



(AP) A framed portrait of former president Nelson Mandela and flowers are placed outside Mandela's Johannesburg home Friday, Dec. 6, 2013 after the freedom fighter passed away Thursday night after a long illness.

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The Faith of Mandela
By Tim Ahrens

I do not know the faith of Mandela.

Where did he worship?
How did he pray?
To which God he did cry from his prison cell on Robben Island
When he was tortured,
beaten,
torn in two by apartheid hate?
What was the faith of Mandela?

Did he pray to Jesus?
What about Buddha?
Where were Moses and Mohammed...
...when this son of Africa, this sun shining in the darkness of white hate was starving, forgotten,
forsaken, and left for dead?

I only know what Mandela did.
He saved the soul of South Africa.
He saved his people.
He refused to leave jail when his brothers and sisters were rotting there, when they had been
executed, tortured – like him – and thrown into the trash heap of hate.
He saved me.

That's right – he saved me. That makes him my savior.
While you may call this heresy, I call it hope.
His witness moved me and millions
from ignorance to action;
from complacency to divestment.
From my white middle class neighborhood,
I knew nothing about Mandela
while pumping gas and profits into
Shell Oil's Apartheid Machine
in the 1970's.

Then a German Exchange student introduced me to Mandela.
She was 17 and fired up by his witness for peace
from a prison cell on the other side of the world.
Was he Christian?
I wanted to know, I need to know...
She didn't know –
“but he sounded like Jesus,
he probably looked a lot like him
and he ACTED like Jesus!” she said...
“What more did I need to know?” she asked.
She was right....

So I started reading, listening, following....
I started praying for him, writing for him, marching for him....
I started organizing for him, fighting for him, singing for him....
Mandela got in my head, in my heart, in my soul,
Sounds like a savior to me.



Then he was free... South Africa was free.... I was free.
The Truth and Reconciliation trials proved that this man
And his people looked like the Christian I wanted to be.
Liberation was a joyful song,
a lasting melody,
freedom was a hard walk but was everywhere real to me –
in Mandela.
It still is.

So, now he will be laid to rest.
Now is one for the ages, for the sages, for the poets, for all people

But, what was his faith?
Was he a Jew?
A Muslim?
A Methodist?

We all want to claim Mandela as ours.
We want to reflect his light, life, and love.
We want a piece of his peace.
We want his quotes, his words, his essence to remain in us...
We want the faith, hope, love and peace of this man –
Even though he didn't go to our church, didn't pray in our synagogue, didn't pray in our mosque.



Maybe Mandela was simply a beam of light,
cast by God upon the earth for 95 years...
Maybe Mandela is all of us and none of us...
Maybe Mandela is faith for all time and love in our time...
Maybe Mandela is the true reflection of God –
At times angry, just, violent, and judgmental -
At times nonviolent, just, forgiving, peaceful,
present, smiling, kind, driven, hopeful....

Maybe the faith of Mandela doesn't matter
As much as the light which shined in the darkness
and still shines today.

Help us to have the faith of Mandela.
Then, maybe then, we will stop hating and start loving.
Then, maybe then, we will see you in all people...
Then, maybe then, we will see Light in the darkness.

Be light shining in us, O God.



We need Mandela's faith - whatever it was...

