

# ANOTHER SIDE OF BETHEL COLLEGE

EASTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

## A Brief Reflection on Adventist Mission in the Context of White Coloniality and Racism

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### Motivation

This short text is born of my current reading of the 374-page text, *The Lost Prince of the ANC: The Life and Times of JABULANI NOBLEMAN “Mzala” Nxumalo*, by Mandla J, Radebe (2023)<sup>1</sup>

On a recent morning I reflected on why the college programme in Bethel College closed down. Some years ago, I was part of an Adventist Accreditation Association team set up by the Education office of the Southern Africa Union. We visited two countries, the other one being Eswatini/Swaziland.

In Bethel I saw new buildings and unfinished new buildings. The enrolment was small. I went into one of the men’s dormitory and saw destruction (vandalisation) that drew tears from my eyes. I left that structure deeply disturbed. Some of the structures are unused for lack of sufficient students and personnel.

After some painful reflection I came to several conclusions. Some of these are:

1. Pastors must stay away from matters academic. They know schooling but not institutional design, curriculum implementation and associated matters. Frankly, they have been weak links in the system. Their primary association with academic institutions has largely been that of learners/students. This is the reason why the TOC has shut down seventeen school since the late 1950s. This is the reason why I pulled out of a committee set up to establish and institution during the tenure of Dr Paul Shongwe. After two meetings it dawned on me that there would be no school, The committed dissolved after some time.

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2. In the absence of money for education in Conferences, the Education office must logically shut down.
3. I also question the use of tithe to support public education. Pastors hardly ever speak on education, but their children are funded on tithe to receive education. In this country almost all pastors have children who have tertiary qualifications. I need biblical justification for the use of tithe to support secular, even evolutionistic education in public institutions. Count also the number of pastors' children who work in the church after receiving education supported from tithe.

### **About Bethel and Coloniality**

Bethel floundered under African leadership. The institution flourished when Europeans were in the staff. However, this ethnological reality was accompanied by sinister intelligence practices by whites. When I was a student and later a teacher, the institution it was staffed by whites who were racists and associates of state intelligence. I have demonstrable evidence of this. Some students were in Bethel as intelligence agents.

The intelligence operations intensified after the banning of Congress of South African Students (Cosas). Many of its members went to Homelands for schooling. State intelligence followed them there. Some of the students came to Bethel. I have Bethel narratives that can embarrass some persons - teachers and students – at Bethel. Sadly, there were also some naïve African teachers there who did not know that they were used as news sources against students and African staff.

The Butterworth police station had a list of students who were under police surveillance. I saw the list one Friday when I had to deal with the case of a student from the Cape who had been collected by security police from the campus without our knowledge.

1. Bethel was a mere microscopic site for state intelligence from white Adventist teachers.
2. Across the country and in every Adventist Conference there were white pastors and their sons who were engaged in military intelligence along and across the northern borders of South Africa.
3. Catholic missions in Namibia were also under close security scrutiny because they housed SWAPO militia. Adventist whites from South Africa were hired to neutralise them.

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## Some Noteworthy Points

1. Adventists live in the material world. They are affected and influenced by the social and material realities of their places of abode. Their notion of an apolitical spirituality is a fraudulent reality – especially when part of the church engages in activities aimed at liberation while other acts in the opposite direction, to validate and defend a system that oppressed others. This is a major reason why Adventism will not experience exponential growth in this country. It has to deal with its nefarious colonial military activities in the light of the biblical theology of liberation.
2. The merger of Adventist Unions and some Conferences in South Africa is a classical sham that calls for serious revisitation and review. The fact is: The Adventist Church in South Africa is not one. It remains an apartheid reality. I have long decided that this church will become real during “the time of trouble.” All that the church is now – is a colossal fake and deception. *Sengishilo!*
3. In Soweto some of us are launching – not long from now – **an independent Adventist Theological Seminary**. We are in the preparatory stage. We have the epistemic direction we shall take. We are tired of Eurowestern systematic theology. Africans, from Eden, are **Contextual Theologians!**

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