

Reprinted from the Christian Science Monitor, February 10, 2000.
Republished with permission of the Christian Science Publishing
Society. All rights reserved.

Freedom of South Africa

By Elise L. Moore, C.S.B.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, winner of the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize and retired Archbishop of the Anglican Church in South Africa, addressed a wonderfully diverse audience overflowing the Fisk University Memorial Chapel in Nashville on January 14. It was only six years ago, in April 1994, that voters of all races elected the first non-white president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. The abolition of the oppressive apartheid system was accomplished without a wrenching bloodbath, as occurred in the American Civil War, or a victor's retribution, as took place in Afghanistan.

Archbishop Tutu summarized the past decade this way: "Most fairly sober-minded people, there's no doubt about it, thought, 'That country is going down the tubes' - waiting apprehensively for the bloodbath to happen... Many of the right-wing elements had stashed all over the country caches of arms... We were in a real pickle, and then the world watched in amazement, almost in awe" as the election of April 1994 took place. "Here was a veritable miracle unveiling before their eyes," he added. And then Tutu proceeded to thank the audience, with a generous inclusivity. "That could never have happened without the love and support and prayers and commitment of many, many around the world, such as yourselves!"

If one ever doubted the transforming effect of prayer on situations a world away, those doubts dissolved into dust as he repeated over and over again the vital importance of the prayers and love of individuals around the world in freeing South Africans. The audience choked back tears as this humble man embraced them with his eyes and softly said, "I'm speaking on behalf of millions of South Africans when I say, 'Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. ' "

Your prayer matters. It reaches the heart and strengthens the weak, regardless of distance, for God is there. The power of good, the supremacy

of the Holy Spirit, does break down the pride of prejudice. God is universal, and the power of divine Love does reign supreme on earth. As the collective human consciousness shifts away from apathy to love, from fear to faith, from human power to divine might, we see God's government made manifest in increasing freedom and justice.

This is truly the activity of the Church - to pray for and heal the oppressed of the world. Another reformer who opposed mental and physical slavery, Mary Baker Eddy, defined the function of church in those active terms in her book "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures": "Church. The structure of Truth and Love; whatever rests upon and proceeds from divine Principle.

"The Church is that institution, which affords proof of its utility and is found elevating the race, rousing the dormant understanding from material beliefs to the apprehension of spiritual ideas and the demonstration of divine Science, thereby casting out devils, or error, and healing the sick" (pg. 583). This Church is not a denomination or religious sect. It is the universal brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind, uniting for the holy purpose of elevating the race, rousing the understanding, casting out slavery of any sort, and healing sickness.

We are all members of this Church. With unselfish humility, we unite to serve God rather than sect. The power of unselfish prayer and collective action has freed a nation in Africa and set before the world a model for transition without retaliation. How could we withhold the power of prayer and faith in God, knowing it has transforming power in the world? And can we not have more conviction in the power of prayer to resolve injustice here in the United States? As Mrs. Eddy wrote, "No power can withstand divine Love" (pg. 224).

The history of South Africa certainly proves that point. Archbishop Tutu drove home the purpose of the Church universal when he concluded, "You have helped to bring freedom there. Can you help make it real here?" We can begin this new millennium united in prayer and action to free all humankind from mental and physical slavery. No corner of the world is too distant, no problem too close, to feel the resolving power of unselfish, persistent prayer.