

## AN OPEN LETTER TO DESMOND TUTU

My dear Desmond

This past week you have scarcely been out of my mind. How could you? Everybody is once again talking about you. Especially the government. And once again, they are talking in the only language they seem to know when they are addressing us: the language of accusation, threats and intimidation. But you and I know, this is really the violent verbosity of deeply fearful men.

Apparently, taking away your passport was not enough. Making the work of the South African Council of Churches infinitely more difficult did not suffice. We are now hearing the so-familiar sounds that are the prelude to "Kragdadigheid", a fact which bodes ill for you and the Council. You are, they say, "supporting subversive elements" and "encouraging a revolutionary climate in South Africa". You are now "promoting the aims of the ANC". Because of all this, you are now considered an enemy of the state, indeed, an enemy of South Africa. A dangerous subversive who does not "deserve" a passport and now even runs a greater risk - or so we hear. After having made you the victim of a campaign promise to appease the worst of the racists, they now want to use you to divert attention from their obvious inability to face the consequences of their disastrous policies and to undo the damage done to our country and its people after decades of apartheid.

My first reaction was anger. What utter rubbish, I thought. Precisely who is the danger to our society and to the future of this country? Who has caused the problem that now plagues South Africa? Who has taken away the few pitiful political rights that we had so that they could inflict their policies upon us without responsibility to us? Whose laws are making criminals out of men, women and children who want only a decent life together as a family? Whose greed and avarice claim 87% of the land and in so doing rob millions of South Africans of their birthright? Who is trampling on our humanity and our God-given dignity?

Not by any stretch of the imagination can you be accused of "creating a revolutionary climate" in South Africa. No, it is your very accusers, who through their intransigence and their stubborn refusal to respect the dignity of black personhood, are doing that. It is they who are denying us meaningful participation, insulting us with the puppet institutions they themselves would have scorned. It is they who through their draconian measures, setting aside the rule of law, have banned organisations that wanted peaceful change, detained without trial, banned and exiled the best of the sons and daughters of South Africa.

It is they who have done so much to help convince generations of black South Africans that non-violent protest has no chance in South Africa. For years we have petitioned, marched, pleaded, cried, tried to speak to the conscience of white South Africa's government. They have answered with police, with detentions and teargas, with dogs and guns. And with that infinite contempt of violent men who have nothing left but the power of the gun. No, it is not you who have turned so many of our old people into creatures without hope and joy and so many of our young people into desperadoes. It is they.

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But then again I thought, if they only knew you, the man who earned our love and the respect of the world. I heard you speak so often, here and abroad, with such honesty. I have seen you cry tears of genuine anguish as you spoke of White people's unwillingness to listen and to understand. The very tears which have made you suspect in the eyes of so many "radicals". You want so much to believe in the residue of goodness in Whites that many of us think you naive on that point. I have seen how your desire for true reconciliation between Black and White has earned you the scorn of those who cannot believe in reconciliation anymore. And yet you have been able to retain your integrity, even with enemies.

For them you are an enemy of South Africa. For us you are a true South African, a champion of the cause of the poor, the weak, the dispossessed, a follower of Jesus Christ. In what you have done, you have done no more than to reflect the deep feelings of the Black community. You have been no more than the voice of the voiceless.

You are a man in deep love with your country. But they will never understand that. For them, loving South Africa means to accept apartheid and White supremacy, humiliation and exploitation. It means to bow your head in submission and say "Ja baas" even if deep in your heart you despise yourself. They do not understand that loving South Africa means precisely to despise apartheid and all that system has made of all of us, White and Black. It is to fight for a country where we shall no longer be ruled by fear and greed. But you speak a truth that is too humbling, a message that is too disturbing. The love you offer your country is too demanding, and in a real sense, too overwhelming. It is true that a prophet is not honoured nor loved in his own land, but it is also true that a nation that cannot respond to such a love has set fire to its own future.

So let them accuse you; millions of us love and support you. Let them accuse you; when the true history of this country comes to be written, you will be counted as a true son who fought for her integrity and her life. Let them accuse you; in the Church of Christ you shall be honoured as a pastor, a prophet whose obedience to God was more than the fear for those who rule this world. Let them accuse you; in that Great Day He will call you good and faithful servant. For I affirm with all my heart the words of the Belgic Confession, that on that day "the faithful and elect shall be crowned with glory and honour ... all tears shall be wiped from their eyes; and their cause which is now condemned by many judges and magistrates as heretical and impious will then be known to be the cause of the Son of God."

As for myself, I thank God that I may call you friend and brother. Let us pray for one another, so that the temptation to succumb to the false gods shall not overcome us, and that our vision of the promised land shall not be dimmed, nor distorted. And let us be assured that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The peace of the Lord be with you my brother,

ALLAN BOESAK