

YOU WILL BITE THE DUST! (1988)

IN 1988 THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND State intensified. On 24 February, in an act that recalled the repression of 1960 and 1977, the Government outlawed the operations of seventeen anti-apartheid organizations, including the United Democratic Front and the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO), and restricted trade unions from engaging in political activities. The authorities viewed the UDF, the nation's largest non-racial anti-apartheid group at the time, as an ANC surrogate. AZAPO was the main voice of black consciousness. The Government also restricted eighteen leaders, including Dr Simon Gqubule, a former president of the Methodist Church.

Church leaders decided to protest by converging on Cape Town on 29 February and marching on the Parliament buildings in defiance of the law. As the marchers, numbering about 150, left St George's Cathedral in rows with arms linked, they encountered a contingent of police who ordered them to disperse. When they knelt on the pavement outside the cathedral and began to sing, police moved in to arrest the

leaders and take them to waiting vehicles. Once the leadership had been removed, police aimed powerful jets of water from a truck-mounted water-cannon to break up the rest, then carried out a mass arrest. The marchers were released some hours later. James Robbins, BBC correspondent in South Africa, reported: 'South Africa entered a new era of protest today. The Church has unmistakably taken over the front line of anti-apartheid protest.'

Church leaders in Cape Town continued their resistance to the restrictions by joining educators, sports administrators and women's leaders to form an informal Committee for the Defence of Democracy and calling for a protest rally at the University of the Western Cape on 13 March. On 12 March the committee was banned from 'carrying on or performing any activities or acts whatsoever' and the local police commissioner prohibited the rally. Archbishop Tutu, Allan Boesak, now Moderator of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, and Archbishop Stephen Naidoo of the Catholic Church responded by organizing an inter-faith service in St George's Cathedral to replace the banned rally. These extracts are from the most strongly worded parts of the Archbishop's address.

We are gathered today to pray for our country facing a deepening crisis, to reflect on what is taking place and our role as believers – as Christians, as Muslims, as Jews, whatever. What would be our role in this crisis? In the enveloping darkness, as the lights of freedom are extinguished one by one, despite all the evidence to the contrary, we have come here to say that evil, and injustice, and oppression, and exploitation – embodied in the very essence, the very nature, of apartheid – cannot prevail.

In the Bible, we are told to speak of spiritual things. St John says, 'The light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness did not overwhelm the light.' We come to sustain our hope that this is so. Humanly speaking, as we look around at our situation, that situation appears hopeless. But we must assert, and assert confidently, that this is God's world, that God is in charge.

We must say to our rulers, especially unjust rulers such as those in this land, 'You may be powerful, indeed, very powerful. But you are not God. You are ordinary mortals! God – the God whom we worship – can't be mocked. You have already lost! You have already lost! Let us say to you nicely: You have already lost, we are inviting you to come and join the winning side. Come! Come and join the winning side. Your cause is unjust. You are defending what is fundamentally indefensible, because it is evil. It is evil without question. It is immoral. It is immoral without question. It is unchristian. Therefore, you will bite the dust! And you will bite the dust comprehensively!'

Now, in this land we have prostituted language, making words mean something other than their original meaning . . . The Minister of Law and Order, in restricting the activities of a new committee, said he was doing so for the sake of 'public safety'. Now, you've got to be careful in this country. Do you remember Pavlov and his dog? Pavlov carried out experiments. He showed a dog meat, and the dog salivated when he saw the meat. Next he showed the dog meat and rang a bell. The dog salivated. He showed him meat, and then he rang a bell, and the dog again salivated. He showed him meat, and rang the bell, and the dog once again salivated. Then he took away the meat and simply rang the bell. The dog salivated. He called this a conditioned reflex.

Now, in this country, we have what are called conditioned reflexes. When the Government uses certain words, they know that many people will react in the kind of way that they have conditioned people to react. So they say 'public safety'. Do you know what 'public safety' means? Public safety means you can walk safely in public. The police exist to ensure that you can walk. Ha, ha! What happens in this country? People say we want to protest peacefully against pass laws. The police ought to be around to see that those people have 'public safety'. But what do the police do? They shoot the people protesting peacefully. The protesters don't even have stones! . . . We have never shot anyone. Has Allan Boesak ever shot anybody? Has the Rector of the University of the Western Cape [Professor Jakes Gerwel, a member of the banned committee] thrown a stone at anybody? This committee has not done anything

to undermine 'public safety' . . . This committee did not throw stones through office windows. We didn't throw stones through the windows of Allan Boesak's office [last week]. We didn't throw stones at the home of Allan Boesak . . . 'Public safety' indeed. The greatest threat to 'public safety' in South Africa is this Government.

Then they say, 'It is also to maintain public order'. Now we must say it clearly: all of us are law abiding. We obey the laws because we know that any society, in order to survive, needs the structure of good law. If we all drove on any side of the road, chaos would result . . . We obey traffic laws which say you must travel on the left-hand side of the road. And rulers, according to public order, cannot be arbitrary in the exercise of their power. For their power is not absolute. Their power is regulated. Law must, as far as possible, embody morality. South Africa is the only country in which it is a crime for a woman to sleep with her husband if her husband happens to be a migrant worker and she has not received permission to be where he is. That is the law. And to break that law is to do something that is illegal. But that law is fundamentally immoral; to obey it is to be guilty of immorality. So, my friends, you must learn the difference between morality and legality. When something is legal, almost all of the people in the country think that it is also morally right. But it is not always so . . .

Justice is blindfolded because justice must be even-handed. Ha, ha! Even-handed! The conservative Afrikaners walk in uniforms. And they look like Nazis. They've got a thing on their uniforms that looks like a swastika. And they shout anti-black slogans. They march against you. They march to the Union Buildings [in Pretoria, the seat of the executive branch of government there], and when they get there, do you think they get water-cannoned? I don't. The policemen there shake hands with them. The only things we had in our hands [during the march to Parliament] were our Bibles. (You know, this Government is not quite as stupid as we think. We know how explosive the Bible is.) Didn't we say long ago that apartheid is as evil as Nazism? We said that long ago. And they said, 'That Tutu character and all those others, they like to exaggerate. They are melodramatic.' Now you see that they can take action against people who are dressed like priests! We had nothing. We just linked

our hands and we tried to pray. In fact, at the police station we said, 'We would like to pray'. A policeman replied, 'This is a police station. You don't pray here.'

Another word they like to use is 'revolution'. Revolution! They think we run away from revolution, but the people in this country do not think revolution is necessarily a bad thing. Revolution means a radical change. If it is revolution to say, 'I work for a South Africa that is non-racial'; if it is revolution to say, 'I am working for a South Africa that is truly democratic'; if it is revolution to say, 'I am working for a South Africa where black and white and yellow and green can walk together arm-in-arm', then friends, I am for that!

I am willing to say to Mr Adriaan Vlok [Minister of Law and Order] that I am going to continue saying the things that I have said and am saying today. Mr Vlok, you have got all the laws that you can use if you want to use them, But I am not going to be told by you what the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ must be. If preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ is going to lead me into any kind of trouble with you and your sort, tough luck! Tough luck . . .

On one occasion . . . I said to [a] . . . judge: 'I support the ANC and I support every organization that seeks a new kind of South Africa.' I said, 'I don't support the methods that they are using but I stick to them. They are my brothers; they are my sisters; they are my friends; they are my fathers; they are my mothers. How can I repudiate them?' The Government once asked me to repudiate the ANC. I said, 'OK. Will you, asking me that question, repudiate your forefathers? For, according to the laws of this country, they too would be guilty of terrorism. For they fought for their freedom.' Why must it be OK when they fight for their freedom and when we do, it's not good? . . .

I finish, my friends, by saying: if they want to take on the Church of God, I warn them. Read a little bit of history and see what happened to those who tried to take on the Church of God. Don't read all of history. Just read your own history. I just warn them that even if they were to remove this, that, or the other person, the Church of God will stay. Our Lord and Saviour said, 'Even the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church of God.'

And so we say: Freedom is coming! Freedom is coming, because that is God's will for us. Freedom is coming, because God did not make us doormats on which people can wipe their dirty boots. Freedom is coming, because God has created us for freedom. Freedom is coming. And we can all walk hand-in-hand, black and white, together, proudly, holding our heads high in a new South Africa. A free South Africa. A South Africa where people count because they are created in the image of God. A free South Africa where all of God's people will share equally the good things that God has given us.

Freedom is coming, and we want it also for you, Mr Vlok. We want you to be able to sleep at night and not wonder what we are up to. We want you to sleep, Mr Vlok, and not wonder, 'Where is the UDF? Where is Boesak now? What is he doing?' Freedom is coming even for you, Mr P.W. Botha. We want you to be free. We want you to be here with us. We want you to put away the Casspirs . . . Freedom is coming for all of us. There can be no doubt about it, because if God be for us, who can be against us? Amen, and amen.