



EARL CALDWELL

Tutu challenges the Israel-S. Africa tie

NY DAILY NEWS 2/1/89

First they brought South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu to the front of the pulpit. There they put into his hands one

of the highest honors the synagogue has to give, the George Brussel Jr. award for human rights.

At the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue on W. 68th St., where only a few seats were left empty, all who were there stood, and the applause for Tutu rose until it became special.

"Courage and commitment is what the Brussel award is all about," Tutu was told. He was the 26th recipient. The applause was the congregation's way of saying it was an honor Tutu had earned.

For the role he has played in the fight against apartheid in his native South Africa, Tutu has made himself one of the most admired religious leaders in the world. Nothing has ever stopped him from using his voice and position to stand up to the regime. Whenever needed, Tutu has been there with the commitment and the courage to say (and do) what the situation demanded.

On Monday night, Tutu did not come to the synagogue on the upper West Side only to be honored. Again, he was called on to exhibit the courage that has earned him esteem, the Nobel Peace Prize and a good place in history. Before an audience made up mostly of Jews, Tutu was asked to speak about the unspoken—the relationship between the nation of Israel and the racist regime in South Africa.

In New York, where relations between blacks and Jews have been strained, the Israel-South Africa connection has been an explosive issue. So what would Tutu say? How far would he dare to go?

By himself, no matter how eloquent, Tutu cannot square matters between the black and Jewish communities. But it was in his hands to put a thorny issue on the table, and Tutu did exactly that.

"What a wonderful gift God gave us through the Jews," he said. "You have been a tremendous light to the world."

✓ "We give thanks to God for the Jewish people. Your history is our history. At home (South Africa), many of those in the forefront of our struggle have been Jews—and we salute them."

✓ But on this night, Tutu had two stories to tell. "We blacks in South Africa cannot understand how you (Jews) allow the government of Israel to have the relation-



Bishop Tutu

ship with South Africa that it has." He told of how the two nations collaborated even in matters that involve defense and nuclear know-how. "We cannot understand how Jews cooperate with a government that collaborated with Hitler,"

✓ Tutu also spoke of the price to be paid. "Black-Jewish relations in South Africa and the United States will suffer grievously as long as the Israeli-South Africa link exists," he said.

Before his speech at the Stephen Wise synagogue, Tutu had not spoken on the

matter. But once the time had come, he also questioned other Israeli initiatives. "I find it very, very difficult to understand Israel's policy regarding the Palestinians," he said. Tutu said descriptions of what is happening on the West Bank and Gaza Strip sounded to him like descriptions of South Africa.

He used more than an hour to make his case. Then he laid down a challenge.

"Press Israel hard for justice for the Palestinians," he said. "Press Israel hard to change its policy on South Africa."

After he had his say, Tutu looked into the audience. "All this comes from the heart," he said. Again, everybody in the synagogue stood, and applause began to build. The senior rabbi, Balfour Brickner, went to Tutu, put his arms around the black South African and for a long moment, the two embraced.

✓ "A powerful message," Brickner said. "Words that come from the heart go to the heart."

One speech will not change Israeli policy toward South Africa. Neither will it heal the deep divisions between blacks and Jews in the U.S. In time though, the speech Tutu made at Stephen Wise Free Synagogue may be looked back as a turning point. For old allies, it brought into the open a very big problem.

● Our Johannesburg Correspondent writes: The outlawed African National Congress is seeking a peacekeeping role to try to end black-on-black violence in South Africa's Natal province, which claimed two more lives on New Year's Eve.

More than 1,000 people have been killed in two years of bloody feud between supporters of the conservative Zulu Inkatha movement and of the radical United Democratic Front, which supports the broad political aims of the ANC.

It was reported yesterday that delegations representing the UDF and two of its major affiliates, the South African Council of Churches and the Council of South African Trade Unions, as well as Inkatha, have been invited to meet the ANC in Harare, Zimbabwe, on Jan 25.

The Daily Telegraph.
2nd January 1989.
London