DESMOND TUTU

There was a time when Desmond Tutu was regarded as the “turbulent priest”; feared and disliked by the racist apartheid government who saw his liberation stance as threatening, destructive and even unchristian.

Today, Mpilo Desmond Tutu, has become the spiritual architect of the new understanding we, as South Africans, seek of each other and of our beloved country.

Tutu was born in the heartland of racist South Africa. His rise form birth and childhood in the barren black township of South Africa to a Nobel laureate was against all odds. Mpilo, his African name means “life”. Tutu has lived up to that by re-affirming life at every turn, leading fearlessly by example. He has challenged the might of the Apartheid State, admonished even the democratically elected government of Nelson Mandela when he deemed necessary. The character of this man, improbably pitched into struggle that has shaken the world, proves to be as rare as any in this century.

When Tutu won the Nobel Peace Prize, South Africans of all races embraced one another in joy. The world was listening to the “voice of the voiceless”. Tutu was acknowledged as an agent of peace, justice and reconciliation. His response was typical.

“It is our prize. It is not Desmond Tutu’s prize.” We celebrated.

The award he proclaimed is for millions of people who suffered indignities of an unjust system. It was for mothers in squatter camps whose shelters were being destroyed callously everyday, who sat near railway stations trying to eke out an existence selling vegetables.

Why should you listen to Desmond Tutu?

Because he is here in Edmonton and he has a valid passport. Everytime Desmond Tutu wanted to travel abroad he had to apply to the Department of Internal Affairs. Many of his requests were denied and the intermittent withdrawals of his passport prevented him from accepting in person the awards that were beginning to be heaped upon him. Desmond Tutu is in town. He has a valid passport and this is significant because 10 years ago his request to travel to Edmonton could have been denied. Because of his fight for justice, it enabled ordinary citizens like me to travel with a valid passport.

Arch, we never believed them when they called you a controversial figure – a rabble rouser, publicity seeker, agitator, communist, terrorist. We, the ordinary people from the Cape Flats, Soweto, KwaMashu and indeed all peace-loving South Africans always knew who you were and what you stood for so did the rest of the world. Thank you for your contribution to the struggle for human rights, peace and justice.

DESIREE BLANKENBERG
SOUTH AFRICAN GRADUATE STUDENT: ED PSYCH