

ST MARY'S DIOCESAN SCHOOL FOR GIRLS, PRETORIA  
PRIZE GIVING, THURSDAY 27 NOVEMBER 1986

MY LORD BISHOP, HEADMASTER, MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNING BODY, GIRLS OF THE SCHOOL, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WHEN MR HUGH BROWN INVITED ME TO ADDRESS YOU THIS EVENING, I ACCEPTED WITH ALACRITY. WE HAVE KNOWN EACH OTHER FOR MORE YEARS THAN EITHER OF US CARES TO REMEMBER, HAVING BOTH BEEN PUPILS AT ST JOHN'S COLLEGE AND STUDENTS AT RHODES. ONE YEAR IN FACT WE SLEPT IN ADJACENT BEDS IN A LARGE DORMITORY. UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES YOU EITHER BECOME FIRM FRIENDS OR SWORN ENEMIES. WE WISELY CHOSE THE FORMER COURSE, AND THAT IS WHY I AM HERE TONIGHT. LITTLE DID I REALISE THAT MY DORMITORY MATE WAS DESTINED TO BECOME A HEADMASTER OF A GIRLS' SCHOOL. SUCH A POSSIBILITY WAS INCONCEIVABLE IN THOSE DAYS. I EXPECT THAT HE ALSO DID NOT THINK OF ME AS A FUTURE UNIVERSITY PRINCIPAL: I CERTAINLY DID NOT DO SO MYSELF.

AS I PREPARED MYSELF FOR THIS EVENING BY READING THE HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL AND SOME OF THE MAGAZINES, I REALISED THAT THERE WERE FURTHER CONNECTIONS TO BE MADE. FOR EXAMPLE, THERE IS A MARKED COMMONALITY IN BUILDING STYLES AMONG THE THREE INSTITUTIONS, RHODES, ST JOHN'S AND DSG. THE MAJOR BUILDINGS IN ALL THREE CASES ARE CLEARLY INFUSED WITH THE GENIUS OF HERBERT BAKER. IT CAME TO ME AS NO SURPRISE, THEREFORE, THAT YOUR ARCHITECT, VIVIAN REES-POOLE, WAS ONE OF BAKER'S APTEST APPRENTICES, AND HENCE EXPRESSED YOUR BUILDINGS IN THE CLASSIC MEDITERRANEAN STYLE, ADAPTED TO SOUTH AFRICAN CIRCUMSTANCES. HAVING EXPERIENCED THIS STYLE FOR THE MAJOR PORTION OF MY EDUCATIONAL CAREER, I NATURALLY REGARD IT AS SINGULARLY ADAPTED TO ITS PURPOSES. UNKIND CRITICS, HOWEVER, REFER TO IT AS COLONIAL MEDITERRANEAN.



AS I READ DEEPER INTO YOUR HISTORY I REALISED THAT THE BOUSFIELD  
HOUSE, OF WHICH I WAS A PROUD MEMBER AT ST JOHN'S PREPARATORY SCHOOL,  
WAS NAMED IN HONOUR OF YOUR FOUNDER. THE KEY ROLE OF RELIGIOUS ORDERS  
AND THEIR PIONEERING WORK IS SOMETHING TO WHICH ALL THREE INSTITUTIONS  
OWE AN INESTIMABLE DEBT, AN INDIRECT ONE IN THE CASE OF RHODES IN THAT  
WE HAVE INCORPORATED THE GRAHAMSTOWN TRAINING COLLEGE, FOUNDED BY THE  
COMMUNITY OF THE RESURRECTION. *It interested me to learn that the school was originally called*  
IN 1982 MY WIFE AND I VISITED ELY *St Ethelreda's*  
CATHEDRAL, QUITE FORTUITOUSLY ON ST ETHELREDA'S DAY, THE SIGNIFICANCE  
OF WHICH WE DID NOT APPRECIATE AT THE TIME. FINALLY, IF WE ADD TO ALL  
THESE CONSIDERATIONS THE MEMBERSHIP OF MY WIFE'S SISTER ON YOUR  
GOVERNING BODY, AND THE SMALL BUT STEADY STREAM OF DSG GIRLS THAT COME  
TO RHODES, MY WIFE AND I WERE CERTAIN THAT WE SHOULD FEEL AT HOME HERE  
TONIGHT.

IT IS NO SECRET THAT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS SUCH AS ST MARY'S DSG, ST JOHN'S AND RHODES, AND THE EDUCATIONAL TRADITIONS WHICH WE REPRESENT, ARE UNDER SERIOUS ATTACK IN THE RAPIDLY CHANGING AND TUMULTUOUS CIRCUMSTANCES OF SOUTH AFRICA TODAY. THE MAIN CRITICISM LEVELLED AGAINST US IS UNDOUBTEDLY THAT WE ARE ELITIST ORGANISATIONS, CATERING BY OUR VERY NATURE TO THE COMFORT AND INTERESTS OF THE RICH AND THE PRIVILEGED. IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THESE CRITICS ARE ADVOCATING THAT SCHOOLS LIKE YOURS SHOULD OFFER AN EDUCATION NO BETTER THAN THE AVERAGE, AND SHOULD DEVOTE ALL THEIR RESOURCES TO THE EDUCATIONALLY DEPRIVED, REGARDLESS OF THEIR LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE. THIS GOES CONSIDERABLY BEYOND A CALL TO OFFER A FAIR OPPORTUNITY OF ATTENDING SUCH SCHOOLS TO ANY PUPIL FROM ANY BACKGROUND, PROVIDED SHE CAN RESPOND TO THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND HER PARENTS ARE PREPARED TO MAKE THE NECESSARY SACRIFICES TO FIND THE FEES, OR A SPONSOR CAN BE FOUND



TO PROVIDE A BURSARY OR SCHOLARSHIP. THIS LATTER IDEA IS SURELY ONE WITH WHICH WE CAN ALL AGREE, BUT THE ANTI-ELITIST, EGALITARIAN WAY OF THOUGHT IMPLIES THAT EVERY PERSON SHOULD BE TREATED EXACTLY EQUALLY, AND NOT ONLY GIVEN AN EQUAL CHANCE AT THE BEGINNING. IT IS INTERESTING THAT NOBODY APPLIES THIS POLICY IN THE CASE OF SPORT. IN EVERY SPORT SITUATION THAT I KNOW OF, THE BEST AVAILABLE TEAM IS CHOSEN, AND ONCE SELECTED, GIVEN BETTER COACHING, BETTER EQUIPMENT AND BETTER FACILITIES. THIS SEEMS TO SUGGEST THAT SPORT IS HELD TO BE A MUCH MORE IMPORTANT MATTER THAN EDUCATION. IN SPORT A CLUB, A SCHOOL OR A COUNTRY DELIBERATELY SEEKS OUT THE BEST TALENT AND ENCOURAGES IT, IN THE HOPE THAT THE TEAM WILL PERFORM AT THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE LEVEL.

ONCE THIS APPARENTLY SENSIBLE IDEA IS APPLIED TO EDUCATION, HOWEVER, ALL SORTS OF PEOPLE CRY "FOUL". EDUCATION, IT WOULD SEEM, IS NOT VALUED FOR ITS OWN GOOD, *and for the service it can offer the community through the role played by its products* ~~BUT~~ MUST BE MADE TO FIT ITSELF IN TO A RIGID *Rather, it*

IDEA OF HOW SOCIETY SHOULD BE RUN, THAT IS THAT NOBODY SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO OUTPACE ANYBODY ELSE, NO MATTER WHAT HIS OR HER TALENTS OR MOTIVATION MAY BE.

SURELY THIS LEVELLING-DOWN IDEA, ONCE IT IS BROUGHT OUT INTO THE OPEN, CAN CLEARLY BE SEEN TO BE FLYING IN THE FACE OF ALL THAT WE KNOW OR CAN LEARN ABOUT HUMAN NATURE AND HISTORY. SINCE WE ARE TALKING ABOUT TALENTS, LET US CONSIDER THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS AS RELATED, FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER OF ST MATTHEW'S GOSPEL. WE ALL KNOW THE STORY VERY WELL. THE MASTER, JUST BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE ON A LONG JOURNEY, ENTRUSTS FIVE TALENTS TO THE FIRST SERVANT, TWO TO THE SECOND AND ONE TO A THIRD, IN PROPORTION TO HIS ESTIMATE OF THEIR ABILITIES. WE REMEMBER HOW THE FIRST TWO WERE VERY DILIGENT, AND DOUBLED THEIR MONEY, WHILE THE THIRD HID THE MONEY IN A HOLE, AND DID



NOT MAKE ANY PROFIT. THE MASTER, ON HIS RETURN, PRAISED THE FIRST TWO FOR THEIR HARD WORK, AND WAS SO ANGRY WITH THE THIRD THAT HE TOOK HIS SINGLE TALENT AWAY FROM HIM, AND PASSED IT ON TO BE ADDED TO THE TEN PRODUCED BY THE FIRST SERVANT. THE MASTER WAS OBVIOUSLY A SHREWD BUSINESSMAN, AND HAD JUDGED HIS EMPLOYEES WELL. HE HAD LAID OUT EIGHT TALENTS, WHICH HAD GROWN TO A TOTAL OF FIFTEEN. THIS REPRESENTS A GOOD TIDY PROFIT OF  $87\frac{1}{2}\%$ . NOT BAD BUSINESS.

SUPPOSE NOW INSTEAD WE TAKE AN "EQUAL SHARES" VIEW OF LIFE. FROM THIS VIEWPOINT THE PARABLE IS GROSSLY UNSATISFACTORY, AND TEACHES ALL THE WRONG LESSONS. IT WILL OBVIOUSLY HAVE TO BE RE-WRITTEN. THE MASTER WOULD TAKE HIS EIGHT TALENTS, AND SPLIT THEM EQUALLY AMONGST THE THREE SERVANTS. EACH WOULD RECEIVE EXACTLY  $2\frac{2}{3}$  OF A TALENT. AFTER ALL, THAT IS THE ONLY "FAIR" WAY TO DO THINGS. IF WE ASSUME THAT EACH

SERVANT PERFORMS MUCH AS BEFORE, (AND WHAT A BIG "IF" THAT THIS) THEN, AFTER A LITTLE ARITHMETIC WE SEE THAT THE TOTAL RETURN WOULD BE  $13\frac{1}{3}$  TALENTS, YIELDING A SOMEWHAT LOWER  $66\frac{2}{3}\%$  PROFIT. FURTHERMORE, THE THREE SERVANTS, BEING FAIRMINDED FELLOWS, WOULD GET TOGETHER AND DIVIDE THINGS UP EQUALLY, AND EACH WOULD SAY THAT HE NOW HAD  $4\frac{4}{9}$  TALENTS IN PLACE OF THE ORIGINAL  $2\frac{2}{3}$ . THE IDLE SERVANT WOULD NOT BE PUNISHED, AND JUST LIKE IN THE FAIRYTALES, THEY WOULD ALL LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER.

IN FACT, AFTER ITS REWRITE, THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT THE PARABLE HAS BECOME - A FAIRYTALE. WHERE ELSE BUT IN A FAIRYTALE WOULD AN EMPLOYER ENTRUST BOTH HIS ABLEST AND HIS MOST INCOMPETENT EMPLOYEE WITH EXACTLY THE SAME RESPONSIBILITIES? ONLY IN A FAIRYTALE WOULD THE MOTIVATED, DILIGENT WORKER RISK HIS OWN BONUS BY COVERING UP FOR THE IDLE, GOOD-



FOR-NOTHING LOAFER WHO HIDES THE BOSS'S MONEY IN A HOLE IN THE GROUND,  
AND DOZES IN THE SUN. IF THOSE REALLY WERE THE RULES OF THE GAME  
EVERYBODY WOULD DO JUST ENOUGH WORK TO KEEP OUT OF TROUBLE, AND IF  
TROUBLE WERE NOT VISITED UPON THEM, THEY WOULD DO NOTHING. YET,  
STRANGE TO RELATE, THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO SAY JUST THIS, ONCE YOU  
STRIP AWAY SOME OF THE CAMOUFLAGE. JUST THINK OF SOME OF THE SLOGANS  
ONE HEARS:-

"FROM EACH ACCORDING TO HIS ABILITIES, TO EACH ACCORDING TO HIS  
NEEDS"

"AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL"

"PASS ONE, PASS ALL" (IN RELATION TO SCHOOL ASSESSMENTS).

AS WE ALL KNOW, COUNTRIES WHICH RUN ON THIS KIND OF FAIRYTALE LOGIC  
TEND TO PRODUCE FAIRYTALE RESULTS, WITH THE ONE TELLING EXCEPTION:

THEY DO NOT GET TO LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER. IN MOST GOOD FAIRYTALES THESE USUALLY ARE SOME REALLY MENACING OGRES, WHO TEND TO GET THEIR COME-UPPANCE FROM THE HEROES, BUT WHEN THE HEROES HAVE BEEN LIQUIDATED THE OGRES COME INTO THEIR OWN.

IF WE APPLY WHAT I HAVE BEEN INFERRING TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE GIRLS OF THIS SCHOOL, THEN THERE IS NO NEED <sup>for anyone to make you</sup> ~~TO~~ FEEL GUILTY ABOUT YOUR GOOD FORTUNE IN BEING HERE. BE THANKFUL THAT YOUR FOUNDING BISHOP, THE PIONEERS AND THE GOOD SISTERS OF THE COMMUNITY OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN LABOURED SO DEVOTEDLY AND DILIGENTLY TO ESTABLISH AND NURTURE THIS SCHOOL, THAT THE PRESENT STAFF AND GOVERNING BODY MAINTAIN THE GOOD WORK AND THAT YOUR PARENTS MAKE SUCH SACRIFICES FOR YOU TO BE HERE. REJOICE IN YOUR GOOD FORTUNE. USE THIS FERTILE SOIL TO DEVELOP ALL THE TALENTS WITH WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN BLESSED. THERE IS NO MORE



NEED TO FEEL GUILTY ABOUT IT THAN THE FIRST TEAM HOCKEY PLAYER SHOULD WISH TO GIVE UP HER PLACE TO A LESS SKILLED AND LESS MOTIVATED GIRL IN THE SECOND TEAM.

YOUR PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY REALLY BEGINS WHEN YOU DECIDE HOW YOU ARE GOING TO EMPLOY THE OPPORTUNITIES WITH WHICH YOU HAVE SO ABUNDANTLY BEEN SHOWERED. ARE YOU GOING TO USE THEM TO FURTHER YOUR PERSONAL WEALTH, YOUR COMFORT OR EVEN YOUR SECURITY? IS THAT ADEQUATE RECOMPENSE FOR ALL THE SACRIFICES WHICH HAVE BEEN MADE ON YOUR BEHALF? OR ARE YOU RATHER GOING TO DEVELOP YOUR ADVANTAGES SO THAT YOU CAN SERVE GOD AND OTHER PEOPLE AND SO PERPETUATE THE GREAT TRADITIONS OF THIS SCHOOL.

THE CHOICE IS YOURS, OR IS IT? IF THE ANSWER IS "YES", THEN WE MUST ACCEPT THE VIEW THAT INDIVIDUALS DO MATTER, AND THAT THEIR EFFORTS DO MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE. ONCE AGAIN WE HAVE TO STRIP AWAY SOME VERY TENACIOUS FALLACIES. IN THE LAST FEW CENTURIES THERE HAS BEEN NO SHORTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE SAID IN EFFECT THAT EACH ONE OF US, NO MATTER HOW MUCH WE MAY DENY IT, IS PREPROGRAMMED. JUST LIKE A COMPUTER, AND THAT WE HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO OBEY OUR "PROGRAMME". SINCE WE ARE ONLY SOPHISTICATED MACHINES, LET US NOT DELUDE OURSELVES INTO THINKING THAT WHAT WE DO IS OF ANY LASTING IMPORTANCE. HOW THEY GET AROUND THE ARGUMENT THAT, IF SUCH IS THE CASE, THEN THEIR DOCTRINE ITSELF IS MERELY PROGRAMMED INTO THEM, AND SO NOT TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY, I HAVE NEVER MANAGED TO UNDERSTAND. BEFORE COMPUTERS WERE INVENTED ONE COULD NOT SPEAK OF PROGRAMMING. THE ARGUMENT WAS WRAPPED UP IN PONDEROUS PHRASES LIKE "PREDESTINATION", "ECONOMIC DETERMINISM"



OR "PSYCHOLOGICAL COMPLEXES", BUT IT REALLY AMOUNTED TO THE SAME THING. AN ANONYMOUS LIMERICK SUMMED IT UP BEAUTIFULLY:-

"THERE WAS A YOUNG MAN WHO SAID, 'DAMN!  
AT LAST I'VE FOUND OUT THAT I AM -  
A CREATURE THAT MOVES  
IN DETERMINATE GROOVES,  
IN FACT NOT A BUS BUT A TRAM'".

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, AND ESPECIALLY THE YOUNG LADIES OF THE SCHOOL,  
IF I HAVE DURING THE SHORT TIME AT MY DISPOSAL CONTRIBUTED TO  
REINFORCING YOUR UNDERSTANDING THAT IT IS AN ENORMOUS PRIVILEGE AND AN  
UNMERITED STROKE OF GOOD FORTUNE TO HAVE BEEN AN ACTIVE PART OF THE

LIFE OF THE DSG, THEN MY LABOURS WILL NOT HAVE BEEN IN VAIN.

FURTHERMORE, IF YOU GO OUT FROM HERE DETERMINED TO DEPLOY THAT PRIVILEGE IN THE SERVICE OF OTHERS, (AND NOT TO DECRY IT AS A LAMENTABLE PIECE OF ELITISM), IN THE CONVICTION THAT YOUR PERSONAL ENDEAVOURS WILL MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE, THEN YOU WILL HAVE AMPLY FULFILLED THE IDEALS OF THE FOUNDERS.

I WELL RECALL THE OCCASION, EXACTLY FORTY YEARS AGO, ALMOST TO THE DAY, WHEN I ATTENDED MY LAST PRIZE-GIVING AS A SCHOOLBOY. WHAT SCHOOL LEAVER DOES NOT VIEW SUCH AN EVENT WITH VERY MIXED EMOTIONS? ONE IS EMERGING FROM THE SECURITY OF A KNOWN AND PREDICTABLE ENVIRONMENT, AMONGST FIRM FRIENDS FROM WHOM ONE MUST PART, AND WHOSE PATHS MAY NEVER CROSS AGAIN. AHEAD LIES A DAUNTING AND UNCERTAIN FUTURE, FULL



BOTH OF EXCITING CHALLENGES AND PERHAPS SOME DISAPPOINTMENTS. FROM THE TOP RUNG OF THE LADDER OF YOUR SCHOOL LIFE YOU WILL DESCEND ONCE AGAIN TO THE BOTTOM RUNG OF A CAREER OR ANOTHER INSTITUTION. THAT COULD BE A REAL TEST OF HUMILITY. I OFFER YOU MY BEST WISHES FOR WHATEVER LIES AHEAD IN THE NEXT LAP IN THE RELAY OF LIFE.

IT REMAINS FOR ME TO EXPRESS MY CONGRATULATIONS TO THOSE WHO HAVE MERITED AWARDS AND PRIZES, AND TO TAKE YOU BACK AGAIN FOR ONE BRIEF MOMENT TO THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS. YOUR RETIRING HEADMASTER, HUGH BROWN, MOST DEFINITELY DID NOT PUT HIS TALENTS IN THE GROUND, EITHER DURING HIS DECADE OR SO HERE, OR IN WELKOM OR EARLIER IN HIS TEACHING AREER. I CAN CONFIRM FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCE WHAT AN EXACTING TASK IT IS TO BE HEAD OF AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION IN THESE DAYS OF RAPID



TRANSITION. HIS LIFE HAS BEEN ONE OF DEDICATED AND SELFLESS SERVICE.  
THERE CANNOT BE ONE PERSON HERE TO NIGHT WHO WOULD NOT SAY, AS IN THE  
PARABLE, "WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT", AND ~~TO~~ WISH HIM AND  
MRS BROWN A RICHLY DESERVED AND WELCOME RESPITE FROM THEIR LABOURS.

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