Archbishop Thabo Makgoba

Pastor to the Nation

The Most Reverend Dr Thabo Makgoba is the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town and Metropolitan of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa.

Born in Limpopo Province in 1960, he grew up in Alexandra Township, Johannesburg. He matriculated at Orlando High, Soweto, and in 1989 obtained a BSc degree from Wits, completing his studies for the Anglican ministry in the same year. He subsequently obtained his Honours and Masters of Education degrees in Applied Psychology and Educational Psychology, also at Wits University. He lectured for three years at Wits, during which time he was Dean of the historic Knockando Residence. In 2009, he was awarded a doctorate by UCT for a thesis entitled *Spirituality in the South African Mining Workplace*.

After serving several parishes in Johannesburg and the Eastern Cape, he was elected Bishop of Grahamstown in 2004, and in 2007 became the youngest person ever to be elected to head the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, succeeding Archbishops Njongonkulu Ndungane (1997 to 2007) and Desmond Mpilo Tutu (1986 to 1996).

He was awarded the Cross of St Augustine by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Dr Rowan Williams, in 2008 for his role in the design of that year's Lambeth Conference, and in 2009 he received the degree of Doctor of Divinity, *honoris causa*, from the General Theological Seminary of The Episcopal Church in New York.

Archbishop Makgoba is a man of deep faith and a pastor at heart. He went to Ficksburg after Andries Tatane was beaten and murdered by police during a service delivery protest in April 2011. He provided comfort and counsel to the people of Khayelitsha at the height of the divisive conflict concerning the lack of toilets and sanitation. He interceded in the xenophobic riots in various parts of the country and ministered to the parents of a child sucked into a culvert during flooding in Alexandra.

He is also an innately principled man. At Albertina Sisulu's funeral, in accordance with the request of the family, he used the Anglican liturgy, refusing to allow her burial to be absorbed into the political rally that followed. In the presence of the President and cabinet ministers who attended the funeral, he spoke out against political leaders who failed to live up to Mama Sisulu's moral values and behaviour. When President Zuma visited Bishopscourt as part of a meeting with the Western Cape religious leaders, Makgoba told him that as a leader "blessed with the power of influence" he has a special obligation to care for "the poor, the weak, the marginalised, the voiceless, the excluded" and to do so "in ways that give them unconditional dignity and respect".

Within the Anglican Church he has responded to the demands of leadership with a level of frankness and candour equal to the advice he gave the President. This has sometimes been at a cost to his popularity in sections of the church. He has confronted senior bishops and others judged to be guilty of maladministration and the misappropriation of funds, requiring the guilty persons to be relieved of their positions and in some instances to withdraw from active priesthood.

His job as Metropolitan requires him to oversee the work of the Anglican Church in South Africa as well as Angola, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, St Helena and Tristan da Cunha. He travels widely to keep abreast of developments facing the church and the wider public in these countries. He is also a keen participant in global ecumenical debate and serves as the chair of the Anglican Environment Network.

Journey to Bishopscourt

The Archbishop's childhood memories take him back to Alexandra Township in Johannesburg. "I can still smell the stench, the dirt of that dark city, my home, my roots, the source of my being," he says. "We drank goat's milk straight from the teat, and caught locusts and birds which we ate for lunch." His mother, Kedibone Elizabeth Makgoba went to Makgoba's

Kloof, the Makgoba ancestral home, for the birth of Seare Nthabiseng and Madiye Makhanyo, who became known as Thabo. They were taken back to Alexandra a short while later and it was there that his political and religious consciousness began to develop.

Makgoba reflects on the anger and the welter of emotions that his family felt at the time, which grew deeper with their forced removal to Pimville. He speaks of a "difficult relationship" with his father: "Apartheid ground him down, and I knew him as a man who felt failure – the failure of being unable to protect his family from poverty and forced removals; the failure of a marriage that included an extra-marital affair; the failure of an uncontrollable temper." Drained by the hardships of life, he died of a heart attack within a few years of the family being moved to Pimville. The family had no telephone in their township home and Makgoba recalls: "I ran non-stop for about 15 kilometres to the police station in Kliptown to report my father's death. When the yellow mortuary van arrived some time later, the family sang *Hamba nhliziyo yami, uye ezulwini* as my father's body was removed from the house. That memory is part of who I am."

Makgoba's Kloof is similarly embedded in Makgoba's formative memory. He remembers the impact of his father telling him, when he was still a young child, of the beheading of King Mamphoku Makgoba who had fought against boer forces. The boer government had recruited Swazi *impis* to assist them to dislodge the king's forces from their mountaintop fortress in 1895, and when King Makgoba was captured the Swazi *impis* cut off his head to prove to the boer generals that they had fulfilled their assigned task. "We are still looking for the king's head," Makgoba says, describing how he has taken his son Nyakallo and daughter Paballo to King Mamphoku Makgoba's memorial in Haenertsburg.

The Makgoba family in Makgoba's Kloof were also victims of forced removals by the apartheid government, and have recently regained possession of 59 farms through the Land Commission. Insisting on the right to maintain control over their ancestral land, the community now finds itself at loggerheads with the present government that wants to use this land for alternative development purposes. Makgoba talks of the importance of place – both ancestral and religious: "As Africans our memory, identity and sense of the sacred are embedded in place – in the soil, in our ancestral home and, given our history, in the church."

A further location of memory for Makgoba is Grahamstown, where he

studied for the priesthood at what was then St Paul's Seminary. "It was there that I tested my calling to the priesthood," he says, stressing that this Eastern Cape town, like so many South African towns, is "a place of two worlds – the town and the township directly opposite". Describing these two worlds he says: "You can smell the poverty; you can touch it. It changes my mood and my temperament every time I return to Grahamstown and Makana [township]."

These are the memories that shape Makgoba's ministry and his role as Archbishop. Asked to outline his priorities as Archbishop he says: "I see myself essentially as a pastor to both the church and the nation, mindful of the fact that I am required to fill the big shoes and big mitres of my immediate predecessors and others who served before them."

Service delivery of a spiritual kind

At the heart of Makgoba's ministry is a perception that "South Africa is in danger of losing its moral compass, sense of human dignity and the social skills required to engage one another with dignity and respect".

Referring to his personal need to ponder and dig deep into what it means to be human, Makgoba argues that, as we care for our physical bodies through healthy living, so we also need to care for our inner or spiritual beings. In deference to those who do not share his spirituality and faith he, on occasions, qualifies his comments on these matters by talking of the "broadly spiritual dimensions of existence". In so doing, the burden of his argument is clear. He insists that "to the extent that we fail to reach beyond the material and corporeal dimensions of life, we cannot hope to win the battle against corruption, bad service delivery and social inequality". This, for him, is a process that can be appropriated in a variety of different ways. His counsel is that: "We need to find time to read, to ponder, to meditate and to consider the world in which we live," adding that "those of us who are religious do so in prayer and worship".

He suggests that we too often define ourselves on the basis of what we *have* rather than on who we *are* as rational and spiritual beings with a capacity to aspire to those values that transcend and survive what the New Testament refers to as the things that "moths eat, rust destroys and thieves break in to steal". Makgoba's concern is that in coveting wealth, influence, power and domination of others we lose the capacity to be fully human and to build a society within which we can live in harmony with one another. He enjoins us

to stand aside regularly from the big and noisy things of life, taking time to address the smaller elements that underlie both the tensions and the successes of our existence. "It is around these basics," he says, "that community is built." He adds: "It is here that the moral fibre of a community emerges. We often miss these less obvious, causal ingredients of life that are given insufficient attention in the media, in our daily conversations and in what society sees as the defining marks of success."

Seeking to discern these less obvious realities of life, Makgoba prioritises pastoral ministry. He sees this as an essential part of seeing and recognising what he refers to as "the smaller ingredients, perplexities and pleasures that enable people to find mental, emotional and spiritual resources with which to overcome the challenges of existence". He contends that this is a difficult task for many South Africans to accomplish, not least because "the nation hitherto was dominated by one big problem, to which there was one simple answer – apartheid was wrong, and it had to go".

"Well," he notes, "apartheid has gone and democracy has come – and with it a society that has a range of issues on the table at the same time. These are often very complicated issues to which there are no simple solutions. They involve complex human relationships." Stressing that while there are still many big issues waiting to be tackled – HIV/Aids, poverty, corruption, unemployment, gender inequalities, as well as issues of sexual orientation and abortion among them – his priority concern is to "define the specific contribution of the church and other faith communities to the resolution of these problems."

Makgoba argues that corruption needs to be dealt with uncompromisingly through the courts, while suggesting that the fight against corruption is not primarily a procedural or a political one. "We need to eradicate it through a spiritual form of service delivery," he says. He sees this as being at the heart of a theological understanding of what it means to live in obedience to God and to what we have agreed to in our Constitution. He maintains that if we fail to deal with the higher dimensions of existence we, as a nation, are in danger of losing the battle against corruption, bad service delivery and social inequality.

Makgoba believes that we carry within ourselves an imprint of having been created in the image of God – which manifests itself in a form of moral intelligence. He argues that we are innately predisposed to live moral lives in harmony with others. The problem is that we stray from this moral

predisposition, becoming entrapped in material and other forms of instant gratification. This, he says, requires us to pause regularly amidst our daily lives to regain a sense of purpose and direction. He quotes St Augustine: "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee." The implication of Makgoba's theology is obvious. It requires us to align our political, economic and social lives with a God-given purpose that, he argues, is the only basis for realising what we as a nation committed ourselves to become in 1994.

A different kind of politics

This higher level of existence is for Makgoba an essential ingredient for promoting a savvy democratic debate and a robust contestation of ideas. His argument is that this can only happen within a context of mutual respect and an atmosphere that encourages us to explore new solutions to the problems we face. He says: "We must ensure that the tone of our debate and the words we use do not become a provocation for us or others to take refuge in the ideological pigeonholes of the past or the simplistic ideologies and slogans that characterise so much of contemporary political posturing. To call one another 'dogs', to brand Thabo Mbeki a 'dead snake' or to dismiss the critics of government policy as 'ultra-leftists' is not language that promotes open debate. Not all whites are 'racist' and not all blacks are 'incapable of governing'. We know that is not true, so why do we allow people to suggest it is? This kind of thoughtless racist talk gets us nowhere."

Makgoba suggests that the South African negotiated political transition, and the TRC in particular, provide a glimpse of a brand of politics worthy of emulation. "Our settlement," he stresses, "was far from a state of grace. Many of us in fact felt quite ambiguous about things. We were angry, at times bewildered and often puzzled. Rational thought and moral sensitivity, however, prevailed. We knew we faced no viable alternative and that if we were to have a reasonable chance of creating an alternative to intensified violence we could not put our opponents in jail, could not kill them and could not drive them into exile. Apartheid leaders would not have laid down their arms had they known that this was the fate that awaited them. We did not exactly forgive one another or say let bygones be bygones. We did, however, realise that we needed to coexist, to learn to understand one another and treat one another with dignity and respect. The tragedy is we have not adequately built on this endeavour. We have become forgetful of the crisis we faced. Racism

in its various guises continues, poverty persists and political conspiracies endure."

For Makgoba, "the failure of the post-apartheid state is not primarily a result of limited resources, incompetency or the lack of the necessary skills. It is a result of a lack of political will and purpose as seen in the compromised institutions of state, bad appointments to state institutions and a failure of leaders at various levels of society to pursue the creation of an inclusive society that transcends the racial, gender and economic divides of the past." He speaks of "the pains of the past and the agonies of the present", which include poverty, epidemics such as TB and HIV/Aids, poor education and social exclusion. He also speaks of the lack of sufficient resolve to free ourselves from the shackles of the past.

In the words of Nelson Mandela in his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*: "We must face the matter squarely that where there is something wrong in how we govern ourselves, it must be said that the fault is not in our stars but in ourselves … We know that we have it in ourselves, as Africans, to change all this. We must assert our will to do so, we must say that there is no obstacle big enough to stop us from bringing about an African renaissance."

A major concern for Makgoba is the loss of citizen engagement with a government that does not always show the level of moral and social commitment required to serve the common good. Makgoba's point is that all too often we fail to acknowledge that the emergence of effective government is dependent on the will and the ability of society to organise itself around its major concerns. He argues that it is only this level of engagement, between the governed and government, that can save the nation from further decline. He questions whether South Africans have the self-confidence to make the necessary demands on government. "Self-respect, self-confidence and a willingness to claim our rights as human beings, lay at the heart of Black Consciousness and liberation theology," he argues. "These are essential human rights and spiritual claims that each one of us needs to affirm, promote and celebrate."

He reminds us that we are created in the image of God and that at the heart of the injunction to love one's neighbour is the realisation that one's future is inextricably bound up with those of others. Turning to the African tradition, he argues that this kind of good neighbourliness lies at the heart of the philosophy of *ubuntu,* stressing that *ubuntu* is a less romantic philosophy than is often realised. He sees it as giving expression to a piece of political

common sense. It means we cannot afford to turn our backs on anyone who genuinely wants to be part of our community, provided that person is ready to accept the privileges as well as the responsibilities involved in being part of a family, a community and a nation. He insists that: "There is all too often a price to be paid by a community or nation that seeks to exclude someone on the basis of colour, creed or class. The story of apartheid has taught us this."

Constitutional and democratic governance

"We would do well to stand back on occasions, remembering that we are still a young democracy within which we need to find appropriate ways of living together after the long struggle against colonialism and apartheid," Makgoba notes. "We are also discovering that it is not easy to live with those whose values, cultures and social standing in life are so different from our own. We are discovering that no one group in this country can afford to say to other groups 'it is our turn to eat so stand aside and let us have our fill'. We are inextricably bound together and need to find a formula that enables us to coexist in a peaceful and mutually beneficial manner."

Makgoba quotes the former UN secretary general, Kofi Annan, who said: "No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime." We have taken the first step as a nation. The question is, how do we move beyond what we have already accomplished?

Drawing again on his theological resources, Makgoba applies the biblical notion of covenant to constitutional rule in the Harold Wolpe Memorial Lecture which he gave in November 2008. He draws on the Pauline teaching, abused and exploited as it has been by the apartheid government and other oppressive regimes throughout history, which teaches that "every person be subject to the governing authority" (Romans 13:1). In so doing, Makgoba emphasises that a covenant theology stresses that ultimate authority is not the authority of a particular government in a particular place. He sees this level of authority as coming from God alone.

It is this belief that inspired Christians, drawing on different forms of contextual, liberation and black theology, to resist the state theology of the apartheid era. In essence, Makgoba's concern is to find an appropriate and responsible manner in which to ensure that government and rulers are held accountable to the higher demands of God. Stressing that the present

government has been democratically elected with a broad mandate to serve the needs of all sections of the nation, he argues that Christians and others have an obligation to acknowledge its authority, without ultimately compromising or surrendering obedience to the authority of God. "We would do well," he suggests, "to ask ourselves whether out of a desire to show critical solidarity with government we have not, at times, shown too much solidarity with, and not enough criticism of, government."

He adds that: "We as a nation are still feeling our way into relationships appropriate to constitutional democracy. Government, political parties, the private sector, academia, the media, civil society and faith communities are each, in their distinctive and separate ways, making a contribution to the life of the nation as a whole. We are still discovering when to stand in solidarity, and when to be critical. We are still learning how to hold and exchange legitimately diverse perspectives. We are still learning both how to deliver and how to receive honest criticism." Makgoba suggests that the broad answer to these needs is to be found in the adaptation of the words of St Paul who counsels us "to be subject to governing authority". "In our case," Makgoba argues, "this means we need to be subject to our Constitution, which captures the broad principles of the teachings of the major religions of the world."

Makgoba traces the long history of covenant theology in the scriptures of the three Abrahamic faiths. He identifies three elements, which taken together, constitute the essence of good governance in South Africa and anywhere else. These are the "sanctity of life", the "dignity of difference" and the "integrity of the created world". These, he says, require us to be in solidarity with those whose lives are under greatest threat through poverty, marginalisation, lack of education or lack of health care, and with strangers who experience xenophobic attacks and other forms of exclusion.

Makgoba draws on the insights of the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, Sir Jonathan Sacks, who spoke to an international gathering of Anglican Bishops, at the Lambeth Conference in 2008. He summed up the differences between covenant and contract in four succinct points.

- Contracts concern our interests, while covenants concern our identities.
- Contracts deal in transactions, while covenants deal with relationships.
- Contracts benefit, while covenants transform.
- Contracts are about competition – if I win, you lose; while covenants are about cooperation – if I win, you also win.

Constitutional democracy, says Makgoba, is more like a covenant than a contract. This, he argues, is made clear in the Preamble to the Constitution that, *inter alia,* commits us to "recognise the injustices of our past … believing that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity". To this end the Constitution commits us, among other things, to:

- Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;
- Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law;
- Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person; and
- Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.

For Makgoba, the Constitution is more than a legal document. It is a promise we have made to one another as South Africans and to which we must hold one another accountable – as individuals, as ethnic, racial and economic groups, as the governed and as government. "The detail of how we realise the goals enshrined in the Constitution is what democratic politics is all about," he says. It has to do with how we live with our differences, how we transform the structures of the old into the beginning of something new, how we cooperate in realising this transformation, and how we hold accountable those who deviate from the Constitution and the laws under which we agreed to live. This means we have a solemn responsibility to assess our own lives, to monitor and critique the economic practices of the day, and take responsibility for the conduct of government through the ballot box and other forms of democratic participation."

Makgoba ended the Harold Wolpe Lecture with the words of Thomas Paine, the English political theorist of the 18th century, who said: "When it can be said in any country in the world, 'My poor are happy, neither ignorance nor distress is to be found among them; my jails are empty of prisoners, my streets of beggars; the aged are not in want; the taxes are not oppressive; the rational world is my friend, because I am the friend of its happiness'. When these things can be said, then may that country boast of its constitution and its government."

A country on the edge

"God is not finished with us." This is Makgoba's response to the inevitable question – where do we as a nation go from here? "In many ways we are a country on the edge," he says. "This means things can go any way – up or down. What is clear is that we cannot remain at the present level of existence. Things are too precarious to remain where they are. We need stronger ethical leadership that draws on the Constitutional promises and captures the hope that gave this nation birth."

In 2011 Makgoba visited a primary school in Alexandra on Mandela Day, a day set aside each year on Mandela's birthday for people to contribute something to the community to ensure that the Mandela legacy is carried forward. "There were young children as well as some parents, teachers and members of civil society present. The surrounds of the school were a big improvement on what they were when I lived in Alexandra, but there was also a sense of resignation, if not despair, among some people I spoke with. What could I say to that audience of children and adults? I tried to encourage them to have hope, not to lose sight of the prize of human dignity, to speak up when they felt undermined or those around them were acting badly."

Makgoba says he realised again on that day that children need tools with which to build a better society for themselves and others. He says: "This includes a decent education which embraces maths, science, language skills and the like. We must all raise our voices in support of educational reform to ensure that schools provide our children with basic technical and language skills to succeed in life. Unless we locate these skills within an ethical framework, which poses deeper questions about life's purpose, the human capacity for good and evil, and the need to choose between right and wrong, we are not going to build that 'better life for all' that politicians and others so easily talk about. The choice we face is a deeply spiritual one. We need to draw on the religious, cultural and historic resources that have shaped us and our constitutional democracy, of which we are so justly proud. It is a choice that is directly related to the commitment we made in 1994. It also has to do with shaping the future soul of the nation."