

BOOK CHOICE

On October 18, 1972, Benjamin F Chavis Jr. and nine other Black activists were convicted of having incited race riots in Wilmington, North Carolina in 1971. They were sentenced to a combined total of 282 years in prison. Nearly a decade and millions of dollars later, that conviction was overturned and the Wilmington Ten were freed. The case has become a landmark in the struggle for civil rights in this country. Amnesty International declared the Wilmington Ten political prisoners in the U.S.A.

During his years of confinement in various North Carolina prisons, Chavis knew that he had to maintain his faith in God, in God's people, and in their

collective will and yearning to be free. He decided to capture his prison prayers and experiences in the form of psalms. The psalms were written as a testament that the descendants of African slaves were able to survive centuries of oppression because of an irrepressible faith in God of justice and freedom.

The book is divided into three parts: Oppression, Struggle, and Liberation, the three historical phases of all successful freedom movements. It consists of 150 psalms, written in freeline and free verse, from the perspective of a Black minister who was a political prisoner in the United States. The psalms speak directly to the issues of the Black struggle, but they also address the overall issue of

human rights. As Chavis writes in his introduction, "The context is particular but the message is universal."

Since leaving prison, Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. has earned a doctorate from the Divinity School of Howard University. He is currently Deputy Director of the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice. A veteran of the civil rights movement for 21 years, Dr. Chavis is a former schoolteacher, and is an experienced civil rights leader who has worked with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the NAACP. Currently, Dr. Chavis is helping to organise the National Black Independent Political Party.

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designed primarily to give people homes and schools and hospitals and jobs to do; a new way of looking at the world without the barbed wire of nationalism, denominationalism, race or sex, a faith which blasts the church out of the tyranny of its traditions and tumbles its conceits off the throne, and sees new communities of the faithful growing more rapidly than ever before in history.

It is a vision which laughs at the idea that western

churches can have a moral reforming influence on the western powers - any more than they can improve Botha's unshining image; which mocks your ego trips in your best suits to burning the Church to the notice of Government ministers or the big names of business; which says to those hopeless reformists who recognise the enormity of the west but steadfastly refuse to contemplate the revolution: come over and join us!

This faith is a gift. When Jesus told Nicodemus it was necessary to be born all over again to see the Kingdom of God he was referring to the transformation of our religious

experience. No one can force themselves to be reborn, or manufacture faith, but they can be willing to let the old life go, to let the burden of those oppressive ideas of God and his world roll away, to realise that in the cold lonely godforsaken nuclear fears of the oppressive western world, the liberated people are offering us the hope of new life.

**Let us all say
apartheid
must go**