

Address to Graduates of the College of the Transfiguration

An address to the Graduation of the College of the Transfiguration, delivered at the Cathedral of St Michael and St George, Grahamstown, on March 19, 2014:

Lessons: Sirach 1:1-10; Psalm 19; and Matthew 28:16-20

I greet you all in the name of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen.

Dean of the Province and Chair of Council, Bishop Rubin, members of Council, the Rector, the Revd Canon Pityana, staff and students, the Bishop of Grahamstown and other bishops present at this historic milestone in the life of our Province and the College, graduates, your family members, invited guests, ladies and gentleman: Greetings!

What an honor and privilege it is to be here as Visitor of Cott to speak at this graduation ceremony and at the Inauguration of the college as it begins a new life as a duly registered higher education institution and with an accredited qualification. As a teacher and pastor who is striving to be a theologian one day, this is one of the greatest moments in my archiepiscopal journey. I just want to say out loud, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is gracious and ever faithful. He has carried us over the years and during the application phase and he will carry us into the future." Today, we come together to celebrate and rejoice at God's wonderful mercies.

So, thank you's are the correct place to start this address, which after all is about gratitude and a deep sense of appreciation. Let me start with you, Professor Pityana, for your robust leadership, your pragmatic spirituality and your reckless belief in God's purposes for you and the church. Without your firm hope and love for this church as well as your courage to affirm and yet to challenge, we could not have arrived at this milestone. When I approached Prof during a rugby match at Orlando Stadium shortly after your retirement from Unisa, I said the task would take a year to complete and was embarrassed that I didn't even have a stipend to pay you. Your humility, especially against the backdrop of what others were offering you at the time, and your acceptance of this life of sacrifice and poverty, have stayed with me. I am eternally grateful for your role and hope to learn from it too. Thanks also for our friendship and those emails or SMS interventions that always come at the

appropriate time.

The task has taken longer than I anticipated, and each time you have raised the succession debate, I have pleaded that I am not numerate and asked you, “Why are you raising the issue in your first year?” – even if it was your third year! In this way I have avoided the fact that one day I will have to face the prospect of appointing a successor to you. Thank you, Barney and Dimza, for serving the college, this city and the Province with such distinction. Thank you, Prof and your staff in your various capacities for enabling Cott to arrive at this stage. In my Charge to the 2013 Provincial Synod, I said that it is my dream that Cott should eventually be an Anglican university, dare I add that I pray it will happen sooner rather than later. Please join me in applauding Prof Pityana for his efforts.

To the Council, the Executive and the Chair of Council and all our benefactors, partners and students who make this institution succeed, thank you and please continue to be ambassadors of Cott, especially as it enters this new and untrodden path for the ACSA. We are writing church history and I hope someone will research and publish an account of this new phase of our witness and service to both church and society. May this place be a well from which we can draw true wisdom and where many will be formed to be sent to all nations to make disciples of them.

In our self-understanding of our identity as ACSA, we share publicly our vision that we seek to be:

Anchored in the love of Christ,
Committed to God's Mission, and
Transformed by the Holy Spirit.

We further commit in our mission statement that we will heed the Matthean command to grow communities of faith that form, inform, and transform those who follow Christ. In our list of stated priorities, we unpack how we propose to do this at Provincial level by identifying seven priority areas. There, theological education is second only to liturgical renewal for transformative worship. In fact, if you look at all the priorities, they boil down to the theological formation of all members of ACSA.

I can thus paraphrase today's lessons by saying that at a Provincial level, ACSA holds that true wisdom comes from obeying the command to make disciples for Jesus Christ and to fashion our lives in his likeness; that this starts with theological literacy and the formation of all ACSA followers; that true wisdom is nurtured by transformative worship, wrestling with God as we seek to interact with our context through his ways; and that this will be expressed through acting for the marginalised, taking care of the environment and being good stewards. These are the key priorities of our Province, which we hope will enable each one of us to be a disciple who is anchored, committed and transformed.

As we respond to the times we live in, what tools do we need to address the issues we face? What wisdom do we need, and how can we apply it as we make disciples of all nations in our secularising world? Are we to "baptise all cultures" and end up with a flawed syncretism? When can we say boldly as those formed for mission, "This is wrong," and "This is correct"? Does our wisdom teach us to be extra-sensitive to mission contexts, either so that we are afraid of pronouncements or that we are so dogmatic that we are afraid of engaging with difference? I guess the question is: do we have what it takes to fulfill our sent-ness as anticipated in the Matthew story?

Today, as I address these questions as they relate to what kind of priest we are training at Cott, and what our understanding is of the contexts in which they will be ministering, I want to share with you three broad issues that have occupied me over the last few months -- and some for longer than that. Addressing them, I believe, requires a relevant, disciplined and contextual spirituality, prayerfulness, wisdom and the courage to be humble. I have taken from what's on my desk, as I said, three areas: theological education and education more broadly; the coming political elections; and Uganda's new anti-homosexuality law.

Let me begin with theological education and formation. Now that Cott has passed a new milestone, a new set of questions is emerging, or perhaps old ones with a new impetus. Globally, the cost of theological education and formation is unaffordable. There is a call to review our model of dioceses funding theological education. The current "full stipendiary" model is proving

unsustainable and may need to be reviewed. The drop-out rate, especially of women clergy who are identified for stipendiary ministry within dioceses, is increasing.

Prof Pityana is exploring ways in which we could establish an endowment to fund theological education and formation and assist dioceses. Cape Town, for example, has established the Archbishop's Theological Education Endowment Fund because theological training and formation comprises the second-highest item of expenditure in our budget. We also need to explore how we can encourage families of ordinands to help in the training and forming of our clergy, and to explore options for funding training, including partnerships and ecumenical formation. For South African students, and with Cott's registration almost done, might student loans and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) be another option?

In terms of pedagogy or the modes of delivery, should we be exploring using practitioners in the field without requiring them to be present at Cott? The stipend that we pay lecturers inhibits us from attracting the young and recently-qualified. I am conscious that this is a life of sacrifice but the reality is that young people's sense of vocation is tied to material reward. Is this perhaps not another area in which we should be modelling and teaching selflessness and sacrificial giving among our clergy?

We need to explore the best that information technology can offer us, of course noting that nothing can or should replace human contact in the art of formation, for we are more than the acquisition of facts -- we model wisdom, which has at its core love, respect and using knowledge for the extension of the Kingdom. But we must make the theological education of all accessible beyond our site of delivery. Recently I launched at Bishops court the E-reader project in collaboration with Cott. This was a particularly exciting development, because it builds on a long tradition of educational pioneering at Bishops court: not only was it the place where Bishops School began, it was also the first home of Zonnebloem College, where the sons and daughters of leaders such as Maqoma and Sandile of amaRharhabe and Moshoeshoe of the Basotho studied. Later, Bishops court established one of the country's first electronic bulletin boards, used by Archbishop Tutu during the anti-apartheid struggle and it was there too that Archbishop Ndungane conceptualised and started the

Historic Schools Restoration Project.

It is my firm belief that theological education equips us to embody and proclaim the message of God's redemptive hope and healing for people and creation as well as to honour God in worship that feeds and empowers us for faithful witness and service. The modalities may vary due to our differing contexts but in spite of these contexts, we are all formed and sent to proclaim these eternal, changeless truths to all and to feed on and be fed by them. As you gather by now, for me theological education is not to create a band of the elite who are invisible in the week and audible on Sunday, nor is it a sanctuary for those who do not have the courage to face life's challenges. Quite the opposite. It equips us with wisdom, God's wisdom to be loving pastors and shepherds of all, fervent in prayer and seeking God, and dedicated in pursuing peace with justice without fear or favour. Equally, it equips us to know when not to act but to be present in a context of need and to hold God's people together as they seek God's wisdom themselves.

The next area that I want to reflect on is the coming elections. We have elections this year in three countries of our Province – South Africa, Mozambique and Namibia. This graduation is occurring in Lent, I can't recall the rationale, perhaps we should review this tradition and move graduations to November or December. But seeing that this is currently the case, what can we learn from the discipline of Lent as we approach these elections? Well, first, just as we spend time on Bible studies, we could go deeply into party manifestos and make choices on the basis of what will help people to flourish. We could also drink from our spiritual wells, engage with our consciences and be guided by these rather than by fear and blind loyalty when we make our mark on the ballot paper. And vote we must: too many people have suffered and died for you to stay away from the polls out of apathy.

In South Africa, we are seeing sporadic violence and the looting of property as political parties introduce a new and unacceptable mode of campaigning: that of physically confronting their opponents. We are also seeing disturbing signs of those who have tasted power using race, culture and ethnicity to manipulate voters, treating God's people as pawns to maintain their power and wealth. And we are seeing a lot of mudslinging as parties and their supporters accuse one another of failing to deliver services or create jobs. Last

week, the Human Rights Commission released a report in which they confirmed that poor provision of water and proper sanitation, especially for the poorest of the poor, is a legitimate "service delivery" concern. Without discounting the legitimate concerns of communities and while yearning for redemptive solutions that are hope-filled, I pose the challenge: Wouldn't it be wonderful in this wonderful country of ours if, instead of pointing at what others can do for us, we could focus on what we can do to make South Africa succeed? If instead of looking for what we can take, we could explore what we can give to make our country work?

As proclaimers of redemptive hope, we are called to understand our context at a deeper level. We have the responsibility of giving real life to God's world and to God's people. Are we in our different countries sufficiently equipped to engage with policies and programmes of the political parties, the strategies of wealth makers and the cries of those denied access to most resources? In the coming elections, as those graduating today are sent out to make disciples, how might this disciple-making pan out? How do we make the task of encouraging all registered voters to go to the ballot box part of making disciples? In Cape Town, I am part of the Electoral Code of Conduct Observer Commission – known as ECCOC -- whose task it is to act as referees to ensure that parties adhere to the code and that politicians are held accountable. Are you willing as Cott or in your ministers' fraternals to start something like ECCOC to help our followers to understand how to hold their elected officials accountable and thereby to enable us to make South Africa the best it can be?

In South Africa, we have prided ourselves on our free and fair elections. But now a cloud has been cast over our Independent Election Commission by an alleged conflict of interest involving the chair of the commission and a business partner from a political party. I hope that we will demand that this be dealt with urgently, to avoid the credibility of the IEC being eroded. And while I am talking about institutions created by our Constitution which play a vital role in our democracy, let me tell you what I said in the media yesterday in defence of South Africa's public protector, Thuli Madonsela.

We deeply regret that certain clergy have in the past week ganged up against the Public Protector in the name of the church, attacking her for her investigations into the IEC and the SABC. They have done so without adequate

knowledge of her reports and their intervention only serves to undermine the fight against corruption. It is also shameful to see the dirty tactics being employed by politicians against the Public Protector. There is clearly a coordinated campaign by those implicated in her reports to denigrate her office and its work. This threatens to undermine the legitimacy of an institution established and protected by our Constitution. We welcome the Public Protector's reports on corruption and mismanagement. We thank her for making the country accountable and transparent. Her office's work helps to develop our democracy, and I call on civil society to join the churches in defending it against the current assault.

Much has been achieved in a democratic South Africa over the past 20 years against the backdrop of apartheid, but much still needs to be achieved by all of us. Our political and business leaders and civic organisations also have a duty go into the mission field, as it were, and to serve others. There are huge disparities between the wealthy and the poor, and there ought to be less of the social distance which that creates. There should also be less lining of pockets by those who are connected with wealth and power, and less lecturing to the poor that they should be patient, work hard and not expect government to do things for them. Yes, I agree that people need to do things for themselves, but there is nothing stopping us as voters from letting them have our taxes as resources to do something with!

As we dig into our scriptures and walk more closely with God this Lent, let us pledge to serve our neighbour, to be courageous in speaking out where our elected leaders are corrupt, and to alleviate poverty by sharing more of our resources. As we develop theological insights and deepen our spirituality, let our love for God be evident in our intolerance of discrimination.

Let me now deal with the third and last area, one that has been with us for a long time and will continue to be until we have reached a godly consensus on the matter. I am referring to the debate around human sexuality. In this debate we as Anglicans in Southern face the same tensions within our own ranks as the Communion does internationally. We have two polarities: those who believe that homosexual relationships are not permitted by the Bible and others who believe that we should treat same-sex unions in the same way as we do heterosexual relationships. In addition, in South Africa – although not in

other southern African countries – our Constitution permits same-sex marriage and protects the rights of gay and lesbian people in just the same way as the rights of others are protected.

Our challenge therefore has been to respond to positions within the Church which are diametrically opposed and, in South Africa, to provide pastoral care to members whose rights to express their sexuality are protected by the Constitution. We have responded to this challenge by adopting the same approach as we did during the apartheid era in South Africa, when our Church was deeply divided on a range of issues, ranging from the ways in which we fought apartheid to questions such as whether to ordain women as priests. We have taken the position that our differences over human sexuality are not such basic issues of faith and doctrine that they should be allowed to divide us. We have maintained a strong commitment to talking through the issues over which we differ. People who experience their sexuality as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered are God's people, created in God's image, just as heterosexual people are, and in our Church we are committed to dialogue with one another over how we respond to the challenge of ministering to all of God's people.

The approach, however, of many of our sister churches on the continent is different. Now, I have to say that as Africans we have over the past two centuries been subjected to Western attitudes of cultural superiority, and I have no desire either to perpetuate such attitudes or to promote new attitudes which assume that we in Southern Africa have a monopoly on the truth. We should as a Province, therefore, be hesitant to preach to our brothers and sisters elsewhere in the continent. We should instead be offering them – and the Anglican Communion – our own model of dealing with difference: patient dialogue in which we wrestle with difficult issues for as long as takes to reach consensus on them. This must simply be an offer to act as a bridge -- we cannot, neither should we wish to, impose our model on anyone.

In 2010, the Synod of Bishops recorded its concern at Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill and said it saw the Bill as a gross violation of human rights. We said that as bishops we believe that it is, and I quote, "immoral to permit or support oppression of, or discrimination against, people on the grounds of their sexual orientation, and contrary to the teaching of the gospel; particularly

Jesus' command that we should love one another as he has loved us, without distinction." In that context, we cited John 13:34-35. Although the Bill was amended – in particular by removing the death penalty as a punishment– the law which President Museveni recently signed in Uganda continues to brand homosexuality as an offence. In its definition of the offence, it includes not only homosexual sex but says a person "commits the offence of homosexuality if... he or she touches another person with the intention of committing the act of homosexuality." And touching is defined as including touching "(a) with any part of the body; (b) with anything else; (c) through anything..." Under this section of the law, offenders are liable to imprisonment for life. Moreover, a person who attempts to, and I quote "commit the offence of homosexuality" or anyone who aids, abets, counsels or procures another to engage in acts of homosexuality is liable to imprisonment for seven years.

As Anglicans in Southern Africa, we are calling for an intensification of the dialogue over our response as Christians to the debate over human sexuality, both within Africa and in the wider Anglican Communion. And as we wrestle with the theological, moral and legal issues of the debate, our behavior towards one another must be modelled on the imperative to love our neighbour. The persecution of anybody, including minorities, is wrong. All human beings are created in the holy image of God and therefore must be treated with respect and accorded human dignity.

Finally, it only remains for me to congratulate those who are graduating tonight, as well as your families who have given you such love and support. Congratulations too to Cott on reaching such a great milestone in our time.

May God the Holy Spirit transform us, and lead us as well as equip us for the journey ahead into the mission fields into which he sends us. May we be gentle like doves and wise like serpents. May God's concerns be our concerns, and may God's pain be our pain until we find one another and the fulfilment of our humanity in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

+Thabo Cape Town