

ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, JOHANNESBURG, SPEECH DAY ADDRESS

FRIDAY 28 NOVEMBER 1986

MY LORD BISHOP, CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF COUNCIL, HEADMASTER AND STAFF, BOYS (AND GIRLS) OF THE COLLEGE, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, AS I STAND HERE BEFORE YOU THIS AFTERNOON MANY POIGNANT MEMORIES JUXTAPOSE THEMSELVES IN MY MIND. THE LAST TIME WHICH I ATTENDED THIS FUNCTION WAS EXACTLY FORTY YEARS AGO, ALMOST TO THE DAY. ON THAT OCCASION I WAS A RECIPIENT, RATHER THAN BEING NUMBERED AMONGST THE GREAT AND THE GOOD ON THE STAGE. IT WAS THE LAST DAY OF MY SCHOOL CAREER, AND WHAT SCHOOL LEAVER DOES NOT VIEW SUCH A MOMENT WITH VERY MIXED EMOTIONS? ONE WAS FORSAKING THE SECURITY OF A KNOWN AND PREDICTABLE ENVIRONMENT, DOMINATED, AND TO A LARGE EXTENT SHAPED BY A GIFTED AND LEGENDARY HEADMASTER, S.H. CLARKE, TO WHOM SO MANY IN MY GENERATION OWE SO MUCH. THERE WERE FIRM FRIENDS FROM WHOM ONE HAD TO PART, AND WHOSE

PATHS MAY NEVER HAVE CROSSED AGAIN. ONE WAS SHORTLY TO BE SHORN OF A LITTLE BRIEF AUTHORITY, TO PLUNGE INTO THE ALIEN ENVIRONMENT OF ANOTHER INSTITUTION, WHERE LIFE BEGAN AGAIN ON THE BOTTOM RUNG OF THE LADDER. THAT IS THE DAUNTING PROSPECT WHICH MANY OF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING TO-DAY, AND I WISH YOU WELL FOR THE NEXT PHASE OF YOUR CAREERS.

THERE ARE, OF COURSE, SOME SATISF^{ying}~~ACTORY~~ COMPENSATIONS. IF YOU HAVE BEEN A BOARDER THE IMPERIOUS SCHOOL BELL WILL NO LONGER REGULATE YOUR LIFE, TWENTY-FOUR HOURS A DAY. FOR SOME EIGHTEEN MONTHS AFTER LEAVING, THAT BELL STILL DOMINATED MY DREAMS. MANY WAS THE OCCASION WHEN I WOULD SIT BOLT UPRIGHT IN BED, CONVINCED THAT I HAD MISSED EARLY MORNING ROLL-CALL, ONLY TO WIPE THE SWEAT OFF MY BROW, AND RETURN THANKFULLY TO SLEEP IN THE REALISATION THAT THE SUMMONS EXISTED

ONLY IN MY SUBCONSCIOUS. A FURTHER COMPENSATION IS THAT SOME OF YOU IN FORTY YEARS TIME MIGHT FIND YOURSELVES ON THIS PLATFORM. IT IS A MEASURE OF THE GROWING MATURITY OF THE COLLEGE THAT NOT ONLY YOUR SPEAKER, BUT ALSO YOUR BISHOP, YOUR CHAIRMAN OF COUNCIL AND BOTH HEADMASTERS ARE OLD JOHANNIANS. UNTIL VERY RECENTLY DUNCAN BUCHANAN WAS A NEAR NEIGHBOUR IN GRAHAMSTOWN, WHERE SOMETHING OF A ST JOHN'S MAFIA WIELDS GREAT INFLUENCE.

{ warden of St Paul's,
2nd master of St. Andrews
(recently) H of SAs } prominent academics
doctors & accountants }

NOT ONLY THE OCCASION BUT THE VERY HALL, THIS BIG SCHOOL, REVERBERATES WITH MEMORIES FOR ANY JOHANNIAN. MANY A GENERATION RECALLS WITH NOSTALGIA AND APPRECIATION THE SERIES OF EXCELLENT GILBERT AND SULLIVANS SUPERBLY PRODUCED BY NOEL IVERSON, OR THE SCHOOL PLAYS IN WHICH HE MIGHT HAVE ENJOYED A MINOR ROLE.

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T of T Hall
only one of DSH, RSH, CSH made it
to thrust day chair
|| Reading. staccato → legato
might as well have been
Italian

IT IS NOT ONLY AS A JOHANNIAN BUT ALSO AS VICE-CHANCELLOR OF RHODES UNIVERSITY THAT I HAVE BEEN INVITED TO ADDRESS YOU TODAY. THE LINKS AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE TWO INSTITUTIONS ARE STRONG AND DEEP. AT ANY GIVEN TIME THERE ARE BETWEEN TWENTY AND TWENTY-FIVE OLD JOHANNIANS AT RHODES, AND THE TRAFFIC IS NOT ONE WAY. RHODIANS OVER THE YEARS HAVE MADE A LASTING CONTRIBUTION AS STAFF MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL. IN MY OWN CASE IT WAS THE DEEP RESPECT IN WHICH I HELD MY HOUSEMASTER, J.H. HUGGETT, AND MY SCIENCE MASTER DOUGLAS JEFFREY WHICH TIPPED THE SCALES IN FAVOUR OF RHODES. BOTH INSTITUTIONS ARE DOMINATED BY BAKER OR BAKER INSPIRED BUILDINGS, THE DETAILED HANDIWORK OF HIS DISCIPLES FLEMING OR KENDALL AND MASEY. THE INFLUENCE OF THE COMMUNITY OF THE RESURRECTION IS DIRECT AND SELF-EVIDENT AT ST JOHN'S, INDIRECT BUT NONETHELESS REAL AT RHODES, IN THAT WE TOOK OVER THE COMMUNITY-FOUNDED GRAHAMSTOWN TRAINING COLLEGE WITH ITS BAKER CHAPEL, IN WHICH YOU WILL MARK THE SELF-SAME CANDLESTICKS AS ADORN THE HIGH ALTAR HERE.

THE FINAL SIMILARITY LIES IN OUR MOTTOS, IN EACH CASE THREE UNCOMPROMISING LATIN ABSTRACT NOUNS. AT ST JOHN'S IT IS LUX, VITA, CARITAS, OR LIGHT, LIFE, LOVE: WHEREAS AT RHODES WE HAVE THE ALLITERATIVE VIS, VIRTUS, VERITAS, OR STRENGTH, COURAGE, TRUTH. IN EITHER CASE THE CHALLENGES ARE EXPLICIT, AND NOT TO BE DENIED. I SHOULD LIKE THIS AFTERNOON TO TAKE UP THE CONCEPT OF TRUTH, ECHOED IN PART BY LIGHT, BOTH HAVING A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH KNOWLEDGE, WITHOUT A COMMITMENT TO WHICH NO EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION CAN BE WORTHY OF THE NAME.

A GOOD DICTIONARY DEFINITION OF TRUTH IS AGREEMENT WITH REALITY, WITH WHAT IS. WE ARRIVE AT TRUTH BY MEANS OF THE MENTAL ILLUMINATION OF THE LUX OF YOUR MOTTO. THE RESULT IS KNOWLEDGE, OR THE CONFORMITY OF THE OBJECT AND THE INTELLECT. NOT ALL TRUTH IS OF COURSE KNOWN TO US,

OR IS EVER LIKELY TO BE, SHORT OF THE BEATIFIC VISION. REALITY IS FAR RICHER AND TOO EXTENSIVE FOR US TO GRASP. IN OUR PAINFUL GROPING AFTER KNOWLEDGE WE CAN OFTEN BE COMPARED WITH THE DRUNKARD WHOM A POLICEMAN FOUND ONE EVENING ON HANDS AND KNEES, ~~GROPING AROUND~~ UNDER A STREET LIGHT. THE MAN SAID HE WAS LOOKING FOR HIS KEYS. "WHERE DID YOU DROP THEM"? ASKED THE POLICEMAN. "ABOUT TWENTY METRES DOWN THE STREET", SAID THE MAN, "BUT THERE IS NO LIGHT THERE"! PROBABLY THE GREATEST SCIENTIST WHO EVER LIVED, SIR ISAAC NEWTON, UNDERSTOOD WITH GREAT CLARITY HOW FAR OUR INTELLECTUAL ATTAINMENTS FALL SHORT OF OUR AMBITIONS. TOWARDS THE END OF HIS LONG AND ILLUSTRIOUS CAREER HE MODESTLY ASSESSED HIS ACHIEVEMENTS IN THESE WORDS:-

"I DO NOT KNOW WHAT I MAY APPEAR TO THE WORLD; BUT TO MYSELF I SEEM TO HAVE BEEN ONLY LIKE A BOY PLAYING ON THE SEASHORE, AND

DIVERTING MYSELF IN NOW AND THEN FINDING A SMOOTHER PEBBLE OR PRETTIER SHELL THAN ORDINARY, WHILST THE GREAT OCEAN OF TRUTH LAY ALL UNDISCOVERED BEFORE ME".

ST PAUL, SPEAKING IN A MORE RELIGIOUS VEIN, MAKES THE SAME POINT IN HIS FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS:-

"FOR NOW WE SEE THROUGH A GLASS, DARKLY; BUT THEN FACE TO FACE: NOW I KNOW IN PART; BUT THEN I SHALL KNOW EVEN AS I AM KNOWN".

OUR KNOWLEDGE, IMPERFECT, APPROXIMATE AND LIMITED THOUGH IT BE, IS SLOWLY AND PAINFULLY ACQUIRED, AS ALL OF YOU WHO HAVE SPENT UP TO TWELVE OR THIRTEEN YEARS OF SCHOOLING IN ITS PURSUIT ARE INDUBITALLY

AWARE. THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE, OR MAY BECOME TEACHERS, WILL ALSO APPRECIATE HOW PRECARIOUS AND UNCERTAIN IS ITS PRESERVATION AND TRANSMISSION. ITS EXTENSION IS EVEN MORE DEMANDING, AS ANYONE WITH EVEN THE SLIGHTEST EXPERIENCE OF EXPERIMENTATION OR RESEARCH WILL READILY ATTEST. WITH KNOWLEDGE THEREFORE AT THE CORE OF THE WHOLE EDUCATIONAL ENTERPRISE, WHICH ITSELF CAN NOW BE CLASSED AS ALMOST OUR LARGEST INDUSTRY, IF THAT IS NOT TOO OFFENSIVE A TERM, IT NEVER CEASES TO SURPRISE ME HOW CARELESS PEOPLE CAN BE WITH IT. HISTORICALLY THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN SOME, THOUGH THESE CANNOT BE MANY TODAY, WHO WOULD AFFECT A "HOLY IGNORANCE", CLAIMING THAT ANY KNOWLEDGE NOT RELATING TO THEOLOGY OR THE SCRIPTURES IS AT BEST SUPERFLUOUS, AT WORST POSITIVELY HARMFUL. OTHERS, THE VERY ANTITHESIS OF NEWTON, ARE SUPREMELY ARROGANT CONCERNING THEIR INTELLECTUAL ATTAINMENTS. A PARADIGM EXAMPLE OF THIS ATTITUDE IS ATTRIBUTED, PROBABLY UNFAIRLY, BUT

CERTAINLY AMUSINGLY, TO A LEGENDARY MASTER OF BALLIOL, BY A GROUP OF UNDERGRADUATES IN THE 1870'S:-

"FIRST COME I; MY NAME IS JOWETT.

THERE IS NO KNOWLEDGE BUT I KNOW IT.

I AM MASTER OF THIS COLLEGE:

WHAT I DON'T KNOW ISN'T KNOWLEDGE".

KNOWLEDGE IS A DEMANDING AND A JEALOUS MISTRESS. IT IS TO BE USED, CERTAINLY, BUT FIRST IT MUST BE GAINED AND RESPECTED FOR ITS OWN SAKE. THOSE, AND THERE ARE MANY TODAY, WHO ARGUE THAT WE MUST PLACE PRIME EMPHASIS ON EXPLOITING THE KNOWLEDGE WE HAVE, WITH A GREATER PRIORITY THAN ACQUIRING MORE, ARE CONSUMING INTELLECTUAL SEED CORN. THEY ARE LIKE MINEOWNERS WHO PLACE ALL THE EMPHASIS ON ORE EXTRACTION.

TO THE DETRIMENT OF DEVELOPING NEW RESERVES. SUCH AN ATTITUDE MERELY POSTPONES THE DAY OF RECKONING.

THESE ATTITUDES TO KNOWLEDGE, THAT IS, WILLFUL IGNORANCE, ARROGANCE OR KILLING THE GOOSE THAT LAYS THE GOLDEN EGGS, ARE AS MINOR PECCADILLOES WHEN CONSIDERED ALONGSIDE THE ACTIONS OF THOSE WHO KNOWINGLY AND DELIBERATELY DISTORT, MANIPULATE, EVEN PROSTITUTE KNOWLEDGE, AND THE UNDERLYING TRUTH ASSOCIATED WITH IT, IN THE ALLEGED SERVICE OF AN IDEOLOGY OR CAUSE, HOWEVER DEVOUTLY AND COMMITTEDLY THAT CAUSE MAY BE CHERISHED. I SUPPOSE WE HAVE ALL BEEN FACED AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER WITH A SITUATION WHERE THE APPARENT INTERESTS OF A BELOVED INSTITUTION OR IDEAL APPEAR TO BE COMPROMISED BY AN AWKWARD FACT OR INOPPORTUNE EMBARRASSMENT. THE TEMPTATION TO TEMPORISE, OR EVEN DECEIVE, CAN BE ALMOST OVERWHELMING. IT OFTEN TAKES A REAL ACT OF FAITH TO ACCEPT

THAT NO IDEAL WORTHY OF OUR ALLEGIANCE CAN HAVE ITS LONG TERM INTERESTS COMPROMISED BY A STRICT AND IMPARTIAL ADHERENCE TO THE TRUTH. TRUTH, IF I MAY REPEAT, IS AGREEMENT WITH REALITY. JUST AS THERE IS ONLY ONE REALITY, SO THERE CAN ONLY BE ONE AND INDIVISIBLE TRUTH. TRUTH, LIKE GOODNESS AND BEAUTY, ARE ATTRIBUTES OF THE SUPREME REALITY, WHICH IS GOD. IT MUST NOT THEREFORE BE SUBORDINATED TO THE INTERESTS OF A CAUSE, WHETHER IN THE SCHOOLS OR UNIVERSITIES, IN POLITICS OR IN THE CHURCH. THE END, HOWEVER NOBLE, IS NEVER SERVED BY AN IGNOBLE MEANS, A COMPROMISE WITH THE TRUTH.

THIS FAITH IN THE INDIVISIBILITY OF THE TRUTH IS THE ONLY CURE TO THE CONFUSION ENGENDERED BY THE PERIODIC CONFLICTS BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION, SUCH AS THOSE ASSOCIATED WITH THE NAMES OF GALILEO AND DARWIN, AND WHICH STILL TROUBLE SOME MINDS TODAY. IF FOR EXAMPLE

THERE IS SOME DISCREPANCY AS TO WHETHER THE WORLD WAS CREATED IN 4004 BC OR FOUR BILLION AND FOUR BC, TO THE MAN OF FAITH THERE ARE TWO LOGICAL ALTERNATIVES: EITHER THE FINAL VERDICT OF SCIENCE IS NOT YET IN, OR ELSE HE HAS NOT FULLY UNDERSTOOD HIS FAITH. IN EITHER EVENT HIS PRIDE MAY RECEIVE A BRUISING, BUT THERE IS NO NEED FOR EITHER HIS INTELLECT OR HIS FAITH TO DO SO. IN A SUPREME IRONY, A FURTHER SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENT, ASSOCIATED WITH THE NAME OF EINSTEIN, MADE THE GALILEAN DILEMMA IRRELEVANT: IN RELATIVISTIC SENSE, DEPENDING ON YOUR FRAME OF REFERENCE, THE SUN CAN BE VIEWED AS GOING ROUND THE EARTH, OR THE EARTH ROUND THE SUN, WITH EQUAL VALIDITY, ALTHOUGH THE LATTER IS UNQUESTIONABLY THE MORE MATHEMATICALLY CONVENIENT STANCE.

AS WE CONTEMPLATE THE TROUBLED AND UNCERTAIN FUTURE OF OUR BELOVED COUNTRY, LET US ACCEPT THAT NOTHING OF LASTING VALUE WILL BE

ACCOMPLISHED BY COMPROMISING, FEARING OR SUPPRESSING THE TRUTH. NO PARTY IN OUR SITUATION OF CONFLICT HAS A MONOPOLY ON THE TRUTH, ON RIGHTEOUSNESS OR ON LEGITIMATE FEARS. WHAT ULTIMATE PURPOSE THEREFORE IS SERVED BY DENYING PEOPLE A HEARING OR SUPPRESSING THEIR VIEWS? BY THE SAME TOKEN THOSE WHO STILL HAVE ACCESS TO THE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION OR WHO ARE WITH INFLUENCE IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITIES, HAVE AN AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY TO AVOID THE TEMPTATION OF GRANDSTANDING, OF PANDERING TO THE LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR, AND OF PRESENTING PLAUSIBLE HALF TRUTHS. FOR SUCH SINS AGAINST THE LIGHT, IN THESE GRAVE TIMES, I AM CONVINCED THERE IS A SPECIAL PUNISHMENT RESERVED.

LET ME GIVE YOU A CONCRETE ILLUSTRATION OF WHAT I AM CONCERNED WITH. ON NOT A FEW OCCASIONS I HAVE EITHER PERSONALLY WITNESSED A POLITICALLY SUPERCHARGED EVENT, OR HAD A FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT FROM SOMEBODY I COULD

TRUST WITH ABSOLUTE CONFIDENCE. SUBSEQUENTLY I HAVE SEEN BOTH TELEVISION AND NEWSPAPER VERSIONS. THAT THE TV AND THE NEWSPAPER COULD ALMOST BE DESCRIBING UNRELATED EVENTS DID NOT NECESSARILY SURPRISE ONE. THAT BOTH VERSIONS SEEMED OFTEN TO HAVE ONLY THE MOST TENUOUS RELATIONSHIP WITH REALITY ALWAYS CAME AS A SHOCK. GRINDING EITHER THE LEFT-HAND OR THE RIGHT-HAND SIDE OF THE AXE SEEMS FREQUENTLY TO BE OF GREATER CONCERN TO THE AUTHOR THAN ILLUMINATING THE MINDS OF HIS AUDIENCE.

HOW CAN WE, WHO HAVE BEEN SO PRIVILEGED IN OUR EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, POSSIBLY SERVE OUR COUNTRY OR ITS PEOPLE, IF WE DO NOT RESPECT THE TRUTH, AND STRIVE EVER MORE DILIGENTLY TO KNOW IT? IF OUR EDUCATION UP TO NOW MEANS ANYTHING AT ALL, OR WILL BE OF ANY CONSEQUENCE IN THE FUTURE, THAT IS OUR BOUNDEN DUTY.

WHENEVER I SING G.K. CHESTERTON'S GREAT HYMN I HAVE AN UNEASY FEELING
THAT IN SOME PROVIDENTIAL WAY IT WAS WRITTEN PARTICULARLY
TO FIT OUR PRESENT SOUTH AFRICAN CIRCUMSTANCES. THE FIRST STANZA
SUMMARIZES OUR CURRENT POSITION AND NEEDS.

"O GOD OF EARTH AND ALTAR,
BOW DOWN AND HEAR OUR CRY,
OUR EARTHLY RULERS FALTER,
OUR PEOPLE DRIFT AND DIE;
THE WALLS OF GOLD ENTOMB US,
THE SWORDS OF SCORN DIVIDE,
TAKE NOT THY THUNDER FROM US,
BUT TAKE AWAY OUR PRIDE."

HIS SECOND STANZA TOUCHES DIRECTLY ON WHAT I HAVE BEEN SAYING.

"FROM ALL THAT TERROR TEACHES,
FROM LIES OF TONGUE AND PEN,
FROM ALL THE EASY SPEECHES
THAT COMFORT CRUEL MEN,
FROM SALE AND PROFANATION
OF HONOUR AND THE SWORD,
FROM SLEEP AND FROM DAMNATION,
DELIVER US, GOOD LORD!"

FINALLY IN THE THIRD VERSE HE EXHORTS GOD TO "BIND ALL OUR LIVES
TOGETHER", AND TO

"LIFT UP A LIVING NATION,
A SINGLE SWORD TO THEE"

WHETHER THESE CRUEL MEN, SO ADDICTED TO OR COMFORTED BY EASY SPEECHES, ARE TO BE FOUND ON THE LEFT OR ON THE RIGHT, YOUR TASK, THOSE OF YOU ESPECIALLY WHO ARE ON THE THRESHOLD OF LEAVING THIS GREAT COLLEGE, IS TO BE AN APOSTLE OF THE TRUTH, AS WELL AS OF LOVE. ST JOHN, THE APOSTLE OF LOVE PAR EXCELLENCE, NONETHELESS IN THE PENULTIMATE VERSE OF HIS GOSPEL TELL US THAT

"THIS IS THE DISCIPLE WHICH BEARETH WITNESS OF THESE THINGS, AND WROTE THESE THINGS: AND WE KNOW THAT HIS WITNESS IS TRUE".

LIKE ST JOHN I MUST BRING MY TESTIMONY TO A CLOSE. BEFORE I RESUME MY DEAT I SHOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE ALL THOSE WHOSE EXERTIONS HAVE MERITED PRIZES, AND TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO SCALE EVEN GREATER HEIGHTS. AFTER FORTY YEARS I STILL NURTURE A GREAT PRIDE IN AND AFFECTION FOR ST JOHN'S COLLEGE.

I HOPE THAT I AM NEVER OBLIGED TO PUT IN ANY PRIORITY ORDER MY
SENTIMENTS TOWARDS ST JOHN'S AND RHODES. MAY THEY BOTH THEREFORE
CONTINUE TO BE FLOURISHING EDUCATIONAL CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE, TO
SERVE ALL THE PEOPLE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA FOR THE NEXT FORTY YEARS, AND
THEREAFTER.

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18 NOVEMBER 1986