

# Renaming “Colonial” Congregations of UPCSA and the Politics of Toponym: The Case of Columba Mission, Centane

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## Abstract

This article is an offspring of Columba Kirk Session’s desire and request to change its name in favour of Reverend Frederick Wele Ngxenge. A discussion of the politics of toponyms, with special reference to Columba Mission, is the central theme of this article. In order to have an understanding of why there was this call for a name change, it is inescapable to not consider some background discussions of Rev. Ngxenge, who ministered in Southern amaGcalekaland, and Saint Columba, the man, who had never set foot in Africa. To that effect, this article presents Rev. Ngxenge within the context of his life and ministering and his connection with, and impact on, the rise and development of Columba Mission in the evangelising crusade. It provides Rev. Ngxenge’s contributions to the development of Columba Mission, Centane, from 1922 to 1971. It became clear that Rev. Ngxenge (1895–1971) belonged to Columba; he had spent his ministering life in this mission, where he and his wife, Dorothea Flora (1899–1974), were interred/laid to rest. It also provides a brief historical background of Columba, the man, as a basis for the elders and congregation to anchor their deliberations on a sound foundation. The author argues that the church, therefore colonial congregations and presbyteries, must tackle and dismantle the hegemony of White, Eurocentric and Western nomenclature and engage in debates around toponyms in favour of renaming their church after eminent personalities. The renaming of colonial congregations is one coin of the wider transformation agenda.

**Keywords:** Saint Columba; Reverend F. W. Ngxenge; toponyms; colonial congregations

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## Introduction and Historical Background to the Proposed Re-naming of Columba Mission

Naming and re-naming processes should be in accordance with the vision of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) to be a reconciled community of Christians exercising a prophetic witness to Christ, and a mission that sets out to build vital, reforming congregations for worship, ministry and discipleship, as well as visibly proclaiming the Kingdom of God through unity, justice, peace and love. The politics of toponym must consider the values of human rights, human dignity, non-racialism and non-sexism, as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (hereafter the Constitution), while simultaneously embracing UPCSA's identity and diversity.

In re-naming an entity or building, particular attention must be given to a number of vital considerations. For example, the existing name of Columba must be subjected to a process of internal reflection and review in light of the principle of identity, heritage and diversity within UPCSA. The process of re-naming was initiated by the Columba Kirk Session and recommended to the congregation, the primary occupants or users of the entity, before it could be forwarded to the upper courts of UPCSA. Thus, the re-naming processes could not be centrally prescribed.

At a congregational meeting, robust discussions took centre stage as everyone (enrolled members) participated from the position of knowing and understanding. Collective decisions were for the owners of the church, the congregants, as they exercised their rights and carried out their responsibilities in league with the Session, "a Council of the Congregation that is responsible for overseeing all aspects of the Congregation's life and work ..." (Manual of Faith and Order of the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, Chapter 6, Section 1, Paragraph 6.1, read with 6.3. and Chapter 7, Section 2, Paragraph 7.2). In the re-naming process, different views of the congregants (with their associations) were treated with sensitivity. Aspects raised for consideration included the following:

- A general feeling that the existing name is empty of any obvious meaning or historical or cultural significance.
- The current name is a duplication, as there is a church structure in the town of Komani sharing the name with Columba.
- The current name is potentially contentious, especially because it is associated with colonialism, landlessness, dispossession, segregation, apartheid, and unpleasant historical incidents or occurrences.
- The proposed name maintains some continuity of identity across generations of Columbans, the Bantu Presbyterian Church, RPCSA and UPCSA.
- The proposed name has the opportunity to be accepted and embraced by new generations of congregants and the entire church.
- The proposed name is, no doubt, capable of enduring for an extended period.

The account given here of the politics of toponym in Columba Mission is intended to understand and come to grips with deliberations, debates and robust engagements as initial stages towards commemorative church renaming. The toponymic process is usually embarked upon with the aim of erasing signs of earlier colonial, political and ideological regimes. As Duncan (2005) has noted with reference to the resumption of unity talks that had been conceived in 1972 (which floundered on the rocks of a failure due to the political dispensation), the resumed unity talks of the post-1994 period culminated in the formation of UPCSA on 26 September 1999 in Port Elizabeth. As he further puts it, “it was a change in this same political context that was the catalyst for unity talks to be resumed” (Duncan 2005, 189–219). He further contends that “in the spirit of national euphoria which surrounded the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, the Reformed Presbyterian Church initiated union discussions with the Presbyterian Church” (Duncan 2003, 359–373).

The ultimate objective of toponyms is always to advance new notions of cultural, local, regional and national identity and memory (Alderman and Inwood 2013, 2). Upholding the contention of Khabela, in which he concludes that the church is an agent of change in society, stating that “since the church does not operate in a political vacuum, there is always an underlying socio-political context,” this article is structured within socio-cultural and political dimensions (Khabela 2000, quoted in Duncan 2005, 189–219).

Columba Mission, a 1 105-member congregation,<sup>1</sup> was founded along the Khobonqaba River in southern amaGcalekaland. It is one of the missions that played a significant and ground-breaking part in the earliest missionary endeavours in South Africa, particularly in the area east of the Nciba (Kei) River.<sup>2</sup> However, those missions are not discussed in this article because the focus here is on Columba Mission’s name change, as proposed by its Columba Kirk Session.

South Africa, unlike former British Protectorates (Botswana, Swaziland and ...) was, like Namibia and Zimbabwe, a settler colony. She underwent “harsh colonialism compared to” the former British Protectorates (Manatsha 2014, 270). In the former British Protectorates, contends Manatsha, “during the colonial period, the British used the policy of indirect rule. ... The dikgosi (chiefs) were left to rule their own people, with minimal interference from the British” (Manatsha 2014, 270). In the settler colonies, writes Manatha, “large-scale land grabbing, systematic segregation and racial discrimination were institutionalised, which resulted in unprecedented dispossession and displacement of the Black population. In response, indigenous Africans waged

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1 I am indebted to Elder Mvuyo (E. M.) Mtirara, the Session Clerk of Columba Mission, for providing this information on 7 April 2022, having made verification with the Resident Minister, Rev. N. G. Luthuli.

2 These include, but are not limited to, the Rhenish Missionary Society, the London Missionary Society, the Berlin Missionary Society, and so forth.

protracted and tumultuous wars of liberation” (Palmer 1977, 57 quoted in Manatsha 2014, 270; Stiff 2000).

The strategic objective of this article is to contextualise the request for name change by presenting both Columba and Rev. F. W. Ngxenge<sup>3</sup> in such a way that the latter’s contribution towards the growth and development of Columba Mission is unearthed in terms of grasping who Rev. Ngxenge was in the context of the operation of the mission from the time he joined the mission in 1922 until he retired in 1971. Saint Columba had no physical connection with the mission named after him. The purpose is to discuss these personalities in order to trace where and when Saint Columba’s and Rev. Ngxenge’s names are topical in the deliberations, and why there emerged a desire for name change. The two have historical value in their connection with Columba Mission, though in extremely varying degrees.

Although this article limits the politics of name change to Columba Mission, there are many instances in other missions and presbyteries where calls for a name change are loud and clear. In some of these institutions, a name change has been granted.<sup>4</sup>

## Context of the Article

In this article, an attempt is made to explain and critique the factors that prompted the Columba Kirk Session to table the request for church renaming. This is discussed within a historical and politico-cultural framework, as was previously done by scholars on debates regarding the renaming of institutions (Alderman and Inwood 2013, 1–23; Azaryahu 1997, 479–493; Rose-Redwood 2008, 431–452). Christian John Makgala’s observation is appropriate and apt: history and culture “seem to matter when the general public feels that their heritage is facing danger from global forces” (Makgala 2008, 53).

The ushering in of democracy in 1994 has greatly influenced a trend and debates towards renaming church institutions in favour of particular events and eminent personalities. The exercise of engaging in the renaming of church institutions is a direction toward righting colonial wrongs (Manatsha 2014, 271). Colonial domination centred on the colonisers’ belief that they were superior human beings on a mission to save and “civilise” the “uncivilised” people in the colonies, seeing themselves as providers of supervision and guidance to the “weak” and “childlike” peoples in the colonies (Bain 2012, 59–77; Mamdani 1996, 4; McEwan 2009, 220; Mudimbe 1985, 149–233).

As background to the subsequent sections, a short overview of both Columba and Ngxenge is provided with a strong emphasis on the growth of Columba Mission and

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3 Hereafter referred to as Rev. Ngxenge.

4 Tiyo Soga Memorial Presbytery (formerly Transkei Presbytery) is one example in point. Having been ordained as the minister of the United Presbyterian Church on 23 December 1856, Tiyo Soga, the grandson of Jotelo, was the first ordained African minister from southern Africa.

outstations during the tenure of Rev. Ngxenge, who had a great influence not only on the elderly people but also on the young folk.<sup>5</sup> Rev. Ngxenge was, and still is, a symbol of pride to many people.

For purposes of putting the reader into a position of grasping the political context in which Rev. Ngxenge worked, it is prudent to give a background of the proposed re-naming of Columba as F. W. Ngxenge and discarding its original name (Columba) by giving an elucidation on who Columba was, and then proceeding to provide an account of the work of Rev. Ngxenge in Columba.

The Columba Kirk Session set itself on the path towards making this request for a name change a reality by convening a congregational meeting with the intention to recommend a name change, marking the beginning of a process towards renaming Columba Mission. The proposal to that effect was tabled to the Columba congregational meeting as a recommendation for discussion and further recommendation and request to the Tiyo Soga Presbytery Memorial<sup>6</sup> for discussion in preparation for forwarding it to the General Assembly for approval. As the discussions were in motion, a battery of questions for clarity and further discussion was posed for clear responses. As not all questions could be responded to satisfactorily, there emerged a need to demystify those grey areas. Hence, I was mandated by the congregation to present a bald outline of the comparative historical account of the two personalities as they border on the life and activities of the Columba Mission. This necessitated me to also present an account of Saint Columba before assessing Rev. Ngxenge's work. This account served as a springboard from which discussions would be centred.

### Saint Columba (7 December 521–9 June 597)

Columba Mission was named after an Irish man, Saint Columba. Born in the north of Ireland, Columba was both a politician and a missionary evangelist who engaged in the Christian crusading movement in Scotland. While active in Irish politics during his early years, he spent most of his life in Iona, Scotland.

Saint Columba was one of the 12 apostles of Ireland who founded a number of monasteries. A monk and an ordained priest, he travelled to Scotland in 563, evading

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5 In one of the congregational meetings held on 6 February 2022, Elder Noqhayiso (K. P.) Singqumba-Ncukana proudly said that Rev. Ngxenge conducted Sunday school sessions; and so did other remnants of the Ngxenge ministership. This admiring stance and appreciation of Ngxenge has always been expressed by many who happened to be associated with the church in the 1960s and 1970s, e.g., the late elders Tembile Canca, Madoda (Windus) Ngxoki, Mvula (B. M.) Ndzotyana, Zabemsukela (Nimrod) Toto, the list can go on ad infinitum. This is probably due to the number of years Rev. Ngxenge worked in Columba.

6 Formerly a Transkei Presbytery recently renamed Tiyo Soga Memorial after Rev. Tiyo Soga, a younger brother of Fesitile and Nkosi Sandile's (A! Mgolombane) *umphakathi* (counsellor) who set foot at Thuthurha, kuCentane, in 1868 on the invitation of Kumkani Sarhili (A! Ntaba), Nkosi Xhoxho Maphasa and Mnzabele of Qolorha and *amaphakathi akoMkhulu*. See J. M. Chalmers and Tiyo Burnside Soga, *UTiyo Soga* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1970, 60, 74, 83, 117).

excommunication and in response to a synod of clerics and scholars who forced him to go into exile. While in exile, he set for Scotland “to work as a missionary ... to help convert as many people as had been killed in the Battle of Cul Dreimhne in 561” (Columba. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columba>). The battle was the outcome of a quarrel between Saint Columba and Saint Finian of Movilla Abbey over the ownership of a psalter. In Scotland, the refugee was allotted land on the “Island of Iona off the west coast of Scotland, which became the centre of his evangelising mission to the Picts” in 563 (Columba. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columba>).

A critical look at Saint Columba in relation to a mission in amaGcalekaland (kuCentane), after whom it was named by Rev. James MacDonald Auld in 1878, could suggest that, indeed, the aim was to use the name “as a connecting link with Scotland” (Cory Library, PR 1082, December 1932) and as an extension of Scotland from Lujilo and Mgwali, where Rev. Auld (2 April 1848–5 December 1932) had worked for two years (Cory Library, PR 1083, 2 January 1933, 17) into Centane, where amaGcaleka had been pushed by the Cape forces all the way across the Qhorha and Mbhashe Rivers for the resettlement of the “loyal” amaNgqika.<sup>7</sup> Adding his voice to the discourse, S. E. K. Mqhayi confirms that before migrating to Centane as a missionary, Auld had been an active “minister at Lujilo from October 1875 to November 1877” (Minutes of the Kirk Session Meeting of the Church of Scotland at Lujilo Mission, 17 May 1878; Cory Library, PR 405, 14 February 1933, 8). Approximately “over 70 000 [20 000 amaNgqika and 50 000 amaMfengu] had been resettled on locations in Southern Gcalekaland between the [Nciba] and the Qhorha [Rivers]” (Saunders 1978, 68). Furthermore, Rev. James M. Auld contends that he chose the name Columba “in order to have a name in the station which would carry some inspiration in it” (Cory Library, MS 8957).

One wonders as to whose inspiration he was referring to. This utterance by Rev. Auld smacks of the Cape Government’s policy of undermining African people and their traditional leaders (chiefs and kings, and to a lesser extent, headmen). The historian, J. B. Peires, correctly concludes about traditional leadership both in South Africa and Africa during the colonial times:

Chiefs in South Africa, as elsewhere in Africa during the colonial period, have long depended on the government rather than their people for both political recognition and financial support. They cannot be regarded as a “traditional” ruling class because they have entirely ceased to represent the dominated remnants of the pre-colonial social order, although this fact has been deliberately obscured for ideological purposes. (Peires 1992, 384)

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7 For an account on the exodus and forced removals of the “loyal” amaNgqika by Cape Governor John Gordon Sprigg, see Jongikhaya Mvenene, “A Social and Economic History of the African People of Gcalekaland, 1830–1913.” *Historia: Journal of the Historical Association of South Africa* 59 (1) (May 2014): 59–71.

Endorsing Peires's line of argument, Richard Price points out that the late 1850s saw iNkosi (chiefs) "reduced to satraps of the government, vulnerable to the slightest whim of the imperial administration. ... All of the chiefs had been reduced to various states of penury and humiliating dependence upon imperial officers" (Price 2008, 234). Price emphatically states that "of all the leading chiefs of the era, only Sarhili<sup>8</sup> [c. 1815–1892], the Gcaleka chief and formal paramount of the Xhosa, managed to escape the grip of the imperial maw. ... Sandile [c.1820–1879], chief of the Rharhabe branch of the Xhosa people, bobbed and weaved around the tentacles of the imperial monster until his luck ran out in the last frontier wars, 1877–1878 when he was killed by Mfengu mercenaries" (Price 2008, 260).

Hodgson hits the nail on the head in summing up as follows: after one hundred years of war, the Xhosa-speaking people, from the Zuurveld in the Eastern Cape to Pondoland, had been incorporated under British sovereignty, suffering dispossession of their ancestral land, destruction of their polities, and displacement and domination by alien rulers (Hodgson 1997, 68). Hodgson concludes: every aspect of their daily lives, their customs, and their beliefs had come under sustained attack from missionaries (Hodgson 1997, 68). Thompson echoes Hodgson as he (the former) comments on the exodus of the "loyal" amaNgqika in 1878: it was attended with the demise of chieftainship and kingship; attended by loss of land, power and authority. As he neatly puts it, by 1870, "all chiefdoms were being subjected to pressures from one or more of the agents of White expansion—missionaries, traders, farmers, and government agents. Such agents had transformed the chiefdoms in varying degrees by 1870" (Thompson 1971, 246). Concurring with both Thompson (1971) and Hodgson (1997), Williams observes thus: sent by the Church of Scotland, the Scottish missionaries soon launched "open, illogical and unwarranted attacks on the Xhosa customs and rites," and further enforced that converts dissociate themselves from non-converts (Williams 1959, 312).

Although conservative in their evangelical beliefs and intolerant of abeNguni customs and rites, the Glasgow Missionary Society funded Scottish missions east of the Nciba (Kei) River, such as Cunningham (1856), Thuthurha (1868)<sup>9</sup>, Blythswood (1875), Malan (1875), Main (1876), Columba (1878), Duff (1880), Ingcisininde (1900) and Kidston (1905) (Mvenene 2019, 8). Generally, Wesleyan missionaries inveighed heavily against the culture and traditional religion, regarding these as heathenish and devilish activities. Missionaries urged amaGqobhoka not to practise polygamy, but rather that each man was to have one wife. The work by Mvenene (2020, 40) is useful in this regard for further reference.

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8 Kumkan Sarhili, the great python who encircles Hohita, was the king of the whole amaXhosaland, which before the arrival of the Dutch farmers in the late 18th century, stretched from the Mbhashe River almost as far as Port Elizabeth and as far north as Komani.

9 On the opening of the Church House in Thuthurha in 1871, Kumkani Sarhili contributed four heads of cattle for catering, while his subjects made a substantial contribution of 32 sheep and goats, see J. M. Chalmers and Tiyó Burnside Soga, *UTiyo Soga* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1970, 117).

In their bid to enforce monogamy, the missionaries told one Xhosa man “to put away all his wives but the first, and also told him to read his Bible [to which] the native said he had read his Bible, and found the whole of the respectable people in the Old Testament had from one to a hundred wives.” He said he had also found no instruction in the old law that they must remove their wives except one (Cape of Good Hope House of Assembly Debates, 26 July 1894, 364).

It is worthy of note that:

... where chiefs have many wives, the first wife is not the principal wife—she is only that one who has removed from him the white paint of his initiation. An important chief's Great Wife is chosen from a Royal House by his counsellors and lobola-ed by the tribe. (Millin 1953, 264)

Lewis (1991) offers a somewhat different interpretation and outcome of this practice as encouraging the characteristic splits between generations of abeNguni kingdoms and chiefdoms, summing it up this way:

This was encouraged by the practice of appointing the heir to the chieftaincy from the first son of the Great Wife, who was not the first wife and often the last to be married. In this way the legitimate heir was often a minor on inheriting his chieftaincy and a regent was appointed, thus extending the rule of councillors [amaPhakathi]<sup>10</sup> of his father's generation. (Lewis 1991, 251)

Generally speaking, the missionaries equated the spread of Christianity with the extension of European culture, and wrongly regarded Christianity and Western (European) civilisation as two sides of the same coin. In this connection, Westermann aptly remarks that “Christianity is a factor of its own and has fundamentally nothing to do with European civilization” (Westermann 1935, 28). Thus, these two processes were distinct though closely interwoven.

It is clear from the naming of the mission after Saint Columba that the colonial element was effectively applied in the church by the missionaries, who were frustrated by their inability to convert the amaXhosa by peaceful means, and resorted to being agents of colonialism. In this vein, Manatsha explains that:

... colonialism played a major role in erasing the identities of the conquered and colonised communities in many ways. For example, the colonisers got rid of the indigenous or local names of many places and streets. They replaced these with names

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10 Amaphakathi were drawn usually from the traditional leader's age-mates and chosen from the richer homestead heads; as senior members of the commoner clans, they were not only the mediators between iNkosi (chiefs) and his subjects but were also the main decision makers in the Great Place (*Komkhulu*). Their authority was derived from the people. For more on this aspect, see L. Switzer, *Power and Resistance in an African Society: The Ciskei Xhosa and the Making of South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press 1993, 36.)

that represented their (the colonisers') identities, culture and identities. (Manatsha 2014, 272)

All pro-imperialists—missionaries, White settlers, governors and generals—were held together by their common acceptance of racialism, believing that “as White exponents of European civilization, they had the inherent right to do whatever they liked to people who were not White and who did not have a European culture” (Peires 1990, 17–30). Burns-Ncamashe (uSogwali kaNtaba) has made an apt statement, endorsing the notion that the missionaries, as pro-imperialists, worked towards entrenching colonialism in amaXhosaland by contending that their relationship was no more than “esomfundisi weVangeli oza kubahedeni abaziphetheyo, ekhatshwa ngamawabo amabini, omnye elijoni, omnye engumrhwabi” (Burns-Ncamashe (Aa! Zilimbola) 1970, ix). He (Burns-Ncamashe 1970, ix–x) goes on to point out:

*UMfundis ekhwapheni  
Eqhusheke ibhayibhile;  
Isoldathi lon' egxeni  
Lixhome isinandile;  
Umrwebi yen' engxoweni  
Ezalise ngeebhotile,  
Ukuz' umXhos' engqondweni  
Ahlal' ehilitekile;  
Ang' angathath' emqulwini  
Sizongom' isinandile:  
Ang' angangen' eLizwini,  
Alukuhlwe yibhotile.  
Ahlokome k' amahlathi,  
Kufunwa amaphakathi;  
Macala kujub' ugodo,  
Abafi babeligoqo,  
Xolani mzi kaNojoli,  
Noko sigudl' amajoni  
Besingavusi lukhoko:  
Besingathisi lukholo.  
Izigukru nomumatha  
Nililele kuQamata.  
Noko sigudl' onyawontle,  
Anibhanganga ngabo ke.  
Noko sigudl' abeenkanti,  
Bayazalana ke kanti  
Nesoldathi nonyawontle.  
Ngabalumkisi nabo ke.*

In a similar vein, Mqhayi (1943, 71), singing his umbongo in 1925, demonstrated the same sentiments about the missionaries, the governors and White settlers:

*Hay' kodw' iBhritan' eNkulu,*

*Yeza nebhohile neBhayibhile;  
Yeza nomfundis' exhag' ijoni,  
Yeza nerhuluwa nesinandile;  
Yeza nenkanunu nemfakadolo.*

Burns-Ncamashe (1970) and Mqhayi (1943) paint a clear picture of the colonial governing authorities using the missionaries as their pawns, as well as confusing Africans with regard to embracing Christianity or indulging in liquor. The complementary role of generals, governors and missionaries is central in the two poems. The missionaries' presence was a cause for confusion as they "brought Bibles in their right hands, and beads and buttons in their left" (Beck 1989, 211). Beck (1989, 213) further argues that other missionaries were so deeply involved in commercial relations with Africans that they "abandoned forever the holy book for the account book."

Rev. Tiyo Soga, on his arrival at Thuthurha in 1868, made the following remark about uKumkani Sarhili's reaction to the establishment of Thuthurha Mission:

In my opinion, the Galekas will now, more than ever, resist the introduction of the Gospel. They may not prevent the establishment of mission stations, but they will oppose the progress of the Gospel among the people. The prevalent opinion of that tribe is, that the missionaries are the emissaries of Government, to act upon the minds and feelings of the people, with an instrument which they call "the Word," and that those who become affected by the Word, and exchange Kafir customs for those of the White men, become subjects of the English Government. Thus, White men plan to get a footing in their country, which they afterwards take altogether. These are the views of not a few of Kreli's people. (Chalmers 1877, 327)

Hence, the people of the Mission set out to vent their disaffection with the past by venturing into a name change, thereby promoting their own cultural, political and ideological objectives (Horsman 2006, 279–291). This exercise and attitude show the intimate relationship between the church, culture and ideology. When the colonisers, explorers and mapmakers implanted their Western values and practices into the African continent, they also excluded and devalued the naming systems of original inhabitants, thereby erasing the aborigines on the map of Africa and writing off native knowledge (Alderman and Inwood 2013, 4–5; Manatsha 2014, 270). It is fitting to claim that the time has come to correct the wrongs of the past. In Africa and beyond, when the colonialists were defeated, there was a campaign by Africans to rename their countries, cities, streets, and churches. They embarked on a process of destroying many of the symbols of colonial oppression and degradation. The defeat of the colonialists was also attended with the restoration of the indigenous or local names. The symbols of colonialism and oppression, such as statues and monuments, were destroyed. This phenomenon happened after the collapse of the Roman Empire and the end of colonialism (*Guardian* 9 August 2013; Guyot and Seethal 2007, 55–63). It also occurred in West and East Germany after the end of the Cold War in 1989, "whereupon the street

and place names ... represented the ideologies held by the political elite who controlled and administered that area” (Manatsha 2014, 273).

In Russia, ideological considerations were key factors in the renaming process in the Pamir Mountains under the Tsarist, Soviet and post-Soviet regimes and to advance new notions of national identity and memory (Alderman and Inwood 2013, 2; Horsman 2006, 279–291). Azaryahu opines that the French Revolution, which was a major political upheaval, “set an example for the use of streets and squares for the purpose of political representation ... [renaming has] become a common feature of major changes in political regime and raptures in political history” (Azaryahu 1996, 313; Azaryahu 1997, 479–493). In the same way, this trend has also recently occurred in Namibia (*Guardian* 9 August 2013).

As in the world over, the renaming of institutions, streets, churches, buildings, municipalities, universities, schools, important landmarks, and so forth, after prominent personalities, are not only strategies of power and reflections of socio-cultural dynamics, but are also indicative of politics of power dynamics and ideological considerations. It unravels the extent of power relations. Indeed, political factors are key elements when deliberations and decisions are made to name and rename institutions. This view is expressed by numerous researchers on naming and renaming (Alderman and Inwood 2013, 1–23; Azaryahu 1996, 313; Azaryahu 1997, 479–493; Berg and Vuolteenaho 2009; *Guardian* 9 August 2013; Guyot and Seethal 2007, 55–63; Horsman 2006, 279–291; Koopman 2004, 70–87; Manatsha 2014, 270; Rose-Redwood 2008, 431–452).

The renaming of institutions and places is a growing trend that seeks “further restitution of culture and land recognition for tribal people of ... Africa” (*Guardian* 9 August 2013). Debates among communities centring on name changes can be described as socio-politico and cultural arenas for coming to terms with the current political dispensation and ideological considerations within the parameters of congregants’ identity and memory. It is a matter of seeking public recognition of their heritage and historical achievements—and so was the case with Columbans when they ventured into this terrain and discourse. Any conflicting arguments and views on the toponymic process symbolise the dynamics of social and cultural power relations. In this connection, Alderman and Inwood (2013) argue that “because of the cultural power of naming, social actors and groups place great value on controlling the messages communicated on and through the place name landscape” (Alderman and Inwood 2013, 1). Both in the Columba Kirk Session meeting and congregational meetings, a concerted effort was consistently and unambiguously made to choose a name that inspires the congregants of Columba Mission. It has become commonplace that Rev. Ngxenge’s name is inspirational; he is one of the renowned historical figures in the history of the church. His name denotes significant values associated with human rights or social, cultural and environmental upliftment.

Columba Mission was not the only mission in amaXhosaland, east of the Nciba River. It was not the first denomination to begin with missionary work among the indigenous people in South Africa. Butterworth Mission was founded in AmaXhosaland by one of the descendants of the 1820 British settlers, Rev. William Shaw, who not only masterminded the spread of the Gospel in south-east Africa (Mvenene 2022, 6) but also committed himself to building a chain of missions stretching along the coast of the Cape Province from the Nxuba (Fish) River to Natal (Broster 2009, 30).

Accompanied by Reverend William J. Shrewsbury, Rev. Shaw of the Wesleyan Missionary Society visited uKumkani Hintsa of the whole amaXhosa nation in 1826 “for the purpose of securing land for the mission station, which was to be the first in the chain of his plans” east of the Nciba (Kei) River (Coulter 1988, 12). UKumkani “Hintsa possessed better claims than Ngqika to be the Xhosa paramount because he was a direct descendant of [King] Phalo, the recognised founder of the Xhosa nation in the mid-eighteenth century” (Price 2008, 240). However, this did not carry the authority that would permit him to dole out instructions and orders to the other chiefs. Monica Wilson observes that “[UNKosi] Ngqika acknowledged the seniority of the Gcaleka king, Hintsa, but acted independently of him ... he was also unable to exercise effective authority over his father’s brother, Ndlambe, or over the Dange, Ntinde, Gwali, Mbalu” (Hammond-Tooke 1965, 159–161).

UKumkani Hintsa, Aa! Zanzolo, permitted Shaw to open a Christian mission station in Butterworth (Broster 2009, 31). This station was founded on 28 May 1827, along the banks of the Gcuwa River in the country of the amaGcaleka, near King Hintsa’s iKomKhulu (Great Place) (McGregor 1977, 2). UKumkani Hintsa had a Great Place on the banks of the Gcuwa River on the site of the present-day town hall of Butterworth, and others at Holela (kulo Nogqoloza<sup>11</sup>) in Centane and Gatyana (Willowvale), and another in the northern part of amaGcalekaland,<sup>12</sup> at Mbinzana in Lady Frere, near Komani (*Daily Dispatch* 22 July 1922; Nkosi Gawushigqili Mcothama, Interview, 28 September 1999; Mda Mda, Interview, 22 May 2014; Nkosi Dumehleli Maphasa, Interview, 19 June 2014).

The heir of Hintsa, uKumkani Sarhili, expressed his apprehension about having missionaries in amaGcalekaland, citing past experiences and the dishonesty of the missionaries. On his acceptance of Rev. Tiyo Soga at Thuthurha in 1868 and concession on the establishment of the mission, uKumkani Sarhili insisted that converts might forsake their customs, but they “would continue under the authority of the chief in all lawful things” (Soga to Somerville 9 April 1867, quoted in Chalmers 1877, 372). He made it clear that the missionaries:

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11 Nogqoloza was one of King Hintsa’s unmarried sisters after whom the Great Place was named. She had a hump on her back (isifombo).

12 The northern part of amaGcalekaland, the present-day Cofimvaba and Xhalanga, was allocated by Governor Sir Philip Wodehouse to the abaThembu under the original Mathanzima (Rhaxothi).

... were not to introduce any person into the country without the chief's consent; they were not to claim control over any land in his country, except that allotted to the missionaries and teachers, for houses and agricultural purposes. (Williams 1978, 78–79)

Sarhili's attitude was a result of his late father's disappointments regarding the Wesleyan Mission at Butterworth and his own experience with St Mark's (Church of England). The two missions had formerly been founded in amaGcalekaland. At the time, "Butterworth was within Fingo territory and belonged to the Fingoes, and St Mark's was in Tambookie country and belonged to the Tambookies" (Missionary Record of the United Presbyterian Church, 1 October 1867, 409).

### Reverend F. W. Ngxenge (1895–1971)

Rev. Ngxenge hails from Khabakazi (kuFesitile<sup>13</sup>), though on retirement, he and his wife settled at his new home, eMgobhozi (Celia Maxhama-Ncukana, Interview, 29 July 1999; Victor Fuma Marawu, Interview, 14 July 1999). Rev. Ngxenge pursued ministry at Lovedale Theological College (Nobulali Ngxenge, Interview, 10 August 1999). When Rev. Auld retired on 27 June 1927, having been "nobly supported by Mrs Auld, whose work among the women and girls will long keep her memory fragrant in the Transkei" (Cory Library, PR 1083, 2 January 1933, 17), he left Rev. Ngxenge, "a son of the mission [who had been assisting]" him in the missionary work (Cory Library, PR 1083, 2 January 1933, 17). The former left his "beloved Gaikas [amaNgqika] ... to settle in East London" in Vincent, continuing his work for the Kingdom (Cory Library, PR 1083, 2 January 1933, 17).

Having taken over from Rev. Auld, Rev. Ngxenge was a missionary in every instinct of his soul. Through his preaching and by leading the exemplary life of a Christian, he was highly respected by converts and non-converts in and around Centane. He strongly promoted missionary and evangelising work in Centane, building outstations throughout the district of Centane. He and his predecessors in the Rhabe Church played an important role in South Africa's Christian history and heritage.

Rev. Ngxenge played a significant part in the life of the residents at Columba Mission, instilling a concept of time, and calling people to worship. In the outstations, he urged evangelists, elders and converts to pay pastoral visits to the elderly people and offer pastoral care to the mourning families, as well as celebrate joyous occasions.

Little wonder that a number of old Columbans held and still hold Rev. Ngxenge in high esteem whenever they reminisce about their experience in the church, romanticising the good old days of Ngxenge ministry.<sup>14</sup> One of my informants affirms this noble notion by stating: "UMfundis uNgxenge wabalidini lokuphucula uluntu kwiNkonzo kaThixo

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13 Situated in Centane, the Village was named after Fesitile, the elder brother of Tiyo Soga.

14 The late elders Ayliff Lulama Maseti, Ndili Ndzotyana, Zabemsukela Toto, James Ncukana remembered Rev. Ngxenge with admiration, regarding him as man of integrity and peace.

nokuphakamisa ubuKristu. Imigidi, nemidudo ibingezonto ezilindelekileyo kumaKristu.”<sup>15</sup> These cultural practices were viewed as impacting negatively on missionary work. Thus, the renaming was to have innate value or significance for Christians.

Amelioratively known as Ntozam, he was the first Black missionary to do missionary service at Columba. He was allocated a place of abode far from Rev. Auld’s, probably because of his skin colour. He and his better half, Dorothea (1899–1974) shared rooms with the former principal of Columba Primary School, Mr Bongela, uMathatha (Nongqalelo Ngxenge-Kondile, Interview, 15 September 1999). However, the retirement of Rev. Auld enabled Rev. Ngxenge, his wife and children (they were blessed with Ebba Nokhwezi [1923–1967], Nobulali, Monica [Mrs Mdledle], Joy [1932–1971] and Nongqalelo [Mrs Kondile]) to move/relocate and occupy the manse. Having joined Columba in 1922, Rev. Ngxenge continued his evangelising crusade and toiled hard as a missionary among amaRharhabe. He received a stipend from the congregants [members of the Church of Rharhabe<sup>16</sup>], while his predecessor had been supported by the Church of Scotland.

In spite of the adversity accruing from his skin colour, Rev. Ngxenge worked incessantly to convert the people (Black and White) to Christianity (Rev. Twelve T. Dekeda, Interview, 31 August 1999; Nobulali Ngxenge, Interview, 10 August 1999). After taking over from Rev. Auld, Rev. Ngxenge established a number of further stations in Centane. These outstations played an extremely important role in the lives of the residents and converts, both spiritually, educationally and socially. The church buildings of these outstations and the mission formed an integral part of their cultural heritage. Hence, Columba mission’s presence still has a very strong presence not only within the confines of the Tiyo Soga Memorial Presbytery, but also in South Africa and beyond. No wonder Rev. Ngxenge’s name is associated with the fortunes and the growth of Columba (Lennox 1911, 24). His ministership brought in its train a period of excellence and resurgence in the mission and the blooming of outstations (James Ncukana, Interview, 10 September 1999; Pesika P. Mfafa, Interview, 17 June 1999; Rev. Goodman. F. Tyani, Interview, 19 July 1999).

He set up a higher standard in the management and leadership of the Church of Rharhabe, from which the word Rhabe is derived. This is corroborated by the fact that after his retirement to Mgobhozi, his new home, his successors did not stay long, until the arrival of Rev. S. O. Loni in 1979, who was succeeded by Rev. Goodman. F. Tyani, uMlungu, in 1985. Rev. Twelve Dekeda points out that ministers who came to Columba in the aftermath of Rev. Ngxenge’s departure, were no match for the latter in terms of

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15 My communications with elderly congregants of the Ngxenge tenure as Minister.

16 The church came to be known as the Rhabe Kerk, since Whites and the Coloured people could not pronounce Rharhabe. It is important to note that the term “Coloured” fell away with the repeal of the Population Registration Act in 1991. It is used here to facilitate identification and ease of understanding.

management, pastoral care and leading God's people (Rev. Twelve T., Interview, 31 August 1999). No wonder that after the retirement of Rev. Ngxenge, a string of interim moderators characterised the ensuing years.<sup>17</sup>

This article contends that the urge to have Columba renamed after Rev. Ngxenge is justified, as it demonstrates the reshaping of political power structures and political influence on the church, erasing names that carry the sting of coloniality. Azaryahu posits that "the renaming of the past is also an effective demonstration of the reshaping of political power structures" (Azaryahu 1997, 479).

## A Discourse on Church Renaming

It is argued that the renaming of a church results in the contestation over suitable names gauged in terms of historical achievements and an element of power dynamics that may best be called "toponymic warfare." The toponymic process is an outcome of the coming to power of the African National Congress (ANC [formerly South African Native National Congress from its inception in 1912 to 1923]) in 1994, heralding a major political revolution and spearheading the radical renaming of ... [institutions] throughout South Africa (Manatsha 2014, 275).

It is mired with political and cultural controversies and conflict between a number of stakeholders. Language issues are also factoring in as powerful weapons in debates around the renaming of churches, streets, schools, bridges, hospitals and other government buildings. A language has ideological and political significance in the politics of naming the church. Thus, language is an expression of power and authority (Azaryahu 2012, 461–479). The renaming of a church can be regarded as righting the historical and colonial injustices, restoring dignity and culture and promoting nationalism and nationhood (Manatsha 2014, 275). World-wide, contend Alderman and Inwood, "challenging historically entrenched patterns of racial segregation and marginalisation is exactly the purpose of many ... naming campaigns" (Alderman and Inwood 2013, 1–23).

The name Columba is rooted in colonial and Western worldviews and epistemological traditions. It is largely Eurocentric and reinforces White and Western dominance and privilege. Western dominance and Eurocentrism defined what it means to be civilised, modern and human (Sardar 2008, vi–xx). The renaming of the church is a way of transforming and decolonising our colonial congregations and presbyteries through the maintenance of non-violent and intellectual struggle aiming at dismantling

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17 Ministers who served Columba were: Revs Irvin Njoloza (1970), Nkayi (1971), Sokupa (1972), T. T. Dekeda (1973–1976), Sokupa (1977), Resident Ministers V. V. Dipa (1978), S. O. Loni (1979–1984), G. F. Tyani (1985–1991), Interim Moderator B. Z. Mkentane (1992), Dr Lungile Mpetsheni (March 1992–May 2000), Interim moderator S. P. Ndibongo (June–Nov. 2000), the late and long-serving Minister Similo Xmas Malindi (Dec. 2000–2020) and the Assessor-cum-Interim Moderator, Rev. Lulama Dick. Rev. Nkosikhona Godwin Luthuli's tenure commenced during the first half of 2021.

Eurocentrism. A concerted campaign to decolonise the church can be realised “by ending the domination of Western epistemological traditions, histories and figures” (Molefe 2016, 30–37).

It is common knowledge that “colonialism, apartheid and other vehicles for entrenching White supremacy did not only affect political rights or economic freedoms” (Nwadeyi, *Mail and Guardian* 30 June 2016). On the contrary, they affected every aspect of life, and their effects and legacies are still entrenched in post-apartheid South Africa. Retaining colonial nomenclature is one of the structural imbalances, inequalities and injustices that remain stumbling blocks for the emancipation of South Africans. Thus, if the colonial congregations remain colonial outposts well into the liberation era up to this day (8 April 2022), 28 years after 1994, retaining colonial names, reproducing “hegemonic identities instead of eliminating them,” there is something profoundly wrong (Mbembe 2016, 29–45; McKaiser 2016).

## Conclusion

The above survey does not purport to cover everything that Rev. Ngxenge did at Columba. It does point to the fact that Saint Columba never set foot on the African continent, but his name was used to retain the connection between South Africa and Scotland. A name change as part of transformation and decolonisation is justifiable in light of people’s sentiments of identity and heritage. The process of decolonisation needs us to rethink how and why our mission was named after Saint Columba, and bring about a new name acceptable to all congregants. For Cesaire, “decolonisation [of the church] is about the consciousness and rejection of values, norms, customs and worldviews imposed by the [former] colonisers” (Cesaire 2000, 89), where congregants see themselves “clearly in relationship with ourselves and other selves in the universe [a quest for relevance]” (Ngugi 1981, 87). More importantly, the decolonisation in the church must entail rethinking, reframing, reconstructing, deracialising, demasculinising and degendering colonial congregations and presbyteries.

The conversion of Centane people is an example in point of the services rendered by Rev. Ngxenge. And so is the increase in the number of those ordained to eldership and the increasing number of evangelists during Rev. Ngxenge’s tenure. In terms of time, Saint Columba passed on in 597, about 1 281 years before the founding of the Columba Mission in September 1878. Also, in terms of space, Scotland and South Africa are far apart, geographically and continentally. I may go on to say that they belong to different continents. Rev. Ngxenge, a South African, was interred at the Columba graveyard. Be that as it may, the report does not purport to influence the congregation in any way whatsoever. However, it does provide a bedrock to facilitate robust and concrete discussions towards what we all aspire to achieve as a congregation.

On submitting the report on 6 February 2022, I recommended that the Moderator, Rev. Nkosikhona Godwin Luthuli, and his wife, Mrs Nomphele Luthuli, members of church associations, committee convenors and members of the congregation accept this report

in toto, and subject it to specific criticism in light of the proposal for a possible name change. I now urge them that as they proceed with discussions around the proposed (not decided upon) renaming of Columba Mission, they need not construe the report as anything to tailor the nature and outcomes of the deliberations. They are implored to make a collective decision on this matter of the proposed renaming of Columba Mission as the congregation belongs to *all* the congregants of the mission, *all* being equal in equality.

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