

STELLENBOSCH WINTER SCHOOL

“No Nation Can Win a Struggle Without Faith”

Religion, the Struggle, and the Future of Our Democracy.

July 18, 2019

©Allan A Boesak

Religion and Struggle

My exploration of the quote from Steve Biko that serves as the title of this talk is based on a four-fold premise: One, that the struggle for true political and economic freedom in South Africa is far from over; two, that that struggle is inextricably linked to all such struggles for freedom and genuine democracy across the world; three, that in those struggles people’s faith has been and still is central; and four, that the very concept “religious values” should be seriously scrutinised.

I believe that religion is meant to play a decisive role in helping to shape societies in their struggles for an open, inclusive, responsive, responsible democracy, where justice for the people is central to all decision making, and the dignity of the people comes before expediency in politics. But following Karl Barth’s lead, I too make the distinction between religion and faith. Religion as privatized, individualized, culturalized conformity is mere religiosity. It is, Barth said, “the enemy of faith.” The distinction is vital.

Where religiosity is satisfied with form, faith is concerned with substance. Where religion seeks a place of comfort within the world and its rules, structures, and systems, faith seeks to disrupt those systems and structures, challenging those rules and exposing them as rules which favour only the rich and powerful.

When war is at its most profitable, and religion is at its most complacent because it is complicit, faith is most combative in its work for peace. When religion betrays the poor and is craven before the powerful, faith stands with the poor and seeks to empower the powerless. When

religion worships at the altar of greed and avarice, faith reminds us that we cannot serve God and Mammon. When religion dons the robes of cowardice and covers up the lie, faith clothes itself in righteousness and stands for the truth. When religion embraces political pietism, calculated forgetfulness and hardheartedness and calls it reconciliation, faith calls for repentance that translates into justice, restitution, and the restoration of dignity.

When religion beats the drums of hatred, revilement, and extremism, faith sings the songs of justice, love, and freedom. When religion preaches exclusivist dogma, faith rejoices in the inclusive love of God. When religion justifies hypocrisy and bigotry in the name of God, faith, with the prophet Isaiah, exposes the truth: "This people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." Faith stands with Jesus as he says, "And as I am lifted up, I will draw *all* unto me." No exceptions, no excuses.

This is what Biko had in mind when he said that this is the faith we cannot do without, that we need in our struggles for justice and genuine democracy. It is this faith, he would say elsewhere, that is "the righteousness of our strength." This is the faith through which we will win. Biko knew only too well that the religion brought by colonialism, that religion that justified land theft, oppression, slavery, and genocide, was not the faith we needed. It was not a religion that served the God of liberation, justice and dignity. It was rather, one that offered "an appalling irrelevance in the interpretation to the Scriptures", "the ideal religion for the colonisation of our people." And he warned black preachers that "nowadays" it was *our* interpretation of the Bible that still makes Christianity the ideal religion for the subjugation of the people. He was searching for the religion of Jesus, the One Biko called "the selfless revolutionary" because of Jesus' love for God, God's people, and God's justice.

Steve Biko was speaking to black church leaders in 1972 at a time of great repression after the Sharpeville massacre, and great fear among the oppressed communities. One consequence of this was that the prophetic

church, so challengingly present during the Defiance Campaign, seemed to have lost its voice. Biko accused the black church of not just complacency, but of “conniving” with an oppressive ideology and an interpretation of the Scriptures that has maintained Christianity as a depressingly efficient instrument for the subjugation of the people. We did not just accept, we “connived” at “an appalling irrelevance of the Scriptures” which is no more than a colonialist-trained version of Christianity that had nothing liberating, comforting or humanizing to say in a country “teeming with injustice and fanatically committed to the practice of oppression, intolerance and blatant cruelty because of racial bigotry ... where all black people are made to feel the unwanted step-children of a God whose presence they cannot feel ...”

What Biko said about black people, the oppressive interpretation of the Bible by the church and Christianity as a power of subjugation, is today equally true of Christianity and women, LGBTQI persons, and the poor and the vulnerable in general. Note that “nowadays” Biko uses. Modern-day Western Christian fundamentalism, with its vicious exclusivism, predatory capitalist consumerism, sacralized bigotry, baptized homophobia and sanctified patriarchalism, is trumpeted to people of the Global South - on 43 television channels in South Africa alone - not just by whites, but by Africans and African Americans as the favoured faces of imperial religion in the Global South. And so-called “main-line” religion, in our impotent floundering to compete and catch up, has mainly caved in.

Increasingly, the church across Africa is characterised by the unholy emulation of that peculiar Christianized militarism of American “patriot pastors,” a so-called “spiritual warfare” wholly based on an unabashed, imperialist, violent jihadism across the globe, in tandem with a spiritually militarised bigotry aimed against women, the poor, the LGBTQI community, and everyone not a “born-again, Bible-believing” Christian. And, in the end, as the “prosperity gospel” fires up the imagination of the “set men of God” while capturing the purses of the poor and needy, it is all about power and greed. We are not forced, coerced, or blackmailed into this: we are

“conniving” as Biko rightly says. We have made the Bible what Biko called a “poisoned well,” and in the process we are poisoning our democracy. For women, LGBTQI persons, and the poor, we have made faith impotent in the face of these onslaughts upon their dignity, rights and lives, even while we have made society an unsafe place for them, and our churches a refuge for predatory capitalists, patriarchalists and homophobes. This kind of religion does not enhance democracy.

In his address, Biko was speaking of the Christian faith, but it is obviously true of people of other faiths, as they experience their faith as an inspiration for struggles for justice and freedom. Listen to Ayatollah Khomeini: “Islam is the religion of militant people who are committed to faith and justice. It is the religion of those who desire freedom and independence. It is the school of those who struggle against imperialism.”

Historically there is no question about the role religion – meaning the role played by people inspired by their religion - in the South African struggle for freedom. As far as Christianity is concerned, most of the leaders of the indigenous resistance, such as David Stuurman, David Kruiper and Hendrik Boezak, were committed Christians. And as John De Gruchy makes plain, so were the leaders of the ANC formed in 1912: Dr John Dube, Rev. Zacharias Mahabane, Dr Pixley Iseke ka-Seme, Rev. James Calata, Prof Z.K. Matthews, and Chief Albert Luthuli to name just the most well-known. In 1916, with the devastating effects of the 1913 Land Act becoming clear, at the beginning of the most grandiose acts of legalised land theft in modern history, Pixley wrote, “The only thing that stands between us and despair is the fact that Heaven has not yet deserted us.” These words from an ANC leader were not considered strange; they were, in fact, fairly typical.

Luthuli was one of the most outspoken and eloquent:

It became clear to me that the Christian faith was not a private affair without relevance to society. It was, rather, a belief which equipped us in a unique way to meet the challenges of our society. It was a belief which had

to be applied to the conditions of our lives; and our many works – they ranged from Sunday School teaching to road building – became meaningful as outflow of Christian belief.

And once more:

For myself, I am in Congress precisely because I am a Christian. My Christian belief about human society must find expression here and now, and Congress is the spearhead of the real struggle. Some would have the Communists excluded, others would have all non-Communists withdraw from Congress. My own urge, because *I am a Christian*, is to enter into the thick of the struggle, with other Christians, taking my Christianity with me and praying that it may be used to influence for good the character of the resistance.

And yet again,

It is my hope that what began, in the way of Christian involvement and thinking out, at the time of the Defiance Campaign, will not simply drain away, leaving Christians in despondency and impotence, adapting themselves fearfully to each new outrage, threat, and assault upon the people in our care. There is a witness to be borne, and God will not fail those who bear it fearlessly.

It is this faith tradition Biko was following in his critique of religion and its role in society and the role of the black church in particular within that context.

But clearly this is not the ANC of post-1994 Nelson Mandela who, when Archbishop Ndungane spoke truth to power on the infamous, wasteful, unnecessary and nefarious arms deal, angrily told the churches not to challenge the government, to stick to preaching the Gospel (the RDP of the soul, he called it) and leave politics to politicians. That sounded exactly like P.W. Botha, Louis La Grange, and Alwyn Schlebusch admonishing us in the 1980's.

Nor is it the ANC of Thabo Mbeki, who, speaking to the South African Council of Churches in 2001, warned the churches to be merely a voluntary organisation serving the national agenda, but letting the ANC, the true "vanguard of the revolution," set that national agenda. Of the church, or religion as a "restless presence" in society as Charles Villa-Vicencio called it, as prophetic critique of politics, there should be no sign. And neither is

it the ANC of Honorary Pastor Jacob Zuma who now cannot wait for Jesus to come back and end the rule of Cyril Ramaphosa.

What Kind of Religion?

International Law scholar Richard Falk is hopeful of the positive role of religion in society today. Despite the distressing signs of religion “wrecking world order” as Falk titled this chapter in his book, he concludes that in the realm of global politics, and in the face of an American “counterapocalyptic reading of September 11 ... taking the unprecedented form of a nonterritorial, counterterrorist crusade” that wields its interventionary authority throughout the world through the exercise of “monopoly control over the militarization of space and oceans, only the great world religions have the credibility, legitimacy, and depth of understanding to identify and reject the idolatry that seems to lie at the core of this American project of planetary domination.” One hopes this might be true, but we must not ignore the issues raised by those who believe religion as such is so fundamentally corrupt, so fundamentally irredeemable, that it has nothing to say, nothing to contribute because of our history of violence, divisionism, hypocrisy, and cruelty. The so-called New Atheists have found an eloquent spokesperson in Richard Dawkins. Listen to what he says,

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.

Dawkins uses this picture of the “God of the Old Testament” to write off religion as a whole. Such a god is indeed a menace to democracy. So for us it is crucial to be honest and begin with the question: what kind of religion are we talking about? And we must, with Biko in mind, begin with that unforgettable African American freedom fighter and abolitionist Frederick Douglass’ persistent and fine distinction between “the two religions” and by the same token the two different readings of the Bible:

I love the religion of our blessed Savior ... which comes from above, in the wisdom of God which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle ... without partiality and without hypocrisy ... which makes it the duty of its disciples to visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction. I love that religion ... It is because I love this religion that I hate the slave-holding, the woman-whipping, the mind-darkening, the soul-destroying religion that exists in America ... loving the one I must hate the other; holding to one I must reject the other.

Douglass was not finished:

I assert most unhesitatingly, that the religion of the south is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes – a justifier of the most appalling barbarity – a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds, - and a dark shelter under which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection.

Yet we must not confuse Douglass with Dawkins:

What I have said respecting and against religion, I mean strictly to apply to the *slave-holding religion* of this land, and with no possible reference to Christianity proper; for, between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference ... I can see no reason, but for the most deceitful one, for calling the religion of this land Christianity.

That is a crucial distinction, as valid today, as we try to discern the workings of empire in its claims upon the Christian faith and its relentless clamour for a religion that is the handmaiden of empire, the echo chamber of its bombastic religious verbosity, the justifier of its hubristic bellicosity.

Equally, Biko made a clear distinction between the Christianity he rejected and the Christianity Black people were yearning for, which for him, as for his generation, was Black liberation theology. For Biko, that could not be the religion of the coloniser, the oppressor, the instigator of dehumanisation and genocide. For him, it was the religion of Jesus, whom he, in a wonderful phrase, called the "selfless revolutionary." That was what instilled in him the belief that religion not only *could*, but was *meant* to play a transformational, revolutionary, healing role in society. That religion that made him believe in the liberation of the oppressed *and* the oppressor; that

kept him sane, and truthful, and faithful, even into those last, indescribably horrific moments.

The Politics of Vulgarly

Slovenian sociologist and philosopher Slavoj Žižek speaks of what he calls “the politics of vulgarity” rampant on the world stage today.

Žižek means, of course, especially Donald Trump and his vulgar language, the way Trump brags about his sexual assaults on women, his racist talk about Mexicans, Africans and other people of colour. His denigration of vulnerable groups, his homophobia and misogyny, and his justification and encouragement of violent, white supremacists. Tinyiko Moluleke has added to the list Trump’s despicable characterisation of Global South countries as “s-hole countries”.

The fact that the US president is backing the worst dictatorships in the world today and is seeking to create some more is not new. He is simply honouring an imperialistic American exceptionalist tradition, the country that has, since the second world war, engineered 72 regime changes and coup d’Etats around the world. In this, Donald Trump is simply being true to a tradition followed mercilessly and relentlessly by US presidents including the two Bushes, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. But more than any occupant of the White House Mr. Trump has used that power to set himself up as a “role model” for other leaders in the world, spurring on and blessing the legitimization of narrow, violent, ethnic nationalisms: from Rodrigo Duterte’s autocratic gangsterist regime in the Philippines and Saudi Arabia’s Mohammed Ben Salman’s youthful but lethal war-mongering and bloodlust, and Bolsonaro’s corrupt dictatorship in Brazil, to Britain’s perfidious Trump clone Boris Johnson to Hungary’s exclusivist, violent Christian nationalism under Viktor Orban to India’s Narendra Modi’s equally exclusivist, equally violent Hindu nationalism.

But this situation raises serious, compelling and inescapable questions for people of faith and for those who believe religion should have a positive

role in society. Recently I find myself turning again and again to that great African American scholar, activist, and Pan-Africanist, W.E.B. DuBois. In 1957, six years before his death, in *The Ordeal of Mansart*, Book One of his still fascinating three-part work, *The Black Frame Trilogy*, W.E.B. DuBois posed a series of questions that, already challenging in the struggles of his day, would become increasingly so for the times that followed; ours included.

“How shall integrity face oppression?” he asked. “What shall honesty do in the face of deception? Decency in the face of insult, self-defense before blows? How shall [courage] and accomplishment meet despising, detraction, and lies? What shall virtue do to meet brute force?”

These are questions, we are discovering, that were not only pertinent to the situation in the United States, from where DuBois was writing and where Dr Martin Luther King Jr. and the black masses of America answered them so magnificently in the Civil Rights struggle. And that was a struggle, you will recall, that has been driven principally by people of faith, especially the black church with its prophetic tradition, from slave preachers and insurrectionists David Walker and Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner and Sojourner Truth, to Henry McNeal Turner, Martin Luther King Jr., and Ella Baker, to name just a few.

DuBois’ voice has been, and is still calling to us, everywhere, in every generation. Even if we did not consciously think about DuBois, (as we did about Franz Fanon for example), these were the very same questions generations in South Africa were faced with, and were called upon to answer. And they were answered by those who took their faith seriously, who believed, like Ayatollah Khomeini and Albert Luthuli, that religion is a force against injustice and imperialism. By Rev James Calata and Sol Plaatjie and Albert Luthuli. By Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph and the incredible women of the 1956 march; by mothers of the nation Sophie de Bruijn, Winnie Mandela, Albertina Sisulu and Adelaide Tambo; by Biko and the brave young people of the Soweto Uprisings and by the indomitable masses

responding to the call of the United Democratic Front, a courageous non-violent, non-racial battering ram against the gates of apartheid.

DuBois' questions were answered by the prophetic church who heard the call and did not cower, who courageously and self-sacrificially, gave leadership in the struggle. I am thinking especially of the thousands upon thousands who from 1976 onwards took their worship of God and their love of justice from the sanctuaries of the nation to the streets of the nation in righteous protest against apartheid until that evil system was vanquished.

They were, for us, through their life, their testimony, and their sacrifices the living embodiment of the sobering, chilling, but glorious list of the writer of Hebrews:

They suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.

Others were stoned to death, they were sown in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented –

They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

... The world was not worthy of them.

They all believed, they all acted upon that belief, they paid the price, but they persevered, and they were victorious. And the incredible thing is, we were living witnesses.

So they have grown in urgency, these questions; became immortal words that challenge the very core of our being, the decisions we make about the most urgent matters in life, the way we face the global struggles for justice, freedom, equality and dignity in our day. Indeed, they determine the way we embrace our humanity, for how we respond will tell us what kind of human beings we are, the depth of our commitment to a humane, just, and peaceable world. They are crucial for a genuine, open, inclusive, responsive and responsible democracy.

So hear them once more: "How shall integrity face oppression? What shall honesty do in the face of deception? Decency in the face of insult, self-defense before blows? How shall [courage] and accomplishment meet despising, detraction, and lies? What shall virtue do to meet brute force?"

These are questions people of faith, in fact all South Africans, must learn to ask, and respond to as faithfully as we can in a world besieged by the politics of vulgarity.

Enemies of the Faith

But I am thinking of the politics of vulgarity way beyond Donald Trump's predatory misogyny and lethal racism. Let me elaborate. The combined wealth of the world's richest 1% overtook that of the other 99% in 2016. More than half of the wealth in the world was then in the hands of just 62 individuals, more than is owned by the entire 3.5 billion of the world's population. The year 2017 had scarcely started and we had to revise our statistics. In January 2017 Oxfam reported that the situation was much worse: just 8 white men own as much wealth as half the world's population. One in nine people do not have enough to eat and more than 1 billion people live on less than \$1.25 a day.

This year Oxfam reported that in 2018 billionaire fortunes grew by \$2.5 billion *a day* while the 3.8 billion of the poorest half of humanity saw their wealth decline by 11%. New billionaires were created every two days between 2017 and 2018, while every day 1000 people die because of lack of access to basic, affordable health care, and as we speak African children are dying of measles a disease we had overcome decades ago. That is the politics of vulgarity.

In 2019, South Africa remains the most unequal society on earth. Over half our population live in utmost poverty. In the meantime, though, we have over 13,000 dollar millionaires. According to a new study released in June 2019 by AfrAsia Bank, Durban, Belito and Umhlanga, with 25%, have seen the biggest growth in wealth among these billionaires over the past decade, a time period which corresponds nicely with the Zuma/Gupta

years. Meanwhile, some of the richest ones, over - 3,000 - live in the Stellenbosch, Paarl, Franschhoek triangle. Right here, in other words. Time Magazine, reporting on our rich/poor gap, writes, "Poverty is so extreme in South Africa that even a lower middle class area looks rich." People of faith should be outraged, but we aren't. The late, and greatly lamented Stellenbosch economist, Sampie Terreblanche, constantly raised these crucial matters, pointing out the undeserved enrichment of whites and the undeserved impoverishment of black South Africans over more than three centuries; warning us that our present grotesque social and economic inequalities are the greatest danger facing our country. It is, he insisted, not only a socio-economic and political question; it is a *moral* question, prompting him to ask, "Why don't the churches rise up in revolutionary anger at these conditions?" Why not, indeed.

As we speak, at the US' southern border, parents and children are separated and almost half of those have not yet found each other. Babies, toddlers and young children are left to die in those concentration camps the Trump administration calls "border facilities." Those children lucky enough to survive, are still there, sleeping on concrete floors, not allowed a shower since they have come across the border; no soap, no clean clothes, miserable food. This treatment, a report says, is brutal by design. Those wanting to help them are turned away by border guards. A young teacher from Arizona, Scott Warren, has been arrested, charged, and brought to trial where he faces twenty years in prison. His crime? He gave food and water to immigrants wandering through the desert, hoping to reach the US. You heard me right: in the US right now, saving lives is a crime.

A father and his young daughter died trying to cross the Rio Grande, fleeing from the violence, poverty and desperation in El Salvador. President Trump merely shrugs, declaring that "people who try to enter the US illegally, drown in rivers." This despite the fact that people who flee from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, flee from conditions of oppression, violence and impoverishment, created by dictators in turn created and put

in place by the US in murderous coup d'Etats and regime changes since the 1980s and who are still doing the US' bidding. Mr. Trump's ignorance or forgetfulness of this history, whether in El Salvador or Honduras or Chile is almost as criminal as his treatment of the refugees fleeing from these countries.

But, and this is the point, Mr Trump is in power because 81% of white Evangelicals in the US voted for him in 2016. He is what Christian America wants. Which religious values are Christians upholding here?

Last month, Franklin Graham, son of the late evangelist Billy Graham and today one of the front leaders and foremost spokesperson for the American white evangelical right, called for a Day of Prayer for President Trump. Graham gave his reasons: the president was under severe attack from enemies of the president and the US, who, by the same token, are also enemies of the faith.

It might be useful to ask who these enemies of Trump and the faithful in the US are. They are the people who are against the endless wars the US is waging in no less than eight Muslim countries at the moment; people against his embrace of the murderous regime in Saudi Arabia (also a fundamentalist religious regime) who last year beheaded 47 of its citizens because they oppose the house of Saud. These are the people against his immigration policies, against the concentration camps along the US southern border. The enemies of the faith are those against sanctions against Venezuela that have taken the lives of more than 40,000 people since 2017. It is those people who stand in the breach for LGBTQI persons against whom the Trump administration has waged a virtual war at every level; those against the propping up of the murderous apartheid regime in Israel and the illegal and deadly occupation of Palestine.

While the resilience of religion has proved Harvey Cox wrong and is playing a larger, more determining role in public life than our post-modern age has ever seen, the politics of solidarity, decency, and integrity has been

swallowed whole by the politics of abusive power, craven cowardice, untamed voraciousness, unrepentant racism, shameless bigotry, and unending violence.

Politics and the Prophetic Word

The politics of vulgarity is not new. And it constantly surprises me how keen the Bible's understanding of the workings of the world is, and how clear the guidelines for prophetic engagement with political powers are. Hear the prophet Jeremiah against king Jehoiakim's vulgar politics: "Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbours work for nothing, and does not give them their [rightful] wages ... Are you a king, because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was *well* with him, [because] he judged the cause of the poor and needy; *then* it was well. *Is this not to know me? says the Lord.* But your eyes and heart are only on your dishonest gain..." (Ch. 22)

Nor was it unknown in Amos' day, or in that of Micah. With prophetic courage and clarity, verse after verse, Micah, in chapter 2, denounces the politics of vulgarity, and then adds with amazing, and sober, insight into the workings of power, ancient and modern, "*because it is in their power.*" (2:1) This is what lies at the core of their evildoing: raw, abusive power. The prophet sees it, and is not afraid to say it. Micah writes as if he has just seen a session of the Zondo Commission.

One should read these words as the conclusion of every accusation the prophet makes: "They covet fields, and seize them; houses, and take them; they desire the inheritance of the lowly, and take it – *because it is in their power.* This is profound, systemic, and sustained critique not just of personal wrongdoing, but of unjust, unequal, and exploitative economic systems.

Then Micah turns to that ever willing handmaiden of abusive power: the religious legitimization of civil religiosity, to the prophets who preach only

what the people want to hear. Micah accuses them of crying "Peace" because they themselves, in contrast to the poor, live well off the profits of their faithless complicity while the rich declare "war against those who put nothing in their mouths." (3:5) It is, Micha sees correctly, a *class war* that is being waged against the poor.

For the followers of Jesus of Nazareth his own example is unequivocal. In his life, his teachings, and his every-day acts, he proved himself to be an implacable enemy of Roman rule, Roman imperial injustice, oppression, and exploitation. He was, as New Testament scholars Richard Horsley and our own Andries van Aarde among others convincingly argued, a social and political revolutionary. African American N.T. scholar Obery M. Hendricks sums it up very well indeed:

"To say that Jesus was a political revolutionary is to say that the message he proclaimed not only called for change in individual hearts but also demanded sweeping and comprehensive change in political, social, and economic structures in his setting in life: colonized Israel. It means that if Jesus had his way, the Roman Empire and the ruling elites among his own people either would no longer have held their positions of power, or if they did, would have had to conduct themselves very, very differently. It means that his ministry was to radically change the distribution of authority, power, goods and resources, so all people – particularly the little people, or "the least of these", as Jesus called them – might have lives free of political oppression, enforced hunger and poverty, and undue insecurity."

Those of you who know me will know that I can hardly speak on a subject like this without reminding us of John Calvin and the Reformed tradition. People from the Reformed tradition have no excuse. We know how at the heart of the Reformed tradition lie the gospel's demands for justice, equity, inclusion and dignity. Perhaps Nicholas Wolterstorff said it best when he reminded us that understanding John Calvin's "exceptionally bold" theology of social justice was to understand the woundedness of God: that Calvin

teaches us that God deems Godself violated in the wounds inflicted upon human beings created in God's image.

To inflict injury on a fellow human being is to wound God; it is to cause God to suffer. Behind and beneath the social misery of our world is the suffering of God. To pursue justice is to relieve God's suffering.

"The call to justice is the call to avoid wounding God; the call to eliminate injustice is the call to alleviate divine suffering. If we believed that, and believed it firmly, we would be far more reluctant than we are to participate in the acts and the structures of injustice. If we believed that and believed it firmly, we would ceaselessly struggle for justice and against injustice, bearing with thankful, joyful patience the suffering which that struggle will bring upon us."

These are the values faith should hold up in the struggle for genuine, inclusive, responsive, humane democracy and an ubuntu world.

We began with Biko. Let us end with him: We will not end our struggle, Biko said, until we have grasped that "glittering prize" still "far on the horizon ... the greatest gift we can bestow ... to give South Africa a human face." That prize is still lingering on that far, distant horizon. South Africa does not yet have that human face. We hide behind masks. Behind the arrogant mask of self-satisfied power, behind the smug smiles of greed and instant gratification; behind the self-congratulatory mask of rainbow-nationism, we hide the grim realities of unrepentant racism, crippling poverty, suffering, and abuse, which is the face of the poor, the vulnerable, and the forgotten. Biko's vision remains unfulfilled, and we must work to bring it to life.

We are not seeking to build a perfect society, but we refuse to be satisfied with injustice, intolerance, discrimination, exclusion, exploitation, and violence. And like Albert Luthuli, we will go into that struggle, taking our Christian faith with us, in the hope that it might influence for good the character of our nation.

