

The Schlelein Family

Missionaries to the Tsongas of southern Africa

AUGUST 2012 | LIMPOPO, SOUTH AFRICA

Confessions of a Vulcanist

It's true I've written in the past on the Prosperity Carnival, but even St. Paul was redundant (Phil. 3:1). In southern Africa, the Prosperity Gospel is the volcano on the island of religion. Its bombs touch every denomination, so it's as easy to find a Catholic priest promising healing for Kojo's diabetes as it is an apostolic prophet guaranteeing a Mercedes near Themba's hut.

Seth and I have served as vulcanists here for six plus years, and we've imbibed our share of Charismatic silliness. When it suits us, we'll pose as each other. We're two whites who live in neighboring black villages, speak Shangaan, drive matching 4x4's, and wear khakis 350 days a year. Some still believe Seth can view two miracle crusades at once.

Never been to a crusade? While I've seen everything described below, I'll let you hear it from Pastor Tear Gas.

Slipperiness 101: By Pastor Tear Gas

"The show starts at 7 p.m., but before arriving you'll spot colorful advertisements *everywhere* (like the one to the right). You'll notice it's ripped, but that's because one can of glue is used per poster. The only way to remove is by tearing, which is why there are a lot of "Y2K: Year of Miracles" posters still stuck to handicap signs.

Fridge-size speakers are essential to every successful crusade. Got a classroom-size meeting with a dozen people? No matter. Best wear a lapel *and* use a hand mike. Lather up the audience with inane singing. *Don't* make them think. Sing three-chord, two-word songs like 'Dula tempeleni' (Sit'n in the church); this will pacify them for hours.

Always preach from your iPad or laptop, but there's no need to reference it. The Shangaan and Venda just want to see bling. Begin shouting early. The translator must be equal in volume, but never in dress. Eyes on the pastor, remember? Give the name of your text early, you won't be coming back. For example: 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me' (but only explain the first part).

Be smooth. Drop names. If chilly, still dab your face with a hankie. Now sprinkle in your titles. 'Rev' is so yesterday. Better to use 'Pastor of Pastors', 'Bishop', or 'Apostle'. Borrow ideas from the playbook of American Revivalism--You can't blow dry your hair, but you *can* give honorary doctorates. Insist on being called "Doctor".

The offering is around the corner, so promises must be big! 'Belief will make AIDS flee.' 'Faith will fit size 32 skirts.' Be loose in your translation. 'Greater is he that is in you than he that is in your paralysis.' Start the music as the offering starts. Keep going until they give. Finally, don't forget the altar call."

Between laughing and cringing,

Paul, Melinda & the kids

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