



Graduation Address¹

Remember the past, invest in the future

Dit is 'n groot voorreg om vandag hierdie eredoktorsgraad van hierdie universiteit to ontvang. Ek sê hartlik dankie vir dit alles en waardeer dit baie. Ek glo dat ons almal saamstem dat die feit dat ek hierdie geweldige groot eer kry, 'n uitstekende voorbeeld is dat dinge in ons land baie verander het en dat transformasie aan die gang is.

Looking back

But it is true when you think of where we come from – that a few years ago I was regarded by most white South Africans as an ogre and they used to tell some delicious Tutu stories – like the one where I have died and I thought I was going to heaven. When I get there St. Peter informs me that I have to go to the other, the warmer, place to which I repair. A fortnight later, there is frenzied knocking on the pearly gates and when St. Peter opens them, there is the old Devil himself on the doorstep. St. Peter asks him, “Nou toe jong, what do you want here?” And the Devil replies, “Well, you sent Bishop Tutu down there – he is causing so much trouble that I have come to ask for political asylum.”

Could you imagine in those days any Afrikaans university being willing to risk the ire of its community by honouring me? Even the so-called open English universities showed considerable reluctance because many of their wealthy supporters would have been incensed had I been honoured in those days. Hence it is very eloquent testimony to the fact that something quite out of the ordinary has occurred in our beautiful land. It is as if a Prince Charming has kissed a revolting frog which has then been transformed into a gorgeous princess, not that I could be that princess!

As I was preparing this address I thought too of the recent bombing spree which most South Africans believe was the handiwork of a dis-

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gruntled fringe right-wing group. We have to condemn that outrage unequivocally though we should also ask whether there were genuine grievances that should be attended to so that we are not held to ransom by people who have been made desperate because they thought no one was paying attention to their anxieties, grievances and concerns. But what I wanted to point to is the remarkable phenomenon of the response of most South Africans. There has been no panic and the perpetrators must be very disappointed that they have not provoked a racist reaction in which black people turned on white South Africans in anger. We have reacted in a remarkably adult and mature manner in which a wide spectrum of leaders has spoken as one, and almost unanimously indicated that the perpetrators represented a very small group and that most South Africans of all races were committed to our new non-racial, non-sexist, democratic dispensation.

Now that is something for which to be immensely thankful. It could have been so easily otherwise, horribly so. A few years ago there might have been quite significant support in some white quarters, and there could very well have been a black backlash and we could have perhaps experienced the blood bath that so many had predicted for our land.

Do not fall victim to amnesia

Part of our problem is that we have far too quickly become blasé. We have far too quickly been afflicted with amnesia, we have forgotten what it was like when violence seemed to be endemic in our land and it appeared as if the Kempton Park negotiations would end up as a disastrous fiasco. We have been blessed with leaders who were ready to take huge risks as Mr. F.W. de Klerk did in February 1990, as Nelson Mandela did when he opted for talking rather than fighting, and a population that chose peace rather than war, reconciliation rather than revenge and retribution.

We should be a great deal more appreciative of what we have achieved, of what God has blessed us with. Just look at this fabulously beautiful land, achingly, breathtakingly beautiful as a natural spectacle with all its impressive array of fauna and flora, the envy of the world which is now flocking in droves to our shores. This land which not so long ago was a pariah being, avoided like the plague in a world in which South Africans had to skulk because they were really unwelcome because of the scandal of apartheid and its awfulness. Now we travel to all parts of the world and South African Airways does not have to go round the bulge of Africa. Outside Nairobi Airport there is a huge SAA bill board, which reads, "You are here and we are here too!" That is a huge achievement. South Africans walk tall with our flag emblazoned on their luggage and

often on their lapels because we come from Madiba's land, the statesman who towers head and shoulders above all political leaders in the world and is acknowledged as an unchallenged icon of reconciliation and forgiveness.

How blessed we are ...

I thought as I mused about our land how blessed we are not to live in countries that can be devastated by earthquakes as happened so recently in Italy or devastating veld fires as in Australia and California. Yes, we have huge problems: poverty, AIDS, unemployment, crime. And yet look at the world today – some of the most vicious race riots happen not in South Africa where it might have been understandable, but in Britain. Would you have wanted to live in the USA in Washington D.C. and be panic-stricken, scared of doing ordinary things like shopping or filling your car with petrol because of snipers who terrorised a nation; or be in a Moscow theatre, or Bali, or Northern Ireland where young children cannot go to school except with a heavily armed guard?

We have a lot to be thankful for. And we should be affirming ourselves, affirming our successes and accomplishments and then rolling up our sleeves to tackle the massive problems we still have in our land – problems that prevent us from becoming the scintillating success we have it in us to become.

Afrikaners have a remarkable history

You who are Afrikaners have had a remarkable history. You escaped British imperialism in your Great Trek and then you fought to be free in the Anglo-Boer War. You suffered grievously as in the concentration camps, a British South African invention. In a way that is what surprised blacks that with your history you could have supported the injustice of apartheid. Be that as it may, you experienced much deprivation and destitution with a massive problem of poverty. You prevailed. You overcame great, formidable odds. You eradicated poverty in your midst and you prospered prodigiously. You attained economic and political prominence.

Redistribute the good things we share

Now I ask you, please place your considerable skills and accomplishments at the disposal of your motherland. Use your magnificent talents and ability to help uplift your black fellow South Africans. Enter the fray with enthusiasm and zeal. Reconciliation will be for the birds if the wide gap between the rich and the poor is not narrowed dramatically and

speedily. Great affluence and luxury cannot exist easily or forever cheek by jowl with grinding poverty, squalor and deprivation. We owe it to ourselves and to our children and our children's children to engage with all our will and determination in transformation, in redistributing the good things of this earth. We owe it to ourselves to make sure that the shack dweller becomes a homeowner, that those who fetch water from a polluted stream have clean running water. This is not charity – it is eminent good sense, it is investing in the future, my future, your future, our future. As long as there are conditions which make people desperate when they are hungry, homeless, poor, without adequate education and health care, then no one can sleep comfortably. For these are the conditions, which are the fertile soil for producing the suicide bombers, the terrorist, the confiscator of farmland, and the desperate who think they have nothing to lose.

Help your fellow South Africans to become truly free, prosperous, contented and happy.

Defiant ones.

Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu