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PARSING GOD: CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE MEANING OF WORDS AND METAPHORS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY SOUTHERN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT: During the first half of the nineteenth century, European missionaries in southern Africa sought to establish their intellectual and moral authority over Africans and propagate the tenets of Christianity. Men like Jacob Döhne, Robert Moffat, John Colenso, Henry Callaway and others viewed a knowledge of African languages as key to disclosing 'the secrets of national character', to the translation and transmittal of ideas about the Christian 'God', and to accepting the 'literal truth' of the Bible. Africans, especially the Zulu king, Dingane, disputed these teachings in discussions about the existence of God, suitable indigenous names for such a being (including *uThixo*, *modimo*, and *unkulunkulu*), and his attributes (all-powerful, or merely old), arguing for the significance of metaphor rather than literalness in understanding the world.

KEY WORDS: Southern Africa, Christianity, missions.

LANGUAGE stood at the heart of the colonial encounter, mediating relations between Africans and Europeans.[1] One of the earliest missionaries to South Africa, Jacob Döhne, argued in his dictionary of Zulu published in 1857 that the study of language, in particular of 'barbarian language', had two objects, philosophical and practical.

> The philosophical object is the attainment of an insight into the character of a people, by means of an accurate acquaintance with the form in which its thoughts are moulded – and which is invariably the true expression of the national spirit. As regards savages, this is in especial degree the fact. The investigation of the language discloses the secrets of national character, otherwise impenetrable, and reveals the origin of customs long since forgotten.

Language provided 'the only safe source of history among natives so destitute of traditions as the savage tribes of South Africa'. With regard to the second object of language study, the practical, Döhne contended that 'as far as barbarous tribes are concerned ... a literature should be created for the propagation of Christian truth and the extension of civilization'. Both these objects, he considered, were part of the 'Christian Missionary enterprise', with the immediate goal 'a written language for the purposes of the truth'.[2]

[1] Parse: to describe a word according to its part of speech, inflexion, and syntactic connexions.

[2] Döhne, *A Zulu–Kafir Dictionary Etymologically Explained, with Copious Illustrations and Examples, Preceded by an Introduction on the Zulu-Kafir Language* (Cape Town, 1857), vii. Döhne's work has been described as 'the first complete dictionary of a Bantu language'. See the entry for Döhne in the *Dictionary of South African Biography* (Cape Town, 1968), I, 248.

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Yet the focus on language raised two problems. First, for Döhne, like most of his missionary peers, African languages in their grammatical construction and vocabulary were expressive of the barbarism discerned in indigenous societies: 'the language [of the Zulu] bears plainly the stamp of the people who now use it. Outwardly it presents a massiveness and bulkiness of form as well as of idea – it is coarse, clumsy, and unrefined as the barbarians themselves'. Döhne cited the use of words to indicate rank and class such as *induna* (which he derived from 'bull') that were 'frequently taken from wild animals or from massive objects, like large herds of cattle', as well as from 'violent actions such as striking, strife, battle', as proof of this coarseness and bulk.[3] He remarked also on the readiness of Zulu to 'contract many ideas into one word' – for example, *boboka* (*bhoboza*), signifying 'to pierce or penetrate into a solid body', *gologoqa* (*kholokotho*), 'to take away by pricking or cleaning out the ear holes', or *pelekezela* (*phelekezela*) 'to accompany one for mere pleasure's sake' – as further evidence of how 'rude and clumsy' their language was.[4] Arguing that Zulu had no metre, no rhyme, no poetry or song, 'nothing that interests or soothes the feelings or arrests the passions', Döhne wrote that 'the savage custom of going naked' had 'denuded the mind, and destroyed all decorum in the language'. Moreover, the language's supposed bulkiness and massiveness, while reflective of its only beauty (euphony through alliteration was the feature most remarked upon by missionaries), necessarily 'obstruct[ed] the flow of thought' and was responsible for the 'stagnation of thought' he believed evident among Zulu: 'it is easy to conceive that the mind, after having formed this compound word [*opelezelayo* or *pelekezela*, Döhne listed both spellings], needs rest, or some time for collecting strength, in order to proceed with another proposition'.[5] Such stagnation of thought, Döhne argued, was evidenced further by the 'fact that the older people possess greater mental powers than do the younger generation'. Indeed, he contended that the very complexity of the language, the existence of a multitude of compound forms, the repetition of pronouns, the lack of abbreviations and contractions – for him all proof of a lack of novelty and innovation – proved that the basis of the Zulu language 'had been derived from one far superior in every respect', formed by 'a race ... of a far higher cultivation than the Kafirs at present – all traces of whose existence is lost in remote antiquity'.[6]

Second, with the languages of southern Africans so 'barren and barbarous' and thus so 'perfectly consonant to their ideas', as another missionary,

[3] He derived *induna* ('signification of rank, something like lord-lieutenant; one who is next to the chief') from *inkunzi* ('bull') in the following manner: originally the bull was 'representative of strength, power, and value ... and, being scarce in former times, was only in the possession of a king or chief of a tribe, who was on that account identified with the bull, and so called. Afterwards the noblemen (*see* in-Duna) were also allowed to possess bulls and entitled to the name'. *A Zulu–Kafir Dictionary*, viii. 67, 181–82.

[4] Döhne, *A Zulu–Kafir Dictionary*, viii-ix, 30, 103, 271. Words in parentheses are current-day renderings from C. M. Doke *et al.*, *English–Zulu Zulu–English Dictionary* (Johannesburg, 1990), Zulu–English, 48, 399, 654. Doke generally gives singular rather than compound meanings. For example, *kholokotho* means abyss, or earwax, or lachrymal caruncle (an inner part of the eye), or ugly-looking person, or species of herb. He does not gloss it as describing a process as did Döhne. [5] Döhne, *A Zulu–Kafir Dictionary*, ix.

[6] Döhne, *A Zulu–Kafir Dictionary*, viii, xxxii-xxxiii.

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Robert Moffat, expressed matters with regard to the Tlhaping, the dilemma then arose as to how the religious ideas of Christianity could be transmitted effectively.[7] Moffat complained in his journal that the more that he became 'acquainted' with SeTswana 'the greater difficulties rise in view; the great want of small words, chiefly of the conjunctive, the great length of some, the aspirate guttural of others'. The most 'immense difficulty' he found was in 'translating theological ideas. Kingdoms, crowns, thrones, and sceptres are unknown here'.[8]

That Moffat (like his peers) equated theological ideas with words signifying temporal authority clearly complicated the process of transmitting the missionary truth. What was a theological idea? How could it be distinguished from a political one? How did the 'kingdom' of god differ from that of the king of England? Language was the key to the translation, exchange and transmittal of ideas. But what did those ideas signify?

Working out meaning was a difficult business, especially since the Bantu languages were not nearly so simple as some claimed. John W. Appleyard, a missionary and dictionary writer, whose study of *The Kafir Language*, primarily Xhosa, appeared a few years before Döhne's text, argued that African languages, though 'spoken by tribes confessedly illiterate and uncivilized', were not at all 'irregular in their formation, nor barbarous in their construction'. These languages were 'highly systematic, and truly philosophical', 'superior to many in ingenuity of form, and inferior to few in the expression of thought'. Eugène Casalis, who had proselytized among the BaSotho since the 1830s, remarked on the exactness with which all southern Africans treated language, always speaking 'in a correct form', and 'never fail[ing] to reprove their children when they express themselves badly'. He gave as examples of the complexity of SeSotho the existence of at least ten words 'to signify a horned animal', two to distinguish between the earth as a whole and as matter, and five to 'express the word day, considered as a period of twelve hours, or as an interval of light, or as an epoch, etc'. Furthermore, he considered the language already well supplied with all 'the metaphysical and religious expressions … required in the literal translation of the New Testament'.

But it was metaphor that really distinguished southern African languages. Casalis argued that so abundant was the use of this form of speech that 'one could hardly speak it [SeSotho] without unconsciously acquiring the habit of expressing one's thoughts in a figurative manner'. Similarly Appleyard remarked that the Bantu languages were characterized above all by their 'free use of *tropes* and *figures*'. Indeed, for both these scholars, unlike Döhne and most of their peers, the difference between African and European languages

[7] Robert Moffat to Alexander Moffat, 25 Feb. 1822, in Isaac Schapera (ed.), *Apprenticeship at Kuruman: Being the Journals and Letters of Robert and Mary Moffat, 1820–1828* (London, 1951), 57.

[8] Robert Moffat, journal entry, 4 Feb. 1822, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 43–4. John Colenso, first bishop of Natal, made the same point thirty years later: 'No one, who has not tried, can conceive how hard, and almost impossible, it is, to give correct representations in another, and that a barbarous tongue, of the refined and expressive language of some parts of the Bible and Prayer Book'. Colenso, journal entry, 4 Mar. 1855, *Ten Weeks in Natal: A Journal of a First Tour of Visitation Among the Colonists and Zulu Kafirs of Natal* (Cambridge, 1855), 160.

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did not lie in issues of inferiority and superiority, nor of barbarity and civilization, but in the significance of figures of speech.[9]

GOD THE FATHER

Missionaries sought to associate mystery with power in attempting to get Africans to accept the omniscience of the Christian god and of his representatives on earth. Conceiving of themselves as, in Robert Moffat's words, 'instructor[s]... in divine truth', missionaries presented to Africans an image of themselves as 'mysterious character[s]' who derived their knowledge from a god with power almost beyond belief, and who demonstrated that knowledge through prayer.[10] Meeting the Tlhaping chief Mothibi in March 1820, John Campbell began by reciting from Matthew 24:14 – 'And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come' – and followed up this combination of revelation and apocalypse with a request that missionaries be allowed to preach to all the king's people. A month later, while visiting the town of Mashow, Campbell spoke about the mysteries of god and the evil of sin and, 'after explaining the nature of prayer to God', had his interpreter offer 'up a prayer in their own language', likely the Setswana version of the 'Lord's Prayer' which the missionary printed as an appendix to his *Travels*. In this version of the Christian prayer the phrase 'hallowed be thy name' was rendered as 'thy name be feared'.[11] Like Campbell, Stephen Kay among the Xhosa a decade later used the Lord's Prayer in what he termed its 'Kaffir' version on all public occasions and noted that 'many of the natives... frequently hearing it have committed it to memory, and may often be heard repeating it in their houses'. Kay's rendition, as with that of Campbell, stressed the temporal associations of heavenly power, especially in the use of the term 'Inkosi enkulu', applied usually as a praise name to chiefs and signifying lord in or of the sky, as the translation for 'Lord' or 'God' rather than the term used in the first prayer composed by an African, Ntsikana, who had adopted 'Utixo' (a word derived from Khoisan) for 'god' and who began his praise of the Christian lord with reference to him as 'our mantle of comfort'.[12]

[9] John W. Appleyard, *The Kafir Language Comprising a Sketch of Its History* (King William's Town, 1850), v, viii, 70–1. Emphasis in the original. Eugène Casalis, *The Basutos; or Twenty-Three Years in South Africa* (London, 1861), 307, 318–22, 326. Casalis had earlier published his comments on the complexities of SeSotho and the exactitude with which it was spoken in his *Études sur la langue Séchuana* (Paris, 1841), esp. 1–9.

[10] The words are Moffat's, drawn from his account of a conversation with Mzilikazi, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa* (London, 1842), 550.

[11] John Campbell, *Travels in South Africa Undertaken at the Request of the London Missionary Society; Being a Narrative of a Second Journey in the Interior of that Country* (2 vols.) (London, 1822), I, 69, 172; II, 361, 362, 363.

[12] Kay, *Travels and Researches in Kaffraria* (New York, 1834), 239, 397–8, and 559 for 'The Lord's Prayer in the Bootchuana language'. Kay preached (43) to his African audiences that 'God is truly almighty, but he uses means to effect what he designs... God sends teachers to proclaim his word; this you must hear and believe: repent of your sins, and pray that he will save you. Fear the Lord, and renounce the service of Satan'. His version of Ntsikana's prayer followed that originally copied down by John Brownlee and published as an appendix in George Thompson, *Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa* (London, 1827). The pagination is from the reissue edited by Vernon S. Forbes (2 vols.) (Cape Town, 1967), II, 214. See below for a discussion of *uThixo*.

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Over time the temporal qualities of the Lord's Prayer became even more pronounced in the missionaries' rendition. John Colenso, the first bishop of Natal, on a march through his see in 1855 with Theophilus Shepstone, had the colonial official explain to Africans again and again in Zulu the prayer, stressing that it was used every day by the Queen of England and all her subjects, and that it was the 'Lord's Prayer: for the Great God... [the] Supreme King'. Reciting the prayer first in English, then in Zulu, then having Shepstone repeat it after him, then those Africans who gathered recite the words also, Colenso later described to his readers how

> strongly one felt, that this was indeed a Prayer, given us by One, Who knew well what was in man – Who knew what words would suit the wants, and express the heart's desires, of *human* beings in all conditions and circumstances – high or low – rich or poor – educated Englishmen, or wild barbarian Kafir!

Shepstone recommended the prayer to the chief Pakade's people as 'very proper' to be used at their harvest ceremonies.[13]

Changing European printings of Ntsikana's prayer likewise emphasized power rather than humanity. In 1850, the missionary John Appleyard in his version of the prayer pushed the initial emphasis on God as a 'mantle' into the background, pre-empting it with text infused with metaphors of authority: 'Thou Shield of Truth... Thou Tower of Truth... Thou Bush of Truth... Thou art the Hunter', 'Thou art the Leader', and then only, 'Thou art the great mantle'. Indeed, by mid-century Ntsikana's prayer had become in the writings and teachings of missionaries a celebration of 'the great power of God'.[14]

Yet such versions of prayer did not find a receptive audience. Pakade ignored Colenso's suggestion that he recite the Lord's Prayer at the first fruits ceremony. When Colenso had Shepstone ask another chief, Langalibalele, point blank, 'What do you think of that prayer?' the chief shifted the burden of answering to his praiser, who replied 'He had nothing to say *against* it; perhaps he would say more another time', though he noted also that the amaHlubi already had a prayer of their own that they recited at the annual first fruits ceremony.[15]

Missionaries played also upon metaphors of mystery and power in introducing Africans to writing and to the Bible – the 'Word' and the Book'. At his first meeting with Mothibi and the chief's wife Mahuta in June 1813, Campbell wrote down and then read out loud to the king 'the names of his predecessors and all his family'. This performance apparently impressed Mothibi more than any of the discussion of Europe's superiority, 'informa-

[13] Colenso, journal entries, 22, 24 and 27 Feb. 1855, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 98–101, 116–7, 130–1.

[14] See Appleyard, *The Kafir Language*; and his version of the prayer quoted by Henry Callaway (who wrote of 'the great power of God'), *The Religious System of the Amazulu* (London, 1870), 69. Lamin Sanneh has argued that Ntsikana's prayer is likely an ancient 'hymn' with a Christian ending tacked on – 'The Christian material did not, therefore, so much infringe the earlier sense of religious propriety as deepen it. New converts would now possess a richer repertoire of religious feeling'. *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (New York, 1989), 170–1. Sanneh, however, is looking at later versions of the prayer (the ones that start with shield of truth, tower of truth, etc.) rather than at the earliest, and misses therefore seeing that it might originally have had a Christian prologue (one suffused with metaphors of power and authority) rather than epilogue.

[15] Colenso, journal entry, 27 Feb. 1855, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 130–31.

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tion of the true God', or presents of 'trinkets' and a looking glass: 'For the first time he smiled... and seemed full of astonishment and pleasure'.[16] Campbell had already 'explained' to Mahuta 'the nature of a letter, by means of which a person could convey his thoughts to a friend at a distance' and had already showed her a Bible which he told the queen 'informed us of God, who made all things; and of the beginning of all things, which seemed to astonish her, and many a look was directed towards the bible'.[17] Assured by Campbell that the missionaries would neither compel people to receive instruction nor 'interfere with his government', Mothibi told the missionary: 'SEND INSTRUCTORS, AND I WILL BE A FATHER TO THEM'.[18]

Awareness of 'the book' spread widely among Africans, often preceding the arrival of missionaries. The Zulu king Dingane's first request of the missionary Allen Gardiner upon the latter's arrival at his capital in February 1835 was that he be shown 'the Book'. Gardiner produced a pocket testament, which the king examined, and then at Dingane's request read from it, choosing 'a number of passages... exhibiting the nature and penalty of sin, the power and omniscience of God, and the awful day of account when he will judge the world in righteousness'.[19] While Dingane then asked a series of questions about god and salvation, he appeared mostly impressed with the usefulness of writing, asking Gardiner to transcribe for him a letter to the English settlers at Port Natal. Only after delivering that letter would the missionary be allowed to return 'and teach "the Book"'.[20] When the missionary Francis Owen first arrived at the king's capital in August 1837, he spoke to Dingane of 'the blessedness of those who believed and practised what was contained in the book and the misery of those that did not believe and who did not practice it, that they would be cast into hell – a place of everlasting fire'.[21] A few weeks later he read to the king a letter from Dutch-speaking settlers in Natal and noted that Dingane much admired 'the mystery of writing'.[22] Indeed, the king had already told the missionary that he wanted to learn how to read and write, and practiced with some text for several days until 'he was able to read every word without a mistake'.[23] The

[16] Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 285–7. The relationship between literacy and Christianity has a lengthy literature. For useful recent discussions see Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (2 vols.) (Chicago, 1991), I, 192–3, 233–4; and Paul Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (Portsmouth, NH, 1995).

[17] Campbell, *Travels in South Africa* (1815), 273.

[18] Campbell, *Travels in South Africa* (1815), 287, emphasis in original.

[19] Allen Gardiner, Feb. 1835, *Narrative of a Journey to the Zoolu Country in South Africa* (London, 1836), 32–3. [20] Gardiner, 8 May 1835, *Narrative of a Journey*, 133.

[21] Owen, journal entry, 20 Aug. 1837, George Cory (ed.), *The Diary of the Rev. Francis Owen, M.A., Missionary with Dingaan in 1837–38, Together with Extracts from the Writings of the Interpreters in Zulu, Messrs. Hulley and Kirkman* (Cape Town, 1926), 30. Owen arrived in the company of Gardiner.

[22] Owen, journal entries, 26 and 27 Oct. 1837, Cory, *The Diary of the Rev. Francis Owen*, 55.

[23] Owen, journal entries, 11, 21, 27 Oct. 1837, Cory, *The Diary of the Rev. Francis Owen*, 39, 48, 55. Owen was not impressed by Dingane's ability at learning to recognize words, suggesting that his accomplishment was 'doubtless as all other beginners [acquired] in a great measure by rote'.

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king also examined with a critical eye the copy of Gardiner's published *Journey* that Owen brought with him, listening as the missionary read from the first page the author's description of the missionary task ('to open a way whereby the ministers of the gospel might find access to the Zoolu nation, and be the means of introducing true religion, civilisation, and industry, into those benighted regions'), and commenting in particular that the portrait of him was an unrecognizable likeness.[24] Yet despite the evidence that Dingane, like other Africans, quickly appreciated the techniques involved in reading and writing, missionaries continued to stress the mysterious. David Livingstone in the 1850s claimed, like Moffat and Owen and others before him, that for Africans 'Writing is a profound mystery … [with] nothing like it in their sphere of knowledge … It is as much beyond their ken as the things of Heaven are beyond ours'.[25]

In presenting to Africans an image of god as all-powerful and of themselves as the wielders of mysterious powers, the missionaries used the metaphor of the father to buttress their own claims to heavenly and temporal authority. The beginning words of the Lord's Prayer, *Baba wetu*, our father, repeated a metaphorical relationship that missionaries noted existed also between subject and chief.[26] Gardiner recounted that the two words always used by Africans addressing Dingane were *bayete* (the meaning of which he did not discover) and *Baba* (father), with the latter term 'used by inferiors of all ranks to them above them'.[27] George Champion, traveling among Zulu a year after Gardiner remarked how the king's subordinates spoke always to Dingane in tones and phrases of 'submissive adulation': 'Yes, father; O father! mighty chief'.[28] Owen argued that *bayete* too could be translated as 'Our Father'.[29]

Comparing the relationship between subject and chief with that of Christian and God, missionaries were more than willing to fit themselves into the metaphor. Moffat recounted how on his first meeting with Mzilikazi, the Ndebele king, after hearing the missionary claim that one day all the dead would rise and live again, told him that as his own father was dead, 'Molimo [which Mzilikazi said 'he *supposed* … was the name of God'] had raised him, or more literally made for him another father in myself, and in future he would call me Machobane [the name of Mzilikazi's late father]'.[30] Moffat embellished his initial account somewhat in his published *Missionary Labours*, writing that Mzilikazi had greeted him by saying 'you are come to your son', and 'I am a king, but you are Machobane, and I come to sit at your

[24] Owen, journal entries, 11, 23, 27 Oct.; 14, 15 Nov. 1837; Cory, *The Diary of the Rev. Francis Owen*, 39, 53, 55, 68–9.

[25] Livingstone, journal entry, 20 May 1853, Isaac Schapera (ed.), *Livingstone's Private Journals, 1851–1853* (Berkeley, 1960), 133.

[26] See Colenso, journal entry, 22 Feb. 1855, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 98, for reference to 'Baba wetu'; and Kay, *Travels and Researches in Caffraria*, 239, for the use of 'Ubawo wetu'.

[27] Gardiner, *Narrative of a Journey*, 91.

[28] George Champion in John Bird (ed.), *The Annals of Natal, 1495 to 1845* (2 vols.) (Pietermaritzburg, 1888), I, 205.

[29] Owen, 26 Nov. 1837, Cory, *The Diary of the Rev. Francis Owen*, 72.

[30] Moffat to the directors of the London Missionary Society, 20 Nov. 1836, in J. P. R. Wallis (ed.), *The Matabele Journals of Robert Moffat, 1829–1860* (2 vols.) (London, 1945), I, 16, my emphasis. See below with regard to the concept of *molimo*.

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feet for instruction'.[31] Colenso also recounted with approval the relationship of African to missionary as one of child to father. He claimed that Zulu regarded Shepstone in such a manner and recorded with some satisfaction the praise names that he learned had been accorded himself by Pakade's people: 'One is *Sokululeka*, "Father of raising-up,", and the other *Sobantu*, "Father of the people"', by which he believed Zulu 'meant to include all – men, women, and children'.[32]

But the European as father, African as child metaphor was open to a number of interpretations. Moffat, for example, recorded how when he replied to Mzilikazi's question 'Shall I call you my father' with the response that the king should do so 'Only on condition that you be an obedient son', Mzilikazi and his advisors emitted 'a hearty laugh'. On another occasion when telling Mzilikazi 'that it was the duty of a wise father to instruct his son' and that the king should therefore cease war, the Ndebele leader replied only that Moffat should pray to his god to protect them from Dingane.[33] Clear limits on the missionaries' assertion of the role of father were evident also in a letter written by Shepstone and published in Colenso's account of travels in Natal. The letter described a visit that Shepstone made to the Mpondo chief, Faku, between May and August 1854 in the hope of getting the chief's permission for Africans from Natal to settle in his territory. Initially Faku sent his son to tell Shepstone that he could not meet the colonial official because he was ill. When Shepstone insisted on a meeting, however, Faku acquiesced but made him wait 'hour after hour…in suspense', required that he take off his hat so that 'he might see if I really was the man I purported to be', and called him '"Theophilus", several times, as if to try whether I would answer to it'. When Shepstone complained that he thought this ritual all a 'childish extravagance', Faku inverted the official's metaphor giving Shepstone a 'good-natured scolding for my having exhibited impatience' and referring to himself as Shepstone's 'father'. Indeed, Faku 'repeatedly' told Shepstone that he must look upon the chief as his 'father' and 'invariably said "my son", when speaking to me'.[34]

Indeed, whereas the missionaries had claimed to silence Africans through a combination of revealed knowledge and reciprocating wonder, the response usually seemed more often a contemptuous dismissal of the fantastical information presented. Kay had written that in preaching to Africans it was 'easy…to distinguish between those that mock and those that pray', the former

> irreverently throw themselves down within a few yards of the [church] door, and sometimes jestingly ask 'Where is God? When shall we see him?' while the latter hide themselves among the trees, in the recesses of the rock, or in the depths of the ravine, and from thence cry, in the simple language of one of their hymns…*sipe ufefe olukulu*; Give us, Lord, the favour.[35]

[31] Moffat, *Missionary Labours*, 532, 537, 551. Andrew Smith, in whose company Moffat traveled to Mzilikazi, had no allusions about being Mzilikazi's father, also noting that the king had told him too that 'he loved me much'. See Percival Kirby (ed.), *The Diary of Dr. Andrew Smith, Director of the 'Expedition for Exploring Central Africa', 1834–1836* (2 vols.) (Cape Town, 1940), I, 255.

[32] Colenso, journal entry, 23 Feb. 1855, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 104.

[33] Moffat, *Missionary Labours*, 552, 557. [34] Colenso, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 155–6.

[35] Kay, *Travels and Researches in Kaffraria*, 240.

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The naysayers seemed much more in evidence than potential believers. Moffat wrote that when he preached about 'God... heaven and hell, [and] a Saviour', Tswana expressed surprise at his continued efforts and either laughed or replied '*Maka haila* (only lies)'.[36] Similar denunciations met a Griqua convert who preached the Christian message in the company of Livingstone. To the convert's claim that the English were 'a powerful nation with large ships', the response was 'cries of "You lie! You lie!"'[37]

Sometimes these accusations of 'only lies' were based on disagreements about earthly knowledge. Mothibi could not quite understand why Campbell claimed to live in the north when quite evidently he had traveled from the south ('he [Mothibi] shook his head, and pointed to the south, as if he had said, that he knew better').[38] Moffat had no self-doubt when asserting a year later that a rain-maker who also thought Europeans lived in the south 'looked rather stupid when I informed him that my native country was in the north'.[39] With Europeans so seemingly mistaken about geography, it must have seemed quite reasonable for Mzilikazi to consider that Moffat might well be telling him deliberate 'falsehoods' when trying to make the king acknowledge that the earth moved and not the sun.[40]

More often critical responses were elicited by the missionaries' theological teachings. Mahuta, for example, asked Campbell if 'people who are dead [will] rise up again' and 'Is God under the earth, or where is he', while the king 'expressed surprise, that if all men came from one father and mother, they so differed from one another'.[41] MaNthatisi, the leader of the Tlokwa people (who had been defeated in the battle of Dithakong in 1823 by Mothibi and Moffat), having listened to the Wesleyan missionary, James Allison, tell her people of 'the doctrines of original corruption and the necessity of a Saviour', asked how could it be,

> if what you preach be true, did not the Lord reveal it sooner to the nation? How can it be that our ancestors should have died in extreme ignorance of all these things? And why have I myself heard them only in the decline of life, when the taste for novelty has already quitted me[42]

Unconvinced by the missionaries' claims to superior knowledge of the heavens, the response of Africans was frequently contemptuous. Tswana

[36] Moffat to James and Mary Smith, 20 Aug. 1822, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 63; Moffat, *Missionary Travels*, 319.

[37] Recounted by James Chapman, journal entry, 13 Sept. 1853, in his *Travels in the Interior of South Africa, 1849–1863: Hunting and Trading Journeys from Natal to Walvis Bay & Visits to Lake Ngami and Victoria Falls* (2 vols.) (London, 1868, revised edition, Cape Town, 1968), I, 117.

[38] Campbell, *Travels in South Africa... Second Journey*, I, 71.

[39] Moffat, journal entry, 15 Oct. 1821, Schapera, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 29.

[40] See above.

[41] Campbell, *Travels in South Africa*, 273, 289. When Moshoeshoe's people expressed the same skepticism about origins to Eugène Casalis, however, the Sotho king used an animal metaphor in explaining to the critics the logic of a single ancestor for a multitude of different colored individuals: 'Stupids! In my herds are white, red, and spotted cattle; are they not all cattle? do they not come from the same stock, and belong to the same master?' Casalis, *My Life in Basutoland* (London, 1889), 220–1.

[42] See the account of the exchange, which took place in August 1834, printed in T. Arbousset and F. Daumas, *Narrative of an Exploratory Tour to the North-east of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope* (Cape Town, 1846), 39–40.

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laughter greeted a speech by Moffat's in 1827 on death and generally followed his attempts to explain 'the doctrine of the Cross'.[43] When Allen Gardiner in 1835 tried to tell Zulu 'that God had declared in his Word that Man's heart was full of sin' ('this I have always found the most difficult subject to explain'), 'an audible laugh proceeded from all who were present'.[44] James Chapman witnessing David Livingstone preaching in 1853, recounted how the people 'laugh at Livingstone telling them about God, mimic him preaching and singing, and the chief and his councillors fill the air with shouts and yells'.[45]

The intellectual engagement of Africans with the teachings of missionaries, and their near universal rejection of those teachings, was clearly captured in an extended dialogue that took place on Sunday, 16 November 1837, between Francis Owen and Dingane and his subjects. Dingane had over the previous two years engaged in numerous private conversations about the concept of God with the missionaries Allen Gardiner, George Champion and Owen, all without being convinced of the superior knowledge of his visitors. Now there was to be a public test and demonstration of the relative merits of the missionaries' knowledge and that of the king. On the 16th, which Owen recorded in his journal as the 'most memorable [and] at the same time painful day since the commencement of the Mission', Dingane called the missionary before him and a large public gathering of about 1,000 Zulu. He told Owen that he was '*very sore*' because he felt that the missionary party was 'not *one with him*'. He accused Owen of trying to 'twist' himself out of the king's charge that the missionary was allied with other whites in denying Zulu access to firearms, gunpowder and bullets. He told Owen 'plainly that *he was offended*'. When Owen replied that it was the Sabbath, Dingane bade him 'to address his people and teach them the word of God'.[46]

Owen began his discourse with a feeling in his heart that he had been 'called to testify Christ publickly in this place for the last, and the only time'. At first the missionary spoke quietly, telling his audience that 'all knew that there was a great chief above the sky'. Dingane, through his *induna* Masipula, who in turn spoke to Owen's interpreter, told the missionary to speak louder. Owen then raised his voice, stating that the king above was greater than all earthly monarchs, that while all should 'fear' their own king and their parents, 'much more' should they 'fear [and obey] the Great God'. So far, so good. Dingane and his people expressed no objections to what they were being told. Next, however, as Owen put matters, 'the contradiction began', the 'cavilling', as he proceeded to tell those gathered that all (including his own family) were 'sinners' because 'none...[had] done what God has told us to do...[and] he is displeased at us'. Each person, Owen continued, had a soul that would live forever but because of sin these souls were 'filthy and ...must be *washed*'. At this point in the monologue Dingane and his advisors, previously silent, began 'shout[ing] out their objections'. In

[43] Moffat, journal entry, 1 May 1827, Schapera, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 250.

[44] Gardiner, journal entry, 28 Aug. 1835, *Narrative of a Journey*, 314–5.

[45] Chapman, journal entry, 13 Sept. 1853, *Travels in the Interior of South Africa*, I, 117.

[46] Owen, journal entry, 26 Nov. 1837, Cory, *The Diary of the Rev. Francis Owen*, 72–3. Emphasis in original. On the number present, see the account by R. B. Hulley, Owen's interpreter, printed in Cory, *The Diary of the Rev. Francis Owen*, 174–5.

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response to Owen's stress on the need for 'spiritual washing', one *induna* asked if the cleansing should take place in a river. Owen answered, 'Not with water, but with blood!'

'Whose blood?'
'The blood', I answered, 'of the Son of God, who was Jesus Christ'.
'Where is he?'
'In heaven...but once he came down to earth'.
'Whom did he leave behind to wash us?'
'He washes us himself with his own blood. It is not our bodies that he washes, but our Souls'.
'Anyway, it's all a lie'.

Dingane then asked Owen if it was God who died? The missionary replied no, but 'the Son of God'. 'Did not God die?' the king wondered. 'I said God cannot die'. Then why, Dingane persisted, if 'God does not die...has he said that people must die?' 'I told him it was because all people were sinners, and death was the punishment of sin, but he would raise us all again from the grave'. This resurrection seemed like a fantasy of the missionary's imagining. Dingane told Owen that if Christ did indeed rise from the dead after three days it was 'very likely that he was not dead in reality, but only *supposed* to be so!' Owen reverted to his theme of purgative bodily fluids, arguing that it was Christ's blood, drawn by a soldier's blade, that, 'if believed in washes away sin'. Dingane and his advisors did not accept Owen's claims. They told the missionary to speak no more about resurrection 'for they would not believe it'. While they had no objection to 'God's word', they did not accept that he could bring the dead to life. Owen, they said, should speak no more about the dead but 'leave them where they are' and instead should '*go to the sick* and keep them from dying, for this is easier than to raise the dead'.

Even then, Owen would not give up. He asked Dingane if he thought that the 'spirits of his ancestors' survived their mortal bodies. The king replied that all that his people believed was that when a person became sick a 'doctor' was consulted. The doctor would sometimes say that the spirit of the sick person's father had caused the illness, in which case a bullock might be slaughtered to appease the spirit. Rather than engage in ritual sacrifice, Owen counseled the ritual of verbal supplication: 'it would be much wiser for [the] sick man to pray to God that his sins might be forgiven'. He confided to his journal satisfaction that, despite the objections expressed by Zulu, 'God had enabled' him 'to bring the truth before them'. His audience remained unconvinced, however, particularly by the 'foolishness' to them of the idea 'that it was by blood [that] sin was to be cleansed'.

Indeed, after two hours Dingane had had enough. In words recorded by Owen's translator, but not by the missionary himself, the Zulu king told Owen that if he persisted in believing that there was everlasting life and that blood alone was the cleansing agent ensuring such a future, then he 'was of no use' to Zulu: 'I and my people believe that there is only one God – I am

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that God... I do not want you to trouble me again with the fiction of you English people'.[47]

NAMING GOD

In the face of such rejection, yet convinced that Africans were bereft of reason and idolators only in their religious beliefs, the missionaries sought to establish knowledge of the Christian god through a process of naming. By mid-century, moreover, with empire encroaching more and more on the lands of Africans, the European desire for local people to have knowledge of 'God' was driven by an imperative beyond that just of conversion to Christianity: the need for a phrase by which Africans could swear to tell the truth in courts of law and be held accountable for the veracity of their testimony.

But 'fixing on a proper name for God' was extremely difficult.[48] Colenso noted that Africans appearing in court were required to repeat '*Ngi bona* "*nKos*" *iPezulu*, "Behold me, Lord above," or *Ngi size*, "*nKos*" *iPezulu*, "Help me, Lord above"'.[49] The problem with these constructions was that *inkosi phezulu* literally meant chief or lord above (an adverbial phrase denoting directional and temporal authority), and likely explained why Dingane and Mzilikazi each stated that he himself was the only true god on earth.

The distinction between temporal metaphors and ones denoting the more transcendent authority embodied in the Christian concept of 'God, the Lord' was not absent from African languages. Jacob Döhne in his *Zulu–Kafir Dictionary* distinguished between the earthly connotations of the adverb *phezulu* which he glossed as signifying 'upward', 'above', 'a higher plane', as in '*isilo si pezulu emtini*, i.e.: the tiger is too high in the tree', and the quite distinct meanings of the noun form, *izulu*, which included 'atmosphere', 'air', 'sky', 'weather' and 'heaven'.[50] Indeed, while most missionaries recorded *phezulu* as the word they heard called out by Africans greeting their monarchs, it was *izulu* that a number noted as the word actually used in the praises. One of Dingane's praises, taken by the American missionary Lewis Grout 'from the natives, in their own tongue', included the line 'Izulu eli bete izi'lambi', which the missionary translated as 'Like

[47] Owen, journal entry, 26 Nov. 1837, Cory, *The Diary of the Rev. Francis Owen*, 73–4, and see also Hulley's account, 174–5. Emphasis in original. Another missionary present on the day, Alexander Wilson, reported also that when 'Owen attempted to preach, there was an effort, both on the part of the indunas and of the king, to turn the whole matter into ridicule'. See Henry Venable to Rufus Anderson, 5 Dec. 1837, in D. J. Kotzé (ed.), *Letters of the American Missionaries, 1835–1838* (Cape Town, 1950), 218–9.

[48] These words are Colenso's, journal entry, 4 March 1855, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 160.

[49] Colenso, journal entry, 4 March 1855, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 160.

[50] Döhne, *A Zulu–Kafir Dictionary*, 274–5, 390. Albert Kropf, a member of the Berlin Missionary Society who worked in the Cape, recorded the same distinction among Xhosa. See his *A Kaffir–English Dictionary* (London, 1899), 315, 471. Moffat, for one, did not recognize the distinction. Noting that Mzilikazi's praises included reference to the monarch as 'the great king Pezoolu', with pezulu meaning, in Moffat's view, 'heaven', the missionary lectured the king on 'the impropriety of allowing himself to be addressed with names which belonged to God alone'. Moffat, journal entry, 23 June 1835, Percival R. Kirby (ed.), *Robert Moffat's Visit to Mzilikazi in 1835* (Johannesburg, 1940), 20. See also Moffat, *Missionary Labours*, 530–1.

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heaven above, raining and shining'.[51] Yet it was the adverbial *phezulu* that missionaries used again and again in referring to their own god and never the noun form, *izulu*, thereby embedding a temporal value in a concept that they wanted to convey as transcendental.

Even more difficulties arose with the second phrase that missionaries recorded as being used for swearing in court – '"Utikxo o pezulu", God of heaven; or, "I swear by the Lord of heaven"'.[52] As a number of missionaries in the 1830s and after argued, the word *uThixo* had been adopted by Europeans from Khoisan languages and introduced among Xhosa and Zulu as a name for the Christian god since, as Francis Owen put matters, 'The Zoolus have no word in their own language to express the sublime object of our worship'. Though seemingly necessary for their endeavors, this word choice made the missionaries increasingly uncomfortable. Owen disliked *uThixo* partly because it had 'a harsh and difficult click in it', but more so because it appeared to have 'no meaning' in the languages of those among whom he prosletyized.[53] Stephen Kay had already noticed that few Africans used the word and heard from a colleague, William Shrewsbury, who had been preaching in South Africa for 10 years, that Xhosa had 'no definite notion whatever' of its meaning.[54] When Colenso made his tour of Natal in 1855, he found a similar incomprehension about this word used by Europeans for their god. At Pakade's kraal, while the people there said that they had heard of 'uTixo', the chief told Colenso that on the signification of the word, which they had heard but 'lately', and on the Christian concept of god in general, 'there was a complete separation in these matters between the black and the white – we could not at all understand each other'. At Langalibalele's settlement too, people told Colenso that they had only known 'of uTixo since white men had come into the country'. Indeed, one man who spoke directly with Colenso, Nceni ('or Karl'), who for three years had worked for Allen Gardiner, told the bishop that Dingane, and Zulus in general, had 'first heard of uTixo from Capt. Gardiner'.[55]

The missionaries became even more disquieted as they became aware that *uThixo* had metaphorical implications that they certainly did not want

[51] Lewis Grout, *The IsiZulu: A Grammar of the Zulu Language: Accompanied with a Historical Introduction, also with an Appendix* (Pietermaritzburg, 1859), 422–3. The same line was spoken by Zulu word for word ('Izul' elibeth' izihlambi!') almost 80 years after Grout first heard it, when James Stuart recorded between 1927 and 1930 the *izibongo* of Dingane. The line has been re-translated in a recent compilation as 'Intermittent showers of rain' and its meaning described as obscure. See D. K. Rycroft and A. B. Ngcobo, *The Praises of Dingana* (*Izibongo ZikaDingana*) (Durban, 1988), 92, 93, 199. Grout, whose translation seems much the more evocative (and in context, more convincing), claimed (*The IsiZulu*, 377) that all of his material was 'taken from the natives in their own tongue, and accompanied with an English translation'. Mpande's praises included the line, 'Izulu eli dumile pakati kwAmalonlo', which Grout glossed as 'The celestial who thundered between the Makonko', 424–5.

[52] H. Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu* (Pietermaritzburg, 1870), 121.

[53] Owen, diary entry, 23 Dec. 1837, Cory, *The Diary of the Rev. Francis Owen*, 89. Owen was relying on information conveyed to him by another missionary, George Champion, rather than his own investigations.

[54] Kay, *Travels and Researches in Caffraria*, 289–90, 359.

[55] Colenso, journal entries, 13, 23 and 27 Feb., 1 Mar. 1855, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 56–7, 114–5, 129, 137. Zulu told Colenso they only used the word because they found it in the European bibles.

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associated with their own concept of God. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Johannes van der Kemp, the first head of the London Missionary Society in South Africa, who believed firmly in 'the national atheism of the Kafirs', had cited as 'decisive proof' of his belief the fact 'that they [Xhosa] have no word in their language to express the idea of the Deity' and used a word ('Thiko') borrowed in a corrupt form from 'the Hottentots… literally signifying, one that induces pain'.[56]

Despite this apparently unfortunate origin, subsequent missionaries found the word useful for their translation of biblical material into the vernacular. W. B. Boyce, the author in 1834 of the first Xhosa grammar, simply listed 'U-Tixo' as the indigenous equivalent of 'God'. Kay, like his peers, used the word in printed versions of Ntsikana's prayer.[57] But concern about corrupt origins did not disappear. Moffat investigated the derivation of *uThixo* among the Namaqua. Talking through his translator, Africaner, with an 'aged sorceror', Moffat learned from his informant that *uThixo* derived from 'Tsui'kuap', a 'notable warrior', whose name literally meant 'wounded knee'. When Moffat expressed surprise that pain should be associated with 'the Creator and Benefactor', the sorceror 'applied the term to what we should call the devil, or to death itself; adding, that he thought "death, or the power causing death, was very sore indeed"'. At once assuming the figure of the devil rather than 'God', *uThixo* appeared doubly troubling to Moffat because the word seemed associated also with the 'praying Mantis… which is said to have been worshipped by the Hottentots'.[58] Colenso, likewise, became increasingly disconcerted on his tour of Natal when learning that not only was the origin of *uThixo* 'very uncertain', but the word likely signified 'a species of mantis, which is called the Hottentot's god'.[59] Complicating matters, Ulangeni, a Xhosa informant of Henry Callaway, denied to the missionary that *uThixo* came to his people from the Khoisan but was indeed 'an old word of our own' often uttered when sneezing.[60] Such a word, either with metaphorical imputations of devil and insect worship or with onomatopoeic implications hardly seemed satisfactory for translating the Chris-

[56] Quoted in Moffat, *Missionary Labours*, 257.

[57] Boyce, *A Grammar of the Kaffir Language*, 8, 18; Kay, *Travels and Researches in Caffraria*, 397.

[58] Moffat, *Missionary Labours*, 257. Appleyard in his 1850 grammar written on historical principles followed Moffat in arguing that *uThixo* was derived from a Khoisan word, 'Tshoei'koap', which he believed Khoi applied to their god but which also had a 'curious' derivation. He noted that Tshoei'koap meant, literally, 'wounded knee', and had been applied several generations back to a particularly skilled sorcerer 'in consequence of his having received some injury to his knee'. Appleyard did, however, continue to use *uThixo* in his translation of the Lord's Prayer, *The Kafir Language*, 12, 48. The mantis was not an object of worship for Khoisan but did figure prominently in their story telling. See D. F. Bleek (ed.), *The Mantis and His Friends: Bushman Folklore Collected by the Late Dr. W. H. I. Bleek and the Late Dr. Lucy C. Lloyd* (Cape Town, 1923). For discussions of religious concepts among the Khoisan, and the transfer of *uThixo* to the Xhosa by missionaries, see Theophilus Hahn, *Tsuni–llGoam: The Supreme Being of the Khoi–Khoi* (London, 1881); and Janet Hodgson, *The God of the Xhosa* (Cape Town, 1982), 91–5.

[59] Colenso, journal entry, 13 Feb. 1855, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 57. For a detailed contemporary discussion of *uThixo* see Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 105–6.

[60] Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 63–5.

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tian concept of God, nor of value when trying to extract 'truth' in the courtroom.

But what else could missionaries use when their initial conversations with Africans appeared to produce no evidence of an indigenous concept of God that embodied the heavenly and temporal qualities of the Christian Lord of the Europeans, a single creator of all things who intervened actively in daily life and who would one day sit in judgement, allowing some everlasting life and consigning the rest to eternal suffering in a burning hell? The king of the Tlhaping town of Mashow told John Campbell in 1820 that his people 'knew nothing of God', at least not of one who could be pleased or who had created the sun; another 'very aged man', Laheisey, who could recount his line of descent back 160 years, said to Campbell that he had 'never heard from the old men any tradition respecting the origin of man, or from whence he at first came'. Though Laheisey had 'heard [from the elders] that God kills men', and dwelt in the ground, he thought himself that 'God was above' and 'expected to hear from the white men about these things'.[61]

Like his LMS predecessors van der Kemp and Campbell, Moffat believed firmly that Africans had 'no religion *of their own*' and were 'without exception still perfect heathens...[with] the most incorrect and corrupt notions of God and Death'.[62] Given this conclusion, he found the adoption by missionaries among the Tswana of a local word, '*Moreemo*' or '*Morimo*' (modern orthography uses *modimo*), as their appellation for the Christian god, full of contradictions.[63] Believing that 'derivation at once determines...meaning', Moffat considered *morimo* had an advantageous genealogy: '*Mo* is a personal prefix, and *rimo* is from *gorimo* ''above''. From the same root *legorimo*, ''heaven'', and its plural *magorimo*, are derived'. Confounding this logic, however, Tswana, according to Moffat, 'reversed' the expected 'correspondence between the name and the thing designated'. They might apply *morimo* to distinguish an exceptional quality (as in 'a horse which is swift is Morimo, an ox which is strong Morimo'), or perhaps to identify the first man on earth, but they also used the word to describe 'the more cunning among them', to indicate 'a malicious being taking delight in the injury of man' that lived in a hole in the ground, and also a 'noxious

[61] Campbell, 22 May, June 1820, *Travels in South Africa* (1822), II, 2–5, 110–11. Campbell did add that the king said that 'old men in former times used to speak of those things [god and Jesus perhaps, though the referent is not clear in the text], but men now speak of nothing'.

[62] Moffat, journal entries, 24 Mar. 1822, 26 July 1824, Moffat to Alexander Moffat, 25 Feb. 1822, Schapera, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 49, 129; Moffat, *Missionary Labours*, 256–68. Moffat did, however, criticize Campbell for claims that the latter had made in the *Missionary Chronicle* as to Tswana acquiring 'correct notions of God': 'Let me assure you [Moffat's brother, Alexander] that the authority he has it from is false. The apostacy of our interpreter [Cedras], a Bootchuana, and the abominable conduct of some of the Hottentots, have been the source of much grief to us, and formed a stumbling block in the way of the Bootchuanas', Moffat to Alexander Moffat, 25 Feb. 1822, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 56–7.

[63] Moffat used the spelling *Moreemo* in his letters and journals, but changed it to *Morimo* in his *Missionary Labours*. Modern orthography has the word as *Modimo*. The first letter is usually capitalized, but not always. Since capitalization in English orthography implies a proper name, I have chosen to use lower case when using the word other than in quotations.

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reptile'. Its use by Tswana did not signify, he argued, either a knowledge of the Christian god that but for the word itself had been lost, or an indigenous conception of a creator figure.[64]

Besides being concerned about the ways in which a word with such multiple, and for him offensive connotations could be used, Moffat objected also to the way in which Africans appropriated Christian concepts of God and embedded these in an indigenous refashioning of *morimo's* signification. Whereas Moffat's questioning in the early 1820s of local people about their knowledge of God had elicited practically no information beyond nomenclature – one man in 1823 told Moffat: '*Kee ueetsee leena haila*... "I know the name (Moreemo) only"'. In an answer that was typical of those reported by the missionary, Africans appeared ready to expand their own meaning of the word in response to missionary suggestions.[65] In September 1823, the Wesleyan missionary, Thomas Hodgson, and his wife, Anne, proselytizing among the Tswana, began a dialogue with 'the more intelligent of the natives' by first repeating 'a version of the Lord's Prayer in their tongue' and asking 'Who is this Father above?' None answered. Pausing a moment, and 'feeling the difficulty of gaining access to their dark minds', Anne Hodgson then asked,

'But you know we exist; your cattle exist; and the world exists: there must have been a beginning and a cause. Who was the first?', Several together answered, 'Madeemo', giving a soft sound to the *d*, somewhat between that consonant and *r*. I replied, 'Well, that is our heavenly Father whom we address in those words'.

Upon being asked 'Where is God? How big is He?... Has he hair? Have you seen him?' Anne Hodgson relied that 'Modeemo' was 'the Creator', the Bible was his 'word', and he was the 'King of Kings, to whom all Kings and people must hereafter give an account of their conduct; human life is at His disposal only'.[66]

Moffat described in his *Missionary Labours* how such a displacement of Christian power to an indigenous signifier of age (*modimo* 'as the first') could recoil against the missionaries. A rain-maker, seeking to end a drought, heard 'the wife of a poor man... bringing wondrous tidings that she had seen Morimo'. Taking advantage of a new 'stratagem' – one in which the woman, Moffat argued, with her vision of a new god served the same function for the rain-maker as a 'a ventriloquist or Pythoness' had in the past – the rain-maker ordered 'thousands of women' to clear and cultivate a garden for this

[64] See Moffat's journal entries, 24 Mar., 26 Aug. 1822, 2 May 1823, 27 May 1827, and his letter to his brother Alexander, 25 Feb. 1822, Schapera, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 48–9, 56, 82, 257; as well as his *Missionary Labours*, 256–68.

[65] Moffat, journal entries, 26 Apr. 1822, 25 May 1823, Schapera, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*, 49, 82; Moffat, *Missionary Labours*, 263. Moffat complained that his informant showed more interest in eating a piece of rhinoceros meat than in pursuing a discussion about 'who made the thunders roar, the lightning flash, and rain descend... He gave a significant laugh and asked if people were to think on such things'.

[66] Quoted in Samuel Broadbent, *A Narrative of the First Introduction of Christianity Amongst the Barolong Tribe of Bechuanas, South Africa* (London, 1865), 80–84. Broadbent had Hodgson using *mo* and *ma* interchangeably. Broadbent's account is fuller than that in the published version of Mrs. Hodgson's letters and journals, William Shaw, *Memoirs of Mrs. Anne Hodgson; Compiled from the Materials Furnished by Her Husband, the Rev. T. L. Hodgson* (London, 1836), 148, 157.

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'Morimo'. While the woman who had had the vision 'soon ... died', the rain-maker continued to employ the newly-empowered concept of *modimo* to his advantage:

The rain-maker, when asked by the missionary [Moffat] why he could thus honour the little malicious thing which they called Morimo, that only came out of a hole to inflict pain, taking advantage of our Christian views as to the meaning of the word, would promptly reply, 'Do you not say Morimo is the governor of the heavens, and that he only can make rain? Why then should we not honour him?'

This line of argument, Moffat suggested, showed the rain-maker's 'skill in the appropriation of our principles for his own purposes'. Moreover, the rain-maker was quick to allocate blame when rain did not come, placing the burden on 'the Morimo of the teachers'. Then Tswana would 'use the vilest epithets, and curse both the missionaries and their Morimo. When we assured them that God was in the heavens and that he did whatever He pleased, they blamed us for giving Him a high position beyond their reach; for they viewed their Morimo as a noxious reptile. ''Would that I could catch it, I would transfix it with my spear'', exclaimed S., a chief'.[67]

For Moffat and his missionary peers among the Tswana, the struggle for control of the meaning of *morimo* (a word whose appeal lay in its apparently simple derivation, for Moffat literally 'the person above') was made more difficult not only by men such as the rain-maker, but also by grammar. Wilhelm Bleek argued in his 1862 *Comparative Grammar of South African Languages* for greater exactness and complexity in parsing god. For SeTswana, he distinguished between *Mo-rimo*: God, *me-rimo*: gods, and *morimo*: ancestral spirit, *barimo*: ancestral spirits (SeSotho he had as, respectively, *Mo-limo*, *me-limo*, and *molimo*, *ba-limo*) and noted the close association between words for 'God' and 'ancestor-worship'. He also pointed out a logical flaw with the idea (which he attributed to Casalis, but which Moffat had had also) that *molimo* (or *modimo*) derived from the word for heavens – *maholimo* in SeSotho, *magorimo* in SeTswana – and could mean 'one who is in heaven'. Any similarity in appearance between the words for above (*holimo* and *gorimo*) and for heavens (*maholimo* and *magorimo*) with *molimo*, Bleek argued, was 'almost accidental' since in his view the latter word did not derive from either of the former. Moreover, Sotho and Tswana were hardly likely to personalize a spirit-figure, whether ancestor-related or signifying a god, as being in the sky when 'the spiritual world, for the ancestor-worshipping nations, is beneath'.[68]

[67] Moffat, *Missionary Labours*, 263–5. For another view of this exchange, one that stresses Moffat's appropriation rather than the rainmaker's, see David Chidester, *Savage Systems : Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville, 1996), 194.

[68] Wilhelm H. I. Bleek, *A Comparative Grammar of South African Languages* (London, 1862), 91. He was disputing points made by Casalis in *The Basutos*, 248–9. Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, refer often to Moffat and to *modimo* in their two volumes on the Tswana encounter with Christian missionaries, but have no consistent view as to who or what the word signified at any particular time. In their indexes and footnotes they generally equate *modimo* to 'supreme being' (I, 330 n. 40, 338 n. 39, 407; II, 577), while in the text they draw variously from missionary accounts of the early, mid, and late nineteenth century, and early twentieth (used in no particular chronological order) to suggest that *modimo* was some sort of non-personal force about whose name,

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Missionaries to the Zulu, however, claimed to have found indigenous knowledge of 'God'. Allen Gardiner, on his first visit to the Zulu, engaged in a dialogue in May 1835, about religion with Nonha, the female chief ('Incosa-case') of one of Dingane's military towns and two of her servants. The conversations took place over a period of two weeks as Nonha and her retainers, having apparently deserted their town without the king's permission in order to seek refuge at Port Natal, were being marched, bound and under guard, to Dingane's capital. Certain that the prisoners 'would be put to death', Gardiner decided to accompany them 'in order to instruct them by the way in the method of salvation through Jesus Christ, as also to endeavour to obtain their pardon'. From conversations made with the prisoners as the party took regular halts on its 120 mile march, Gardiner quoted Nonha as saying that her people had 'always believed there was an Incosi-pezula' (a great chief above) 'who, before there was a world, came down and made it; he made men; and we knew also that there were white men'. And though neither she nor her servants knew anything of 'a deluge, or of the world having ever been destroyed', Gardiner understood them to have a universal belief in 'the transmigration of souls'. According to the missionary, Nonha told him that when a person died her or his 'breath or spirit... passed into the body of some animal, generally a snake, called issitata, which is harmless, though sometimes into other animals such as the buffalo or the hippopotamus'. In turn, he spoke to Nonha of the 'true Scriptural account of these important subjects', and expressed hope that it would 'please the Lord to open their hearts, and to lead them all to truth'. On the basis of these conversations, Gardiner concluded that Zulu had 'always had some indistinct idea of a Supreme Being'.[69]

Further dialogue with Zulu convinced Gardiner that Europeans had arrived in Natal just 'at the period when the traditionary knowledge of a Supreme Being is rapidly passing into oblivion'. Speaking before a hundred people at the village of Nondunga, Gardiner, having asked who created the world, recorded that one of those assembled pointed upward and 'said it was the "Incosi pezulu" (Great Chief above)'. 'Did they know anything of this Great Chief?' '"No", they replied; "now we are come to hear about Him – it is you who must tell us"'.[70] Despite this hint that perhaps the 'great chief above' designated the Christian god, about whom Zulu had already heard from previous European travelers in the 1820s, rather than an indigenous concept of a 'supreme being', Gardiner found additional evidence of a lost

according to one of their twentieth-century sources – J. Tom Brown, *Among the Bantu Nomads: A Record of Forty Years Spent Among the Bechuana* (London, 1926) – to speak 'was a great taboo, the mere mention of which [*modimo*] in the ears of the people would cause death to the profane one' (a taboo that appears to have gone unreported by Brown's predecessors). Following Brown rather than Moffat, the Comaroff's derive -*rimo* or -*dimo* from *dima*, 'to penetrate' or 'pervade with power', rather than from *gorimo*, 'above', thus choosing a genealogy imputing 'penetrating superhuman power' rather than one that might accord with more earthly implications of distance and hierarchy.

[69] Gardiner succeeded neither in converting Nonha and her servants as he had hoped, nor in convincing Dingane that their lives should be spared. The king ordered them left without food and water until they starved to death. Gardiner, journal entries, 14–30 May 1835, *Narrative of a Journey*, 145–74.

[70] Gardiner, journal entry, 1 June 1835, *Narrative of a Journey*, 177–8.

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knowledge of Christianity in African accounts of creation.[71] From his conversations with Zulu, he determined that their 'forefathers [though not themselves] believed in the existence of an overruling spirit, whom they called Villenangi (literally the First Appearer)', and that this spirit 'soon after created another heavenly being of great power, called Koolukoolwani, who once visited this earth, in order to publish the news (as they express it), as also to separate the sexes and colours among mankind'. The missionary then recounted a story of the origin of death:

During the period he [Koolukoolwani] was below, two messages were sent to him from Villenangi, the first conveyed by a camelion, announcing that men were not to die; the second by a lizard, with a contrary decision. The lizard, having outrun the slowpaced camelion, arrived first, and delivered his message before the latter made his appearance.

This story, he argued, was 'evidently an indistinct and confused idea of the incarnation of our Blessed Lord, and of the entrance of sin into the world, Satan employing the body of a reptile to practise his first deceit upon mankind'.[72] Since the arrival of Europeans, he suggested to his readers, Africans' 'vague idea of a Supreme Being has again become general'. No longer was 'the reigning king... their only idol'.[73]

GOD THE ALMIGHTY

It was John Colenso in his account of his travels with Theophilus Shepstone through Natal in 1855 who most developed the theory that Africans had once had a knowledge of the Christian god, had lost this knowledge, yet remnants still existed from which missionaries could resurrect the truth and return knowledge of 'God' to Africa. Colenso saw the evidence of this knowledge in the existence of 'true words for the Deity in the Kafir language – at least in all this part of Africa... *umKulunkulu*, literally, the Great-Great One = The Almighty, and *umVelinqange* – literally The First Comer-Out = The First Essence, or rather Existence'. These two words, which Colenso felt other missionaries had 'scarcely noticed at all', were, he argued, familiar to Zulu from their childhood even if no longer referred to in daily speech. Their existence as 'names for Him "who created them and all things"', signified 'traces of a religious knowledge, which, however originally derived, their ancestors possessed long before the arrival of Missionaries, and have handed down to the present generations'. Choosing to ignore such words and 'forcing upon [Zulu]... an entirely new name for the Supreme Being', such as *uThixo* or *uJehova*, or perhaps even *iTongo*, championed by the missionary James Allison but believed by Colenso to refer to spirits of the dead

[71] Adulphe Delegorgue, who traveled through southern Africa in the 1840s, claimed that Zulu had learnt of the Christian god from James Farewell, the first Englishman to visit Shaka's kingdom, and, being 'not at all perturbed by his discovery' had fashioned a 'composite word, *Kospezou*, from *kos*, master, and *pezou*, on high', to 'designate this god'. This construction, Delegorgue argued, 'clearly proves that the acquaintance is very recent', Delegorgue, *Travels in Southern Africa* (trans. by Fleur Webb, Pietermaritzburg, 1997, originally published, Paris, 1847), II, 127.

[72] Gardiner, journal entry, 1 June 1835, *Narrative of a Journey*, 178. See also 314–7 for his journal entries for 28 and 29 Sept. 1835, recounting hearing about 'Oukoolukoolu' from Africans living near Port Natal.

[73] Gardiner, journal entry, 1 June 1835, *Narrative of a Journey*, 179.

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appearing in the form of a snake, would, the bishop argued, create 'an unnecessary hindrance to the reception of the Gospel'.[74]

As Colenso and Shepstone and their party marched through Natal, they asked people in each of the African communities they visited to tell them what they knew of *umKulunkulu* and *umVelinqange*, and stressed in each dialogue the concordance of indigenous and European beliefs. To Ngoza, Shepstone's chief *induna*, Colenso directed the question in February 1855, 'Did he know anything about umKulunkulu before?' and received the answer, 'Yes; they [Ngoza and his people] all knew that everything came from Him', to which Colenso replied, 'Say that I am sent to tell them more about Him'. Ngoza continued that, by understanding through conversation with Colenso the distinction between 'amaTonga and amaHlose ... departed spirits [and] umKulunkulu [who] made all things', his people realized that they had 'missed the truth very little, after all, for we pray to *unseen* spirits, and you to an *unseen* Being'. [75] At Pakade's settlement two day's later, the chief said that his people 'did know of *umKulunkulu* by their own traditions – [and] that he was the same as *unVelinqange* [Colenso used the prefixes 'um' and 'un' interchangeably with regard to the latter word], the First Outcomer', but that white and black did not understand one another in these matters. Shepstone, however, 'explained' to Pakade that 'there was not so great a separation as he supposed', that Europeans 'believed in umKulunkulu (the Great-Great-One), as well as they', and that Colenso had been sent by God to 'tell them more about Him, what he had done, and what he was doing, for them'. The Secretary of Native Affairs, according to the bishop, extracted through this speech Pakade's admittance that the two Europeans had 'quite beat him ... with talking of the umKulunkulu, and saying that we prayed to Him in England; for he saw that there was not so great a separation after all'.[76] Likewise at Langalibalele's settlement near the end of the February, Colenso had Shepstone tell the chief 'that we prayed to umKulunkulu'; and at Putine's on the last day of the month the bishop told the people assembled that their 'own Names are excellent names for God; and we shall call them by those Names, and shall come to tell them more about Him'.[77]

Yet even as he traveled among Africans and claimed to worship the same god as they did, Colenso began to question the very concordance that he preached. After having copied at Shepstone's dictation 'the 100th Psalm in Kafir' (at 13 lines about the shortest psalm in the Bible, and with 'Lord' or 'God' mentioned five times), Colenso decided that *umKulunkulu* and *umVelinqange* were 'both too long for common use'. He wondered whether it would not be better to adopt either *umPezulu*, the word used in courts of law, or perhaps, *uDio* – new, short, easy to pronounce, 'directly connected with the Greek and Latin names for God', and, ostensibly, a solution to the almost 'impossible' task of giving 'correct representations in ... a barbarous tongue, of the refined and expressive language of some parts of the Bible and

[74] Colenso, journal entry, 13 Feb. 1855, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 56–60.

[75] Colenso, journal entry, 22 Feb. 1855, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 98–9. Emphasis in original.

[76] Colenso, journal entries, 23 and 24 Feb. 1855, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 114–6. Emphasis in original.

[77] Colenso, journal entries, 27 and 28 Feb. 1855, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 129–31, 134–7.

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Prayer Book'.[78] More significantly, perhaps, he became concerned about the complex figurative meanings of *umKulunkulu*. Nceni told Colenso at the beginning of March that Gardiner had always taught Zulu that 'umKulunkulu must be the same as uTixo', the latter a word and concept that the bishop considered 'mean and meaningless'. The following month Colenso learned from Daniel Lindley that while Zulu 'had the name umKulunkulu, which they used to express the Creator of all things', they also 'meant by it a little worm in the reeds, a sort of caddis-worm'. Colenso viewed this information as proof that the Zulu in the area where Lindley preached 'rank in yet lower degradation' and had 'lost yet more of the truth of their original traditions than others of their brethren'.[79]

However, a conversation between himself, Lindley, and two Zulu men, aged between 46 and 49, seemed to allay Colenso's concerns. The two Zulu men, their words translated by 'a young half-caste woman, Nancy, a very pleasing and intelligent girl', told the missionaries that while they had heard of *uThixo* from Gardiner, they had themselves thought (rather than been told by him) that he must really have been talking about *umKulunkulu* in describing the person who created all things. They said that they had 'heard of Him, that there was such a Being; they did not know *where* He was'. When asked by Lindley if the name alluded to a 'little worm down in the reeds', the Zulu responded with a 'smile of respectful derision' and the statement, 'Oh no! we only call it so; we use the name for it, but we do not pay honour to it'.

Colenso sought further reassurance that Zulu believed in a creator god and not a worm when, two weeks later at the mission station of Aldin Grout, he selected the 'four oldest men for a little... inquiry' about God. Though the men had each converted to Christianity when children and as a result 'their reminiscences of heathenism' were, Colenso thought, likely to be 'only faint shadows of their early childhood', their testimony delighted the bishop. They gave Colenso 'immediately the two Kafir *names*, as those by which their fathers knew the Great Creator' before ever having heard of *uThixo*. They also provided evidence of what missionaries such as Colenso regarded as a necessary and fundamental feature of Christian worship, prayer. At first, the four men denied a theory that Colenso had initially heard from Norwegian missionaries in Natal – that Zulu sent their children out to pray to *umKulunkulu* – but upon pressing their informants Colenso and Grout were delighted to see 'the face of one of them suddenly gleam, as it were, with a bright flash of memory, and he began instantly to chatter vivaciously with his three brethren who were very soon in a similar state of excitement'.

[78] Colenso, journal entry, 3 Mar. 1855, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 159–60. He thought another Zulu word, '*uLungileyo*, "The Good One"', also too long for regular use. Colenso apparently dropped the idea of using *uDio* when he was told by another missionary, Thomas Hodgson, that a word of similar sound in Zulu, *udiyo*, meant earthenware pot. See Döhne, *A Zulu–Kafir Dictionary*, 63; and Doke, *English–Zulu Zulu–English Dictionary*, English–Zulu, 360, Zulu–English, 150. William Shaw, a Wesleyan proponent of *uThixo*, cited Colenso's experiment as an example of the 'difficulty of Kaffirizing the Latin name of God', *The Story of My Mission in South-Eastern Africa* (London, 1860), and quoted Döhne as stating that every time the bishop used his Africanized term he had to explain it 'by saying that it meant UTIXO', 451–2.

[79] Colenso, journal entries, 1 Mar., 14 Apr. 1855, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 137, 238–9.

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With eager eyes and unanimous voices, they turned to tell us that they now recollected that there *was* such a practice among them, and sometimes parents *did* send their children out to call on umKulunkulu, though from lapse of time they had almost forgotten it'.

Colenso was much relieved. Here, to his mind, was proof not only of a belief among Zulu in *umKulunkulu* as the creator god, but irrefutable evidence also of prayer.[80]

Despite Colenso's confidence in 1855 that Zulu had an indigenous knowledge of 'God' and engaged in the ritual of prayer, there was considerable contemporary evidence that his identification of *umKulunkulu* as the lost Christian god was misplaced. Francis Owen, for example, understood in 1837 that 'Ukulunkulu [was] a real Zulu word with an emphatic signification, "the great, great"' yet for him it did not express 'the sublime object of our worship'. Moreover, he learned that the American missionaries objected to it as a word 'inconsistent with the Deity' since they believed it to apply to 'a certain ancient chief, whom they [Zulu] suppose to have sprung from a reed', and also to be 'the name of a certain worm which makes a covering for itself with grass'. While the American missionaries preferred to use 'Elohim' for god, Owen thought the issue of naming needed further consideration.[81] Owen's translator, R. B. Hulley, reported that in his experience 'Unkulunkulu' was 'not in use among the natives', and suggested that Gardiner had 'introduced it to express the Greatest, or the Maker of all Men'. Though Hulley accepted that the root word, *kulu*, 'meant great… [he] denied that Unkulunkulu existed in the language to express that which Capt. Gardiner wished' and 'refused to use it in this sense' of 'Greatest' or 'Maker'.[82] Colenso's contemporary, J. L. Döhne, emphasized the importance of prefixes in understanding word meaning and the resulting confusion that arose with people 'paying no proper attention to the nom. form whether *un* or *um*'. *Inkulunkulu*, Döhne wrote, signified 'Greatness in a high degree… *as*: u yinkulunkulu na, wena na? i.e.: are you then all-wise – all-knowing – all-seeing'. *Unkulunkulu* referred to the 'first great individual; the progenitor of one or all the natives', and was, he thought, equivalent to Adam. While Döhne accepted that there might be 'some idea of a being like God at the bottom of this word', he thought that misunderstanding always arose when it was used in the sense of 'God-Almighty'. Indeed, he argued that Zulu only used *unkulunkulu* in the latter sense when some 'Christian Missions have already gained [influence] over the nation in general'. *Umkulunkulu*, the word used by Colenso for God, Döhne noted, signified 'the greatest', though in a temporal rather than transcendental sense (his example was 'umuntu o ngumkulunkulu, i.e.: a man who is a great genius'). More significantly for the confusion arising among missionaries with regard to

[80] Colenso, journal entry, 13 Apr. 1855, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 258–9. Emphasis in original.

[81] Owen, journal entry, 23 Dec. 1837, Cory, *The Diary of the Rev. Francis Owen*, 89–90.

[82] Hulley's views, and Gardiner's derivations, are discussed by Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 54–5, fn. 3. Callaway notes that despite Hulley's refusal to use *unkulunkulu* as the equivalent of god, others of Owen's servants told Zulu that the meaning was the same.

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names for god, *umkulunkulu* was also the term applied to a 'caddis-worm, because this insect builds its house so wisely and carries it all about'.[83]

Döhne suggested further that what missionaries claimed as evidence of prayer was no more than a misunderstanding by 'foreigners who did not sufficiently understand the people and their language... and [who had mistakenly] concluded that there must be a great deal of religious knowledge among them'. Though Zulu did send their children out to look for *unkulunkulu*, this practice, in his view, did not represent a reverence for 'God'. Rather, it was a 'common trick, which greedy mothers or women play upon their children when they have prepared a daily meal and wish to enjoy it alone, for which purpose they send the children away, saying: "yiyani ni memele kunkulunkulu a ni pe izonto zonke ezinhle", i.e.: go and call out to unkulunkulu, that he must give you all nice things. The hungry children do what their mothers say and are laughed at for their obedience'. The story, which represented a prayer to Colenso, signified a 'fable' to Döhne .[84]

Zulu testimony collected by Henry Callaway, a missionary in Natal from 1854 onward, who intently pursued investigations of vernacular accounts of the heavens and the earth, added to the body of evidence that underpinned the view that among the numerous figurative meanings of *unkulunkulu* none accorded with Colenso's and others' conception of an interventionist creator god. Callaway recorded in Zulu the words dictated by his informants, 'initially with the view of improving my knowledge of their language... [and then] for the intrinsic value of the information itself', and published these, with his own translation into English, in two volumes in 1868 and 1870.[85] Some of Callaway's Zulu informants, on being questioned about *unkulunkulu* as an original or creator figure (Callaway did not give the text of his questions but this is the import suggested by the answers he recorded), wondered whether the missionary did not mean *umvelinqangi* (a word that Callaway noted 'expresses priority; the first out-comer').[86] Callaway argued that the

[83] Döhne, *A Zulu–Kafir Dictionary*, 178. Döhne included the following exposition of the mis-translation he thought common: 'This word [unKulunkulu] refers only to some great or original man of a whole nation – This idea is established by the etymology and the usage of the language. But tradition says, "unkulunkulu wa dabula abantu nezinto zonke eluhlangeni", i.e.: the very great one made go or come forth people and all things out of or from a descent. And this expression being incorrectly interpreted by foreigners (*viz.*: the very great one created men and all things out of a reed, – or, as some, paying no proper attention to the nom. form whether *un* or *um*, understand it, that umkulunkulu, *viz.*: the caddis-worm, had created men and all things out of a single reed), – therefore great confusion has prevailed'.

[84] Döhne, *A Zulu–Kafir Dictionary*, 178.

[85] Callaway to C. Hanbury, 16 Dec. 1858, cited in Marian S. Benham, *Henry Callaway M.D., First Bishop for Kaffraria, His Life-History and Work: A Memoir* (London, 1896), 76. See Norman Etherington, 'Missionary doctors and African healers in mid-Victorian South Africa', *South African Historical Journal*, 19 (1987), 81–2 for biographical details on Callaway's informants, and 86–9 for a discussion of *unkulunkulu*. Etherington has hypothesized a geographic interpretation with regard to African concepts of *unkulunkulu*, suggesting that those people living closer to the expanding settler frontier in the west, and thus coming under the influence of missionary ideas, were more likely to claim that the word signified a 'High God' and creator, whereas those to the east were more likely to associate the term with 'the first ancestor'.

[86] Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 7, fn. 16 and 17. See, for example, the testimony of Ufulatela Sithole, 7–8, and that of Umpengula Mbanda, 16. I have retained Callaway's usage in the spelling of his informants' names.

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Zulu form – 'Unkulunkulu ubani na?' – of the question usually asked by missionaries – 'who or what is Unkulunkulu' – really meant, 'What is his *name*?' And in response, he continued, 'The native cannot tell you his *name*, except it be Umvelinqangi'.[87]

Those informants, men and women, who spoke to Callaway suggested a variety of meanings and identities for *unkulunkulu*: he was the first man and thus the original ancestor of all people; or he was not a man but rather a woman, who had given birth to two men, one white, one black; or the first man and the first woman together formed one *unkulunkulu*.[88] Or, in the testimony of numerous informants, the word signified not a single primordial figure but rather an ancestral relationship, one that was in constant process. Uludonga (a member of the Ngwane people) told Callaway: 'All natives have their own Unkulunkulu ... The Unkulunkulu of our tribe is Ungenamafu and Uluthlongwana and Usangolibanzi'.[89] Ukota Mhlongo, a 'very old' Langeni man whose aunt had been Nandi, the mother of Shaka, told the missionary that 'the Unkulunkulu whom we know was the father of Utshaka; Usenzangakona was Utshaka's father ... Ujama was the father of Usenzangakona, the father of the Utshakas; it is he who is Unkulunkulu'.[90] Indeed, Callaway noted with regard to the 'remarkable' testimony of a 'very old' female informant, Ubebe, that *unkulunkulu* 'went up to heaven' the strong concordance with an *izibongo* of Senzangakona that had the deceased king ascend into the sky: 'Child of Ujama, who twisted a large rope which reached to heaven'.[91] Moreover, as Callaway noted elsewhere in his investigations, with the constant splitting off of people and the development of new groups as people moved about within southeastern Africa, new *unkulunkulu* were constantly being identified: 'So Umahaule, who has formed a small tribe, says, in a few years he shall be an Unkulunkulu'.[92]

Whatever the varieties of meaning attached to *unkulunkulu*, there were certain common elements in the testimony of Callaway's informants. The 'Unkulunkulu of all men was himself a man'.[93] This *unkulunkulu* was long dead, did not exist in a spirit form as did the immediate ancestors of the living and did not take an anthropomorphic shape such as that of a snake.[94] Nor was *unkulunkulu* an object of veneration or prayer – 'the first man is no where worshipped. No isibongo of his is known. The worship, therefore, of

[87] Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 10, fn. 25.

[88] Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 2, 35–6, 49.

[89] Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 51. See also the testimony of Ungqeto Wakwatshange (32 fn. 62), recorded by Callaway in 1860 and providing 'the first intimation I received that there are many Onkulunkulu, that each house has its own, and is an object of worship, his name being the chief *isibongo* or surname, by which the Spirits or Amatonga of his family are addressed'.

[90] Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 47–8. A. T. Bryant used the metaphor of age in identifying the ancestral founder of the Zulu people, Malandala, as 'this Zulu *uNkulunkulu*'. *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal* (London, 1929), 17.

[91] Ubebe's testimony was relayed to Callaway by her son, Ubapa. Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 55–6 and fn. 4, 83 fn. 46.

[92] Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 51, fn. 96.

[93] Callaway referring to the testimony of 'an old man', Umdumo, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 99, fn. 72.

[94] See, for example, the testimony of Umpengula Mbanda, Ubebe, and Unjan, Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 15, 56, 62–3.

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him according to native worship is no longer possible'.[95] Except that is, in the testimony of a single informant, a refugee from Zululand whose testimony Callaway had first 'laid aside as useless' because it was 'absolutely contradictory' to what he had heard from all other Zulu. This informant told the missionary that people loved *unkulunkulu* because he provided cattle, maize and beer, and told Zulu 'to take ten wives'. They also asked *unkulunkulu* for rain, '"Si pe imvula, nkosi, ku kule umbila wetu". "Give us rain, O Chief, that our maize may grow"', the 'only instance' that Callaway had ever encountered 'in which even apparently a native has said that prayer is made to Unkulunkulu'.[96]

For the rest of Callaway's informants, *unkulunkulu* as an object of worship or as a 'lord of heaven' (other than in the image of Shaka's father) was a concept that they associated with the teaching of certain missionaries:

> When I [Callaway's assistant Umpengula Mbande] enquired [of Unjan]...'Do not your teachers [Roman Catholic missionaries] tell you that the lord which is in heaven is Unkulunkulu?' he replied with a start, 'Hau, by no means. I never heard such a word, neither did I ever hear them even mention the name. It is your teacher [Callaway] alone with whom I have ever spoken about it'.

To Callaway himself, Unjan then said, 'We have now heard from you that the Lord which is in heaven is he who made everything. The old men said that Unkulunkulu was an ancestor and nothing more, an ancient man who begat men, and gave origin to all things'.[97]

For many Zulu, *unkulunkulu* was also a symbol of deceit. In a variation of the story first published by Döhne, Umpengula Mbande told Callaway how old people would tell children 'to go and call' *unkulunkulu*. The children, believing 'through ignorance' and 'with sincerity', that a man would appear, would shout until hoarse. The old people sent the children on this pointless quest, Umpengula argued, whenever they wanted to do something in private. They used the name *unkulunkulu* because they

> care nothing about him...The name of Unkulunkulu has no respect paid to it among black men; for his house [family line] no longer exists. It is now like the name of a very old crone, which has no power to do even a little thing for herself, but sits continually where she sat in the morning till the sun sets. And the children make fun of her, for she cannot catch them and flog them, but only talk with her mouth. Just so is the name of Unkulunkulu when all the children are told to go and call him. He is now a means of making sport of children.

It was because of these unpleasant experiences that Zulu, according to Umpengula, found it so impossible to forsake their own 'Onkulunkulu [ancestors] whom we do worship' (Umpengula used '*bonga*', which Döhne had glossed as to express praise, to extol, to poetize – as in praise poems for chiefs – or to express gratitude, but not as the equivalent of worship) in order

[95] Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 17, fn. 35 and 36, 18, fn. 38. See also the testimony of Umpengula Mbanda, 17–18, 22–3.

[96] Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 83–5.

[97] Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 61–3. Callaway had first rejected (only two months after his arrival in South Africa) the use of *unkulunkulu* as a translation for the Christian God on the grounds that it was 'a proper name' much like Jupiter or Woden rather than an expression of 'the idea of Divinity'. See his diary entry for 5 Mar. 1856, cited in Benham, *Henry Callaway*, 55.

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to worship (again '*bonga*') or pray to someone who was 'but a man like ourselves, dead and buried long ago', and by whose name 'all of us in our childhood were deceived'.[98]

Indeed, Zulu and other Africans, half a century after Callaway carried out his investigations into the meaning of *unkulunkulu*, remained ambivalent about its metaphorical implications. Mini ka Ndhlovu, born in the middle of the 1820s and speaking in 1910 to the colonial official, James Stuart, equated *unkulunkulu* with *umvelinqangi* 'who created people'.[99] Mabola, a Swazi born in the 1840s, thought that all his people were descended from Mkulumgcadi whom he considered 'the same as the Zulu *UmVelinqangi*'.[100] Others suggested that missionaries and their African converts (*kolwa*) had either invented or tried to appropriate *unkulunkulu* and gave different meanings to the word. Ndukwana ka Mbengwana, born in the 1830s among the Mthethwa people and Stuart's main informant, said that Zulu had 'never used to apply the word *Nkulunkulu* to the creator; that has been imported by missionaries and *kolwas*'.[101] Mqaikana ka Yenge, born in 1830 or 1831, thought *kolwas* talked 'a lot about *Nkulunkulu* but *they do not understand his affairs*; *they do not know them properly*'. Moreover *kolwa* had twisted the mortality story of Zulu, preaching that the lizard (death) had been sent by Satan and the chameleon by *umvelinqangi* (signifying 'God' for the converts). Mqaikana also could not imagine how *umvelinqangi* could have 'communicated his will to the Europeans', as missionaries claimed he did in their preaching about the book and the word, since 'we do not see how paper could have come down from the sky'.[102]

While criticizing missionaries on literal grounds, Zulu were well aware that their own language and their explanations of the heavens were infused with metaphor. Ndukwana explained his understanding of creation to Stuart in the following way.[103]

We say *that all things were created* (*datshulwa*) *by Mvelinqangi*. We however do not know for certain. *Mvelinqangi* is a personality. No one knows where he lives. It is merely an *expression* (*isiga*), this, of saying, '*Mvelinqangi* created all things' – a common saying or proverb. *All* say he *did the creating*. There is nothing

[98] Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 70–6. Umpengula did not use the word, *ukukuleka*, that signified paying obeisance, often on one's knees, to a chief or king, and which was later used by missionaries as their translation of 'to pray'. See Döhne, *A Zulu–Kafir Dictionary*, 176–7; and Doke, *English–Zulu Zulu–English Dictionary*, English–Zulu, 362. Whereas in Döhne the entry on *bonga* refers only to praises to departed spirits or to chiefs, Doke's entry (Zulu–English, 84) gives *ukumbonga uNkulunkulu* (to extol God) as the example for the first, and by implication prime, meaning of the word.

[99] Testimony of Mini ka Ndhlovu, 22 June 1910, Colin Webb and John Wright (eds.), *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples* (Pietermaritzburg, 1976–), III, 129–30.

[100] Testimony of Mabola, 25 Nov. 1898, Webb and Wright, *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence*, II, 7–8. Mabola had been born a Zulu but as a young child went with his father to join a Swazi regiment.

[101] Testimony of Ndukwana ka Mbengwana, 1 Oct. 1900, Webb and Wright, *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence*, IV, 302, 303.

[102] Testimony of Mqaikana ka Yenge, 11 May 1916, Webb and Wright, *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence*, IV, 15–16.

[103] Testimony of Ndukwana ka Mbengwana, 1 Oct. 1900, Webb and Wright, *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence*, IV, 302.

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understood among the Zulus about *Mvelinqangi* living in the sky, on or in the earth, or anywhere. Nothing is declared of him but that he created all things. It is not known who created him. Only today (recently) do we hear of an *inkosi*, that he lives in heaven, and that his name is Jesus. There was no definitiveness about our knowledge of *Mvelinqangi*.

Though *umvelinqangi* figured in numerous Zulu accounts of creation, the most persistent metaphorical construct among other Africans as well as among Zulu equated the origin of mankind with that of plants through the splitting off of a reed or the development of a seed. The operative verb in these accounts was either *dabuka*, 'to spring or break off, from something by fissure or division', as when one of Callaway's informants told him that *unkulunkulu* 'was the first man, he broke off in the beginning', ('Yena umuntu wokuk*q*ala; wa dabuka ekuk*q*aleni'), or *vela*, 'to come forth from', as when Unsukuzonke Memela testified 'Unkulunkulu sprang from a bed of reeds [''Unkulunkulu wa vela em*h*langeni''], and a woman (a wife) sprang from a bed of reeds after him [''nomfazi wa vela em*h*langeni emva kwake'']. They had one name, viz., Unkulunkulu [''Ba'bizo linye ukuti Unkulunkulu'']'. In this, as in other stories, the earth existed before *unkulunkulu* emerged, and the reed (*umhlanga*) could appear as another name, '*Uthlanga*', for the first man alongside *umvelinqangi* and *unkulunkulu* (Callaway distinguished between *uthlanga* as signifying 'potential source of being', *umvelinqangi* priority 'the first out-comer', and *unkulunkulu* antiquity, 'the old-old one').[104] Umpengula Mbande told Callaway: 'To us black men UnKulunkulu is a stalk of maize. It may produce the ear, it may be plucked, and the stalk be left...the grains of the cob are Onkulunkulu of houses, which now worship [*bongana*] those only of their own family according to the order of their growth on the cob'. In recounting Umpengula's use of 'a metaphor comparing men, or their houses, to the grains on an ear of corn', Callaway explained its meaning in the following way:

Unkulunkulu is the stalk, which having done its work dies; the seeds are the men, who sprang from him and became centres of families, each having its distinct family name or isibongo, and the children of successive generations worship those who preceded them.[105]

These metaphorical implications of Zulu creation stories fitted well with Callaway's own understanding of religion, particularly when, as he expressed matters, words 'must always be more or less inadequate'. Indeed, Callaway considered it crucial for his readers to 'note that all expressions used for religious notions from the names of the Divinity to every department of religion are metaphorical; and if traced bring us to natural objects, or to

[104] Testimony of unidentified informant, and that of Unsukuzonke Memela, Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 1–2, 39–44. The definition of *dabuka* is from Callaway, 1; that of *vela* from Döhne, *A Zulu–Kafir Dictionary*, 365. In explaining the meaning of *dabuka*, Callaway gave as examples how 'the swarming of bees is an *ukudabuka*. The division of small tribes from larger ones–is spoken of as *ukudabuka*. So if a village has become large, and the eldest son leaves the paternal kraal, and commences a new centre, that too is an *ukudabuka*'. It was also the verb used in describing the origin of different kinds of livestock and plants. In this account it is clear that *unkulunkulu* is not doing the breaking (i.e. active tense) but is being broken away (passive tense). For Callaway's distinctions between the names for the first man, see *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 7, fn. 16.

[105] Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 18.

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something we have noticed in intimate connexion with matter – that is, they are borrowed from Matter and Force by which the material universe is created'. 'Man', he noted, commonly spoke of 'the Wisdom, and Love and Fatherhood of God by anthropomorphic terms' in order to 'gain clearer ideas of God and his own relations to God', even while realizing that these terms too were 'inadequate'.[106]

Yet there was a critical distinction between Callaway's and other missionaries' metaphors for god, and those current in the testimony of African informants. In trying to get at 'the underlying primary principle upon which all the various religious superstructures [of the world] have been built', Callaway 'invariably' found himself 'coming at last to the notion of POWER, as that which suggests itself to the human mind as the first attribute of God, Man's felt need, continually demanding his attention in the revolutionary tyranny of his surroundings'. In reflecting on the traditions with which he had grown up, Callaway argued that 'man' constantly

> appeals to this Unknown Unseen Something as a Power which he instinctively personifies, and which according to circumstances of education, temperament or surroundings he may regard as a Malignant Power who has to be deprecated lest he destroy, or a Beneficent Power on whom he may confidingly lean with a child-like confidence.

God for Callaway and his fellow missionaries was 'a Power above them'.[107]

For Ukoto, however, nephew of Nandi, cousin of Shaka, *age* was the important signifier. He explained to Callaway that Zulu used the word for great, *kulu*, to 'designate the father of our father'. Reduplication of the word was a way of uniting children with the name of their father and before him with their father's father and so forth. To 'say Unkulunkulu ... [was to say] one who is very old'. In such fashion, Ukoto stressed to the missionary that Zulu 'do not speak of power [*amandla*] when we say Unkulunkulu, but especially of age [*ubudala*]'.[108] This was the very same adjective used by the first Zulu whom Callaway upon his arrival in Natal had asked about indigenous religious beliefs: 'He [*unkulunkulu*] was dala, dala, dala, *dala*, that is, old, old, old, *old*'.[109]

Yet it was the metaphor of power that missionaries affirmed in their teachings about the heavens and the earth, a metaphor that they hoped to associate literally with themselves and with colonial authority. Colenso and Shepstone in particular, traveling through Natal on their mission for institutionalized religion and the colonial state, reciting the Lord's Prayer at every opportunity, and instructing Africans in the knowledge and the truth of an all-powerful, all-masculine, creator-god, over and over used metaphors, or to cite again Appleyard's words, 'tropes and figures', that imbued every aspect of their preaching and instructions with images of authority, control and hierarchy in a patriarchal, and very fearsome, universe. *Unkulunkulu* in Colenso's retelling of Zulu stories, came not from the reeds but created them

[106] H. Callaway, *On the Religious Sentiment Amongst the Tribes of South Africa: A Lecture Delivered at Kokstad* (n.p., 1876), 12–13.

[107] Callaway, *On the Religious Sentiment Amongst the Tribes of South Africa*, 9–10. Emphasis in original.

[108] Testimony of Ukoto Mhlongo, Callaway, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 48.

[109] Callaway to Hanbury, 21 July 1855, Benham, *Henry Callaway*, 51–2.

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in the first place. *Unkulunkulu* gave death to humans, sending the chameleon and the lizard in a race against one another.[110] In Colenso's text, God was represented as 'the Almighty', 'Almightiness', 'The First Essence', 'Existence', 'Original Existence', 'the Great Source of All Wisdom', 'Great Inkos', 'Great Creator', 'Lord Above', 'Governor of the Universe', 'Power of Universal Influence', 'Great-Great-One, Supreme Being, traditional Creator of all things', 'the *INKOSE EN-KULU* – Great Lord – of all men... the Lord of us all – the *UKUMKANI*, Supreme King, Whose Kingdom ruleth over all; and we must obey Him, and try to please Him in all things'.[111]

CONCLUSION

By mid-century, what most missionaries had anticipated as a relatively straightforward task of studying a 'barbarian language' to attain 'insight into the character of a people' and to create a literature 'for the propagation of Christian truth and the extension of civilization' (the words are Döhne's) had turned out to be an infinitely more complicated endeavor than originally envisaged. Most Africans rejected the missionaries' assertion of superior knowledge, and even those few who did convert to Christianity sometimes

[110] In his re-telling of these stories, Colenso was relying on versions collected in the summer of 1855–56 by Wilhelm Bleek from refugees from Mpande's kingdom living in Natal. See Wilhelm H. I. Bleek, *Inhlamvu Ezikulunywayo Gabantu BakwaZulu : Thirty Chapters of Zulu Traditions and Customs* (n.p., 1857), republished in an edited form by J. A. Engelbrecht as *Zulu Legends by Wm. H. I. Bleek* (Pretoria, 1952), 1–9.

[111] Colenso, *Ten Weeks in Natal*, 57, 59, 100, 114, 115, 129, 137, 238; Colenso, *Zulu-English Dictionary* (Pietermaritzburg, 1861), 341. With regard to the story of the chameleon and the lizard there were a great number of variations in the telling recorded throughout the nineteenth century. Grout, *The IsiZulu*, 349, noted that Zulu used a passive construction – 'there was sent a chameleon' – rather than identified a sender. Bleek recounted that Bopapa told him that *unkulunkulu* (which Bleek wrote meant either 'the Great-great-one' or 'the Old-old-one') 'created the nations out of the reed' ('*u-Nkulunkulu wa-dabula izi-we o-hlangeni*'), and then 'sent the chameleon'. See Bleek, *Inhlamvu Ezikulunywayo Gabantu BakwaZulu*, 1–3, 29, 30, 33. Callaway's informants also had *unkulunkulu* (though a figure that they did not recognize rather than Colenso's creator god) sending the chameleon, *The Religious System of the Amazulu*, 3–4, 38. In the account collected in the 1870s by Fred Fynney, however, the author was told by a Zulu with whom he remonstrated for torturing a chameleon, that humans already existed when a great council of chiefs decided to send the chameleon and the lizard, *Zululand and the Zulus* (Pietermaritzburg, 1880), 15–17. The differences between Colenso and Callaway in interpreting Zulu religious ideas set off various debates in missionary circles throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. For an examination of these differences, by an author who thought Callaway (and Moffat and Döhne) too influenced by a 'scientific' bias in concluding that Africans had no indigenous knowledge of a creator god and Colenso much the more persuasive an analyst, see the lengthy expositions of the German missionary, William Wanger, 'The Zulu notion of God according to the traditional Zulu God-names', part 1, *Anthropos*, 18/19 (1923–4), 656–87; part 2, *Anthropos*, 20 (1925), 558–78; part 3, *Anthropos*, 21 (1926), 351–85; and his *The Ntu God-Names* (Innsbruck, 1927). Wanger thought a key language distinction, which he argued was missed by Callaway, was between 'uNkulunkulu' meaning 'All-Great' and 'u(n)kulu(n)kulu' meaning 'the oldest'. Despite these controversies, the original god-names selected by missionaries remain in use in biblical translations to the present day. For the Xhosa version, god is 'u-Tixo', for the Tswana, 'Modimo', and for the Zulu, 'uNkulunkulu'. See, respectively, *Incwadi Yezibalo Ezingcwele* (London, 1956), *Bibela E E Boitshepo* (London, 1958), and *Ibhayibheli Elingcwele* (London, 1961).

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did so in ways that subtly subverted linguistically what were viewed and interpreted by missionaries as overt representations of fealty. Julius Torrend, a Jesuit missionary in southern Africa in the late 1880s, described in his memoirs an exchange between himself and 'a poor old Kafir woman'. Torrend gave the woman a loaf of bread receiving in return 'the following expression of thanks: *Nkosi*! *Dade*! *Mta ka Tixo*! *Mta ka Rulumente*! *Solotomana*! That is: "Lord! Father! Child of God! Child of the Government! Solotomana!"'[112] This conjugation of paternalism and power was one of particular appeal to colonial authorities. It was represented as well in a linguistic transference that gained currency in the 1870s and 1880s, 'Tixo Yilonde in Kosikazi' for 'God Save the Queen'.[113] Yet that for many Africans such a conjugation remained metaphorical rather than literal, and might well intimate a verbal mocking of colonial power, was, however, also suggested in the figurative language of Torrend's exchange with the woman and in the translated oath to the sovereign. Torrend noted that the phrase 'child of god' was 'a mere compliment, or "name", as Kafirs say', much like the proper name that they applied to him, 'Solotomana'. Torrend did not gloss his proper name, perhaps because he may have thought it a combination of *sola*, to blame, to reprove, to complain, and *tamana*, small mouthful.[114] With regard to the oath, the question remained in the mid to later nineteenth century as to whether Zulu accepted that *uThixo* referred to a creator god allied with the sovereign rule of the colonial state, or whether the word as propagated by the missionaries still had the vernacular connotations of devil and insect worship (as well as sneezing) that had so troubled Colenso?[115]

Most troubling to the missionaries and the British colonial authorities, however, was what they viewed as the apostacy of one of their own. Just over five years after his tour of Natal with Theophilus Shepstone, John Colenso, bishop of Natal, published the first part of what turned out to be a seven volume opus in which he questioned the literalness of the Bible. Prefacing his text with a quote from Paul the Apostle (Corinthians 2.xiii.8), 'We can do nothing against the Truth, but for the Truth', Colenso recorded how 'intimate communion with the native mind' through his language studies had allowed him 'not only to avail myself freely of their criticisms, but to appreciate fully their objections and difficulties' with regard to missionary teachings. Whereas while engaged in parochial work in England he had 'contented' himself 'with silencing, by means of the specious explanations, which are given in most commentaries, the ordinary objections [by some of his parishioners] against the historical character of the early portions of the Old Testament', in Natal talking with Zulu he had

[112] Julius Torrend S.J., *A Comparative Grammar of the South African Bantu Languages, Comprising those of Zanzibar, Mozambique, the Zambezi, Kafirland, Benguela, Angola, the Congo, the Ogowe, the Cameroons, the Lake Region, etc*. (London, 1891), 294–5.

[113] Charles Roberts, *A Zulu Manual or Vede-Mecum* (London, 1900), 60. Roberts claimed that the translation had first appeared in print 21 years before the publication of his book.

[114] Torrend, *A Comparative Grammar*, 294–5.

[115] On the complex ways in which some Africans reinterpreted mission Christianity on their own terms in the nineteenth century, see Norman Etherington, *Preachers, Peasants, and Politics in Southeast Africa, 1835–1900: African Christian Communities in Natal, Pondoland, and Zululand* (London, 1978); and Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (eds.), *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1997).

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been brought face to face with the very questions which I then put by. While translating the story of the Flood, I have had a simple-minded, but intelligent, native – one with the docility of a child, but the reasoning powers of mature age – look up, and ask, 'Is all that true? Do you really believe that all this happened thus – that all the beasts, and birds, and creeping things, upon the earth, large and small, from hot countries and cold, came thus by pairs, and entered into the ark with Noah? And did Noah gather food for them *all*, for the beasts and birds of prey, as well as the rest?' My heart answered in the words of the Prophet, 'Shall a man speak lies in the name of the Lord?' Zech.xiii.3. I dared not do so. My own knowledge of some branches of science, of Geology in particular, had been much increased since I left England; and I now knew for certain, on geological grounds, a fact, of which I had only had misgivings before, viz. That a *Universal* Deluge, such as the Bible manifestly speaks of, could not possibly have taken place in the way described in the Book of Genesis, not to mention other difficulties which the story contains.

Driven against his will 'to search more deeply into these questions', Colenso 'tremble[d] at the result' of his inquiries. Though believing still 'in a God of Righteousness and Truth and Love', he informed his readers that 'the Bible can no longer be regarded as infallibly true in matters of common history'. Rather than an insistence on literal truth and a requirement that Africans see in the Bible a code of absolute hierarchical rule, Colenso recommended to his fellow churchmen and missionaries that they 'teach' people 'to look for the sign of God's spirit… within the Bible, which tells them of what is pure and good, holy and loving, faithful and true, which speaks from God's Spirit directly to their spirits, though clothed with the outward form of a law, or parable, or proverb, or narrative'.[116]

Colenso's plea for a rejection of literalness and a focus on metaphor won him few European allies. In 1863, he was tried and convicted of heresy and thereafter ignored by most missionaries and colonial officials.[117] Africans, however, remembered the bishop as 'the great Know-all'.[118]

[116] Colenso drafted most of these comments in a letter he wrote to an English professor of divinity in the early part of 1861 and which he reproduced in the preface to his first volume of studies on the Bible. See John Colenso, *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined* (7 vols.) (London, 1863, fifth edition), I, vi, vii–ix, 152.

[117] For a full study of Colenso's life and career, see Jeff Guy, *The Heretic: A Study of the Life of John William Colenso, 1814–1883* (Johannesburg, 1983).

[118] Evidence of John Kumalo, interviewed 28 Oct. 1900, Webb and Wright, *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence*, I, 218.

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