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Desmond Tutu Peace Lecture

Cape Peninsula University of Technology

"Ethical Leadership in both *Kairos* and *Chronos* Time"

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The Most Revd Dr Thabo Magkoba, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, presented the Desmond Tutu Peace Lecture at CPUT on 15 October 2010

Full Text below

Vice Chancellor, Professor Mazwi-Tanga, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a great privilege to be giving the Desmond Tutu Peace Lecture this morning.

Thank you Ms Njoli-Motale, for your warm introduction and kind words. I thank the Cape Peninsula University of Technology and the South African Council of Churches for the invitation to address the theme of ethical leadership, and what it takes to be a good and effective leader in our times.

There is a famous passage in the Hebrew Scriptures – which Christians call the Old Testament – in the Book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 3, which says:
For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted
a time to kill, and a time to heal
a time to break down, and a time to build up,
a time to weep, and a time to laugh
a time to mourn, and a time to dance …

… and so the passage continues, until it ends
a time to love, and a time to hate
a time for war, and a time for peace.

We must ask ourselves, what sort of times do we live in now?

Surely we seek a time of peace, of planting, of building up, and healing?

But what also of the unfinished mourning and weeping from our past, and of breaking down those aspects of our inheritance which still need to be broken down?

Answering these questions leads us to today's central question – if these are our times, then what sort of leadership, ethical leadership, do we now need?

Let me stay with the Bible a little longer, as a means of getting under the skin of my questions.

In the New Testament, in the Greek of first century Palestine, there are two words that speak of time.

The Leadership of Kairos Time

One is *kairos* and the other is *chronos*.

Let me start with *kairos.*

Kairos became an iconic word during the struggle era, through the issuing, 25 years ago last month, of 'The Kairos Document – A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa'.

It was so significant and influential, that numerous other Kairos Documents have since been written around the world, from Central America to Kenya and Zimbabwe; and most recently, Palestine.

All address a particular urgent need. All focus on a moment in time that has the potential to be a tipping point, a chance for turning the tide – if only we take hold of it.

This is *kairos* time – a pivotal point, perhaps of crisis or threat, perhaps of opportunity. It calls for a decisive response, for speaking out and for acting.

The Kairos Document of 25 years ago spoke into just such a time.

A state of emergency existed. Oppression and violence were at unprecedented levels. Thousands were in detention; some suffered torture and death; and others went missing, or were banned, restricted, deported or forced into exile. There was an 'almost total black-out' of honest news coverage.

Sometimes it is hard to convey to those who were not part of it, quite what we experienced.

Believing that *kairos* time comes with the promise of blessing, if we grasp the opportunities which God presents – the churches realised that, into this dire situation, they had to speak out loudly and clearly the authentic word of God, the true gospel of Jesus Christ with his promise of good news for all who suffer.

Therefore, most importantly, this had to be done ‘bottom up’ and not just ‘top down’.

This was not a task for those bishops, clergy and academics who were cushioned in ivory towers.

It was for those who lived and pastored in townships and countryside, who experienced the daily realities of these hardships. It was a task for the theologians of the university of life – both ordained and lay.

A deep and honest critique emerged, which stated the difficult truth that Christians were in reality divided, even within denominations, over apartheid and how to respond.

It challenged the Churches to grapple with three ‘theologies’ which it identified: ‘state theology’, ‘church theology’ and ‘prophetic theology’: two which supported or contributed – perhaps unwittingly – to the unacceptable status quo; and one that declared God’s better way.

Today I want to look at what these three theologies might mean in our own time, and the vital lessons we can learn from them for ethical leadership – whether or not we are Christians or people of faith.

The Leadership of Chronos Time

To do this we must return to the question of what sort of times we live in today.

Life is not as it was 25 years ago.

The era of democracy is closer to the other sort of time of which biblical Greek speaks, *chronos* time.

This is measured, not by stark crises and opportunities, but on watches, in diaries, through calendars.

Politically speaking, we mark the returning seasons of elections, party congresses, annual budgets and each new tax year.

Leadership in such a time is far less about grasping pivotal moments (though these may still arise) – and far more about persevering for the long haul.

It is less about heroes of the hour – it is more about those who are prepared to put in the long hard grind, and steadfastly hold to their goals, their principles, their values, as the ups and downs of life roll steadily on.

Chronos times call for ethical leaders who will keep on upholding the highest standards in public and private life, day by day by day: leaders who have demonstrated that they have earned and deserve our trust – and to whom we can look to lead and guide us through the evolving changes and challenges of our country.

We need people of determination and persistence, on whom we can rely, on the long and often daunting journey we still have to make, to continue moving from the oppression of the past to a country of true equality for all – not just the equality of a ballot-paper for every adult, but the equality of economic justice and fair opportunity for everyone.

This is the destination for which we strive.

The Right Goals of Human Living

In this respect, the goals of kairos and chronos are much the same.

Ethical leadership should always direct us towards providing a better context for human beings, as individuals, and within society, to live well – to flourish.

By flourishing, I do not mean that we are all entitled to an opulent lifestyle.

Not at all! Indeed, we know in theory – even if we have not acknowledged it yet in our behaviour – that our planet cannot sustain 6 billion people pursuing the capitalist, consumerist lifestyle which the advertising world implies is our right!

Human flourishing is something far more fundamental – and must be open to everyone. This is why we also use the term ‘the common good’.

It is rooted in what it essentially means to be human, and what, in such terms, are our basic human rights.

These begin with a necessary standard of material well-being – adequate food and clean water, housing, clothing, health-care and so forth; with particular provision for the very young, the very old, the sick and disabled, and other vulnerable individuals unable to look after themselves.

They also include access to decent education, which opens up opportunities for employment, and brings each of us the dignity of having some choice in our own destinies.

The common good also entails a stable, safe, just, society which accords everyone respect materially, emotionally, spiritually, intellectually.

Now, if you are wide awake, by now you might have spotted that I have just described human existence as encompassing heart and soul and mind and physical embodiment.

I hope this has reminded you of words of Jesus, who said that humanity is created 'to love God, with all our hearts, minds, souls and strength'. This is, he said, the first commandment of being human – being created by God in his image.

More than this, God further dignified the human person through the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity – or, in less theological language, God became a human person in Jesus Christ.

Thus every human individual, without exception, is intrinsically deserving of being treated with dignity and respect – indeed, with honour akin to that due to God himself.

And creation – the planet and all life on it – must also be treated with the reverence and care that is due to the handiwork of God.

The teachings of Jesus give further instruction on how we should live – doing to others as we would have them do to us. This principle, often known as the Golden Rule, is of course shared among those of many faiths, and none.

This attitude underlies the second great commandment – that we should love our neighbours as ourselves.

We should direct our lives towards ensuring that others are in receipt of what we would like for ourselves – especially where those others face any sort of need or vulnerability.

Within this ethical context of mutuality and reciprocity, Jesus came, he said, to bring 'life in abundance'.

Therefore this 'abundant life' cannot possibly be understood as the affluence only of some, at the expense of others.

Abundant life consists in the fair and equitable availability of the material, spiritual, emotional and intellectual provisions which I have outlined.

Ethical leadership must promote all this – in both the crises of our lives, and daily routine; in both *kairos* time and *chronos* time.

One does not have to share the underlying Christian reasoning, to share in this conviction.

Our own Constitution, in making provision of equitable space for everyone, no matter what our beliefs, reaches the same conclusions.

Intrinsic human worth, lived out and enjoyed by individuals and in community, is the right of every citizen, every resident within our borders.

And it is the responsibility of our nation's leaders to guarantee it, through the policies set by politicians and administered by public servants – and, where necessary, through the legal system where these fail.

While secular human rights theory may root itself in very different principles, its conclusions are sufficiently close to Biblical concepts of appropriate human flourishing for there to be fertile common ground for collaboration in forwarding these goals.

Whatever our religious or philosophical starting point, we can always begin a conversation around the essential question of what it is to be human and to live decently; and how we achieve it more fully for our population.

Furthermore, in such conversations, we increasingly have no option within this globalising world of ours, but to recognise that our obligation to be 'good neighbours', in promoting reciprocal flourishing, applies not only to those near by, but to all across space and time – whether those who share our global village today, or those who will inherit our legacy in generations to come; and this must include responsible care of our environment.

In consequence, since human well-being encompasses every aspect of human existence, there is no reason to consider that faith communities should confine themselves to promoting the common good in some artificially defined 'private realm' while the public sector is left to its own devices.

Kairos Theologies and Chronos Theologies

However, since not everyone agrees the voices of religious communities should legitimately be heard in the public space, perhaps I should give a little more justification.

In doing so I want to draw on lessons from the crises of our *kairos* past and apply them to the *chronos* of democracy.

Earlier I mentioned that the Kairos Document identified three theological approaches – state theology, church theology and prophetic theology.

Each, I shall now argue, finds new forms in our changed circumstances – but the dangers of the first two, and the challenges of the third, remain with us, even if we must learn to recognise them with new eyes.

State Theology

The Kairos Document described how the apartheid state used Scripture and theological concepts to justify racism, untrammelled capitalism and totalitarianism.

Using the Bible this way (and I quote) 'blesses injustice, canonises the will of the powerful and reduces the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy' (unquote).

The starting point for this was a passage from St Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 13, which begins with these verses:
'Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resist what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement…for it is God's servant for your good' (Rom 13:1-2, 4).

Taken literally and superficially, these verses do indeed seem to offer an absolute and divine legitimacy to any state; to offer justification for any form of 'law and order' required to maintain that state and its rulers; and to condemn anyone who stands against them.

But there is truth in the saying that 'any text without a context is a pretext'.

We cannot just rip verses out of the Scriptures to suit ourselves, without taking into account everything else that lies between the covers of our Bibles.

Therefore, as the Kairos Document pointed out, we must also pay attention to the many examples of God's people and God's prophets standing up against oppressive rulers and unjust state practices.

Even the quote from St Paul begs the question of whether a particular authority really is acting as 'God's servant for the good' of its citizens, as it is called to do.

Today we recognise that apartheid was fundamentally opposed to the purposes of God, of abundant life and the full breadth of opportunity for human flourishing open to all.

But what of our current democratic system?

The preamble of our Constitution ends 'May God protect our people' and then the words 'God bless South Africa' are repeated in many of our languages.

And its provisions, especially in Chapter 2, the Bill of Rights, closely mirror the essentials of human existence which I have outlined.

Does this mean that the words of St Paul wholly apply? – that government can expect its citizens to unreservedly support whatever they do; and especially the ANC and its partners, since they were the ones who brought in this new political era?

Should faith communities let government get on with the business of politics, and stick to matters of worship and personal piety?

Is our task the so-called 'moral regeneration' of the country, only coming into the public arena to denounce crime, and argue that the laws of the land must be upheld unquestioningly by all?

Well, all this would be to fall into very much the same trap of 'state theology' as before, even if our context is so changed.

A good Constitution gives no one a 'divine right' to rule!

Government must not expect the religious sector and other struggle partners merely to offer unconditional support in this new era.

Nor can they unilaterally set the agenda for dealing with the faith communities, through bodies such as the National Religious Leaders Forum, or the National Interfaith Leadership Council – even at times expecting us to be a sort of mouth-piece in support of them, within our own communities.

The same is true of other civil society bodies that were partners in the struggle, but who are also now called to act independently for the common good.

For democracy does not mean that instead of an unrepresentative minority holding all the power and wielding it in its own interests, another minority – though technically representative of the majority – gets to do the same instead.

Democracy is a completely different way of doing politics: where everyone has a voice. We must all hold one another accountable to the highest aspirations of our Constitution, and to the vision of common good and human flourishing that underlies it.

Government must expect critique – and the rest of us must offer it – because open, honest, transparent policy making, and free debate around it, are the best way of seeing the issues, analysing the needs, and formulating and delivering effective policies to address them.

It goes without saying – but I will say it anyway – that the so-called Protection of Information Bill is a disgrace to our democratic aspirations.

Leadership – whether of coalition partners or opposition political parties, of academia, of the media, of civil society organisations, and of the faith communities, must always be directed towards this goal.

When government are working clearly towards these objectives, we must support them – and when they fall short, then we must offer the sort of critique that insists they move in a better direction, and helps them do so.

Church Theology

This brings challenges not only to the state's understanding of itself and the leadership role it plays within democracy, but also to the way the Churches, the faith communities, and others, comprehend our role in these new times.

In the extreme conditions of 25 years ago, the Kairos Document criticised mainstream churches and their leaderships for being too limited, too cautious in their critique of the state – despite understanding apartheid to be wrong.

Rather than engaging in in-depth analysis of the 'signs of the times', there was too much reliance upon superficial and uncritical application of a few stock ideas derived from Christian tradition.

In particular the Churches' right desire for peace and reconciliation was not adequately matched with demands for justice, repentance and change. There was too much emphasis on individual morality and not enough on just social, economic and political systems and practices.

Sometimes it was merely the case that those in leadership in government and in the faith communities, were just too close to one another, with shared backgrounds, lifestyles, and social connections.

But, including through the influence of the Kairos Document, Churches increasingly came to work closely with others in the struggle; and today there are many lasting personal ties across society.

Often religious and civil society leaders, politicians and business people bump into each other on political occasions, at sporting events, in social gatherings, even on aeroplanes. We are members of the same extended families. Our children go to the same schools.

We all benefit from the opportunities available to the middle and upper economic classes: enjoying our nice suburbs, shopping at Woolies and Pick 'n' Pay and then going home to watch DSTV or surf the internet; and

sharing our shock at the scandals revealed on Carte Blanche or in the Mail and Guardian.

But what are we actually doing to make a difference where it matters, to support those for whom all this is unimaginable luxury?

It is not surprising that religious leaders face accusations that in seeing ourselves as 'critical friends' of government, we have often been far too friendly and nowhere near critical enough.

True, we stood shoulder to shoulder together in the struggle, in our shared desire for human flourishing.

But now we need to ensure that human flourishing, rather than sharing in the struggle, important though it was, remains the central issue.

This should be clear, if we only read the Constitution, or return to the pages of the Bible.

It is implicit in Jesus' own self-understanding, that he came to bring good news to the poor, and liberty to the oppressed (Lk 4:18) – no matter what form impoverishment and oppression take, whether in material or spiritual terms, or emotional well-being, or the structures of society.

It is far more explicit in some of the Old Testament prophets, who, in their condemnation of self-serving and corrupt leaders, continually warn religious leaders against being compromised in their association with power and influence.

For example, the prophet Micah declares:
'Its rulers give judgement for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets give oracles for money; yet they lean upon the Lord and say "Surely the Lord is with us, no harm shall come upon us!"' (Mic 3:11).

There is warning for South Africans here.

We often speak of God's blessing in bringing us into a new era without a bloodbath – but we cannot take God's blessing into the future for granted, if we are not ready to be his instruments to ensure his blessing on all.

Prophetic Theology

Let me now turn to what the Kairos Document has to say about Prophetic Theology – the sort of theology it advocated for that time of crisis, and which we now must appropriate for our own era.

Given that I am in a university, a place of study and learning, let me read the following key passage:

‘Prophetic theology differs from academic theology because, whereas academic theology deals with all biblical themes in a systematic manner and formulates general Christian principles and doctrines, prophetic theology concentrates on those aspects of the Word of God that have an immediate bearing upon the critical situation in which we find ourselves.’

This is a warning to all of us who love theological studies – and also for all who major, academically and professionally, in political studies or economics or social sciences or any other discipline that relates to the life of the world!

The message is this – where does the rubber hit the road?

Where does our studying connect with the needs of those for whom the coming of democracy has not brought abundant life, freedom of choice, human flourishing?

This is the crunch for ethical leadership.

We, who have positions of authority and influence may indeed generally find ourselves in a *chronos* context – working through stable structures of governance and democracy.

But we must do so in the service of those who still live with *kairos* urgency – in crisis times of inadequate food, shelter, clothing, health-care, education, and so much more that we take for granted.

Even clean water from the tap! I was shocked to learn recently that the Department of Water and Environmental Affairs acknowledges that in South Africa over 100 children may die daily from diarrhoeal diseases, largely a result of poor water and sewage provisions

It is so basic – so why do we not address such fundamentals with far, far, greater urgency?

The greatest risks of leadership today are not of missing the window of opportunity – they are more often about complacency.

Yet it takes strong, courageous, committed individuals to provide the leadership of integrity necessary for these times of so-called normality.

This is leadership often behind the scenes, over years; content to proceed through small gains achieved through steady perseverance, not one-off great and decisive victories; without the adrenalin of the moment, with little promise of glory in the public eye.

But, if we are not to fall back into the traps of ‘church theology’, and the thinly disguised patronising attitudes with which it so often unwittingly

comes, we must do more than merely work ‘on behalf of’ those we consider less well off than ourselves, within existing systems and practices.

We need to turn the uncompromising eye of the prophet on these also, and ask ‘Whose interests do they primarily serve?’

Are we content with political, economic and social structures that are more geared to upholding our own comfortable lives, than to delivering human flourishing to those who most lack it?

Of course, this may not be popular with voters who aspire to the comfortable life!

But once one has achieved even very modest levels of material well-being, more money is no guarantee of increased happiness, as studies increasingly show.

We need to change the debate, as Pope Benedict attempted to do in his visit to Britain last month. He posed to young people the challenging question, ‘What sort of society do you want?’

There is far more to life than individualism and conspicuous consumption. Attempting to define ourselves by our wealth and what we buy, or though our status and influence, will not bring deep or lasting satisfaction.

Leaders of our Times

Nor is this what leadership is about.

True leadership is not for the personal gain of those involved – an opportunity to maximise the benefits for oneself and one’s family and friends.

It is not about 15 minutes of fame – like a prize supermarket dash, where one races through the aisles trying to stuff as much as possible into one’s trolley before one’s time is up.

Whether we find ourselves in politics, in business, in academia, in the media, in civil society organisations, or the faith communities: leadership must be about serving the interests of the nation as a whole – and especially the needs of those who still do not have access to the basic necessities of a good life.

This is the leadership of servanthood – to put our lives on the line, for the wellbeing of others.

We have seen one of the most remarkable examples of this in Luis Urzúa, the leader of the 33 Chilean miners trapped underground.

He held them all together, especially during the terrible 17 days before contact was made – days when death seemed closer than life.

He provided the structure, focus, and discipline they needed, so that every single one was supported through the crisis.

The strength of his character was such that it came as little surprise to learn he would be the last one of the 33 out of the mine.

How many of our political leaders would show such selflessness, I wonder?

Yet we should not just imagine that he was a man of the moment who sprang from nowhere to meet this crisis.

He had been a miner for three decades – three decades during which he developed the habits of behaviour and character which earned the trust and the respect of his colleagues.

And when crisis came – he was ready to step up: and others recognised and followed his lead.

Madiba too, spent his long apprenticeship in jail – which shaped him for the pivotal task of leading us into a new era.

We should form our lives through the same commitment to a life of doing what is right, in the right way, for the right reasons, in the service of humanity now and through the future of our planet.

We must do so as individuals, and corporately – for example, the ANC and other political parties must come to see servant leadership of the nation as the vocation of the whole party, and not merely of leaders acting as individuals.

Furthermore, we must choose our leaders not on the basis of their connections – but on their fitness for office, in terms of both qualifications and experience, and of character and track record

It must be normative to expect the highest values, the truest morals, the best standards, and to see congruence between public and private lives.

Conclusion

Let me end with a challenge to all of you here today.

Each one of you has the opportunity to be a leader – perhaps not in big or public ways.

But all of you, through the choices you make or fail to make, will influence people around you – for good or for bad.

My challenge to you is to be the best, ethical, servant leaders that you can be – directing your lives for the good of all, in the little things of life, and sustaining that commitment through whatever life brings your way.

This is the sort of thing the LEAD-SA campaign is promoting, and I support it wholeheartedly.

And then, when opportunities arise – through the long slog of life or through moments of pivotal change – you will be the ones who are best placed to take them, and shape this country so that it can truly be a place where every person can flourish and live an abundant life.

There can be no greater aspiration in life.

May God bless you as you pursue this goal, and make you a blessing to others.