

Desmond Tutu

The outspoken bishop of humanity



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“For goodness sake, will they hear, will white people hear what we are trying to say? Please, all we are asking you to do is to recognize that we are humans, too. When you scratch us, we bleed. When you tickle us, we laugh.”

Statement urging sanctions against South Africa, 1985

AGENCIES

“Never has a (Nobel) peace prize been so fitting,” said Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store after South African anti-apartheid icon Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a leading figure in the anti-apartheid struggle and international defender of human rights and peace, died on Sunday aged 90.

Just five feet five inches (1.7 metres) tall and with an infectious giggle, Tutu was a moral giant who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his non-violent struggle against apartheid. He also helped to heal the deep wounds of a divided country by providing justice and mercy as head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The buoyant, blunt-spoken clergyman used his pulpit as the first Black bishop of Johannesburg and later as the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town to galvanise public opinion against racial inequity, both at home and globally.

Talking and travelling tirelessly throughout the 1980s, Tutu became the face of the anti-apartheid movement while many of the leaders of the rebel African National Congress (ANC), such as Nelson Mandela, were behind bars.

to incite their followers to extreme actions. In contrast, Tutu always invoked his moral authority to turn down the flame and calm a rowdy crowd.

He repeatedly condemned all violence as a means to end apartheid, which eventually ended in 1994. This position put him at odds with many Blacks, including Nelson Mandela's ANC, who argued that some forms of armed struggle were necessary to force the White government to change.

When Mandela and his fellow ANC leaders emerged from prison in 1990, Tutu stepped aside, just as he had always promised. Yet he remained a powerful moral voice.



Nelson Mandela Foundation CEO Sello Hatang recounted that Mandela and Tutu first met at a debating competition in the early 1950s and that four decades later, on the day when Mandela was released from prison, he spent his first night as a free man at the home of the Tutus in Bishopscourt, Cape Town.

Hatang said from then onwards until Mandela passed away in 2013 they were in regular contact and their friendship deepened over time.

It was Tutu who held aloft Madiba's hand on the balcony of Cape Town's City Hall on May 9, 1994 and presented him to the assembled throngs as the country's new “out of the box” president.

As head of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Tutu and his panel listened to harrowing testimony about torture, killings and other atrocities during apartheid. At some hearings, Tutu wept openly.

“You are overwhelmed by the extent of evil,” he said. But, he added, it was necessary to open the wound to cleanse it.

In return for an honest accounting of past crimes, the committee offered amnesty, establishing what Archbishop Tutu called the principle of restorative — rather than retributive — justice.

The commission's 1998 report lay most of the blame on the forces of apartheid, but also found the African National Congress guilty of human rights violations. The ANC sued to block the document's release, earning a rebuke from Tutu.

“I didn't struggle in order to remove one set of those who thought they were tin gods to replace them with others who are tempted to think they are,” Tutu said.

The outspoken human rights defender kept his voice loud against mismanagements,

brutality and corruption by the new leaders, including Mandela.

He was one of the first to raise voice against Mandela saying he was acting ‘like an ordinary politician’ when a row erupted over high salaries of cabinet ministers. He castigated the new ruling elite for boarding the “grave train” of privilege and also chided Mandela for his long public affair with Graca Machel, whom he eventually married.

As Mandela reflected in that period: “His most characteristic quality is his readiness to take unpopular positions without fear ... He speaks his mind on matters of public morality. As a result, he annoyed many of the leaders of the apartheid system. Nor has he spared those that followed them — he has from time to time annoyed many of us who belong to the new order. But such independence of mind — however wrong and unstrategic it may at times be — is vital to a thriving democracy.”

In his final years, he regretted that his dream of a “Rainbow Nation” had not yet come true. In 2014, he admitted he did not vote for the ANC, citing moral grounds.

Madiba and Tutu were both founding members of The Elders, an international grouping of inspirational leaders which has done human rights work in countries around the world.

A schoolteacher's son, Tutu was born in Klerksdorp, a conservative town west of Johannesburg, on Oct. 7, 1931.

Always a passionate student, Tutu first worked as a teacher. But he said he had become infuriated with the system of educating Blacks, once described by a South African prime minister as aimed at preparing them for their role in society as servants.

Tutu quit teaching in 1957 and decided to join the church, studying first at St. Peter's Theological College in Johannesburg. He was ordained a priest in 1961 and continued his education at King's College in London.

After four years abroad, he returned to South Africa, where his sharp intellect and charismatic preaching saw him rise through lecturing posts to become Anglican Dean of Johannesburg in 1975, which was when his activism started taking shape.

“I realised that I had been given a platform that was not readily available to many Blacks, and most of our leaders were either now in chains or in exile. And I said: ‘Well, I'm going to use this to seek to try to articulate our aspirations and the anguishes of our people,’” he told a reporter in 2004.

He was named the first Black Archbishop of Cape Town in 1986, becoming the head of the Anglican Church. He would retain that position until 1996.

In retirement, he battled prostate cancer and largely withdrew from public life.

Tutu is survived by his wife of 66 years, Leah, and their four children.

Asked once how he wanted to be remembered, he told The Associated Press: “He loved. He laughed. He cried. He was forgiven. He forgave. Greatly privileged.”

TUTU'S LIFE in key dates

October, 7, 1931: He is born in the small town of Klerksdorp, west of Johannesburg, his mother a domestic worker and his father a teacher.

1961: Is ordained as an Anglican priest, having studied theology after working as a school teacher.

1976: He is appointed the bishop of neighbouring Lesotho.

1978: Becomes the first black secretary general of the South African Council of Churches, a highly influential grouping with 15 million members that is active in the struggle against apartheid.

1984: Is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his opposition to South Africa's apartheid regime. The same year he becomes the first black bishop of Johannesburg and calls for an embargo against the white-minority regime.

1986: He is ordained as the first black Archbishop of Cape Town and head of the Anglican Church for Southern Africa, covering two million followers.

1996: Two years after the end of apartheid, he heads the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that begins hearings into atrocities committed under the previous regime.

1997: Diagnosed with prostate cancer and undergoes repeated treatment over the following years.

2007: Helps to found The Elders group of global leaders working for peace and human rights, acting as its chairman until 2013.

2010: Aged 79, he announces his retirement from public life.

2013: He declares he will no longer be voting for the African National Congress, South Africa's long-ruling party, citing inequality, violence and corruption among other reasons.

2016: Joined advocates calling for the right to assisted dying.

2021: Tutu makes a rare public appearance to receive his Covid-19 vaccine. He emerges from hospital in a wheelchair, and waves but does not speak.

DESMOND TUTU IN HIS OWN WORDS



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“Did he have weaknesses? Of course he did, among them his steadfast loyalty to his organisation and to some of his colleagues who ultimately let him down. ... But I believe he was saintly because he inspired others powerfully.”

At Mandela's death, 2013

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“I would not worship a God who is homophobic and that is how deeply I feel about this. I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. No, I would say sorry, I mean I would much rather go to the other place. I am as passionate about this campaign as I ever was about apartheid.”

Speech at a UN's gay rights campaign, 2013

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“I give great thanks to God that he has created a Dalai Lama. Do you really think, as some have argued, that God will be saying: ‘You know, that guy, the Dalai Lama, is not bad. What a pity he's not a Christian?’ I don't think that is the case, because, you see, God is not a Christian.”

Speech at Dalai Lama's birthday, June 2, 2006



But he never saw himself as a politician and regarded himself as a proxy during this period.

Despite efforts to silence him, he gave the anti-apartheid movement a guiding light at a time it would have otherwise been largely leaderless and was in danger of being taken over by angry young men.

The outspoken Tutu was considered South Africa's conscience by both Black and White, an enduring testament to his faith and spirit of reconciliation in a divided nation.

He preached against the tyranny of white minority and even after its end, he never wavered in his fight for a fairer South Africa, calling the black political elite to account with as much feistiness as he had the white Afrikaners.

On the global stage, the human rights activist spoke out across a range of topics, from Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories to gay rights, climate change and assisted death - issues that cemented Tutu's broad appeal.

In many conflicts, religious figures tend

South Africa's apartheid explained

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“I have prepared for my death and have made it clear that I do not wish to be kept alive at all costs. I hope I am treated with compassion and allowed to pass on to the next phase of life's journey in the manner of my choice.”

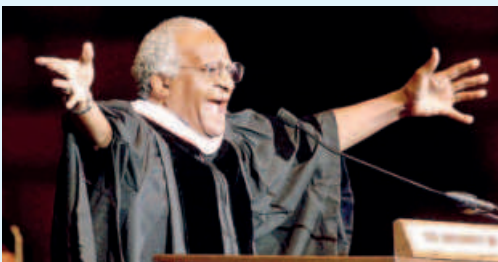
Op-ed in The Washington Post, 2016

RACES SEPARATED

Apartheid -- an Afrikaans-language word meaning the state of ‘apartness’ -- became official government policy in 1948 when the conservative National Party took power. It formalised a system of domination that had been in place since European settlers started arriving on the southern tip of Africa more than 300 years before. Rooted in the doctrine that human beings were separated by race, apartheid was built on laws that classified people as either “native” (black), “coloured” (mixed race), “Asian” or “white,” according to skin colour and other features. The races were separated in every aspect, including at school, work and hospitals, and where they could live and shop. Jobs were reserved for certain races and marriage and sex across the colour bar was forbidden. Even beaches, buses, park benches and public toilets were separated according to racial category.

WHITE MINORITY RULE

Whites made up less than 20 percent of the population but owned more than 80 percent of the land. They controlled the economy, including agriculture, the lucrative mining sector, and all political levers. Blacks were relegated to inferior jobs, education and services and denied a vote. They were made to live in neglected townships on the outskirts of urban areas or in villages. Until 1986 black South



Africans were obliged to carry a passport-like document called a dompas which restricted their movements.

THE FIGHT BACK

The African National Congress (ANC) led the resistance to apartheid, first adopting non-violent tactics such as strikes, boycotts and civil disobedience campaigns. In 1960 a march in

Sharpeville against the hated pass books became a massacre when police opened fire on the crowd, killing 69 blacks. That same year, the government banned the ANC and other black opposition and imposed a state of emergency. Underground and in exile, the ANC turned to armed struggle. The Sharpeville massacre brought world attention to the regime's brutal repression, leading to the start of its international isolation. It came as a shock when in 1990 President FW de Klerk, in power for just five months, announced the legalisation of the black opposition. Within days Mandela walked free after nearly three decades in jail. Less than a year-and-a-half later, apartheid was officially over, the last of its discriminatory laws struck from the statute books on June 30, 1991. Its dismantling was celebrated with the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Mandela and de Klerk. The first all-race elections were held in 1994. The ANC won by a landslide and Mandela became the country's first black president.