

The Scots Afrikaners: Identity Politics and Intertwined Religious Cultures in Southern and Central Africa, by Retief Müller

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The book makes fascinating reading, not only for scholars interested in the influence of Scottish ministers on the Afrikaans religious community, but for readers on the formation of South African politico-piety in general.

The story starts in the early 19th century when there was a shortage of ministers of the Word in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. Scottish ministers were sent to the Netherlands to learn “the language” to be sent to South Africa to fill this gap. One of the first Scottish ministers to serve locally was Andrew Murray Sr (1794–1866).

Chapter 2 of the book covers the early careers of Andrew Murray Sr’s two famous sons, Andrew Murray Jr as a DRC minister, and John Murray who eventually became the first professor at the Stellenbosch Seminary. We meet Andrew Murray Sr again in Chapter 3 as moderator of the infamous 1857 DRC Synod where the segregation of White and other members of the DRC was accepted, here with the author making a kind nod towards the Scottish minister. Chapter 4 deals with the missionary engagement of the DRC in the rest of Africa with the assistance of the Free Church of Scotland and the drive of local Scottish ministers, especially that of Andrew Murray Jr. Chapter 5 describes the ongoing Afrikanerisation of Scottish ministers—such as Andrew Murray Jr—against the background of the South African War (1899–1902).

Chapters 6 and 7 contain interesting material on the main reasons why there eventually was a fall-out between Afrikaner and Scottish ministers. These reasons have to do with different views on mission and the formation of the CCAP (Church of Central Africa Presbyterian), the development of Afrikaner ideologies that eventually led to apartheid, and the mistrust towards Methodist “liberalism.”



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The book is excellently researched from archival and published sources, and written in a very readable style. While aptly sticking to the chronology of events, bold interpretations of the events are given. The author chose the term “Scots Afrikaners” not only to paint them as “intentionally hybrid” but also to allow himself to write their history within the grand narrative of Afrikaner politics of the past century and a half.

The book is valuable reading for scholars and academics in South African history, as well as for the interested reader.