

ST. ANDREW'S COLLEGE SPEECH DAY, THURSDAY OCTOBER 7TH 1976

"The Future belongs to those who prepare for it"

My Lord Bishop, Mr. Headmaster, Mr. Chairman of Council, boys of St. Andrew's, parents, Ladies and Gentlemen.

As the fairly recently appointed head of an institution that grew out of the pioneering work done by St. Andrew's College for tertiary education in the Eastern Cape, the centenary of which initiative we are rapidly approaching, it is a great honour for me to have been invited to address you this afternoon. I also feel extremely privileged to be speaking to you, not as one of your own sons, but as a scion of a school with similar aims and objectives, a school which has provided the headmaster of your Preparatory School, your recently acting headmaster, and

.... /2

the Rector of St. Paul's Theological College, and which reached into the ranks of your staff for its present headmaster.

St. Andrew's was one of the earliest, and is still one of the best Church-affiliated private schools in South Africa. As such it has always shown a high degree of courage, enterprise and initiative, and I am certain that it will continue to do so. This school was one of the first to pioneer higher education and certainly the first to have attempted such an imaginative symbiosis with an adjoining School for girls.

It is appropriate therefore that I should share with you this afternoon some thoughts on what life has in store for us and how we should prepare for it. We all agree that coming events cast their shadows before them, but what scant attention we so often pay to the signs and portents. Generally speaking, the closer an event is and the more certain

.... /3

we are of its definitely taking place, the more we are capable of rousing ourselves to prepare for it. If the forthcoming event is unique and important, and the exact time and place is determined, we do indeed prepare for it with meticulous attention to detail, particularly if our anticipations are pleasurable. Making preparations for an overseas holiday is a case in point. We go to great pains to read the brochures, plan the itinerary, obtain our passports, vaccination certificates, air tickets and travellers' cheques. Every item in our luggage is carefully considered. If the anticipations are not pleasurable it is a certain test of character to plan just as carefully. Many in the audience this afternoon will have taken just such pains in their preparation for the forthcoming matriculation examinations, albeit some of the weaker

.... /4

brethren may have needed more outside (shall we call it) encouragement than was strictly necessary.

If the events we are contemplating are just as certain, but repetitious rather than unique, it is typical of human nature to prepare less carefully. We take great pains with our first communion or our first date with a good looking member of the opposite sex. Thereafter familiarity breeds a certain carelessness and we do not make proper preparations. For this reason virtually every Government in the world extracts its taxes through a pay as you earn system, because it knows that it cannot rely on the citizenry to make proper provision for the inevitability of taxation.

When the event is either inevitable, but hopefully far in the future, like retirement or death, or else is not certain, but only has a statistical

.... /5

probability of taking place the whole human race reacts in all too familiar a way. Many of us have virtually to be compelled to take out insurances or make contributions to pension funds or medical benefits. Even when the whole future happiness of one's family, often their very survival, is at stake we do not always bring ourselves to face the issues squarely. Consider the example, how many otherwise exemplary people do not make out a proper will, or how many businessmen bumble on to the brink of financial disaster, or beyond, without rousing themselves to the danger.

On a global scale the energy crisis should have come as no surprise. The whole world went on a drunken oil spree as if the supply of petrol

.... /6

were inexhaustible and the oil exporting countries lacked the political cohesion and will to hold the world to ransom. We are sadder and hopefully wiser today.

Fortunately, evidence of the beginnings of more enlightened attitudes can be found, particularly in industry. At one time a dangerous level of industrial accidents was regarded as inevitable and an acceptable price to be paid for increased wealth and comfort. Slowly and painstakingly the causes of industrial accidents have been identified and corrected. The level of mechanical reliability of machinery, particularly transport machinery, is now very high. Human factors of boredom, fatigue distraction and lack of motivation have

.... /7

been carefully analysed and corrective measures applied.

When, in spite of all precautions, disaster does strike, measures to combat it have improved out of all recognition. In many industries first aid has reached a high level of proficiency, and medical techniques for dealing with disasters, both individual and large scale, have improved out of all recognition. The advances in getting people rapidly to medical aid, coupled with carefully researched techniques for dealing with trauma have been most impressive.

The advanced countries in the world have over the past decade made extraordinary strides in what one might call crisis-management. What is needed for forestalling the worst effects of natural disasters is being worked out on a global scale. Techniques for the rapid deploy-

.... /8

ment of emergency housing, food, medical supplies and personnel, the receiving of supplies of uncontaminated water and the like are now saving millions of lives.

Three factors are crucial and immediately discernible in these developments. First, it must be perceived that the problem, however daunting, is capable of solution, or at least amelioration. This perception very frequently leads on to the necessary will and motivation to mobilise resources for the objective identified. Secondly, the individual contribution of each member of a team, sometimes a very large one, of highly trained and motivated individuals, is absolutely vital to the success of the mission. Finally, meticulous attention

.... /9

to detail is a sine qua non of success. It never ceases to amaze me how people can imagine that they can will the end without willing every last detail of the appropriate means.

Let me give two examples, one well known and highly complex, the other deceptively simple almost, routine and humdrum. In 1957 the American scientific and engineering fraternities were shocked out of their sense of superiority and complacency by the launching of the first successful orbiting Russian sputnik. A tremendous galvanisation of political purpose occurred. The rest is history. President Kennedy vowed that an American would land on the moon by 1970. One of the most exciting and astonishing technological tours de force in the history of mankind then ensued. The individual knowledge and

.... /10

skills of literally tens of thousands of scientists, engineers, planners, managers and factory workers was required. The personal contribution of each individual was absolutely vital. Whole new technologies and methods of organisation and control were born. It was high and exciting adventure of the most exhilarating kind.

In contrast, my second example is very down to earth and prosaic, but in terms of human survival the lessons to be learned are no less important. It is reputed that the whole of mainland China has been permanently rid of the household fly by the very simple expedient of requiring every individual of that enormous population approaching 1000 million to swat his daily quota. In this case no special skills

.... /11

were required and ordinary people were involved.

The two examples have some important features in common. A very clear, agreed and worthwhile goal is identified and accepted. Each individual contribution is vital and attention to detail cannot be regarded as trivial. In the one case each of a myriad of components had to be carefully designed, meticulously constructed and quality controlled. On the other hand every last fly, no matter how persistent or evasive, had to be eliminated.

It is when one considers problems that are generally classified as political that the improvidence of human nature is exhibited in its most extravagant form. In hindsight virtually every major political disaster appears on analysis to be a demonstration of an unbelievable lack of foresight, amounting to a mass death wish. A classic example is the

.... /12

behaviour of the British and French people when Hitler acceded to power in Germany. The Third Reich could hardly have made its intentions more obvious. One extraordinary man almost alone, Sir Winston Churchill, perceived the dangers that were inexorably building up, but his words, like so many inspired prophets before him, went unheeded until it was almost too late. Hasty and urgent preparations at the last moment, coupled with the bravery and resourcefulness of a great people finally aroused, staved off total disaster.

Pharoah showed unusual perspicacity when he accepted Joseph's interpretation of his dream, and during the seven fat years filled his granaries to overflowing in preparation for the seven lean years to come. So did the people of Nineveh who actually heeded Joseph when he called

.... /13

on them to repent. One of the very few modern nations consistently to protect their future are the Swiss whose dedication to military preparedness has spared them for generations from the horrors of war.

Some of the reasons for people not exhibiting the necessary prudence and foresight are not hard to find. Indolence, improvidence, failure to accept responsibility, fatalism are some of the causes. Nonetheless, examples abound of political and structural myopia where none of these failings is the major determinant. A more subtle factor is at work : the confusion of ends with means. At a certain point in the history of a group a set of ideals has been embraced. The will to achieve those ideals has been mobilised and very successful means of achieving or at least approaching them, have been worked out. Circumstances change, the ideal is still accepted as worth preserving,

.... /14

but, alas, the particular means originally chosen are no longer effective. Worse, they are often counterproductive. Unfortunately the original means have become inextricably bound up with the ideals. Even modest proposals concerning necessary change are met with the full force of defensive rhetoric with which we are all familiar. Phrases like "no compromise with principle", "never in my lifetime", or "not in a thousand years" rend the air.

The Church especially has frequently been guilty of defending a particular historical setting of ideas associated with orthodoxy, rather the orthodoxy itself. Two very familiar examples illustrate the point. A particular cosmology, that in which the earth was regarded as the centre of the physical universe, had uncritically come to be accepted

.... /15

as part of the corpus of revealed truth. Alas for poor Galileo who dared to challenge the assumption. Three centuries later the mistake was repeated when Darwin's new theories on evolution appeared to challenge the inerrancy of Holy Scripture. In the famous debate at Oxford, Bishop Wilberforce challenged Thomas Huxley to inform the audience whether his descent from the monkey was on his father's side or on his mother's side.

The fundamental error in these examples was the confusion of the proper spheres of theology and science. When an ideology is elevated into a theology and allowed to overlap into the political sphere, the confusion can be just as dangerous. Politics is in reality a more modest form of human endeavour than theology. It is the art of organising to obtain a common end, and as such it should not be required to carry more ideological and intellectual overburden than is absolutely

.... /16

necessary. When it does so it leads to as much myopia and lack of sound preparation for the future as the commoner human failings of sloth, greed and hedonism.

Let us apply this analysis to our own situation in South Africa. An ideal to which we can all subscribe with a clear conscience is that we wish to guarantee the continual survival and wellbeing of ourselves and our families. The traditional means of accomplishing this has been to ensure that the Whites retain full political control at all levels. Circumstances have changed, but our historical means which might once have been appropriate in a particular set of circumstances has now in the minds of many been coalesced into the basic and defensible ideal. Worse yet, the whole package has been elevated to

.... /17

the status of a theology. Woe betide any would-be Galileo or Darwin of the political arena who questions the orthodoxy. The arguments used against him are redolent of those of Bishop Wilberforce. Civilisation will founder if a Black or Brown man shares a room, a bus, a railway carriage, a toilet, a swimming pool, a school, a university, or a ballot box with us. The world is proving itself just as impatient with, and merciless in its judgment of, such shibboleths, as it was with the geocentric theory of the Universe or the arithmetic in Britain of Archbishop Ussher and Dr. John Lightfoot of Cambridge University who by a series of mystical calculations had fixed the actual date of the creation of the world. It was 9 a.m. on Sunday 23 October in 4004 B.C. ! This extraordinary pronouncement was printed with all the authority of the Gospel itself in many copies of the Bible that were in circulation at that time. Are we
...../18

going to prove ourselves less capable of preparing for a sane and inevitable future and of respecting our own prophets, the Alan Patons and the Beyers Naudes, than the infidel Egyptians and Ninevans who paid heed to Joseph and Jonah respectively?

This question of preparing for our future with a sense of realism that keeps firmly apart our fundamental ideals and the particular temporal expressions of them, applies to institutions and individuals with the same urgency as nations.

Universities especially are institutions sometimes overly fond of dispensing advice to others without noticing the beams in their own eyes. They must in each generation reaffirm their dedication to the preservation, transmission and extension of knowledge. They cannot
...../19

afford to be identified as bastions of privilege and exclusiveness, but must confirm boldly the commitment to accept and to teach all who can profit from the experience. Has not the time come for some generous gestures to be offered at the times they are most appreciated, that is when they can be freely given and not unwilling coerced. For example, mixed sport at club level is no longer at variance with Government policy. One hopes that a clear and timeous lead will be taken by our educational institutions in this area. Secondly, as realists as well as idealists, let us press for the admission of Coloureds and Indians in the first instance on the same basis as for Whites. In this respect Rhodes is less fortunate than its sisters in Johannesburg and Cape Town, who have a proud tradition as Open Universities to look back on. St. Andrew's too should look to its earliest origins to uncover

.... /20

an underlying tradition. The donors of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge as well as your founding father, Bishop Armstrong, clearly had a multiracial school in mind. Indeed, for the first twelve years of the fledgling College's existence, African pupils were in attendance, although they did not share the same classrooms with their White counterparts. Finally, nothing in the Statute books precludes the appointment of Black or Brown members to the governing Councils of either institution. Such a gesture would do more as an expression of goodwill and confidence in our future role in an evolving South Africa than just about anything else I can imagine.

As individuals we have as much to answer as nations and institutions in the way we look at the future and our role in it. This is of special relevance to the senior boys in the school who are on the threshold of

.... /21

participation in the greater life of the community, whether it be more immediately during your period of military training, or else as you go forward to further education, a job, a family and the role of leadership which your experience at this school almost morally binds you accept. It is customary on occasions such as this to remind the leavers that the future belongs to them. In less troubled times you would have come into your heritage in a more leisurely fashion. Now you must expect to be in the thick of things in years rather than decades. As English-speaking South Africans, for the most part from a strong Christian background, the proud heritage and background of strong moral commitment to which you have been exposed places a great responsibility on you to unlearn prejudices, to look on the world with a fearless eye and to demonstrate to your elders that you are going to do a better job than they did. There are many who condemn youth for

..../22

their lack of respect for authority, denigration of experience and general iconoclasm. Some of these traits are all to the good. Idols need toppling, there are many sacred cows to despatch. I am not one who shares in the widespread pessimism about young South Africans. To me they exhibit a welcome tendency to accept values from a deep sense of inner commitment rather than from a docile acquiescence in values imposed from without. Such an approach will carry you forward with the necessary determination to acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills to be used in the service of all your fellow men. It also enables you instinctively to realise that in looking to the future the greatest dangers are a failure of nerve, a lack of generosity and a too exclusive concern with the preservation of your own in-group. In

..../23

trying to preserve too much we stand in danger of losing all.

Young men in your last days at St. Andrew's, we have great faith in you. This school has prepared you to the best of its ability.

We know that you will not let it down

you will not let yourselves down

you will not let your country down.

Remember that the future in this world and the next belongs to those who prepare for it. The best preparation for both is a clear mental image of your goal, no more baggage than is necessary and a stout heart. As for a people, so too for an individual : if you have no clear commitment to a concept of your future, you probably do not have one. The Book of Proverbs puts it very succinctly "Where there is no vision the people perish". Let us hope that as in the

.... /24

days of the prophet Joel "it shall come to pass afterwards that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, you old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions".