

Essence of morality in academia

March 5 2012 at 12:07pm

By Wendy Martin [Comment on this story](#)



. NEW BROOM: Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town Thabo Makgoba being inaugurated as the University of the Western Cape's Chancellor. Chairperson of Council Brian Williams helps Makgoba to put on his academic gown. Makgoba advocates for the fusion of intellectualism and spirituality. Picture: Cindy Waxa

Describing himself as a “lifelong student”, the new chancellor of the University of the Western Cape is set to fulfil his role beyond pomp and ceremony. This week, the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba, was inaugurated as the chancellor of the Bellville-based institution, a role once filled by an ecclesiastical predecessor of his, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu.

Some people regard the role of chancellor as a purely ceremonial one.

“I enjoy ceremony: the piano, the process, the incense; I love it. It makes me tick.

“As Anglicans, we go for the jugular when it comes to ceremony,” he enthusiastically said.

“It’s wonderful watching youngsters go into the world and sharing that joyous moment with them.”

His plans involve visiting the campus and regularly meeting the council chairman, Brian Williams, and the Vice-Chancellor and Rector, Brian O’Connell.

“I want to hold them on moral issues.”

He humourously suggested having a chancellors’ tea at Bishops court with other university chancellors, like Trevor Manuel (Cape Peninsula University of Technology) and Graça Machel (UCT).

Makgoba wants to practise what he preaches though, particularly on instilling a moral and ethical presence at UWC.

“For example, I can’t tell a taxi driver off for cutting me off in traffic – he may be a UWC dropout,” he said with a smile.

In the aftermath of his inauguration this week, the archbishop took time to reflect on his own days in tertiary education.

He holds an Honours and Masters degree in Applied Psychology and Educational Psychology, respectively, from the University of the Witwatersrand.

After passing matric, he tried to enrol at the university in 1981, but was unable to owing to having to wait for ministerial approval because he was black. This was needed for each year of his studies at the mostly white Wits.

He then enrolled at the then University of the North (now the University of Limpopo).

“At the University of the North, there were boycotts. It was a waste of two years. People were being beaten by police.

“I asked myself if I wanted to continue. I wanted a degree.”

In 1984 he was accepted at Wits once ministerial approval was no longer needed. By 1989, he completed his BSc.

“I don’t regret it. It exposed me to different types of education, being denied access on the basis of my race.”

Looking at his application letters for ministerial approval to study at Wits, he always listed his grandmother’s having TB and needing to be close to her to administer her medicine was the reason for his needing to study in Joburg.

He was granted approval, but it was too late in the year for him to join Wits. What the ministry never noticed was that he also indicated that he wanted to stay in the university’s residence.

“Didn’t the minister notice and ask how would I have had time to give my grandmother medicine if I was staying in res?” he jokes.

He also pondered the jarring contrasts of academia then and now.

“As a member of the Anglican Students’ Society, we looked at why was God taking the side of the teagasser instead of the poor? Many things have changed. It is a whole refined process now. I marvel at children with their laptops and iPads. I wrote on a typewriter, tipexed and then typed again.”

UWC opened its doors in 1960 as a coloureds-only university, much like the University of Limpopo was for African students, both institutions created for segregated learning.

“We should not be trapped by this, nor embarrassed. It is a powerful statement to acknowledge where we come from. We must get out of this self-perpetuating inferiority sense

of identity. The university is improving standards and accepting people of diverse backgrounds. They can compete in the intellectual scene.”

Describing himself as a lifelong student, he said: “No one is too young, too old or too clever to learn. I learn every day. I am turning 52 this year, but my academic learning does not stop. Every Sunday I preach a sermon and for that I have to read the Bible. I learn from the people I encounter.”

Williams, who is also the president of the convocation of UWC, said Makgoba personified the university’s vision.

“It is the greatness of humility and the power of simplicity that acts as the spiritual centre of the archbishop. This is what we need as a transformational compass to ensure that we remain rooted to those who need our help the most – the poor and the vulnerable,” said Williams.

“The archbishop is a modest person who is an intellectual with deep spirituality. He combines wisdom with a warm caring disposition and this makes him an ideal healer and unifier. As our chancellor he is the living symbol of spiritual power and academic excellence. He will inspire the university to even greater heights.”

<http://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/essence-of-morality-in-academia-1.1248828?ot=inmsa.ArticlePrintPageLayout.ot>