

23/4/87

VICE-CHANCELLOR'S SPEECH AT THE 23RD ANNUAL CONGRESS OF THE NEW
TESTAMENT SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA DINNER - THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 1987

IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO WELCOME YOU, THE MEMBERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA, AND YOUR GUESTS, ON YOUR FIRST OFFICIAL VISIT TO RHODES UNIVERSITY. I HOPE THAT THIS WILL NOT BE THE LAST MEETING OF YOUR SOCIETY AT THIS UNIVERSITY.

WE TAKE PRIDE IN OUR FACULTY OF DIVINITY AT RHODES. AT A TIME WHEN THERE IS SO MUCH DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE VARIOUS CHURCHES IN THIS COUNTRY, AS WELL AS OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD, A SOCIETY SUCH AS YOURS, CONSISTING LARGELY OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SO-CALLED "AFRIKAANS" CHURCHES IS MEETING AT RHODES UNIVERSITY IN GRAHAMSTOWN. IT IS PARTICULARLY PLEASING THAT YOU SHOULD HAVE SELECTED A RECOGNISED CENTRE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND THE SO-CALLED "ENGLISH" CHURCHES.

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GRAHAMSTOWN IS KNOWN AS THE "CITY OF SAINTS" BECAUSE IT IS CRAMMED WITH SO MANY CHURCHES, CHURCH SCHOOLS AND OTHER RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS. THE RECORD OF THE SISTERS OF THE COMMUNITY OF THE RESURRECTION, WHO FOR SO MANY YEARS RAN AN EXCELLENT TEACHERS' TRAINING COLLEGE HERE, IS NOT THE LEAST IMPORTANT OF OUR CLAIMS TO FAME AS A CENTRE OF CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY IN SOUTH AFRICA. GREAT MEN AND WOMEN OF SEVERAL DENOMINATIONS HAVE MADE THEIR MARK ON GRAHAMSTOWN AND ITS ENVIRONS. I THINK, THEREFORE, THAT WE ARE WELL-QUALIFIED, AS THE SAINTS OF GRAHAMSTOWN, TO WELCOME THE SAINTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA.

AN IMPORTANT, AND OFTEN FORGOTTEN, EVENT IS COMMEMORATED BY A MONUMENT ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THIS CITY. THE BIBLE MONUMENT MARKS THE SPOT WHERE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE BRITISH SETTLERS PRESENTED BOER TREKKERS WITH A BIBLE AS THEY SET OUT TO CONQUER NEW HORIZONS DURING THE LAST

CENTURY. THIS EVENT WAS IMPORTANT BECAUSE DESPITE CULTURAL, LANGUAGE AND POLITICAL DIFFERENCES BOTH BOER AND SETTLER WERE UNITED IN THEIR FAITH IN THE ONE FATHER. IT IS PERHAPS SOMETHING WE NEED TO RE-LEARN IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

YOUR CONGRESS THEME, "THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN" IS ONE THAT WOULD CAUSE MANY A MAN OR WOMAN IN THE PEW TO QUAIL. AS WE APPROACH THE END OF THE SECOND MILLENIUM, MANY CHRISTIANS REMAIN CONFUSED ABOUT THE TEACHINGS CONTAINED IN THE FINAL BOOK OF THE BIBLE AND, INDEED, ABOUT MOST OF THE APOCALYPTIC TEACHING IN OTHER PARTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AS WELL AS THE OLD TESTAMENT.

I HOPE THAT YOUR DELIBERATIONS IN GRAHAMSTOWN WILL FILTER THROUGH TO OTHER CHRISTIANS WHO HAVE LOST MUCH OF THE RICHNESS OF BIBLICAL

TEACHING THROUGH THE FAILURE, IN MANY CHURCHES, TO TEACH ABOUT THE APOCALYPTIC WRITINGS. SOME OF THE MISINTERPRETATIONS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS THAT HAVE ARISEN FROM THIS LACK OF TEACHING HAVE SOMETIMES BEEN BIZARRE, I AM SURE YOU WILL AGREE.

I NOTE THAT THIS IS THE TWENTY-THIRD ANNUAL CONGRESS OF YOUR SOCIETY - A NOTABLE RECORD FOR A LEARNED SOCIETY IN THIS COUNTRY. I HOPE THAT YOUR FINAL DAY OF MEETINGS WILL BE WORTHWHILE AND INTERESTING AND THAT YOUR TWENTY-FOURTH CONGRESS WILL BE EQUALLY VALUABLE TO ALL WHO ATTEND IN 1988.

DR D S HENDERSON

APRIL 23, 1987