

Idolatry Today

## MAN OF PEACE?

On 21 January 1985 the State President of South Africa, P W Botha, speaking in parliament, offered Mandela his freedom on condition that he 'unconditionally rejected violence as a political weapon'.



**MANDELA REJECTED  
THE OFFER.**

Most people's perceptions of Nelson Mandela have been shaped by *Invictus*, the stirring film directed by Clint Eastwood on South Africa's 1995 Rugby World Cup victory. Starring Morgan Freeman as President Nelson Mandela, *Invictus* made a major contribution towards the building up of the mythology of Nelson Mandela as a modern day idol.

### **Their Finest Hour**

*Invictus* focused on the New South Africa's finest hour, as the Springbok rugby team, led by Francois Pienaar, won the World Cup. It also focused on President Nelson Mandela's finest hour as he donned the Springbok rugby team's green and gold jersey and cap and publicly associated with the Springbok's triumph.

### **Astute**

There is no doubt that this was probably Nelson Mandela's most astute move to appear in public at the World Cup Finals in the Springbok uniform jersey and cap. One billion people were

watching. This was, as Morgan Freeman playing Nelson Mandela in the film declared: "*An opportunity!*"

Indeed any wise politician would seize the limelight and exploit such an opportunity to identify with his national team's greatest moment of triumph.

### **Political Gesture**

In the context of the racially polarized New South Africa, this gesture was meaningful and it was appreciated. It particularly won Nelson Mandela much admiration and support from white South Africans to whom rugby was much more than their national sport. However, it was a political token amidst a much broader context of Marxist violence.

### **Racial Stereotypes**

The stirring *Invictus* film clearly has a political agenda. It includes dangerous distortions of reality and a selective focus which portrays whites in South Africa as narrow minded, disgruntled, racial bigots. In fact, all the white characters in *Invictus* are one or two dimensional, with no depth of character. Incredibly this even includes Matt Damon's portrayal of Francois Pienaar, the South African rugby team captain. One never got to see quite what made him tick. His leadership seemed completely inadequate to explain this spectacular triumph of the Springboks over the previously unbeatable Australian and New Zealand rugby teams.

### **A Political Hijack**

Incredibly, *Invictus* boldly gave all the credit for the Springboks' World Cup victory to President Nelson Mandela. This must be the first time in history that any head of state had been given the credit for a sport team's achievements on the field. Does Queen Elizabeth II get the credit if England's rugby team wins? Was US President Bush credited with American Olympic athlete's achievements in Beijing?

### **An Astute Politician**

It was undoubtedly a very wise and astute political move for Nelson Mandela to oppose his own party's plans to abolish the Springbok green and gold uniform and symbols. Doubtless Nelson Mandela genuinely wanted the national team to win, not only for the desirable national unity it could inspire, but for the international prestige it could give to his government.

### **Ignoring the Context**

However, the filmmaker should not have oversimplified the fascinating story by separating it from its real context of crime and violence, after a brutal 30-year terrorist war waged by Nelson Mandela's ANC.

### **Imaginative Idolatry**

Time and again the film focuses on Mandela's imprisonment on Robben Island, often with dream-like imaginative flashbacks of Nelson Mandela breaking rocks on Robben Island. The film even includes a pilgrimage to Mandela's cell in the prison on Robben Island, but there is never any mention of **why** he was imprisoned. The impression given is that he was imprisoned for opposing apartheid, but many people, including Bishop Desmond Tutu, vigorously opposed apartheid without being imprisoned.

### **The Unanswered Reason Why**

The fact is that even Amnesty International refused to take on Nelson Mandela's case because they asserted that he was not a political prisoner, but had committed numerous violent crimes and had had a fair trial and a reasonable sentence. The most radical newspapers of the day, such as the Star and Rand Daily Mail praised the leniency of the Court in giving away the lightest possible sentence for such violent crimes. In 1964, anyone in America, or Britain, or France, who committed such crimes would have been executed.

### **Just and Fair**

Even the Rand Daily Mail, the most outspoken liberal newspaper at the time in South Africa and, in many ways, a supporter of Mandela and the ANC, wrote about the sentences passed by the judge, *"The sentences pronounced by Judge De Wet at the close of the Rivonia trial are both wise and just. The law is best served when there is firmness tinged with mercy, and this was the case yesterday. The sentences could not have been less severe than those imposed. The men found guilty had planned sabotage on a wide scale and had conspired for armed revolution. As the judge pointed out yesterday, the crime of which they were found guilty was really high treason. The death penalty would have been justified."*

### **Mercy**

These are the facts of history. Sentencing Mandela to imprisonment instead of letting him be hanged was an act of mercy on the part of his political enemies. Mandela had, therefore, every reason to be grateful and not the least reason to harbour a grudge against them. He owed his life to them.

### **Terror Bombing Campaign**

Nelson Mandela was the head of UmKhonto we Sizwe (MK), the terrorist wing of the ANC and South African Communist Party. He had pleaded guilty to 156 acts of public violence including mobilizing terrorist bombing campaigns, which planted bombs in public places, including the Johannesburg railway station. Many innocent people, including women and children, were killed by Nelson Mandela's MK terrorists. President Obama, when condemning the Boston bombings declared: *"Any time bombs are used to target innocent civilians it is an act of terror."* Obama denounced the Boston bombings as *"cruel", "savage"* and *"malevolent"*, yet he still seems to honour a man responsible for many such terror attacks! Obama praises Mandela as his *"role model"*.

### **Refusal to Renounce Terrorism**

South African President P.W. Botha had, on a number of occasions, offered Nelson Mandela freedom from prison, if he would only renounce terrorist violence. This Mandela refused to do.

### New Maths

In *Invictus* Mandela's 26 years in jail, custody and prison becomes 30 years in the cell in Robben Island! Even though prisoners on Robben Island were allowed to walk freely around the Island during the day and were only locked up at night. No mention was made of the very comfortable warden's house at Victor Verster (five-star) prison where Mandela spent his last years of confinement. Actually Mandela was on Robben Island for 18 years.

### Inspiring Words

*Invictus* regularly portrays Nelson Mandela as a most gracious, kind and forgiving man. Many most commendable words are put in his mouth including *"the past is past. We need your services. We can only succeed with your help... reconciliation starts here.... forgiveness liberates the soul....forgiveness is a powerful weapon."*

On occasions Nelson Mandela has articulated inspiring words of reconciliation and national unity. However, he failed to speak out clearly against the explosion of violent attacks on white farmers. Nor did he rebuke his followers who frequently spoke of an Uhuru/Night of the Long Knives massacre of whites *"when Mandela dies."*

### Did Only One Group Have Anything to Forgive?

Under Clint Eastwood's directorship, *Invictus* dogmatically asserts that Nelson Mandela and the black people needed to forgive the whites. Never does the film portray how much the whites had to forgive people like Nelson Mandela and his ANC terrorists who were responsible for the murder of thousands of South Africans. There is no mention in

*Invictus*

of the three decades of vicious terrorist warfare, including the burning down of thousands of schools, hacking to death of thousands of innocent people in homes and in the streets, pouring

gasoline over thousands of innocent victims setting them alight, in the brutal necklace murders, the car bombs in public streets, limpet mines in shopping centres, petrol bombs and grenades through windows at night and assassinations.

### Sanctions and Boycotts

Nor were economic sanctions referred to - which cost millions of jobs; and the sports boycott which had prevented the Springboks from competing internationally for decades.

### A Negotiated Settlement

At one point in the film, Morgan Freeman's Mandela character reminds his secretary: "*The whites still control the army, the police and the economy.*"

That was correct, which gives the lie to the picture portrayed in *Invictus*

of grudging, unwilling, narrow-minded white racist bigots. The fact is that white South Africans, who had the political, military and economic power and who had defeated Mandela's ANC terrorists consistently, willingly handed over the reigns of power after a negotiated settlement.

### The Communist Connection

*Invictus* never mentions Nelson Mandela's open support for brutal communist regimes such as Fidel Castro's Cuba, Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe, Red China, Gadhaffi's Libya, Saddam Hussein, Yasar Arafat and other dictators. During the very time covered by *Invictus* Mandela received Fidel Castro, the longest reigning dictator in the world, and gave him the highest award that South Africa could give and then had both Houses of Parliament gather to hear an address from the Cuban tyrant.

### The Ugly Reality

During the very time covered by the movie many hundreds of white farmers, and their wives and children, were being brutally murdered, actually tortured to death, often by UmKhonto we Sizwe guerrillas, many of whom were now part of the South African National Defence Force.

### Double Standards

Although *Invictus* gives all glory for the Springbok Rugby World Cup win to Nelson Mandela, it does not attach any blame to him for the rising crime and plummeting economy he presided over. During one short visual in the film Mandela looks at a newspaper headline which speaks of the rising crime and plummeting currency. This reality deserved a little bit more attention. During 46 years of National Party *apartheid* rule over 18,000 people had been killed by rioters, terrorists, by the police and the army, on all sides, including terrorists, civilian victims, military casualties and police. A total of 18,000 dead during 46 years of conflict. However, in peace time, under Nelson Mandela, an average of 25,000 people were murdered every year. In Mandela's first four years as president, the Rand lost 80% of its value, more than 2.8 million man-days were lost to strikes and the national debt doubled.

### Fuelling the Crime Wave

Yet to celebrate his birthdays, Mandela would regularly open the prison doors and set many criminals, including armed robbers, murderers and rapists, free, some of whom were murdering and raping within 24-hours of being released. Over 100,000 people were murdered under Mandela's term as president.

### Economic Deterioration

In the 1970s, even while facing terrorism, riots and engaged in a border war with the Cubans in Angola, the South African Rand was stronger than the US Dollar. However, after years of US sanctions, the South African Rand had fallen to R2 to the Dollar. Under Nelson Mandela even with no war, no sanctions, no riots, no conscription, and with massive international aid and investment, the Rand plummeted to R8 to the Dollar, and even R10 to the Dollar, then R12 and even to R14 to the Dollar for a time. But according to *Invictus*, no blame can be attached to Nelson Mandela for the economic deterioration and the sky-rocketing crime rate under his presidency. However, he should be given all the credit for what the Springbok rugby team

achieved on the field!

### Legalising Abortion and Pornography

Viewers of *Invictus* also need to be aware that the kind and thoughtful gentleman portrayed in *Invictus*

was the prime mover of the legalisation of abortion, pornography, gambling and homosexuality in South Africa and of the introduction of sex education in public schools. Since Nelson Mandela forced through the legalisation of abortion, not even allowing ANC MPs a conscience vote, and signed it into Law, 1 February 1997, over a million South African babies have been killed through abortion, officially, legally and with tax-payers money.

### Censoring Christianity

Another disturbing aspect of *Invictus* is the editing out of the Christian Faith of key members of the Springbok rugby team. There were many consistent reports of a core of the Springbok rugby team being Bible-believing Christians who regularly met for prayer before the matches.

Yet that is never depicted. The film does give a very anaemic presentation of the Springbok team kneeling in prayer after their victory, but it is such a lame and limp "*Thanks Lord for letting us win the game*" that it just doesn't ring true.

As Francois Pienaar declared in his BBC Sport interview in 1995: When the final whistle went "*I fell right to my knees. I'm a Christian and wanted to say a quick prayer for being in such a wonderful event, not because of the winning. Then all of a sudden, the whole team was around me, which was a special moment.*"

Pienaar testified:

*"It wasn't about winning! We would have knelt and prayed and thanked God no matter what the result!"*

### Slanderous Distortion

Despite Francois Pienaar's testimony, *Invictus* incredibly portrays him as fornicating before the winning match and swearing during it. Although the Springbok rugby team gave all glory to the Lord Jesus Christ for their triumph, Clint Eastwood's production of

*Invictus*

transfers that glory to Nelson Mandela and a humanist poem by English poet William Ernest Henley, which he quotes:

*"I thank whatever gods may be for my unconquerable soul... I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul."*

### Invictus Poem

It is the title of that poem, *Invictus*, after which the film is named. *Invictus* states: *"It matters not how straight the gate, how charged with punishment the scroll, I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul."*

Clearly Jesus Christ is the Gate that is straight and the Bible is the scroll charged with punishments. The *Invictus* poem is openly anti-Christ and hostile to the Scriptures. *Invictus* is blatant secular humanism. Yet many Christians idolise both the *Invictus* film and that which the film idolises.

### Selective Focus

Francois Pienaar also pointed out in his 1995 interview with BBC Sport that the game favourites for the 1995 World Cup Rugby had been Australia, whom the Springboks beat in the opening game. This landmark victory is down played in *Invictus*, to give the false impression of a hopelessly weak team that came from below to achieve victory only because of Mandela!

### Oversimplifying a Complex Country

It is unfortunate that *Invictus* reinforces stereotypes of narrow minded, white racists and whitewashes Nelson Mandela and the Marxists in the ANC. South Africa is far more complex and interesting than this film suggests. To understand South African history we need to understand the African context and the reality of the [Cold War](#) ,

which was the backdrop to the conflict in which Nelson Mandela played such a key role.

### **A Paid Political Advertisement?**

It would be interesting to know from where the funding came for this film. At times it seemed like a paid political advertisement for Nelson Mandela and the ANC. If all that the film depicts of Nelson Mandela encouraging the team is really true, then it is commendable. But surely any sport team's victory is to the credit of the Manager, the Coach and the team members' dedication, training, fitness and skill?

### **Who is First in Your Life?**

The important question is: Who is first in your life? It is disturbing how many people make idols of fallible human beings. As our Lord Jesus declared: *"No one is good except God alone."* No one and nothing can take the place of Almighty God, our Creator, Redeemer and Eternal Judge as first in our affections, focus and loyalty.

***"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*** Joshua 24:15

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[\*\*A Modern Idol – Martin Luther King Jnr.\*\*](#)

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[\*\*The Battle For the Mind in the News Media\*\*](#)

[\*\*True and False Guilt\*\*](#)

[\*\*The Cold War and The Iron Curtain\*\*](#)

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