

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Harold Wolpe Memorial Lecture
‘Constitution and Covenant’

7 November 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests, it is an honour to be here this evening. Thank you for your invitation.

It is a privilege to contribute to critical debate around key issues within contemporary South Africa; and I am grateful to The Harold Wolpe Memorial Trust for all that it does in promoting such open discussion.

And it is a particular privilege to receive this invitation when fundamental questions around our constitution, our democracy, are so much in the spotlight.

Now, if you invite an archbishop to speak, you must not be surprised if he begins by quoting the Bible.

‘Be Subject to the Governing Authority’

St Paul, in his letter to the Christians in Rome, instructed: [quote] ‘Let every person be subject to the governing authority’ [quote] (Rom 13:1).

Given the nature of our past governing authority, this has not always been an easy verse to handle!

But fortunately, any good Bible expositor knows the saying that ‘a text without a context is a pretext’.

Therefore we understood that this verse must be seen within the wider context of the full sweep of Scripture. We concluded that apartheid had to be rejected – and, more than this, that any attempt to justify it theologically was, frankly, nothing more than heresy.

So we sat light to this verse, and strove to bring about a governing authority which reflected what subsequent verses went on to describe – rule that could be seen as God’s servant for our good.

The Governing Authority that is Constitutional Democracy

Now, thanks be to God, we have a very different governing authority.

This evening I want to explore what it might mean for us to take to heart St Paul's admonition 'to be subject to the governing authority' when our authority is constitutional democracy, and why such subjection can bring blessing, for ourselves, and for others.

However, before I go any further, let me make it entirely clear that I am not at all advocating submissiveness before a particular President, nor before any particular political party.

Absolutely not.

Indeed, an important aspect of my address is the changing relationship between the various actors on the contemporary stage – particularly that between the churches and the governing party.

In the past, the churches shared with the ANC – and, of course, with many others – the burning desire to replace apartheid with constitutional democracy.

After liberation in 1994, many of us in the churches advocated the adoption of a concept drawn from Latin American liberation theology, that of critical solidarity with the government.

According to this principle, we believed we should stand in solidarity with a democratically-elected government which represented the will of the people – but we should reserve the right to criticize it when it failed to live up to the values of the Gospel.

It has recently been argued – notably by the President of the South African Council of Churches and Unisa theologian and commentator, Professor Tinyiko Maluleke – that in practice critical solidarity has, broadly speaking, entailed too much solidarity and not enough criticism.

Well I can't speak for other denominations and faith groups, but I don't think the Anglican Church has been short on criticism.

Indeed, within three months of Nelson Mandela's election, he and Archbishop Desmond Tutu were at public odds over the new government's decision to continue manufacturing weapons and over the parliamentary 'gravy train' – and the Arch has hardly remained silent since, on almost any issue you care to mention!

Though less flamboyantly, Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane has been equally outspoken, particularly on poverty, HIV and AIDS, and the arms deal.

Other Anglican leaders have been sharply outspoken in their own dioceses, for example the now-retired Bishop David Russell in the Eastern Cape.

As for solidarity, I believe our synods and bishops have praised the government where praise is due.

And, as an aside, since they don't take marching orders from the church, let me mention there is no shortage of Anglicans in public life – they inhabit – even infest – the political life of this country at every level, and in every party: among them

- President Kgalema Motlanthe,
- Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the leader of the IFP,
- the Vice-Chancellor of UNISA, Barney Pityana (a keynote speaker at last weekend's convention),
- Athol Trollip of the DA,
- and, in times past, the PAC leader Zeph Mothopeng, and Steve Biko.

My point is this: as the former UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan has said, [quote]

'No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime.' [unquote]

In South Africa, we have to learn how to become a democracy, and all of us who stood together in the past, are still feeling our ways into the new relationships appropriate to constitutional democracy.

Government, political parties, the private sector, academia, the media, civil society, faith communities and so forth, now each have our

distinctive and separate contributions to make to the life of the nation as a whole.

We are still learning where we should stand in solidarity, and where we should be critical.

We are still learning what it means to hold and to exchange legitimately diverse perspectives.

We are still learning both how to deliver and how to receive criticism that is constructive.

The way to pursue such maturing democracy is to abide by – or, in the words of St Paul, be subject to – our Constitution.

Therefore this evening, I want to look at what this means for all of us – whether we live in Groote Schuur or Guglethu; whether we are from Luthuli House or Langa, from Bishopscourt or Bronkhorstspuit, from the University of Stellenbosch or the ‘university of life’.

I want to explore how we can abide by, uphold and promote our Constitution as individuals, as members of civil society, and as political participants.

In other words, I want to address how we can make our Constitution ‘God’s servant for good’; that is, a vehicle for the genuine well-being and flourishing of every South African.

To do this, I will use the paradigm of covenant.

Covenanting and Flourishing

Covenants have a long history, rooted in the political treaties of the Fertile Crescent of 3- to 4-thousand years ago, and their Biblical parallels.

The earliest Biblical Covenant is found in the well-known story of Noah.

The Book of Genesis tells how God regrets he ever created wicked and degenerate humankind – with the exception of faithful Noah. God

tells Noah to make an ark, a great boat, in which Noah's family and two of every kind of animal take refuge. A flood then destroys all other living things.

After the flood subsides, God warns Noah and his sons not to shed human life – for humanity bears the image of God – and God adds [quote]

'I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendents, and with every living creature ... never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth ... and this is the sign of my covenant: the rainbow' [unquote].

This is a covenant for all of humanity, and for all of creation.

It is a covenant about the sanctity of human life, about the integrity of the created world, and about the dignity of difference, symbolised by the rainbow.

God says that people matter.

God cares that his beloved children should have adequate food, clothing, shelter and so forth. God cares that everyone should be treated with complete respect by everyone else, with no-one marginalised, excluded, voiceless in the ordering of our common lives (which is, of course what democracy is all about).

God also cares that we do not destroy our environment out of short term greed. And God cares that we should each be able freely to become our best selves, neither unduly exalted nor unfairly diminished because of how he created us.

These three elements – sanctity of life, the integrity of the created world, the dignity of difference – taken together, are for me the touchstone of human flourishing, as God intended us to be.

If my ministry as priest, bishop and now archbishop, is about nothing else, I hope it is about caring for every single human being, for all God's people, as God – the God who is love – cares for them.

Therefore I am in solidarity with whatever promotes these three elements; and I am critical of whatever hinders them.

I am prepared to be in solidarity with any party that, in actions as well as words, promotes them.

But I will be critical of those who pay lip-service to the neediest in their electioneering, but who fail to deliver. And I will be critical of those who make undeliverable promises merely to gain votes.

I am in solidarity with the needs of the poorest, the most vulnerable, the most marginalised; including the strangers, the foreigners, in our midst.

I am in solidarity with available, affordable health-care for all.

I am in solidarity with effective rural development.

I am in solidarity with, why not, a Basic Income Grant.

I am in solidarity with education for all, that truly equips our young people to be responsible citizens, able to face the challenges of adulthood. And my prayers are with all those who began their Matric exams this week.

On the other hand, I am critical of a response to crime that leads to escalating deaths among both police and suspects.

I am critical of complacency and incompetence in housing programmes, such that Irene Grootboom died before receiving her home, despite the Constitutional court ruling.

I am critical of inadequate social support, and of continuing delays faced by too many of the most needy, especially paperless orphans and pensioners – though I recognise that there are some improvements.

In all this, it seems to me that I can be in solidarity with whatever upholds and implements the Constitution, because it can serve as a covenant for human flourishing.

Contract and Covenant

It is important to recognise that a covenant is far more than a contract.

In contracts, parties give legal undertakings to effect transactions for reciprocal benefit. In covenants, people bind themselves together, in pledges of faithfulness and loyalty, to promote mutual well-being.

The Chief Rabbi of Great Britain spoke about Covenants to the international gathering of Anglican Bishops, the Lambeth Conference, earlier this year.

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 in 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.

Constitution as Covenant

We should see life under constitutional democracy as considerably more like covenant than contract.

We, the people of South Africa, have covenanted together through our Constitution, for the well-being of us all.

This is clear from the Constitution's Preamble. Let me remind you what it says:

*We, the people of South Africa,
Recognise the injustices of our past;
Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;
Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and
Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.*

We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as 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.*

May God protect our people.

Now, of course the Constitution is a legal document, and its contents and their interpretation are to be debated within the Constitutional Court.

But the Preamble makes it abundantly clear that the life of our nation and people extends far wider than legal argument alone.

We are concerned with honour and respect, with freedom, with unity and diversity, with healing, with democratic values and social justice; with human rights, with quality of life and liberating potential, for every single one of us.

It is for this that we covenant together.

To be subject to our Constitution means to breathe life into these covenant promises to one another.

Covenant and Identity

As Rabbi Sacks reminds us, first of all, covenants concern our identities.

This is where the Constitution begins: ‘We, the people of South Africa’.

We are the people of this land, which [quote] ‘belongs to all who live in it’ [unquote].

We belong to this nation; and we belong to each other, through a common South African citizenship, of which no-one may be deprived.

This is who we are, and we are in this together.

For better or for worse, we have a common history, with all its pains. We all have to live honestly with this legacy – and we have to find a shared way forward.

Covenant and Transformation

To go forward, we have covenanted together for transformation – Rabbi Sack's second point.

In our Constitution, we acknowledge our past, with all its injustices, and then pledge to heal its divisions.

We cannot change the past – but we need not be trapped by it.

Therefore, we have chosen new foundations, of democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights. We have covenanted for a new beginning and a better future.

Even ancient covenants between military victors and defeated opponents were meant to signal a new beginning, to the benefit of all.

There was, after conflict, the chance for a settled, peaceful life – even if it came with obligations of tax-paying and obedience to the ruler.

Ours is not a covenant of victors over vanquished – but our nation building also requires everyone to pay their taxes and abide by the rule of law: everyone, without exception.

Even St Paul tells us to pay our taxes and keep the law, if we want a sustainable, peaceful, society!

God's promises are far more transformative than human pledges alone.

The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel write of new covenants: covenants of peace, of everlasting blessing, of forgiveness, of new hearts and transformed spirits.

Christians understand Jesus as the fulfilment and guarantee of these promises: through his life and death and resurrection, making possible redemption from our past and hope for the future.

Yes, covenants should be vehicles of redemption and hope – and in our Constitution we dare to live with hope, and we dare to pursue redemption, for ourselves, for our whole nation.

‘May God protect our people,’ the Constitution’s preamble prays.

Amen to this.

Covenant and Relationship

Thirdly, constitution as covenant underlines the fact that human society cannot be reduced to matters of money and litigation.

It is about people and relationship.

This relationship is first of all, a covenant between equals.

The Constitution says we should all enjoy not only equal status, dignity, and protection before the law; but also freedom from discrimination on grounds that include [quote] ‘race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth’ [unquote].

The fact that we spell out such a long list indicates that, though equal, we are by no means the same.

Yet our Constitution insists that we are ‘united in diversity’.

To covenant, is to commit to one another, in mutual loyalty, whatever our differences.

One goal of the Constitution is to [quote] ‘improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person’ [unquote].

For this to happen, mutual loyalty must extend across not only race, culture and so forth, but also across what Nobel Prize Winning

Economist Amartya Sen terms 'agency' – our differing ability to participate in the mechanisms of our society.

Thus, the powerful must recognise that they covenant in loyalty to the powerless, the strong to the weak, the persuasive to the voiceless, and the rich to the poor – whether economically rich or rich in skills, in experience, in abilities, or any other aspect of what it means to live with quality and potential.

Only if we do this will we overcome the debilitating inequalities of the past, whose legacies remain with us.

Wendell Wilkie, the US lawyer and politician of the first half of the 20th century, said that the US constitution [quote] 'does not provide for first and second class citizens' [unquote].

Neither does ours.

But, have we understood that democracy does not mean the replacement of one unjustly privileged, self-serving, elite, with another unjustly privileged, self-serving, elite – who revel in conspicuous consumption while the rest of the population struggle with rising bread prices?

This challenge is for all of us, as individuals as well as for government.

There is a particular challenge to the private sector to contribute to reversing economic inequalities.

The Acts of the Apostles, in the New Testament, records how in the early church [quote]

'There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold' [unquote] (Acts 4:34).

We in our turn must work out how to share our country's economic gains so that no-one has too much, no-one has too little.

If we fail to enact mutual loyalty across our nation, our society, then we will fail to achieve the quality of life, the liberation of potential, for everyone, which is our goal.

So we should each ask ourselves: Does mutual loyalty provide the lens through which we see our neighbours, our colleagues, our employers and our employees?

Do we feel ourselves bound in covenant mutuality with those we pass at robots; with those whose faces we see on the TV news; with our business competitors; to say nothing of our political opponents?!

Covenant and Cooperation

Of course politics inevitable entails competition.

But we have covenanted together to pursue politics by democratic means.

This is our fourth emphasis – cooperation trumps competition.

In the past, many of us across a broad spectrum of interests, cooperated for the downfall – thankfully, peaceful – of apartheid, and its replacement by constitutional democracy, participative democracy.

Now we are having to learn what it means to participate together in democratic life, from all our different – our legitimately different – perspectives.

This returns me to the question of balancing criticism and solidarity.

How are political movements, NGOs, faith communities, academia, the media, business, and so on and so forth, who cooperated in the struggle years, now to cooperate for the strengthening of constitutional democracy?

Well, governments must govern.

But it is not the government's role to do the job of business, of civil society, of the media, or of anyone else.

However, it *is* the government's job to listen, and to take account of, everyone's perspectives, and to promote a climate in which each can

fully do what they are called to do, and so contribute to the life of the nation as a whole.

Therefore it is government's job to promote

- an independent media;
- and a space for business that is free from corruption and undue interference;
- and a society in which the rule of law is upheld;
- and a climate for effective dialogue with all, especially with NGOs and civil society bodies, including faith communities.

Similarly, it is both the right, and the responsibility of the media, academia, professional bodies, business, civil society, faith communities, to speak without reservation from our own perspective.

So too can any individual.

Our constitution invites us to do so, and to speak from the particularity of our own cultural, linguistic, faith, and other identities.

What it does not allow us is intolerance, nor the denigration of others. Racialism, tribalism, gender discrimination... You name it – it is all out!

So for all of us, when we think government has got it right, we should applaud them; and when we think they have got it wrong, we will not be afraid to say so.

Our commitment must be only, and always, to the flourishing of all South Africans, through the covenantal promises of our Constitution.

Therefore, for example, civil society and religious communities must not be shy to take the opportunities provided by the 16 Days of Action Against Violence Against Women later this month, and World AIDS Day on December 1st.

Speaking up, speaking out, contributes to the furtherance of our Constitutional aims of a better life for all.

Democracy, Participation and Accountability

When our governing authority is participative democracy, to be subject means to promote the effective participation of all, at every level.

Participation may take many forms.

All adult South Africans have the right, and the responsibility, to vote – but only some will find themselves called to high office.

Yet all manner of opportunities for participation exist, and must be exercised, between the two levels – and between elections.

For participative democracy entails accountability – as Chapter 3 of our Constitution stipulates.

Accountability not only comes through the ballot box – though it certainly comes here.

Accountability also comes through continuing open debate, and through strengthening the effective functioning of robust and independent civil society and private sectors.

Government must also promote debate about effective accountability, including through the electoral system.

We have seen how party lists undermine the links between electorate and elected.

Some form of constituency arrangement could improve this. But we must also uphold minority representation, and not all constituency systems safeguard this.

In practice, democracy comes in many forms: some better than others, and none without flaws.

So we must strive to ensure that our democracy delivers the goals of our Constitution.

We must do what we can to help our pursuit of democracy grow in wisdom and maturity.

We should not be surprised if this takes time, and has some ups and downs along the way.

I am the father of teenagers – and I know that to be 14 years old is to face all the traumas of adolescence, where aspirations to adulthood run up against the limitations of experience.

But, whatever the limitations of experience, mature democracy requires mutual acknowledgement that political opponents seek the good of the country and its people – however great the policy disagreement on the best means for achieving this.

We must accord everyone freedom of speech: freedom to debate issues, to put differing arguments, to propose alternative policies, and to persuade – but never to coerce.

Anyone who threatens, or intimidates – or stands by while their supporters do so – is not worthy to be a leader.

Anyone who incites violence, or advocates harm to their political opponents – or allows others to do so – is a disgrace to democracy and deserves only our contempt.

Anyone who pursues power to further their own interests, or the interests of those around them, is unfit to hold office.

Let there be no misunderstanding: the competition of constitutional politics is very different from the struggle for liberation.

Given our past, there can be no excuse for militaristic metaphors or the vocabulary of violence.

Given the history of our struggle, and the implications of being branded a ‘counter-revolutionary’ in the past, I do not believe this is an appropriate way for ANC leaders to describe their opponents today.

Nor was Terror Lekota wise in recently highlighting the possibility of violence, even if against his supporters.

Such warnings can too easily become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Nor do we live under a system where the winner takes all.

After elections, whichever party governs, must govern for the good of everyone.

Its representatives must sit in parliament together with the opposition – acknowledging them as the *loyal* opposition.

For we all share the constitutional goal of [quote] ‘a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights’ [unquote].

Covenant and Diversity

Democratic life – as the briefest glance around the world will show – is endlessly full of complicated, complexly interrelated, and evolving, questions.

No-one, no matter what their parliamentary majority, can have all the solutions.

This is why every voice matters. We must all contribute from our own perspective, so that we ensure decision makers can take into account the fullest possible picture.

Within political parties too, the debate must always go on, as circumstances unfold.

In 2003, at a joint sitting of parliament to mark ten years of democracy, Nelson Mandela said, [quote]

‘A guiding principle in our search for, and establishment of, a non-racial, inclusive democracy in our country, has been that there are good men and women to be found in all groups and from all sectors of society; and that in an open and free society those South Africans will come together to jointly and cooperatively realise the common good’ [unquote].

Democracy and Ubuntu

Let me put this in other words. Effective democracy needs ubuntu.

Ubuntu says, 'I am because we are.' Ubuntu says 'My full humanity is dependent on your full humanity.'

Ubuntu is shared covenantal living – living through loving and caring, honesty and respect, compassion and trust. Ubuntu is upholding good morals. Ubuntu is helping those in need.

Ubuntu is saying that if any other person is diminished, then I too am diminished.

It is easy enough to speak of ubuntu, and our politicians love to commend it.

I wish they would practice it, in their conduct of political debate – both within and between parties!

Is it in accordance with the values of ubuntu to call opponents 'dogs', [as Angie Motshekga, leader of the ANC Women's League has reportedly done], or to brand former President Thabo Mbeki as a 'dead snake', and leaders of the new party as 'dangerous snakes', [as ANC President Jacob Zuma has reportedly done]?

Surely not!

Ubuntu says politicians should criticise policies, not other politicians.

Ubuntu says that personal attacks devalue and demean the attacker.

Ubuntu teaches instead, that as we debate the difficult social, political and economic issues of the day, we are enriched by hearing every side of the question, every point of view, and reaching conclusions that reflect everybody's need.

As Madiba stressed, this means not only politicians talking with other politicians, but that policies should evolve through continuing substantive dialogue that embraces all of society.

For democracy insists that politics – which is, by definition, all that concerns the life of the *polis* and the *polites* ['polit-aze'], of society and citizens – is far too important to be left solely to politicians!

Business; NGOs; faith communities; media; academia; unions; professional bodies such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and engineers; community organisations; faith groups; and all other stakeholders, must be included.

Ubuntu says that if we take everyone into account, we will avoid the worst excesses of individualism that undermine western democratic life.

Covenant and Economics

The whole world needs ubuntu – the whole world needs covenantal living.

Our current international economic turmoil shows us the dangers of untrammelled capitalism – of unfettered individualistic greed – of contract without covenant.

We have allowed greed to race ahead, until, like a cartoon character, it finds itself running in thin air, facing nothing but a long, long, drop into the void below.

Cartoon characters bounce with a lot more resilience than the real live individuals whose pensions, whose savings, whose livelihoods, have come crashing down.

My challenge to Trevor Manuel, and Tito Mboweni, is to bring concepts of ubuntu, covenant, cooperation, and mutual loyalty into the international economic arena – so that the interests of the weakest, the poorest, are safeguarded, rather than allowing those with the greatest greed to make the greatest gains at the expense of those in greatest need.

I call on the private sector to come to the party too.

And to the new and inspirational President of the United States, I would like to say this:

Dare to lead the world into a new economic era; dare to call us into global covenanting together for the integrity of creation, the well-being of the planet, and the flourishing of every human person.

The Role of Individuals

Let me return to my contention that God's call to be subject to a governing authority which is participative democracy, means to participate democratically.

Every South African therefore has the responsibility first of all to register as a voter.

This very weekend, 8 and 9 November, voting stations across the country will be open for registration.

Having moved house earlier this year, my wife Lunghi and I will be going along to ensure we are registered as electors.

The second responsibility that everyone should exercise, is to go and vote, once the elections come.

But political parties have to earn our vote. It cannot be taken for granted.

If politicians behave badly, they should expect supporters to withdraw their backing: in the way that Archbishop Tutu suggested last month – in answer to a hypothetical question – expressing how appalled he was at the personalisation and acrimony dominating political debate.

He has worked tirelessly for dignity, tolerance and respect for all, as intrinsic to the democracy for which he strove.

He, and we all, have a right to see such dignity, tolerance and respect shown in the behaviour of our politicians – as those who most embody our democratic life.

Instead of accusing Archbishop Emeritus of [quote] 'vomiting on the graves of liberation heroes' [quote] [as Buti Manamela, the Young Communist League's National Secretary, reportedly did], politicians from all parties ought instead to reflect on the challenges posed by his comments.

The Responsibility to Vote

How, then, should we vote? What should we look for in a political party?

The Covenant with Noah suggests we might usefully ask:

‘Who most promotes the sanctity of life, the integrity of creation, and the dignity of difference, as desired by God, and as expressed through our Constitution?’

Take care!

I am not asking which party – new or otherwise! – proclaims most loudly that it upholds the Constitution!

Instead I am asking, which party, not only in its words, but by its actions, will best deliver the true heart of the Constitution: understood as the blessing of our country and the flourishing of its people, for today and for tomorrow.

Both short and long term matter.

God’s covenant with Noah was for all his descendants. We too must act with the best interests of future generations in mind.

And if political parties want to claim they have the support of God (now I am really stepping into a minefield!), then let them demonstrate both that their past track record, in words and action, and their current and future commitments, accord with God’s standards.

For both St Paul, and Jesus himself, warn that we must persistently abide in God’s ways – and if we do not, we risk being pruned, cut out, uprooted [and long before Jesus comes!].

This is why service delivery matters.

Having the right vision, and saying the right thing, means nothing, if we do not put it into practice.

We must be honest in recognising that it is not easy to turn the vision of a new South Africa, prosperity for all, into concrete reality.

It is also difficult to take broad sweeping ideals and turn them into specific policy solutions that can meet all vastly differing needs of our population.

But we must not use the enormity of the challenge as an excuse for complacency, for inefficiency, for incompetence, for settling for second best.

Nor can we give up half way – last week's Conference here in Cape Town underlined the need to follow through on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and to take seriously the implementation of its recommendations.

Do we really want to undermine the progress we have achieved so far?

Conclusion

It was for good reason that ancient covenants, political and biblical, often concluded with blessings and curses.

In essence, they say, if you abide, and abide fully, by this covenant, all will go well with you. If you disregard its provisions, you will suffer dire consequences.

We must also recognise that

- if we fail to uphold our Constitution,
- if we fail to promote the effective maturing of democracy,
- if we fail to ensure the equality of all persons before the law,
- if we fail to uphold tolerance,
- if we fail to celebrate our diversity and tap the potential contribution of all,
- if we fail to promote the quality of life of all citizens,
- if we fail to deliver the services we promise,
- if we fail to make our vision of a better life for all concrete reality for all South Africa's people

– then the consequences for us will indeed be dire.

Let me end, not with scripture, but with a quotation from Thomas Paine, the English political theorist of the 18th century.

He said this [quote]:

‘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.’ [unquote]

Whoever we are, whatever our role within democratic life, let us participate, and play our part, and never falter in our covenant of mutual loyalty, until we can boast this of South Africa.

Amen.