2024-10

In honor of Inus Daneel

In Honor of Inus Daneel

By J. N. J. (Klippies) Kritzinger[116]

Marthinus Daneel, known among his friends and colleagues as Inus, lived a long and impactful life in Zimbabwe, South Africa and, eventually, Boston Massachusetts. This tribute flows from my experience of working with Inus in the Department of Missiology, as it existed in the 1980s and 1990s at the University of South Africa (Unisa). I treasure the memory of Inus as friend, scholar, organiser, and fellow pilgrim.

As a friend, Inus was generous and welcoming. When hosting Unisa colleagues on fishing trips in Zimbabwe, he magnanimously shared his boat and fishing equipment as well as his time and expertise to introduce us to the art of tiger fishing, even when we did not always show proper respect for the expensive equipment. Inus loved conversation and carried a large bag of jokes wherever he went. He was an accomplished storyteller who could entertain and intrigue for hours, recounting his experiences of research, theological education, and "earthkeeping" activism in Zimbabwe. His tallest tales, however, were reserved for hunting. He was affectionately known in Shona as *Mafuranhunzi* ("The one who can shoot a fly") for his hunting prowess and he used that name as *nom de plume* for his work of fiction, *Guerilla Snuff,* in 1995. His legendary shooting skill surprisingly allowed him access to the oracular cave of Mwari in the Matopo Hills and he never tired of telling that story. The tales of successes and escapes on hunting trips with Nico Smith and Willem Saayman, his Unisa colleagues and friends, were legendary and they (predictably) became taller and more dramatic through constant retelling. Both Nico and Willem preceded him in "the final departure to the Beyond," as Inus once formulated it. And now he has joined them.

As a missiological researcher, Inus represented a rare combination of observer, interpreter and activist. His competence in Shona, which he acquired as a "missionary kid" growing up on the Morgenster Mission of the Dutch Reformed Church near Masvingo, opened unique research opportunities as a unique insider-outsider researcher of African religion and African-initiated churches. His postgraduate formation in Amsterdam at the feet of his three Reformed role models – Hendrik Kraemer, Johan H. Bavinck, and Gerrit Berkouwer – instilled in him a lifelong striving for academic excellence and accurate observation but also a mystical sense of wonder. Inus was a prolific author, not only because he produced numerous publications but also because of the way he wrote. He was not given to terse and summarising writing. He had too much respect for the people about whom he was writing and the complexities of their context, particularly for the role that religion played in shaping their lives. For that reason he gave lengthy, "thick" descriptions of the fascinating encounters taking place in (mainly rural) communities as African believers remixed and improvised their cultures and Christianity.

The "missionary" impetus in his life did not allow Inus to be a mere observer and interpreter of African religious movements. It led him to initiate an ecumenical theological education programme (*Fambidzano*) for African-initiated churches as well as tree-planting and other earth-keeping organisations (ZIRRCON, AZTREC, AAEC), to mobilise both AIC leaders and spirit mediums for ecological activism. His creative liturgical proposal for a tree-planting Eucharist deserves special mention. In the tree-planting context he earned another Shona nickname, *Muchakata*, ("the tree that may not be felled"), which refers to the cork-tree that is sacred to the ancestors and may therefore not be chopped down. His two Shona nicknames reveal

[116] Dr. J. N. J. (Klippies) Kritzinger is Professor emeritus of the University of South Africa (Unisa).

the high regard in which he was held by his collaborators.

When I wrote a chapter for a *Festschrift* dedicated to Inus in 2003, I called it "*Pamberi*! Towards a pilgrim theology". I did that to honour Inus's activism, since *Pamberi* ("Forward!") was a rallying cry that he and others used to mobilise communities for "The war of the trees," a new liberation struggle. I did that also to express my resonance with his journey as a Eucharist-shaped pilgrim to (and in) the margins, moving into the light of the dawning Day of God.

How did Inus integrate all these dimensions of his life? He was a liminal, hybrid figure who managed to hold together a (non-doctrinaire) Reformed theology with an African worldview and a commitment to grass-roots transformation. He was a pilgrim activist, imbued with a grace-filled spirituality that enabled him to avoid the hubris of a "we can change the world" activism and to respect the unique initiatives of AIC leaders and spirit mediums. This enabled him to work *with* rural peasant communities for the liberation of the earth from deforestation *and* to write academic publications *about* that work. He was able to move across boundaries and to be at home in different worlds, embodying an intercultural and interreligious transformation praxis. He had deep roots and solid wings: He was an African in heart and mind, who was also at home in the USA due to his commitment to the love of his life, Dana Robert – his soulmate, intellectual partner, and unwavering support until the end. He was a Reformed Afrikaner in heart and mind, who was also at home among Zimbabwean AICs due to his commitment to Shona communities and to gospel-based rural transformation in their midst. He was an African Christian in heart and mind, firmly connected and deeply loyal to the triune God and to the Gumbo clan that had adopted him – and also at home among the spirit mediums who shared his passion for "clothing the land."

A majestic *Muchakata* tree, with wide-reaching branches and casting a long shadow, has fallen.