

Invader snakes inspire land-debate approach – Afrika Mhlophe



Part 2 of a two-part series on the land issue

[Read Part 1](#)

I stay in a suburb that seems infested with poisonous snakes. In my garden, I have encountered a viper and boomslang on two separate occasions.

When I shared my predicament on Facebook, some users suggested that I kill these dangerous creatures – as a preemptive measure to protect my family and me. No doubt this was an attractive proposition, especially considering that some members of my household have a morbid fear of snakes.

One evening we discussed this fear and myths about snakes. I was shocked when a university student who shares the house with us confessed to a fear of having a snake chase her around the house. We used the evening to allay such fears and demystify myths regarding the behaviour of snakes.

Now allow me to link this incident with the protracted land debate currently taking place in South Africa. The link is purely for the analogous benefit and nothing more.

Let me start by telling you how I handled this snake problem. I took the option of paying a snake catcher to safely remove and release the snakes elsewhere.

I figured that snakes have as much right to live as I do. I also suspect that our suburb is built in a space that used to be their habitat. And if I am correct then the snakes are not the intruders – we are.

But as humans, we can coexist with poisonous snakes – if we pay the price to find solutions to nagging problems and demystify persistent myths.

As you would know, different types of snakes behave differently. And the same is also true of human beings. You can't generalise and say that all whites in South Africa are against making concessions on land. Also, you can't say that all blacks favour the wholesale expropriation of land.

There are nuances in between. Therefore, progress is only possible when we remove the veil of ignorance. For instance, we can't be blind to the fact that some politicians are not only leading this debate for egalitarian reasons – but also for political mileage.

Personally, I am wary of the socialistic approach wherein the state should own all land – with citizens merely tenants. Most South Africans are paying less attention to this. Others are imagining a type of resettlement scheme where private homes will be expropriated and given to new owners.

Now, let me share what I think will break the land impasse. For the last two years, my wife and I have been facilitating an empowerment project between an Eastern Cape farmer and his employees.

The farmer bought more land to expand the farming operation with long-serving workers as the main shareholders and beneficiaries.

Business plan and off-take agreements are in place for what would become a multimillion-rand project. We have now seen the project through tedious government bureaucracy to a place of

implementation.

I imagine that if there was an attempt to invade this particular farm, the workers would become a bulwark against such an action. They would want to protect what they own.

What excites me about this project is its social improvement plan. It involves the creation of an NGO to oversee things like job creation, educational needs, healthcare, recreation, etc. There's even talk of a pre-school and multipurpose centre for the community. So there is a multi-generational focus.

My point is, for South Africa to work, we have to work together. There has to be compromise from all sides. In my case at home, I am not prepared to move out and make room for the snakes. But I am prepared to pay for them to be settled elsewhere.

Let me finish off with Genesis 3:15. God said to the snake, *"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."*

Notice that enmity between the snake and the woman is multi-generational, and that as long as this enmity exists, there will be bruising on both sides.

**Getting to the heart of the
land issue – Afrika Mhlophe**



Part 1 of a two-part series on the land issue

[Read Part 2](#)

The land issue has got South Africans into a knot. It has brought a terrible stench and revealed fractures lying below the surface. The debate is opening up old wounds, some say, while others are grateful that wounds that were festering are now finally being attended to. The positions are so irreconcilable and divisions deeper than we care to admit. So deep, in fact, that they cut across every sector of society – including the Church.

This issue is piercing through pleasantries and platitudes – to the core of our being. Brother is now rising against brother, as Cain did against Abel. You must understand that Cain did not just kill Abel because of jealousy over a rejected offering. He did so because he “belonged to the evil one” (1 John 3:12). In other words, his heart was captured elsewhere even though he had an offering directed towards God. A commitment to religion overshadowed a right relationship with God.

The heart of the matter

Jeremiah tells us that the heart is deceitful above all things. So much so that it hoodwinks its very owner. Perhaps this is why Solomon tells us to *Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life – Proverbs 4:23*. Your life course is not determined by politics but by what is swirling in your heart. The real battlefield is your heart, rather than the parliament of South Africa. The battle itself is not just over land but over the future of this country.

Do we want a country where race continues to be an arbiter of a person's future? As Christians, there are two things that we share as a common inheritance. The kingdom of God and an earthly place called South Africa. We must advance God's kingdom, rather than extend our fiefdoms. We can't keep land in perpetuity for our descendants, but we must steward and use it as part of our mission to advance God's kingdom.

Remember Peter tells us that *the earth and the works that in it will be burned up*" – 1 Peter 3:10. So it is not worth destroying our eternal bonds for something that will pass away.

The heart is the wellspring of life

Personally, I knew that the land issue would surface at some point. But I am shocked at the fractious response from the church. Before Cain killed his brother God said to him: "Why are YOU so angry?" the LORD asked Cain. "Why do YOU look so dejected?" (Genesis 4:6, emphasis mine). God wanted Cain to take personal responsibility for how he felt. He didn't want him to follow the example of Adam who transferred blame to his wife Eve. Well-known author and communicator, Andy Stanley, in the book *Enemies of the Heart*, says that a person can have a life-threatening heart problem that can go on undetected for years.

This issue can manifest itself through certain symptoms which are often treated as isolated issues unrelated to the health of the heart. The benefits from this kind of intervention are short-lived because the real problem (health of the heart) is left untreated and thus leaving it to worsen (2006:11). If you press a tube – let's say of toothpaste – only what is inside the tube comes out. So when you are pressed, what comes out of you? Anger and hatred? Or kindness and love?

Let me use an example surrounding H&M, the Swedish retail giant, whose stores were recently trashed by Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) supporters. H&M faced the wrath of EFF when

they produced an ad of a black boy wearing a sweatshirt with “coolest monkey in the jungle” on it. When H&M realized their marketing blunder, they apologized and removed the offending items. However, this was not enough to appease EFF supporters.

Sunday Times columnist Barney Mthombothi, was disgusted and wrote the following concerning the EFF, “Rage, after all, is their only currency.” He says with the departure of their gift horse – former President Jacob Zuma – the party will look for something to be “perpetually angry about.” In the Bible, anger is justified, but actions resulting from it are not. And this is why God presented Cain with another option. God said: *“You will be accepted if you do what is right – Genesis 4:6.*

In my next article, I will share my views on “what is right” regarding the land issue. For now, I want to encourage you to keep guarding your heart.

When the role of Jesus is replaced by ‘men of God’ – Afrika Mhlophe



Video screenshot of the arrest today of Pastor Omotoso at Port Elizabeth Airport. (PHOTO: [HeraldLIVE](#))

In December last year, I wrote a piece about Lethebo Rabalago, a so-called prophet who gained notoriety for spraying his congregants with the insecticide Doom to heal them.

Now the latest 'prophet' to bring disrepute to the Christian faith is Timothy Omotoso. This Nigerian national was recently the subject of a SABC 1 Special Assignment expose into allegations that he lured young ladies, some as young as 14, to his Umhlanga Durban house for them to perform sexual acts on him.

Up to 30 ladies throughout the country have now come forward to reveal that they have been victims of Omotoso, whose alleged modus operandi involved the use of a recruiter who approached beautiful ladies from disadvantaged backgrounds to spend time with the man they refer to as "daddy".

These ladies were then trafficked to Durban on the pretext that daddy will help improve their lives, but ended up as sex slaves who were detained for weeks to satisfy the carnal needs of Omotoso.

Shift in focus of faith

The unfortunate thing about these abusive incidents is that they provide fodder to secular media and sceptics who already have a bone to pick with our faith. But the same incidents reveal a shift from a Christ-centred faith to an anthropocentric one where the meeting of our personal needs ranks higher than knowing Jesus.

We are now living in the days of Christian hedonism people follow Jesus for the fish and the loaves that feed the flesh for temporary satisfaction. And not for the words of life that feed the soul for eternity.

In fact, the majority of people who shore up the ministries of false prophets and false miracle workers are Christians who have left their congregations in search of human mediums who would connect them with God.

Thus the role of Jesus has been replaced by “men of God” who operate with supposed superhuman abilities. In fact, the Holy Spirit, who convicts, corrects and helps to produce the character of Christ, has also had to give way to spiritism that produces a false sense of righteousness.

Most of the people who fall victim for the likes of Omotoso do very little to advance God’s kingdom. They don’t witness to the lost, will never go on missions, or support a charity. They won’t attend a prayer meeting unless they are the main focus of the prayer.

But their time is preoccupied with running from demonic forces that are forever chasing them. If they give, it is often to their man of God because of the idea that he’s their main channel of blessings from God.

As for faith, it is safe to say that they do have, but it is directed to the wrong object. Instead of faith in God, it is faith in the man of God.

What kind of believers are we producing?

So the question we should be asking ourselves is what kind of believers are we producing in SA? Are we producing believers who can stand persecution and can sacrifice all for Jesus? Or ignorant ones who want shortcuts and aren’t prepared to see Jesus as anything more than a Christian sangoma?

Heavily armed police arrested Omotoso as he landed at Port Elizabeth Airport today. But what I am hoping for is that the church will arrest the rapid decline from Christian orthodoxy – and disown a faith that exists to placate the egos of prideful charlatans and that caters to the whims of self-centered Christians.

An inquiry I would like to see this year



With 2017 underway, I must say I am grateful that the year is not starting with the kind of Penny Sparrow drama that ushered in 2016. But with the ANC going to an elective conference, we are in for drama this year. Especially that it looks very likely that the conference will be preceded by the reinstatement of the 783 criminal charges against President Jacob Zuma. And this will mean that South Africa will join Brazil, as the second Brics country, to have a sitting president face criminal misconduct charges.

But Zuma is a different kettle of fish compared to Brazil's Dilma Rousseff – who was impeached in September. Zuma has a well-established patronage network, and this means that the process of getting rid of him might paralyze state institutions and even further widen cracks within his party. Adding to Zuma's woes for 2017 is the commission of inquiry into state capture that former Public Protector Advocate Madonsela has ordered him to establish. It is an inquiry that will add to the R300 million that has already been spent in other Judicial commissions of inquiry under Zuma. But hopefully, it should have much more credibility than some of the others.

What happened?

But there's one inquiry I would still like to see conducted this year. Not one about the abuse of state power or the use

of institutional resources for personal pecuniary gain, but one simply to find out how South Africa has managed to sink so low – and so fast. Our country is almost unrecognizable from the one that was celebrated the world over for its moral leadership and rare displays of heroism. In fact, I remember travelling in Guangzhou City China a few years ago and the best way to describe where I came from was to say I was ‘from Mandela’s country.’ That’s all it took to establish a rapport with complete strangers.

That we have taken a tumble from this lofty position should be obvious even to the staunchest supporters of the ruling party. Greatness was within our grasp, but somehow we chose a path of shameless accumulation and disregard of the values that make us who we are. I imagine that two things would form part of the findings of my proposed inquiry. The first is that populist politicians are good at getting elected into office but terrible at running it. Secondly, that yesterday’s heroes can easily become today’s villains.

But lest we forget that, amandla ngawethu, the power belongs to us. The ANC itself trumpeted this mantra recently at Orlando Stadium. The January 8 event marking the 105th birthday of the ANC was a colourful affair, complete with theatrical performances from a party that sadly refuses to transition from its revolutionary past into a modern organisation. On that Sunday, President Zuma read from the national executive committee’s January 8 statement and spoke against things like corruption, factionalism, and various forms of discrimination.

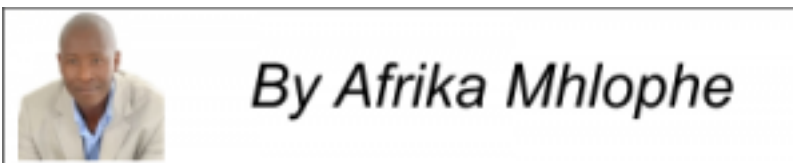
Reflective posture

He reaffirmed the importance of respecting – and upholding – the country’s constitution. He also made references to ANC stalwart, the late Oliver Reginald Tambo, who would have turned 100 years this year. This reflective posture is similar to what the ANC did after its poor showing during the recent local governance elections. The problem I have with that

reaction is the lack of rehabilitative consequence. Germany's first post-war chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, was correct when he said that 'history is the sum total of things that could have been avoided.'

Something South Africans could have avoided is giving untrammelled power to a few untested hands. While it is tempting to say that our democratic project has been hijacked, the sad reality is that it is we who gave the political elite the keys to their licentious behaviour. The Save South Africa Campaign led by businessman Sipho Pityana will hopefully awaken all of us from the slumber we took after 1994. As Christians we can never afford to slip into a complacent mode that assumes that our politicians have the country's best interests at heart. So in 2017 may you remain vigilant! God bless

Save us from charlatans



Lethebo Rabalago, who made headlines recently for spraying insecticide onto his congregants in order to "heal" them of their ailments, represents a troubling and growing trend within the Christian faith.

The trend is that of self-serving ministers who use desperate people to shore up their ministries.

Rabalogo's unusual antics follow those of Penuel Mnguni who gained notoriety for feeding his congregants snakes and rodents.

These young ministers have turned their religion – which was once a force for good – into a thing of ridicule.

Even the Limpopo health MEC Dr Phophi Ramathuba has weighed in on the insecticide matter. Last week he said his department would approach the courts to get permission to have Rabalogo taken in for psychiatric evaluation. And this week the Limpopo High Court [granted an interdict](#) to stop his poison spraying antics.

This young man who is now dubbed the “Prophet of Doom” leads the Limpopo-based Mount Zion General Assembly (MZGA) where he tests his unusual “healing” methods.

These include making people eat powder soup and drink petrol.

Rabalago claims his methods are a testament to the superiority of his faith.

An irony

The irony for me is that just as this story hit the headlines I was busy savouring the amazing accomplishment of a young woman from Port Elizabeth who has just qualified as a medical doctor.

Raised by single parent, she is part of the so-called missing middle and had to beg and borrow in order to complete her strenuous and lengthy studies for a medical degree.

Even then her qualification does not amount to an automatic right to practice. Before this young woman is able to start working as a medical doctor she has to register and be accredited by the Health Professions Council of South Africa

(HPCSA) – a statutory body that regulates health professions and ensures professional conduct and ethical behaviour.

This body ensures compliance with healthcare standards and is a vanguard against medical quackery.

She also has to take the Hippocratic Oath – which commits her to always act in the best interests of her patients.

Clergymen such as Rabalago however, have no such requirements.

They act with impunity and remain unchecked as they ride roughshod over their congregants' right to dignity and privacy.

And they tend to be dismissive, not only of calls for them to back up their claims of supernatural power, but of the notion of accountability to the wider Christian community.

In a recent interview on etv Rabalago was asked: "Who mentored you to become a pastor?"

His terse reply was "God".

To their credit many churches have distanced themselves from the antics individuals such as Rabalago.

The Commission for Promotion of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL) has now entered the fray.

Thorny issue

But regulating religion is a thorny issue, one in which, allow me to say, the devil is in the detail.

The commission cannot simply barge in and curtail religious freedom. The thing about this freedom is that it is essentially the right to believe in anything you wish – no matter how bizarre, illogical or irrational it may appear.

Complicating the issue is the mushrooming of charismatic

churches that follow harmful esoteric beliefs.

Similar to cults, these churches tend to be under the leadership of a strong individual who basically engineers absolute control over the members.

Such a leader will style him or herself as a "prophet" who essentially offers a shortcut to God's favour.

This is often for a fee.

These cultic churches tend to indoctrinate and isolate their followers using a combination of apocalyptic ideas and some sort of spiritual experience. If co-leaders exist they are often receptive acolytes who are only too eager to implement the ideas of the absolute leader.

This was the modus operandi of the infamous US sect leader David Koresh who founded the Branch Davidians. It separated from a mainstream denomination in 1955 and the community of followers lived on a ranch 14 kilometres east of Waco, Texas.

Over the years scandalous rumours began to circulate about Koresh sleeping with church members' wives and marrying underage girls.

In 1993 the US authorities became particularly alarmed after they learned that the group was illegally arming themselves. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms then issued a search and arrest warrant.

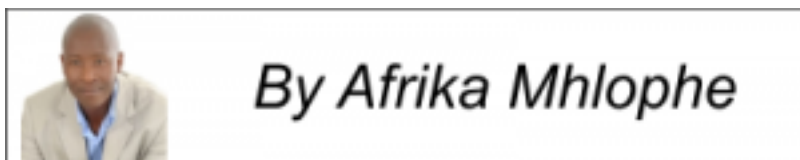
But their attempt to raid the ranch resulted in an intense gun battle in which four FBI agents were killed as well as six Branch Davidians.

A 51-day siege followed.

Eventually, the FBI used tear gas in attempt to break the siege but a fire was lit inside the complex. It killed 77 people, Koresh among them, and 20 children.

Rabalago preaches that people need to be saved. He is absolutely correct. They do indeed need to be saved – from charlatans like him.

Talking about hate crimes and racism...



EFF leader Julius Malema's recent tirade against white South Africans has left me wondering if his future unguarded speeches will fall foul of the proposed Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill.

This bill, which was published for public comment, makes provision for perpetrators to spend up to 10 years in prison. Justice Minister Michael Masutha concedes that it won't end the scourge of racism, but believes it will serve as an instrument to hold perpetrators legally accountable.

The bill however is not just focused on the criminalisation of racism but has a far wider reach. It sanctions anyone showing prejudice, bias or intolerance on the basis of person's gender or sex – including intersex – as well as ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, religion, belief, culture, language, birth, disability, HIV status, nationality, gender identity, albinism and occupation or trade.

But there are questions around its ability to pass muster in the Constitutional Court. For instance to adduce evidence the prosecutor will consider two things: the interests of the

victim and the impact of the offence on the victim. Nothing is said about possible abuses such as false claims of racism or on dealing with those who overplay the race card.

In simple terms the bill will deal harshly with anyone who advocates hatred or incites violence or harm towards any person or group. As long as intent can be proven, incitement does not have lead to actual harm for it to be an offence.

In this bill racism is not premised on power and privilege. So such fancy arguments won't be entertained and neither the idea that blacks lack proclivity towards racism. In any case this idea that racism hinges on power and privilege is unsustainable.

It suggests that whites who lose power and privilege automatically stop being racist. If this is true then new beneficiaries of power and privilege would also gain a disposition towards racism and yet in Africa discrimination and prejudice has existed without economic or political power. It is has hinged on culture and its associated beliefs.

So for me the best bet is to look at racism in terms of socialization and nurturing. In fact I want to link it to the theory of transactional analysis. This theory was first introduced by Dr Eric Bernie who was a psychiatrist who practised in the early 50s. The theory is a method for studying interactions between individuals. In the course of his treatment Dr Bernie noticed that his patients, and indeed all people, would and could change and assume one of three ego states.

He defined these as: parent, adult, and child. The parent ego state contains all the information we accept as true that we have gathered from authority figures including our parents. The adult ego state is the collection of all information that we have proven to ourselves as being true (using some sort of logic). The child ego state is our natural good and bad side

of feelings – love, anger, greed, empathy, etc.

These ego states have nothing to do with a person's age or social status but are only about how relationships are transacted between individuals. According to Dr Bernie, the simplest transactions are between adult ego states. An adult operates from *learned concepts*, parent from *taught concepts* and a child from *felt concepts*.

So which one is your ego state? I want to think of racism as a human frailty. It is an inherited and sinful condition that can afflict anyone and therefore a claim that blacks are immune from this condition is a claim to superiority.

And sadly it is this claim that has given legitimacy to the actions of the likes of Malema. And it is time we reject this claim and the false sense of immunity that comes with it. Hopefully the incoming Hate Speech bill will help us to just that – provided that [major concerns](#) with the bill itself are satisfactorily addressed. The deadline to submit comments is December 1, 2016.

WATCH: 'Black pain, White guilt and issues of identity' – more relevant now than ever



Watch, share and engage society with a Christian perspective

This week I decided to share a video of a talk I did at the University of Cape Town (UCT) on March 18 2016.

The subject I spoke on was 'Black Pain, White Guilt, and Issues of Identity' and it was chosen for me by His People Church. This Cape Town based church invited me to do a tour of Western Cape universities.

I landed in Cape Town on March 17 and I went straight to Tygerberg Medical Campus to do a lunchtime service between 12 and 2pm. In the evening of the same day I spoke at Stellenbosch University.

The following day I was at University of the Western Cape in the afternoon and UCT in the evening. All my talks revolved around the theme of 'Black Pain, White Guilt, and Issues of Identity.' I covered issues of cultural identity, racism, economic and academic exclusion, redress, etc. I fielded very interesting questions and at times faced up to very angry students who felt marginalised and misunderstood.

As you would know, things have gotten worse now at our universities, and this why I feel that this video is more relevant now than when it was recorded in March. In it I discuss things like: the superiority of the Christian faith over ethnic cultures, cultural imperialism, access to higher education, rationalisation of violence, etc.

A particular emphasis I make is that Christians belong to a kingdom and in this kingdom is the King who makes laws and not the subjects (See 18:08 on the video timeline). We do not formulate or have a say in the laws of God's kingdom but only have an obligation to obey them.

We believe that this video will add to the conversation on how we as Christians should respond to the call for free higher education. At this point the #FeesMustFall movement has literally taken over the country's universities while other stakeholders have been reduced to passive spectators.

This passivity should change and Christians should join the fray with a Biblical worldview. A growing number of students now rationalise violence and amongst them there are also Christians.

Christians are also part of the racial polarisation currently taking place at our universities. Why is this happening? Is there an agenda here we are not aware of? Watch my 29 minute video and the brilliant questions that follow afterward. Please share it further on so that we can counter the negative narrative that dominates today.

Protesting students and conflict resolution models



Protesting NMMU students flee as police fire teargas at them. (PHOTO: [Herald Live](#)).

While on campus this week as part of a Christian ministry presence, I witnessed a power play when students supporting free higher education withstood management of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) and prevented them from accessing the administration block and restarting the academic program. It took police, who were there to enforce a court interdict restricting picketing to designated areas, to make a way through. And in the melee I got to experience again the dreaded smell of teargas. It was as if I was transported back to 1980's where such incidences were a norm.

Many commentators are good at elucidating our current and contemporary challenges but very few have sufficiently familiarised themselves with the historical process and events that have brought us here. As a country we have gone through a lot and we need to improve on what we have inherited. But not everything needs to be replaced or fall in order for us to build an inclusive and cohesive society.

A 5th way

Norwegian Mathematician and Peace Activist, Johan Galtung, says that there are four traditional but unsatisfactory ways in which conflicts between two parties are handled: 1. A wins, B loses; 2. B wins, A loses; 3. The solution is postponed because neither A nor B feels ready to end the conflict; 4. A

confused compromise is reached, which neither A nor B are happy with. Galtung proposes a 5th way: where both A and B feel that they win. The method also insists that basic human needs – such as survival, physical wellbeing, liberty, and identity – be respected.

But some students are digging in their heels and vowing to shut down the university until all their demands are met. And so the standoff continues with no solution in sight. I suspect that a triumphalism mindset might be blinding some students. It does so to a degree that they fail to see that one day they will be standing on the side of management as future leaders facing off another generation of students.

The demands of that future generation are not known now. But their impressionable minds are already learning methods and modes of negotiation that will ensure that the current scenario becomes a permanency. The chaotic scenes that we regularly see in our parliament have certainly not helped in making a negotiated settlement an attractive proposition. They have rather given traction to the idea that militancy is more valuable than manners. Joel Modiri, a lecturer at the University of Pretoria expressed a concern this week that the increased media attention covering the student protests might be sidetracking students from their core mission.

He wrote the following in Daily Maverick: “And I do worry that the intoxicating gaze of the camera and increasing media attention may shift student protests more in the direction of public spectacles and choreographed theatrics, rather than slow contemplation and reflection.” Some media houses obviously favour a certain slant when they publish news and students might be unwittingly playing to this agenda.

Many of them abhor violence but they fail to uproot provocateurs among them. And it is the violent and destructive students who often attract the gaze of the media. I experienced first-hand how a few students with stones reduce a

peaceful and noble cause into an orgy of violence. Some students take glee in the chaos by pelting police with stones and then hiding in bushes and populated areas. The result is that students not involved in the violence suffer needlessly.

For the first time this week I saw a South African National Defence Force helicopter hovering above students who were involved in running battles with police. The deployment of the army would undoubtedly please those who would feel that police have lost control of this situation. But students are already scarred by the actions of the police and the presence of the army will make things worse. I pray that the court ordered mediation process will have the protagonists at NMMU find the 5th way proposed by Gatlung.

Christ on our campuses: We must find a way to draw the line



By Afrika Mhlophe

Pastor and author Afrika Mhlophe reflects on the turmoil on South African university campuses, three of which he has recently visited – as a mission speaker, part of a church dialogue-facilitation team, and observer.

I am writing from Cape Town where I have just had the opportunity to visit the University of Cape Town and interact with students. I also visited Nelson Mandela Metropolitan and Rhodes universities last week.

At all of these campuses I found there were definitely students in dire need of assistance to not only access but complete their higher education.

I also discovered, firsthand, that the majority of university students are desperate to resume their academic programmes. These students know full well that the window of opportunity for completing this academic year is rapidly closing, but they are largely powerless against those who want universities to remain shut.

Quiet desperation

The majority group reminded me of those people who the 19th century philosopher and naturalist Henry Thoreau spoke of when he said "the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation". Indeed, many of the students are quietly frantic.

Those fighting an unjust system which deprives many poor, young people of the opportunity of tertiary education, are entirely convinced that their right to protest weighs more heavily than the right of the rest to study. But justice is an even line. It cannot be flexed or bent on account of someone's personal cause or material conditions.

So, while the voices of the poor and the marginalised need to be heard, it cannot mean muzzling others or trampling on their right to go back to class.

I think efforts to stop the violent protests are hampered by several factors.

First, the small group involved in the violent protest has become remarkably nimble. The government rightly or wrongly claims "regime change agents" or agents provocateurs are complicit in stirring up havoc for political reasons.

Little to lose

That allegation aside, the fact that the stance of those students seemingly bent on violence has hardened to the degree

that it has, suggests some of them have very little to lose. Why is that? That in itself is an issue that needs to be unpacked in its entirety.

President Jacob Zuma has called education a “societal issue”. Well the same applies to violent protests. Many in our society have sought to rationalise the violence as a natural trajectory resulting from frustration at the actions of a series of governments – old and new – and therefore legitimate.

But while the initial student protests may have been necessary, and perhaps even cathartic, there is no disguising the fact that things are now completely out of hand. On some campuses there is also a strong anti-white sentiment that points to a political hand that might have hijacked the cause.

Rocks, rubber bullets and stun grenades have become the order of the day. A life has been lost and another is in the balance. As I write, Universities of South Africa, the organisation representing the country’s tertiary institutions, has revealed that the damage to university property since violence started has escalated to an estimated R1-billion.

South African society generally is fixated on and convulsed by violence. But now it feels as if we have regressed to the days of apartheid where a small minority reduced the lives of the majority to a state of quiet desperation.

Somewhere, somehow we must find a way to draw the line.

If we do not, we will continue to slide into an abyss where a loud and active minority rules a silent and timid majority. I like the statement from the Nelson Mandela Bay arm of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) offering solidarity to the students but simultaneously calling for a de-escalation of violence.

‘It is now enough’

“It is now enough. No matter how just the cause, the loss of

life, the destruction of property and the injury to students and others – unintentional as it may be – is a point at which we must draw the line,” said the SACC.

No matter what history might have done to us as a society, violence cannot continue to be the way we automatically react. While it may seem to have short term benefits, it always creates longer term problems. It also shows a lack of creativity.

Zimbabweans for example, led by the vocal pastor, Evan Mawarire, recently showed us it is possible to virtually shut down a country without violence, destruction or intimidation and gain the attention of the world. Yes, their struggle for reforms continues, but it has not been with human life and wanton destruction as collateral.

**Light of gospel penetrates
darkness of campus turmoil**



Police drag a student away during protests at Rhodes University on 28 September 2016. (PHOTO: YouTube/The Oppidan Press)

On Tuesday this week I managed to weave myself into the conflict engulfing Rhodes University and had two sessions to share the gospel during an evangelistic mission hosted by Christians @ Rhodes – an umbrella body that represents all Christians on the campus.

Their mission – with the theme ‘Break the Mould – entails various evangelistic talks and events throughout the week covering a range of topics.

The topic of my first talk was ‘Breaking the Culture Mould’ but it was almost cancelled due to the student protests that broke out earlier in the day. In fact, Mahlatse Mashua, who is the South African head of Ravi Zecharias International Ministries and one of the speakers for the mission, phoned me while I was stuck in one of the roadworks stops leading to Grahamstown to gauge my thoughts on whether to cancel or continue with my talk. He told me about the turmoil that

ensued earlier with students in running battles with police.

I was by that time 15 minutes from the campus, and the idea of turning back was just not attractive. I arrived and went straight to the mission tent which was pitched close to the Law Faculty and also very close to where the students had earlier [clashed with the police](#).

Breakthroughs

I was met with reports of breakthroughs with the gospel with some participants pleasantly surprised at how open students were to conversations about faith. The participants also told me about how they had responded and brought relief to students who were injured and traumatised by police action.

So even though there were disturbances to their planned programme, they also happened to be at the right place and at the right time. The disturbances did lead to a change of venue for my talk and I went to the new venue with a wait-and-see attitude with regards to the attendance.

Well, by the time I started my talk at 1:15pm that venue was about 70% full. Leaning on my book, *Freed by God but Imprisoned by Culture* I shared my thoughts on culture and then opened the platform for questions and answers.

As to be expected, the topic of culture did ruffle the feathers of those who see their culture as an index of their identity. But the opportunity to present the superiority of the gospel in such instances is something I cherish.

In the evening we returned for the talk on "Breaking the Religion Mould". For this talk, I shared a platform with Mashua, Carol Mkize – who is a pastor at His People Johannesburg, and Simon Brace – who is a missionary and apologist based at North West University. We took 15 minutes each, doing our best to break the religion mould and present Christianity as a better alternative.

But as you might have seen from news reports, things have got worse now at Rhodes University. Police are being accused of heavy-handedness in their response to a group of students who decided to disturb lectures.

NMMU meeting

So pray – and while doing so, please also pray for a meeting I will be part of that has been planned at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) this coming Saturday. The meeting is an attempt to find a way forward in the impasse engulfing South African universities and also to deal with competing interests.

A particular issue is to find a balance between the interests of those wanting the campus to remain closed until their demand for a free education is met, and those who want lectures and the academic programme to resume.