found a more attentive congregation."<sup>23</sup> During Murray's first visit, more than 800 people attended the prayer meetings and services. On the Friday and Saturday he ministered to the parents of the children to be baptised, and on Sunday he administered Holy Communion. After the service on Monday morning he took the catechism class, during which he taught the children who were to be confirmed during the church service on Christmas day, 1849.<sup>24</sup> Although all this happened before the congregation was formally founded, it set the scene for parish life after the congregation came into being.

Murray found his ministry to the people "behind the Magaliesberg" very rewarding, as he himself reported:

De ernst en de aandacht, de belangstelling en gewildheid, waarmede het woord hier ontvangen werd, dede mij de aangeneemste hoop koesteren, dat de Here Zijn Woord,

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Manson and Bernard Mbenga, The evolution and destruction of Oorlam communities in the Rustenburg district of South Africa: the cases of Welgeval and Bethlehem, 1850s–1980. *African Historical Review*, (2009), 41(2), 87.

<sup>17</sup> These were young people registered to serve as apprentices.

<sup>18</sup> Manson and Mbenga, 85–115.

<sup>19</sup> Frederick GM du Toit, *'n Eeu van Genade: 1850–1950. Oorsig van die Wording en Groei van die Ned Herv of Gerefd Gemeente Rustenburg* (Rustenburg: Kerkkantor, 1950), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Du Toit, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Du Toit, 8.

<sup>22</sup> "Hadden wij, met eenige juistheid, iets geweten van de groote bevolking van deze gewesten, dan hadden wij ons verblijf in dezelve zeker 14 dagen verlengd." Du Toit, 8.

<sup>23</sup> "Nergens heb ik eene meer aandachtige gemeente gevonden." Johannes Du Plessis, *The Life of Andrew Murray of South Africa* (London: Marshall, 1919), 88.

<sup>24</sup> Du Toit, 10.

door de onreine lippen van een onwaardige diens knecht verkondigd, niet zonder zegen had gelaten.<sup>25</sup>

Murray also wrote that the time had come for a new congregation with its own minister to be established in the area “behind the Magaliesberg”. After visiting Ohrigstad, Murray returned to the Magaliesberg district and on Monday, 21 January 1850, after a lengthy meeting, a new congregation was founded. Initially known as the Magaliesberg congregation, it soon became known as the Rustenburg congregation.<sup>26</sup>

The foundation of the Magaliesberg congregation in fact led to the foundation of the town of Rustenburg. The church council dispatched a memorandum in which it asked the government of the ZAR for land on which to build a church. On 22 September 1850 the Volksraad registered the following decision: “De Raad over eengekomen zijnde hebbe dien plaats aan den Kerkeraad en gemeenten toegestaan tot dien einde om een Kerk te bouwen.”<sup>27</sup> This decision was not only to provide land for a church, but would lead directly to the foundation of the town of Rustenburg.

### *Parish life*

Three key issues were important in the parish life of the congregation, namely developing infrastructure, pastoral care and missionary work.

- Developing infrastructure

Although members of the congregation experienced financial hardship,<sup>28</sup> building a church where the congregation could gather remained a priority. NJ Hofmeyr wrote in a report about his visit to the community: “Zij heft een ruime pastorie gebouwd en heft besloten een kerk te stichten die £18000 zal kosten en 1200 hoorders kan bevatten.”<sup>29</sup> It was therefore no surprise when, on his second visit to the Magaliesberg region in 1850, the Rev Andrew Murray found a large congregation. There was also an almost completed church building, 80 feet long and 30 feet wide. The building was, however, already too small for the 800 to 900 members who gathered for the church services. Murray baptised 109 children and confirmed 30 new members. He had an enormous impact on the congregation: they liked his soul-searching sermons and saw his visit as an answer to their prayers.<sup>30</sup> Before he left, Murray promised that he would return for the inauguration of the church building.

Murray kept his promise and returned for the inauguration on 26 April 1851 in “een pas aangelegd dorp achter den Magaliesberg.”<sup>31</sup> More than 230 wagons gathered for the event. Murray preached from Psalm 132:14,<sup>32</sup> Holy Communion was celebrated, and in the days that followed another 46 new members were confirmed. The inauguration of the church building was also symbolic for the members of the congregation – it was seen “als een waarborg tegen de veredere verwoesting der bevolking in het maatschappelijke en godsdienstige, en een onderpand van nog grotere zegeningen welke de Heere uitstorten wil over de gemeenten.”<sup>33</sup>

- Pastoral care

Pastoral care was the second important issue in parish life. From the outset, parish life in Rustenburg was no different from that of any of the other Dutch Reformed congregations in the north in that church services, prayer meetings and pastoral care by elders, deacons and the minister played a central role. The congregation was organised according to the principles of the Reformed tradition, in which the minister, the elders and the deacons played an integral part. The congregation was divided into districts, with an elder and a deacon taking responsibility for each one.<sup>34</sup> The elders were responsible

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<sup>25</sup> Du Toit, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Du Toit, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Du Toit, 11.

<sup>28</sup> The financial difficulties experienced by members of the congregation are revealed in the minutes of the church council of 4 May 1850.

<sup>29</sup> Nicolas J Hofmeyr, *Transvaal, mijn herinneringen: meteen zestal preeken uitgesproken in de Transvaal en een woord tot de leden en leeraren der vereenigde Kerk* (Kaapstad: Jacques Dusseau, 1897), 10.

<sup>30</sup> Du Toit, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Du Toit, 12.

<sup>32</sup> Du Toit, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Du Plessis, 88.

<sup>34</sup> Phillipus B van der Watt, *Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk: 1824–1905* (Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel, 1980), 122.

for “huisbezoek en waken voor de zuiverheid der leer.”<sup>35</sup> When there was no minister in the congregation, the elders were responsible for church services and other pastoral work; in the absence of a minister, one of the elders would read a sermon to the congregation during the Sunday service.

Because the congregation had no permanent minister during the first few years, the elders organised the congregation, and visiting ministers played an important role. The report of Prof NJ Hofmeyr, who visited the congregation in 1895, gives an account of the importance of services and meetings in the life of the congregation. He arrived on a Thursday and describes his meeting with the women of the congregation at their usual Thursday prayer meeting, where he taught on the subject of the power of prayer. From Friday to Sunday he held six church services, including a special children’s service. Holy Communion was celebrated on the Sunday and discussions about every sermon took place after the sermon.<sup>36</sup> Hofmeyr further reported that the last service on the Sunday evening was attended by over 800 people. After the service a special prayer meeting was held, during which members of the congregation thanked the Lord for his blessing.<sup>37</sup> As the congregation developed, a week of prayer was held annually during the second week of the new year, and the celebration of Pentecost became increasingly important.<sup>38</sup>

The importance of *huisbezoek* (the visits by ministers or elders to members of the congregation at their homes) in the parish is confirmed by a report by Rev Rudolph, who served the congregation for 30 years. At his farewell on 7 October 1928 he described to the congregation how he had conducted his house visits first by mule cart and later by horse cart, and often had to travel for 16 hours to visit members of the congregation living at the various outposts. That he enjoyed this pastoral work is confirmed by his own words: “Ek was geen prediker nie. My geliefkoosde werk was huisbesoek.”<sup>39</sup> The minister was usually accompanied on these visits by an elder of the congregation.<sup>40</sup>

The deacons were responsible for caring for the poor. They were responsible for visiting church members at their homes to collect money and other donations for the congregation. This is reported as happening monthly, and this task became more important after the war of 1899 to 1902.<sup>41</sup>

- Missionary work

A further important feature of parish life was missionary work, which took two forms. On the one hand, members of the congregation took it upon themselves to teach their servants the gospel. This was in large part due to the influence of the German missionaries<sup>42</sup> working in the district. Rev JC Hefer, the first minister of the congregation, confirmed this when he wrote: “De belangstelling in de zending is ontwaakt en allengs toegenomen, iets waartoe de goede verstandhouding tussechen de Boeren en de Duitsche zendelingen, die in de district arbeiden, het hare heft bijgedragen.”<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, the congregation supported missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church working in the district.

One of the first missionaries was Henry Gonin. After arriving in the Rustenburg district in early 1860s, Gonin established a large Dutch Reformed settlement among the Bakgatla ba ga Kgalefa by gaining personal title to the farm on which many of the Bakgatla were living.<sup>44</sup> His arrival was a direct result of the Cape Synod’s decision of 1857 to expand missionary efforts throughout South Africa. Gonin was dependent on the Rustenburgers for his everyday needs and for access to the surrounding black African populations. By February 1864, after buying the farm Welgeval, Gonin had built a small church and started a congregation drawn from the farmworkers in the district. These workers were mainly of *inboekstelsel* origin. Many of them were already literate in Dutch, Sesotho or Setswana, having been taught to read the gospel by their Dutch masters.<sup>45</sup> Gonin was also visited regularly by a large core of learners living on Paul Kruger’s farm Saulspoor. In 1866 he built a new mission station at

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<sup>35</sup> They were required to visit members of the congregation at their homes once every quarter, and to ensure the purity of church doctrine.

<sup>36</sup> Du Toit, 31.

<sup>37</sup> Du Toit, 32.

<sup>38</sup> “De tien dagen van Hemelvaart tot Pinksteren worden in onzen kerk hoe langer zoo meer als dagen van gebed en godsdienstiche zamenkomsten doorgebragten ter voorbereiding tot eene meer gezegende Pinksterfeest-viering.” De Almanak 1891–1899, 26.

<sup>39</sup> “I was not a preacher. My favourite work was visiting members of the congregation at their homes.”

<sup>40</sup> The importance of this component of the elders’ calling is confirmed by the fact that those elders who did not conduct their visits on a regular basis were called to appear in front of the Church council. Notule van die kerkraad van die Ned Herv of Geref gemeente Rustenburg, 3 Oktober 1904, in Du Toit, 36.

<sup>41</sup> The war of 1899 to 1902 between the ZAR and Great Britain left many people poor and homeless as a result of Lord Milner’s scorched earth policy. Van der Watt, 123.

<sup>42</sup> These were the missionaries of the Hermannsburg Missionary Society.

<sup>43</sup> Hofmeyr, 10.

<sup>44</sup> Bernard Mbenga and Fred Morton, The missionary as land broker: Henri Gonin, Saulspoor 269 and the Bakgatla of Rustenburg district, 1862–1922. *South African Historical Journal* (2007) 36(1), 145–167.

<sup>45</sup> Mbenga and Morton, 149.

Saulspoor and by 1870 Gonin began to shape what became a thriving Christian community, with catechists and teachers even working on outstations. This meant that much of the work of spreading the gospel and Western education were undertaken by members of the Welgeval community, indicative of their close relationship with the Dutch Reformed Church.<sup>46</sup> By 1882 Gonin had 120 church members, an average of 100 in attendance on Sundays, 25 in baptism classes and more than 100 students attending school.<sup>47</sup> Manson and Mbenga describe the situation as follows:

In the enclave of Welgeval, physically hidden and isolated within the circular ring of the Pilanesberg Mountains, the farm residents found relative peace and solace. Unconstrained by the restrictions of chiefly control, as in villages around them, the *Oorlamse* enjoyed a large measure of economic freedom, and cultural and social independence. On the whole, they were able to co-exist with the African communities around them. The latter however associated them with Afrikaner society, which only helped to re-inforce their *Oorlam* identity and gave them a sense of difference

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the relationship between the Welgeval residents and the local Africans (mainly baKgatla), was certainly not static, for as local Africans became Christianised and westernised and acquired some of the skills and attributes of the *Oorlamse*, so the differences between them were then less noticeable. Over a number of generations, on the side of the Welgevalites, they increasingly saw themselves as a sub-section of baKgatla society.<sup>48</sup>

Although the Rustenburg congregation did much to promote missionary work by supporting Gonin, it was never integrated with congregation life.

Not only religion, but also cultural and social practices were transferred to local communities:

The Welgeval residents clung to the Dutch, later Afrikaans, language, though it was infused with Setswana words. They retained Afrikaner names, and some elements of Afrikaner dress, particularly among women. They built their houses according to the Dutch style, with a veranda, as was customary.<sup>49</sup>

The same trend, namely the transfer of religion and culture, manifested in the Lutheran congregation with regard to Bethlehem.

### **The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa: Kroondal**

#### *Early beginnings*

“They were to create a mission church identical in doctrine, liturgy, discipline and organisation to the church at home.”<sup>50</sup> It was in this spirit that Ludwig Harms, founder of the Hermannsburg Missionary Society,<sup>51</sup> constituted the mission of the society in 1849. Harms believed that “heathen” would be attracted by three features of Lutheran missions: “the glory of our divine service, the pure teaching and divine sacrament of our church and the power of our singing.”<sup>52</sup> The foundation of the Lutheran church at Kroondal and life in the parish was organised according to these key features of the Hermannsburg Missionary Society.

Kroondal is situated about eight kilometres from Rustenburg, overshadowed by the Magaliesberg.<sup>53</sup> The origin of the congregation goes back to the arrival of the Hermannsburg missionaries from Germany in 1857. A group of missionaries, Christian Müller, Hans-Peter Jordt, Christoph Penzhorn, Heinrich Backeberg and Theodore Wenhold (who was the son of a missionary) and two German settlers, Wilhelm Lange and Georg Otterman, looking for a farm for their sons, bought Kroondal in 1889. This group of German-speaking farmers, artisans and entrepreneurs developed into a rural community and organised their spiritual life informally according to the

<sup>46</sup> Manson and Mbenga, 93.

<sup>47</sup> Mbenga and Morton, 157–158.

<sup>48</sup> Manson and Mbenga, 94.

<sup>49</sup> Manson and Mbenga, 95.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History* (Cape Town: Credo, 1997), 175.

<sup>51</sup> The society was founded in 1849 by pastor Ludwig Harms in Hanover, Germany. Crafford, 48.

<sup>52</sup> Elphick and Davenport, 175.

<sup>53</sup> Dieter Krüger, Kroondal Evangelical Lutheran Congregation, in *Die Vorgeschichte in 100 Jahre: Deutsche Ev Lutherse gemeente Kroondal SA* (Kroondal: Stupps, 1996), 104.

Evangelical Lutheran tradition, with Müller as their minister. After church services on Sundays they practised choir singing, and in 1890 instruments for a brass band were ordered from Germany.

Only after the first church was built in 1896 did the settlers proceed to the formal founding of a congregation on an Evangelical Lutheran basis.<sup>54</sup> Eleven people signed the founding statement, among them the original purchasers of the farm Kroondal. The congregation grew steadily. On the death of the first minister in 1916, the congregation numbered 114 adults and 92 children. In 1996, a hundred years later, it numbered 412 adults and 94 children.<sup>55</sup>

### *Parish life in Kroondal*

The congregation at Kroondal aligned itself to the original mission of the Hermannsburg Mission Society. This is evident from the *Stiftungsurkunde*<sup>56</sup> of the congregation, which also identifies those aspects of parish life considered important, namely music and church services, the development of infrastructure and missionary work.

- Music and church services

From the outset, music and church services played an important role in parish life, and considerable effort was put into choir singing and the brass band: “For as long as the Congregation existed, a Church Choir and Brass Band have existed and have made their contributions to parish life.”<sup>57</sup> The wealth of music created by the Reformation greatly influenced the church services, as the congregation sang songs together as part of the Liturgy. Musical accompaniment was supplied by the brass instruments and an organ, particularly during festival services. The *Posaunenchor*<sup>58</sup> of Kroondal constituted one of the unique characteristics of the congregation and became one of its most noteworthy “export products,” as the band, accompanied by the church choir, also performed for Rustenburg society from time to time. Music not only bound the community together; it also became an important evangelisation tool.

For as long as the congregation existed, the brass band was part of it. The *Posaunenchor* was founded by Georg Otterman in 1890 after he ordered instruments from Germany in 1889. The first practice session took place in the barn of Christian Müller in 1891, with Otterman teaching members of the German community to play various instruments. Practice sessions continued to be held there until after the school was completed in 1897.<sup>59</sup> One of the legends about the band, which also confirms the important role it played in the community, is that two members, August and Georg Behrens, travelled 23 miles every week to attend the practice sessions.<sup>60</sup> MJ Ryan<sup>61</sup> wrote that the band became a “jewel in the crown” of the Kroondal church.<sup>62</sup>

The church choir also played an important role. The congregation’s first church choir, consisting of eight men and five women, performed for the first time in 1889 in the mission church when then missionary, later pastor of Kroondal, Christian Müller, invited them to sing during a church service. This set the tone for one of the unique features of the congregation. Otto confirms the importance of singing and the role played by the choir in parish life, writing: “Die Singefreundigkeit und Liebe zur Musik der ersten Kroondaler ist bis heute erhalten geblieben.”<sup>63</sup>

Like music, church services formed an integral part of parish life. Services were held on Sundays, when the congregation met at the church building. Even before the building was erected, services were regularly held in the home of G Otterman.<sup>64</sup> At the commencement of church services a member of the congregation read the prescribed texts from the New and Old Testament. The sermon by the “pastor” followed as part of an integrated liturgy, with the congregation taking part in the singing of hymns. Special children’s services were held regularly.<sup>65</sup> This was in keeping with one of the

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<sup>54</sup> Krüger, 106.

<sup>55</sup> Krüger, 104.

<sup>56</sup> 75 Jahre Kirchengemeinde Kroondal 1896–1971. Kroondaler Bibliothek 85/125.

<sup>57</sup> Krüger, 105.

<sup>58</sup> Brass band

<sup>59</sup> Coetzee, 484.

<sup>60</sup> Coetzee, 484.

<sup>61</sup> Dr Martin J Ryan taught music at the Technical College Rustenburg, and his comment about the band appeared in the August edition of “Lantern” in 1990.

<sup>62</sup> Coetzee, 484.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Otto, *Die Vorgeschichte in 100 Jahre: Deutsche Ev Lutherse gemeinde Kroondal SA*, (Kroondal: Stupps, 1996), 45.

<sup>64</sup> Chronik. 1895–1966, Deutsche Evangelische Gemeinde zu Kroondal, 1–9, 3, Kroondaler Bibliothek, Kroondal.

<sup>65</sup> Krüger, 106.

outstanding characteristics of the congregation, namely its support of and commitment to education. After the church was built in 1896, the school followed in 1897.<sup>66</sup>

A further important issue was the organisation of the congregation, which followed the structures of the Lutheran church. The highest authority in the congregation was the congregational meeting, which took place twice annually. A church council, consisting of the minister and members, managed the affairs of the congregation. The Hermannsburg Mission Society initially acted as guardian of the congregation. In 1911, the congregation became a member of the Hermannsburg German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of South Africa. When the two Evangelical Lutheran churches, which had originated in the Hermannsburg and Berlin mission societies, united under the name of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa (ELCSA), the congregation was part of the process.<sup>67</sup> The organisation of the congregation also demonstrated its commitment to education, a school being built shortly after the completion of the church building, as mentioned earlier. The importance of education was also revealed by the fact that in addition to his pastoral work among the congregation, the minister was responsible for teaching religion at the Kroondal school.<sup>68</sup>

- Developing infrastructure

As in the case of the Dutch Reformed congregation, buildings played an important role in the functioning of the congregation, and a number of buildings reflecting the particular ideals and needs of the congregation were constructed. Initially there were no church or school facilities for the ever-growing community; church services were held in the large dining room of Georg Ottermans' house, and school was held in a newly built hut and the outbuildings on Heinrich Backeberg's farm. He was also the first teacher in the community.<sup>69</sup> When land was made available by the initial founders of the congregation, the elders decided to build a school that could also be used for church services. Karl Heyne,<sup>70</sup> Rustenburg architect and master builder, was adamant that the community should build a church first, however. His opinion prevailed, and work on the church, which he designed, started in 1895.<sup>71</sup> By 1925, the land was transferred to the congregation. The first buildings constructed, listed according to year of completion, were:

Old church	1896	
Old school	1897	
School hostel	1905	
Old parsonage		1909
Old congregation hall	1937	

The construction of these buildings confirms the growth and development of the congregation. Subsequent buildings were a new school (1952), new church (1962), new parsonage (1970), new congregation hall (1977), a row of workrooms for the use of those preparing for bazaars (1982) and Altkroondal (1989).<sup>72</sup>

- Missionary work

Arising from the roots and work of the Hermannsburg Mission Society,<sup>73</sup> the congregation took missions seriously. This is confirmed by the work of the first German missionaries in the Magaliesberg region. In 1864, superintendent Hohls and missionary Willem Behrens of the Hermannsburg Mission Society were selecting sites for new mission stations along the Magaliesberg when they met with H Gonin, missionary of the Dutch Reformed church, who was also endeavouring to set up a mission station further afield. A mission station was set up at Magatastad, after which mission work commenced. The success of the work led to another mission station at Saron, under the leadership of Christoph Penzhorn, one of the founders of the Kroondal congregation.<sup>74</sup> Following consent for further missionary work from President MW Pretorius, the first president of the ZAR, Ferdinand Zimmermann

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<sup>66</sup> Chronik, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Krüger, 106.

<sup>68</sup> Chronik, 4.

<sup>69</sup> Coetzee, 487.

<sup>70</sup> Karl Heyne also designed the building of the Dutch Reformed church in Rustenburg. Coetzee, 487.

<sup>71</sup> Coetzee, 487.

<sup>72</sup> Kruger, 105.

<sup>73</sup> This confirmed by the following quote: "Unsere Gemeinde ihren Ursprung schon in der frühesten Missionsarbeit der Hermannsburger Mission in der Kroondaler Gegend hat." Otto, 39.

<sup>74</sup> Coetzee, 485.



arrived in the Rustenburg district in 1866. In 1872 he reported that his congregation had grown to 79, but that the black community was “a rocky soil to till for the missionary as a result of the bad example set by the whites.”<sup>75</sup> As missionary work progressed, missionary Christian Müller founded a mission station at Ramakokstad in 1878.<sup>76</sup> In 1896 Müller also became the first minister of the Lutheran congregation in Kroondal.<sup>77</sup>

A unique feature of the Kroondal congregation was their special connection with the Bethlehem community through Zimmermann’s missionary work. Like the people of Welgeval they were not an organic “community” from the outset, being of very diverse origins.<sup>78</sup> In 1873, in response to Zimmermann’s request, the Volksraad measured out six *erven* for the Hermannsburg Missionary Society for the express use of the Bethlehem community.<sup>79</sup> A visiting missionary reported in 1886 that Bethlehem was a little paradise among the town lands. Its buildings included a church (completed in 1872), schoolhouse, residence and wagon shed, and a vegetable garden with fruit trees. Many people worked on farms nearby and lived closer to other mission stations, but had joined the Rustenburg community, where teaching was offered and sermons were delivered in Dutch. The membership consisted of descendants of the Khoi, Sotho and Zulu peoples, as well as many coloured people whose fathers or grandfathers were whites.<sup>80</sup>

Manson and Mbenga identify two features as setting the people of Bethlehem apart from the Setswana-speaking population in the vicinity of Rustenburg. The first was that they were *oorlamse*. Although their *oorlam* identity was weakened by the influx of non-*oorlam* people, a former resident of Bethlehem claimed that non-*oorlam* immigrants assumed *oorlam* status, either out of a sense of belonging or for convenience.<sup>81</sup> The second was their membership of, and close connection to, the Lutheran church. This is confirmed by birth and baptismal records and the frequency of distinctive *oorlam* family names.<sup>82</sup>

The connection to the Lutheran church also meant a close connection with German culture. Manson and Mbenga confirm this:

The Bethlehemites were similar to the Welgeval *Oorlamse* in that they shaped for themselves a distinct identity derived from features of an alien culture. Inevitably cultural aspects of Afrikaner and German existence were imported into the Bethlehemites’ daily routines and lifestyles, though there is no doubt that Afrikaans culture was the more dominant social force of the two.<sup>83</sup>

The early years of the Kroondal community are the story of a congregation that reached out to the local people of the district. They ministered to the Tswana community through the music of the brass band and the church choir,<sup>84</sup> and built a church as well as two schools known as the Kroondal Farm School and The Tirelong School for Tswana and other children.<sup>85</sup> They were also committed to the *oorlam* people of Bethlehem, with whom they had a special relationship through missionaries Zimmermann and Müller. Although the history of the congregation confirms that they answered to their missionary calling, the Kroondal congregation remained an exclusive German congregation, with German as the predominant language.<sup>86</sup> Language, and the laws of the Transvaal, which did not permit equality between different race groups, were the most likely reasons for the establishment of separate black congregations. This changed in later years, when marriages between people who spoke different languages necessitated the introduction of Afrikaans church services,<sup>87</sup> but the race boundary was never crossed owing to the development of apartheid in South Africa.

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<sup>75</sup> Manson and Mbenga, 99.

<sup>76</sup> Coetzee, 485.

<sup>77</sup> Krüger, 105.

<sup>78</sup> Manson and Mbenga, 97.

<sup>79</sup> Die groei van Rustenburg, *Rustenburg Herald*, 13 Februarie 1929.

<sup>80</sup> Manson and Mbenga, 100.

<sup>81</sup> Manson and Mbenga, 98.

<sup>82</sup> Manson and Mbenga, 98.

<sup>83</sup> Manson and Mbenga, 104.

<sup>84</sup> Otto, 39.

<sup>85</sup> Theo Meyer, Der Missionarische Einsatz der Kroondaler Gemeinde, in *Die Vorgeschichte in 100 Jahre: Deutsche Ev Lutherse gemeente Kroondal SA* (Kroondal: Stupps, 1996), 39: “Nebst anderer missionarischer Arbeit war unsere Gemeinde stets um das geistige und geistliche Wohlergehen seiner schwarzen Arbeiter bemüht. 1910 wurde für die Orts-Tswanagemeinde die kleine Grasdachkirche auf Kroondaler Gemeindeboden errichtet. Es wurden auch zwei Klassenzimmer gebraucht, den Schulunterricht zu ermöglichen. Später kamen zwei weitere hinzu und eine Evangelistenwohnung.

<sup>86</sup> This was confirmed in an interview with Ms L. Benade, resident of Rustenburg during the 1950s, on the subject of her recollections of the German community at Kroondal. (Interview 23 June 2010, Stilbaai, South Africa)

<sup>87</sup> Krüger, 104.

## Conclusion: two churches, one mission

A comparison of the two churches, and more specifically, parish life in the two churches, reveals both important similarities and subtle differences. In terms of the similarities, both these churches stemmed unmistakably from the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation, which explains the primacy of the Word of God and the importance of the preaching of the gospel in church services in both. This is best demonstrated by the fact that even in the absence of church buildings, the members of the congregation met in houses for prayer meetings and church services, and that in the absence of ministers, church services were nevertheless held, with elders reading sermons to the congregation. Moreover, reformed theology was the driving force behind the mission of both the churches to proclaim the gospel to the local Africans as well as they could. Although language undeniably played an important role in the founding of separate churches, with the Germans in the congregation in Kroondal speaking German and the Boers in Rustenburg speaking Dutch, this separation was due mainly to the laws of the ZAR, which clearly prohibited equality between races. In church and society this meant the establishment of separate communities with separate churches for different race groups. This made the two churches exclusive in a certain sense, and prohibited local Africans from attending church services, as confirmed by the work of the churches in the *oorlam* communities. Although they worked in two different communities, Welgeval and Bethlehem, the outcome was the same. While the *oorlamse* understood the language, and in the case of Bethlehem and Kroondal even shared a minister, separate churches were nevertheless founded, and no integration with the two mother churches took place.

An important focus of the two churches became evident in the development of their infrastructure. Buildings were important to both congregations. Both in Kroondal and in Rustenburg much was done to build good infrastructure. Considerable sums of money were spent, and it is interesting to note that the same architect, Karl Heine, designed both church buildings. Although the church minutes provide no evidence of official contact between the two churches, there must have been spontaneous contact between the Germans and the Dutch in this close-knit community. Oral sources reveal that the Dutch-speaking Boers attended the concerts and bazaars held by the Kroondal community, and that the Kroondal brass band often played at church functions held by the Dutch Reformed congregation. The bazaar held by the Kroondal community was an annual highlight of the entire Rustenburg community.<sup>88</sup>

In terms of the subtle differences, the missionary strategy of the congregations constitutes an important point of departure. Although the primary focus of both congregations was on ministering to their own members, missionary work was nevertheless an important part of their calling. Growing from the seeds sown by the Hermannsburg Missionary Society, the church in Kroondal did much to promote its ideals. The brass band and church choir were important instruments in evangelising the local people. Churches and schools were built and missionaries were supported, but always outside Kroondal. The majority of the missionary work conducted by the Dutch Reformed Church in Rustenburg, on the other hand, comprised supporting missionaries from the church working in the district. This led to separate churches outside Rustenburg and kept the congregation in Rustenburg white and Dutch.

Culture undeniably played a significant part, as revealed by the importance of the church choir and the brass band from the very beginning of the ministry in the Kroondal congregation; the importance of music and singing in outreach to the community was in harmony with the mission of the Hermannsburg Mission Society. Although the Rustenburg congregation also had a choir, it was not nearly as important as the Kroondal church choir. While the Germans in Kroondal were together celebrating their culture, the Dutch in Rustenburg were unable to achieve uniformity of opinion.<sup>89</sup> Ministering to the youth was important in both congregations, with Sunday school and regular children's services taking place. The Kroondal congregation took this a step further, however, with their minister teaching religion at the local school in Kroondal.

A review of the history of the two congregations and parish life shows both churches to be "children of their time". They were born of a pioneering community endeavouring to fulfil their calling in society. This is perhaps best summarised by Dieter Krüger in his review of the achievements of the Kroondal congregation:

It should be clear to the attentive reader that the Congregation has built up a comprehensive infrastructure over years. This achievement can among other factors be attributed to the fact that the congregation had the assistance and contribution of

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<sup>88</sup> Interview with Ms L Benade.

<sup>89</sup> The Dutch-speaking Boers were known for their infighting from the very outset of the Great Trek. Schisms in congregations in the Cape continued to be manifested in Rustenburg, and eventually led to three different Dutch-speaking Reformed churches in the erstwhile Transvaal.

enthusiastic, unselfish and competent members to achieve its objectives. What, however, counts is not the material means at the disposal of the congregation, but the inner power reaching out from the congregation and its members. This power in a Christian congregation can have only one source as mentioned in the first Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians chapter 3, verse 11: “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”<sup>90</sup>

History proves that this is true not only of the Evangelical Lutheran Kroondal congregation, but also of the Dutch Reformed Rustenburg congregation: two churches, eight kilometres apart, with what was in essence the same mission.

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