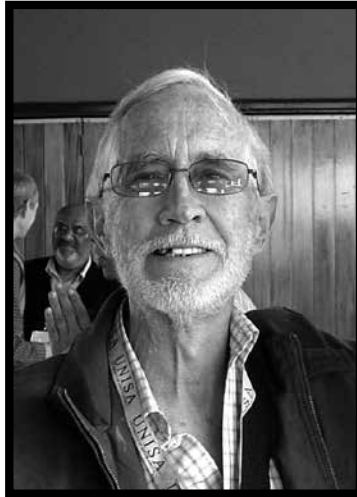


Tribute to Willem Saayman



To respond to the editor's request for a brief eulogy on the life and work of Willem Adriaan Saayman, bestows a great honor on me, but simultaneously throws up an awkward ambivalence. To write about someone with such an illustrious career, a wonderful family man, a colleague amongst colleagues, a brother amongst sisters and brothers, a comrade par excellence might not be too daunting. Yet, the deep and at times uncontrollable sadness about his sudden passing on from a devastating heart attack, renders the task quite difficult. As a friend, a wise councilor, a mentor he has left a huge void and will be sorely missed.

After the untimely death of David Bosch in 1992, Willem Saayman stepped in and provided excellent leadership in building the unit for Missiology at Unisa into arguably one of the biggest and indeed most reputable schools of Missiology in the world. This happened during the time of major political change in South Africa with the first ever democratic elections looming and the country heading for national liberation. One of his tasks was to transform the unit for Missiology from an almost exclusively white entity to one that would be slightly more representative of the demographic realities in South Africa. What is little known is that his shocking early retirement in the late 1990's was not only triggered by ill health, but indeed also by his quite astonishing and gracious gesture to create space for black Missiologists in the Department.

His life has been the embodiment of the glaring paradoxical nature of the reign of God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The unwritten banner over his life

was: "...when I am weak, then I am truly strong...when you are weak my power is made perfect in you. My grace is enough for you" 2 Cor. 12:8-10 NCV). Despite his suffering of illness over a long period of time in the form of devastating migraines, recurring periods of deep depression, an accident on his way back from Zimbabwe in which he was nearly killed, serious surgery to the colon, in a remarkable or is more apt to say in a miraculous way he was still able to deliver fifty two Masters and Doctoral students, six monographs, two books co-authored, numerous research articles in accredited journals, speeches, presentations and indeed a host of brilliantly constructed short and sweet sermons.

He shall, however, perhaps be remembered more for his prophetic witness to a South Africa with a more human face. Informed greatly by the 1968 Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala in its insistence on humanization based on the reign of Christ not only in individual lives, nor only as the Head of the Church, but as Lord of the cosmos (cosmic Christ), this finds reflection in his writings. More importantly though, the quest for greater humanization in a country confronted with ongoing violence and the triple crisis of inequality, unemployed and poverty, it is indeed his PRAXIS of identification with the poor characterized by compassion, kindness and humility, that might live on as his long lasting legacy.

Willem, son of the African soil, brother, comrade, HAMBAMBA KAHLE!

Nico Botha (SAMS General Secretary), Autumn 2015