

Hubertus Elffers (1858-1931) and the Dutch-English Tensions in the Developing South African Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Introduction

From the earliest days of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's work in South Africa there was significant tension between English-speaking and Dutch-speaking members. As early as 1892 – only five years after the arrival of the first official Seventh-day Adventist missionaries – Phillip Wessels was to write to W. C. White complaining that “We ought to have a Holland class or teacher [at the soon to be opened Claremont Union College] engage in that language....There is no work done here in the Dutch to my know,ege [sic]”.¹

In 1901, a group of Dutch-speaking Seventh-day Adventists led by Hubertus Elffers – an ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister then serving as the vice-president of the South African Conference – left the Seventh-day Adventist Church and formed an independent Dutch-speaking congregation.² Elffers' breakaway from the Seventh-day Adventist Church exemplifies the polarization present both in South African society and the South African Seventh-day Adventist Church at the time.

This paper will discuss Elffers' contributions to the South African Seventh-day Adventist Church and will attempt to place in historical context, the cultural and language tensions within the Church that contributed to Elffers' resignation from both the pastoral ministry and church membership.

¹ Phillip Wessels to W. C. White. October 25, 1892.

² Elffers and seventeen of his followers did return to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1909; however Elffers left for a second and final time in 1926.

Hubertus Elffers

Elffers was born in Haarlem, Holland in 1858 to Mennonite parents. At the age of 15 the family left the Mennonites and joined a Dutch Reformed congregation. At the age of 18 Elffers completed a two year teacher training course and soon after travelled to Cape Town having accepted an appointment to teach Dutch and other subjects at the Dutch Reform Church's Normal School there. Two years later Elffers joined the staff of the Stellenbosch Gymnasium as a teacher of Dutch. While there Elffers wrote the first of his several textbooks on the Dutch Language.

In 1888 Elffers accepted a headmaster position and moved to Smithfield, in the Orange Free State. After four years he returned to Cape Town where he established Rustica Press and worked as a translator. Around 1893 he came into contact with Seventh-day Adventists and as a result was asked to teach Dutch at the newly established Claremont Union College. He also undertook translating and printing work for the church—in 1894, the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* noted that the pamphlet "Rome's Challenge" had been translated into Dutch by Elffers and that he was at work translating "Christ and the Sabbath" into the same language.³

In 1895 Elffers converted to Seventh-day Adventism. That same year he began to publish—apparently somewhat unofficially—*De Wachter* – a Dutch translation of the Church's *South African Sentinel* magazine. In 1896 he received a ministerial license though he continued to work as a translator and printer/publisher at his Rustica Press in addition to carrying out various forms of evangelistic work for the church.⁴ A year later he was elected a trustee of the South African branch of the church's Medical Missionary Association and a member of the Claremont Union College Board. His work as editor of *De Wachter* was also officially recognized.⁵ Four years later at the March 1900 session of the South African Conference, Elffers was ordained to the Seventh-day Adventist ministry and elected Vice President of the South African Conference.⁶ At the time he was the only Dutch-speaking ordained minister in South Africa.

A little over a year later – in the middle of 1900 – Elffers resigned his position as Vice President and did not participate in Seventh-day Adventist Church life until granted readmission at his request in January 1909.⁷

³ A. T. Robinson, "South Africa," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 3, 1894, 220.

⁴ I. J. Hankins, "South African Conference Proceedings," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 8, 1896, 784.

⁵ J. M. Freeman, "South African Conference Proceedings," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 14, 1897, 797. In 1924, the *Sentinel* became *Signs of the Times*, and *De Wachter* became *Tekens Van Die Tye*.

⁶ I. J. Hankins, "South African Conference," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 5, 1900, 364.

⁷ R. C. Porter, "South African Union Conference," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 18, 1909, 18.

Elffers' sudden resignation, so soon after his ordination and election to church administration needs to be viewed in the context of the long standing tensions between English and Dutch speaking church members and administrators.

English-Dutch Tensions

From the earliest days of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's work in South Africa there was significant tension between English-speaking and Dutch-speaking members. This tension was exacerbated by the presence of so many foreign (mainly American) English-speaking missionaries who filled most administrative and leadership positions in the South African church structure.

In 1885, Pieter Wessels and George van Druten wrote to the General Conference (GC) requesting a Seventh-day Adventist minister to come to South Africa. While their request did not specify such, it seems clear from Wessel's later remarks that a Dutch-speaking minister was expected.⁸ The GC did in fact recommend that B. F. Stureman—a fluent Dutch-speaker—be a member of the first group of missionaries sent, however this did not eventuate.⁹ No other Dutch-speakers were apparently available and when the party of six missionaries sent by the General Conference arrived in Cape Town in 1887, all were English-speaking Americans—as were the second party of four that arrived in 1889.

Reflecting later, Wessels wrote, "I was at first disappointed that the brethren were not able to send us a Dutch minister, but we decided we would learn the English language, and the Lord helped us."¹⁰ Initially the work of the fledging church seemed to be proceeding well; congregations had been formed in Cape Town, Grahamstown, and the Kimberly; and in 1890, the first church building was constructed in Beaconsfield.¹¹ That same year, Wessels was granted a ministerial license—the first South African to be so endowed—with those present expressing the hope that "his labours among those who speak his language [ie Dutch] will be blessed of God."¹²

In 1892 the South African Conference of Seventh-day Adventists was organized. While the three officers (President, Secretary, and Treasurer) were American, at least three members of the five member Executive Committee were South African: Pieter Wessels, his brother

⁸ P. J. D. Wessels, "The Rise of the Message in Africa: Testimony of one of the first two believers," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 27, 1929, 13.

⁹ Quoted in L. Francis Swanepoel, "The Origin and Early History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Africa, 1886-1920" (MA, University of South Africa, 1972), 10. Swanepoel erroneously gives Stureman's initials as J. F. Apparently Stureman continued his work amongst the Dutch-speaking population of Michigan for some years.

¹⁰ Wessels, "The Rise of the Message in Africa: Testimony of one of the first two believers," 14.

¹¹ W. S. Hyatt, "When the Message Was Young in South Africa," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 27, 1929, 14.

¹²

Philip Wessels, and D. F. Tarr.¹³ At the Conference's third session in 1895, Pieter Wessels was elected to the position of Vice President.¹⁴

It was clear however, that problems existed. As early as 1892 – only five years after the arrival of the first official Seventh-day Adventist missionaries – Phillip Wessels was to write to W. C. White complaining that “We ought to have a Holland class or teacher [at the soon to be opened Claremont Union College] engage in that language....There is no work done here in the Dutch to my know,ege [sic]”.¹⁵ Earlier Wessels stated that “something must be done in the near future”, that the work had “started on a bad footing there” with several Dutch-speaking believers already having given up their beliefs.¹⁶

It seems quite clear that the fledgling church had every intention of reaching the Dutch-speaking population, but simply lacked the means—especially Dutch-speaking personnel—to carry out their plans. For example, in 1893, the South African Conference in session voted to send a minister to work among the companies of Dutch-speaking members along the Vaal River in the Kimberly, however none could be found.¹⁷ There are numerous requests to the GC for assistance. In 1890, the South African Church appealed for “literature in the Dutch language”.¹⁸ In 1893, they voted to renew their request to the GC “for a health book in the Dutch language”¹⁹; and made the same request in 1896.²⁰ In 1897 Pieter Wessels wrote to Ellen White, “...but what about the Dutch work is the question? Hardly anything is done for them.”²¹

Much of the tension seems to be due to a disregard by the American missionaries of the need for contextualization. Phillip Wessels hints at this in his aforementioned 1892 letter to W. C. White: “As you are well aware of the fact there do exist national prejudice and national peculiarities, and the only correct way of dealing with them is to meet them on their own ground as much as possible, with advance and ripe plans and ideas.”²² Wessels hints at an American belief in the inferiority of the Dutch-speaking population when he writes:

¹³ Swanepoel, “The Origin and Early History of the SDA Church in South Africa”, 27.

¹⁴ Swanepoel, “The Origin and Early History of the SDA Church in South Africa”, 42.

¹⁵ Phillip Wessels to W. C. White. October 25, 1892.

¹⁶ Phillip Wessels to W. C. White. October 25, 1892.

¹⁷ Swanepoel, “The Origin and Early History of the SDA Church in South Africa”, 55.

¹⁸ Charles L. Boyd, “South Africa,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 17, 1891, 166.

¹⁹ A. T. Robinson and N. Druillard, “General Meeting of the Seventh-day Adventists of South Africa,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 17, 1893, 44.

²⁰ Hankins, “South African Conference Proceedings,” 784.

²¹ Pieter Wessels to Ellen G. White. April 26, 1897.

²² Phillip Wessels to W. C. White. October 25, 1892. The context of this statement is W. C. White's suggestion that an office of Pacific Press be opened in London & that Seventh-day Adventists from South Africa & other “colonies” deal with it rather than with the Oakland, California Headquarters. Wessel's agreement with White's suggestion suggests that the problem existed (or at least was greatly heightened) because of the American nationality of those involved, rather than the simple fact that they were English-speakers.

I yet love the American people, all though [*sic*] there are some things in us Africanders [*sic*] which they do not like, and we hold that we are just as good as they are in some respects, in other respects we are willing to learn from them, we are not so very primary and crude in our ideas as some think we are. My nationality had long long years to battle against barbarism and disadvantages, but now prosperity has given our country a share, and now my people are lifting up the brow for civilization and advancement.²³

Wessels employs similar language when he bemoans the lack of understanding for Dutch South African racial prejudices: “The best thing in the long run is to be kind to the colored but keep them in their position in their line and you have no trouble....strangers come in our churches...and they go away with bad impressions...our Dutch work is hindered[.] We have to meet the people where they are. We cannot always carry out strict American notions.”²⁴ Wessel’s racist attitude is certainly to be held in contempt. However his statement does illustrate the frustration with American methods and personnel that clearly existed amongst Dutch-speaking South African Adventists of the era.

The Boer War Heightens Tensions

Any tensions between English-speaking and Dutch-speaking Seventh-day Adventists was made much worse by the eruption of the South African (Boer) War in October 1899. As Pantalone has pointed out, “The involvement of so many South Africans in the war and in the political and social dilemmas that surrounded them, made it inevitable that the Seventh-day Adventist Church would also be confronted with its own share of controversies.”²⁵ Many Dutch-speaking church members apparently believed that the English-speaking American administration was strongly biased. Following the retrenchment of a Mr Haupt in 1899 due to the financial constraints brought on by the war, the president of the South African Conference, W. S. Hyatt, complained that his actions were misinterpreted by Dutch-speaking church members: “They tell me straight that it is all because he is Dutch. If he were an American he would be employed and get good wages and nothing that I say helps the matter any.”²⁶

Hyatt’s letter reveals that there was significant tension between the English-speaking and Dutch-speaking church members themselves:

There is another matter that is causing me much perplexity. I feel very anxious about it. It is the feeling between the Dutch and English brethren....[The Dutch brethren] have expressed several times to me that the

²³ Phillip Wessels to Ellen G. White. July 10, 1893.

²⁴ Phillip Wessels to Ellen G. White. July 10, 1893.

²⁵ Antonio Pantalone, “A Missiological Evaluation of the Afrikaanse Konferensie (1968-1974) and its Significance for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Africa” (PhD, University of Durban Westville, 1998), 50.

²⁶ W. S. Hyatt to Ellen G. White. December 14, 1899.

English brethren are very bitter towards them. With the exception of one or two instances I have not heard any of the English brethren express themselves harshly towards the Dutch. This feeling has grown until we have reached a crisis.

Some of the brethren feel that there should be a separation in the work; but they are not all united on this point. Last evening I met with the leading Dutch brethren and sisters and after some consultation a committee was appointed to draft a plan which will express the desires of the Dutch brethren. Now, Sister White, it seems to me that we are in a very critical time. The question of supremacy in South Africa between these classes is very much strained.²⁷

Less than a year later, the situation reached a critical point following a meeting of the South African Conference Executive Committee in July 1901. During this meeting the Committee expressed their strong opposition to a plan formulated by a group of Dutch-speaking members that would have seen the creation of a parallel Dutch-speaking church structure. The spokesman for this group was Hubertus Elffers who took personal exception to the remarks of the committee and soon after resigned his position as Vice President of the Conference “withdrawing from any and every part of the work”.²⁸

In a letter written to the Executive Committee shortly after the meeting Elffers gave his perspective. He summarized the three speeches by Hyatt, Ingle, and Edmead (all American missionaries in leadership positions) as follows:

1. That since the time when I accepted the truth, the introduction of the language question had divided the conferences.
2. That on account of my conviction that the gospel should go to every individual in his mother’s tongue, I am looked upon as a disseminator of strife, and have been kept from visiting other parts of the field lest these too should become polluted by the spirit that is in me.
3. That as long as I hold to the plan for gospel labour laid down in Acts 2:7-11, the work of God will never prosper in Africa and I shall be the means of crippling its course.
4. That the use of the Dutch language is a curse to South Africa, as it has proved politically, and ought not to be countenanced in our work.²⁹

More specific details of the Dutch-speaking member’s proposal are found in the Committee’s reply to Elffers’ letter: “You had suggested that the Dutch should have their

²⁷ W. S. Hyatt to Ellen G. White. December 14, 1899.

²⁸ Quoted in Pantalone, “A Missiological Evaluation of the Afrikaanse Konferensie”, 53.

²⁹ Quoted in Pantalone, “A Missiological Evaluation of the Afrikaanse Konferensie”, 53.

own meeting-houses, with their own services, ordinances, and Sabbath-Schools, and it was this division of the church that we as a Committee could not endorse.”³⁰

It seems likely that the American administrators based their reply—at least in part—on the opposition of Ellen White towards such language based conferences. Previously Elffers had received a letter from W. C. White in response to communications from Hyatt and Hankins “about the desire on the part of some of our South African brethren to have the conference work divided into two sections, or two conferences, in which the Dutch will work for the Dutch and the English for the English.”³¹ White’s letter to Elffers stated,

I was with my mother for two years in Switzerland, Germany, France and Scandinavia, and heard many propositions from our brethren regarding the separation of the work of the several nationalities. The counsel sent us from the Lord was always contrary to such a separation. This counsel urged the brethren of the different nationalities to join together in the most perfect union. Brethren who speak both the German and the French language were advised not to concentrate their efforts upon people of their own nation, but to labour for souls wherever they could find the most ready to listen to the truth. They were also advised not to labour for division according to nationality and language in the conferences, but to forget all national questions, and labour together to carry the message to all the people.³²

Elffers circulated copies of his letter to the Executive Committee to various church members, including the matriarch of the influential Wessels family, A. E. Wessels. She herself wrote to the Conference Committee condemning their actions in very strong terms, and pointing to a long history of tension between the two groups:

For the last eight years accusation of the same sort as those referred to above have been made both privately and publically against the Dutch workers in the cause. Many of the Dutch members of the denomination feel that unless something be done very soon to remedy this state of affairs, not only will there be a serious division in the church, but its loyal members will have to take matters into their own hands and control not only their own funds but their own church, and appeal to another body than the South African Conference for advice and counsel....A meeting will be convened in due time by some of the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to consider what action is to be taken in the future.³³

It is not known whether such a meeting was in fact held, nor if held, what actions were taken. What is clear, is that Elffers did separate from the church—probably along with a small group of like-minded believers. The number of separatists is not known—however upon the group’s eventual reconciliation with the church in 1909, there were 18 others in

³⁰ Quoted in Pantalone, “A Missiological Evaluation of the Afrikaanse Konferensie”, 54.

³¹ Quoted in Pantalone, “A Missiological Evaluation of the Afrikaanse Konferensie”, 55.

³² W. C. White to Hubertus Elffers. December 14, 1899.

³³ Quoted in Pantalone, “A Missiological Evaluation of the Afrikaanse Konferensie”, 54-55.

the group: "At our last session of the conference, in January, 1909, our hearts were all made glad to welcome back Professor Elffers and his company of eighteen who had been disconnected for some time."³⁴ Similarly, it is not known for certain if other groups or individuals severed connections with the church over this issue, though it seems likely. However, those supporting a separatist movement were clearly a minority as Hyatt was re-elected as South African Conference president two months later.³⁵

It is clear that the South African War disrupted the Church in other ways too; a report from the newly established Natal-Transvaal Conference notes that: "The increase in our membership has not been due so much to accessions to the truth, but rather to returning refugees after the close of hostilities between Britain and Boer."³⁶ Similarly, an earlier report in 1900 noted that the work of the South African Conference had been "much hindered by the war" though "with few exceptions the war spirit has not affected the minds of our people, although the temporal affairs of some have been much affected for the time being, and they are now among the refugees."³⁷

An action taken by the Beaconsfield Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1901—towards the end of the South African War—implies a higher level of tension and indeed, active participation on the battlefield; then the above statement would indicate. The Beaconsfield Seventh-day Adventist Church passed a resolution stating (in part):

"Whereas some of our church members have taken a very active part both public and private in the war Spirit that has been almost universal. Therefore—resolved that we deplore this state of things and do earnestly urge all our members that the spirit of War is the spirit of Satan and while we are Christians we cannot take up arms to kill our fellow Beings."

Swanepoel states that, "the experience left wounds on the body of the church that proved almost impossible to heal." However, by December 1903, O. O. Fortner, editor of the *South African Missionary*, noted that there were,

signs of better days for truth in this land. Peculiar difficulties have beset the work of the Lord in times past. Many labourers have worked hard and have sacrificed not a little, but their efforts have been counteracted, weakened, and nullified by a wrong spirit that has pervaded so many of us. Sharp and unfriendly criticism has been indulged in; and some have withdrawn their support, while a few have withdrawn altogether from the truth, apparently for the reason that the work was not conducted according to some individual minds...We are glad that many of the difficulties that have been in our midst in the past are fading one by one. Our people are beginning to understand

³⁴ J. V. Willson, "South African Union Conference: Review of the union field," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 3, 1909, 19. Another report places the number at 20: Porter, "South African Union Conference," 18.

³⁵ G. W. Reaser, "South African Conference," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 3, 1901, 739.

³⁶ G. W. Reaser, "Natal-Transvaal Conference," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 30, 1902, 4.

³⁷ Hankins, "South African Conference," 364.

each other better, and with the better understanding comes a willingness to work together for the advancement of the cause.³⁸

The Dutch/Afrikaans Language

In examining the controversy it is helpful to examine briefly the history of the Dutch language in South Africa. European settlement began in South Africa in 1652 when Jan van Riebeck and a group of approximately 180 Dutch colonists founded what is now Cape Town. Under the Dutch East India Company which governed what was then known as the Cape Colony, the Dutch language was used as the language of administration and importantly, also of the dominant Dutch Reform Church.³⁹

Though Britain gained control of the Cape in 1795 and again in 1806, Dutch remained the dominant language of more than 90% of the European population, despite the formal introduction of English, in 1828, as the language of the courts and of administration. By the mid-1840s, some 15 000 Dutch-speaking colonists had left the Cape Colony and soon established independent Dutch-speaking republics in the Transvaal and Orange Free State. Few of these colonists however could speak or write formal Dutch, but rather spoke a vernacular known as Afrikaans that had evolved from Dutch under the influence of the indigenous Khoikhoi and the imported Malay-speaking slaves. Descendants of slaves were the first to use Afrikaans in print in the 1840s when prayer books in an Arabic script were prepared for local Muslims. The first secular book in Afrikaans was written by Louis Henri Meurant and published in 1861. Most English-speakers (and a number of educated Dutch-speakers) considered Afrikaans as contemptible, in 1857, the *Cape Argus* – a leading Cape Town newspaper – called the Afrikaans language “a miserable bastard jargon”.⁴⁰

Nevertheless there was growing support for both Dutch and Afrikaans. In 1876, the *Die Afrikaanse Patriot* newspaper was begun—the first newspaper to be written entirely in Afrikaans. The first edition began with a call to support the Afrikaans language: “True Afrikaners, we call upon you to acknowledge together with us that the Afrikaans language is the mother tongue that our Dear Lord gave us; and to make a stand with us through thick and thin for our language; and not to rest before our language is generally acknowledged as the national language of our country.”⁴¹ In 1877 J. H. Hofmeyer proposed the formation of a “Society for the Promotion of the use of Dutch” that would help combat the pervasive presence of English; however nothing came of the proposed Association until 1890, when at a congress in Cape Town the *Zuid-Afrikaanse Taalbond* (South African Language

³⁸ O. O. Fortner, "The Closing Year," *South African Missionary*, December, 1903, 1.

³⁹ This introductory overview relies heavily the work of Hermann Giliomee, "The Rise and Possible Demise of Afrikaans as a Public Language," (Cape Town: PRAESA, 2003), 3.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Giliomee, "The Rise and Possible Demise of Afrikaans as a Public Language," 5.

⁴¹ Lloyd Holliday, "The First Language Congress for Afrikaans," in *The Earliest Stage of Language Planning: The "First Congress" Phenomenon* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993), 18.

Association/Union) was formed.⁴² As Elffers was living in Smithfield in the Orange Free State from 1888-1892, he is unlikely to have attended this first congress. He is however, known to have become a member at some stage before his first break with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.⁴³

S. J. Du Toit, an influential promoter of Afrikaans, was unable to be present at the 1890 congress but he authored 71 theses which were presented at the congress and later published as *Afrikaans our National Language: 71 Theses or Propositions*. These theses focussed on the promotion of the Afrikaans language, with du Toit's forty-second thesis reading: "It is the duty of everyone who is against the general domination of English in South Africa, to co-operate for the preservation of the national Language, even though there are differences amongst them about the form". Similarly, his forty-sixth, "The language you speak in your home, and in the market, and in the Legislature, and that you read in your newspaper, must be acknowledged as the official language in schools, in the state, in the church, and everywhere." The sixty-fourth thesis links the promotion of the Afrikaans language to the development of Afrikaner nationalism: "A general development of the spirit of the nation can only take place in the national language."⁴⁴

A second Afrikaans Language Congress was held at Paarl in 1896 with approximately 100 in attendance. The Congress accomplished a number of important tasks including the formation of teams to compile and publish a grammar (*A Comparative Grammar of Afrikaans and English*, published in 1897) and a dictionary (the *Patriot Dictionary*, published in 1902). Another committee was tasked with the formulation of spelling rules, while a monthly journal promoting creative writing in Afrikaans (*Ons Klyntji – Our Little One*) was also strongly promoted.

Though all of Elffers early published works were focussed on the Dutch Language, in 1900 he published his *The Englishman's Guide to the Speedy and Easy Acquirement of Cape Dutch (Grammar, Useful Information, Conversation) for the Use of Travellers, Settlers, and Military Men*. This work focussed on Cape Dutch – Afrikaans – and noted that a knowledge of this language "may in fact be called indispensable to all South Africans."⁴⁵ Later he states that "The language of South Africa is confined between the geographical borders of the country, and must be strictly so. The vernacular is handy and good in its way, but its birth and growth are both local....The use of Cape Dutch is extensive enough, and the inherent power of the South African language is sufficiently developed to ensure for it a long life."⁴⁶

⁴² Holliday, "The First Language Congress for Afrikaans," 19.

⁴³ Pantalone, "A Missiological Evaluation of the Afrikaanse Konferensie", 53.

⁴⁴ All quotations from Holliday, "The First Language Congress for Afrikaans," 21.

⁴⁵ Hubertus Elffers, *The Englishman's Guide to the Speedy and Easy Acquirement of Cape Dutch (Grammar, Useful Information, Conversation) for the Use of Travellers, Settlers, and Military Men*. (Cape Town: J. C. Jutta & Co., 1900), 5. The work went through 5 editions, the last published in 1914.

⁴⁶ Elffers, *The Englishman's Guide to the Speedy and Easy Acquirement of Cape Dutch*, 7.

In 1904 – while estranged from the Seventh-day Adventist church – Elffers published his first book written in Afrikaans, a novel of the South African War called *Voor God en Vaderland (For God and Fatherland)*.⁴⁷ In the novel, Elffers clearly and strongly promotes a nationalistic belief in the need for Afrikaans literature, thus echoing the calls of the First and Second Afrikaans Language Congresses:

The successful development, yes even the survival of the Afrikaans language, which is developing out of the Dutch language, is unthinkable, unless the language urgently creates its own literature that it can call its own. This literature will guarantee the life of the language. My 'story' must at least in a small way represent a well meaning attempt, to contribute to this need... according to my ability.⁴⁸

In 1929, in the biographical sketch that introduced his book, *Scripture Lights*, Elffers noted that "The introduction of Afrikaans into the nation's life has completely thrown my books off the market; yet grateful testimony has been borne from many sides, and during a lengthy period, to their intrinsic worth".⁴⁹

Despite these advances, it was not until 1925 that Afrikaans was recognized as an official language alongside Dutch and English.⁵⁰ D. F. Malan, who introduced the bill, noted that in the previous decade more literary works had appeared in Afrikaans than English books originating in South Africa; that Afrikaans was being taught in all primary schools; and that at South African universities, theses written in Afrikaans were being accepted.⁵¹ This official recognition of Afrikaans saw its rapid spread: "Afrikaans almost immediately replaced Dutch as a medium of instruction, and as the language in which laws and official documents were published."⁵²

Such recognition did not of course, vanish the tensions present between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans. In 1926 Elffers left the Seventh-day Adventist Church for a second and final time. Approximately 50 followers joined him—including a number of family members. Much less is known about this second separation as Elffers was no longer employed by the church, having retired c. 1920. Even though he was given Honorary Ministerial Credentials in 1921, this second separation was essentially ignored by the church's publications and little is known about Elffer's exact motivations.⁵³ Elffers stepped down as leader of the group in 1929 due to ill-health and M. W. Carey—an ex-Seventh-day

⁴⁷ Hubertus Elffers, *Voor God en Vaderland* (Wynberg, South Africa: Rustica Press, 1904).

⁴⁸ Elffers, *Voor God en Vaderland*. Translation supplied by Weiers Coetser.

⁴⁹ Hubertus Elffers, *Scripture Lights: An Epitome of the Faith I Have Professed and in Which I Die* (Wynberg, South Africa: Rustica Press, 1929), xi.

⁵⁰ Giliomee, "The Rise and Possible Demise of Afrikaans as a Public Language," 14.

⁵¹ Giliomee, "The Rise and Possible Demise of Afrikaans as a Public Language," 14.

⁵² Giliomee, "The Rise and Possible Demise of Afrikaans as a Public Language," 15.

⁵³ B. E. Beddoe, "Honoured Workers," *African Division Outlook*, August 15, 1921, 3.

Adventist minister who had his credentials withdrawn – took over as leader.⁵⁴ Elffers died in 1931 and it is not known what happened to the group—it seems unlikely that their existence continued for very long following Elffers’ death.

It is certain that tensions between English-speakers and Afrikaans-speakers remained, though it seems likely that there were additional factors that played an important role in Elffers’ decision to separate for a second time. While Elffers apparently retained a belief in most Adventist beliefs, his theology appears to have taken an almost mystical turn.⁵⁵ The group took the name “The Brotherhood of Christ” and met in a small chapel that Elffers had erected on his Rustica Press property many years earlier.

Conclusions

Elffers is an important figure in the history of the early South African Seventh-day Adventist Church—as well as a figure of importance in South African history generally—he is the only Seventh-day Adventist to have been listed in the *Dictionary of South African Biography*.⁵⁶ The importance of his contributions as author, translator, printer, and publisher, have been generally under-acknowledged. In addition, an examination of his life reveals much about the cultural and language tensions that filled early South African Seventh-day Adventist history—tensions that while they have been in many ways reframed—clearly still exist in the South African Seventh-day Adventist Church today.

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⁵⁴ Ronald Thompson, “A History of the Growth and Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Southern Africa, 1920-1960.” (PhD, Rhodes University, 1977), 22-26.

⁵⁵ For an overview of his theology after his separation, see Elffers, *Scripture Lights: An Epitome of the Faith I Have Professed and in Which I Die*.

⁵⁶ W. J. de Kock, Daniel Wilhelmus Krüger, and C. J. Beyers, eds., *Dictionary of South African Biography*, 5 vols., vol. 1 (Cape Town, South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council, 1968).

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