

# OUR GOD LIBERATES!

*A Biblical Meditation by Fr F F Gqiba, Director of Chaplaincy.*

*'The Lord — and the Lord alone — is our God.'* (Deuteronomy 6:4).

Here is recorded the most primary declaration of a faith of the early Hebrews, a faith from which our Christianity was to emerge six centuries later. The assertive affirmation is that the Lord (Yahweh = The one who is what he becomes) whom they worship, He alone is the true God, and He alone is to be worshipped.

This affirmation, as we will explain below, is made within the context of an experience of a great historical trauma and uncertainty. It was a time during which these people's faith was assailed by the cultural and religious subjugation they were subjected to after their defeat and enslavement by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. In the face of this they are reminded that:

*'... the Lord is God, there is no other beside Him.'*  
(Deuteronomy 4:35)

Anything else besides this God, that the Israelites in captivity were tempted to believe in and worship, is an idol — the work of man's hands and mind, the worship of which is beautifully ridiculed by the Psalmist:

*'Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make sound in their throats. Those who make them are like them, so are all who trust in them.'*  
(Psa. 115:4-8).

And the prophet Habakkuk makes the same point:

*'What use is an idol when its maker has shaped it? It is only a metal image, a source of lies; or when the maker trusts what he has made? — he is only making dumb idols! Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, "Awake", or to a dumb stone, "Arise?"'*  
(Habk. 2:18-19).

The tremendous significance of this proclamation of the prophets, and the declaration of the uniqueness of Yahweh, can only be appreciated within the context in which these pronouncements were made.

According to B W Anderson (*The Living World of the Old Testament*, p. 290), the most significant development within Judah during the Seventh Century BC was 'the rediscovery of Moses', and that the greatest monument of this rediscovery is the book of Deuteronomy. This book, from which our main text is derived, is in other words, at the heart of the history of the Jewish people which covers the tragic

events of 586 BC, i.e., the vanquishing and taking of Judah into exile by the Babylonian Empire, and the ever-present threat of being totally annihilated by this powerful nation.

Now, in those days, the defeat of a people meant a defeat of their god or gods as well; and a victory was the victory of the god(s) of the conquering forces. According to the understanding of the day, it was Yahweh, the God of Israel, who was defeated by what the Israelites have all along viewed as the dummies of Babylon.

It is in the face of this national cultural and political humiliation and crisis, that the Deuteronomist reiterates his faith in this God of Israel. A reaffirmation is made that Yahweh alone is still God, and that the faith of the Assyrians and Babylonians are but idolatry — the stupid products of men's hands.

But what makes the Deuteronomist so sure that Yahweh is God and that all other gods are merely idols? What is definitive of a true God which differentiates 'Him' from an idol, a product of people's self-interest?

Over and over again, the book of Deuteronomy returns to the Egyptian experience. This is what sorts out a true god, God, from idols:

*'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage ... remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and that I the Lord (Yahweh) your God rescued you by my great power and strength.'*  
(Deut. 5:6, 15)

It is in His mighty act of liberation, that Yahweh's uniqueness, and claim to being God rests. And therefore, it is only in a religious life which is committed to the liberation of the oppressed that true and authentic faith is distinguished from false, and thus enslaving, idolatry.

It is important, as well as interesting, to note that the cause of the fall of Judah in its combat against Babylonian imperialism, which was a sign of their abandonment by God, was largely because they had departed from the true faith of compassion for the socially under-privileged in their midst, and that later Judaic regimes had degenerated into virtual tyrannies.

Now, the beautiful thing about us today is that we are not just talking about the deity of a small 7th Century BC Palestinian tribe. We are in fact talking about the only God; we are talking about the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, in and through Jesus Christ the uniqueness of our God has been supremely demonstrated, even over

death itself — that final and ultimate enemy of humanity. We are talking about our God who in and through Jesus Christ demonstrated supremely that He is a God of deliverance, a God who liberates from oppression and bondage.

Now since the God of Deuteronomy is none other than God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore our unique and only God, we too carry today this faith and the message of the one and only God who delivers, who saves, who liberates. We carry this faith and this message today — today, that is in the very midst of the darkness that is enveloping South Africa, our beloved Land and our people.

The more gloomy the future looks to the men and women in the street, the brighter it appears when seen through the eyes of the God of liberation, who alone is God; the more hopeless the future looks to some, the more wonderful the hope for the future for us, for we know that our God acts and liberates at a time which neither 'Pharaoh' nor his oppressed slaves expect — at His own time, which is always the right time.

The hour is dark, and considering the mad obstinacy of the forces of oppression arrayed against our people, it might get darker still. Still more of our people will be maimed, more will die violently. And those who will forget that our faith is in a God of salvation will be tempted to give in. Yes! they will want to abandon our tested liberation wagon. But we who believe in the only, the supreme God, will remember that our God saves, and will save us, that he cannot be defeated by the idols of the militarisation of the apartheid state, its racism and exploitation.

The future of South Africa belongs to the God of our salvation, and not to any man, however, cunning. He is the God who is God because He always sides with the weak and the oppressed, the downtrodden, the marginalised and struggling. He abhors the arrogance of the heartless rich and the strong who like to play god in the lives of others, and he acts against them.

This, Sisters and Brothers, is our message today. We must be seen to live already that freedom that issues from God's act of salvation.

'For Freedom', says Paul to the Galatians, 'Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery' (Gal 5:1). Fortunately, through and within our vanguard political movement the ANC, we can and we do demonstrate that, notwithstanding (indeed, in defiance of) the bondage that prevails, we have already the liberty of those who believe and are in the God who alone is God.

**Stand ye therefore firm!**

**Amandla!**

Poems by: Dean T S Farasani, from his: *Justice In My Tears*, Africa World Press, Trenton, New Jersey, 1988.



### **Farewell to innocence**

Farewell to non-violence;  
Innocence, I'll never meet you again.  
Until the work is done,  
When apartheid is undone.  
Then I'll be innocent again,  
When violence is needed no more.  
Don't push me too far!

Forward Umkhonto we sizwe.  
Peace and I will never walk hand in hand  
Until the boers are crushed,  
When discrimination is history.  
Then I'll love again,  
When hatred is needed no more.  
Don't push me too far!

Crush the SADF and security forces;  
Life is not precious any more.  
Until the boers respect our lives,  
When minority rule is paralysed.  
Then I will forgive again,  
When anger is required no more.  
Don't push me too far!

Slaughter them all wholesale;  
Mow them down child and old  
Until their pride is smashed,  
When their ego is deflated.  
Then I'll preach salvation again,  
When hell has cleansed racist hearts.  
Don't push God too far!