

The unsettling Story about Allan Boesak's Involvement in the Struggle against Apartheid

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Abstract

The poststructuralist assertion is that all meaning and knowledge are discursively construed through language and other signifying practices. In order to decipher the story of Boesak, the author made use of the notions of poststructuralists, namely Foucault, Spivey, Milne, and so forth. The media has been the major authority that delimited, designated, named and established Boesak as an object of the discourse. The media constitutes Allan Boesak and simultaneously constitutes the dominant, prevailing discourse regarding his life and work. The legacy of Boesak is, therefore, portrayed as constituted socially and is consequently inherently unstable. The following subsections are being discussed in the article, namely: the role of the media in construing Boesak; the formation of Boesak as the object of the discourse; Boesak's early involvement; Boesak's engagement with church and society during 1982–1990; and Boesak our leader, we are not throwing a friend to the wolves.

Keywords: Apartheid; Belydende Kring; black theology; Boesak; heresy; liberation theologian; Programme to Combat Racism; theological anthropology; World Alliance of Reformed Churches; Foucault

Introduction

Yann Martel ends his story of the *Life of Pi* (2001) with the following, which I see fit to express myself and the gratitude of a million others to Allan Boesak for his lifelong contribution to church and society.

What a terrible thing it is to botch a farewell. I am a person who believes in form, in the harmony of order. Where we can, we must give things a meaningful shape ... It's important in life to conclude things properly. Only then can you let go. Otherwise you are left with words you should have said but never did, and your heart is heavy with remorse. That bungled goodbye hurts me to this day. I wish so much that I'd had one last look at him in the lifeboat, that I'd provoked him a little, so that I was on his mind. I wish I had said to him then—yes, I know, to a tiger, but still—I wish I had said, Richard Parker, it's over. We have survived. Can you believe it? I owe you more gratitude than I can express. I couldn't have done it without you. I would like to say it formally: Richard Parker, thank you. Thank you for



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saving my life. And now go where you must. You have known the confined freedom of a zoo most of your life; now you will know the free confinement of a jungle. I wish you all the best with it. Watch out for Man. He is not your friend. But I hope you will remember me as a friend. I will never forget you, that is certain. You will always be with me, in my heart. What is that hiss? Ah, our boat has touched sand. So farewell, Richard Parker, farewell. God be with you. (Martel 2001, 360–361)

This festschrift¹ is about saying thank you to Allan Boesak for:

- a) His contributions as black liberation theologian of the south.
- b) The deconstruction of the theological anthropology of the Dutch Reformed Church.
- c) Being unashamedly black and Reformed.
- d) Embodying the Belhar Confession.
- e) Being the voice of the voiceless, for the marginalised, the excluded.
- f) Being passionate about human dignity, justice and church reunification.
- g) Being a mentor and spiritual father to many.
- h) Ensuring that thousands of students from impoverished backgrounds could have access to higher education through the scholarships of The Foundation for Peace and Justice.²

One of the most unsettling stories in South Africa is about Allan Boesak (born on 23 February 1946 in Kakamas, Northern Cape). He is known as a minister of the Word of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC), a politician and anti-apartheid activist, and is also being epitomised by many as a controversial figure. Boesak matriculated in 1962 at Gordon High School, Somerset West, a school segregated for “coloureds.” Higher education in the apartheid-era South Africa was racially structured, with universities for different racial and ethnic groups. One such racially segregated institution was the University of the Western Cape (UWC), situated in Bellville South, which opened its doors in early 1960. Allan Boesak studied at the UWC and the Theological Seminary of the DRMC during 1963–1967.³ Both of these institutions were specifically created for the training of people of mixed descent. Boesak was ordained as minister of the Word and sacraments of the DRMC in 1967, at age 22, at the DRMC Immanuel in Paarl.

1 This article was published in *Festschrift in Honour of Allan Boesak*, edited by C. Flaendorp, N. C. Philander and M. A. Platjies-Van Huffel, 2016.

2 In 1984 Boesak’s congregation, Dutch Reformed Church Bellville South, established “The Foundation for Peace and Justice”; a body whose objective was to assist victims of apartheid. A new trust, known as the Children’s Trust (the Trust), was formed in 1988 at the insistence of an American entertainer as a vehicle to receive donations to be used for the benefit of child victims of apartheid. Large amounts of money were donated to the Foundation for Peace and Justice and to the WARC by individuals, as well as international religious and humanitarian organisations.” *S v Boesak* (CCT25/00) [2000] ZACC 25; 2001 1) BCLR 36. Accessed 3 March 2015. www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZACC/2000/25.html. Numerous students at UWC were recipients of scholarships of The Foundation for Peace and Justice. Without this gracious financial support higher education would have been a pipe dream for thousands of youth from impoverished backgrounds in apartheid South Africa.

3 Lic. Theol. (University of the Western Cape and Theological Seminary Dutch Reformed Mission Church 1963–1967).

Boesak was a brilliant and gifted student. This was also being taken cognisance of outside the DRMC. Prof. Johan Heyns recommended Boesak (in the late 1960s) for postgraduate studies to the Stellenbosch University, a racially segregated institute for the training of white students, but the Faculty of Theology turned Boesak's application down.⁴ The Lord was meanwhile preparing Boesak for studies abroad. During 1969 Boesak received a scholarship to study at Kampen Theological Institute in Holland after meeting Verkuyl.⁵ In 1970, after only two years in full-time ministry, Boesak received demission from the DRMC Immanuel in order to embark on his post-graduate studies in Holland. In doing so, Allan Boesak became one of the first DRMC ministers to study in Kampen.

Meanwhile Boesak became a member of the Belydende Kring (Confessing Circle). According to Klippies Kritzinger, the Belydende Kring was a "ministers' fraternal established in 1974 which united ministers of the DRMC, the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) and (later also) Reformed Church in Africa (RCA)" in a commitment to unity, reconciliation and justice" (Kritzinger 2013, 201). Boesak wholeheartedly embraced the aims of the Belydende Kring.⁶ The Belydende Kring became a "broker in arranging scholarships for DRMC and DRCA ministers to do postgraduate studies in theology overseas, mainly in the Netherlands" (Kritzinger 2013, 200).

Boesak completed a doctorate on ethics during 1976. Boesak's notions about political theology in general and his theological anthropology had been shaped primarily during his stay in the Netherlands and through his personal contacts with scholars abroad like Wolterstroff, Rothuizen, James Cone, and Rothe, to name a few, who had influenced his doing theology.⁷ This is clearly seen in his numerous publications.⁸ Apart from many articles on theology and politics,⁹ Boesak is the author of 17 books, editor of one, and co-editor of three. In these publications the political and cultural influence between the Netherlands and South Africa can clearly be discerned; especially Rothuizen's influence on Boesak's theology cannot be underestimated.

The Role of the Media in Construing Boesak

This article contends that the media played a huge role in construing different images of Boesak during the course of time. During the 1980s Boesak became known as one of the leading opponents of the apartheid regime. He played a pivotal role in the public sphere during the heydays of apartheid. Boesak was adored by most of the students at UWC. Some

4 For detail on all the South African students who studied at Kampen, see Van Oel, M. 2011. *De Wereld in Huis: Buitenlandse Theologiestudenten in Kampen, 1970–2011* (The World in our House: Foreign Students of Theology in Kampen, 1970–2011). Kampen: PThU, especially chapters 1 and 2, 19–72.

5 The *Theologische Hogeschool Kampen* (which later became the *Theologische Universiteit Kampen* and then the *Protestantse Theologische Universiteit*) and the Free University of Amsterdam were the institutions where most of the Belydende Kring members studied in the Netherlands.

6 Belydende Kring 1988. Statement. *Dunamis* No. 1: 16. These aims were formulated in 1974 at the inaugural meeting of the Belydende Kring, originally in Afrikaans.

7 See, for example, Boesak, A.A. 1984a. *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation and the Calvinist Tradition*. Cape Town: Skotaville.

8 See "Publications by Allan Boesak" in list of references.

9 See "Articles by Allan Boesak" in list of references.

even wanted to speak with a high-pitched voice, and/or dress like him. They usually addressed him affectionately as “Doc.” Boesak is, however, also remembered by many for being sentenced to prison for fraud in 1999. Although he subsequently received a presidential pardon, his criminal record was expunged and he was reinstated as a cleric in late 2004, Boesak remains a controversial figure in South Africa. This article upholds the premise that all knowledge—even the legacy of Boesak—that is constituted socially is consequently inherently unstable. This is in line with Levi Strauss’s thesis that the world and/or people are constituted by language (Polzin 1977, 16).

Boesak reverted in the past 30 years from being well-known, illustrious, eminent, prominent, extraordinary, remarkable, important, significant, popular, well-liked, esteemed, honoured, revered, respected, accepted, admired, noticeable, prominent, coveted and an inspired leader, to notorious due to major international newspapers like *The New York Times* and national newspapers like *Die Beeld*, *Die Burger*, *Die Volksblad*, *Rapport*, *Ekstra Rapport*, *The Cape Times* and *The Argus*, which construed different images of him at different periods. Numerous newspaper articles on Allan Boesak surfaced across the globe during the struggle against apartheid. Sometimes a daily account of his involvement in the struggle against apartheid and/or his statements would make world news. For instance, the fact that Boesak “played a pivotal role in the struggle for the liberation” of the people of South Africa was highlighted, among others, by the abovementioned newspapers and numerous others. Up until 1982 Boesak was an unknown black liberation theologian of the South. One of the journalists of *The News York Times* even said in the 1980s: “He does not have the look of an ascetic or demagogue about him; he gives the appearance of a minister of the Word who is soft-spoken off the rostrum.”¹⁰

The media used binary oppositions in order to construe Boesak conversely as a redeemer or as a troublemaker, protester, activist, campaigner, wrongdoer and rebel. According to Berman, “binary oppositions are created by language and refer to depth structures, that is, the dominant discourse based on socio-economic realities, underlying to text” (Berman 1988, 122). I concur with Milne (1989, 21–23) that the “binary oppositions point to the dominant discourse on which text is based, and cannot be changed by rereading or reinterpretation of the surface information of text.” Boesak can, therefore, not be redeemed of these images by simply re-reading or reinterpreting these newspaper articles in a positive light.

People across the globe, therefore, maintain one of the two images of Boesak. Some, notwithstanding the media-construed images, still embrace Boesak as their close friend. For example Nicolas Wolterstorff (2011, 13) mentioned in his book, *Hearing the Call. Liturgy, Justice, Church, and World* that ever since 1980–1981, when Allan Boesak lectured at the Calvin College, he became and remains one of his closest friends. I met Nicolas Wolterstorff recently in the USA and he unwaveringly embraced Boesak as friend, activist and scholar. He even dedicated his book, *Until Justice and Peace Embraced*, to Boesak. In *Until Justice and*

10 “PBS Show Examines Apartheid.” *The New York Times*, Thursday 3 October 1985, Late City Final Edition: 26. Accessed 20 March 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/10/03/movies/pbs-show-examines-apartheid.html>.

Peace Embraced, Wolterstorff said the following “For my dear friend, Allan Boesak, black Reformed pastor and theologian, from South Africa in whose speech I have heard both the cries of the oppressed and the Word of God”.¹¹ Boesak, on his side, also dedicated his latest book, *Dare We Speak of Hope? Searching for a Language of Life in Faith and Politics*, to Wolterstorff. People across the globe usually applaud Boesak for his role in the struggle against apartheid, whilst in South Africa his role is on the one side adulated and on the other side decried. While at one stage working closely with Boesak as a member of the moderamen in the United Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), I observed with astonishment how some hailed him as a redeemer, whilst others saw him in a negative light. For example, General Van der Merwe, who headed the Police Force during apartheid South Africa, construes Boesak in his *Die Belydenis van Belhar—’n Memorandum*, as one of the clergy who had been directly or indirectly responsible for the mangle or death of children and women during the struggle against apartheid.¹² General Van der Merwe’s views are highly contested in the URCSA. The question is: What lies behind the empirical reality? Both sides usually stacked historical facts for their claims. For example, according to Van der Merwe, his account of Boesak is based on facts.¹³

The author contends that Boesak’s story has been construed by language. Spivey once said on reading texts that: 1) human behaviour and issues are not the reality; 2) the reality is structured; and 3) this structuring is coded (Spivey 1974, 133). We should, therefore, try to decipher the meaning or code behind the individual stories of Boesak. All human institutions and communication are expressions of language. We should always remind ourselves that “language is not a neutral medium” (Plaatjies-Van Huffel 2006, 110–111). Words have the power to present thoughts. Language constitutes, as we will see in Boesak’s case, “even when used to communicate or to reflect on the world” (Plaatjies-Van Huffel 2006, 110–111). Reading the numerous newspaper clippings on Boesak, one should remember that the text should subsequently be read as follows: what is written there and what is not written there. Combined, “this way of reading text provides a coherent structure” (Plaatjies-Van Huffel 2006, 110). All knowledge, therefore also all knowledge about Boesak, is constituted socially and is consequently inherently unstable. Knowledge comprises perspectives, ideas, stories, commentaries, rules, categories, laws, terms, stipulations, explanations and/or definitions

11 Wolterstorff, N. 2011. In *Hearing the Call. Liturgy, Justice, Church, and World*, edited by M. R. Gornik, and G. Thompson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Wolterstorff, N. 1987. *Until Justice and Peace Embraced*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

12 “Hulle moes elke dag die wrange vrugte pluk van geestelike leiers wat in kerklike gewaad rewolusionêre bedrywighede bedryf het wat regstreeks of onregstreeks bygedra het tot die dood en verminking van burgerlikes, onder wie weerlose vrouens en kinders.” Van der Merwe, J. 2012. *Die Belydenis van Belhar—’n Memorandum*. Accessed 20 March 2015. <http://www.praag.co.za>.

13 Van der Merwe, J. 2012. *Die Belydenis van Belhar—’n Memorandum*. Accessed 20 March 2015. <http://www.praag.co.za>.

which are produced by the disciplines, fields and/or institutions by applying scientific principles.¹⁴ In order to decipher the story of Boesak we need to ask ourselves:

- a) Who speaks? As Foucault says, the first question is: “Who is speaking?”
- b) Who, among the totality of speaking individuals, is afforded the right to use this sort of language?
- c) Who is qualified to speak and why?
- d) Who derives from it his own special quality, his prestige, and from whom, in return, does he receive if not the assurance, at least the presumption that what he says is true?
- e) What is the status of the person who has the right to speak?
- f) Is this right sanctioned by law or tradition?
- g) Who is judicially and spontaneously acceptable to present such a discourse?
- h) Is the power judicially defined or is it spontaneously accepted?
- i) What are the institutional spaces and/or platform from which the person makes the discursive contribution? (Foucault 1972, 50–51)

The Formation of Boesak as the Object of the Discourse

The media played a decisive role in constituting Boesak as object of the discourse. Boesak has been “constituted by all that was said”; all the press statements named him, explained his political position concerning apartheid, judged him and possibly gave him speech by articulating what he had said in the name of the struggle (Foucault 1972, 50–51). The media has been the major authority that delimited, designated, named and established Boesak as an object of the discourse (Foucault 1972, 41). Numerous journalists criticised Boesak, while others applauded him. Some concentrated only on one part of Boesak’s life and rejected or excluded the other facets of his being. We should, however, remember that Boesak didn’t wait passively to be manipulated by the media in one or another way. Rather he had been an active agent in the discourse. Boesak willingly availed himself to comment on social justice issues in apartheid South Africa—and in so doing he became known as one of South Africa’s most outspoken critics of apartheid.¹⁵

The institutional sites from which Boesak made his discourse include, among others, synod halls, ecumenical organisations, lecture rooms, political rallies and funerals. Boesak’s right to speak on behalf of others was accepted by some of the members of the DRMC and DRCA, especially the Belydende Kring, as well as many ecumenical organisations during the 1980s. The synods halls, ecumenical forums (for example the World Council of Reformed Churches (WCC), South African Council of Churches (SACC), World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in South Africa (ABRESCA) and Belydende Kring (BK) served as institutional platforms from which Boesak made his

14 Foucault treats the history of medicine in terms of language (Bakker 1973, 62). According to Foucault, the medical objects change with the transformation of medical language. Foucault studies the dominant discourses and their relative dependency on social structures in his book, *Madness and Civilisation* (1961). Foucault shows, among others, how leprosy, insanity and sexuality were constituted by social discourses and/or formations in *Madness and Civilization* (1961).

15 “Key Cleric Seized as he Leads March near Cape Town.” *The New York Times*, Sunday 11 August 1985, Late City Final Edition: 1985: 1.

discourse. He is a founding member of ABRESCA and was elected as the first chairperson. The ABRESCA statements reflect many of Boesak's beliefs. Among others, Boesak "rejected the use of religion as a cultural or racist ideology (as employed by the white Dutch Reformed Church)."¹⁶ The standpoint of Boesak, as voiced in his collection of articles, statements and speeches and published in *Black and Reformed* (Boesak 1984a), was seen as the standpoint of the black and of the Reformed tradition in South Africa.¹⁷ Boesak had been regarded during the struggle against apartheid both in South Africa as well as abroad as the unqualified spokesperson of the black Reformed tradition in South Africa. Boesak used ABRESCA to promote his ideas on black theology and liberation theology, unity, reconciliation and justice. Even the URCSA presented a letter of Boesak personally to Minister A. Schlebusch on 24 August 1979, in response to the minister's acrid attack on the SACC's decision on civil disobedience, to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as "moments which are representative of the former DRMC and DRCA's willingness to resist injustice and unfairness."¹⁸ Seemingly, even the URCSA sanctioned the notion that Boesak spoke on behalf of the DRMC and the DRCA.

Boesak's early Involvement

During the 1960s millions of black South Africans had been forcefully removed to racially demarcated areas due to the apartheid laws. Boesak's own family had been forcefully removed from Somerset West to Eersterivier, a racially segregated area for "coloureds."¹⁹ This experience had a lasting impact on the young Boesak. Later, as young pastor, he was once more confronted by the fact that members of his congregation, DRMC Immanuel, had also been forcefully removed to a racially segregated area reserved for "coloureds" in Paarl. One of his congregants, Meraai Arendse, urged Boesak to reflect on the issue of forceful removals in his sermons.²⁰ This call of Meraai Arendse challenged Boesak's theological presuppositions fundamentally. For the first time Boesak strongly contemplated leaving the DRMC. Rev. Beyers Naudé, who by then had already left the DRC and was the director of the Christian Institute, persuaded Boesak that the DRC was "not telling the truth" about the Bible and its attitude toward racism. Naudé urged Boesak not to succumb to the *status quo*. Boesak followed this advice and later became known for his objection against the theological justification of apartheid.

Boesak, however, was not the first DRMC minister who objected to the scriptural justification of apartheid. Being a minister of the DRMC, Boesak knew of an earlier unsung prophet in the DRMC—namely reverend Isaac David Morkel (1910–1983)—who also opposed apartheid on scriptural grounds during 1948–1950 (Carstens 1959, 48–53). The

16 *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. 2004. Allan Aubrey Boesak. Encyclopedia.com. Accessed 1 June 2015. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3404700742.html>.

17 Boesak, A. A. 1984a. *Black and Reformed*: ix.

18 *Acta General Synod URCSA* 1998: 4/11.

19 "Group Areas Act, Act No. 41 of 1950. Forced physical separation between races by creating different residential areas for different races, led to forced removals of people living in 'wrong' areas, for example Coloureds living in District Six in Cape Town. Apartheid Legislation in South Africa." Accessed 3 March 2015. [scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/HIST/Apartheid Legislation in South Africa.htm](http://scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/HIST/Apartheid%20Legislation%20in%20South%20Africa.htm).

20 "Allan Boesak. 1945-." Accessed 3 March 2015. <http://www.litnet.co.za/author/erica-terblanche>.

DRMC, however, did not take heed of his call. As Naudé rightly said: “If only Christian people would stop shouting down their own prophets.”²¹ In 1950 Morkel and 26 members of the Rondebosch congregation left the DRCM to form the Calvin Protestant Church (CPC). The nationalist government suppressed the CPC.²² Rev. Morkel, other than Boesak, did not have the media on his side to construe him as a prophet against apartheid. The international community also then did not take notice of the Nationalist government’s tactics to suppress Morkel and his church. The DRMC ignored the fact that the constitution of the CPC was due to apartheid and the theological justification thereof. In the case of Boesak, numerous things happened on the international arena which ultimately played favourably to construe him as an apartheid activist. For instance, the United Nations General Assembly (UN) adopted a resolution on apartheid as a crime against humanity in 1962, whilst the WCC adopted its focus on racism at an assembly in Uppsala, 1968. The WCC launched its *Programme to Combat Racism* in 1969, in the 1970s and 1980s. The *Programme to Combat Racism* played a “highly visible and controversial role in international debate about white minority rule in Southern Africa” (Plaatjies-Van Huffel 2013a, 2). This prepared the way in the 1970s and 1980s for the young, well-articulated, educated black man to be propelled onto the national and international scene as an apartheid activist.

Boesak’s Engagement with Church and Society during 1982–1990

Boesak became recognised as a liberation theologian after the publication of his doctoral work, *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study of Black Theology and Black Power*, in 1976. “Boesak returned to South Africa shortly after the 1976 Soweto uprisings.”²³ Soon after his arrival he travelled the world as one of the most visible faces in “the fight against white minority rule”²⁴ and in so doing he brought the South African problem of structural racism and the “theological justification of apartheid to the centre” (Foucault 1972, 41). Allan Boesak rose to prominence during the 1980s as an outspoken critic and opponent of the National Party’s policies and played a pivotal role in the struggle against apartheid. He became known as a provident speaker and received numerous invitations across the globe to present papers or keynote addresses. During the course of time the media portrayed Boesak

21 “PBS Show Examines Apartheid.” *The New York Times*, Thursday 3 October 1985, Late City Final Edition: 26. Accessed 20 March 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/10/03/movies/pbs-show-examines-apartheid.html>.

22 25 October 1957, the Minister of the Interior issued the following regulations which suppressed the CPC effectively. Regulation 88, sub-regulation i) lays down that: “Any person who, without the approval of the Commissioner or the magistrate of the area concerned: a) Holds, presides at or addresses any meeting, gathering or assembly at which more than five persons in the area under the control of the Board of Management are present at any one time; or b) Permits any such meeting, gathering or assembly to be held in his house or on other premises or land under his control, shall be guilty of an offence. Sub-regulation ii), however, does make it possible for more than five persons to gather, without permission, for events such as funerals, weddings, political meetings presided over by M.P.s and religious services held by the established church or churches in the area, etc.” In Carstens, W. P. 1959: “The Dutch Reformed Church Militant.” *Africa South* 3 (2): 52.

23 *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. 2004. Accessed 1 June 2015. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3404700742.html>.

24 “Former Cleric Gets 6-Year Sentence.” *Times Wire Reports*. 25 March 1999. Accessed 20 March 2015. <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/mar/25/news/mn-20865>.

as one of the nation's most prominent anti-apartheid activists.²⁵ Some hailed Boesak as militant, whilst others saw him as a humanist or even as a saint.²⁶

The issues Boesak struggled with during the 1970s and 1980s were mainly regarding how to be black and Reformed.²⁷ As student chaplain at UWC, Peninsula Technical College and Bellville Training College for Teachers, he can be accredited for shifting the students' theological anthropology paradigmatically. His sermons at UWC were usually preached before a packed auditorium.²⁸ Even the security police and the media attended the services on a regular basis. One could dare to say that the theological contributions of Allan Boesak contributed majorly to the deconstruction of the fundamental basis of the dualistic theological anthropology embedded especially in the Reformed churches of South Africa.²⁹ Boesak begged for a theological anthropology in which the complete humanity of all people—regardless of race, culture, colour, origin, status or class—were freed from that which Boesak initially made his discourse. Boesak's sermons preached during the 1980s before a packed auditorium at the UWC (for example “Whence comes our help”; “Jesus and Pilate”; “Presence of the hidden God”; “In the wind and fire”; “Like an animal resurrection and insurrection”; “Do not be afraid of them”; “The law of Christ”; “The eye of the needle Jesus frees ... and divides”; “The King is Here”; and “The Finger of God”³⁰) were aimed at shifting students' theological anthropology paradigmatically. Usually after the sermons everyone concluded that Boesak's sermons had few equals.

Boesak's main focus was relevant preaching in the black context. The main theme of the sermons was the socio-political responsibility of Christians. His book, *Met die Oog op Môre: Briewe aan my Maats* (With the Eye on Tomorrow: Letters to my Friends) (1979), was nothing other than a guide to young people to introduce them, among others, to black theology, civil disobedience, black nationalism, and so forth. For the first time the Afrikaans Christian youth of South Africa had been introduced to numerous themes concerning social justice issues. The book, which is nothing more than an appeal for black nationalism, became a tool to deconstruct the white theological anthropology entrenched in the youth. Young people can, according to Boesak “Assist [t]he church to understand its task in the world of

25 “Key Cleric Seized as he Leads March near Cape Town”. *The New York Times*, Sunday 11 August 1985, Late City Final Edition: 1.

26 “PBS Show Examines Apartheid.” *The New York Times*, Thursday 3 October 1985, Late City Final Edition: 26. Accessed 20 March 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/10/03/movies/pbs-show-examines-apartheid.html>.

27 Boesak, A. A. 1984b. *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books; Boesak, A. A. 1984a. *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation and the Calvinist Tradition*. Cape Town: Skotaville Publishers; Boesak, W. (red.) 1998. *Vraagtekens oor Gereformeerdeheid*. Belhar: LUS Publishers.

28 All the sermons appear in *The Finger of God* (Boesak 1978 [1979]).

29 Whilst studying at Kampen, Boesak published *Coming Out of the Wilderness—A Comparative Study of the Ethics of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (1974a), as well as *Om het Zwart te Zeggen; Een Bundel Opstellen over Centrale Thema's in de Zwarte Theologie* (1974b). The article “The Courage to be Black” appeared in this volume. Boesak's *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power* (1976) can be regarded as his most important contribution to theology. Boesak sees the state/church as instrumental to the oppression of people.

30 All the sermons appear in *The Finger of God* (Boesak 1978 [1979]).

today. It is the Christian youth who should protect the church from stagnation, self-deception and fossilization” (Boesak 1979, 29). Boesak deals with the following themes in the book: “Met die Oog op More” (With the Eye on Tomorrow); “Prioriteite” (Priorities); “Bekering” (Conversion); “Die Goedheid van God” (The Goodness of God); “Die Groter Gehoorsaamheid” (The Greater Obedience); “Die Rol van die Jeug in die Kerk Vandag” (The Role of the Youth in the Church); “Die Christen en die Politiek” (The Christian and Politics); “Swart Bewussyn—’n Persoonlike Reis” (Black Consciousness—a Personal Journey); “Swart Teologie” (Black Theology); “Die Tekens van die Tye” (Signs of the Times); and “Die Hoogste Lied—Liefde” (The Highest Song—Love). During the course of time the youth, inspired by Boesak, became active participants—to the dismay of their parents—in the struggle against apartheid.

The issues that Boesak struggled with during the 1970s and 1980s were mainly with regard to being black and Reformed.³¹ Boesak contrasts white theology against black theology in a bipolar way. Black theology refers, according to Boesak, to a way in which black Christians understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the way in which the gospel addresses them and in which they try to verbalise and express their faith in Jesus Christ. Boesak paraphrases white theology as follows:

They learnt their theology from us. And in that theology there was through the years, no place for suffering, pain, the hope or doubt of black people. Not the voice of the slave, but the voice of the slave-owner was heard in theology. Not the pain of the oppressed, but the satisfaction and the power of the oppressor determined their understanding of the Bible, of God and people. This we call white theology. (Boesak 1979, 48)

Boesak presupposes that white people with their privileges, with their political and economic power, read the Bible differently to black people from their position of political and economic powerlessness. Unequal power relations and social practices consequently came into being through these white theological presuppositions, according to Boesak.

Boesak believes that the black church is dependent on a strange theology. Boesak distinguishes two theological streams of thought in the black church. There is the theology that the black church inherited from Western Christianity on the one hand; that is the theology of accommodation and silent acceptance. It entails an individualistic, other-worldly spirituality that has no connection with the realities of the world, other than regarding the *status quo* as God-given. This theology wants black people to accept their position as second-class citizens. The irony is, according to Boesak, that black people have accepted the heavenly-centred theology. According to Boesak, the black church is a church that is uncertain of her identity. He, in an eloquent way, urged the black church to embrace their authentic black identity as well as the theology of refusal. According to Boesak, it is a theology that refuses to accept the subservient status as God-given, a theology that

31 Boesak, A. A. 1984b. *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books; Boesak, A. A. 1984a. *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation and the Calvinist Tradition*. Cape Town: Skotaville Publishers; Boesak, W. (red.). 1998. *Vraagtekens oor Gereformeerdeheid*. Belhar: LUS Publishers; Loff, C. J. A. 1981. *Dogter of Verstoteling? Kantaantekeninge by die Geskiedenis van die Ned Geref Sendingkerk in Suid-Afrika*. Cape Town: LUS Publishers.

understands that the God of the Bible stands on the side of the destitute, and a theology that is against those who oppress or dehumanise people. Boesak criticised the influence of the DRC on the black Reformed churches: “I am thinking of the predominantly white image of the black church: in style, in witness, in commitment” (Boesak 1984a, 6). According to Boesak, white people provided the boundaries within which black people may act as discursive objects. Whites determined the possibilities and boundaries of black people’s human dignity. Boesak’s presumption was that boundaries were created by language and power discourses. According to Boesak, whites determined the whole lives of blacks; where and how they will live, who black people will socialise with, marry and how and to what level black people should be educated. Boesak is of the opinion that human dignity is a fundamental biblical right. Black people consequently rejected the idea that human dignity is an exclusive right of whites, and that whites should define and/or limit them. According to Boesak, blacks wanted to make it clear to whites that this whole process of the dehumanisation of blacks was sinful.

During 1982 Boesak attended the WARC General Assembly in Ottawa as a delegate of the DRMC. He had been requested by the WARC to prepare the Bible studies of the WARC General Assembly. It was, however, the motion Boesak introduced at the WARC General Assembly 1982 requesting that the WARC declare apartheid a heresy, contrary to both the gospel and the Reformed tradition, which ultimately propelled Boesak as anti-hero onto the South African scene. The Alliance adopted a *Declaration on Racism* and furthermore suspended South Africa’s white Dutch Reformed Church.³² From this point onwards Boesak was construed by the news accounts as one of the main spokespersons on apartheid. This was furthermore reinforced when Boesak, aged 36, was elected as President of the WARC General Assembly. Boesak held this esteemed position until 1991. His election put him in a favourable position to secure international attention to the plight of the victims of apartheid.³³

Shortly after this decision of the WARC, during September 1982, Boesak attended the Synod of the DRMC. Huge media coverage had been given to the synod’s deliberation on racism. At the said synod a bulky report on the *Programme to Combat Racism*, compiled by Dr A. A. Boesak, Dr H. M. Beets, Dr D. J. Smit and Prof. D. Cloete, was also tabled. After many deliberations the DRMC Synod 1982 declared that because the secular gospel of apartheid fundamentally threatens the reconciliation in Jesus Christ and every essence of unity of the Church of Jesus Christ, it constitutes a *status confessionis* for the Church of Jesus Christ. Dr Allan Boesak and Rev. Isaak Mentor as well as three lecturers from UWC, namely Professors Dirkie Smit, Jaap Durand and Gustav Bam, were appointed by the Synod of the DRMC to draft a concept confession of faith, known today as the Confession of Belhar.³⁴ The synod approved the draft as well as “an official accompanying letter which explained, among

32 *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. 2004. Accessed 1 June 2015. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3404700742.html>.

33 *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. 2004. Accessed 1 June 2015. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3404700742.html>.

34 Cf. Plaatjies-Van Huffel, M. A. 2013a. “Reading the Belhar Confession—As Historical Text.” In *Reformed Churches in South Africa and the Struggle for Justice—Remembering 1960–1990*, edited by M. A. Plaatjies-Van Huffel and R. R. Vosloo. Stellenbosch: Sun Press.

others, the attitudes and expectations behind the decision to draft a confession” (Plaatjies-Van Huffel 2013b, 3).

Boesak’s right to speak on behalf of others was accepted spontaneously by the former DRMC and DRCA as well as many ecumenical organisations during the 1980s. Among others, Boesak had been the founding member of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians; Advisor to the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group to South Africa 1986; Advisor to the Apartheid Commission of the UN; 1980s member of the International Commission on the Future of the United Nations; President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches; Moderator of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church; and President of the Association of Christian Students in South Africa. This base of national and international support subsequently protected him against some forms of governmental repression.³⁵ He met on a regular basis ANC and SWAPO members in exile.³⁶ The synods halls, ecumenical forums (for example the World Council of Reformed Churches; the South African Council of Churches; the World Alliance of Reformed Churches; the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in South Africa (ABRESCA); and the Belydende Kring served as institutional platforms from which Boesak made his discourse. The former DRMC and DRCA as well as ecumenical bodies like the Belydende Kring and ABRESCA declared that Boesak’s standpoint, as voiced in his collection of articles, statements and speeches and published in *Black and Reformed* (1984a), is the standpoint of the black and of the Reformed tradition in South Africa:

We believe that this book, which is a collection of important articles, statements and speeches written and made by Dr Boesak over the past few years, states very clearly not only his own position, but that of the black and Reformed tradition in this country. (Boesak 1984a, ix; 146)

Boesak had been regarded during the struggle against apartheid both in South Africa as well as abroad as the unqualified spokesperson of the black Reformed tradition in South Africa. His elevated rhetoric against apartheid swayed his followers, both black and white, to become opponents of apartheid. Boesak was inspired by Martin Luther King Jr., the American civil rights leader, on whom he modelled his style. Frequently when he addressed the crowds in South Africa the people chanted: “Boesak! Boesak! Boesak!” They usually carried him to the podium shoulder high in order to deliver his speech. Boesak was known for invoking his moral authority to speak against apartheid. Boesak gave a contemporary interpretation of being Reformed, and consequently extended to being black and Reformed. Boesak was of the opinion that the Reformation did nothing to change the theological anthropology of black people:

35 “Dit was uiters moeilik om vanweë druk uit die buiteland teen enige kerklike instansie of kerkleier op te tree.” Van der Merwe, J. 2012. *Die Belydenis van Belhar—’n Memorandum*. Accessed 20 March 2015. <http://www.praag.co.za>.

36 “Trustfonds vir Boesak-sake.” *Die Burger Ekstra*, 15 Mei 1986: 1. Accessed 20 March 2015. <http://152.111.1.87/argief/berigte/dieburger/1986/03/17/9/8.html>.

One of the most significant events in the history of the Christian Church, the Reformation, bypassed completely the black situation, and neither the Roman Catholic Church nor the new Protestant churches endeavoured to make black reality part of the fundamental changes, which had occurred then. Indeed, the Reformation did not change anything about the lot whites had prepared for black. (Boesak 1984b, 31)

Boesak became a prominent foe of the apartheid government and was included in a list of what pro-government forces called “troublesome priests.”³⁷ Boesak had been considered to be undesirable with a view to the maintenance of public order. In January 1983 Boesak advocated that all groups opposed to the government’s new Constitution should unite. Boesak’s opposition against the Constitution was based on “moral grounds since it excluded the majority of South Africans, entrenched apartheid and white domination, and accepted ethnicity as the criterion for politics in South Africa and ultimately played a pivotal role in the establishment of the United Democratic Front (UDF), an umbrella organisation for some 700 organisations representing about two million white, mixed-race, and black South Africans.”³⁸

Despite the fact that thousands of South Africans had been arrested, incarcerated without trial, released on bail, charged with subversion, charged with strict bail conditions and restricted to leave the country during the apartheid era, Boesak with his status as minister of the Word and his international stature and his charismatic leadership gave the media a rare opportunity to put a human face to the misery of the people of South Africa’s struggle against apartheid. For instance, when Boesak was arrested during the 1980s along with other people (many of them clergy) after defying a police order against attending a funeral in a black township near Cape Town, the story was published across the globe.³⁹ He was also accused of involvement in illegal gatherings.⁴⁰ His dear friend, Wolterstoff, had been a character witness on behalf of Boesak. Boesak was charged with three counts of subversion and released on R20 000 bail. His congregation, with the help of overseas donors, established a trust fund in order pay his and another activist’s legal expenses.⁴¹ Boesak’s bail conditions

37 “Church Clears South African.” *The New York Times*, Thursday 21 March 1985, Late City Final Edition: 3.

38 *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. 2004. Accessed 1 June 2015. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3404700742.html>.

39 “Key Cleric Seized as he Leads March near Cape Town.” *The New York Times*, Sunday 11 August 1985, Late City Final Edition: 1.

40 Boesak was detained on 27 August 1985, on the eve of a planned protest march to demand the release of Nelson Mandela, and was held for a month without charges. Boesak was formally charged and freed on bail on 21 September 1985 after nearly a month in detention. The charges related to calls by Dr Boesak for school and consumer boycotts and withdrawal of foreign investments. (“South African Cleric is Freed from Bail.” *The New York Times*, Saturday 21 September 1985, Late City Final Edition: 6.

41 “Boesak Vows to Keep Resisting Apartheid.” Associated Press, 23 September 1985. Accessed 3 March 2015. http://articles.latimes.com/1985-09-23/news/mn-19522_1_allan-boesak.

were flagged nationally and internationally.⁴² Cape Town Magistrate W. A. de Klerk later substantially relaxed Boesak's bail conditions, who had been charged with subversion. He dropped a ban on Boesak giving press interviews, attending funerals, speaking at meetings and leaving his local magisterial district without permission.⁴³ The fact that the South African government overruled a magistrate's court and withheld Boesak's passport, president of the WARC and a patron of the multiracial UDF, hit the world news in 1985.⁴⁴ The authorities did not immediately give a reason for the move, which prevented Boesak from traveling to the United States to accept the Robert F. Kennedy humanitarian award.⁴⁵

Boesak our Leader, we are not Throwing a Friend to the Wolves

The media brought all aspects of Boesak's life under its controlling gaze. During the late 1980s negative and sometime defamatory images were used by journalists to describe Boesak. As Elizabeth Castelli rightly says, language is never a neutral medium. It constitutes even when used to communicate or to reflect on the world (Castelli 1992, 205). During the 1980s the view the media portrayed of Boesak swung from saint to hero with feet of clay. Firstly, the Security Police had tried to discredit Boesak during 1985 by disseminating tape recordings said to have been made in bugged hotel bedrooms and purporting to provide evidence of adultery between Boesak and a white employee of the South African Council of Churches—then an offence in itself under the Immorality Act.⁴⁶ Allan Boesak was temporarily suspended from church activities in the DRMC Bellville South.⁴⁷ He denied the allegation, but had acknowledged a “relationship” with the lady. It later seems as if it was nothing other than a state-inspired smear campaign.⁴⁸ The DRMC therefore exonerated and reinstated him.⁴⁹ The DRMC embraced Boesak wholehearted during this ordeal as their leader. The news that Boesak had been reinstated as pastor of his local congregation in the

42 Ten conditions were imposed for his release, including that he not leave his home in Bellville South, a mixed-race area near Cape Town, between 9 PM and 6 AM or go outside the magisterial district where he lived without permission of the authorities. He had to report to the police daily and was also barred from addressing meetings of more than 10 people, with the exception of church meetings. He was barred from meetings with the press and had to surrender his passport. He was also barred from undertaking boycotts or drives for disinvestment, visiting educational institutions or attending funerals without police permission. The magistrate barred Boesak from communicating with state witnesses. “South African Cleric is Freed from Bail.” *The New York Times*, Saturday 21 September 1985, Late City Final Edition: 6.

43 “South African Radio Charges Distortions by Foreign Press.” *The New York Times*, Tuesday 5 November 1985, Late City Final Edition: 8.

44 “Weier hulle Paspoorte.” *Die Burger Laaste*, 12 Augustus 1986: 8. Accessed 20 March 2015. <http://152.111.1.87/argief/berigte/dieburger/1986/08/12/8/4.html>. “Saak teen Boesak Môre Hervat.” *Die Burger Laaste*, 18 September 1986: 3. Accessed 20 March 2015. <http://152.111.1.87/argief/berigte/dieburger/1986/09/18/3/3.html>. “Pretoria Blocks Activists’ Visit to U.S.” *The New York Times*, Wednesday 6 November 1985, Late City Final Edition.

45 “Pretoria Blocks Activists’ Visit to U.S.” *The New York Times*, Wednesday 6 November 1985, Late City Final Edition.

46 “Police Link with Smear on Boesak/South African Security Forces Implicated in Attempt to Discredit UDF Patron.” *The Times* (London), Friday 2 August 1985; “Man in the News; A Fiery Foe of Apartheid: Allan Boesak.” *The New York Times*, Wednesday 28 August 1985, Late City Final Edition.

47 “Church Clears South African.” *The New York Times*, Thursday 21 March 1985, Late City Final Edition: 3.

48 “Church Clears South African.” *The New York Times*, Thursday 21 March 1985, Late City Final Edition: 3.

49 “Apartheid Foe Kept out of Township.” *The New York Times*, Tuesday 26 March 1985, Late City Final Edition: 3.

DRMC Bellville South was published across the globe.⁵⁰ In 1986 the DRMC showed unwavering support for Boesak in electing him as their moderator. With the election of Boesak as moderator in 1986, an era of the conscious and/or unconscious acceptance of the theological anthropology of the DRC came to an end. The theological notions of the DRMC and the DRCA on race, ethnicity, apartheid, had been shifted by Boesak more than anyone else.

Boesak had been very opinionated on social justice issues and apartheid, and used the media to highlight the broader struggle of the people of South Africa. The DRMC, however, tried in vain to limit Boesak's authority to speak on behalf of the DRMC. The DRMC, like other Reformed churches, regulated in their Church Order who could speak on behalf of the church. In the DRMC it was unheard of that a member of the moderamen could have spoken on behalf of the church—least to say on international platforms without having the mandate to do so. Boesak, in his haste to flag the hardships in apartheid South Africa, overstepped these rules and regulations of the DRMC and eventually became a lone ranger. Soon Boesak as an individual—as portrayed in the numerous newspaper articles and not the DRMC at large—was recognised as an authority to speak on behalf of the people of South Africa. In his own denomination Boesak's image was confrontational. At one stage his own congregation in Bellville South lodged a protest against him.

However, the powers at bay did not rest. In 1990 Boesak's affair with a married white woman, Johannesburg television producer Elna Botha, had been reported by numerous newspapers. The media exploited this episode in order to construe Boesak as an immoral leader, fallen from grace. South Africans can still clearly recall the image of the newsreader, a distraught Colin Fluxman⁵¹ (then husband of Elna Botha), who tried his best to read the news on national television. He, however, was overcome by emotion as he read a report about the resignation of Allan Boesak, a leading "coloured" anti-apartheid clergyman. The programme was interrupted and Colin Fluxman was taken off the air.⁵² Boesak admitted that his 21-year marriage with Dorothy Martin had been failing "for some time now," but insisted that "nothing immoral" had taken place between him and Botha.⁵³ He resigned immediately from the DRMC as minister as well as from his position as president of the WARC and the SACC.⁵⁴ This episode had been described as scandalous by the press.

Boesak decided then to join politics as the political candidate for the ANC in the Western Cape. Boesak forfeited his status as minister of the Word and sacrament of the Uniting

50 "Church Clears South African." *The New York Times*, Thursday 21 March 1985, Late City Final Edition: 3.

51 He and Elna got married on 23 February 1990 and they have two daughters.

52 "Husband Breaks Down on TV over Boesak Scandal." *The Times*, Thursday 26 July 1990. "Colin Praat uit oor Elna Botha." *Beeld JHB FIN*, Dinsdag 10 Julie 1990: 3: <http://152.111.1.88/argief/berigte/beeld/1990/07/10/3/8.html>.

53 "A Scandal in the Cloister." *Newsweek*, 23 July 1990, United States Edition: 34.

54 "Boesak Quits World Church Post: Boesak Resigns as President of World Calvinist Church Group." *WORLD*, 13 August 1990. http://articles.latimes.com/1990-08-13/news/mn-627_1_boesak-quits-world-church-post; "Allan bedank binne dae uit al sy ampte." *Beeld JHB FIN*, Dinsdag 10 Julie 1990: 15. Accessed 20 March 2015. <http://152.111.1.88/argief/berigte/beeld/1990/07/10/15/5.html>.

Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) when he went into politics due to provisions made in the Church Order of the URCSA: “He/she accepts appointment to a political governing body, or if he/she makes him-/herself available as a candidate in a political nomination or election contest” (Article 3 of *Church Order of URCSA*). The ANC overestimated Boesak’s reputation to swing the vote in the Western Cape in their favour. He was unsuccessful in doing so. It seems as if Boesak’s authority to speak from a moral high ground withered when he was forced to resign his ministry after the press disclosed that he was having an extramarital affair with Elna Botha.

Consequently Boesak’s credibility suffered a great deal for some, but the freedom-loving people in South Africa kept on reminding themselves that without Boesak the dismantling on theological grounds would still have been a far cry. Therefore, they applauded it when they learned that in 1995 Boesak was named by the first democratic elected government of South Africa as ambassador in the first round of political appointments to overseas embassies. For them it was the rightful accolade bestowed on an esteemed leader. However, before Boesak could commence as ambassador in the Geneva headquarters of the United Nations he was met with allegations by The DanChurch Aid organisation that \$570 000, intended for the Foundation for Peace and Justice, had been misappropriated. With dismay the people in South Africa learned that Boesak’s appointment as ambassador was frozen while the allegations were investigated. Prayerfully they watched as things unfolded.

In an interview Rev. Llewellyn Macmaster, the scribe of the Regional Synod Cape of URCSA, stated emphatically: “We do not throw a friend to the wolves.”⁵⁵ These words summarised that a large part of the URCSA perceived Boesak as an esteemed leader prophet and a leading spokesman for the oppressed. Macmaster further stated that Boesak had been a role model for many in the URCSA. According to Macmaster everyone wants to imitate Boesak. With satisfaction the public took note that Boesak “called the allegations that he spent money from the foundation for personal use a witch hunt.”⁵⁶ He categorically denied “any personal involvement in the alleged misappropriation of funds. “Whatever monies I received over the years by way of either donations or a salary package, were given on the grounds of merit or agreement,” he said.⁵⁷

An inquiry ordered by President Nelson Mandela regarding charges that Boesak had stolen foreign donor money intended to help child victims of apartheid, cleared Boesak of criminal wrongdoing. The government said it found his management of donor funds negligent and sloppy.⁵⁸ President Nelson Mandela, however, requested Boesak to withdraw from the appointment as ambassador.⁵⁹ Some of those following the saga in the news then thought this would be the end of the story; that it would be possible for Boesak to take up a political

55 “Je gooit je broeder niet voor de wolven.”

56 “South African Ambassador Denies Misusing Funds.” *Jet*, 23 January 1995: 9.

57 “South African Ambassador Denies Misusing Funds.” *Jet*, 23 January 1995: 9.

58 “Final Church Leader Is Cleared.” *Sunday Times*, Late Edition, 23 April 1995: 16; “Boesak dalk in Ere Herstel: Ambassadeurspos in Portugal Moontlik.” *Beeld Laat*, Saterdag 22 April 1995: 1. Accessed 20 March 2015. <http://152.111.1.88/argief/berigte/beeld/1995/04/22/1/10.html>.

59 “Boesak to Lose UN Job in Aid Scandal.” *The New York Times*, Wednesday 4 January 1995: 1.

position elsewhere, but DanChurch Aid did not accept the government's report and decided to go ahead with a court case against Boesak, charging him with fraud.⁶⁰ Hundreds of devotees supported Boesak by attending the trial on a daily basis. Boesak's decision to decline to testify in the trial shifted his image to that of a martyr. In the end Boesak was convicted in the Cape of Good Hope High Court in March 1999 on "four charges of fraud and was acquitted on 23 other charges."⁶¹ An effective sentence of six years imprisonment was imposed.

In 2000 the Appeals Court of South Africa ruled that Allan Boesak had to spend three years in jail. According to Rev. Llewellyn Macmaster the URCSA had anticipated that it could happen but was shocked by the verdict of conviction. On a personal note Macmaster observed that members of the URCSA held Boesak in high regard. He said that for the new generation of ministers of the Word, Boesak would still continue to be a mentor. With gratitude Macmaster took note that much can be accredited to Boesak: "Maar op persoonlike titel wil ik wel zeggen dat we een groot respect voor hem houden." "Voor de nieuwe generatie dominees blijft hij een mentor. We hebben zoveel aan hem te danken."⁶²

Boesak was jailed in 2000 and released from a penitentiary after serving one year of a three-year sentence. On 27 May 2001 Boesak preached to a 5 000-strong crowd at His People Centre hours after his release. With gratitude cognisance had been taken that shortly after his release Boesak applied for a presidential pardon from Thabo Mbeki. With disappointment the public took note that the presidential pardon was not granted. "What, if any, could have been the reasons of the government for not granting presidential pardon to Boesak?" members of the URCSA asked themselves. On 15 January 2005 the URCSA took note with gratitude that Boesak had received a presidential pardon and that his criminal record had been expunged.

Meanwhile Boesak applied for reinstatement as pastor of the URCSA at the Permanent Judicial commission of the URCSA. During 2004 his application for reinstatement had been approved by the General Synodical Commission of the URCSA. Immediately upon approval of his application and legitimation he received a call to the Uniting Reformed Church of Piketberg, an impoverished rural congregation. He accepted the call and was ordained on Sunday, 30 January 2005. What a great day it had been for the URCSA to reinstate Boesak as minister of the Word and sacraments. More than 2 000 people and 40 ministers of the Word attended Boesak's inaugural service in Piketberg. They saw it as the welcome back of a great leader who would be able to lead the URCSA in addressing the numerous social justice issues at bay in post-apartheid South Africa. Walter Philander, pastor of the Uniting Reformed Church of Piketberg, stated clearly that the decision to re-ordain Boesak had "nothing to do with the presidential pardon he had received a few weeks earlier."⁶³ The process to approve

60 "Boesak Veg Terug: Soek Hoë Pos Maar Dagvaarding Gaan Voort." *Beeld Johannesburg Finaal*. Dinsdag 25 April 1995: 1. Accessed 20 March 2015. <http://152.111.1.88/argief/berigte/beeld/1995/04/25/1/13.html>.

61 Former ANC Figure Convicted of Fraud. 18 March 1999 | From Times Wire Reports.

62 "Je gooit je broeder niet voor de wolven."

63 "Ordained Boesak to Fulfil Prophetic Role." Independent Online (IOL). Accessed 1 December 2015. <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/ordained-boesak-to-fulfil-prophetic-role-1.232745>.

Boesak's application for reinstatement had started long before the announcement of his presidential pardon. Philander furthermore said: "Today we must set the record straight. Certain members of the South African media think we are here today because of the pardon by President Mbeki. That is not true. We are here today solely by the work of the Almighty God."⁶⁴ The URCSA, like Boesak, believes in the God of second chances. In a moving sermon Boesak addressed the economic injustice as one of the great ills of post-apartheid South Africa, the government for abandoning the poor and for failing to deliver a new South Africa to the majority of people in the country.

In the years to come the URCSA showed their unwavering support for Boesak by electing him as vice moderator of the General Synod of the URCSA in 2005 and in 2006 as moderator of the Regional Synod Cape. From this point on Boesak wholeheartedly devoted himself to the discourse about church reunification of the DRC family⁶⁵ and in the joint globalisation project of the URCSA and the Evangelische Reformierter Kirche. The latter project, spearheaded by Boesak, led to the booklet *Dreaming A Different World Globalisation and Justice for Humanity and the Earth: The Challenge of the Accra Confession for the Church*.⁶⁶ This can be seen as one of the largest gifts of Boesak to the URCSA.

In 2008 Boesak was appointed as the chair of a synodical committee of the General Synod of the URCSA, which had at task to clarify the theological and moral status of homosexual unions as well as the ordination of practising homosexuals into ministry. He tabled the report of the commission at the General Synod of the URCSA in 2008 in Hammanskraal. Boesak's premise was that the URCSA, based on the principles of the Belhar Confession, should embrace the full rights of gay members of the church. After a heated debate the Synod refrained from approving the recommendations of the Commission and referred it back to the Regional Synods of the URCSA for discussion. Compelled by his convictions for an inclusive community, Boesak resigned from all leadership positions in the URCSA. This event gave the media an opportune time to revert in construing Boesak as proponent for an inclusive society.

Conclusion

The poststructuralist assertion is that all meaning and knowledge is discursively construed through language and other signifying practices (Gavey 1989, 463). The media constitutes Allan Boesak and simultaneously constitutes the dominant prevailing discourse regarding his life and work. The dominant discourses underlying the meta-narrative of Boesak's life and

64 "Ordained Boesak to Fulfil Prophetic Role." Independent Online (IOL). Accessed 1 December 2015.

65 Boesak played a pivotal role in the church reunification talks as reflected in the efforts of the DRC Family since 2005, namely Esselen Park (2006), Bloemfontein (2006), and Achterberg I and II (2006 and 2007).

66 Boesak, A. A., J. Weusmann and C. Amjad-Ali (eds). 2010. *Dreaming a Different World: Globalisation and Justice for Humanity and the Earth, The Challenge of the Accra Confession for the Churches* (edited with Charles Amjad-Ali and Johann Weusmann); final report of the Globalisation Project, Stellenbosch, 2010 Accessed 3 March 2015.

<http://academic.sun.ac.za/tsv/downloads/Globalisation%2520report%25202010%2520proof%25203>. Pdf. See also *Globalisation: The Politics of Empire, Justice and the Life of the Earth* (edited with Len Hansen), Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2009; *Globalisation II – Global Crisis, Global Challenge, Global Faith* (edited with Len Hansen), Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2010.

work are apartheid and power relations. As Gavey (1989, 463) rightly says, individuals are not passive. Rather they are active and have choices when positioning themselves in relation to various discourses. The same is true of Boesak. Boesak refused to become a docile body—passive, subjugated and a productive individual of the apartheid regime; rather he resisted, rejected and challenged the regime and criticised the theological justification of apartheid.

Boesak occupied a prominent position as a minister of the DRMC and later the URCSA and was at the forefront of the anti-apartheid struggle. His oratory skill is without comparison in the South African context. However, Boesak, the celebrated, famous, renowned, distinguished, outstanding, reputed, notable, admired black liberation theologian, church leader, ecumenist, political activist, and humanist had been discredited by the same media that hailed him as a saint. As has been noted, Boesak cannot be redeemed by simply rereading or reinterpreting the numerous articles, letters, documents and books about him. As Gavey said: “There is no essential ‘true’ meaning that resides within the text: rather, different meanings are construed on every reading” (Gavey 1989, 466). Our understanding of Boesak is being delimited by our own location in the discourse. Above all, the two images of Boesak will prevail, depending with what presupposition you are approaching Boesak’s legacy; but for the URCSA he would remain the prophet without comparison who led his people from the wilderness to the Promised Land.

Taking into account the above, this article contends (with acknowledgment to Martel) in this festschrift to Boesak:

We owe you more gratitude than we can express. You gave our humanity back to us. We must confess: we as a faith community couldn’t have done it without you. We would like to say it formally: Allan Boesak, thank you. Thank you for fighting on behalf of us ... for those on the margins. Thank you for your relentless, justice-driven response to the ills of society. We wish you all the best. Your contributions will surely influence generations to come—that is certain. God be with you.

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