

Albert Pilon's Scrutiny of Kwasizabantu



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Is this a genuine revival? a missiological investigation about the revival among the Zulus

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Author:

Albert Pilon

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Review Title:

Albert Pilon's Scrutiny of Kwasizabantu

Reviewer:

P.A. Rousseau¹

Affiliation:

¹Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa

Corresponding author:

P.A. Rousseau,
20170041@nwutheology.co.za

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Is this a genuine revival? This is a question that essentially poses a contradiction in terms, for could a 'revival', which is not 'genuine', still be regarded or even referred to as *revival*?

Although not stated outright, this appears to be the question Albert Pilon grapples with through the pages of his book. Translated from Dutch, the book deals with the difficult, sometimes even contentious concept of revival: the heavenly occasion that God alone can and will do in his time and on his terms. Revival is something so deeply yearned for, so fervently prayed for, unceasingly hoped for and continually expected by evangelical and Protestant Christian believers who are burdened with social decline and ecclesiastic apostasy. To read about revival can be so edifying, but then a revival must be real – wrought by God.

The phenomenon that Pilon investigated is called a revival among the Zulus of Northern KwaZulu-Natal. It had been hailed the most durable revival the world has known and, as such, Pilon's investigation is reported in a wide ranging and inclusive historical narrative that spans 45+ years from c. 1966. During this time, the author was involved in the movement.

The Kwasizabantu revival is described and compared, sometimes even contrasted against a variety of backgrounds, inter alia African forms of Christianity, supernatural phenomena and traditional African belief, Kwasizabantu's own 'doctrine' and the contents of their sermons, and the communication of and effect of the Christian message. Most importantly, it is then evaluated against the characteristics of cults.

Pilon's narrative is packed with historical detail from the Kwasizabantu movement. Depending from which perspective it would be read, for instance with a view to personal spiritual edification in the assurance that God really worked among the Zulu people in most excellent and amazing ways or from a discerning, critical evaluation of the sometimes wild claims that were made for what happened at Kwasizabantu, the detailed description is testimony to the thorough research the author engaged in.

The detailed descriptions display an authenticity that comes from the intricate knowledge that only insiders are privy to. It is exactly this authenticity that would polarise the reader – on the one hand hoping it was or still is a genuine revival and, on the other hand, extreme disappointment to learn about practices and operations that fail completely to characterise the grace and truth of the godly integrity that one would attach and expect of the lofty construct of a revival wrought by the Holy Spirit.

Pilon's work has much merit: it is thoroughly researched, engagingly written, understandably described and it provides a sobering eye-opener on what (genuine) revival is not. The description provides insight on the movement from its heydays when people across church, cultural, ethnical, denominational and international lines were taken up and enthused by the Kwasizabantu phenomenon.

The driving force behind Kwasizabantu was honoured with a prestigious recognition of his work among rural people. Doubtlessly, the missionary, endeavour stretching over the decades, must have reached many people with a form of Pentecostalism in which a quasi-supernaturalism had to convince people that God is at work. Contrarily, Pilon reveals the unmistakable (and disturbing) cultic traits within the movement, both in its character and the way that especially its leadership treated people. These occasions were not only to the detriment of people thus treated, but especially damaging as regards the integrity of the movement's description ('revival'). Pilon does not hesitate to use the word *browbeat* as descriptive of how the leaders went about with people that were perceived as potentially threatening to the movement. The one outstanding merit of this book is its revealing of what is not genuine.

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The book is brim-full with valuable historical information that will interest readers and researchers in a South-African missiology perspective within the field of revival and/or similar religious phenomena. While it may, or might not attract much general reader-interest, unless a potential reader had or has dealings with Kwasizabantu, it will be a valuable informative and defensive tool for pastors who

have to cope with pro-Kwasizabantu church members who may be eager to convert their church to a Kwasizabantu-style satellite congregation. Moreover, it is a guide on how not to be a co-worker with God in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 3:9) if God would ever entrust something as heavenly and precious as revival to a spiritual leader of many people or a pastor of few.