

BISHOP MAKGOBA FUNCTION
Oppidan Dining Hall
23 February 2008

Bishop Makgoba, the Makgoba family, distinguished guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen – Molweni, good afternoon.

It is my pleasure to welcome you to Rhodes University, to this Oppidan Dining Hall, in the Student Union Building, which the University community has agreed will be renamed the Steve Biko Building in a ceremony with the Biko Family later this year.

It is a privilege for Rhodes University to be one of the hosts of this afternoon's function. We can claim Bishop Makgoba to be one of our own, as he is a member of the Rhodes University Council. Of course our association with the Makgoba family extends beyond that, as Lungi is a graduate of Rhodes University, and father-in-law Dr. Cecil Manona served the University with distinction for many years.

I met Bishop Makgoba soon after taking office some 20 months ago. It is my great regret that although we live a few streets away from each other, our very busy lives have meant few opportunities to socialise. Like everyone I was immediately impressed by his great modesty, which nonetheless failed to hide an outstanding intellect and wisdom which belied his youth, as well as by his deeply human nature.

Reading one weekend the brief autobiography that the Bishop provided me, it was clear where the quiet determination and wisdom came from. As in the case of others it is the long and arduous journey from the dusty streets of Alexandra and the determination to outwit and outsmart the design of apartheid's architects to reduce us to being mere hewers of wood and drawers of water that confers on people like Bishop Makgoba wisdom well beyond age.

I recall saying to some colleagues at Rhodes that while we were very fortunate to have Bishop Makgoba in Grahamstown, I feared that it would not be long and that here was person who was clearly destined for greater office. Recent events have confirmed this, and on behalf of Rhodes University I wish to congratulate the Bishop on his election as Archbishop and wish him well in this formidable new post with its huge and grave responsibilities. We know that the congregation has chosen well and that he will discharge his responsibilities with great imagination, wisdom and energy.

There are not many opportunities that one has to preach to an Archbishop, so I must use this last opportunity.

In the *Algebra of Infinite Justice*, Arundathi Roy writes 'the only dream worth having ...is to dream that you will live while you're alive and only die when you're dead'. This means

..to love. To be loved. To never forget our own insignificance To never get used to the unspeakable violence and vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try and understand. To never look away. And never, never to forget.

We must 'never forget' or 'look away' or 'get used to' our social structures and relations, which underpin the coexistence of unbridled accumulation of wealth and desperate and grinding poverty, great privileges for a small minority of rich and huge deprivation for a large majority of poor, unbound economic and social opportunities for some and the denial of such opportunities for many others.

Before his tragic murder deprived the world of an outstanding humanitarian and fighter for justice, Archbishop Romero of El Salvador observed that 'when

the church hears the cry of the oppressed it cannot but denounce the social structures that give rise to and perpetuate the misery from which the cry arises’.

The late Archbishop Dom Helder Camara who worked among the poor of Brazil was another who questioned the structures, systems and policies that produced great inequalities in Brazil, once observing that ‘When I feed the poor, they call me a saint; when I ask WHY they are poor, they call me a communist’.

On behalf of Rhodes I wish Bishop well, recognising that he is a man of this African soil well-aware of the challenges that face our society and confident that he will serve the church and our society with great distinction.