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(Special Section) Translating Race: Mission Hymns and the Challenge of Christian Identity

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(Special Section) Translating Race: Mission Hymns and the Challenge of Christian Identity

Cover Page Footnote

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Translating Race

Mission Hymns and the Challenge of Christian Identity

Philip Burnett

Of all the paraphernalia, customs, practices, beliefs, and language disseminated by missionaries during the nineteenth century, the most confusing must have been race.¹ The word “race” was used in English-language hymnody and came to be part of the vocabulary and concepts that had to be translated into new vernacular versions of hymns. The race referred to in hymns offered converts redemption and equality, but these values were at odds with the terms of the racially segregated colonial societies in which Christian mission work took place. Missionaries and Indigenous peoples, both converted and unconverted, would no doubt have been aware of these contradictions, because it was impossible to keep the racial segregation of colonial society out of the mission station, where verses such as Galatians 3:28 were read and taught: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

In this article I explore how the meanings of “race” (and in particular “Christian race”) were translated for use in missions during the nineteenth century. First, I present a case study of hymns translated into isiXhosa for use on the South African Anglican missions established in the eastern part of the Cape Colony (today known as the Eastern Cape). I use close analysis and archival research in order to explore how race was understood. The isiXhosa hymns I will discuss were all based on lyrics from *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, and so I will also look at the understandings of race that are found in

that book. Finally, I use this moment of translation to examine missionary reports and writings in order to place these hymns within missionaries’ attitudes to race and race relations. I wish to explore how race was framed in the English-language hymnody on which missionaries drew, and how this reflected the racial realities of the mission field. As noted above, race and race relations were part of the frameworks by which people involved with mission saw (and were made to see) themselves in colonial society. Examining how race was thought about in the realm of faith and belief can, in turn, help us to understand better how people negotiated the fluid and fraught world of colonial race relations.²

But first, a note on the word “translation,” which can be thought of in different ways. In its more common usage, it refers to the process of converting from one language to another. An essential part of translation is conversion and adaptation, and the effective transference of meaning. The word also has deep roots in religious practice, as the other sense in which translation can be thought of is transferring actual things, and here it has most often been used to refer to the process of moving the relics (usually of a holy figure or a ruler) from one place to another. This form of translation is an ancient Christian practice and has referred not only to transferrals on earth but also to heaven, when it signifies the change from an earthly to a spiritual life. I mention these meanings at the start of this article as the word “translation” itself provides a useful lens through which

to examine the process of translating hymns. Translation on one level represents a change of language, but this itself comes out of the need to translate (or move) a text from one place to another, a process which has implications for meaning as texts come to be understood in a new linguistic and cultural context. There is also the means to which these texts were put in mission work: they existed to help converts translate themselves into a Christian way of life. It is with these notions of mobility, transferral, and the changes that go along with these processes that I proceed to examine how race operated in these mission hymns.

Translating Race

Example 1 is a hymn translated from English into isiXhosa sometime toward the end of the nineteenth century, and in it we find an example of how race was understood and interpreted in the context of colonial mission work.³ “Vuman’amandla ka-Yesu” translated “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name,” a popular hymn at the time

in Britain. The original English hymn was written by Edward Peronnet (1721–1792), and its first appearance in an Anglican hymnal was in the 1889 edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, the hymn which was the main source for translations made by the Anglican missionaries working in the Cape Colony. The first line of the isiXhosa version translates literally as “Exclaim/sing the praises of the power of Jesus”: *vumana* is an imperative (to exclaim or to sing the praises); *amandla* means power; and *ka-Yesu* is built of the isiXhosa version of the name for “Jesus,” with *ka-* indicating possession. The translator was Daniel Malgas (ca. 1853–1936), a Black Xhosa Christian in Anglican holy orders who was known as a prolific hymn writer and translator.⁴ The earliest isiXhosa version of this hymn that I have found is in *Incwadi yamaculo yase ‘Church of England’* (1900), where it was printed as hymn 184, with ST. LEONARD and STOCKTON (found in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*) as the suggested tunes (see Exx. 1a and 1b).⁵



Example 1a: “Vuman’amandla ka-Yesu” (Malgas/Peronnet) with the tune ST. LEONARD (Henry Smart)



Example 1b: “Vuman’amandla ka-Yesu” (Malgas/Peronnet) with the tune STOCKTON (Thomas Wright)

One of the lines in the English version ran, “Ye seed of Israel’s chosen race” and was rendered in isiXhosa by Malgas as “Nina nzala kaYakobi”: *Nina* is “you” (plural), while *inzala* is the noun for “seed,” which also means, according to a contemporary dictionary, “progeny, generation, race.”⁶ *kaYakobi* is built with the possessive *ka* (of/belonging to) and *Yakobi*, an isiXhosa adaptation of “Jacob”: the phonological structure in isiXhosa retains the sound of the word in English.⁷ The hymn addresses all Christians, telling them that they are the seeds of Jacob, because of the word *nina* (English, unlike isiXhosa, does distinguish between the singular and plural versions of “you”). Both the English and isiXhosa versions framed Christian race in terms of lineage and descent: Christians were a race because they were linked to a common ancestor, in this case Jacob/Israel, the son of Abraham.⁸ Christian race was different from biological or visual race in that it was determined not by ethnicity or skin color, but by belief and belonging.

Missionary teaching about Christian race presupposed unity and equality: all human beings were the same in the eyes of God. The imagery of race in hymns reinforced the message and aims of Christian mission, which, simply put, were to draw more people into the Christian community to become adherents of the faith, and hymns were part of the apparatus used to express what that meant. Mission hymns not only inscribed this image of race, but also performed it: singing the same text together could be a powerful expression of unity.⁹ But while hymns were meant to communicate and create unity, they could also have the opposite effect. Paul

Landau has noted how mission literacy—an important requirement in order to be able to use, for instance, a hymn book—created divisions within Indigenous societies as it challenged community identities and destabilized traditional epistemologies.¹⁰

How much non-mothertongue-speaking missionaries knew about idiomatic language varied from one person to another. Even those who became highly proficient speakers often enlisted the help of Indigenous converts when it came to translation work and how to express English imagery in isiXhosa. While there is evidence of a lot of translation activity, there are very few accounts of how the translations were actually done and what informed those who did the work.¹¹ Some white British missionaries resorted to translation methods. Henry Waters, who worked on St. Mark’s mission, made an appeal for a copy of “Selwyn’s Analysis” to help with translation.¹² Whether or not Waters actually used Selwyn is another matter, but the book gives some insight into how missionaries approached translation. Selwyn’s universal method for translation contended that all languages had a common origin, a belief that came from the Book of Genesis, chapter 1. As Selwyn observed: “beneath that rude exterior he [the missionary] will find thoughts and feelings answering his own.” The prevailing belief was, therefore, that texts could be transposed from one language to another and still communicate ideas shared by all people, regardless of linguistic or cultural background.

Four hymns from *Incwadi Yamaculo yase ‘Church of England’* (see page 95) illustrate the different ways in which race was expressed when translated into

isiXhosa.¹³ In many ways, these hymns are “true” adaptations of the original English versions, as the metric schemes and number of verses were retained in order for the same tunes to be used.¹⁴ The first hymn is “Abebehlel’ebumnyamen” by Rev. J. J. Xaba, a Black Anglican mission priest who worked in the Diocese of St. John’s.¹⁵ Xaba’s isiXhosa text is a version of John Morison’s 1781 hymn “The Race That Long in Darkness Pin’d” (a paraphrase of Isaiah 9:2–8) and associated with Epiphany, the Christian feast observed 12 days after Christmas. Xaba probably knew the *Hymns Ancient and Modern* version, which altered the first line. J. R. Watson explains that when the hymn appeared in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, the editors wished to improve the language and poetry, hence the change from “race” to “people.”¹⁶ Nonetheless, the hymn alludes to *a people*: in both version of the original English this is the Jewish people, while in the isiXhosa translation the race or people came to refer to Christian converts, who had been separated but were now “enlightened,” making the hymn directly applicable to these missions.

A figurative reference to race is also found in the next translation, “Sidumis’ i-Nkosi yetu” by Rev. W. Philip, a white missionary priest who grew up and was trained in the Eastern Cape. It was based on a hymn by Thomas Kelly (1769–1855), usually sung at Passiontide (being a meditation on Galatians 6:14, its thematic focus is the cross of Christ and redemption through Christ’s death and resurrection). In the isiXhosa hymn book it appeared in the “General Hymns” section.¹⁷ In this hymn, race is associated with deliverance. The “ransomed race” is a reference to Revelation 5:9 and refers

to the Christian people. In his translation, Philip used the noun *abakululwa*, a plural that means delivered or free people, and derives from the verb *ukukulula* (to loosen or untie). The *-wa* suffix denotes action toward, so in other words “the delivered” becomes “those who were delivered.” Another figurative reference to “Christian people” in this hymn comes in the second line: *aboni*, the plural of *umboni* (someone who sees). Here, Christians are presented as those who are able to see, referring to the truth of the scriptures and belief in God.

“Siyavuya ngokuvuya” is a translation of the Ascensiontide hymn “Hail the Day That Sees Him Rise” by Charles Wesley (1707–1788). Here the image of Christ as the “first-fruits” of the Christian race is altered to portray Christians as those who are near to Christ.¹⁸ “Zukisa mpefumlo wami” is a translation by William Frederick Bassi (1858–1917) of “Praise My Soul,” a hymn by H. F. Lyte (1793–1847) that was first published in 1834. Bassi was born into a Christian family, educated at Lovedale College, Alice and later worked on Anglican mission stations.¹⁹ He translated race as *intlanga*, the plural form of *uHlanga*, meaning a tribe, generation, or people. Here, depicting race was done through imagery that evoked belonging, light, and deliverance.

What these four examples have in common is that, after nearly 50 years of Anglican mission work in the Eastern Cape, translators provided different understandings of the word “race.” As such, they give us a glimpse into how Christian race was understood by and presented to isiXhosa-speaking Christians at the turn of the twentieth century. It is worth noting that two of the four

translators of the texts examined here were mother-tongue speakers. Xaba and Bassi, both Black converts, had experience of Christianity and Christian culture and so were able to provide a more nuanced understanding and use of the language; Patten and Philip, on the other hand, were white missionaries who spoke isiXhosa as a second language. Patten originally came from England, while Philip was born, grew up, and trained for the priesthood in the Cape Colony. The first isiXhosa hymn book for Anglicans was published in 1869, and the majority of the 48 hymns it contained were translations from *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. Most of the translators in that edition were white missionaries, although as new editions were produced (1873, 1875, 1883, 1890), there were not only more hymns and original texts, but also more contributions from Black Christians.

Another feature of these translations is the figurative references they make to race: none of them use a literal word. Kropf's *Dictionary* provided five words for race in isiXhosa:

1. *ulu-Ntu*: "The human race, mankind." (294)
2. *im-Punde*: "The relic of a family or race." (431)
3. *in-Zala*: "Progeny, generation, race." (485)
4. *izi-Zozo*: "The foundation or source of races." (492)
5. *isi-Zukulwana*: "A generation, race, class of men." (492)

This vocabulary, however, is not evident in the four examples examined here (although Malgas did use *inzala* in the translation discussed earlier).

These translations appeared at a time when "conversionist" approaches to mission were under pressure from racial legislation and colonial government policy.²⁰ Andrew C. Ross points out that from the 1890s onwards, belief in the equality of all human beings irrespective of race, held and taught by many missionaries, were challenged by a combination of settler government policies that were becoming increasingly hostile toward mission education and the dominance of new theories about human history and evolution.²¹ The hardening of colonial policies and attitudes was in counterpoint to the increasing involvement of Black Africans in church affairs, and those involved in the Anglican missions would have been aware of these debates, and how they were playing out locally.²² This was the period when moves were being made toward Black disenfranchisement, culminating in the infamous Land Act of 1913.²³ Nonetheless, by the turn of the century, there were more Black Anglican clergy, and outstations were being run by Black clergy, catechists, and teachers.

What these translations suggest is that new Christians were having their say on what Christian race meant through providing additional understandings of the word. Christianity itself had to be refashioned if it was to take hold and become established in Xhosa society. Perhaps these early translators understood the complexities of the word "race" particularly in the wider colonial context that operated on racial lines. In order to further understand how these understandings arose, I turn now to look at how English-language hymns expressed the concept of Christian race and the context in which these ideas arose.

**Verse 1 of “Abebehlel’ebumnyamen” /
“The People/Race That in Darkness Sat”
(Xaba/Morison):**

The people/race that in darkness sat
Abebehlel’ebumnyamen’
*They who were separated [because they were]
in the darkness/ignorance*

A glorious Light have seen;
Bayakanyiselwa;
They are illuminated/caused to shine;

The Light has shined on them who long
Aba kwitunzi lokufa
They who are in the shadow of death

In shades of death have been.
Babon’ ukukanya.
They see and they are bright.

Abe- = “they” (auxiliary used to form a compound tense)
-be- = pronoun for third person plural
ukuhlela = to sift grain, shake out (literal). Also a verb:
to separate, sort.
ubuMnyama = darkness, gloom (literal). Also a noun:
ignorance (figurative).
itunzi lokufa = shadow of death

**Verse 6 of “Sidumis’ i-Nkosi yetu” / “We Sing
the Praise of Him Who Died” (Philip/Kelly)**

To Christ, Who won for sinners grace
Makazukiswe u-Kristu
Let Christ be praised,
By bitter grief and anguish sore,
Owabafelay’ aboni;
Who died for those who have seen;
Be praise from all the ransomed race
Ngabo bonk’ abakululwa.
By them all the delivered/free ones,
Forever and for evermore,
Kuse kuw’ amapakade.
To eternity.

[In the isiXhosa version, “Be praised” is in the first line:
Makuzukiswe]
aboni (*ababoni*), plural of *um-Boni* = who sees
Ngobo = by them, those people (i.e. who give praise)
Bonk’ (*bonke*) = all
Abakululwa = plural: those who are free

**Verse 5 of “Siyavuya ngokuvuya” /
“Hail the Day That Sees Him Rise”
(Patten/Charles Wesley and Cotterill)**

Still for us He intercedes, Alleluia!
Yen’uyasitetelela! Aliluya!
*He is the one who speaks for us [in that place,
i.e. heaven/above]! Alleluia!*

His prevailing death He pleads, Alleluia!
Ngokufa wasifela; Aliluya!
*Through dying he died for us
(i.e. for our sake); Alleluia!*

Near Himself prepares our place, Alleluia!
Ap’ akona somlandela Aliluya!
There where he is we will follow. Alleluia!

He the first-fruits of our race, Alleluia!
Yena owasandulela. Aliluya!
He is the one who for us was the first. Alleluia.

Yen’ (*yena*) = he (emphatic pronoun)
owasandulela is made up of *o-* (third person subject
pronoun, i.e., who) + *-wa-* (third person past form of
“to be”) + *-s(i)-* (us) + *ukw’ Andulela* = verb (to be the first)

**Verse 4 of “Zukisa mpefumlo wami” / “Praise,
My Soul, the King of Heaven” (Bassi/Lyte)**

Angels in the height adore Him!
Izitunywa zapezulu
Angels of the heights/above
Ye behold Him face to face;
Ziyawa pambi kwake,
They [angels] fall before him,
Saints triumphant bow before Him!
Bememelel’ abangcwele,
The saints they are standing,
Gathered in from every race;
Bengabentlanga zonke;
They are from all nations;
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Aliluya! Aliluya!
Alleluia! Alleluia!

Praise with us the God of grace.
Zukisani u-Tixo.
(You, plural) praise the Lord.

Izitunywa (plural of *umtunywa*) had several meanings: a
messenger, a sent one, an apostle; it was also used to mean angel
Intlanga/ihlanga (part of the word *Bengabentlanga*) = a nation

Race in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*

The understandings in the translations examined above were reformulating framings of race from *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, the hymn book published in Britain which formed the bedrock of the Anglicans' mission hymnody in the Eastern Cape. The anthology was produced in a period when the hymn enjoyed huge popularity. The genre was an important vehicle of expression for British religious and cultural values. As Jeffrey Richards has noted, in the nineteenth century hymns became "[as much a] part of the imaginative inner life of the [British] people as any musical form."²⁴

The point Richards makes is that hymns expressed and instilled values. Hymns were sung not only in churches, but in homes, schools, and at community events. This was partly due to their volume and ubiquity as a form of religious and cultural expression: between 1837 and 1901 Ian Bradley estimates that in Britain some

400,000 hymns were written, and 1,200 separate hymn book titles were published.²⁵ The sheer volume of hymns produced in the period is an indication of their ubiquity and suggests that their poetry and music became embedded in the cultural imagination of the British population, whether churchgoing or not.

Table 1 shows a sample of hymns found in *Hymns Ancient and Modern* that made direct reference to race, phrases like "guilty race," "ruined race," calling Christians "the race of Adam's children," and referring to God and Christ as "the Hope of all our race." There were other hymns that used vocabulary such as "chosen," "nation," and "people" to invoke the idea of a Christian race. For example, "Creator of the Starry Height," a translation by J. M. Neale of a ninth-century Latin hymn, is a plea to Christ to hear the suffering of the whole world ("Jesu, redeemer hear us all"). The contrast in this hymn was between Christ,

Number	First line	Verse(s) in which race is mentioned
31	Creator of the Starry Height	(verse 2) Thou, sorrowing at the helpless cry Of all creation doomed to die, Didst save our lost and guilty race By healing gifts of heavenly grace.
45	O Christ, Redeemer of Our Race	(verse 1) O Christ, Redeemer of our race, Thou Brightness of the Father's Face, Of Him and with Him ever One, Ere times and seasons had begun. (verse 3) Remember, Lord of life and grace, How once, to save a ruined race, Thou didst our very flesh assume In Mary's undefiled womb.
46	Of the Father's Love Begotten	(verse 3) He is found in human fashion, Death and sorrow here to know, That the race of Adam's children, Doomed by Law to endless woe, May not henceforth die and perish In the dreadful gulf below, Evermore and evermore! (verse 4) O that Birth for ever blessed, When the Virgin, full of grace, By the Holy Ghost conceiving, Bare the Saviour of our race; And the Babe, the world's Redeemer, First revealed His sacred Face, Evermore and evermore!
77	O Thou Who Dost to Man Accord	(verse 1) O Thou Who dost to man accord His highest prize, his best reward; Thou Hope of all our race; Jesu, to Thee we now draw near, Our earnest supplications hear, Who humbly seek Thy face.

Table 1: Hymns in *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (1861) That Mention Race

characterized as the light of the world which brings salvation, and grace, the “Creator of the starry height,” “Redeemer of us all.” It is into this distinction between the earthly and the heavenly that the idea of race was introduced: the human world is referred to as a “lost and guilty” race that is “doomed to die.” A similar contrast is found in “O Christ, Redeemer of our Race” (also translated from a Latin hymn), where again the human world stands in contrast to the light provided from heaven. In these two hymns race is therefore associated with the darkness of the earth; race presupposes sin, darkness. Crucially, however, race requires the presence of Christ to bring humanity to redemption.

The ideas of race expressed in the hymns found in *Hymns Ancient and Modern* were not recent: many of the hymns which mentioned race had been embedded in the English hymn repertoire for decades. For instance, Charles Wesley’s “Hail the Day That Sees Him Rise,” written in 1739, contained the line “He that first-fruit of our race,” referring to Christ as the savior of the Christian race. Here, race was indelibly linked with notions of what it meant to be Christian, not just through belief but also through everyday aspects of life.

In Britain, these ideas were easily disseminated as people engaged with hymns. *Hymns Ancient and Modern* was a denominational example of a hymnal that appealed to the broader church as it was used to emphasize, and indeed came to embody, the lineage of the Church of England’s history, thus exhibiting an image of the British as a Christian race. The hymn book was therefore used politically and culturally as much as it was religiously. British Christian congregations, when they sang hymns with lines such as those

identified above, were thus encouraged to *imagine* themselves, on one level, as the chosen race, the inheritors of the promise made to Israel.

Missions, Race, and Sharing Faith

Distinguishing between races was a Victorian obsession, and countless theories were published which provided explanations for racial differences, the aims of which were to show why some races could be called superior and others inferior. One example is Robert Knox’s *The Races of Men* (1850), the conclusions and arguments of which used comparisons of physical characteristics between people of different race groups. The obsession with classification, differentiation, and ordering was heightened by imperial and colonial expansion and the European “civilising mission” that sought to deliver people and lands seen as different and inferior. Indeed, Knox’s thesis was to explain what he observed during his own travels to the Cape Colony.

Missionary attitudes to race and race relations were formed in Eurocentric and imperial frameworks, but they came to be challenged by the human encounters that missionaries had with Indigenous people, and the missionary desire to build a common community. As Jeffrey Cox notes, this tension gave rise to a question with which missionaries had to grapple: “can we participate in a shared faith, on the basis of spiritual equality, in an imperial setting?”²⁶

There was a further tension arising from the colonial context in which the Anglican missions operated. African converts to Christianity, therefore, were confronted with several notions of race predicated on their heritage, their adopted religion, and

the way they were viewed in the colonial system of societal ordering. The missions were in the Eastern Cape, which, although populated by different groups of people and nations, was homogenized into what colonial authorities labeled “black” races. This was largely for the convenience of the colonial authorities, including many missionaries, who struggled to understand the nuances in language, customs, governance, and society between different groups of people. As Lewis R. Gordon explains, race grew out of processes of global colonization to support the worldview of European superiority. African peoples forced into that process experienced their transformation from the variety of ethnic groups to which they belonged into a singular category of racialization: “blacks.”²⁷

Many missionaries did appreciate that the Indigenous population was not homogenous. Henry Waters in a report published in *Mission Field* wrote, “The Christians at St Mark’s are of mixed races—Xhosa, Tembu, Fingo, Basuto, Hottentot, and European; but all work in harmony.”²⁸ While such understandings to a degree reflected missionary fervor and idealism, they nonetheless illustrate that some missionaries acknowledged that biological race did not necessarily determine the ability to be a Christian.²⁹ It was also evident on the Anglican missions that further groups were created, dividing people along Christian and non-Christian lines which cut across and contradicted black-white divisions. For instance, Peter Masiza (ca. 1840–1907), the first Black person to be ordained into Anglican holy orders in South Africa, referred to unconverted Black people as “red people,” a term that refers to the traditional custom

of wearing a blanket dyed red ochre that persisted among amaXhosa who would not convert to western modes of dress.³⁰

Missionaries arrived with a variety of different understandings of race, largely based on the colonial homogenizing of race into “black” and “white,” false dichotomies which disregarded preexisting groups. Race was interchangeable with language, dress, domestic habits, and character, not to mention religion and religious belief. John Hardie, a missionary at St. Luke’s mission in the 1850s, remarked about the Xhosa that “the religious sense is so thoroughly dead . . . nothing short of God’s grace can revive it. We Missionaries of this generation must be grateful if we are permitted to sow the seed of Life broad-cast over the dark field of Heathendom.”³¹ Hardie, it seems, did not separate religion and race, and saw what he called the Xhosas’ “abominable rites” and “nationality” as intermingled, leaving him wondering about the futility of his mission.

A Multiracial Enterprise

The reality on the ground differed from the characterizations that missionaries had acquired and which, at first, conditioned their attitudes toward mission work. For one thing, attitudes had to change. Even though many did (and continued to), it was difficult for missionaries to issue defamatory remarks about the people who had joined and were employed on mission stations. As early as 1859, missionary reports suggest that white missionaries were relying on Black staff to run mission stations. By 1880, Charles Taberer estimated his mission to have 1,000 members. In addition to his wife and one other “European” teacher, the rest of the 26 staff who ran the mission were Black. Missionary statistics are always difficult to

work with, but even when painted with a broad brushstroke, they give a sense of the urgency for racial cooperation with which white missionaries had to approach their work. These statistics do show not only that white missionaries relied on Indigenous Christians, but also that Indigenous Christians (not to mention those who remained unconverted) outnumbered white missionaries. While missions might have been established by white missionaries, the real work of conversion was largely carried out by Black missionaries, as missionary reports for this period attest.

Many white missionaries opposed racial segregation and racist policies brought about through colonial government policies, especially when they impacted on mission station services and other activity.³² This meant preaching and enforcing—to both their converts and the wider settler society—the message of Galatians 3. Missionaries, then, found their own views challenged by personal encounters in the field, where they found that religion, religious belief, and race were inseparable, and with this came the realization that their views on race had to shift if they were to have success in their project of proselytization. Such an example is found in the memoirs of John Armstrong, first bishop of Grahamstown. After meeting with two messengers from Sarhili (1810–1892), king of the Gcaleka Xhosa, Armstrong recalled his surprise at hearing that the two men were not in favor of war. “And yet how often have I been told that the [Xhosa] are a hopeless race,” wrote Armstrong.³³ Later Armstrong, frustrated with the colonial attitudes, practices, and policies that prevented his congregations from being racially mixed, called for the church to “beat down

these walls of partition.”³⁴ As the century progressed, many mission institutions did become multiracial and open to all races—such as Lovedale College, founded by the Glasgow Missionary Society—in defiance of the surrounding societies’ views. And yet, white missionaries often had to explain their position to Black converts. Henry Waters reported that when Henry Callaway, bishop of St. John’s, visited his mission, he gave a lecture “on the position of the Government towards the natives.”³⁵

This is not to say that all white missionaries held the same views, but rather that any attitudes they held had to shift in the mission field. Furthermore, there was considerable overlap between the projects of proselytizing and civilizing. Many missionaries saw their task of working with the local population as both conversion and cultural reform. Take, for example, the comments of missionary Albert Maggs, who wrote, “Many of them [converted people] are not yet so far advanced in religion as to see the necessity and duty of family prayers in their own homes.”³⁶ Maggs was talking about the “benefits” of daily prayer, and how habituation and discipline were a means to change daily habits and lifestyle. Not all missionaries were quite so severe, however. Writing in the same publication in the same year, another missionary, William Greenstock, noted, “There are many points in their character which render them open to good influences, and they have warm feelings, which admit religious ideas readily into the mind. It is interesting to read the effect that preaching and singing sometimes have upon them.”³⁷

Missionaries distinguished between “missionary work” (Indigenous conversion) and “colonial work” (relating to white

settlers), but they often had to fulfill both roles, a task that required meeting two sets of expectations.³⁸ The missionary Alan Gibson wrote that at his mission in Umtata (known today as Mthatha), a separate church had to be built for Europeans, ostensibly so that services could be held at “more suitable hours.”³⁹ The reasoning on the basis of “more suitable hours” is not clear, but suggests that factors in wider society that kept white and Black congregants apart impacted on the way mission were run, regardless of how egalitarian and nonracial missionaries’ views were. Missions also faced criticism for teaching literacy, a project of which hymns were part. The Christian message of equality was a threat to those who denounced mission education, as Norman Etherington has noted: “They [denunciators of mission education] argued that mission education at the higher levels would be only too well understood by converts, who might imbibe doctrines of equality, demand equal rights, and foment insurrections.”⁴⁰

Singing hymns (let alone writing and translating them) required the ability to read, and this had to be taught. Racist criticism came from outside missions, so those involved in mission work would have been all too aware of the ways in which race was deployed to criticize, segregate, and construct difference. Among the missionaries themselves there were competing attitudes and understandings of race, complicated further by the society in which they existed.

Conclusion

This article has explored some of the ways in which the concept of Christian race was framed when missionary hymns were translated into isiXhosa during the nineteenth century. My primary focus has been on the language that was used for the word “race” and how that differed from uses of the word in English-language hymnody. I have argued that the understandings of race had to change not only because of the involvement of Indigenous interlocutors and converts in the translation process, but also because of the context in which missions were operating.⁴¹ To “belong” to the Christian race meant being converted or being born into it, and these are the terms along which Christian missionaries would have thought. As such, Christianity was not just about religion per se, nor was it a simple matter of aligning oneself to a new theology. It required a realignment of lifestyle to follow the commerce, culture, and civilization proffered by Christian missionaries. But missions existed in a societal context which was racially conditioned, meaning that racial equality might have existed on the mission station and in the Christian sense, yet beyond the confines of the mission station racial inequality was rife. Mission Christianity could offer membership in the Christian race, but what it could not do was offer equal racial membership in an unequal colonial society.

NOTES

1 The literature on British nineteenth-century mission history, most of which deals with missionary practices and methods, is extensive, but the key issues and themes are outlined in the contributions found in *Missions and Empire*, ed. Norman Etherington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

2 Mission historiography is largely silent on the topic of hymns and their functions within mission. Hymnology has increasingly broadened to include mission hymnody, and recent examples engaging with the topic can be found in *The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology*, ed. J. R. Watson and Emma Hornby, <http://www.hymnology.co.uk> (accessed February 20, 2023). See also Michael Webb's "Heart, Spirit and Understanding: Protestant Hymnody as an Agent of Transformation in Melanesia, 1840s–1940s," *Journal of Pacific History* 50/3 (2015): 275–303.

3 IsiXhosa is an Nguni language, which is spoken in a variety of dialects in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. Orthography varied in the nineteenth century, and I have kept to spellings as they appear on the pages of the sources I use, explaining any variations and inconsistencies where necessary. A further note on language: in many contemporary sources, words and language which are today considered offensive are used. I have replaced such language with ellipses.

4 I am grateful to Andrew-John Bethke for providing Malgas's vital dates. In this article, "Xhosa" refers to someone born in the region who spoke isiXhosa and would have been considered Black by colonial authorities. "Black" and "white" when used in this article are the categories that would have been imposed by the contemporary colonial society.

5 *Incwadi yamaculo yase 'Church of England'* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1900). Whether "Vuman'amandla ka-Yesu" was sung to these tunes is not known for certain. It is highly likely that other tunes were used in the mission field. Tunes were probably selected on the basis of familiarity. In the 1917 edition of the isiXhosa Anglican hymn book, only St. Leonard is suggested, while the 1919 edition suggested St. Leonard and University.

6 Kropf's *Dictionary* of 1899 (revised 1915) is the nearest printed source for the isiXhosa language; it explains the meaning of *in-Zala* as "progeny, generation, race." See Albert Kropf, A . . . -*English Dictionary* (Lovedale: Lovedale Mission, 1915), 485. This dictionary was by no means perfect and has been critiqued for misconstruing how culture inflected the meanings of words. See Koliswa Moropa and Alet Kruger, "Mistranslation of Culture-Specific

terms in Kropf's Kafir-English Dictionary," *South African Journal of African Languages* 20/1 (2000): 70–79, DOI: 10.1080/02572117.2000.10587414. Moropa and Kruger point out that translation is both interlingual and intercultural (79).

7 I am grateful to Dr. Simthembile Xeketwana for this explanation.

8 A reference to Genesis 25:19–26.

9 For a study of how music making on mission "performed" race, see Grant Olwage, "John Knox Bokwe, Colonial Composer: Tales About Race and Music," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 131 (2006): 1–37.

10 Paul Landau, "Language," in Etherington, *Missions and Empire*, 194–215, at 195.

11 One account is found in Godfrey Callaway, *A Shepherd of the Veld* (London: Wells, Gardner, Darton & Co.), 144–45. While this account is presented as J. J. Xaba's own recollection, it is highly mediated and written to show that it was the white missionary who instigated the translation of texts. Nonetheless, it is valuable because it shows that white missionaries did not always translate texts themselves and worked with assistance from mother tongue speakers.

12 Henry Waters, "Letter, 16 October 1861," Archive of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (Bodleian Library, Oxford) [hereafter USPGL], D.24C (1860–1867) [n.f.]. "Selwyn's Analysis" probably refers to Augustus Selwyn, *A verbal analysis of the holy Bible; intended to facilitate the translation of the holy Scriptures [etc.]* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1855).

13 The examples are presented as follows: the original English is in plain type; the isiXhosa translation is in bold; and a literal translation is in italics. Underneath each example I provide a breakdown of the important vocabulary. The literal translations are my own, and I am grateful to Simthembile Xeketwana, Thembeisa Mbunjelwa, and A. R. Burnett for their assistance in getting to grips with these texts.

14 Tune, of course, is the other significant element of a hymn. Exploring the nuances of meaning this brought, through sound, to understandings of race would require separate consideration that exceeds the constraints of space available here.

15 There is not much biographical information available for Xaba and Bassi. Xaba is mentioned sporadically in reports and missionary books, and was involved in the revisions to the isiXhosa Prayer Book (1906). In the early twentieth century he was in charge of St. Cuthbert's Mission, Ncolosi, and then worked on missions in Swaziland. C. C. Watts, *Dawn*

in Swaziland (London: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1922), 119.

16 J. R. Watson, "The People That in Darkness Sat," *The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology* (accessed February 3, 2023).

17 J. R. Watson, "We Sing the Praise of Him Who Died," *The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology* (accessed February 3, 2023).

18 The first line translates literally as "We are happy through the joy." Reference to Christ's ascension comes later in the verse.

19 Bassi's name is recorded in *Lovedale: Past and Present: A Register of Two Thousand Names: A Record Written in Black and White, but More in White than Black* (Lovedale Press: Lovedale, South Africa, 1887), a directory of past Lovedale students. An annotation in the Cory Library's copy of the register (Cory Library, Rhodes University, Makhanda, 276.875 LOV) notes that in 1894 Bassi was at St. Dunstan's, Willowvale.

20 For a discussion of the tensions that arose over discussions of race in the Cape Colony in the late nineteenth century, see Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001).

21 Andrew C. Ross, "Christian Missions and Attitudes to Race," in *The Imperial Horizons of British Protestant Missions, 1880–1914*, ed. Andrew Porter (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 85–105.

22 Patrick Brantlinger has noted how in the latter part of the nineteenth century imperial and colonial discourses hardened and became more ideological as a response to the rise of independence movements and resistance to imperial and colonial rule. Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 31.

23 See Farai Nyika and Johann Fourie, "Black Disenfranchisement in the Cape Colony, c. 1887–1909: Challenging the Numbers," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 46/3 (2020): 455–69.

24 Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain, 1876–1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 367.

25 Ian Bradley, *Abide with Me: The World of Victorian Hymns* (London: SCM Press, 1997), 4; and Richards, *Imperialism and Music*, 368. There are no figures available for circulation outside Britain, but several studies have alluded to the book's use and popularity in parts of the British world. For example, see Andrew Selth, *Burma, Kipling and Western Music: The Riff from Mandalay* (New York: Routledge, 2017). Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it was common practice in other denominations to import hymn books from Britain and use them to

introduce hymns. For a discussion of this practice in Australia, see D'Arcy Wood, "Worship and Music in Australian Methodism," in *Methodism in Australia: A History*, ed. Glen O'Brien and Hilary M. Carey (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 181–96, at 191–92.

26 Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 16.

27 Lewis R. Gordon, "Africana Thought," *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Race*, ed. Paul Taylor, Linda Alcoff, and Luvell Anderson (New York: Routledge, 2018), 140–51, at 141. There is an extensive literature on racial ideologies and theories in the nineteenth-century British world. On the intellectual history of racism in South Africa, see Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See also Vivian Bickford-Smith, "The Betrayal of the Creole Elites, 1880–1920," in *Black Experience and the Empire*, ed. Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 194–227; and Kwezi Mkhize, "'To See Us as We See Ourselves': John Tengo Jabavu and the Politics of the Black Periodical," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 44/3 (2018): 413–30. Both Bickford-Smith and Mkhize discuss how educated Black intellectuals experienced racial discrimination in spite of their education and embracing of British Victorian attitudes and religion.

28 Henry Waters, "Report," *Mission Field* (April 1, 1878).

29 Cf. Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines*, 25, who noted that in India "early missionaries mentioned race in describing Punjabis . . . to praise them as a noble people with a distinguished history who would make wonderful Christians if it were not for [their present practices]."

30 Peter Masiza, "Report, 14 July 1866," USPG, E.20 (1866), f. 301; and Peter Masiza, "Journal, 17 August 1880," USPG, E.35A (1880), f. 1125.

31 C. F. Pascoe, *Two Hundred Years of the S.P.G.: An Historical Account of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1701–1900*, 2 vols. (London: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1901), 1: 300.

32 G. A. Bremner, *Imperial Gothic: Religious Architecture and High Anglican Culture in the British Empire, c. 1840–70* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 219: "It would be wrong to suggest that the Anglican Church in South Africa [in the nineteenth century] was merely an extra-gubernatorial arm of the colonial executive . . . [Missionaries] may have seen empire and Christianity as going hand in hand, but they were determined that the empire and its officers be seen to be Christian too."

33 T. T. Carter, *A Memoir of John Armstrong, D.D., Late Lord Bishop of Grahamstown* (Oxford: James Henry and John Parker, 1857), 330.

34 Quoted in Gill Hunter, "William White in the Colonies," *Ecclesiology Abroad: The British Empire and Beyond*, ed. G. A. Bremner (London: Victorian Society), 95–109, at 100.

35 Henry Waters, "Report of Archdeacon Waters for the Quarter Ended March 31st 1880," USPG, E.35A (1880), f. 1221.

36 *Gospel Missionary* (January 1, 1861): 7.

37 *Gospel Missionary* (March 1, 1861): 35.

38 See A. G. S. Gibson, "Letter, 5 November 1883," USPG, E.38A (1883), f. 1429.

39 A. G. S. Gibson, "Report: 30 September 1883," USPG, E.37 (1882), f. 885.

40 Norman Etherington, "Education and Medicine," in Etherington, *Missions and Empire*, 261–84, at 269.

41 This point is made by Gareth Griffiths in "‘Trained to Tell the Truth’: Missionaries, Converts and Narration," in *ibid.*, 153–72, at 153.