

“Fear the Lord and honour the king. Have nothing to do with those who rebel against them.”

Proverbs 24:21

Did Jesus organise a “*release John the Baptist from prison*” campaign? Did the Apostles encourage work stay-always, boycotts, strikes or riots? No! Jesus rejected the role of a political leader (John 6:15) and taught that “*My Kingdom does not belong to this world.*” John 18:36

His Great Commission to the Church is to proclaim “*The Gospel of repentance and the forgiveness of sins.*” Luke 24:47 - not the message of revolution and self-righteous hatred; to “*preach the Gospel*” Mark 16:15 - not to peddle politics; to “*make disciples*” Matthew 28:19 - not to make dissidents, demonstrators and dedicated revolutionaries.

Yet Ds. Nico Smith could say that “*If Jesus Christ were to come to the world today He would probably come as a Black South African... and He would join the ANC.*”!

To which I ask: Why did Jesus not choose to join the Zealots the “*guerrillas*” and “*freedom fighters*” of Palestine? Jesus taught submission to authority (Luke 20:25). He never spoke out against the oppressive foreign domination of the corrupt Roman government, and He taught the people to pay the taxes they owed to the Romans (Mark 12:17).

“Scoffers set a city aflame, but wise men turn away wrath.” Proverbs 29:8

And so the question comes to each of us:

“Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” Matthew 27:17

“Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” Matthew 27:21

The Lord Jesus Christ - the Saviour?

Or the popular revolutionary Barabbas - the political leader?

Let us not choose the political messiah offered by the liberation theologians of the World Council of Churches. Let us not stand with the religious leaders and screaming mobs who crucified Christ and burn to death innocent people. Let us not parrot-cry political slogans. For those who cried “*Set Barabbas free for us!*” Luke 23:18, also demanded the death of Jesus: “*Kill Him! Kill Him! Crucify Him!*” John 19:15

If Jesus came to South Africa today, would He be detained? Hardly likely. What is more possible is that the professional trouble-makers and religious hypocrites would provoke the crowds to necklace Him for “*collaborating with the system*”, having a tax collector as a disciple, dining with “*oppressors*” like Zacchaeus and commending a Roman office, “*I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!*” (Luke 7:9). For rejecting the role of a political leader (John 6:15; John 18:36), Jesus would surely be rejected by the mobs today - even as He was then.

“What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” Matthew 27:22



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On Friday 13 February 1987, Archbishop Tutu declared before a crowd of 4,000 at a graduation ceremony of the University of the Western Cape:

“If Jesus Christ came to South Africa today, He would be in trouble with the authorities because of His solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, the hungry, and He would certainly be detained.” (Cape Times, 14 Feb 87)

Sensational and irresponsible declarations like this are hardly unique in this time of fanatical hysteria and radical propaganda. Nor is it that unusual that a leader of a church hierarchy could espouse such emotive and manipulative political nonsense. What is amazing is that 4,000 people could listen to such unsubstantiated fiction without at least some of the Bible-reading Christians standing up to challenge this political priest.

If Jesus came to South Africa today... would He be detained?... Or is it not more likely that He would be burned to death, necklaced, by the same kind of mobs which screamed:
“Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” Luke 23:20.

Or has Archbishop Tutu so neglected to study the Scriptures that he has forgotten who connived to arrest and crucify Jesus?

Does Tutu not recall that it was the religious leaders: the Scribes and Sadducees, Pharisees and Chief Priests the theological lecturers, the bishops, priests, and archbishops of that time, who ruthlessly plotted the murder of God's Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:3-4; John 7:32; Luke 22:3-5). And the reason was not so much political but religious. It was because the religious leaders would not believe that Jesus was who the Old Testament prophecies said He was (Matthew 26:57-67). Of course many of our religious leaders today - theological professors, bishops and ministers - are also guilty of this sin of unbelief and reject the Deity of Christ and the inerrancy of Scripture.

The Bible clearly teaches that the Roman governor, Pilate, *“tried to find a way to set Jesus free”* John 19:13; that this political leader declared, *“I find no reason to condemn Him”* John 19:65; *“I cannot find any reason to condemn Him.”* John 19:4; *“I find no reason to condemn this man.”* Luke 23:4

It was the hypocritical religious leaders, and the easily manipulated mobs of common people, who demanded the death of Jesus and the release of Barabbas.

“And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion... But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them.” Mark 15:7, 11

How like the archbishops of our day that the chief priests were more concerned about the release of a political prisoner, a rebel and a murderer than with the Son of God.

“Pilate, therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them. But they shouted, saying, ‘Crucify Him, crucify Him!’” Luke 23:20 21

How like the mobs of our day that they allowed themselves to be manipulated by ruthless and evil men to cause the death of the innocent.

“Then he said to them the third time, ‘Why, what evil has He done? I have found no reason for death in Him. I will therefore chastise Him and let Him go.’ But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified. And the voices of these men and of the chief priests prevailed.” Romans 23:22 23

How like the illogical slogan-chanting, cliché-shouting fanatics of our day.

“Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”
Romans 3: 13-18

How tragic that slogans and clichés and parrot-cries should replace study of the Scriptures and logical discussion.

“So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will.”
Luke 23:24-25

How horrifying that political leaders like Pilate *“wanted to please the crowd”* Mark 15:15. That leaders should be so led. That a leader could pay more attention to what is popular than to what is right. That a leader could listen more to the hysterical screaming of a mob than to the gentle, still, small voice of his conscience.

“He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord.” Proverbs 17:15

As Jesus taught - those people-pleasers who try to win praise from others - they have no love for God in their hearts and they are incapable of a true relationship with Christ (John 5:41 45). The Law of God clearly states:

“You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice. You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute.” Exodus 23:2 3

Which brings up the question: Is God really on the side of the poor and oppressed? Not according to the Scriptures:

“God is not one to show partially, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome in Him.” Acts 10:31 53

“You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbour.” Leviticus 19:15

Not only are those religious leaders (who so dogmatically decide God's political affiliations and socio-economic preferences) emphatically not poor nor oppressed themselves (note their clothing, modes of transport, mansions, lifestyles and big mouths) but the questions we should be asking is: ***“Who is on the Lord's side?”*** Exodus 32:26

Oh, but words are cheap and talking is easy. Paying lip service to the Lord is just not good enough. The Apostle Paul said he was willing to die for Jesus (Luke 22:33), but ran away with the others (Mark 14:50), and later denied Jesus before a servant girl (Mark 15:66 71).

The question is not to be answered with a raised hand or a few words, but by the whole thrust of your life.

Do you reject the advice of evil men? (Psalm 1:1). Do you find joy in studying the Word of God, meditating on it day and night? (Psalm 1:2).

Are you determined to love the Lord your God with all your heart, being faithful to His Word, no matter what the cost? Even if that means being unpopular with the crowd?

What is at stake here is the Lordship of Christ, the nature of the Gospel and the mission of the Church. Is it really the task of the Church to work for the overthrow of a government?