

KEEPER OF THE KEYS

The Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, the Most Reverend Desmond Tutu, was for many years regarded by most white South Africans as a tough man whose priesthood was incidental to his politics, as anti-white, and stridently anti-South African. Blacks held a diametrically opposite view. In 1984 he won the Nobel Peace Prize: his detractors regarded it as a travesty, his supporters as just reward. A year later, both sides began to see a side they hadn't expected when he unequivocally condemned all violence - including that which had taken so grim a hold within the black community - and even physically intervened to save an alleged informer's life. Since he was appointed Archbishop in 1986, both opponents and allies have been made to recognise that he is a man of deep spirituality. That, too, was a surprise.

Over the past two years, Tutu has grown hugely in stature, to the point where he must already be considered one of the most significant South Africans of our time. He has come to dominate the defiance campaign, to set its moral tone, and give it a shape and feel that are considerably different to previous campaigns, which often did more to polarise people than to break down apartheid.

He now even commands respect from those who still differ sharply from him on, for instance, the question of sanctions. As is clear in this interview with Paul Bell, he is as committed as ever to the cause of black liberation, but his actions, while completely uncompromising, hold a parallel possibility of reconciliation.

Bell: The peace marches through Cape Town and other cities have their origins in the churches' Standing for the Truth campaign and the Mass Democratic Movement's defiance campaign. What was the background to the church campaign, and to what extent has it co-operated with the other?

Tutu: The government's banning of organisations in February 1988 forced the churches to take a stand, starting with the march to Parliament, during which I and several other church leaders were arrested.

The churches were being pushed into the vacuum created by government's action. This was a highwater mark for interdenominational co-operation. After our release we said we hoped this was not going to be a flash in the pan, that we were now going to try and have a sustained movement.

The Standing for the Truth campaign was born at a church convention later last year. We were saying we were going to have to put our bodies where our mouths were, in a manner of speaking. When restrictions and bannings escalated, people said it was important that the churches especially show they really mean business when they say they are non-violent. We showed that the non-violent option actually can work, especially to those who might be inclined to use the other option. There was a convergence with the MDM, which decided at about the same time that a defiance campaign should happen.

Central to this is a concept with its origins in passive resistance but which is now defined as non-violent direct action. How do you define it?

Part of the new nomenclature is an effort to underline the positive nature of what you're doing; that it is not a reactive, negative thing. It is not so much a defiance or disobedience. Rather it is something that is positive, an obedience of God's laws when these come into conflict with man's laws. It is not merely passively doing nothing. Certain things are direct action, but it is action meant to be non-violent.

Like going onto the beaches. You wouldn't call that passive, but you accept the principle that, for example, you don't regard your adversary as an enemy but as a potential friend to be won over. You do not taunt people and you have a very profound respect for law, which is why you obey God's law.

Day to day, and event to event, how have you defined your personal role?

I think there was a buildup. We were all agreed as church leaders that we were now in an active phase, starting in February last year. The election gave us another point at which to highlight our concerns. And a number of things happened. We had fewer people under restrictions and were therefore able to make decisions fairly quickly. When the restricted persons "unrestricted" themselves, the churches offered to support them and to take appropriate action if anything happened to them. We were no longer just going to mouth pious resolutions.

I suppose it has been a help to have been the Archbishop of Cape Town, and to have been involved to some extent from 1976 until now. But we haven't sat down and said, now you are the head of the campaign and here are the rules of the game. I have been very fortunate in that the black community and the church community in this diocese have been incredibly supportive, particularly when, for example, Mr [Adriaan] Vlok tried to create a wedge between me and the Cathedral and Anglicans. I have been exceedingly fortunate in the calibre of people around me. And the Cathedral's support has been strategically quite crucial.

Nevertheless, your being the Archbishop has surely given you a certain freedom. A secular political leader has to secure mandates. You at least are able to say yours is from God and that you answer to your conscience. That has surely given a certain definition to your role.

I believe you're quite right, that I do probably operate on the basis that I have greater freedom of movement to some extent than a political leader. Church leaders do consult with the people, but they have

(Opposite) The Most Reverend Desmond Tutu, Archbishop of Cape Town. "I'm no longer going to justify myself to white people. And those who find they cannot take it, tough luck."

LEADERSHIP

DESMOND TUTU

recognised our autonomy as church persons, that our ultimate responsibility is to God, and they respect our understanding of the imperatives that God gives. Not that we are

infallible. Not that we would ride roughshod. I hear the advice of community leaders, and I also have my own advisors, the senior persons in the diocese, the dean, archdeacons, and the other bishops. I often test things out against them, although I don't always take their advice.

To what degree have you been able to maintain your autonomy, in terms of whatever intervention you may decide on in the political sphere?

I try. One has to speak very modestly in this area because it can sound hoity-toity and arrogant. But I have usually said that, while I obviously need to take account of the advice and views I get from other people, my own understanding is that I have to be true to what I believe are the demands of the Gospel, the demands of the Kingdom. It is remarkable, the extent to which community leaders have insisted that we retain this particular right. They realise that we are jealous of it. You saw a little bit of the controversy over the flag in Durban, with [the Roman Catholic] Archbishop Hurley. There is a danger that people might think we were being co-opted, or taken over by other groups. But while we try as far as humanly possible to retain this autonomy, it is relative, not absolute. In the end we are answerable to God through the Church.

What, do you think, have been the effects of the march on the political atmosphere in the country?

It depends on which side you are on. You could say: "Here is a government that is giving in," or: "Here is a government that is allowing peaceful protest to happen, and so it's a feather in the cap for that government." For me, it clearly demonstrated two very important things.

First, that government had failed, despite all its repression, to knock the stuffing out of the people. It is remarkable. You stand up on a Friday in a church and say: "Let's march on Wednesday." You don't know how many people are going to pitch up. Then you get this incredible

turnout. And a turnout of people who are fundamentally disciplined. Then you say: "Now let's keep quiet. To demonstrate, we must have discipline." And they keep quiet. That is the one important thing.

The second is that, despite all that has happened, people actually care about a non-racial South Africa. It brings tears to your eyes. When you looked at the concourse that day and you said that people should hold hands, and you saw the kaleidoscope of colour and that people were just people, you saw it was actually for real. We are willing to be a country that, despite all that has conspired to work to the contrary, will be a country that counts. Because we are people.

It was a wonderful thing to be vindicated in the way that we were. And to be vindicated also in the matter of saying that, if you keep the police away, people will almost always be peaceful. When you look at the numbers of people involved in Johannesburg and Cape Town, it is overwhelming evidence that people are committed to peace and non-violence, even when they don't seem to have had any specific training.

When Allan (Boesak) said to the people: "Brothers and sisters, this march is over," the Parade, which had been chock-a-block, was clear within minutes. We went back to the Cathedral and said: "Let's sit down and just be quiet and just say thank you to God." We recognised that it could have gone so very badly wrong. And yet I myself am just thrilled at the vindication of the people.

It seems very unlikely that this could have happened in the P W Botha era. Is there, do you believe, anything different about F W de Klerk?

We've got to say yes. We have to remember, though, that it was under his Acting State Presidency that they used dogs and whips and teargas and even threatened to use live ammunition, to stop people going onto beaches. We are seeing at the present time the fundamental schizophrenia that affects South Africa.

Government spokespersons often say they really don't care what the world thinks, and then they behave in a way that demonstrates that they care very, very much.

I think there is a difference in style. I still want to see the evidence that there is a difference in substance. We still have people in detention; we've still got a state of emergency which has done nothing except to provide a screen behind which the police have been able to carry out their brutality.

In terms of helping to bring about peace and calm, they themselves admit it. When you say to them, lift the state of emergency, they say, "The minute we lift it, then unrest will happen again." We've had nearly four years of emergency and it has not helped to get rid of the root causes.

If President De Klerk was able to reprieve seven people [on death row]; why not 10? Why not all of them? If he could give that kind of amnesty, why not a clear demonstration that we are moving in a different direction? Now you may say he has to go cautiously. The trouble is, we have had far too many of those wonderful promises of "adapt or die", and we all went into ecstasies and discovered that what we were going to do was die or be dyed.

People have been urged to "give F W a chance". How do you respond to that notion?

I say I've heard this before. The business community said it after the Carlton conference, when they were dazzled by P W's nifty footwork. One heard it in the referendum campaign: people said this guy seems to be wanting to move; give him a chance. When others said, this constitution P W is putting to you is fatally flawed, people said no, no, no, no! Give him a chance.

We've never said we wanted everything. In 1980 we said all government need do was one or two things to demonstrate dramatically to the people that it was serious about change, not reform. We are not impressed by reformists. To talk about reform is to put us off right from the beginning. What we want is not reform, it is change.

Most of the white community do not actually want apartheid removed; it has brought them so many benefits. They want slight adjustments to remove the most horrendous aspect of it, which made the international community annoyed. But if they were able to produce something that made the international community say, "These guys are not so bad, and the loans can come again and it's business as usual," they wouldn't care two hoots about the rest.

A year or 18 months ago I spoke to three of the biggest business leaders at a private dinner. It was set up so we could try to find each other. It ended with me refusing to speak, sitting with my head in my hands, like this. They were saying they firmly believed most blacks wanted a full stomach and a roof over their head. I said: "Gentlemen, even for us there are some

things that are slightly more important than that." That they could actually, to my face, have the capacity to insult our people... Maybe they were not aware of it but it was a very deep hurt. We were speaking not just at cross purposes; we were speaking from different worlds.

Are you saying that, as far as you are concerned, whites still don't understand what blacks mean when they talk about change?

No; there are very many whites who certainly have been told now *ad nauseam* what the score is. Someone said it's impossible to wake up someone who is pretending to be asleep. No, many, many white people know what we are talking about and are as committed as anybody else to the ending of this system. I don't want to generalise, but I would say that many would prefer not to know.

Given the events of the last few weeks, there seems to be a greater lightness in the political atmosphere; a sense of greater manoeuvrability than there was at the beginning of this year. Do you accept that? You appear to be not as optimistic as one might have imagined.

I have always known that we are going to win. It doesn't depend on what white people think, you know. Really. And I'm not being arrogant either. I'm just saying that the moral imperatives are such that it actually doesn't matter, because there is no way that justice will not win out in the end, that repression will continue for ever and ever.

The truth of the matter is that it's quite incredible that people can fly into Cape Town, over Crossroads and Khayelitsha, every day, and it doesn't sear them, it doesn't make them think, "How can we tolerate this obscene cheek-by-jowl existence with this sort of thing?" That they can accept the vilification of people like ourselves by the system.

You hear Anglicans, Christians, who want to say to me, "Why do you advocate this, that and the other?" and think I am answerable to them. But I am no longer going to justify myself to white people. I will do what I believe is right. And those who find they cannot take it, tough luck.

But yes, there is a change in the sense that you have someone now, the State President, who does mind. You have someone who doesn't... That finger! P W annoyed very many powerful people! We

got some of them coming here after meeting with him and saying: "If anything helped to change our views about sanctions, it was our meeting with P W." And this from two powerful US senators who said to us: "We are from the conservative wing of the Democratic Party, but the way that guy treated us..."

What, do you think, is the key possibility that F W de Klerk holds out?

It is possible that F W will realise that his way back into the world is going to be via us. It is only when the oppressed people and their leadership say things have changed, or are changing, that the world will sit up and take notice. The government can spend all the money it likes, but even simple things like whether he gets invited to the White House or not will depend on whether our friends think he ought to be. When the US president can talk to us and ask us: "Should I invite him?..."

You still have to say these chaps are extraordinary. In April this year there were 250 000 empty places in white schools which they say will not be taken by black children in overcrowded facilities. It's crazy! They are still saying, group rights, group whatever... But no! To show we are reasonable creatures, we have said: "You've got six to nine months in which to begin to show that you really mean business."

How do you define the pressures on government, and what do you expect to happen in that time?

The parameters are the forthcoming meeting of Commonwealth heads of government in Kuala Lumpur - by which time Mr De Klerk will have to have done something to enable Mrs Thatcher to withstand the pressures there. Then there's the debt rescheduling in June next year.

We realise he has a constituency that he has to nurse, but this constituency actually wants to be led. All its fears of a right-wing sweep have been disproved. I think this country wants boldness; it wants to see a president say: "We are scrapping Group Areas, and this and that and the other." Let him say: "We have to take people along. Here is my timetable. This is what I plan to do in this period to help to avoid chaotic change."

He will be amazed at the number of people who would come to his support. And the world! How can one say to the world, "Don't reschedule these loans," when the

man has said, "We are scrapping the acts. Detainees are out. Those who have been restricted are unrestricted."

When you met Mr De Klerk last week, what impression did you gain of his commitment to change? [Oct 11, 1989]

We had very earnest and intensive discussions. We came away impressed that there was an obvious concern regarding what we had to tell him, but we did not come away with specifics which would satisfy those we believe we represent.

I must reiterate, however, that we went as facilitators, not negotiators. Our concern is that negotiations should get off the ground - genuine negotiations. We took the initiative to see Mr De Klerk because we seek a way out of the impasse.

Dr (Gerrit) Viljoen articulated the understanding that there was agreement on the issues we raised, that government wanted to normalise the security situation, ie. lift the emergency; normalise the legislative situation, ie. move away from discriminatory legislation; find an acceptable way of identifying those who would be regarded as authentic representatives of the various constituencies; and determine, by agreement, the mode in which negotiations would happen.

None of us would want further sanctions, even the present sanctions, if we could get the commitment we were seeking from Mr De Klerk in a specific timetable. We would be prepared to ask our friends to put their sanctions programmes on hold if we felt there was a commitment we could accept, that certain first actions had been taken which gave us to believe that a new dispensation was emerging.

Mr De Klerk said that while we had real problems, so did he. We recognised that, but - without putting pistols to anybody's head - we are saying that if these things happened, we for our part would be able to say to our people: "Give them a chance, we think they are serious."

