

Reimagining a new social contract in the public space

Evangelical Church and Society

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Abstract

In this essay, I argue that the white Evangelical Church in South Africa has failed in its witness. I suggest that the white Evangelical Church in South Africa needs to repent (*μετανοέω*) of theological error (“an emaciated gospel”) and the consequent sinful withdrawal from socio-political issues. We need to repent of our naïve hermeneutics, under realised eschatology, unbiblical view of the *missio Dei*, and our laager mentality. Without this repentance, I argue, the Evangelical Church in South Africa will forfeit its role in reimagining a new social contract in the public space. Repentance, especially regarding the evangelical ‘apolitical’² stance in South Africa, is a prerequisite if we wish for our voice to be heard at the South African Christian table and if we hope to contribute to a new South African society that is in line with God’s inaugurated kingdom and thus characterised by love and justice. Furthermore, my conviction is that without such repentance, we shall continue to promote and practice an “emaciated gospel”. In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,³ “Cheap Grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace.”

Key words: grace, cheap grace, evangelical, repentance, *μετανοέω*, confession, forgiveness, reimagining, gospel, CESA, REACH-SA, St James, ascension of Christ, Lordship of Christ, kingdom, mission, church and society, evangelism, socio-political involvement

1. Personal context: description and analysis

In 1991, Orbis Books published a significant tome. In my view, it’s a book that every Christian in South Africa should read and study, and certainly every Christian leader in South Africa. The title is “Transforming mission”, and the sub-title is “Paradigm shifts in theology of mission.” The author is the late Professor David J. Bosch. On p. 386, Bosch writes:

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² Cf Boesak 1987:12-13.

³ 1995:43.

We know today – what many of our spiritual forbears would have found difficult to accept - that the empirical church will always be imperfect. Every church member who loves the church will also be deeply pained by it. This does not, however, call for discarding the church, but for reforming and renewing it. The church is itself an object of the *missio Dei*, in constant need of repentance ... The cross which the church proclaims also judges the church ...

I speak to you today as an evangelical who has served in an evangelical denomination in South Africa for over 40 years. I am aware that Donald Dayton argues that “the ‘evangelical’ label should be suspended on the grounds that its use is (1) theologically incoherent, (2) sociologically confusing, and (3) ecumenically pernicious” (1987:1). I hope that after my talk you won’t agree with him and think that I am indeed illogical, confused, and malicious!

However, it could reasonably be asked whether I really am an ‘evangelical’! As Stott (1999:74) has noted:

The hallmark of authentic evangelicalism is not subscription but submission. That is, it is not whether we subscribe to an impeccable formula about the Bible, but whether we live in practical submission to what the Bible teaches, ...

Clearly, in the South African context, we evangelicals (I am generalising) have failed to “live in practical submission to what the Bible teaches” regarding justice and neighbourly love.

I grew up and was converted as a teenager in apartheid South Africa. “Culture is like the water a fish swims in” and, as a white South African who enjoyed the privileges of apartheid, it took me a very long time to wake up to the fact that the gospel of Jesus relates to all of life,⁴ and that includes politics and racism.⁵ “The water in which I swam was full of toxins” (Bartholomew, 2022:1).

I am painfully aware of just how imperfect the Evangelical Church in South Africa is, including my own denomination, my commitment to Christ as Lord and Saviour, and, therefore, my own ministry. After being admitted to the Order of Deacon (1982), I was ordained to the Order of Presbyter (1983) in the Church of England in South Africa (CESA), now operating as The Reformed Evangelical Anglican Church of South Africa (REACH-SA).

I was the assistant rector of the St James Church congregation in Kenilworth, leading the service on the evening of 25 July 1993 when we were attacked.⁶ About

⁴ Boesak (1987:15).

⁵ Both personal and structural.

⁶ See Retief (1994) and (2021:121-130).

1000 people (Cameron, 2017:5) were attending the evening church service when several armed men entered the church building, opened fire with automatic weapons, and lobbed hand grenades into the congregation. The attack lasted about thirty seconds, and the attackers fled in a getaway car. They were APLA combatants (the military wing of the Pan Africanist Congress).⁷ Eleven people were killed, many severely maimed, and many more injured.⁸ It was a living nightmare, the worst experience of my life and something from which I don't think I will ever fully recover, not in this life.

Why⁹ was St James Church Kenilworth targeted and so violently attacked?¹⁰ Was it because APLA and the PAC thought we were a white congregation¹¹ (we were, in fact, a multiracial congregation)? In the words of Mr Justice Marais, "It is possible the attack was a public act of retaliation against white South Africans collectively blamed for atrocities committed by particular whites against blacks".¹² Was it because CESA was known to be conservative in both its theology and politics and identified as racist?¹³ In 1989 the General Secretary of the CESA received a letter from Dr Pierre Rossouw on behalf of Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk asking for "a much closer relationship" between the two denominations as "churches not practicing the politicization of the message and task of the church".¹⁴ Or was it because St James Church was a large, defenceless congregation¹⁵ and an easy target? APLA could launch the attack with minimal risk to themselves but with extreme

⁷ The Azanian People's Liberation Army (originally called Poqo). Sabelo Phama (APLA'S chief commander) sanctioned the following attacks on civilians: King Williams Town Golf Club (28 November 1992), killing four people; Highgate Hotel in East London (1 May 1993), killing five people; St James Church Kenilworth (25 July 1993) killing eleven people; Heidelberg Tavern in Observatory (31 December 1993) killing four people. *Truth Commission – Special Report – TRC Final Report – Volume 2, Section 1, Chapter 7*. sabcrc.saha.org.za (Accessed 19 April 2021).

⁸ In chapter 1 of his book, *Tragedy to Triumph*, Frank Retief (1994) gives a detailed account of the attack. The book's subtitle reads, *A Christian response to trials and suffering*. For a critical assessment of this book, see Balcomb (2004).

⁹ I am aware that this is a very Western question. In my South African context, a better question would be "who"? Who ordered the attack? (e.g., see Mpakanyane nd:4-5, 8). But I use the question "why" because this paper is addressed primarily to white evangelicals.

¹⁰ See Retief 2021:127-128.

¹¹ In the official police file on the St James Church attack (SAP Claremont MR'S 539 tot 548/07/93 Volume 1. Inligingsnota 30/1/2/29/42/2) paragraph 5 states that "Carl Zimbri ... beweer verder dat die kerk as teiken geïdentifiseer is, omdat die gemmentelede 99% wit is."

¹² Cape times 11/04/95: Extracts from the judgment of Justice Marais.

¹³ cf. Boesak 1987:2.

¹⁴ Letter dated 1 March 1989 (AS37/89 PR/isv). See also CESA Synod 1987: Minute 23 State of the Nation. Addendum Y.

¹⁵ Except for one congregation member who was armed and who returned fire. Compare Annemie Bosch who, even in a context of grave danger and fear at Madwaleni in 1963, was not in favour of being armed (Kritzinger & Saayman, 2011:23).

devastation. Was it, in the words of General Constand Viljoen (Krog 1998:3),¹⁶ “The terror of the tyrant invited the terror of the revolutionary”? Did APLA identify us with the ‘tyrant’? Perhaps behind all these possible answers was the Creed of white superiority with its evil fruit of oppression which bred black pain and anger so deep as to be almost incomprehensible (cf. Moore-King 1988:99-102 and 104-108).

Being a white evangelical in South Africa did not/does not exempt one from racism and white privilege. This is true of both overt/dominant racism and covert/aversive racism. In fact, Opperman Lewis (2016:441) has cogently argued that although the description ‘racism’ “only came into prominence in the 1930s, . . . the roots of ‘theoretical racism’ can be traced back to the 15th Century . . .”. Opperman Lewis (2016:442) further argues that within Christianity “the symbols of whiteness versus blackness originated in the European mind with the reformation”. Sadly, in the present author’s view, this has had a tragic influence on Reformed Evangelicalism in South Africa.

Those who applied for amnesty¹⁷ for the attack were:

- Mr Gcinikhaya Christopher Makoma
- Mr Mzukisi Bassie Mkhumbuzi
- Mr Letlapa Raymond Mphahlele¹⁸

At the amnesty hearing in Cape Town on 9 July 1997, Mkhumbuzi testified that, although his unit leader had selected the target,¹⁹ he agreed that “Whites were using churches to oppress blacks” and justified the attack on the grounds that whites “took our country using churches and Bibles. We know and we have read from books that they are the ones who have taken the land from us”.²⁰

As Long ago as 1979, in the Foreword to John de Gruchy’s book, “The church struggle in South Africa”, Alan Paton wrote:

There is unfortunately abundant evidence that many black radicals regard Christianity as a white exploitative religion, and the Christian missionaries . . . as responsible for the destruction of the ancestral beliefs . . .²¹

I mentioned the names of the three young men who attacked St James Church as a reminder that they were not merely APLA combatants, freedom fighters, members

¹⁶ cf. Cãmara, Hélder (1971). *Spiral of Violence*. London: Sheed & Ward; and Fanon, Frantz (2004). *The Wretched of the Earth* (pp. 63-124). Cape Town: Kwela Books.

¹⁷ For a thorough treatment of “the inner history of the amnesty negotiations during the South African transition, and the origins of the TRC’s amnesty process” see Du Toit (2022).

¹⁸ See his two books *Child of This Soil* and *Shining the Searchlight Inwards*. In both books he refers to the attack on St James Church.

¹⁹ Mr Sichumiso Nonxuba.

²⁰ *Truth Commission – Special Report – TRC Final Report – Volume 2, Section 1, Chapter 7, paragraphs 472-477*. sabctrc.saha.org.za (Accessed 19 April 2021).

²¹ De Gruchy (1979: xii).

of the PAC, or criminals or terrorists. They each have a name, as do those they murdered, maimed, and injured. They are human beings created in God's image, human beings for whom Christ died,²² who were caught up in the struggle *for* freedom, equality, justice, and democracy, the struggle *from* oppression, discrimination, injustice, and white supremacy. Human beings with a name, a father, a mother, a family, and siblings. Human beings with feelings, fears, and aspirations.

I speak as an evangelical, but I do not presume to speak for other white evangelicals. I have no desire to throw stones. I speak only for myself. For all my evangelical theology, I failed to love my black South African neighbour as I love myself.²³ I failed, and that failure needs to be called out for what it is – sin. Sin against black South Africans, sin against my black brothers and sisters in Christ in South Africa, and sin against God. For this, I repent.

I believe that the white Evangelical Church in South Africa needs to repent. We need to repent of a truncated gospel. We need to repent of that dualism that reduces our neighbour to nothing more than a soul.²⁴ Human beings are not disembodied souls; we are wholes.²⁵ Our neighbour is not merely a soul, but a body-soul-in community.²⁶ The gospel relates to all of life, including politics and racism.²⁷ How is it that communists (Bram Fischer, Ruth First, Joe Slovo, Chris Hani), liberals (Alan Paton), Black Consciousness leaders (Steve Biko), political leaders (Robert Sobukwe, Nelson Mandela), politicians (Helen Suzman), theologians (Jaap Durand, Alan Boesak, Dirkie Smit, Ernst Conradie), Anglican church leaders (Desmond Tutu, Njongonkulu Ndungane), pastors and dominees (Peter Story, Frank Chikane, Beyers Naudé), medical doctors (Mamphela Ramphele), lawyers (Kader Asmal), revolutionary activists (Ronnie Kasrils), musicians (Johnny Clegg), University students (Noel Leitch)²⁸ and indeed the whole world came to see the problem with apartheid and its legislation of racism and oppression in all areas of life?²⁹ However, white evangelicals in South Africa (of whom I am one) were unable to see what stared us in the face every day.³⁰

And it gets worse. It's now the year 2022. "Surely by now white South African evangelicals should have woken up, self-corrected, and be on a more biblical

²² Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3, Galatians 1:4, Ephesians 1:7, Hebrews 10:19-22, 1 Peter 3:18, 1 John 4:10, Revelation 5:9).

²³ The Gospel According to Mark, chapter 12, verses 28-34.

²⁴ Bosch (1980:203).

²⁵ Wright (2008:28, 152, 199-200).

²⁶ Boesak (1987:12) and Stott (1975:30).

²⁷ Bartholomew (2022:1).

²⁸ Private correspondence and see UCT Fresh (2004:20-23).

²⁹ Bartholomew (2022:2).

³⁰ There were important exceptions, e.g., Michael Cassidy and Africa Enterprise.

course in relation to church and society?"³¹ But we have not. We continue to perpetuate past mistakes. Why? What is the reason?

David Bosch, in his book, "Witness to the World", gives us the answer (1980:206-207):

...all that counts is effective evangelism ... (He continues), If we communicate *only*³² that part of the gospel which corresponds to people's 'felt needs' and 'personal problems' ... while remaining silent³³ on their relationship to their fellow men, on racism, exploitation, and blatant injustice, we do not proclaim the gospel. This is the quintessence of what Bonhoeffer³⁴ has called 'cheap grace'.

Bosch continues:

The more the gospel is proclaimed as an other-worldly reality, the more the existing order is uncritically upheld. Perhaps this phenomenon can be explained with reference to the dualism that is typical of pietistic evangelicals.

My humble prayer is that this paper may at least be a spark to white evangelicals in South Africa (including my own beloved denomination) assessing our theology and practice regarding church and society issues, repenting of our dualism³⁵ and hypocrisy³⁶ (both these tendencies are denial of the ascension [Lordship] of Christ; Bosch, 1991:515) and seeing that the Bible teaches both evangelism and socio-political involvement.³⁷

I deeply feel the damage done in South Africa by the failure of so many white evangelicals (of whom I am one). We have failed God, failed the church, failed the majority of South Africans, and failed in our witness for Christ in South Africa. And because of these failures, the Evangelical Church in South Africa has very little, if any, credibility among most black citizens. In the words of Frantz Fanon (2004:124), "... the European masses must ... wake up, put on their thinking caps and stop playing the irresponsible game of Sleeping Beauty". May God have mercy on us. May God give us grace to truly repent, preach the gospel, and actively

³¹ Bartholomew (2022:2).

³² Italics mine.

³³ "To act as Christians we have to stand against injustice ... I believe a Christian who will remain silent is not a Christian" Crespo in Colson 1987:281.

³⁴ See Bonhoeffer 1995:43-56.

³⁵ The soul is divorced from the social and it is given the priority.

³⁶ Doctrine is divorced from living.

³⁷ cf. Bosch 1980:30.

obey him.³⁸ Then, I dare to hope the Evangelical Church in South Africa will indeed contribute to a new social contract in the contemporary South African public space.

In Christ, the kingdom of God has been inaugurated. Of course, we all know it will only be consummated at our Lord's Second Coming – but it *has been* inaugurated. The Evangelical Church in South Africa needs to act accordingly. Was it not Jesus who taught his disciples to pray:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.³⁹

2. Church and Society

“Church and Society” is a long-standing theme in ecumenical discourse since the Edinburgh Mission Conference (1910), the Stockholm conference on Life and Work (1925), the Geneva conference on Church and Society (1968), the Lausanne movement (since 1974), and several mission documents leading towards Together towards Life (2013). From these conferences and documents, various models on the relationship between church and society have been distilled, e.g., by H. Richard Niebuhr, David Bosch, Avery Dulles, Jaap Durand, and Dirkie Smit.

These influential typologies have been offered to model the different positions of church and society or church and state. In my view, they all have valuable insights as to how the church in South Africa can contribute to the new society that we need in our country. To this end, I would like again to turn your attention to David Bosch.

In his 1980 book, “Witness to the world”, from which I have already quoted, Bosch describes and critiques the evangelical theology of mission (chapter 19) and the ecumenical theology of mission (chapter 20). He notes that evangelical attitudes to social and political involvement (church and state) can take several forms (1980:202-203):

1. Any form of social involvement is a betrayal of the gospel.
2. Social involvement (e.g., education and health care) is viewed as a means to an end (to evangelism).
3. Social activities are optional. If one has the time well and good, but social action is not a priority.

³⁸ Matthew 23:23f; John 14:15; John 15:14; James 1:22; James 2:14-26.

³⁹ Matthew 6:9-10.

4. The relationship between personal redemption and social involvement is that of seed and fruit. The reasoning is that if people are truly converted, they will become socially involved. So evangelism is primary, and service is seen as secondary.

In 1989 Craig Bartholomew gave a paper at the CESA synod on 'Church in Society'. He placed us firmly in category 1. He said (p. 5):

It seems to me that we fall very much within category 1. . . . we regard socio-political involvement as at least a distraction from evangelism, and at worst a betrayal.

He continued that according to CESA:

. . . the answer to South Africa's problems is just evangelism and that we as a denomination need to avoid socio-political involvement.

It is my opinion that this is still true of CESA, 33 years later. Bartholomew continues:

The CESA is perceived as a denomination which avoids political involvement of any sort. It may get involved socially but certainly steers clear of politics.⁴⁰

In my experience, this is still true, despite changing our operating name to REACH-SA. We need to repent of this truncated gospel. We must reconsider, rethink, and form a new and more biblical conception of church and society and our role in reimagining a new social contract in the South African public space.⁴¹

This is also a deep challenge to black evangelicals in South Africa who have been impacted by white racism/supremacy and who for generations have been influenced by evangelical/conservative white missionaries and church leaders who have embraced – and passed on – an emaciated gospel, a downplaying of the Lordship of the resurrected and ascended Christ over all of his creation. This must include a theology and praxis of justice in socio-political-economic issues. Thus, the gospel has been betrayed by white and black evangelicals in South Africa.

I believe the nature of the new society we need may be defined in Jesus' words in Mark 12:30-31 where he brings Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18 together. He says to the teacher of the law that the most important command is to love the Lord your God unreservedly and to love your neighbour as yourself. If the Evangelical Church holds together in biblical tension both evangelism and socio-political

⁴⁰ cf. Resane (2018).

⁴¹ cf. Winter (1994).

involvement, as distinct but equally important aspects of the *missio Dei*, I believe we can make a meaningful contribution to a new and better South African society.

We evangelicals will do well to remember Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 23:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel (NIV 23-24).

3. The way to get to a new “social contract” – correcting past failures

It is now my measured opinion that what *repentance* entails is more than just doing an about-turn on our views regarding church and society, but includes doing a thorough reimagining of our theology in the following four areas:

- A move away from naive hermeneutics.

For too long, evangelicals in South Africa have gone about hermeneutics as if there is only a “text” and not a “reader.” To be sure, “A text means what its author meant.”⁴² But the readers’ politics, economics, race, cultural background, theology, denomination, etc. – all influence our biblical interpretation (cf. Kritzinger 1992:278-280, 303; Kritzinger & Saayman, 2011:3-6; McNeil, 2015:55-64; Smit, 2007:167-173; Wright, 2008:151). Most theologians admit this bias, but evangelicals, for the most part, continue to deny it. There must be constant dialogue between one’s context and the Christian tradition. We need to develop a humble and self-critical hermeneutic that integrates scripture reading with a careful analysis and understanding of our unique South African context (Bosch, 1993:247).⁴³ Then we will hear “not the soothing echoes of our own cultural prejudice but the thunderclap of (God’s) Word.”⁴⁴

- A move to realised (not over-realised) eschatology.

The kingdom of God *has been* inaugurated (Mark 1:15). Christ *is* ascended and *is* Lord, and his reign is one of love and righteousness and peace and justice. Until our theology embraces this point properly, we will continue to espouse unjust ways

⁴² Stott 1999:75. cf. The GWC Handbook for Exegesis (2016).

⁴³ I am grateful to my colleague, Bradley Trout, for our many discussions (in Muizenberg, Kleinmond and the mountains above Afdaks!) on this subject. He has been a help and encouragement to me in wrestling with these issues.

⁴⁴ Stott (1999:64).

of reading the Bible – ways of reading that maintain the status quo (cf. Bochmuehl 1980:109).

- Following the above, we must consider our understanding of the *missio Dei*. We have limited ‘missions’ to evangelism and social service.⁴⁵ We have completely ignored social action (socio-political involvement) as part of our witness.⁴⁶ Which is to say we are weak in the Lordship of Christ. I believe evangelism (not proselytising) is an indispensable dimension of the Christian mission because where there is no forgiveness in Christ, there cannot be true liberation. However, we are wrong to ignore the other dimensions of the *missio Dei*. We must hold in biblical tension *both* justification by grace *and* justice.⁴⁷

- A move out of the laager.

The people I mentioned earlier in this paper (who stood up – at great cost – against apartheid) are miles ahead of us evangelicals on church and society issues. We do not need to give up our evangelical distinctives, but they do not need to hang their heads in shame, as we do when confronted with our stance in the face of blatant injustice.⁴⁸ Instead, their works need to start filling our library shelves and bibliographies.⁴⁹

In other words, the repentance we require is not merely one of personal attitude. We need *theological repentance* - admitting that our theology was and is flawed. If we don't do this, our poor theology will continue to produce the same results. Behaviour always follows belief. We need to work hard at a biblical eschatology, a biblical missiology, a biblical Christology, a biblical ecclesiology, a biblical anthropology,⁵⁰ a biblical theology of stewardship⁵¹ and a biblical hermeneutic,⁵² all this in the South African context. Furthermore, evangelical preachers need to preach from their pulpits sermons that engage the social issues of the day, evangelical synods need to give leadership on these issues, and evangelical congregations must stand in solidarity with the oppressed and marginalised and work for righteousness in society. Is this not what it

⁴⁵ Brown (1998:143f).

⁴⁶ See Bosch (1991:368f) on the thirteen dimensions of mission.

⁴⁷ Romans 3:24; Luke 11:42; Ephesians 2:8-10.

⁴⁸ Again, I am grateful to Bradley Trout for being my interlocuter.

⁴⁹ Ephesians 3:17-18; Colossians 3:16.

⁵⁰ The three traditional South African anthropologies – the apartheid anthropology of Afrikaners, the liberal Anglo-Saxon anthropology and that of traditional African communities (rural and urban) – have all failed. We desperately need a new Biblical Theological anthropology (cf. Kritzinger & Saayman 2011:149-150).

⁵¹ For example, Craig Blomberg (2013) would be a good start.

⁵² For example, Bosch in CassidyKritzinger and Saayman (2011:159-167, 169).

means to be a disciple of Christ? Is this not the calling of the church, the body of Christ (cf. Niebuhr 1975:190-229)? The Evangelical Church in South Africa, in the authors view, needs to embrace a more precise and biblical *missio Dei* (cf. Verster 2022). God's mission is much more than evangelism. God's mission is more than evangelism and social service. God's mission includes social action. As Conradie 2011:84-85) has written: "One may describe mission in multiple ways according to the formula of 'mission as', for example mission as contestation, development, dialogue, evangelism, exorcism, healing, hospitality, justice, liberation, proclamation, reconciliation, reconstruction, restoration, service, transformation and so forth". Evangelical pulpits urgently need to address these issues and more in the South African context.

In the words of this conference, we need to 'reimagine'. The way we have constructed the world, or the way it was constructed for us, is not necessarily the right way. Entrenched attitudes must change (Biko, 2017:217). They are not necessarily God's Kingdom way, which was inaugurated by the death, resurrection, ascension, and Spirit gift of Jesus. We need to identify what is happening in our context, what historical factors still have influence, and what resources and capacities we have to make change possible. At the very least, our leaders must see the need for change and be willing to address that need.⁵³

4. A call to repent

καὶ λέγων ὅτι Πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς καὶ ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ· μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ.⁵⁴

It is my opinion that the Evangelical Church in South Africa needs, therefore, to confess, lament, and repent of this past and present withdrawal from society and socio-political involvement.⁵⁵ In the words of Beyers Naudé and Nico Smith (in Du Toit 2022:11), referring to the inadequacy of their witness in ending apartheid:

I have not done enough ... How is it possible that our preaching was so ineffective, that our actions were so timid, that we did so little to ease the pain of the victims, to confront the rulers of the country, the exponents of the ideology of apartheid?

But confession and lament are not enough. As disciples of Christ, we are obligated to repent before God and our South African neighbour. We must embrace the Lordship of Christ over both church and society and (sacrificially) love our South

⁵³ cf. McNeil (2015:117).

⁵⁴ Mark 1:15 (SBL & Tyndale House Edition). The Society of Biblical Literature Greek New Testament.

⁵⁵ Especially so for those of us who are Fundamentalists, Separatist fundamentalists, Old evangelicals, or Confessional evangelicals. See Appendix 1.

African neighbour as ourselves. Because our theology has been inadequate (unbiblical) regarding the church's relationship to society, we have, at best, been blind to our sins of racism, discrimination, inequality, exclusion, marginalisation, injustice, corruption, dishonesty, and exploitation in the contemporary South African public space. At worst, we have (and continue to) turned a blind eye and are guilty of maintaining the (sinful) status quo—both during apartheid and post-apartheid.

5. Conclusion

I end where I began, with the words of Professor Bosch:

We know today – what many of our spiritual forbears would have found difficult to accept - that the empirical church will always be imperfect. Every church member who loves the church will also be deeply pained by it. This does not, however, call for discarding the church, but for reforming and renewing it. The church is itself an object of the *missio Dei*, in constant need of repentance ...

The Evangelical Church is only a small part of God's church in South Africa. And we are imperfect. And I, who love the Evangelical Church, am deeply pained by these many imperfections. Please don't discard us. Please be patient with us. Please pray for us and hold us accountable to the Lord Christ, whom we profess to serve. Please help us as we seek to repent, reform, reimagine, and renew our witness to South Africa.

And may God grant that together with his whole church⁵⁶ in South Africa, and in fellowship with all Christians in this beloved country, that we may make a real, good, and godly (doxological) contribution to reimagining the contemporary (South) African public space.

Appendix 1

Who/what is an evangelical?

Evangelical Christianity is difficult to define precisely because it means different things to different people. It does not constitute a monolithic block. So, John W. de Gruchy⁵⁷ distinguishes between five different types of evangelicals, and Christopher A. Lund⁵⁸ writes:

⁵⁶ cf. Saayman 1984; Stott 1999:140-144.

⁵⁷ 'The great evangelical reversal. South African Reflections', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 24 (Sept. 1978), 45-57.

⁵⁸ (Masters Dissertation) 'A critical examination of evangelicalism in South Africa, with special reference to the evangelical witness document and concerned evangelicals'. 1988.

In South Africa, similar diversity is apparent. Evangelical groups include specifically identifiable denominations, such as the Baptist church; conservative evangelistic groups, like Christ for All Nations; more liberal evangelistic groups, for example Africa Enterprise; evangelicals within the 'mainline' English-speaking churches; Pentecostal groups like the Assemblies of God and the Apostolic Faith Mission; politically 'radical' groups such as Concerned Evangelicals; Student evangelical groupings like the Students Christian Association (SCA), and the Students Christian Movement (SCM); and groups directly within the tradition of the Reformation, such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa.

In Marsden's words:⁵⁹

Not only do these and other evangelical denominations vary widely, but almost everyone has carefully guarded its own distinctiveness, usually avoiding deep contact with other groups. Viewed in this light, evangelicalism indeed appears as disorganized as a kaleidoscope.

David Bosch,⁶⁰ quoting Peter Beyerhaus, points out that there are no less than six distinguishable evangelical groupings (cf. Stott 1999:24-26):

- New evangelicals (who distance themselves from fundamentalism's science-phobia and political conservatism and strive for the greatest possible collaboration).
- Separatist fundamentalists (also called 'Strict Fundamentalists' who are uncompromising in their separatist attitude).
- Confessional evangelicals (who attach great importance to a confession of faith and a rejection of contemporary doctrinal error).
- Pentecostal and charismatic movements (stressing the work of the Holy Spirit in tongue-speaking, healing, and worship).
- Radical evangelicals (who acknowledge a socio-political commitment and strive to unite evangelistic witness and social action).
- Ecumenical evangelicals (who are developing critical participation in the ecumenical movement).

In 1985 SCM Press published Paul Knitter's book, "No other name? A critical survey of Christian attitudes toward the world religions." In chapter 5, he defines and critiques evangelicalism.

In 1993 Gabriel Fackre published his list of six categories:

⁵⁹ George M. Marsden, 'Introduction: The Evangelical Denomination' in George M. Marsden (ed), 1984, *Evangelicalism and Modern America* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids), p. 9.

⁶⁰ 1980:30f.

- Fundamentalists (polemical and separatist)
- Old evangelicals (emphasizing personal conversion and mass evangelism)⁶¹
- New evangelicals (acknowledging social responsibility and apologetics)
- Justice and peace evangelicals (socio-political activists)
- Charismatic evangelicals (stressing the work of the Holy Spirit)
- Ecumenical evangelicals (concerned for unity and co-operation)

See also DP Whitelaw's 1984 chapter, "Black and white perspectives on colour examined from an evangelical point of view" in J.W. Hofmeyr and W.S. Vorster (eds.). *New Faces of Africa. Essays in honour of Ben Marais*. Pretoria: UNISA. He highlights various important concerns for evangelicals in South Africa, defines evangelical roots and nuances, identifies five main evangelical branches, and suggests correctives on an evangelical perspective.

Given these multiple tribes of evangelicalism, I would like to clarify (following the lead given by John Stott) that by the label 'evangelical' I mean those who believe in the revealing initiative of God the Father, the redeeming work of God the Son, and the transforming ministry of God the Holy Spirit (Stott, 1999:28). Evangelical Christianity is trinitarian Christianity. The principal tenets that evangelical Christians cherish are the Word, the cross and the Spirit. Or, more simply, we hold to the three R's – revelation, redemption, and regeneration (Stott, 1999:147).

These beliefs, in turn, express our dependence on God and his Word, our dependence on Christ and his cross, and our dependence on the Holy Spirit and his work.

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⁶¹ In my view, this describes who we were in CESA in the 1970s – 2000s.

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