Monday, 27 October 2014

South Africa's New Struggle - Beyers Naude Memorial Lecture

A keynote address by the Most Revd Dr Thabo Makgoba, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, as part of the Beyers Naude Memorial Lecture Series at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University:

Vice-Chancellor, staff, students, members of the Kagiso Trust, members of the university community and of the wider Nelson Mandela Bay community: Good evening!

I am thrilled and honoured to be among you to give a lecture named for Beyers Naude, or "Oom Bey" as we knew him in the church community, in the framework of your current university theme of "promoting critical consciousness". I have entitled my lecture tonight "South Africa's New Struggle," and it is the example and inspiration of Beyers Naude which has emboldened me to address you on this topic.

Why do I say that? Let me start by telling you a little bit about Beyers Naude. Oom Bey was born into a staunchly Afrikaner Nationalist household. In fact his name spoke to the strength of this heritage. He wrote in his autobiography, "My Land van Hoop" (My Land of Hope), of how, if his parents had followed Afrikaner tradition, they would have named him after his maternal grandfather. But he was born soon after many Nationalists rebelled against the government at the outbreak of World War I in 1914 when the new Union government ordered them to fight against the Germans in what is now Namibia. One of those who died during that rebellion was General Christiaan Frederick Beyers, a famous Boer fighter and a former comrade-in-arms of Oom Bey's father. As a result, instead of being named after his grandfather, Beyers was named Christiaan Frederick Beyers Naude. His father later became a founding member and the first president of the Afrikaner Broederbond, and Beyers wrote of his enormous pride in becoming a member of that secret society in 1940 after he followed his father into the ministry of the white Dutch Reformed Church.

When the Sharpeville Massacre happened in 1960, Beyers was thus deeply immersed in the Afrikaner Nationalist community. But Sharpeville unleashed a series of developments in the churches which led to them repudiating apartheid and eventually to him resigning both from the Broederbond and his ministry, forcing him to step down from high office in his church. In a famous sermon preached to his congregation of Aasvoëlkop near Johannesburg in 1963, he used as his text the passage from the Acts of the Apostles (5:29), in which Peter and the apostles told the authorities at the temple in Jerusalem: "We must obey God rather than any human authority." Beyers, faced with an ultimatum to decide between the Christian Institute — an anti-apartheid group which he had formed — and his position in the Dutch Reformed Church, told his congregation that his choice was between obedience to his faith and obeying church authority. If he unconditionally obeyed the church, he said, "I would save face but I would lose my soul."

Beyers went on to face 20 years of harassment and attack by apartheid and its supporters. After the killing of Steve Biko in 1977, Beyers, a number of his co-workers and the Christian Institute itself were banned on Black Wednesday, October 19. But perhaps most important, he was cast out of his community, ostracised and vilified by his own people. The reason that I emphasise this is that although Beyers would have been the first to say that he escaped the intensity of the persecution visited upon black activists and fighters against apartheid, he experienced a unique kind of suffering — that of the rejection of the people among whom he had grown up and was living. He was not living in a community which was suffering together and therefore of like mind in deciding to act together. He had to turn around and confront his own people for the suffering they were causing others. So the quality in Beyers Naude that I want to highlight as exemplary tonight is his courage in speaking out against wrong when it was being perpetrated by people from within his own community.

In South Africa, we have made enormous strides in the last 20 years. We have a wonderful Constitution which not only protects our rights but says we are entitled to expect everything else which we count as achievements since our political liberation: the provision of housing, sanitation, water and electricity. We have hundreds and thousands of new houses and many new clinics. We really showed the world what we are capable of when we hosted the 2010 World Cup: the new stadiums, the upgraded airports and the improved roads. In areas where we have replaced mud schools, the new schools are first class.

Yet we all know that we are not where we should be, and that we face huge and growing obstacles to getting there. Our nation is surviving, but not thriving. Despite having perhaps the best constitution in Africa, the principles of democracy are being challenged every day. Despite two decades of progress, we have to acknowledge that there is widespread consensus that for the most part, our country is still not healthy, inequality is everywhere and there is an almost toxic pollution of public confidence and trust. The levels of inequality in our society are shocking. There are huge differences between the development of the wealthy parts of our cities and that nearly everywhere else. We live with massive disparities of income, largely based on race but increasingly based on whether you have made it into the middle class. Black economic empowerment in many instances is contributing to inequality rather than closing the gap between rich and poor. We are failing in our efforts to eliminate the desperate conditions in which many of our people live, creating potential for an explosion of anger if we do not move fast. The Department of Human Settlements reported last year that we still have a backlog of about 2.1-million houses. Even if people have houses, about 2.5 million of them don't have proper toilets. My children are embarrassed because I call myself the “toilet archbishop”, so determined am I to campaign for adequate sanitation for our people.

How did we get here? And where do we go from here?

First, let us acknowledge that the Church has failed to act with the courage that Beyers Naude showed, and to speak out when we have seen our political leaders failing. We have tried to work within our democracy by engaging with its institutions and following paths laid down for consultation and dialogue. That has been the right thing to do — but not at the cost of losing our prophetic voice. Beyers Naude, despite joining the first ANC delegation to meet the apartheid government in 1990, was clear that the churches needed to keep our prophetic voice. He said in 1996:

“People tend to say that now that we have a new government, now that we have a new Constitution, now that we have solved our political problems, for the time being, there is no prophetic role for the Church at the moment. I think [Beyers went on to say, that] such a perception is a very serious mistake.”

We have committed the mistake that Beyers warned us against. We have too often silenced ourselves by practising quiet diplomacy with those in authority, flattered by access to power and ready too quickly to acquiesce when we hear how difficult their task is. In the apartheid era, courage enabled students to ignore bullets and guns and to risk their lives to work for the ideal caring, compassionate society we dreamed of. But courage is fast dissipating in our society, fear seems to be enveloping all of us and if courageous voices don't speak out, there is no one to provide our ruling elite with a moral compass.

When our political leaders realised that they could not meet their well-intentioned promises, when they realized the assumptions which they had used to formulate a national vision had changed, they failed to be transparent and honest and to tell us that. Instead of treating us as adults, they began throwing blame around, pointing fingers and perpetuating fear. Fear has become the dominant emotional driver on many of our country's stages. Fear keeps us focussed on the past and worried about the future. Fear stifles our thinking and actions. Fear creates indecisiveness that results in stagnation. Every day we see talented people, leaders in all walks of life who procrastinate indefinitely rather than risk failure. Lost opportunities cause erosion of confidence,

and the downward spiral begins.

We have to bring to an end the failure of white South Africans to speak their minds, because when they keep silent for fear of being branded racists, they fail to contribute to solving our problems. We have to bring to an end the failure of black South Africans to speak their minds, because when they keep quiet for fear that white racists will exploit differences between blacks, they too fail to help solve our problems. Our future lies in our ability to rise above all of this. Haven't we languished down in the trough of despair and fear for too long already? It's been said: “Only when we are no longer afraid do we begin to live.”7

The most egregious threat to our democracy today is the insidious cancer of corruption. An alarming number of people are venturing down a path that promises short-term financial gain, embracing opportunities to enrich themselves and their families at the expense of their community and our nation. I cannot say it any more simply than that corruption is anti-democracy.

The late Neville Alexander put it this way in a book published last year, where he said that “our real concerns are the palpable signs of social breakdown all around us: the ever more blatant examples of greed and corruption involving public figures, who are expected to be the role models for youth.... the smug dishonesty, indiscipline and slothfulness of those who are paid to render services; the lack of respect for life- preserving rules.” He added, “in short, the mayhem and apparently suicidal chaos that ordinary people experience in their daily lives.”

Let's get some myths about corruption out of the way.

My Roman Catholic counterpart in Cape Town, Archbishop Stephen Brislin, has pointed out that corruption is not something new in South Africa; it is not something that has emerged only after our liberation. In a contribution to a booklet called *Interfaith Reflections on the Fight Against Corruption*, he notes that, and I quote, “the colonial past and our apartheid past were both highly corrupt systems.” He also points out that corruption is not only an issue affecting governments and politics. He writes: “[T]his is clearly untrue, as corruption can and does affect every level of society — business, corporations, NGOs and indeed churches themselves.” So, while all of must be concerned about corruption, no institution can be holier-than-thou about it.

Next, I am really puzzled by what President Zuma and his lawyers are reported to have argued in representations to the National Prosecuting Authority some years ago. According to City Press, which has seen an NPA analysis dealing with Mr Zuma's reasoning as to why he should not be charged:

“One of the reasons President... Zuma believed criminal charges against him relating to the arms deal should be dropped was because corruption is only a crime in a 'Western paradigm'. And even if it was a crime, [Mr] Zuma’s lawyers apparently argued, it was a crime where there are ‘no victims’.”

If this is the case, we have to ask what values — whether they be cultural, constitutional or faith-based values — the President and his lawyers used to come to that conclusion. Contrast what is reported to be their thinking with the following statement identifying who suffers from corruption:

“[Corruption] means that the state pays a higher price than it should, which takes money away from education or health care for the poor. Or it means the state accepts a poorer quality hospital or road or housing unit, which endangers the welfare of the population and particularly the poorest citizens who so often rely on that hospital or house. It is as simple as that.”

That statement was made by Mr Zuma's Minister of Economic Development, Mr Ebrahim Patel, in a contribution to the same booklet I referred to a few moments ago. The title of Mr Patel's article is: *“Fighting Corruption is a Fight For Social Justice.”* I couldn't have put it better myself.

And what can they be talking about if they are saying corruption is a Western paradigm? Presumably, this means that cracking down on corruption is somehow a Western phenomenon which is not appropriate in Africa. Actually, I think it's the other way around. Corruption is a two-way street, a two-way transaction. For corruption to happen, you have to have a corrupter, someone willing to pay the bribe, and what I will call a "corruptee", someone willing to take a bribe. For Africans, over the 50 or 60 years since liberation, the Western paradigm — if indeed there can be said to be one — is one in which Westerners have been the corrupters, and African elites the corruptees.

Let's turn away from talk of Western paradigms, and look for an African paradigm. We need go no further than a declaration adopted by Africa's heads of state and government at a summit in Maputo in 2003. Its title is AFRICAN UNION CONVENTION ON PREVENTING AND COMBATING CORRUPTION.

In the Preamble to the Convention, the African leaders of government say, and again I quote, that they are "concerned about the negative effects of corruption and impunity on the political, economic, social and cultural stability of African States and its devastating effects on the economic and social development of the African peoples." Clearly, they agree with Minister Patel. (As an aside, might I ask our President: Does he?)

In Article Three of the Convention, signatory states say they will abide by the following principles:

- "Respect for democratic principles and institutions, popular participation, the rule of law and good governance.
- "Respect for human and peoples' rights in accordance with the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and other relevant human rights instruments.
- "Transparency and accountability in the management of public affairs.
- "Promotion of social justice to ensure balanced socio-economic development," and finally:
- "Condemnation and rejection of acts of corruption, related offences and impunity."

The Convention goes on to describe in detail the acts of corruption to which it applies, which I won't read here, but in case you are interested I will append the text to the copy of this speech on my blog, as well as a link to the Convention.

Corruption is paralysing progress across South Africa today. We all know about the high-profile cases which dominate the headlines, whether they concern Nkandla or provincial departments here in the Eastern Cape. But for every one of those cases, there are many more — I am sure it is thousands across the country — which go unreported. The moral compasses guiding our leaders and public servants are misaligned.

Corruption contaminates, pollutes and degrades our Constitution. In behavioural terms, if you are pro-democracy, you must also be anti-corruption. If you behave corruptly or make a corrupt decision, you are opening the door to losing the fight for democracy. I was once told by an elder that we each have two wolves in our lives, representing our conscience. We have one wolf on our left shoulder and one on our right. Each of them whispers into an ear. And the wolf that we feed is the one that survives.

I believe in the separation of Church and State. But we have forgotten the bond between our religion and democracy. We in the churches have been surprised by suggestions from politicians in recent years that we should refrain from commenting on political issues. Leaders of the liberation movements had no problem when the Church was involved in politics in the apartheid era. But

now that those leaders are in power, some of them are using the same language as the leaders of the apartheid government. I believe that Church and State have a dual responsibility in which we must each play our role, and religion plays a pivotal role in stabilizing and strengthening our democracy.

Why and how critical is religion is to the functioning of democracy? The reason democracy works is not because the government is designed to oversee everything everyone does, or ensure that every need is met. Democracy works because most people most of the time choose voluntarily to obey the law and therefore to work within structures and parameters designed to ensure that we find consensus and agreed mechanisms for making decisions. In my life I have been blessed to travel across Africa and also visit many democracies around the world, and I have made one key observation: those who attend church, synagogue, mosque, temple regularly, and are taught by religious leaders whom they respect and who teach values-based decision making, overwhelming voluntarily follow a deeply personal set of values and also all of their countries' constitutions, rules and laws.

They operate on a very simple principle: decisions based on sound values are good decisions, and good decisions have good consequences. Decisions based on bad or non-existent values are bad decisions and produce bad consequences. Or to put it very simply: people know that even if the police don't catch them, God will catch them. So their fundamental values become: be honest in everything you do; respect other people's property; celebrate the differences in people; and never take something from someone else that is not yours or that you have not earned. It's what I might call values-based religion. Without values-based religion as a foundation, no society can work. Democracy will not work. If CEOs don't follow values-based honesty, business will fail to achieve its critical role in society. The government can try to police everyone, but it's hard and there is no way to police honesty.

Too many organizations are trying to push religion out of the country's focus and public eye. Faith bodies are the very institutions that protect our civil rights. If religion loses its authority over the lives of South Africans, what will happen to our democracy? Where are the institutions that will teach the next generation that they must voluntarily obey the law because it's always the right time to do what's right? If you take away religion, you cannot hire enough police!

We can do better in South Africa. We must do better. And we will do better if we ask ourselves, our family, our neighbours and our country: What are our values? Why are they neglected in public life? We need to rediscover the core values of our struggle and then we must live by those values. Our political leaders must start to focus on making value-based decisions.

But it's not only up to the politicians and the faith community: the whole of society, not least those of you in the educational and academic community, must play our part in bringing about what I have previously called a “Renaissance of Trust and Responsibility”. The former Truth and Reconciliation commissioner Alex Boraine suggests that civil society played a key role under apartheid, and that under what he refers to as a “failing state”, civil society remains equally important. In assessing what has gone wrong with South Africa's transformation process, Renier Koegelenberg, the Stellenbosch expert on religion and community development, argues similarly that the responsibility lies with all of us — government, business, trade unions, citizens and civil society — and the sooner the governing elite realizes this, the better the prognosis for South Africa.

In fact, the government’s own “National Development Plan 2030” acknowledges the importance of all South Africans working together, stating that “South Africa needs leaders that work together. To successfully implement the NDP, the country needs partnerships across society working towards a common purpose.”

As we enter the third decade of our democracy, we must reflect on what we can learn from our country's “great struggle” of the last century and ask: Are we not again confronting the reality that

we can achieve equality only if we embark on a second “great struggle”, the “New Struggle” of my lecture title?

In some ways, we stand where we stood 20, 30 and 40 years ago. Many of us seem to operate in separate spheres, held apart from one another in the silos in which lived and worked before 1994. Or where we have tried to break out of the old patterns, we have made wrong decisions, or failed to take decisions at all, and hence the pervasive inequality persists. Despite the changes, despite the talk, despite the policies we advocate, disadvantaged South Africans and Southern Africans are still suffering from inequality.

Our families and children still experience inequality in education; our communities are victimised by the inequality in health care; women are increasingly abused because of the inequalities which plague their lives; every day we read about pervasive inequality in service delivery; and there is inequality in addressing the unemployed and underemployed.

But in my opinion, the greatest, most serious inequality is the inequality of opportunity. And it is here that we can see the interrelationship between all of the other inequalities. Access to opportunities is an important predictor of future outcomes. Access to quality basic services such as education, health care, essential service delivery infrastructure (like water, sanitation and electricity) and early childhood development provides an individual, irrespective of background, the opportunity to advance and reach his or her unique human potential.

What did Madiba spend his entire life fighting for? Fundamentally, one word: equality. Isn't it time that we again rise up together as a nation, as a community of communities, to ask, “Is this the best we can do?” and then to reply, resoundingly: “NO”.

We can do better. We will do better. We must do better to give our children a chance. So, where, why and how does the New Struggle begin?

It starts by agreeing that that it begins with the rational and emotional acceptance that after 20 years of democracy, we need to regain our moral compass. We need, as I said when I led a march on Parliament earlier this year, to turn ourselves inside out and expose our sense of moral consciousness to the sun. The sun, the light, is God's disinfectant and will help us cleanse ourselves. It will help us become morally disinfected so that we can recapture the dream we had when Nelson Mandela was inaugurated 20 years ago.

The New Struggle requires that you, who in my mind and heart represent millions of honest, hard-working, South Africans, must come together to realise the potential of this blessed country. It takes integrity to acknowledge we can do better, but it takes courage actually to do better. It takes courage to follow the example of Beyers Naude, and to say to our comrades in our first Great Struggle: your faulty moral compasses are leading us astray.

The power of a country lies in the capacity which relationships generate. Positive or negative national energy is determined by the quality of relationships and the respect in which those relationships are held. Those who relate through coercion, or in disregard of others, create negative energy. Those who are open to others, and who see others in their fullness, create positive energy. Positive energy will frame the answer to the question, “What kind of nation do we want to be?"

The New Struggle is about one word with two letters: “WE".

What do I mean by that? Let's start by asking ourselves: do we live in a “me” country or a “we” country? For most of us the answer is that we unfortunately live in a “me” society. Over the past two decades, we have lost many of our traditional values, and our culture now tends to organise itself around and reward the “me". In our consumer culture, “we” isn't popular. We are slipping away from the values of ubuntu.

In a “me” society, we ask: what are “my” and my family's and friends' needs and aspirations, not what are “our” needs and aspirations as a society. To take an example from this Province: If the astounding allegation is indeed true, that the topmost leaders of a city — leaders from a party once led by Nelson Mandela — diverted money meant for arrangements for his funeral to their friends and for their own personal gain, does that reflect a “we” society or a “me” society?

A “me” country is an “I-centered” country, characterised by cultures that are high on fear and low on trust. People don’t feel or believe they can speak honestly and contribute ideas and opinions freely. Organizations, ministries, departments preach team-work but many “team members” and “team leaders” operate as lone wolves. As a result, we suffer from the high cost of low trust.

In “me"-based societies, leaders, elected officials, those who operate at provincial, city or township level feel they have to protect their territory. As a result, these “leaders” are perceived as ineffectual or autocratic and self-protection is the dominant feeling. Anxiety, frustration and resentment are the common emotions found in “me"-centred societies like ours.

For South Africa to flourish, we need to move from “me” to “we”, asking not what I can do, but what we can do, together, to meet not my needs or those of my immediate circle, but our needs, and to work for the common good. “We"-focussed societies bring out the best in their citizens. “We"-centred leaders are characterised by caring, courage and vision. Environments that foster “we"-centred behaviours encourage diversity of thought and expression of feeling. They encourage risk-taking and tolerate “failure.” “We” cultures support sharing. They are dedicated to fairness and the achievement of the full potential within everyone. They open opportunity,

And, I might add, a “we” society does not stop at the borders of our country. We are a global community and can't separate ourselves from the world's ills while we focus on ours. So we might say that the recent war in Gaza, as well as the conflict in what is called the “Holy Basin” of Jerusalem, benefits the “me” in that situation and not the people as a whole. That part of the world too needs what I am calling for in South Africa — a renaissance of courage and trust.

As religious leaders, as believers, as business leaders, as union leaders, as public servants, as civil society leaders, as government leaders, as neighbours, as a democratic, constitutional, values-based society, we have to work to replace “me” with “we” in our thinking for South Africa and our world to prosper and triumph. We must decide that “we” can do better. We need a national dialogue to recover and reach consensus on our values and we need to hold our leaders — all our leaders, in whatever sphere — to them. We need to teach those values to our children or inequality will continue to be pervasive in our society.

For South Africa to grow and fulfil her potential, for all of us to grow and fulfil our potential:-

“We” must replace “me”;
"We” must rise up and say, “We” can do better!
"We” must step up and say, “We” must do better!
"We” must lead and show, “We” will do better!"

Appendix:

Article 4 of the AU corruption Convention: *Scope of Application*

1. This Convention is applicable to the following acts of corruption and related offences:

(a) the solicitation or acceptance, directly or indirectly, by a public official or any other person, of any goods of monetary value, or other benefit, such as a gift, favour, promise or advantage for

himself or herself or for another person or entity, in exchange for any act or omission in the performance of his or her public functions;

(b) the offering or granting, directly or indirectly, to a public official or any other person, of any goods of monetary value, or other benefit, such as a gift, favour, promise or advantage for himself or herself or for another person or entity, in exchange for any act or omission in the performance of his or her public functions;

(c) any act or omission in the discharge of his or her duties by a public official or any other person for the purpose of illicitly obtaining benefits for himself or herself or for a third party;

(d) the diversion by a public official or any other person, for purposes unrelated to those for which they were intended, for his or her own benefit or that of a third party, of any property belonging to the State or its agencies, to an independent agency, or to an individual, that such official has received by virtue of his or her position

(e) the offering or giving, promising, solicitation or acceptance, directly or indirectly, of any undue advantage to or by any person who directs or works for, in any capacity, a private sector entity, for himself or herself or for anyone else, for him or her to act, or refrain from acting, in breach of his or her duties;

(f) the offering, giving, solicitation or acceptance directly or indirectly, or promising of any undue advantage to or by any person who asserts or confirms that he or she is able to exert any improper influence over the decision making of any person performing functions in the public or private sector in consideration thereof, whether the undue advantage is for himself or herself or for anyone else, as well as the request, receipt or the acceptance of the offer or the promise of such an advantage, in consideration of that influence, whether or not the influence is exerted or whether or not the supposed influence leads to the intended result;

(g) illicit enrichment;

(h) the use or concealment of proceeds derived from any of the acts referred to in this Article; and

(i) participation as a principal, co-principal, agent, instigator, accomplice or accessory after the fact, or on any other manner in the commission or attempted commission of, in any collaboration or conspiracy to commit, any of the acts referred to in this article.

Posted by Thabo Makgoba at 19:00