

THE SIXTH ANNUAL PETER STOREY LECTURE

DELIVERED BY JUSTICE DIKGANG MOSENEKE

At

SETH MOKITIMI METHODIST SEMINARY

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I owe my presence here today to the Chairperson, Prof Gordon N Zide, and the esteemed members of the Governing Council of the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary and indeed to the President of the Seminary, Prof Simangaliso Raymond Kumalo. They collectively sought me out, hounded my senior minister at the Glen Methodist Church, Rev Smanga Bosman who is gratefully here, and persuaded me to assume the role of Grand Chancellor of this inspirational institution.

I salute all esteemed guests who are here present this evening in the name of our Lord and Saviour. I thank my wife Kabonina who did her utmost to be here in support. That she has done for 42 years of our marriage. So too my brother, Malatse Moseneke and his wife Nkhulwane Moseneke and their entire family.

When I was approached to become Grand Chancellor I remarked that I had always felt called to become a good judge of our highest court when it mattered most. The entire trajectory of my life from childhood had prepared me for the role of an activist judge who worshipped at the altar of the pursuit of a just society. I was cut out to help manage our transition to democracy and thereafter to police the democratic reconstruction whose hallmarks were meant to be an open, accountable, clean and compassionate governance under a supreme Constitution and the rule of law. A crucial part of that reconstruction was a narrowing of the social distance between those historically privileged and those who sat on the margins of an exclusive society. That role came nearly naturally as if I was born, if not anointed, to perform.

By the grace of our Lord and Maker, I stayed on course, did my very best and completed my judicial assignment. Even more rewarding was the enduring gratitude and love of our nation in its full diversity. The people appreciated what we judges did and the Court in which I worked. The strength of the Court was founded in the popular support it enjoyed and the correct calls it made. I wish my remaining judicial colleagues well in the enduring task to do justice.

But I do not have the same ease about a leadership role in the Church of my forebears; even though the role is ceremonial and symbolic. I have always seen myself as one of the flock and certainly not a good shepherd of our faith. I have been happy to be led and not to lead in spiritual matters accepting that those who are called to lead are ordinarily given the gift of a deeper and more discerning faith. I have had the fortune of being ministered to by scores of Wesleyan pastors all my life. My spiritual zone of comfort has always been in the pews and not at the altar. In many ways, I thought myself to be a quiet if not a reticent believer.

This reluctance to lead in our church persists, despite the warm tribute I have paid, in my memoir, *My Own Liberator*, to my Christian and in particular, my Wesleyan upbringing. I have recalled my Sunday school morning tutorials in the vibrant Methodist Church in Atteridgeville. I wrote about my maternal grandfather, Makubande Dick Makhaza ka Qwabe who claimed the exclusive right to ring the church bell calling the congregation to worship. Nobody but nobody else for over 40 years touched that church bell chain that ran high into the tall church tower. Every Sunday he yanked that chain with remarkable gusto.

In the memoir I recollected fondly my confirmation in the stone chapel on the kopje overlooking Kilnerton Training Institution under the tutelage of the Rev. Dugmore (whose predecessor was Reverend Peter Storey). My confirmation class teacher was Mmutlanyane Stanley Mogoba who was to become my fellow prisoner on Robben Island and later the first Presiding Bishop of our Church.

At my confirmation service I knelt on the fringes of the same altar of the stone chapel where my grandfather the Reverend Samuel Dikgang Moseneke knelt and where my father Samuel John Sedise Moseneke, many decades later, knelt. Like them in that same church I recited the liturgy, I sang the Lord's Prayer, mumbled the Apostle's creed, sang *Gobani ku Jehova* and in time burst into *Siya kudumisa Thixo; siya kuvuma kuba ngu Jehova. Umhlaba wonke ubedesha wena O Thixo ungunaphakade. (Te Deum)*

Undoubtedly, I was molded by a Christian home and this Church. For this I am deeply grateful - less for the mysteries and miracles of biblical texts, but more for the core and formative values of our faith. At the best and indeed worst of times I have held on to the simple messages and self-evident truths of belief. I embraced with seriousness the oneness and the divine equality of the human race and the place of human solidarity because we are all made in the image of God. I took home my Sunday school injunctions of being caring, considerate and kind to others because I had to love my neighbours as I did myself. This also meant I had to respect others. I took to heart the teachings that I shall work hard in order to live by the brow of my sweat. I knew I had to be industrious in order to multiply my gifts but also I had to avoid being extravagant, avoid being a prodigal son in a world of ample needs. I must opt for peace over violence. I must not steal but rather give with an open heart. I must not be untruthful but rather proclaim and advance the truth and the good things it brokers. I must pray to be and live as a good man.

This is a long way of saying how most grateful I am to be honoured in this way by the Church of my forbears – Rev John Kilner, Rev. Mangena Mokone, Rev Amos Burnett, Rev OT Watkins, Rev John Weavind, Rev Zaccheus Mahabane, who twice became the President of the African National Congress, Rev Moses Maribe who in Mafeteng in 1929 was succeeded by the Rev John Mokitimi whose son, Seth Mokitimi, was to become the first African President of Conference in 1964, Rev Peter Storey Snr and Rev Prof Dr Peter John Storey, Rev Dr Simon Qgubule, Rev Dr Khoza Elliot Mgojo, Rev Ernest Baartman, Rev Dr Stanley Mmutlanyane Mogoba, Rev Dr Mvume Dandala, Rev Ivan

Abrahams and Rev Ziphozihle Siwa and last, and probably least, Rev Samuel Dikgang Moseneke.

Having cleared the overgrowth I turn to a seminal moment of today. The task to deliver the Sixth Peter Storey Lecture falls on me. It is a privilege which I am pleased to embrace with considerable gratitude.

Peter John Storey is a towering spiritual figure and leader within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). Without a doubt he has been also a leader of world Methodism and Christianity. He has preached and lectured widely around the world. Besides his profound scholarship on the practice of Christian ministry he has been a grassroots minister in diverse communities for well over 40 years. His pastoral ministry included inner city churches, most notably District Six in Cape Town and the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg. In time he rose to become president of conference. He also served for 13 years as Bishop of Johannesburg, including Soweto.

Rev Peter Storey's ministry at home was marked by a consistent opposition to apartheid and its oppressive racist policies. He contested forced removals of people of color, most notably in Cape Town. He came to Robben Island as chaplain to Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners but, I pause to remember that for some unexplained reason he did not minister to me then. Later, as a Methodist and ecumenical leader, he played a significant national role in the church's anti-apartheid struggle. He and then Bishop Desmond Tutu were witnesses-in-chief for the SACC when the apartheid regime put the organisation on trial. Bishop Storey was a regional chairperson of the National Peace Accord combating political violence in the Johannesburg/Soweto area and was appointed by President Mandela to help select the members of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

He left even deeper footprints in the MCSA transformational movements like *Obedience '81* and the *Journey to a New Land* process even before the start of democracy. Peter Storey is a prolific writer and a serious academic¹.

But the more pervasive influence of his writing skills is shown by his founding in 1970 of the Methodist monthly newspaper, *Dimension*, which he edited for nearly a decade.

But for me the most abiding contribution of Peter Storey must be the vision of setting up this Methodist Seminary. He was somewhat possessed by the compulsive ideal to found a place of formation of the clergy. The project needed support and prayer but more directly it demanded money, lots of money. His first port of call was the Wesleyan flock. He looked for us, travelled from Cape Town and found us. One evening, 29 November 2009, Peter Storey burst into our home in Houghton, Johannesburg. Then Kabonina, my wife, was a society steward at the Glen Methodist Church. After a few pleasantries, Peter Storey unfurled building plans, sketches and diagrams and artistic impression with all the imaginable elevation and views of the seminary to be. With visible animation, he explained where the chapel will rise, where the library will find place, where the admin section will be and the pending lecture and seminar buildings. Soon his mission became plain to Kabonina and me. He sought a financial donation towards the project – not in hundreds, nor thousands, nor hundreds of thousands but in millions of Rand. His next visit was at my place of work - the Constitutional Court. He seemingly observed no boundaries when the passion to erect the seminary got the better of him.

He pursued many well-placed Methodists relentlessly. That was the measure of his determination and even more the measure of his visionary leadership. True leaders cast their eyes up onto the mountain top and chart the way to scale its highest point. They do not only dream about their ideals but rather take concrete steps to fulfill their dreams.

¹ His publications include: *With God in the Crucible – Preaching Costly Discipleship* (Abingdon, 2002), *And are We Yet Alive? – Revisioning our Wesleyan Heritage in the New South Africa* (Methodist Publishing House, 2004), and *Journey Begun – the Story of a Church in a New Land* (Methodist Publishing House, 1995)

We as the Moseneke family had the privilege to make a small donation and in that way to express our gratitude to the church of our forebears. It is simply so that from 2006 onwards, Peter Storey headed up the design, funding and building of the new Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary in the city of Pietermaritzburg, which was opened in September 2010. He chaired its Governing Council and most recently, in time of need, he served as interim President of the Seminary.

If the truth be told, Peter John Storey, suitably supported by his spouse Elizabeth and their four sons and six grandchildren, was God's vessel to conceive and implement the vision "to form transforming leaders for church and nation by providing the spiritual formation, academic and practical training required to develop skilled Methodist ministers of integrity, faithfulness and excellence." For this we must thank God for the life of Rev Prof. Peter John Storey.

I return to the kernel of my lecture. Hopefully it will be succinct. I went to look at the website of the MCSA. Surfing in it was as instructive as it was impressive in many ways. It carries a historical write-up of the expansion of Methodism in the latter half 19th century and the 20th century. Allow me to observe respectfully that the account may be overly cursory and may call for a more rigorous and inclusive historical account of church history of now nearly two centuries.

The last sentence of the historical piece on the website reads: "Methodism has yet to discover its proper role in the political life of the new democracy"²

This conclusion got me to sit up and think. It is so, that the Christian church and Methodism in particular accompanied us during our prolonged and arduous liberation struggle. The church had no doubts whatsoever about its prophetic obligation to denounce the evil and injustice of colonialism and apartheid. Think of the emphatic role of the World Council of Churches and its vocal *Programme to Combat Racism* launched in 1969. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Programme played a highly visible and controversial role in international debate about white minority rule in Southern Africa.

² <http://www.methodist.org.za/heritage/south-african-history>

It supported reflection and action among churches in Southern Africa, provided direct humanitarian support to liberation movements, and was a leader in international campaigns for economic disengagement from apartheid.³ The South African Council of Churches, whose President Peter Storey became, embraced the stance of its world body.

I say this not oblivious of some academic studies that suggest that our church confronted apartheid only obliquely. I am not unaware of the seminal role of the Rev Kilner – Secretary of British Missionary Church in vastly increasing the number of ordained African ministers and the troubled race schism within the clergy that led to the formation of the Ethiopian Church and later the African Methodist Episcopal Church. I am not unaware of the calls of the 1980 for contextual theology that led to the formation of Black Methodist Consultation. I am not unaware of the challenges of the church to minister to historically racially segregated societies imposed by apartheid geography. In this regard I recall Rev Dr Khoza Mgojo calling on Methodists to confront their own apartheid geography.⁴

And yet on balance and in time Methodism became embedded in Africa and chose the side of the liberation struggle and of the vulnerable and oppressed and excluded. It placed a high premium on their education and training. It reformed its leadership corps starting with Seth Mokitimi in 1964. Its subsequent presidents of conference, including Peter Storey and its presiding bishops made plain the church's vehement opposition to state repression, racial oppression and economic exclusion. In the dark days of the 1980s before the dawn of 1994, its role in peace mediation and in the South African Council of Churches was fulsome and unambiguous. Then the church had a keen sense of what was socially and politically right and wrong.

So what has changed? Since the onset of democratic rule in 1994 did the church make a massive error? I think it did. The church disbanded its prophetic role to teach and indeed demand love, peace and justice within affairs of the state and society.

³ <http://www.aluka.org/struggles/collection/WCC>

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It demobilised its social charge seemingly in the mistaken anticipation that the war against social and political evil was over; or that after the onset of democracy we will all live happily forever thereafter, under the abundant beneficence of a good government and its vast institutions.

I must confess that I too assumed without more that the onset of a constitutional democracy in 1994 will usher in a kind of utopia. I accepted that once legitimately elected, those who hold political office will respect and abide by their mandate and uphold the high calling and values of our struggle for freedom and democracy. I assumed without more that their pre-occupation would be to create a just, inclusive and socially caring society. I thought they would do their damnest to educate fully and properly the young; they would ensure over time full but reasonable access to health care, water, sanitation and food. I thought our government would understand the pain of homelessness and landlessness and try in earnest to heal that indignity and pain.

I had fancied that the advent of democracy would afford us space to embrace full non-racialism; to reject racism and yet celebrate diversity, to find and value every life. I thought we would teach and take steps to achieve peace and not violence; to respect and not violate women and children. How would we heal families, communities and our nation when we rape, rob and kill and with no proper recourse for the victims? I had hoped we would build a good and caring police force that would battle crime on behalf of the vulnerable. I had hoped that we would grow and strengthen not undermine and destroy public institution set up to undergird democratic rule.

I dreamt that we would put all our ingenuity in creating jobs and more jobs and teaching each other or others how to create our own jobs. I expected that we would teach each other how to fish and not how to queue for fish - how to build our homes with the support of the state rather than to jump long queues of waiting lists for RDP housing.

I imagined that we would teach all of us that we are our own liberators and once liberated we would protect and entrench our liberation.

So did my church make the same mistake I made? When I woke up from my slumber of hope I proclaimed publicly: "What matters is not what the ruling political elite wants, but what is good for our people." Has our church not reached that point of discomfort and irritation?

Here is the point I am making. Democratic freedom is not an event but a process meant to enhance the human condition. Freedom demands constant civil vigilance. The high aims of democratic rule do not happen without more like manna from heaven. Civil and electoral accountability are necessary pre-conditions for democratic and social justice. Sadly, it is true that power or incumbency in high public offices often breeds greed and the desire for even more power.

Another important thought - let all of us remember that those who fought for and brought freedom to the people are rarely best suited to preserve it, to grow it. Being a revolutionary is not synonymous to being an effective transformer of society. Those who are in the forefront of war; or who can best destroy an unjust system are not necessarily best placed to reconstruct the post conflict society. Each task demands a distinct set of skills which do not necessarily reside in the same place.

So did the church too, like its worshippers make these erroneous assumptions. Is that why its website is non-committal about its stance towards the state of our nation?

I do not urge the church to make party political choices. In fact I think it should never do so. The church must identify crucial ethical and socio-economic threats in the life of its flock, society and the nation - many I have already highlighted - and reclaim its Wesleyan prophetic role. Methodism may not wait any longer to discover its proper role in the political life of the new democracy.⁵ It is so that the Church is a sanctuary or redemption. But I dare to suggest that it is also a crucible of human formation. It is the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary not only of its budding ministers but of the nation and the continent.

⁵ <http://www.methodist.org.za/heritage/south-african-history>

Thank you for listening

Good night, and

God Bless

Justice Dikgang Moseneke