

**MISSION UPDATE MAY 2021
MARK RICH AND CYNTHIA HOLDER RICH
SERVING AT TUMAINI UNIVERSITY
MAKUMIRA, ARUSHA, TANZANIA**

Greetings from Tanzania! The rainy season is winding down, and blue sky is poking through the clouds more often, reminding us that May and June are two of our favorite months here. We are both super busy (2nd semester situation normal), as we

work with bachelor's, master's, and PhD students engaged in important, original research—on top of a full and over-full schedule of teaching. In 2020, many required courses were not offered as some teaching staff were not present and others were ill and engaged in caring for families. As a consequence, our 3rd year students are currently taking 9 classes—at least 3 more than in a normal semester; and many instructors (including us!) are covering a more-than-regular load.

ADDITIONALLY, 2 projects—one begun in 2018 and another initiated last year—came to fruition this month. Both address issues of how people who are different relate to each other and bring the damage done by historic and ongoing colonialism, with attendant racial overtones, to mind.

RACE AND CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

In the aftermath of the national and international reckoning about race and justice last year, Cynthia and her brother, the Rev. Dr. R. Ward Holder, a professor at Saint Anselm College in New Hampshire, began conversations about the possibility of joint work. Those first discussions culminated in new course designs, grant applications, bicontinental planning, and a teaching and learning experience in Race and Christian Theology. Students were introduced to literature by leading African American and African theologians and discussed these together. Grant funds made it possible to have two African and three African American theologians give lectures online, which students watched and then took part in discussions together with the scholars. 17 Makumira bachelor's and master's students took part with over 20 students from Saint Anselm.

We cannot in a short article share all that occurred or what happened for us and within us from working with students on these issues over the past six months. We can say that what has happened has been a remarkable, difficult, at-times-painful, and thoroughly amazing gift of growth and grace. We share here a few responses from participating Makumira students to give you a glimpse.

“I took part in this because I had always thought that all White people hated all Black people. That was my experience, in society and the church. I was interested in what White professors would say about race.”

“Our brains have been colonized to believe that anything good must come from Europe.”

“There is a relationship between patriarchy and the religion of whiteness.”

“How can we solve this? The churches must work to solve the problem of hatred between people.”

“In the church, we talk a lot about things we are not ready to do.”

“The church has responsibility because the church is called to speak for the voiceless. For racism, it has to start with White people...the change must start with them.”

“The church has a prophetic voice around race. If the church can give space for racism to operate, the church can also play a part in ending racism.”

There is SO MUCH MORE to share about these experiences—please be in touch to learn more.

CHRISTIAN ZIONISM IN AFRICA BOOK LAUNCH

We arrived in Tanzania in the fall of 2017. We encountered many things that were new to us—food, culture, language, and ways of life which we had not known before. One thing among those that struck us both was frequent sightings of Stars of David and exhortative sayings on buildings, transit

vans, and Bible covers carried by our students into classes, urging all to “Pray for Israel”, for God to bless Israel, and for everyone to stand with Israel. This seemed odd, as there is almost no Jewish community in Tanzania. So what was this all about? We began a learning process that led to engaging research on many fronts, and learning that Christian Zionism, a form of belief and practice centered around a number of ideas, was very much present on the ground and in the churches of Tanzania. Here are a few of these (with the caveat that not all Christian Zionists believe all of these, and there are wide variations in how these beliefs are discussed and understood).

- ❖ Jesus will return at the end of time to Jerusalem. For this to happen, Israel must be in power in Jerusalem.
- ❖ The modern state of Israel and the ancient Israel of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are equivalent. That is, the Israelis who live in Israel today—and those who lead them—are the chosen people of God. Not supporting them is denying support to God—no matter what happens.
- ❖ Blessing Israel is a commandment from God (Genesis 12:3, an oft-quoted text in the movement).
- ❖ Those who bless Israel will be blessed—as blessing Israel and blessing God are one and the same. Those who curse Israel will be cursed—for the same reason.

Zionism, the idea that Jewish people deserve a homeland where they can live free of the centuries of deadly anti-Semitic thought and action—which continue today with tragic results—has led to much international action on legal and geopolitical fronts, and to the establishment of the State of Israel. Christian Zionism is a newer phenomenon which has some of the same goals as Zionism and some that are very different—the return of Jesus at the end of time as a primary example.

While Christian Zionism has its roots in Britain and history in the US church, the movement has moved into many poor countries across the globe—including many in Africa. Many of the formerly colonized peoples of Africa were less than open to the new Israeli state’s overtures, particularly after the Six-Day War of 1967 and the 1973 Yom Kippur War, which both ended with much-increased territory, taken from land that had been granted to form a Palestinian state. Moves by Israel and Christian Zionist organizations have worked to change the initial reluctance of many African leaders to work with and support Israel. Israel has offered military and development aid to many countries on the continent, in return for their support of Israel and for not recognizing Palestine in international forums. Christian Zionist organizations, many of which are staffed and funded from the US, are very active in Africa, spreading the message that support of Israel is necessary for economic growth, and that it is the only faithful way to worship God.

We began working toward what became [Christian Zionism in Africa](#) (click on the title to purchase the hardcover or e-book) in 2018. 14 scholars from across Africa took part. The book was to be published in early fall 2020—a date the pandemic did its best to slow down. Publication came in December. The book launch was held as rockets flew over Gaza and Israel and the daily death toll and reports of suffering mounted. Everyone present was aware of what is at stake in the positions Christians take and how we use our power in the world—particularly in Israel and Palestine. The issues at hand are difficult and complex. As with the discussions of race and theology noted above, there is so much more to say. We pray for the coming of a just peace, the end of occupation, and for all who follow Jesus to take up the challenge of working to discern the way toward an end to bloodshed in the land called Holy.

As many congregations work to reopen in safety and health in the US, our prayers for you and your ministries continue! May the Holy Spirit fill you with power for ministry in this Pentecost season. Thanks so much for your continued support. Cynthia and Mark

Pictures from the Launch of *Christian Zionism in Africa*
19 May 2021, Tumaini University Makumira



*Pr. Goodluck Kitomari,
Faculty colleague*



*Legal scholar Sara Ryan,
contributor*



*Prof Ismael Mbise, Dep. Vice
Chancellor for Academic Affairs,
TUMa, receives the gift of a copy of
the book for the TUMa Library*



*Dr. Benjamin Parsalaw,
contributor, Faculty of Law,
TUMa*



*Dr. Nehemia Moshi,
contributor, Faculty of
Theology, TUMa*



*Dr. Samuel Mhajida
University of Dar es Salaam
Historian and contributor*



Book launches are FUN!



Attending contributors celebrate