

AN ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE AWARDS CEREMONY AT THE FEDERAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

by Prof. C.L.S. Nyembezi

Mr President Ladies and Gentlemen, you have asked me to speak to you at a time like this, at a time when our country seems to be moving deeper and deeper into turbulence; at a time when charity is giving place to hatred; at a time when cold fear stalks our country and clouds our reason. It is a time which is having its effect on all of us. It is a time when the Blackman is asking questions, many questions, a time when he is groping to rediscover himself, a time when he casts his eyes in all directions in search of truth.

You are coming into the ministry at a time which is very different from that when our fathers accepted the call to spread the gospel. They preached in a completely different situation. They preached when families were stable and social norms had not been disturbed. They preached when industrialisation had not done the havoc it has done to us in the Black community. They did not have to contend with masses of hungry and jobless people; they did not have to contend with situations of poverty such as we witness today; they did not have to operate in a situation in which crime seems to be the order of the day; they did not have to work in a situation in which laxity of morals seems to be taken for granted; they did not have to contend with a situation in which discriminatory practices generate so much resentment and hatred; they did not have to contend with a situation in which there is such a credibility gap between what the Christians say and do; they did not have to contend with all this which is what you have to contend with. We have today such a complexity of social problems that there is real need for a minister to be well informed about the home conditions of his parishioners. He should be fully aware of their difficulties and hardships. There is no doubt that a very strong case can be made for a specialised ministry with social work as its basis. Our communities need such men. The minister today should also see himself in the role of a social worker. Greater involvement in the day to day life of the people is vital.

With so many people employed in commerce and industry should we not investigate ways of stationing some ministers in those areas even if it means that they are employed as ordinary full time employees doing the work that other people do? Rightly or wrongly I seem to think that ministers would achieve much more that way. That would give them a better chance to reveal the will of God to us in our daily situation.

I wish to appeal to you to spend less time at home in your studies. People yearn for the visit of a minister. The motor car is a very useful invention but in some cases it has affected the work of God adversely particularly in rural areas. I refer to the minister who is always in a desperate hurry to get back home. When ministers depended on public transport or used horses, bicycles and even walked on foot, they were even able to visit societies which today are regarded as inaccessible simply because a car cannot get there. Please do not be ministers who are too much in a hurry.

I have already indicated that we are passing through a period of turbulence. People, including young children, are losing their lives; others are being detained. So far no clear programme of action to meet the situation has come from the Churches. Many people are waiting for such a lead. But should the Church continue to demonstrate its impotence in the present situation it will find itself completely rejected and regarded as irrelevant.

Black people expect the Church to play a more meaningful and positive role in the search for peace and justice — a more meaningful role than the release of press statements or pious declarations. They expect the Church to initiate and support programmes to achieve justice in our country. Either we believe in the brotherhood of Christians irrespective of colour or we don't. Even in the area of Church Unity we find that Churches are moving rather slowly. Black Ministers have organisations such as **IDAMASA** where they adopt impressive but meaningless resolutions on Unity. They talk of exchange of pulpits but how many black ministers are actually engaged in this exchange? And yet the power of the Church depends on its united stand. To me co-operation should not end with exchange of pulpits but should even extend to pastoral work.

In the present situation you are going to be challenged to give a positive lead to your parishioners on the subject of race relations. I seem to sense deep-seated doubt in our young black ministers concerning the genuineness of this brotherhood in Christ. The reason for this is perhaps not far to seek. Even our Church structures have been such that black Christians have developed distrust of their white brethren. What is going to be your reconciliatory role?

One of the main challenges confronting you in your ministry is, in my opinion, to put the record straight. When the Missionaries introduced Christianity to the so-called heathen they worked on the assumption that those people did not know of God at all. Even today, I believe it to be true that in certain quarters it is still maintained that black people did not know of the existence of God before the whites came. Even more tragic is the fact that there are some blacks who also believe this tale. Not only did we know of the existence of God but we also believed in the continuity of life after death. For instance among the ZULU people the custom of UKUGODUSA – “to send home” had to do with the very old who wished to pass on to the land of the spirits. The good news brought by the Missionaries was accompanied by a threat of eternal damnation for the sinners. The idea of eternal damnation was something new to a people who only knew the land of the spirits as a land of bliss.

What is going to be your answer when e.g. the Zulu people assert that you are wrong when you allege that they worshipped idols? What are you going to say when they tell you that when the whites came they, the ZULUS, already had an advanced religion since they believed in one God? What are you going to say when they tell you that Missionaries undermined a structure upon which they should have built? That what they believed and what the Missionaries said were complementary and not mutually exclusive?

As black theologians you are also challenged to interpret clearly what is meant by worship when it is alleged for example that ZULUS worshipped the spirits of their ancestors. The person who takes the view that ancestors must be reversed is baffled when such reverence is branded heathen practice, whereas Christians pray to Saints. Who are these Saints? Are they not people who have been through this life? What is the difference between praying to the Saints and speaking to one's ancestors imploring them to intercede on one's behalf? To you as theological scholars the difference might be clear as daylight but it is not so with many of us laymen to whom you have been sent to labour. What are you going to do to meet the challenge of people who say that they are not getting convincing answers as to the real relationship between Christianity and their indigenous religion? If it is wrong to have a ceremony to remember the ancestors why is it right to erect tombstones? A question now being asked very seriously is whether or not we, as Black people, did not make a big blunder when we turned our backs on our religion.

You are going out to preach Christian charity in a country where it is preached but not practised. You will be preaching against a background of pain and suffering inflicted by Christians on other Christians. You will be preaching against a background in which a section of the Christian community that is able to do so is busy acquiring arms and joining pistol clubs to learn how to shoot; shoot whom? More and more voices in the Black community seem to be saying that Christianity is a thing of the whites. They go so far as to attribute the position of subservience of Black people in this country to the teaching and influence of Missionaries. The tragedy of it all is that some of these people who reject Christianity no longer adhere to their indigenous

beliefs, so that by rejecting Christianity they remain rooted nowhere. In a sense they are like a ship which has lost its compass.

The challenge that confronts you at this time when there is this debate about Christianity being irrelevant is – what are you going to offer to assist the Blackman in his search of himself? How are you going to help him to rediscover himself? To reassure him of his worth? It is necessary to remind our people that our knowledge of God is not something that we have learned from the whites. It has been said that fools rush in where angels fear to tread. But I would be less than honest with myself if I did not accept the role of fool because like many of my people I am in search of the truth. I want to suggest that the time has come when we should take a long, hard look at a little word call UBUNTU, which has been referred to by some as humanism or a devotion to human interests. I want to suggest this morning that there is a dimension to this word which has eluded us for a long time and which deserves much more than casual attention. My reason for saying this is that an acceptable relationship between persons and groups in our society before the whites came had as its basis or core – UBUNTU. There is a way of behaviour which is UBUNTU just as there is a way of behaviour which is not UBUNTU.

It is UBUNTU to love and care for others. It is UBUNTU to act kindly towards others. It is UBUNTU to be hospitable. IT is UBUNTU to be just and fair. It is UBUNTU to be compassionate and to assist those in distress. It is UBUNTU to be truthful and honest so that people know that one's given word is his honour. It is UBUNTU to have good morals. These are but a few examples of what may be regarded as UBUNTU.

On the other hand it is not UBUNTU to take advantage of people who are not able to protect themselves. It is not UBUNTU to do to others what you would not like done to you. It is not UBUNTU to be cruel and callous. It is not UBUNTU to act in a manner which degrades other people. It is not UBUNTU to dehumanise other people. It is not UBUNTU to be greedy and deprive other people of what is legitimately theirs. It is not UBUNTU to be dishonest. Ladies and Gentlemen, what I am trying to project here admittedly in a very inadequate manner, is that UBUNTU is basic to the whole concept of living together peacefully either as individuals or as groups.

The dimension of UBUNTU which I am trying to project here is that when God created man, he planted in him His resemblance; in other words He planted Himself, godliness, which is the attribute that enables man to be godlike in thought and action. UBUNTU is godliness. The source of power is God himself. Man who is created in the image of God is like a sub-station. The sub-station is able to do its work properly if it is in communication with the main station and derives power therefrom. The God in man reveals himself in UBUNTU of an individual. I cannot see how we can claim to be like God if in us there is no UBUNTU. Race relations in our country are bedevilled because of this lack of UBUNTU. An examination of the discriminatory practices and laws in our country will reveal that they lack UBUNTU in their motivation. My understanding of Christ's teaching is that throughout He emphasizes UBUNTU.

I wish to submit in all humility that, in my view, this is the

base upon which the Missionaries should have established their Christian message for every Black man understands what UBUNTU is. Remove UBUNTU from Christian teaching and practically nothing remains.

May I suggest that you, as black theologians, should lead the way in examining this submission and placing UBUNTU in correct perspective. We, as Black people, need to be reminded how wrong we are when we think of Christ as a mere whiteman and not as the personification of UBUNKULUNKULU or the Main Power Station; UBUNKULUNKULU in Christ linking up with UBUNKULUNKULU in man which is UBUNTU, godliness. Those who have a problem in accepting the Holy Trinity and recognising Christ as the son of God and therefore turn their backs on Christianity are, in my

opinion, wrong when they also turn their backs on UBUNTU by resorting to deeds which fail to pass the UBUNTU test. Whatever efforts we may embark upon in our search for the truth that is God, I cannot see how we can do so without acknowledging that a proper appreciation of this dimension of UBUNTU which I have tried to project is our starting point.

As you go out to meet the challenge of the world you go with the good wishes of all of us who pray and will continue to pray that your ministry will be relevant ministry in our time and that UBUNTU or godliness in you will continue to keep you in touch with the Main Source of Power and will always remain your guiding Star in the service of our Lord.□

THE TIME IS SHORT

by Edgar Brookes

The thoughts which follow are addressed in the main to the white citizens of South Africa. Is this an appropriate kind of article for "Reality." "Reality" normally tries to consider all races. But it is the white people of South Africa who must be convinced if radical change is to happen without bloodshed and leaders of black Africa have repeated *ad nauseam* that the business of the whites is to convert their own kind.

There is surely much to be learnt as we look at Rhodesia. Ten years ago, even five years ago, White Rhodesians could have worked out with Black Rhodesians a comparatively painless transition to majority rule. Now this may be impossible. Time is immensely important in our situation.

We get little statesmanship from Mr Vorster, He is like the farmer's dog of whom a tramp said, "He is growling and wagging his tail and I do not know which end to believe." Mr Vorster may feel a moral obligation to support apartheid to the end. But must we follow him? Must we be "butchered to make a Nationalist holiday"? Surely at this late hour we should consider what is best for South Africa rather than what can save the face of the Nationalist Party and its leadership. What we have to make up our minds to is simply this, that *apartheid must go*. It seemed to its supporters a few years ago to be a solution to our problems, practical, safe and even fair. It is none of the three. Detente with other African countries is good and Mr Vorster has made earnest attempts to pursue it, but the changes we need are domestic changes, changes within our own borders, and we need them soon.

It is true that South Africa is not a replica of any other African State. It has a relatively large white population that

goes back more than three hundred years in history. Any wise, kind and right reconstruction of South Africa must respect the part which the white man has played, must respect his present technological ability, must enable him to retain his own self-respect. But if such a reconstruction of South Africa is to be made successful it must be made *now*. The time is short. Soon it will be too late for Black and White to work out peaceful change together. The composition of Parliament is such that it is unrepresentative of the country. What is being done outside Parliament at the present moment is tremendously important.

We repeat that apartheid must go and it must go with White goodwill behind the change. Our task is to create a non-racial South Africa with majority rule based on universal suffrage and yet with such checks and balances, such protection of minorities as will preserve what is best in white South Africa.

In politics it is always good to ask what is the alternative. If radical change of this kind is not made within the next few years, one alternative is war. Nationalist leaders may say, and with some justice, that even with the overwhelming number of blacks the whites would be able to hold their own. But would they be allowed to do so? Two or three battles in a civil war would produce a host of casualties, blood would be running deep on the battle fields. In those circumstances would the great nations of the West not have to intervene, if only to stop Russia and China from doing so? We have, as our Prime Minister has told us, not a friend in the world who would stand by us in a real emergency. These are facts which have to be faced. Surely it is better to face them and to make radical changes now than to have far less acceptable changes forced on us because we made up our minds too late.□