

**ADDRESS OF THE PATRON OF THE TMF,  
THABO MBEKI,  
IN HONOUR OF REV Z.R. MAHABANE:  
BLACK METHODIST CONSULTATION: PRETORIA, JULY 13, 2013.**

Director of Ceremonies,  
Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Rev  
Ziphozihle Siwa, and other leaders of the Methodist Church,  
Leaders and members of the Black Methodist Consultation,  
Distinguished participants:

I thank the General Secretary of the MCSA, Rev Vuyani Nyobole, for his kind remarks.

I would also like to apologise that it proved impossible to deliver this Address last year as I had to leave the country to attend to the urgent task delegated to us by the African Union to facilitate the negotiations between Sudan and South Sudan.

But because it is perhaps better late than never, I am glad that it has been possible for us to convene today among others to celebrate a truly eminent South African and African, the Rev Zaccheus Richard Mahabane.

It is a matter of common cause that Z.R. Mahabane dedicated his whole adult life selflessly to serve our people as a whole.

This centred on the vitally important task of his day, of the liberation of all the black oppressed and the transformation of South Africa into a non-racial democracy.

His rise to prominence in this regard was marked by his election in 1919 at the age of 38 as Provincial President of the Cape Province African National Congress, and then a mere 5 years later, in 1924, as President-General of the ANC.

Z.R. Mahabane stated his life's commitment in his Address at the 1921 Conference of the Cape ANC in these words:

*"Chiefs, ladies and gentlemen, I want to declare, in conclusion, that South Africa will never attain her noble ideal of peacefulness, happiness, prosperity, greatness and national unity, of which the Prime Minister and all lovers of Africa have been rightly dreaming, without the full and free co-operation of all the white and black races of the land and of all classes and conditions of men. Industrially, agriculturally and commercially we have been working together for the development of our common country. Let this policy of full co-operation be extended to our political system; let no race or class or creed be driven to such a condition of despair as it might be compelled to adopt the Gandhian policy of "non-co-operation" - taxation without representation leads to this. And then when our common task in this country has been completed and the end of all things has fully come, we can look back and exclaim - "All's well that ends well"."*

14 years later, in 1935, when he called for an All African Convention to oppose the then so-called Hertzog Bills, he said:

*"How long shall the African people who form the integral and inseparable part and parcel of the population of the Union be contented with a position of political inferiority and political helotry and of exclusion from the civil organism of this land of their birth?"*

I am certain that all of us present here today can feel the deep sense of pain that must have driven Rev Mahabane as he composed these words.

These words and their sense of pain were echoed in freedom songs that were popular certainly during the 1950s into the early 1960s.

I refer here to such songs as:

*"Senzeni na? Sono sethu bubumnyama;"* and,

*"Sikhalela izwe lakithi, elona lazothathwa ngaboGalajane. Zulu, mXhosa, mSotho hlanganani."*

We can therefore say that in his words and actions, the Rev Z.R. Mahabane represented the soul certainly of the African majority in our country.

In similar manner we can say that what he said in 1921 at the Conference of the Cape Province ANC captured the vision of our liberation movement and struggle until freedom was achieved in 1994.

We have gathered here under the auspices of the Black Methodist Consultation, part of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. This is very appropriate, because throughout his life the Rev Z.R. Mahabane was an eminent Pastor of the Methodist Church.

At the same time, this draws attention to the historic role of the Christian Church in our struggle for liberation.

On other occasions I have spoken of the role of the African Christian leaders who emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, who were our pathfinders in terms of taking actions and positions that led to the establishment in our country of the modern liberation movement formed early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as the ANC.

I refer here to leaders such as the Rev Tiyo Soga as well as those, for instance, who gave birth to the Ethiopian Church.

Quite correctly, since then, to date, the Christian Church in our country has celebrated and taken pride in the role which leading Christians, like the Rev Z.R. Mahabane, played in the struggle for our liberation from colonialism and apartheid.

In this regard, in the context of the later decades of our struggle, I would like to refer to the Interdenominational African Ministers Federation (IDAMF), led among others by Rev Mahabane, and more particularly the South African Council of Churches, the SACC.

I am certain that the history of our liberation struggle will always tell an inspiring story about the role of the SACC, its leaders and the affiliated Churches of the Council particularly during the very bloody and challenging two decades leading to our liberation in 1994.

I am certain that the far-sighted African Christian leaders during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to whom I referred, and the others who followed them throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as part of our liberation struggle, would have been immensely proud of what their successors did as represented by the SACC for instance, as all of us were and are.

I think that in this context the question arises naturally – what is it in the Christian faith, especially as understood by the African people in our country, which brought so much of the Christian community and its leaders into our struggle!

In the 1921 speech I have cited, Rev Mahabane said:

*"It was in the Garden of Eden – right in the beginning of things – that the Almighty gave man perfect freedom to choose between right and wrong, good and evil, life and death. Why should we now have to submit to a condition of things which does not give us this God-given right, the inalienable right of self-determination and self-government...God forbid that we, as human beings, made in the image of and after the likeness of Himself, should permit other human beings, made in like manner, to abrogate to themselves a position of superiority over us."*

In addition to this, the Ethiopian Church in our country which emerged as an African expression of Christianity, inscribed on its banners the Biblical Psalm 68:31, which, as you know, says:

*"Princes shall come out of Egypt: Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God."*

I would like to believe it was exactly the reading of the Holy Scriptures as explained by Rev Mahabane, and what is said in the Book of Psalms, which told the eminent African Christians in our country, for over a century, that they could not stand aside in terms of the struggle for the liberation of the black oppressed.

This was despite what the founder of the Methodist Church, John Wesley, had said – *"You have nothing to do but to save souls!"*

Earlier I mentioned the two important collectives through which our Christian community played a critical role, IDAMF and the SACC. This was not to underestimate the role of other formations such as the Christian Institute (CI), the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT), IDAMASA and of course your own Black Methodist Consultation.

I mention all this to raise what I believe is an important issue.

I remain firmly convinced that in the same way that our Christian community played a vital role in the struggle for the liberation of our people, as exemplified by what the Rev Z.R. Mahabane did, so must this community play an important role with regard to what we do with our liberation, almost two decades after the achievement of the historic 1994 victory.

I have raised the matter of such collectives as the SACC, IDAMF, CI and ICT to emphasise what I believe is self-evident, that to discharge its continuing responsibility as I have suggested, our country's Christian community must do everything to act in unity, and therefore respond as an organised collective informed by its faith.

In this context I cannot but refer to the serious efforts in which Rev Mahabane engaged to encourage unity among those who shared and share common suffering and a common cause.

This included his joint sponsorship with the outstanding liberation leader, Dr Abdurrahman, of a succession of National Conferences which brought together the black oppressed - African, Coloured and Indian.

Again to return to his 1921 Address, nobody who reads this speech can avoid being moved by the support he expressed for the common anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles far beyond our shores, such as those in Ireland, India, West Africa and the United States of America, as well as the defence of the rights of the peoples in the British Protectorates of the then so-called Basotholand, Swaziland and Bechuanaland.

In the same speech he cited the efforts of the white South Africans to bridge the divide between Boer and Briton, which had found bitter expression in the 1899-1902 South African ('Anglo-Boer') War, to '*let bygones be bygones*', thus to strengthen the white minority domination of our country.

In this context he said:

*"The Bantu community may profitably learn the great lessons and sinking their petty, weakening and destructive differences purely on racial or tribal personal lines, make a new start by uniting all their labour and political forces under one great national organisation embracing all the various Bantu tribes of Southern Africa. Such an amalgamation of forces would certainly help to solve what is known as the 'Native Problem'."*

In this regard, I am convinced that you as members of the esteemed Methodist Church, all other Christians in our country, and all of us as activists for the fulfilment of the dreams of all South Africans, must pose to ourselves and answer this question seriously whether, today, there exist the mechanisms to enable the Christian Church to act in the same unity and with the same sustained determination to which I have referred.

It would seem to me that part of the painful reality to which our Christian community and all of us must respond in this regard is that all of us have allowed the SACC, the central, national and truly representative home of the entirety of our Christian community, to fall into serious 'disrepair' and ineffectiveness.

This is particularly painful given the outstanding role the SACC played to help bring about our liberation and the vital role it must play as we attend

to the imperative successfully to achieve the reconstruction and development of our country, consistent with the objectives to which our nation agreed, as expressed in our Constitution.

I do sincerely hope that our Churches will do everything possible to rebuild the SACC. Perhaps the Black Methodist Consultation can take this as one of its urgent responsibilities.

I am certain that many of us present here are familiar with the *National Development Plan (NDP)* which has been adopted by our Government and ruling party, our Parliament, and generally by our population as a whole.

Among other things, the NDP says:

*"Eighteen years into democracy, South Africa remains a highly unequal society where too many people live in poverty and too few work. The quality of school education for most black learners is poor. The apartheid spatial divide continues to dominate the landscape. A large proportion of young people feel that the odds are stacked against them. And the legacy of apartheid continues to determine the life opportunities for the vast majority."*

This makes the critical point that almost two decades after what Rev Mahabane fought for was accomplished, our country still faces many serious challenges with regard to the central task of eradicating the legacy of colonialism and apartheid, and achieving the objective we have been pursuing to achieve a better life for all our people.

In this regard, to achieve the objectives it has set, the National Development Plan (NDP) says:

*"To accelerate development, South Africa needs the active support of all citizens, leadership in all sectors that puts the country's collective interests ahead of narrow, short-term goals, and radically improved government performance."*

I believe that this call contained in the NDP is correct. It recalls the perspective we sought to sustain during the years of struggle – *that the people must be their own liberators* – to which the masses of our people responded in a magnificent manner.

As I have said and as you know very well, our religious communities, in particular the Christian Church, were very much part of and mobiliser for that magnificent response.

I strongly believe that the Christian community, as well as all the other Faiths, must seriously consider what they should do to respond to the call made in the NDP to bring about the transformation our country needs – *“the active support of all citizens, leadership in all sectors that puts the country's collective interests ahead of narrow, short-term goals.”*

With regard to this important matter of leadership, the National Development Plan says, among others:

*“In particular, community leaders and public figures should demonstrate leadership qualities that include:*

- *the ability to lead by example and to follow rules that apply to everyone;*
- *honesty, integrity and trustworthiness;*
- *the ability to hold fast to a core set of values as enshrined in the Constitution...;*
- *the ability to listen, especially to those with a different opinion, perspective and/or priorities;*
- *leaders should be able to create conditions that allow everyone to communicate in open dialogue. This requires tolerance, patience, openness to giving and receiving criticism, a willingness to admit mistakes, and an ability to re-examine one's own presuppositions;...*
- *ability to promote meaningful inclusion, helping to overcome barriers associated with class, ethnicity, gender, disability and other factors of exclusion;...*
- *this is all-encompassing leadership that empowers people and places them at the centre of development. It is the visionary leadership required to take the country to its goals for 2030. It can act as a catalyst for change.*
- *In the interests of shared responsibility for development, South Africa must pay attention to the way that disputes are settled. It is vital to promote values of responsible citizenship and solidarity. Nation building will come from diverse people working together, managing tensions creatively.”*

I am certain that all of us would readily agree with these comments and must accordingly insist that all those who would be our leaders should indeed strive to be such leaders as those visualised in the NDP.

I am glad that I have had the opportunity to make the appeal to the Black Methodist Consultation, and through it to the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, to respond to the call to provide the required leadership, especially on an occasion when we have convened to celebrate one of our historic leaders, the Rev Z.R. Mahabane.

I say this informed by the origins of the BMC as part of the Black Consciousness Movement, which therefore defines the BMC as a conscious activist for the affirmation of our human dignity and the fundamental social transformation which our country needs.

Of course, and as I have said, I am by no means addressing my appeal only to the BMC and the Methodist Church but also both to the Christian Church as a whole as well as the other Faiths.

I would imagine that this will raise to the fore the matter I mentioned earlier, of the need to strengthen the SACC so that it plays its historic role as the truly representative and mandated leader of the Christian community as a whole.

To respond to the challenge posed in the NDP, will mean that this community will have to answer the questions – in what ways and in which sectors can it exercise leadership!

I would suggest that among others things, our Faith communities would obviously have to study the National Development Plan exactly to identify what they can do to exercise the leadership that has been requested.

Having identified what they can do, they would necessarily also have to interact with Government to finalise their plans which, in the end, would be focused on accelerating the process of the fundamental social transformation of our country.

On the face of it there are at least three areas identified in the NDP in which the Christian and other Faith communities can and should play an important role. These are:

- addressing the scourge of crime, to improve the safety and security of the citizens;
- confronting corruption; and,
- cultivating social cohesion.



The red thread that runs through all these issues, which is also identified in the NDP, is the critically important matter of the cultivation of the necessary values and value system which must underpin the kind of humane society we have to build.

The NDP pays significant attention to this issue. I am certain that it will be important for the Christian community, like the other Faiths, to examine closely what the NDP says in this regard.

The aim must surely be to help ensure that our country does indeed take the correct, practical and sustained steps successfully to address this challenge.

You will recall that many years ago Nelson Mandela said our new democracy needed and called for *"the RDP of the soul"*.

This was because while all of us recognised the critical importance to realise the goals spelt out in the Reconstruction and Development Programme, the RDP, we also understood very well the challenge of the important matter of our values, the issue to which the NDP has now drawn renewed focus.

This is what led to the launching of the Moral Regeneration Programme in which all our Faith communities played an important part.

In this regard, when I delivered the Nelson Mandela Memorial Lecture in 2006 I said:

*"I believe I know this as a matter of fact, that the great masses of our country everyday pray that the new South Africa that is being born will be a good, a moral, a humane and a caring South Africa, which, as it matures, will progressively guarantee the happiness of all its citizens..."*

*"(The RDP goals) were, and remain critically important and eminently correct objectives that we must continue to pursue..."*

*"We must also say that human fulfilment consists of more than "access to modern and effective services like electricity, water, telecommunications, transport, health, education and training for all our people", to use the words in the RDP document.*

*"As distinct from other species of the animal world, human beings also have spiritual needs..."*

*"Thus do all of us, and not merely the religious leaders, speak of the intangible element that is immanent in all human beings - the soul!*

*"Acceptance of this proposition as a fact must necessarily mean that we have to accept the related assertion that, consequently, all human societies also have a soul!...*

*"With regard to the construction of a humane and caring society, we must accept that (addressing matters of the soul) entails a struggle, rather than any self-evident and inevitable victory of good over evil.*

*"The question must therefore arise - for those among us who believe that we represent the good, what must we do to succeed in our purposes!*

*"Since no human action takes place outside of established objective reality, and since we want to achieve our objectives, necessarily we must strive to understand the social conditions that would help to determine whether we succeed or fail.*

*"What I have said relates directly to what needed and needs to be done to achieve the objective that Nelson Mandela set the nation, to accomplish the RDP of its soul."*

A number of times during our years in Government we discussed the problem of crime with our religious leaders, organised as the National Forum of Religious Leaders.

On these occasions we pointed to the fact that our crime statistics consistently showed that the monthly majority of the most violent crimes in our townships, including murder, rape and assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm, usually occurred during the period from Friday night to Sunday night.

This suggested that there is a particular sociology of violent crime in our townships which I suspect many of us would understand, related to substance abuse.

As all of us know, our Churches have a strong presence in all our townships. For this reason we suggested to our religious leaders that this presence should be used by our Churches, acting in the interest of the nation, to make a vigorous and sustained intervention to confront the challenge especially of violent crime.

I hope that as it responds to the call in the NDP for a united effort to fight crime, the Christian community will reflect on this suggestion. Personally,

I stand ready to work with our Christian and other Faith communities to respond to this challenge.

In a ruling it handed down in 2011, our Constitutional Court said:

*"The seriousness of the offence of corruption cannot be overemphasised. It offends against the rule of law and the principles of good governance. It lowers the moral tone of a nation and negatively affects development and the promotion of human rights. As a country we have travelled a long and tortuous road to achieve democracy. Corruption threatens our constitutional order. We must make every effort to ensure that corruption with its putrefying effects is halted. Courts must send out an unequivocal message that corruption will not be tolerated and that punishment will be appropriately severe."*

I would like to believe that our Constitutional Court took this strong and correct position on the issue of corruption, and issued the directive it did to the judiciary and magistracy as a whole, because of its concern that corruption in our country is becoming endemic.

I am certain that all of us present here today are aware of the growing pervasiveness of this cancer.

As I have visited other African countries I have heard fellow Africans express great concern and immense regret that it seems that we too, the South Africans, are falling victim to the crime of corruption which has negatively affected other African countries.

We see this for instance in the emergence of the phenomenon of people seeking access to political positions on the basis of an expression first exposed in Kenya – *"It's our turn to eat!"*

The Constitutional Court was correct to draw attention to the fact that, among others, corruption *"negatively affects development"*, which directly undermines the objectives to eradicate poverty and underdevelopment and achieve the goal of a better life for our people.

I am arguing that our Christian and other Faith communities should indeed engage this important challenge of corruption, and not merely leave it to our criminal justice system, which is itself a victim of corrupt practice.

In this regard, I am pleased to commend to you a very useful book published last year – *"Anti-Corruption Manual for South Africa: An Introduction"*, written by Steven E. Davids. I am certain that this book will

help all of us to determine what we can and should do to fight a cancer that is eating into our very being as a people.

The Declaration and Programme of Action issued at the end of the National Social Cohesion Summit in July last year says, among other things:

*"We came together to renew our commitment, mobilise and unify society in our on-going national movement of healing the divisions of our painful past and establishing a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights."*

It was indeed correct that the Social Cohesion Summit Meeting should be convened, in the first instance to assess how far we had progressed to achieve the social cohesion we need, and to make the renewed and serious commitment contained in the paragraph I have just cited. The concrete reality is that as with many of our important challenges, much still remains to be done to bring about the social cohesion we need.

Again I am suggesting that our Faith communities have an important role to play in this regard.

When Rev Mahabane's ANC was established 101 years ago, it set as one of its goals the task *"to bury the demon of tribalism"*.

Earlier I cited what Rev Mahabane said about the then imperative for the unity of the African oppressed, in his words - *"The Bantu community may profitably learn the great lessons and (sink) their petty, weakening and destructive differences (based) purely on racial or tribal personal lines..."*

I also cited lyrics from one of our freedom songs which specifically called for such unity.

I raise these matters relating to the important issue of national social cohesion because I am very concerned that the demon of tribalism seems to be re-establishing itself once again as one of the defining features of our national life.

Thus is ethnic mobilisation being used by some in our country to access and distribute political power, centrally to use this power to achieve personal enrichment by corrupt means.

If we do not bury this demon of tribalism quickly and urgently, not only will we not succeed to achieve the social cohesion we require, but we will also be faced with a serious threat to the very viability of our democratic system and our national cohesion.

All this emphasises the imperative for our Christian and other Faith communities urgently to intervene with regard to the matter of national social cohesion, in part to respond to the appeal in the NDP for the kind of leadership it sought to describe.

The Rev Z.R. Mahabane, his predecessors and his successors in the leadership of our Christian community did what they could to help ensure our liberation.

They acted as they did inspired by values contained in the Christian faith, our traditional values of Ubuntu, and what these values said to them about human solidarity, as well as what they too should do to follow the injunction – *"to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed..."* (Luke 4: 18-19).

Through their efforts we gained the invaluable gift of freedom.

The vital question you and all of us must answer, both by word and by our practical deeds is – what will we do to protect this gift and use it fundamentally to change the lives of our people for the better.

Very often I am haunted by the words of the poet, S.E.K. Mqhayi:

*"Kunamhlanj' ilizwe liyazuza;  
Kunamhlanje lomhlab' uyalunywa.  
Int' esesiswini maze niyilumkele,  
Loo nt' isesizalweni maze niyindwebele;  
Ngathi kuzakuzalw' uGilikankqo.  
Ngathi kuzakuzalw' isilo esingaziwa mngxuma."*

In his day, the poet said that our nation was unsettled and disturbed and was troubled by the pains of the possible birth of a frightening animal it had never known and therefore could not even describe. He called on our people, then, to be on guard against a costly tragedy that might befall the nation.

Today, taking into account everything that is happening in our country, we must together consider the question seriously whether we too do not face the prospect of the birth of a frightening animal we have never known and therefore cannot even describe!

The outstanding patriot, the Rev Z.R. Mahabane, would be right to demand of all of us to answer the urgent question - what are all of us doing today, almost 20 years after the birth of our democracy, to fulfil the

hopes shared by the millions of our people when they celebrated our New Dawn in 1994!

We can and must respond to this question honestly, courageously and in a steadfast manner, through our practical actions.

I thank you for your attention.

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