

The truth about Tutu

Rabble Rouser for Peace

John Allen

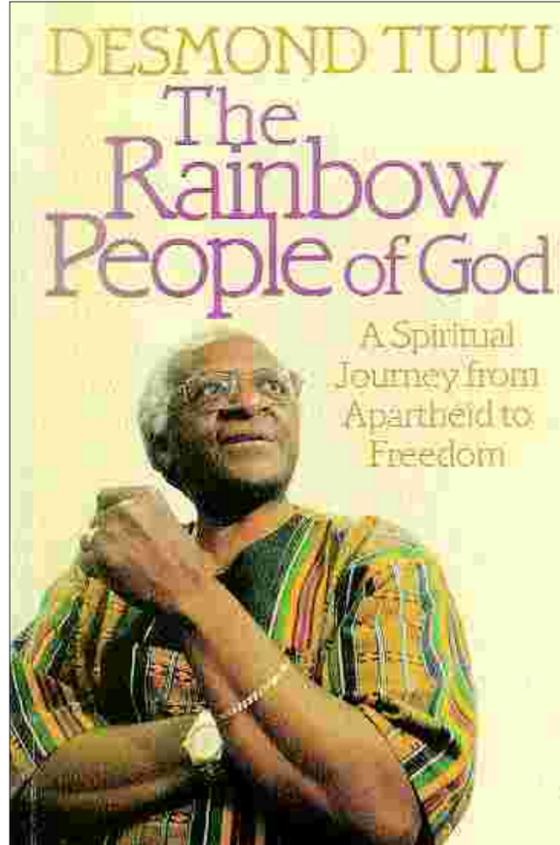
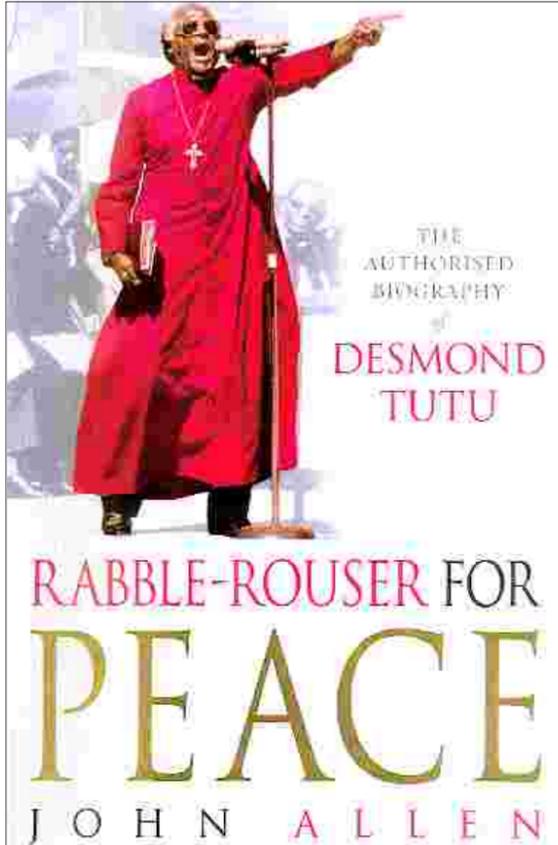
Rider Books

The Rainbow People of God

Desmond Tutu

Double Storey

Review:
Gerald Shaw



ARCHBISHOP Desmond Tutu, reviled as an ogre figure in the apartheid era, is convincingly portrayed in this authorised biography as a maker of peace, stability and non-racial democracy in South Africa.

Tutu, Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk were three key figures in staving off revolutionary upheaval. Yet there are some, no doubt, who still see Tutu as he was slandered by SABC propagandists – as a revolutionary publicity hound bent on setting the country ablaze.

John Allen's fine biography provides more than enough evidence of Tutu's stature as a moral leader whose intervention was often crucial in the interests of peace.

Allen tells Tutu's life story in straight-forward, lucid prose. As the book is clearly destined for an international best-seller readership, the background narrative, filling in the social and political context, covers familiar ground for informed South Africans, but it does so unobtrusively.

The insight left in the reader's mind is that South Africa was saved in the closing years of the 20th century by wise leadership – by the compelling quality of moral leadership shown by Tutu in particular.

His insistence on non-violence and negotiation was critical in shaping opinion in the black community, as was his physical courage in intervening on the ground to prevent murderous violence.

This biography shows Tutu to be an extraordinary man, not least in the contrast between his ebullient, extrovert and sometimes impulsive temperament and his profound, disciplined spirituality.

It shows that Tutu and Dr Allan Boesak, another anti-apartheid cleric, played very different parts in the liberation struggle.

"Boesak, with a fine, sharply honed political mind, worked in the world of organisational strategy and politics. Tutu kept his distance from politics, choosing rather to fol-

low his intuition. Tutu might preach liberation, but his constituency was the church and his mandate the Christian gospel."

Tutu's spirituality was fundamentally transformed in the early '70s, says Allen, in response to a range of influences, including a brush with police brutality at Fort Hare and his exposure to Steve Biko's nascent philosophy of black consciousness. He came to believe that theology had to consider the context in which the believers lived.

Within a few years, Tutu had become "a defiantly outspoken advocate for black South Africans and an emotional exponent of reconciliation with whites".

In a passionate sermon at Biko's funeral, Tutu said Biko had sought

to awaken in the black person a sense of his intrinsic value and worth as a child of God. The black consciousness movement was not a "hate white movement".

Allen documents Tutu's worldwide travels advocating financial sanctions as a lever for peaceful change and he notes that Tutu's efforts were rewarded when the US Senate overrode President Ronald Reagan's attempt to veto financial sanctions against South Africa.

Allen was told in Washington that Tutu was important because he acted consistently with his non-violent position and his position of spiritual leadership.

At home Tutu was furiously attacked by white South Africa for advocating sanctions, but he eventu-

ally persuaded the Anglican bishops to back him.

Historians attribute the ultimate success of the liberation struggle to a variety of factors. But it is fair to conclude that Tutu's contribution to the happy and relatively non-violent outcome was very significant.

When Chase Manhattan called in South Africa's loans in mid-1985 it was the beginning of the end for the apartheid regime.

Allen is fair-minded in recognising De Klerk's crucial peace-making role, notably when he kept the police away from the huge march led by civic and religious leaders in Cape Town in September 1989.

He discusses the question of the so-called "Third Force" atrocities during De Klerk's presidency. Tutu repeatedly warned that De Klerk's credibility was being eroded. Yet Allen points out that Tutu never went as far as some in the ANC, who accused De Klerk of turning a blind eye to the violence to strengthen his bargaining position.

While there is no evidence implicating De Klerk in the atrocities, the statement of the then British ambassador, Robin Renwick, to Tutu is instructive. He said De Klerk had by no means been properly in control of the security forces, and he had admitted as much to Renwick. "He has never been prepared to say this publicly, but he wasn't really in a position to fire 85 generals and that caused all his problems."

De Klerk himself told Allen that firing the whole top echelon of the army and police would be inviting tremendous conflict and a breakdown in authority.

This biography is a substantial contribution to social history. It suggests that moral values and courage in proclaiming and living such values can be more powerful in human affairs than is often believed.

And it is admirably augmented by the second volume listed above, *The Rainbow People of God*, which is a re-issued collection of Tutu's



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