

Yale University Library  
Yale Divinity Library

# Guide to the John William Colenso Papers

RG 129



Compiled by Martha Lund Smalley

1998

409 Prospect Street  
New Haven, CT 06511  
(203) 432-5301

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<http://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections>

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## Table of Contents

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Collection Overview .....                               | 3 |
| Requesting Instructions .....                           | 3 |
| Administrative Information .....                        | 3 |
| Immediate Source of Acquisition .....                   | 3 |
| Conditions Governing Access .....                       | 3 |
| Preferred Citation .....                                | 3 |
| Biographical / Historical .....                         | 4 |
| Scope and Contents .....                                | 4 |
| Arrangement .....                                       | 4 |
| Collection Contents .....                               | 5 |
| Series I: Writings by Colenso, 1855-1879, n.d. ....     | 5 |
| Series II: Writings About Colenso, 1856-1904, n.d. .... | 6 |
| Series III: Writings of Colenso Family, 1907-1908 ..... | 7 |
| Series IV: Photographs and Memorabilia, 1864-1882 ..... | 8 |
| Selected Search Terms .....                             | 9 |

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Yale Divinity Library  
409 Prospect Street  
New Haven, CT 06511  
(203) 432-5301  
divinity.library@yale.edu  
<http://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections>

**CALL NUMBER:** RG 129

**CREATOR:** Colenso, John William, 1814-1883

**TITLE:** John William Colenso Papers

**DATES:** 1855-1908

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 0.5 linear feet (1 box)

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** Writings by and about Colenso document the controversies that surrounded this church leader in South Africa. John William Colenso (1814-1883) was appointed Bishop of Natal, South Africa in 1854. He was a controversial figure due to his stance on polygamy and his theology.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/divinity.129>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use on site, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/divinity.129>.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box  
f. folder

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Acquired in 1970 through Africana Antiquarians (Pty) Ltd. of Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

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### Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

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### Preferred Citation

John William Colenso Papers (RG 129), Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library.

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## Biographical / Historical

| Date             | Event  |
|------------------|--|
| 1814 January     | ○ Born at St. Austell, Cornwall, England   |
| 1831-1853        | ○ Served as a teacher and tutor, attended St. John's College, Cambridge; served as vicar of Fornett St. Mary in Norfolk.   |
| 1846 January     | ○ Married Frances Bunyon who became the mother of his five children: Frances, Harriette, Agnes, Robert, and Francis.   |
| 1854 January     | ○ Arrived in Natal to serve as the first bishop of Natal. Shortly after his arrival, controversy was aroused by his stand on polygamy.   |
| 1855             | ○ Returned to Natal after a stay of some months in England.  |
| 1859-1861        | ○ Published a grammar of the Zulu language, a Zulu-English dictionary, manuals of instruction for natives on history, astronomy, geography, etc.   |
| 1861             | ○ Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans published by Colenso was declared full of heresies by Bishop Gray of Capetown.  |
| 1862             | ○ Colenso published a critical examination of the Pentateuch. His radical theology cause a controversy that shook the Anglican Church in Natal, raising constitutional as well as doctrinal issues. Bishop Gray, as metropolitan of Capetown, claimed to exercise coercive jurisdiction over Bishop Colenso and the power of trying and condemning Colenso.  |
| 1863 December 16 | ○ Bishop Gray pronounced a sentence of deposition followed by excommunication of Colenso. Colenso appealed to the crown and the judicial committee of privy council declared the whole of Gray's proceedings null and void. Colenso returned to his diocese as the legal bishop. Controversy continued to rage as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge chose to regard Colenso as canonically deposed. |
| 1864-1875        | ○ In general, friendly feelings toward Colenso among the colonists increased until he took an unpopular stand on an issue of native trouble.   |
| 1883 June        | ○ Died.  |

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## Scope and Contents

This record group contains primarily printed materials by and about John William Colenso, his children, and the Anglican Church in Natal. Colenso was an important figure in South African church history, representative of mid-nineteenth century "liberal" Anglican theology; these writings document his thought and the controversies that he aroused. The material written or published after Colenso's death relates to 1) the continuing constitutional controversy in the Church of Natal or b) his wife and children, particularly his children Harriette and Francis, who continued their father's involvement in native affairs in South Africa.

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## Arrangement

- I. Writings by Colenso, 1855-1879, n.d.
- II. Writings about Colenso, 1856-1904, n.d.
- III. Writings by Colenso Family, 1907-1908
- IV. Photographs and Memorabilia, 1864-1882

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## Collection Contents

### Series I: Writings by Colenso, 1855-1879, n.d.

|            |  |          |
|------------|--|----------|
| b. 1, f. 1 | "Remarks on the Proper Treatment of Cases of Polygamy, As Found Already Existing in Converts from Heathenism"                                    | 1855     |
| b. 1, f. 1 | "A Letter to an American Missionary"   | 1856     |
| b. 1, f. 4 | "What doth the Lord require of us? Sermon, preached in the Cathedral Church of St. Peter's, Pietermaritzburg"                                    | 1879 Mar |
| b. 1, f. 9 | "First Lessons in Science"   | n.d.     |
| b. 1, f. 9 | "A Sermon Preached in St. Paul's, Durban, on Sunday, Nov. 12th, and in the Cathedral Church of St. Peter's Maritzburg, on Sunday, November 26th" | n.d.     |

**Series II: Writings About Colenso, 1856-1904, n.d.**

|            |  |           |
|------------|--|-----------|
| b. 1, f. 1 | "A Review of Dr. Colenso's Remarks on Polygamy" by H. A. Wilder  | 1856      |
| b. 1, f. 2 | "Case of the Bishop of Natal" - printed leaflet  | 1865 May  |
| b. 1, f. 2 | "The Bishop of Natal" - two copies of leaflet, in different formats  | 1865 May  |
| b. 1, f. 2 | "The Laymen's Address to the Advocates of the cause of Freedom of Opinion" - printed leaflet   | 1865 Jun  |
| b. 1, f. 3 | "The Diocese of Natal, South Africa. Correspondence, Etc.: I. The Sentence of Excommunication by the Bishop of Captown; II. The case of the Rev. A. Tonnesen and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel"  | 1866 Mar  |
| b. 1, f. 3 | "The Diocese of Natal, South Africa. Correspondence, Etc.: I. The case of the Rev. A. Tonnesen and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel; II. The Church of England Defence Association in Natal"  | 1866 May  |
| b. 1, f. 3 | "Colony of Natal, South Africa - Appeal for funds, toward support of any clergy, who in consequence of having paid canonical obedience to the Bishop of Natal, may be unable to obtain the usual salary from the SPG" - printed leaflet  | 1866-1877 |
| b. 1, f. 3 | Extracts from <i>Natal Witness</i> and the <i>Spectator</i> - printed leaflet  | 1866-1867 |
| b. 1, f. 4 | "The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and the Clergy in Natal: 1. A Sermon by the Rev. J. D. LaTouche, in aid of the Bishop of Natal's Clergy; 2. Extract from the <i>Natal Herald</i> ; 3. The Bishop of Natal's Pastoral Address to his Clergy"   | 1867      |
| b. 1, f. 4 | Printed compilation of letters related to the Church controversy in natal, particularly as regards the disturbance caused by the intrusion of Bishop Twells into the Diocese of Natal  | 1867 Jun  |
| b. 1, f. 4 | "The Diocese of Natal, South Africa: I. Letter addressed to the Bishop of Oxford by the Churchwardens...; II. Letter addressed to the Bishop of London by the Rev. Canon Gray...; III. Another letter on the disturbance caused by the intrusion of Bishop Twells...; IV. The Judgment of Judge Phillips on the Churchwardens" | 1867 Sep  |
| b. 1, f. 4 | Printed compilation of letters related to the Church controversy in Natal  | 1868      |
| b. 1, f. 5 | "The <i>Natal Witness</i> on Bishop Colenso"   | 1883 Aug  |
| b. 1, f. 5 | Facsimile of letter to The Rt. Hon. W. E. Gladstone M. P. asking for help for Colenso's widow in the form of a pension from the civil list.  | 1894 Nov  |
| b. 1, f. 6 | "The Southern Cross. May 15, 1894. Church Matters in Natal"  | 1894 May  |
| b. 1, f. 6 | Printed letter from the secretary of the Natal Defence Committee   | 1903      |
| b. 1, f. 6 | "The Church of England in Natal. I. Petition and Memorial to the Archbishop of Canterbury; II. Correspondence between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Church of England in Natal Defence Committee. An Answer to the Statements of the Archbishop of Capetown."   | 1904      |
| b. 1, f. 9 | "Petition. To the Right Honorable and Most Reverend The Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of all England."  | n.d.      |
| b. 1, f. 9 | "Famous Controversies - The Trial of Bishop Colenso"   | n.d.      |

**Series III: Writings of Colenso Family, 1907-1908**

|            |  |          |
|------------|--|----------|
| b. 1, f. 7 | "Memorandum Communicated by Miss Colenso to her Brother, Mr. F. E. Colenso" by Harriette Colenso   | 1907 Dec |
| b. 1, f. 7 | "What a Liberal Government Can Tolerate. Diary of Tilonko's 'Trial' by Court-Martial and fruitless appeals to British Justice. Compiled by his Attorney under Power." by Francis Colenso | 1908     |
| b. 1, f. 7 | "The Dinuzulu Special Court" by F. E. C. (Francis)   | 1908 Oct |
| b. 1, f. 7 | "The Reign of Unlaw in Natal. Miss Colenso's Second Address on Natal Native Legislation"   | 1908 Oct |
| b. 1, f. 9 | "Dinuzulu's Peril" by Francis Colenso  | n.d.     |

**Series IV: Photographs and Memorabilia, 1864-1882**

|            |   |            |
|------------|---|------------|
| b. 1, f. 9 | Two photographs of Bishop Colenso                 | 1864, 1882 |
| b. 1, f. 9 | Photograph of St. Mary's church (Grey's Hospital) | n.d.       |
| b. 1, f. 9 | Misc. note cards referring to Colenso family      | n.d.       |



## **Selected Search Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### **Geographic Names**

Kwazulu-Natal (South Africa) -- Church history

### **Names**

Colenso, John William, 1814-1883

### **Corporate Body**

Church of England -- Missions -- South Africa