



# **The Equality of Believers: Protestant Missionaries and the Racial Politics of South Africa (Reconsiderations in Southern African History)**

*Richard Elphick*

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From the beginning of the nineteenth century through to 1960, Protestant missionaries were the most important intermediaries between South Africa's ruling white minority and its black majority. *The Equality of Believers* reconfigures the narrative of race in South Africa by exploring the pivotal role played by these missionaries and their teachings in shaping that nation's history.

The missionaries articulated a universalist and egalitarian ideology derived from New Testament teachings that rebuked the racial hierarchies endemic to South African society. Yet white settlers, the churches closely tied to them, and even many missionaries evaded or subverted these ideas. In the early years of settlement, the white minority justified its supremacy by equating Christianity with white racial identity. Later, they adopted segregated churches for blacks and whites, followed by segregationist laws blocking blacks' access to prosperity and citizenship—and, eventually, by the ambitious plan of social engineering that was apartheid.

Providing historical context reaching back to 1652, Elphick concentrates on the era of industrialization, segregation, and the beginnings of apartheid in the first half of the twentieth century. The most ambitious work yet from this renowned historian, Elphick's book reveals the deep religious roots of racial ideas and initiatives that have so profoundly shaped the history of South Africa.

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