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South African Historical Journal

ISSN: (Print) (Online) www.tandfonline.com/journals/rshj20

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To cite this article: Hlonipha Mokoena (2023) Black Gods and Black Messiahs— Reading Religion in the Wake of Blackness, South African Historical Journal, 75:3, 222-229, DOI: 10.1080/02582473.2024.2408664

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02582473.2024.2408664

Published online: 19 Nov 2024.

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SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORICAL JOURNAL
2023, VOL. 75, NO. 3, 222–229
https://doi.org/10.1080/02582473.2024.2408664

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Black Gods and Black Messiahs — Reading Religion in the Wake of Blackness

Hlonipha Mokoena

SAHS Conference
Fort Hare University
June 2022

ABSTRACT
The keynote address will be my attempt to come to terms with the presence of religious sentiment in the ideas of nineteenth and early twentieth century black intellectuals. I will try to focus specifically on the term 'Ethiopianism' and the many ways it has come to serve as a shorthand for multiple kinds of salvationist philosophies.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 11 September 2024
Accepted 18 September 2024

In a letter sent to me by an inmate from the Mangaung Correctional Facility, he wrote as his closing sentence, 'Perhaps what you may deem a mere academic exercise is more of a Christian Pilgrimage and Vocation from a Black God.' In the spirit of his words, I have decided to present today's keynote address not as a 'mere academic exercise' but as a journey into that world of pilgrimage and salvation that so many *amakholwa* (Christian converts) have attempted to navigate. From the outset I wish to make it clear that although they were an imperilled intelligentsia, it does not necessarily follow that I will be assuming such a position. Rather, I think that it would be better to take their peril as the starting point for our considered re-reading of the statements of faith and despair that they articulated in their time and in their context. To begin with it may be useful to define the terrain so that we may better understand why the fate of the *amakholwa* is an important lesson in the history of South Africa's 'culture of letters.'[1] The arrival of Christianity in South Africa occurred in distinct phases that are often lumped together. The first attempts by Johannes van der Kemp (1747 - 1811) and James Read (1777 - 1852) on behalf of the London Missionary Society (LMS) yielded meagre results and their presence in Southern Africa was beset by scandals occasioned by the fact that both married indigenous women. Despite the presumption of failure, there is in

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1. John Michael (J.M.) Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (Yale University Press, 1988).

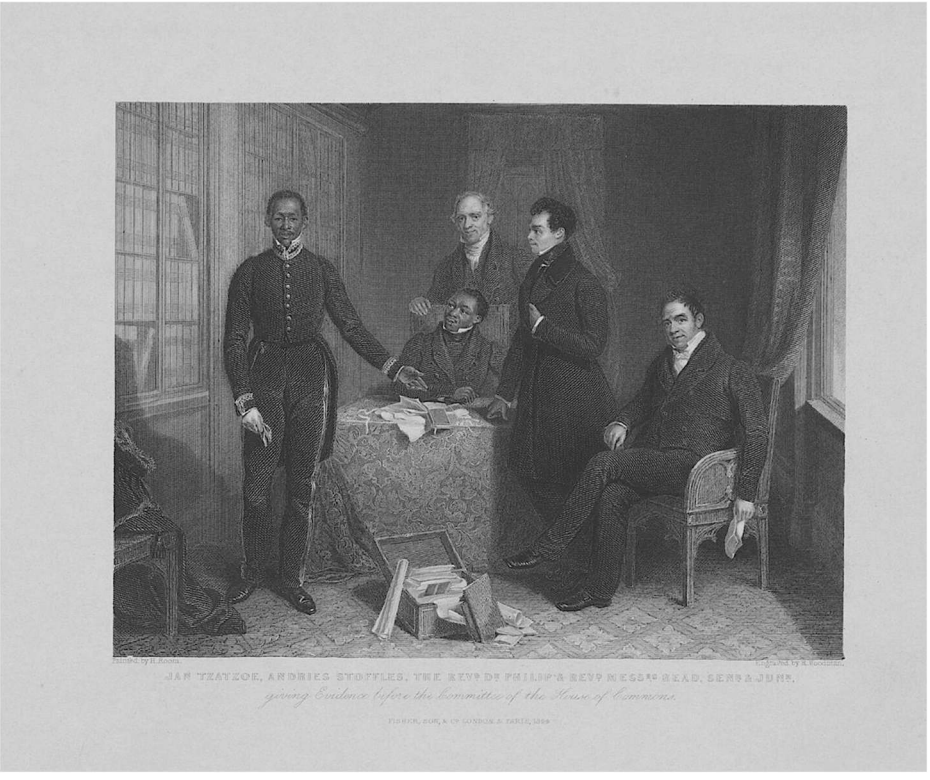


Figure 1. Jan or Dyani Tzatzoe (Tshatshu); Andries Stoffles; James Read Sr; James Read Jr; John Philip. National Portrait Gallery, London.

fact one image that captures the 'fruits' of their labour. In 1844, an illustrated tableau of the Christian converts, Jan Tzatzoe (Tshatshu) and Andries Stoffels posing with James Read, Snr., James Read Jnr, and the other famous LMS missionary, Dr. John Philip, encapsulated what many defences of missionary work could not, namely that the 'convert' was a British gentleman who could be relied upon to exhibit the embodied physical conversion to Western norms that was the prerequisite of the spiritual credos of faith.[2]

In addition to being about the corporeal presence of Western sensibilities, the image also functioned as a testament to the minoritarian liberal tradition that would flourish on mission stations and on the pages of the bilingual newspapers that would emerge in a later period. Thus, one could argue that the Cape Liberal Tradition was not just an ideological salvo fired against white settler prejudices, but that it was an embodied and affective expression of the dilemmas of the converts, that is, how to translate the body language of conversion

2. Jan or Dyani Tzatzoe (Tshatshu); Andries Stoffles; James Read Sr; James Read Jr; John Philip by Richard Woodman, published by Fisher Son & Co, after Henry Room, National Portrait Gallery, London. URL: https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw80908/Jan-or-Dyani-Tzatzoe-Tshatshu-Andries-Stoffles-James-Read-Sr-James-Read-Jr-John-Philip?LinkID=mp69302&role=sit&rNo=0

into the rights promised by the British Empire. In some ways, therefore, this was the first instantiation of the salvationist discourses that would animate the lives of later converts. It was the idea that the British Empire was a refuge for those who were seeking protection from the predatory behaviour of white settlers and from the yokes of the Masters and Servants Ordinance and Act of 1841 and 1856, respectively. The mission station was therefore more than just the site of conversion but it was, as the settlers repeatedly alleged, the site of labour autonomy and the refusal to be subjected to the whim of white labour indentureship. One of the exemplary mission stations of this period was the Moravian mission at Shiloh which was established in 1828. By the 1875 census of the Cape Colony, the mission station boasted the presence of 195 horses and 3 540 heads of 'woolled sheep'. The total human population of the station was 792, according to the same census. It is this non-religious success of the missionary enterprise that constitutes what I would call a 'salvationist' discourse since these achievements demonstrated that Africans could function as independent farmers and peasants and didn't need to be subjected to the discipline of low-paying and degrading farm work.

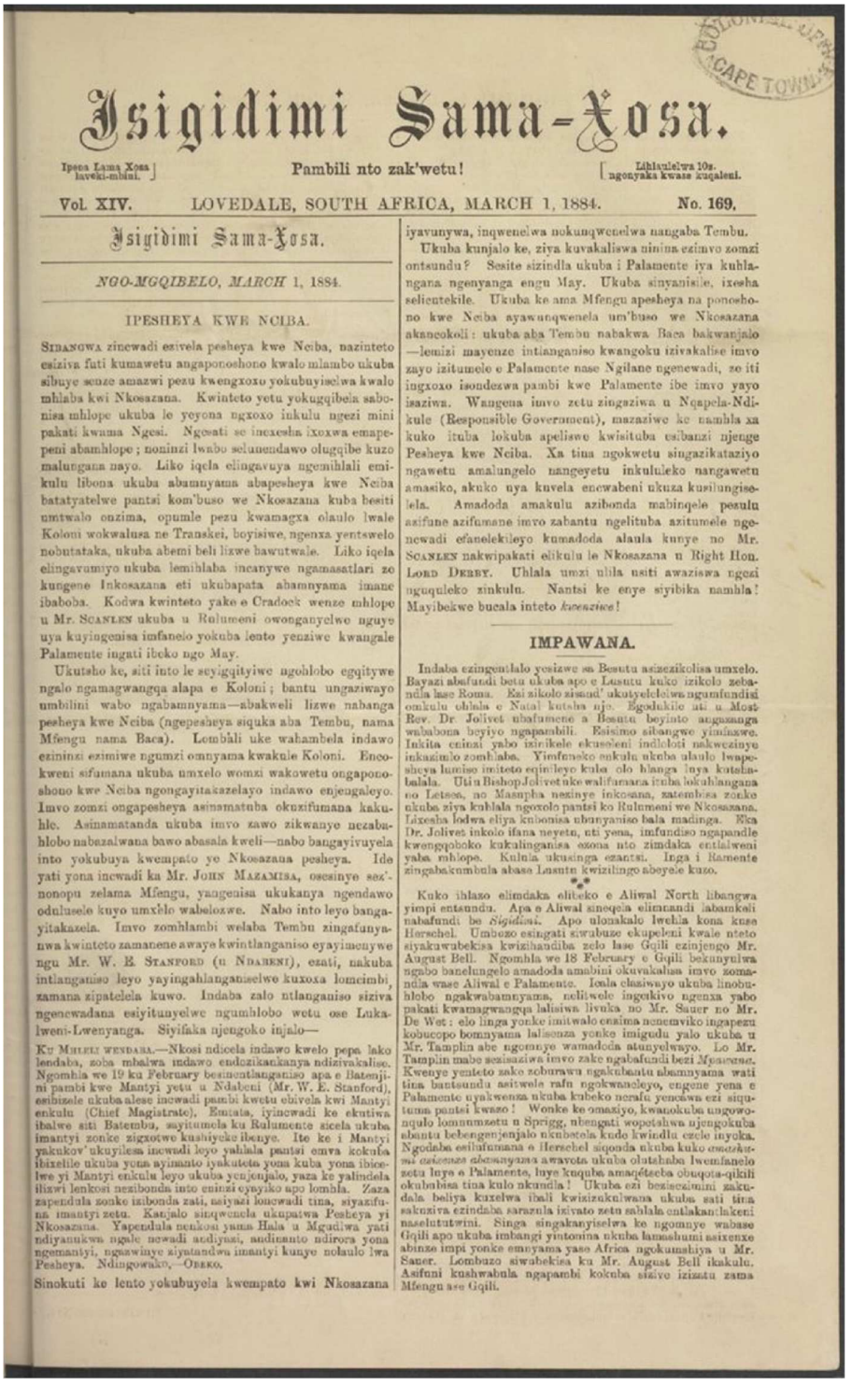
In the second phase of missionary work, the missionary societies all but abandoned the idea of converting rulers and chiefs and started focussing on ordinary Africans as the potential novices. It is at this point that mission stations start to mushroom outside of the Cape Colony. The variety of missionary societies and churches is of less importance than the fact that once Christianity started spreading across the entire region, there was also an increase in the number of African lay preachers and catechists. It is in this new era that the printing of books and newspapers begins in earnest. The first known mission newspaper, *Umshumayeli Wendaba* (The Preacher of News) was established in 1837; it was printed until 1841. Although there were several other newspapers in the interim, the most well-known product of the mission station is the newspaper, *Isigidimi sama-Xosa*, which was established in 1870 and ceased publication in 1888. It is perhaps the establishment of *Isigidimi* that marks the spread of newspaper and book publishing across Southern Africa as mission stations trained printers and compositors. The beginning of this phase of the creation of black-owned newspapers is marked by the establishment of *Imvo Zabantsundu* in 1884. The founder and editor of *Imvo*, John Tengo Jabavu (1859-1921) was the first African to represent both the political idealism of the Cape Liberal Tradition and to inaugurate the history of the black press in ways that would be emulated by his contemporaries and successors such as Sol Plaatje (1876 - 1932) and John Langalibalele Dube (1871 - 1946). The constant presence of the mission station as the site of printing and publication is the main theme that should be extrapolated from the biographies of Jabavu, Plaatje and Dube but it is still important to note that each man was more than a repository of Christian education since each, in their own way, was also a writer, commentator, poet, translator etc. Each of these men

TABLE II.—DISTRIBUTION.—Shewing the Number of Live-Stock in Cities, Towns, Villages, Field-cornetcies, and certain other Localities, according to the Census of March, 1875—*continued*.

CITIES, TOWNS, VILLAGES, FIELD-CORNETCIES AND OTHER LOCALITIES.	HORSES.	MULES AND ASSES.	DRAUGHT CATTLE.	OTHER CATTLE.	WOOLLED SHEEP.	OTHER SHEEP.	ANGORA GOATS.	OTHER GOATS.	PIGS.	OSTRICHES.	DOGS.
WODEHOUSE—*continued*.											
North Highlands	1,213	42	1,150	2,502	50,078	201	4,708	4,076	227	..	329
Tambookie Location	5,307	26	7,718	21,941	180,020	1,872	3,891	32,670	1,221	..	4,897
QUEEN'S TOWN:											
Queen's Town	456	2	1,194	669	1,241	45	459	326	86	7	408
Tarkastad	115	..	290	448	590	..	446	101	53	7	113
Whittlesea	59	..	20	66	580	23	60	82	12	..	25
Goshen (Mission Station)	60	..	145	311	1,783	..	323	354	29	..	30
Hackney (Mission Station)	148	..	316	437	5,245	..	327	471	172	..	106
Shiloh (Mission Station)..	195	..	406	699	3,540	..	..	1,593	143	..	173
Engotini (Mission Station)	90	..	78	187	1,613	..	..	517	53	..	44
Lesseyton (Mission Station)	102	..	309	411	7,233	80	67	1,488	57	..	143
Kamastone Location	546	2	1,714	2,410	36,844	526	1,199	3,849	476	..	769
Ox Kraal Location	683	..	1,974	3,946	29,054	..	798	3,600	781	..	861
St. John Baptist's (Mission Station) ..	37	..	71	90	642	..	2	288	43	..	39
Tambookie Location	6,241	..	6,970	20,543	95,243	245	5,112	49,546	2,505	..	7,168
Bongolo	236	..	1,397	1,170	19,030	..	426	1,226	115	..	121
Buccleuch	389	..	1,348	1,848	26,249	..	3,167	889	168	18	158
Mapassa I	288	..	1,367	1,958	37,549	..	424	2,697	103	..	196
Mapassa II	484	2	1,197	2,158	31,907	223	5,235	1,146	68	2	226
Whittlesea (Field-cornetcy)	466	10	1,701	2,230	52,039	7	3,044	1,755	162	7	296
Klass Smidts River	579	9	1,095	1,746	42,882	..	3,238	1,963	124	..	239
Zwaart Kei	735	..	927	1,806	44,011	..	3,609	1,406	82	43	209
Bradford	522	3	1,226	1,696	32,432	..	2,946	1,398	120	..	181
Wildschutsberg	506	8	736	1,478	30,871	361	2,937	807	45	24	137
Bontebok Flats	365	..	1,148	1,751	72,100	..	587	1,405	85	..	203
Tarka	401	3	739	1,301	30,204	2	5,410	..	83	43	158
Keesendoorns	658	17	916	2,228	40,379	930	3,737	2,913	38	..	255
KING WILLIAM'S TOWN:											
King William's Town	457	3	895	458	625	6	10	5	221	..	347
Brownlee's Station	29	..	79	87	107	..	3	148	60	..	40
Fort Murray	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Komgha	32	2	10	12	165	..	30	..	3	..	9
Stutterheim and Ohlsen	73	2	166	326	10,345	43	1,170	200	64	..	107
Breidbach and Hanover	24	..	91	123	1,251	4	37	..	80	..	37
Berlin	44	..	288	1,330	5,413	..	..	198	142	..	83
Knapp's Hope (Mission Station ..	32	..	165	293	262	..	46	709	145	..	84
Perie (Mission Station)	30	..	294	619	2,004	22	52	948	32	..	195
Peelton (Mission Station)	65	..	497	1,106	3,747	232	2	1,052	142	..	255
Bethel (Mission Station)..	41	..	468	477	4,570	37	140	419	242	..	164

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Figure 2. Extract from the 1875 census showing the distribution of livestock in towns, villages, and mission stations. Source: *Results of a Census of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, Taken on the Night of Sunday, the 7th March, 1875*. Cape Town: Saul Solomon & Co., 1877.



Isigidimi Sama-Xosa.

Ipepa Lama Xosa laveki-mbini. | Pambili nto zak'wetu! | Lihlaulelwa 10s. ngonyaka kwase kugaleni.

Vol. XIV. LOVEDALE, SOUTH AFRICA, MARCH 1, 1884. No. 169.

Isigidimi Sama-Xosa.

NGO-MGQIBELO, MARCH 1, 1884.

IPESHEYA KWE NCIBA.

Sidangwa zincwadi ezivela pesheya kwe Nciba, nazinteto esiziva futi kumawetu angaponoshono kwalo mlambo ukuba sibuye senze amazwi pezu kwengxoxo yokubuyiselwa kwalo mhlaba kwi Nkosazana. Kwinteto yetu yokuqqibela sabonisa mhlope ukuba le yeyona ngxoxo inkulu ngezi mini pakati kwama Ngesi. Ngesati se inexesha lxoxwa emapepeni abamhlope; noninzi lwabo selunendawo oluqqibe kuzo malungana nayo. Liko iqela elingavuya ngemihlali emikulu libona ukuba abamnyama abapesheya kwe Nciba batatyatelwe pantsi kom'buso we Nkosazana kuba besiti umtwalo onzima, opumle pezu kwamagxa olaulo lwale Koloni wokwalusa ne Transkei, boyisiwe, ngenxa yentswelo nobutataka, ukuba abemi beli lizwe bawutwale. Liko iqela elingavumiyo ukuba lemihlaba incanywe ngamasatlari ze kungene Inkosazana eti ukubapata abamnyama imane ibaboba. Kodwa kwinteto yake e Cradock wenze mhlope u Mr. Scanlen ukuba u Rulumeni owonganyelwe nguye uya kuyingenisa imfanelo yokuba lento yenziwe kwangale Palamente ingati ibeko ngo May.

Ukutsho ke, siti into le seyigqityiwe ngohlobo egqityiwe ngalo ngamagwangqa alapa e Koloni; bantu ungaziwayo umbilini wabo ngabamnyama—abakweli lizwe nabanga pesheya kwe Nciba (ngepesheya siquka aba Tembu, nama Mfengu nama Baca). Lombali uke wahambela indawo ezininzi ezimiwe ngumzi omnyama kwakule Koloni. Encokweni sifumana ukuba umxelo womzi wakowetu ongaponoshono kwe Nciba ngongayitakazelayo indawo enjengaleyo. Imvo zomzi ongapesheya asinsmatnba okuxifumana kakuhlc. Asinamatanda ukuba imvo zawo zikwanye nezabahlobo nabazalwana bawo abasala kweli—nabo bangayivuyela into yokubuya kwempato ye Nkosazana pesheya. Ide yati yona incwadi ku Mr. John Mazamisa, osesinye sex'nonopu zelama Mfengu, yangenisa ukukanya ngendawo oduluselc kuyo umxelo wabelozwe. Nabo into leyo bangayitakazela. Imvo zomhlambi welaba Tembu zingafunyanwa kwinteto zamanene awaye kwintlanganiso eyayimenywe ngu Mr. W. B. Stanford (u Ndabeni), ezati, nakuba intlanganiso leyo yayingahlanganiselwe kuxoxa lomcimbi, zamana zipatelela kuwo. Indaba zalo ntlanganiso siziva ngenewadana esiyitunyelwe ngumhlobo wetu ose Lukalweni-Lwenyanga. Siyifaka injongoko injalo—

Ku Mhleli wendaba.—Nkosi ndicela indawo kwelo pepa lako lendaba, zoba mbalwa indawo endozikankanya ndiziva kalise. Ngomhla we 19 ku February besimentlanganiso apa e Batenjini pambi kwe Mantyi yetu u Ndabeni (Mr. W. E. Stanford), esibizele ukuba alese incwadi pambi kwetu ehlvela kwi Mantyi enkulu (Chief Magistrate), Emtata, iyincwadi ke ekutiwa ibalwe siti Batemba, sayitumela ku Rulumente xicela ukuba imantyi zonke zigxotwe kushiyeke ibenye. Ite ke i Mantyi yakukov' ukuyikesa incwadi leyo yahlala pantsi emva kokuba ihixelile ukuba yona ayimanto iyakutota yona kuba yona ibicelwe yi Mantyi enkulu leyo ukuba yenjenjalo, yaza ke yalindela ihlawi lenkosi nezibonda into eninzi eyayiko apo lomhla. Zaza zapendula zonke izibonda zati, seiyazi loncwadi tina, siyazifuna imantyi zetu. Kanjalo sinqwenela ukupatwa Pesheya yi Nkosazana. Yapendula nenkosi yama Hala u Mgadiwa yati ndiyanukwa ngale ncwadi andiyazi, andinanto ndirora yona ngemantyi, ngaswinye siyntandwa imantyi kunye nolaulo lwa Pesheya. Ndingowako,—Obeko.

Sinokuti ke lento yokubuyela kwempato kwi Nkosazana iyavunywa, inqwenelwa nokunqwenelwa nangaba Tembu.

Ukuba kunjalo ke, ziya kuvakaliswa ninina ezimvo zomzi ontsundu? Sesite sizindla ukuba i Palamente iya kuhlangana ngenyanga engu May. Ukuba sinyanisile, ixesha selicntekile. Ukuba ke ama Mfengu apesheya na ponosho no kwe Nciba ayawunqwenela um'buso we Nkosazana akancokoli: ukuba aba Tembu nabakwa Baca bakwanjalo —lemizi mayenze intlanganiso kwangoku izivakalise imvo zayo izitumele e Palamente nase Ngilane ngenewadi, ze iti ingxoxo isondezwa pambi kwe Palamente ibe imvo yayo isaziwa. Wangena imvo zetu zingaziwa u Nqapela-Ndikule (Responsible Government), mazaziwe ke namhla xa kuko ituba lokuba apeliswe kwisituba esibanzi njenge Pesheya kwe Nciba. Xa tina ngokwetu singazikataziyo ngawetu amalungelo nangeyetu inkululeko nangawetu amasiko, akuko nya kuvela encwabeni ukuza kusilungisela. Amadoda amakulu azibonda mabinqele pezulu azifune azifumane imvo zabantu ngelituba azitumele ngenewadi efanelekileyo kumadoda alaula kunye no Mr. Scanlen nakwipakati elikulu le Nkosazana u Right Hon. Lord Derby. Uhlala umzi ublla nsiti awaziswa ngezi nguquleko zinkulu. Nantsi ke enye siyibika namhla! Mayibekwe bucala inteto *kwenziwe*!

IMPAWANA.

Indaba ezingentlalo yesizwe sa Besutu asisezikolisa umxelo. Bayazi abafundi betu ukuba apo e Lesutu kuko izikolo zebandla lase Roma. Esi sikolo sisiad' ukutyelelelwa ngumfundisi omkulu ublala e Natal kutsha ujo. Egolokile uti u Moat-Bov. Dr. Jolivet ubafumene a Besuta beyinto angazanga wubabona beyiyo ngapambili. Esisimo sibangwe yimikawe. Inkita enizi yabo izirikele ekuseleni indlolsi nakwezinye inkanimlo zombhlaba. Yimfeneko enkulu ukuba ulaulo lwapesheya lumiso imiteto eqinileyo kula olo hlanga lnya kutshabalala. Uti u Bishop Jolivet uke walifumana ituba lokuhlangana no Letsea, no Masupha nezinye inkosana, zatembisa zonke ukuba ziya kuhlala ngoxolo pantsi ko Rulumeni we Nkosazana. Lixesha lodwa eliya kubonisa ubunyaniso bala madinga. Eka Dr. Jolivet inkolo ifana neyetu, nti yena, imfundiso ngapandle kwengqoboko kukulinganisa ezona nto zimdaka entlalweni yaba mhlope. Kulula ukusinga ezantsi. Inga i Ramente zingabakumbula abase Lusutu kwizilingo abeyele kuzo.

***

Kuko ihlazo elimdaka eliteko e Aliwal North libangwa yimpi entsundu. Apa e Aliwal sineqela elimnandi labamkeli nabafundi be *Sigidini*. Apo ulonakalo lwehla kona kuse Herschel. Umbezo esingati siwabuze ekupeleni kwale nteto siyakuwubekisa kwizihandiba zelo lase Gqili ezinjengo Mr. August Bell. Ngomhla we 18 February e Gqili bekunyuiwa ngabo banelungelo amadoda amabini okuvakalisa imvo zomandla wase Aliwal e Palamente. Icala elisiwayo ukuba linobulobo ngakwabamnyama, nelilwele ingenkivo ngenxa yabo pakati kwamagwangqa lalisiwa livuka no Mr. Sauer no Mr. De Wet: elo linga yonke imitwalo eximu nenemviko ingapezu kobucopo bomnyama lalisenza yonke imigudu yalo ukuba u Mr. Tamplin abe ngomnye wamadoda atunyelwayo. Lo Mr. Tamplin mabe nesinaziwa imvo zake ngabafundi bezi *Mpaceme*. Kwenye yenteto zako zoburawa ngakubantu abamnyama wati tina bantsundu asitwele rafu ngokwancleyo, engene yena e Palamente uyakwenza ukuba kubeko nerafu yenziwa ezi siqutuma pantsi kwazo! Wonke ke omaziyo, kwanokuba ungowonqulo lomnumzetu u Sprigg, ubengati wopotahwa ujengokuba abantu bebenganjenjalo nkubatela kudo kwindlu ezele inyoka. Ngodaba esilufumana e Herschel siqonda ukuba kuko *amazekumi esizenze abamnyama* awavota ukuba olutshaba lwemfanelo zetu luye e Palamente, luye kuquba amaqiteteba obuqota-qikili okububisa tina kulo nkundla! Ukuba ezi bezincalumni zakudala beliya kuxelwa ibali kwisizukuiwana ukuba sati tina saknziva ezindaba sarazula izivato zetu sahlala entlakanclakeni naselututwini. Singa singakanyiselwa ke ngomnye wabase Gqili apo ukuba imbangi yintonina ukuba lamashumi asixenxe abinze impi yonke emnyama yase Africa ngokumshiya u Mr. Sauer. Lombuzo siwabekisa ku Mr. August Bell ikakulu. Asifuni kushwabula ngapambi kokuba sizive izizatu zama Mfengu ase Gqili.

Figure 3. Cover page of *Isigidimi Sama-Xosa* (Formerly, *The Kaffir Express*) from 1 March 1884. Source: National Library of South Africa Digital Collections, https://cdm21048.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p21048coll72/id/1222/

would also be involved in campaigns to secure the rights of Africans in the face of increasing settler power and the decreasing influence of the imperial ideal. The newspapers established in this period exhibited both the possibilities and the limits of a colonial press since they were subject to precarious and subscription-based revenues. However, even within the boundaries of these limited resources, their content exhibits a cosmopolitan and worldly outlook that functioned to exceed the restrictions set by colonial culture.

The preceding sketch of the history of the missionary press is just that — a sketch; the caveats are too numerous to name. The purpose of the chronology was to paint a picture of how 'the word' was more than just a metaphor for the Christian gospel but that it gave life to other forms of literary awakening. As a foundation for a colonial literati, the colonial printing press was made available for capture from missionary control and many mission presses were run almost one hundred percent by Africans. This sense of independence and autonomy, was in my opinion, the source of many of the salvationist ideas that I would now like to briefly introduce. The most obvious salvationist doctrine was the religious one since it involved the questioning of the spiritual tutelage that the missionaries had arrogated to themselves. The founding of Nehemiah Tile's Tembu National Church in 1884 is conventionally used to mark the beginning secessionist religious movements whose aim was to create congregations that were led by black preachers as well as a liturgy that reflected African values and cultures. What is often neglected in this narrative is that many of these 'Ethiopian' ideas were often tested out on the pages of bilingual newspapers. It is in this cauldron of ideas — missionary presses, independent black newspapers, missionary linguistic labours and cosmopolitan mission stations — that the intersection of religion and the politics of blackness occurs. If the word 'intersectionality' has any meaning in South Africa, it is this — in the colonial period and in the presence of Christian evangelisation, race, gender, class, language and nationality were cross-cutting forces that shaped the lives of black and brown people.

It is from this phase of missionary work and mission-based presses that Magema Fuze emerged as a young novice. Although it was not his intention to create a colonial noviciate, Colenso's school, named Ekukhanyeni, was the fountainhead from which multiple strands of literature sprouted. On April 28, 1893 Magema Magwaza Fuze published a letter in which he bemoaned the manner in which the Bible was being translated into isiZulu.[3] On the surface of it, this letter about whether the isiZulu word for 'lamb' was *iwundlu* or *iwundlwane*. At stake was the translation of the Christian concept of the 'lamb of God'. In his inimitable style, Fuze challenged his contemporaries by questioning their knowledge of isiZulu but he also subtlety accused them of having been 'spoilt' by education and therefore of being unreliable 'informants' for the missionaries. He accused them of coining words by turning them 'inside

3. Magema Fuze (Magwaza), "Ku Mhleli We Nkanyiso," *Inkanyiso*, 28 April 1893.



1893.

(Ku Mhleli we Nkanyiso.)

MNGANE, — Endabeni yamadoda a[illegible]ma ngezwi lokuti "Iwundhlu" yinja esencane, ake ngibeke libe linye kubo abanumzana bakiti. Kimi songati bukona asebelahlekile ngoqobo ekukulumeni kwakiti, abaduke kangaka ukuba baze bahlanganise amazwi amabili awahlukene ngokungaka — "Umwundhlwane" ne "Wundhlu." Ngiyambonga impela u Mr. Mntyali ekucansiseleni kwake okuqamke epepeni elidhlulileyo. Kungebe 'nto ecatshangwa ngabaningi kwabakuluma isiZulu ukuti "Iwundhlu" lingabizwa ngo "Mwundhlwane": ngoba 'Iwundhlu" lizinyane lemvu, nelembube, nelengwe: inganti "Umwundhlwane" ngelenja.

Kupela esikutusayo esikubiza nge "Wundhlu" lyko njengoba sibiza izinyane lembube, nelengwe, nelemvu, — hai imibuzi nenkomo. Litanele, liyilo impela lelo 'zwi lokuti, "Iwundhlu lika Nkulunkulu," uma sitsho inDodana yake: lihle uqobo, ngelake umSindisi.

Ubu "wundhlu" abukombi buqwaga namandhla ento, bukomba ukuhamba kahle, ukuma kahle, ukutula, ukubekezela, njengemvu eno-usa, engati aihlakanipile kanti ihlakanipile: njengembuse nengwe, okuti pezu kwoba kunamandhla, kungadumeli muntu engakakuqali, kuhambe nje ku "wundhluzele." Lelo lizwi-ke silinike lezi zilwane ezitatu ezinomusa: kuxubene nokuzitusa kwetu.

Musani, madoda, ukuti ngokufundiswa niqambe amazwi akiti asekade aqanjwa, niwaqambe ngokuwahlanekezela. Yekani ukukuluma ubuqili bokuhlakanipa kwenu lapa abafundisi besilungisela intshumayelo yakiti enewadini yetu, kona ivakulunga: aniboni yini nina ukuti avasihlupa amazwi okuti lapa uti uyafunda ufumane kulotshwe isiZulu-Mlungu esikwitizayo? Akuvunyelwane kwoku iko, kupikiswane kwokunge iko; kona nalaba abasilungisela i Bible beyakusizakala, siti nati sijabule nge Bible.

Ngisekona njalo, Mngane,

MAGEMA MAGWAZA.

(Ku Mhleli we Nkanyiso.)

MNGANE, — Ngiyanxusa ukuba ungifakele lama-

Figure 4. Letter from 'Magema Magwaza' challenging the translation of biblical terms into *isiZulu*. Source: Magema Fuze (Magwaza), "Ku Mhleli We Nkanyiso," *Inkanyiso*, 28 April 1893.

out' (ngokuwahlanekezela). It is this sense of a world turned inside out by Christianity and modernity that defines the salvationist doctrines that would ignite the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although he did not directly challenge the authority of colonial and missionary linguists, Fuze was challenging his contemporaries by accusing them of being complicit in the 'Anglicisation' of the Zulu language. He called this hybrid language *isiZulu-Mlungu*. Thus, even before he fully articulated his doctrinal differences with his readers, he was already intimating that he would not participate in the 'inside out' translation of the Bible.

In the many years since the publication of Magema Fuze's book *Abantu Abamnyama Lapa Bavela Ngakona*[4] there have been many attempts to define the meaning of Christianity in the lives of converted Africans. As historians, there are several openings that present themselves when we think about the meaning of religious sentiment. There is the obvious tradition of studying mission stations and mission converts. There are however other possibilities for how we may beginning to think about what it means to 'read religion' in the archives. The challenge that presents itself to us as historians is to distance ourselves from an ironic understanding of religion in people's lives and consciousness. Instead of understanding religion as a form of false consciousness, it is perhaps better to begin to think of religion as an ideational ingredient like any other ideological element. This is especially true when one considers that the use of notions of 'black messiahs' and 'black gods' continue to be deployed in the contemporary world. The task facing historians is not just to take religion seriously, but to take the confluence of the politics of religion and the politics of blackness seriously. Many of the debates that have been subsumed under the category of 'Ethiopianism' are also debates about the meaning of blackness. In popular culture, artists such as D'Angelo[5] and Kendrick Lamar[6] are styling themselves as 'black Christs' and this presents the incorrect impression that this is a novel idea. Contrary, to the popular image, the idea of a 'black messiah', or what I prefer to call 'salvationist discourses' is not a novel idea but in fact a resuscitation of ideas that are already present in the work and writings of Christian converts of the nineteenth-century.

4. M. M. Fuze, *Abantu Abamnyama Lapa Bavela Ngakona* (Pietermaritzburg: City Printing Works, 1922).
5. Wikipedia contributors, "Black Messiah (album)," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Black_Messiah_(album)&oldid=1235146788 (accessed August 6, 2024).
6. For a consideration of several iterations of the 'Black Christ' in African-American popular culture, see 'Black Christ in 21st Century Media', National Museum of African American History and Culture – https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/black-christ-21st-century-media