

# A Southern African Multilingual Hymn Collection: A Critical Reflexive Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

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This article is a critical introduction to *A Southern African Multilingual Hymn Collection*. The author, who was the compiler and editor of the collection, self-reflexively describes and assesses the processes which undergirded the collection's genesis and philosophical worldview. Given the self-reflexive nature of the article, the author discusses the funding of the hymnal project and his relationship to the church for which it was intended. He also examines the resolution from the Anglican Church of Southern Africa's Provincial Synod which called for a local hymn collection and how he interpreted it. Additionally, the article analyses the contents of the collection and its editorial principles, examining examples of both texts and music. In terms of the hymn texts, the analysis demonstrates how new theological and sociological issues have been addressed. For the music it provides examples of how localised harmonisations of popular hymn tunes have been included, and how existing choruses and tunes from the Black tradition, largely unknown outside of township settings, have been incorporated in order to gain wider recognition.

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## Introduction

The last decades of the twentieth century witnessed a world-wide Christian hymn-writing explosion.<sup>1</sup> The result is a corpus of new textual and musical material which addresses contemporary issues in contemporary idioms. While this fervor has been concentrated primarily in developed Anglophone countries, voices from less advantaged communities have also been contributing to this flood of new worship material. South Africa, with its rich, but troubled multicultural history, has absorbed a great deal of this international body of new hymnody officially and unofficially through international collections and through internet downloads of texts and music. However, very few local denominations have actively encouraged a robust local hymn-writing tradition which addresses pertinent issues surrounding race, gender, violence and inequality. There are exceptions (see below), but this is the general rule. In 2018 the Anglican Church of Southern

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1 Daleen Kruger, "Gawie Cillié Memorial Lecture" in *Vir Die Musiekleier* 40 (2020) 8-29, 10 and Fred R. Anderson, "Three New Voices: Singing God's Song" in *Theology Today* 47, no. 3 (1990) 260-272, 262.