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WITNESSING IN A PANDEMIC

THE ANABAPTIST NETWORK IN SOUTH AFRICA NEWSLETTER



“The cross is a paradoxical religious symbol because it inverts the world’s value system with the news that hope comes by way of defeat, that suffering and death do not have the last word, that the last shall be first and the first last.”

- The Cross and the Lynching Tree
James H. Cone

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*cover image is from He Qi (www.heqiart.com)

Fragility

Gideon Diego

Who dares say they rest on solid ground
firmly situated on the mountain tops of Zion?
Not us.

These illusory structures that succumb at the most unexpected of times,
it all collapses like rubble at the feet of Ozymandias.

Those realities we've tightly held onto...

Yes, even they begin to lose their qualitative mirage.

But the cause? Who is it, what is it, how is it? No.

But you will see its terror in medical wards, nursing homes
and amongst those who least expect it.

It is quite illusive, but we are told it compromises the respiratory system.

So we attempt to concretize it in a new vocabulary –

Coronavirus, COVID-19, Sars-Cov-2, sanitizers,

social-distancing, isolation, quarantine, lockdowns, ventilators and graves.

This means little, when the number of those infected keeps rising and bodies continue piling.

What measure of safety is there when the home becomes
the potential abode for this Fragilizing Phantom?

When family members are suspected of symptoms that could potentially lead to deaths?

Who dares say they rest on solid ground?

Nobody

Yet some will say,

'I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?'

But Jesus would lift up his eyes to the heavens and be forsaken by his God.

Now, who dares say they rest on solid ground,
when this Fragilizing Phantom has uncovered
the façade of stability?

Fragility reigns and has made its dwelling amongst

Our brokenness, our broken structures,

Our broken Messiah and our broken God.

Thus, we sit, reflect and anticipate
that fragile little Light managing to make its way down to our abyss.

It is only the Most High

who knows what that Light had been through for it to reach
these deepest and darkest of depths

We are grateful for its resilience.

And by that we know

that the light that illuminates the heights of Zion
has not forgotten us in our time of fragility.

WHY IS THE WORLD PERPETUALLY ON FIRE?

Mzwandile Nkutha

The failure of imagination is a failure to take a step back from the world of fires and raise critical questions about why these perpetual fires are happening.[1]

(Emmanuel Katongole, The Sacrifice of Africa)

To reframe the epigraph above and ground it within the current global pandemic - COVID-19, one might say, the failure of imagination is a failure to take a step back from the world deeply affected by viruses, wars, oppression and different forms of violence. This failure to imagine is a failure to raise critical questions about the ongoing oppression that constantly injures vulnerable and disenfranchised people. Katongole does not only linger on the modality or experience of failure but elucidates why and how this failure occurs. He argues:

"The assumption that the nation-state institution is the only possible structure for modern social existence is one of the reasons why failure to imagine other forms of social structure outside the nation-state is fundamentally self-defeating, because this failure undermines the central claim that the politics of Jesus is concrete in our imagination and history. To assume that the only way the world can be transformed is through nation-state modalities, and that the church can only contribute to this process by helping nation-state politics, is ridiculous"[2].

What this crucial observation suggest is that the task of the church is acutely different from that of the nation-state. Katongole's insights are deepened when coupled with Jennings's contrasting of the *crowd* with the *congregation*:

"The crowd is always susceptible to the fear that [...] clothes the creature. The crowd is the creature exposed in its vulnerability. So nationalistic slogan, religious incarnation, or enthusiastic cheering are used to conceal this vulnerability. The volume of crowd is never an indication of the strength of their faith, but always their vulnerability and often times their fear. The crowd needs faith. A crowd that gains faith shrinks in size and becomes a congregation."[3]

Here Jennings takes the notion of failure to imagine (Katongole) and invites a practice of vulnerability rather than fear. Thus, for both Katongole and Jennings, failure to imagine is also a failure for the church to be a vulnerable community of faith.



For Jennings, vulnerability, is the pathway for the church to become a congregation.

In a time of deep fear and the global pandemic. the nation-state has (re)positioned itself as a messianic social and political structure, leaving the church, in what Katongole calls, a posture of reticence. A posture that perceives "politics as the sphere of temporal power, presided over by a presumably 'neutral' state, which determines the social frames of reference and commands obedience in temporal affairs." [4]

Katongole and Jennings invite us to (re)imagine the task of the church outside the 'messianic' power of the state.

To conclude, in the midst of challenging times, the church will need to assume a humble and vulnerable posture. The church, as Katangole challenges us, may have to take a step back and raise critical questions about its role in the world and the pandemic. Lastly, the church, as Jennings insists, may need to shrink in size so as to regain faith and be a discerning, vulnerable, pilgrimage congregation in the world.

[1] Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice for Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 60.

[2] Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 59.

[3] Willie Jennings, *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2017), 189

[4] Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 41.

BOOK DISCUSSION: THE SACRIFICE OF AFRICA

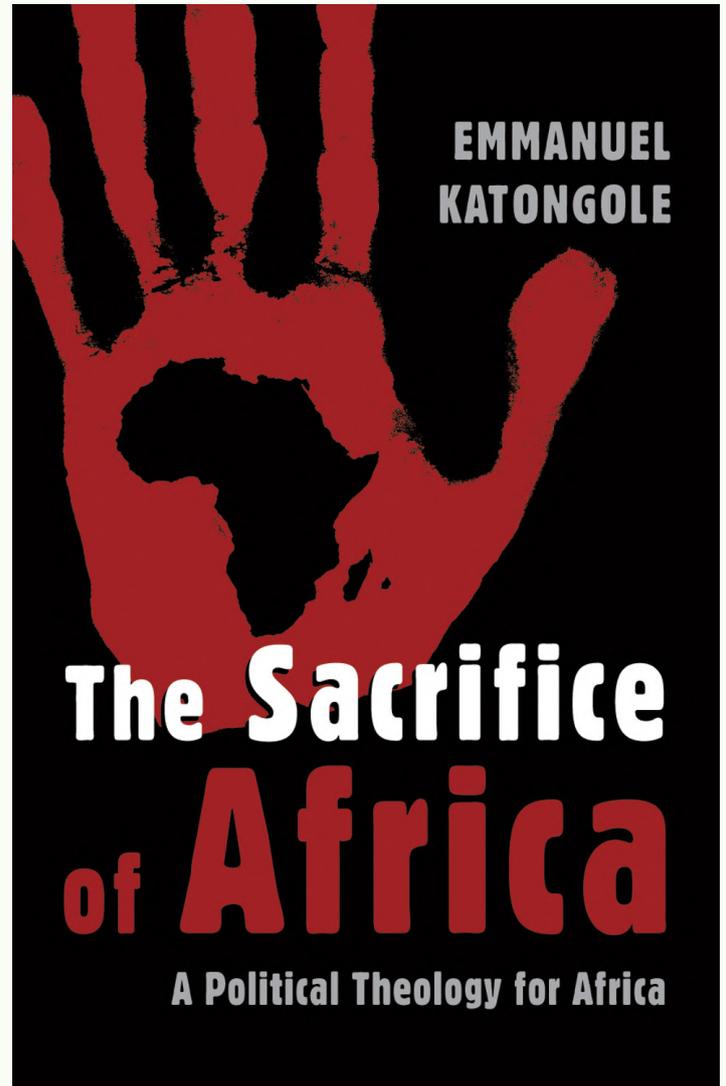
Thandi Gamedze |Sesihle Manzini |Ayanda Nxusani

*Beginning in October 2019, a group of us in Cape Town journeyed together through Emmanuel Katongole's book, **The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa**. This book is deeply insightful and brilliant just in itself, but reading it collaboratively allowed us to draw out from it far more than we could have alone. Each of us read it from and into our particular realities, and our discussion- which was not afraid to go deep and embrace the questions- reflected these realities. For this piece, three of our group members chose to reflect together in a kind of written conversation on the insights, questions and thoughts that continue to remain with us from this journey.*

Thandi: One of the things that I really enjoyed about this book was its insistence on the invitation to see beyond the surface of the issues present in the world, and look at their roots; their 'creation stories'. The book emphasizes that so many of the things that we accept as norms in our society in fact had their origins in someone's (or many people's) imagination. Things like the nation-state, or capitalism, or various other constructions that we often simply accept as the way things have to be. Katongole does not allow us to get away with such lazy thinking, but consistently urges us to question and look deeper into these things that we have just accepted, and identify their origins, their evolutions, the narratives that bolster them, the institutions that sustain these narratives, as well as our own complicity in perpetuating their dominance. I have appreciated this because it challenges the idea of the world as set in stone, and paints it instead as something constantly in motion, with the potential to be transformed as new narratives are constructed.

Sesihle: What I found fascinating about this book is that even though it was written a decade ago, not only does it remain relevant in what is currently going on in Africa, but it had rightly anticipated what would happen when a change of leadership occurs in an African country, like Zimbabwe for instance. This shows that the script has stayed the same - African problems cannot be individualised or solved with a mere change of leadership or elections. It is the root stories which must be interrogated - 'creation stories' which clearly wield so much power (perhaps because they are invisible) that they replicate themselves.

The scary thing is that the story of the nation state in Africa is not one marked by failure, but is precisely working as it was designed to - creating chaos, mismanagement and corruption so that those who profit can continue to; all at the expense of African lives, which the founding story has deemed cheap and disposable.



Thandi: Yes! I think that point- about the chaos, violence, corruption etc. being embodied within the very way that the nation state is designed- is such an important one! So often we think about change in reformist incremental terms and we wonder why the system continues to manifest the same problems. I really appreciated how he related this kind of posture to the church. He problematizes the ways in which the church defines the problem (as rooted within the spiritual, social or political paradigm) firstly without recognising the problem's 'creation stories', and secondly without recognising its own positioning within the narratives that justify and perpetuate these stories. At the moment, I am working on my research proposal for my studies and trying to figure out my research design, and historically one of the major critiques of traditional research methods is that the researcher views themselves as a neutral and objective actor, who is external to whatever is being researched. The critique against this argues firstly, that no actor is neutral (what we call neutral is often simply a conforming to society's dominant narratives), secondly, that there is no such thing as objective (we each come with the lenses of our worldviews, often shaped again by the dominant narratives),

and thirdly, that we cannot be external to that which we are researching, as we are continually influencing and influenced by whatever it is we are interacting with. This feels similar to what Katongole is saying about the church. So often this institution sees itself as a neutral actor, seeking to act within either the spiritual, social or political realms, without realising the myriad of ways that it too is caught up in the narratives producing the realities it is seeking to influence.

Ayanda: This book came into my life as I was in a season of holy discontent and it continued to wreck me apart. I don't think Katongole wrecked me apart for the sake of just doing it, but rather he was forcing me to think deeper and ask more questions of myself and my faith as it manifests itself in Africa. One of the quotes (referencing the words of theologian Jesse Mugambi) that continues to plague me from the book reads as follows:

“Is this religiosity authentic and genuine, or is it superstition arising from despair? How could it be that people who continue to call upon God most reverently are the ones God seems to neglect most vehemently? Could it be that ‘the Gospel has reached many people in Africa to be very bad news?’”

This I believe is the founding question of this book, and while it may lead others to unbelief, for me it has led me to be an ‘unbelieving believing unbeliever who believes’. It is scary to think that the faith that I love so much, which has truly changed my life and my worldview, continues to be used as a tool of oppression, anti-blackness, political passivism, and placating anger among the oppressed peoples of the world.

Sesihle; interlude: I wonder if part of the reason of this, lies in Thandi's point above: “the church defining the problem (as rooted within the spiritual, social or political paradigm) without recognising the problem's ‘creation stories’”... The question remains: how is the Bible and this faith so easily usable in sustaining and perpetuating systems of injustice??)

Back to Ayanda: And so as I read this book I had to turn this quote around and ask, “Ayanda, is your religiosity authentic and genuine, or is it superstition arising from despair?”

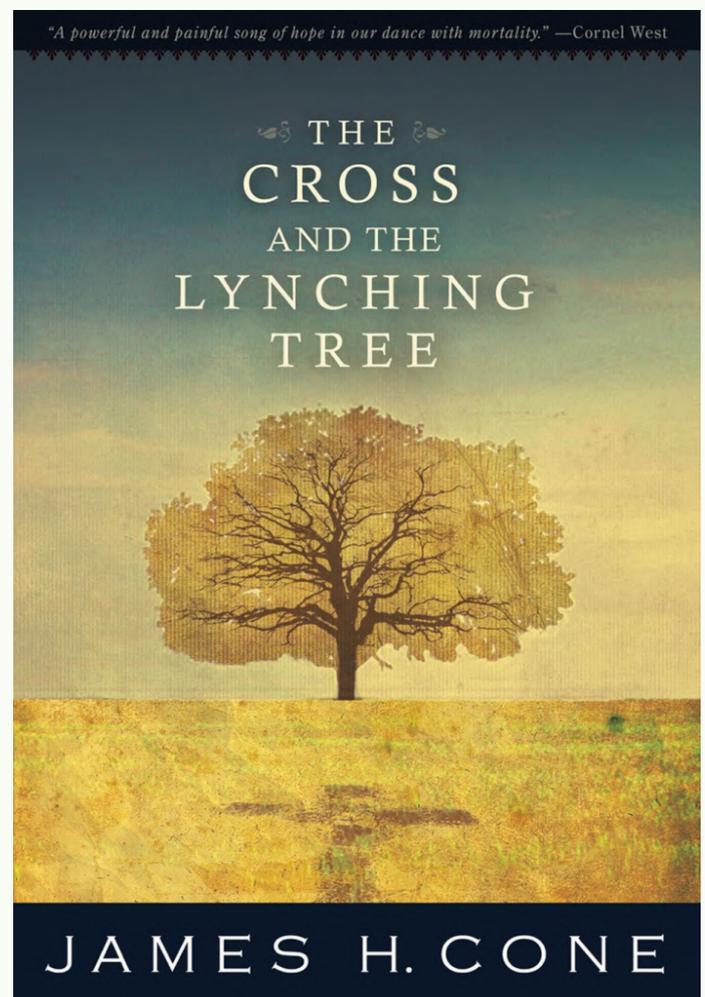
I continue to ask, “Ayanda, how can it be that you who call upon God most reverently are the one whom God seems to neglect most vehemently?” I am unable to answer that question, as I find myself in the same place of the father in Mark 9:24 who says “I believe, help my unbelief”.

I do believe that the Church can be a vehicle for social change and social imagination, and that there is something that Jesus is wanting to offer us. “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”. There is something there. The Sacrifice of Africa by Katongole asks the believer to not be satisfied with Sunday morning spiritual fixes, but rather to read a bit further and deeper and out of that live out a radically transformed life.

BOOK DISCUSSION: THE CROSS & THE LYNCHING TREE

Curtis Love

ANISA and the St. Augustine Alumni Association teamed up to host a book discussion in March (pre-lockdown) this year. While it was somewhat chaotic as lock down forced us to transition from an in-person group to an online one, we were able to reflect on a very important book.



In memoriam

In the last two years the Church has lost two great voices in Black theology, the most recent was the South African Black

theologian Prof. Vuyani Vellum (25 December 1968 – 4 December 2019). Prof. Vuyani taught a graduate module on African theology at St. Augustine in 2016, which I audited and found extremely insightful. Much of what I learned in our time together continues to deeply shape my own theological work. You can read a reflection on his life and contribution here. The second theologian to die in as many years was the American Black theologian Rev. Dr. James Cone (August 5, 1938 – April 28, 2018), whom many consider the ‘father’ of Black theology in America. Prof. Vellum edited a journal volume on the legacy of Cone after his passing. In light of these two significant losses we decided to host a book discussion in their honour using *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* as our text. As always, our group was a mix of theologians, clergy, lay people and students.

The cross as divine solidarity and co-suffering with victims

There is so much historical, cultural and theological richness in this relatively short book, that is devastating in its account of the American (racist) social imagination and the practice and legacy of lynching. Cone argues for a view of the cross as lynching tree which that subverts so much Christian thodoxy’ (in the service of white supremacy) around the cross. The following quote captures a good summary of his core argument in the book:

Because God was present with Jesus on the cross and thereby refused to let Satan and death have the last word about his meaning, God was also present at every lynching in the United States. God saw what whites did to innocent and helpless blacks and claimed their suffering as God’s own. God transformed lynched black bodies into the re-crucified body of Christ. Every time a white mob lynched a black person, they lynched Jesus. The lynching tree is the cross in America. When American Christians realize that they can meet Jesus only in the crucified bodies in our midst, they will encounter the real scandal of the cross (p. 156 -157).

Cone shifts the hope of the cross from the forgiveness of sins for the perpetrators of sin (which has been seen as the primary significance of the cross in Western theology) to an act of divine solidarity and co-suffering with the victims of lynching, and by extension all innocent victims of history. He forcefully shows the connections between a crucified God and a crucified people, in which the lynching of black people in America was, in fact, a re-crucifying of Christ.

The South African connection

Cone’s re-narrating of the cross invited us as a group to reflect on The Crucified of South African society. We spent a lot of time wrestling with and connecting Cone’s insights with:

- The millions of black (South) Africans confined to the ‘the zinc forests’ (thanks Nkosi!) designed to foster violence, disease and despair; leading to premature death.
- The multitudes of black women who are victims of domestic violence and femicide in SA.

The George Floyd connection

The prescience (and sadly, ongoing relevance) of Cone’s work was made clear in the murder of George Floyd and the #BLM protests that followed. While we had already finished the book discussion before George Floyd’s death, Cone had given us historical and theological frameworks to think about and respond to what the world was seeing. If you are interested in a theological reading of America and race, this book is incredibly helpful.

Raising the stakes

To recognise the victims of our society, and the violence done to them, as not only morally repugnant but as the re-crucifying of Christ today, raises the stakes and clarifies the places the Church needs to be present in order to encounter Christ today.



(L) Prof. Vuyani Vellum (December, 25 1968 – December, 4 2019)
(R) Rev. Dr. James Cone (August 5, 1938 – April 28, 2018)



ANISA DISCERNING GROUP: A RETREAT IN 4 ACTS

Curtis Love

From the 31st January to 2nd February 2020, the ANiSA Discerning Group met at the historic St. Benedict's Rest House in Rosettenville, Johannesburg. The discerning group is comprised of stalwarts, new members and long-time friends of the network. What follows is my own four-part narration, as a participant and co-facilitator, of our weekend together.

Act 1: The invitation

How do we name the times we are living in?

This question must constantly be grappled with by those who are committed to incarnating good news in these times. As a people who believe that the Divine Life was poured into a concrete, local, historical moment (Phil 2:1–11) with all of its conflict, beauty and risk, we too, must seek to name the conflict, beauty and risk of our times as we discern how God is pouring Godself into this moment. Mzi, in our Friday night session, unpacked Mbembe's naming of our times as a 'negative moment', that is, 'a moment when new antagonisms emerge while old ones remain unresolved [and] what might come out of their interaction is anything but certain'. This analysis is both affirming, of how difficult this current moment is, and challenging in that we are in uncharted, and highly complex territory (with covid-19 only exacerbating this!). Our session ended with Mzi inviting us to begin co-creating a response to what it means to belong to and steward the Anabaptist network in this 'negative moment'? Saturday's sessions were structured to support us in this task as we listened to our own and one another's contexts, listened to the scriptures and listened to the Anabaptist tradition.

Act 2: The Context

ANiSA is committed to allowing member's local context to shape and guide our collective discernment, and so we started our first session on Saturday morning with reflections on the contexts within which we live and work. To hear stories of juvenile prison work in Craddock, social movements around the coal mines in KZN, disillusioned youth leaving the church in Cape Town, the training of ministers working in rural contexts around Umtata, refugees in Pietermaritzburg, and township economics in Khayelitsha gave me (and I believe all of us) a much richer sense of where our country and the Church is currently at. There was both a mix of familiarity and uniqueness in each of the stories shared and contexts described.

Part of this session included identifying themes that emerged which we think should shape the work of ANiSA going forward. A key framing question that emerged was *what is the role of a radicalised Church in socio-economic and political concerns (women, youth, poverty, land, dilapidation, township economics etc.)?*

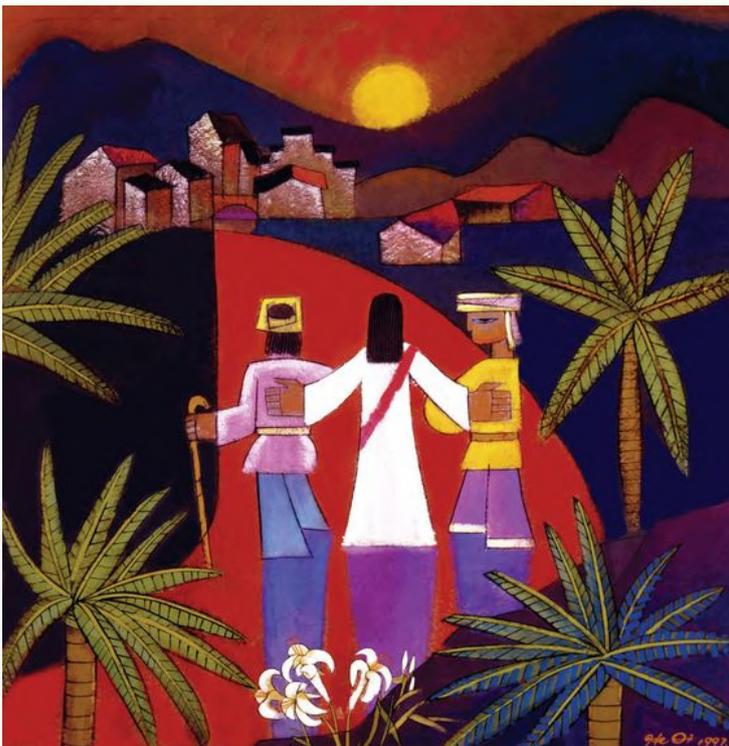
Other themes that emerged included how we ought to think about and respond to:

- The hunger for accessible, relevant theological education.
- The need to live with integrity in spaces of tension (personal, communal and institutional).
- The growing 'generational gap' in the church and society.
- The rural/urban divide.

Finally, in small groups, we each offered our own analysis for why we think these things are happening. I found my group members' analysis of gender-based violence in the context of social movements and xenophobia in Khayelitsha to be extremely insightful and stimulating. In this session, it was not difficult to see ANISA's commitment to (1) the primacy of context in theological action and (2) the commitment to communal listening, analysis and discernment in theological action.

Act 3: The Road

In our second session for Saturday we reflected on the Emmaus road journey (Luke 24:13 – 25) as an example of what Kaunda calls 'critical emancipatory conversation'. We began by reflecting on XI QE's artwork on the story (below), asking what we noticed in the picture and whether we found it compelling or disturbing? The sheer diversity of readings of this 'text' was a powerful reminder of the way in which our own experiences and background shape our reading of both the World and the Word. For some participants the sun was rising, for others it was setting. For some the Christ figure was embracing his companions, for others he was pushing them. For some he was encouraging his companions, for others he was patronising them. For some he was engaging in conversation, for others he was interrogating.



When you look at the artwork what do you see, and what do you find compelling or disturbing?

We concluded this session by reading the Emmaus story in four languages (isiXhosa, Sepedi, Kiswahili and English). This was a difficult but important exercise in which community was given priority over efficiency.

For me, this exercise was a personal highlight of the retreat in that it was one of the richest communal readings of a Biblical text that I have ever been a part of! Even though I had planned the exercise, how it actually played out far exceeded my expectations. Each language captured a nuance or insight of the Emmaus story that is lost in the English translation. Something happened in that intercultural reading that I want to continue attending to as we pursue communal readings of Biblical (and other) texts.



Act: 4 The Horizon

After listening to our individual and common contexts and reflecting on the Emmaus Story, we turned to the Anabaptist tradition as a possible resource for incarnating the good news in our context today.

Mzwandile narrated perspectives on the history, theology and practices of the Anabaptist tradition as we all listened for points of resonance and divergence within our own realities. Questions of violence, power and resistance as non-violence emerged as we listened, and while there was a sense that this is tradition is a helpful conversation partner for the SA context, there are certain realities that we face that don't find easy parallels in anabaptist history.

The discerning group is currently consolidating what was discussed on our retreat into a draft ANISA praxis statement.



STOP CORONA EVICTIONS NOW!*

Church Land Programme

This report from the Church Land Programme (CLP) is about the eviction of shack-dwellers in eThekweni during the Covid-19 crisis. Violent evictions and demolitions of poor black shack-dwellers homes in South Africa are ongoing and must be stopped immediately!

As the world rises against the disproportionate brutalisation and murder of black people in the United States, it's equally important that the world acknowledges and fights the brutal actions occurring at the hands of the South African government, police, and military. During the course of just two months, over 900 people's shacks have been illegally demolished in the Durban area. CLP's new independently-researched report found at (www.churchland.org.za) shows how shack-settlements in the city of eThekweni have been targeted in a sustained campaign of violent evictions and demolitions during the Covid-19 crisis. The local municipality, councillors, the police, the army, and private security companies, have driven this violence in defiance of basic decency and humanity, as well as the national law, international guidance, the Covid-19 lockdown regulations, ministerial proclamations, and the brave and concerted resistance of shack-dwellers themselves. In their report, the Church Land Programme (CLP) argue that "Evictions and demolitions, especially at this time, are an attack on all of us".

CLP insist that: "A public and unreserved apology from the mayor of eThekweni for what has happened, and an unambiguous commitment never to do it again, would be something positive. Fines and real consequences for all the bosses, managers, leaders, and others who have led, authorised, or condoned, these inhumane acts, would be something positive. Support for, and solidarity, with the people affected and the shack-dweller movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo, is also needed. It's up to all of us to call for this to STOP now – and especially up to all of you who read this report."

Click [here](#) for the new independently-researched report from the Church Land Programme.

Click [here](#) for the executive summary

Contact for all media and campaign enquires: CLP Director, Graham Philpott (graham@churchland.org.za & +27 83 338 3588)

**19 June 2020: Police vehicles stand guard at Cato Manor after the eThekweni Land Invasion Unit demolished shacks at eNkanini nearby. (Photograph by Gallo Images/ Darren Stewart)*

State

by Kaitlin Shetler

my sins did not
nail him to
the cross
that was the state

and confusing
the personal
for principalities
is a well-worn play
used by the powerful

the crucifixion
of an unarmed brown man
by authorities
was cheered by threatened
church goers
who said
he should have just
complied

and to call this
personal sin
when it was really
sanctioned oppression
sets a dangerous precedent

because we can baptize
each other
until we drown
but it doesn't matter
if we decide to hide
in a locked room
while justice is nailed to the cross



BETHANY BIBLE SCHOOL: RURAL COMMUNITIES AND COVID-19*

Rev. Reuben Mgodeli

That evening, the disciples gathered together. And because they were afraid of reprisals from the Jewish leaders, they had locked the doors to the place where they met. But suddenly Jesus appeared among them and said, “Peace to you!” (John 20:19)

Due to the current Coronavirus pandemic, the whole nation has gone into lockdown. As a result, the sting of these lockdowns has been felt in rural areas where the rate of unemployment and poverty is high. In order to make a living, people from these communities have depended on planting and selling their crops, whilst others have been dependent on social grants. I am talking about the most rural areas, where you will find more than 10 people living in the same household and who are dependent upon those who receive social grants for basic necessities such as food. In other homes, there could be more than 20 people living under the same roof, and because of this lockdown, they have not been able to sell their crops.

Students that attend Bethany Bible School (BBS) come from these conditions and these are the places and homes they live in. Most pastors that are studying at BBS depend on social grants, others on selling fruits, and some others on repairing shoes. For those that are pastors in independent churches, these lockdowns have meant that their monthly income or stipend which they used to receive from tithes and offerings while they were gathered together in church, is no longer available.

Since the lockdown regulations have not allowed churches to gather, these pastors and students have been struggling during this time of crisis. Even Easter service celebrations were prohibited by the government.

The sad part about this crisis is when one of these pastors' church members passes away. Unfortunately, they are unable to bury their deceased members because lockdown rules the state mandated under the disaster management act, that only 50 people can attend the funeral, that is, immediate family and close relatives. So, we are unable to pay our last respects to our friends or neighbors who have passed on due to the virus.

We remain resilient in order to comply with the lockdown regulations. Lockdown rules, intended to lower the infection rate (i.e 'flatten the curve'), have exacerbated and caused negative economic and cultural impacts within BBS members and their communities, forcing us to put a hold on teaching/studies as well as church gatherings.

Things such as food parcels for the poor is something we see on TV. But even though these parcels get distributed, somehow, they seem not to reach the people who are in dire need of them. There have been some allegations concerning councilors who have been selling these food parcels but also giving it out to their friends and relatives.



There has also been a high rate of crime because of hunger. People have broken into stores to get food and others have even hijacked trucks.

Children in rural areas do not have access to the internet. There are others who do not have smart phones, so they listen to educational programs over the radio. There is a cry from people who are struggling, that the government should lift up these lockdown regulations and allow things to get back to 'normal'. They say this on the basis that, instead of being killed by the Coronavirus, they are being killed by starvation. In the midst of this unprecedented season in modern human history, permit me to make the following biblically substantiated declaration: "This too shall pass away!"

As Isaiah poetically and prophetically puts it: "the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever." (Is. 40:8) This pandemic season too shall, as chapters pass away and wars come and go, storms leave behind severe impact but that too shall pass. These words are also echoed by Jesus in the gospels: "heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away (Matthew 24:35). I believe that the hope and comfort we crave right now is found in none other than the arms of our Saviour, Jesus. We seem to be obsessed, within both church and culture, to be driven by the idea of open doors. You hear people say, I am waiting for an open door or for God to suddenly open up opportunities for us, doors in my favour and so forth.

None of this is wrong, but when we limit ourselves to "open doors" then we minimize the beauty and the blessing of what takes place behind closed doors. After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples not before an open door but behind a closed door, in other words, in our time of quarantine, isolation and arguably social distancing.

It is fascinating to observe that before the disciples would go out to witness, most of their testimonies are encounters with Jesus "behind closed doors."

*What if sometimes closed doors have much more value than open doors?
What if closed doors precede the radical opening of doors?*

Thus, on the one hand, closed doors are a way of preparing, remolding and reforming to a deeper understanding of God and the world. It is the preparing to reflect God's image in the world facing trauma, oppression and poverty. On the other hand, "open doors" signifies revelatory presence of God's shalom. When the doors close, God changes us. When the doors open, God uses us to transform the world. Therefore, if you feel like the doors have shut in front of you, when you are in Jesus, do not curse the closed doors. It might mean re-encountering Jesus differently, possibly in an unprecedented manner.

**pictures from [Bethany Bible School Facebook Page](#).*



GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH: WE WERE STRUGGLING BEFORE THE PANDEMIC!

Pst. Lawrence Coetzee

In the poverty-stricken Chris Hani District and Inxuba Yethemba Municipality of our town Cradock, the Government Relief Fund has created infighting. It is believed that the beneficiaries of the scheme were known and connected to politicians. What was then revealed, was the corrupt mentality of these dealings. Unfortunately, this has only deepened an already grave situation for this community.

Most of our members were not beneficiaries of government subsidies in the form of groceries, the *UIF Solidarity Fund*, or the *Distress Fund* for the unemployed. These relief structures have been difficult for the government to implement. Whilst most churches were able to use modern technologies to make their services accessible, our church members, on the other hand, could only access church services that were provided by gospel channels on the television and sermons broadcasted via local radio stations. On Sundays at least, I do get to connect with those members who are on Whatsapp. I give scripture readings and share a Word with them.

Due to lockdown regulations and the closure of businesses, labour, fraternal and government institutions, Covid-19 has forced a distance between members and the church. It has become difficult for church leaders to progress or to implement activities/programs in our surrounding areas, or to conduct visit - including those wanting to join to church - as doing so would have been unlawful.

In our church community the vast majority of the residents have a tough time reading and most are unemployed. The economic drive of our town relies upon agriculture. This means that our community has been left vulnerable, destitute and economically challenged. The church leadership has also had to deal with many challenges in addressing issues to help and support our community.

Covid-19 has produced many cracks that have divided the church and its source of integration. The difficulties we have faced as a church since the commencement of the lockdown for the first twenty-one days - and its two-week extension - has affected our services. Tithes and offerings were not contributed because there were no replacement drafts that were drawn to deal with such acts as seen during the Covid-19 lockdown.

The purchase and distribution of PPE, fumigation materials and sanitizers for the church are non-existent. The church needs to be assisted in maintaining itself within these trying times. Now that we face more relaxed measures, such as a level three lockdown, we have been allowed to commence church. Yet, under these conditions, we are to restrict our gatherings to fifty members per session with social distancing. Added to this, all objects that are touched would have to be sanitized and members in attendance would have to sign a register.

Therefore, in order to assist our members with food parcels the church leadership is devising a strategic plan for members of the church and community.

Our church will welcome any donation or assistance from any of our partners, persons, or organizations in changing people's lives in this time of need. Covid-19 is killing our people and this virus has gone to all corners of the globe.

After attending the National Day of Prayer (31st May 2020), we were reminded that it is Him who knows what we need. He is the cure and our protector.

In Him we live and see the light.
Stay Safe.
Amen, Amen, Amen.

Anabaptism Today

OPEN ACCESS ONLINE JOURNAL

The Anabaptist Network UK has relaunched its Anabaptism Today as an open access online journal. Please visit www.anabaptismtoday.co.uk and register online to receive notifications of future issues.

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Anabaptism Today is devoted to the investigation of contemporary issues from an Anabaptist perspective. Its primary focus is on how Anabaptism has been re-imaged and applied away from its traditional homelands. The journal also welcomes scholarly articles on Anabaptist biblical interpretation and Anabaptist history.

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Visit www.anabaptismtoday.co.uk



ANiSA Peace Library

Africa cannot afford to be marked by the kinds of ecclesial battles that have marked so much of Euro-American Christianity. We need to work together across denominational lines against all the death-dealing forces that threaten the continent (and the world). As a symbol of this commitment, ANiSA is proud to have its peace library housed at South Africa's only Catholic University, St. Augustine College.



Di Mann (librarian at St. Augustine College) and Mzwandile Nkutha (ANiSA coordinator) in front of the ANiSA Peace Library collection

St. Augustine College campus is located at
53 Ley Road, Victory Park, Johannesburg.
If you would like to have access to this library please send an email to
anabaptistinsouthafrica@gmail.com.