

HONORARY GRADUATE

Desmond Mpilo Tutu

Desmond Tutu was born in Klerksdorp in 1931, the son of a schoolteacher and a domestic worker. After matriculating at the Johannesburg Bantu High School in Western Native Township, he chose to follow his father's career. He took a teacher's diploma at the Pretoria Bantu Normal College and studied for his Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of South Africa. He was a teacher at the Johannesburg Bantu High School for a year and then moved to Munsieville High School, Krugersdorp, for three years. It was here that he married his wife Leah.

In 1958, following the introduction of Bantu education, Tutu decided to enter the ministry in the Church of the Province of South Africa and became an ordination student at St Peter's Theological College, Rossettenville. He received his Licentiate in Theology in 1960 and was ordained as a priest in Johannesburg in 1961. Shortly afterwards he went to study in London, where he obtained the Bachelor of Divinity Honours and Master of Theology degrees, while acting as a part-time curate. In 1967 he returned to South Africa and joined the staff of the Federal Theological Seminary in Alice and became Chaplain at the University of Fort Hare. He moved to the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland in Roma, Lesotho, in 1970, where he held the post of lecturer in the Department of Theology. This step was followed by a further spell in England as Associate Director of the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches, based in Bromley, Kent.

Tutu became Dean of St Mary's Cathedral, Johannesburg, in 1975, but shortly thereafter he was elected as Bishop of Lesotho. By this time South Africa was in turmoil, in the wake of the Soweto uprising of 1976, and Bishop Tutu was persuaded to leave the calm diocese of Lesotho to take up the post of General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches (SACC). It was in this position as Secretary of the SACC, a post that he held from 1978-1985, that Bishop Tutu became a national and international figure.

The SACC represents all the major Christian churches in South Africa, apart from the Dutch Reformed Church and the Catholic Church (the latter is, however, an accredited observer of the SACC). A subsidiary body of the World Council of Churches, the SACC is committed to the cause of ecumenism and to fulfilling the social responsibility of the Church of Christ. Justice and reconciliation feature prominently amongst the priorities of the SACC. As General Secretary of the SACC, Bishop Tutu pursued these goals with vigour and commitment. He built up the SACC into an important institution in South African spiritual and political life, which voiced the ideals and aspirations of millions of South African Christians. Under the leadership of Bishop Tutu, the South African Council of Churches established an effective machinery for providing assistance to the victims of apartheid.

Inevitably, Bishop Tutu became heavily embroiled in controversy as he spoke out against the injustice of the apartheid system. For several years he was denied a passport to travel abroad, but in 1982 the South African Government withdrew this restriction in the face of national and international concern. The name of Bishop Desmond Tutu became synonymous with that of the SACC as he became the leader of a crusade for justice and racial conciliation in South Africa. In 1984 Bishop Tutu's contribution to the cause of racial justice in South Africa was recognized when he received the highest award the world can offer - the Nobel Peace Prize.

In 1985 Bishop Tutu was elected as Bishop of the Diocese of Johannesburg. In this capacity he did much to bridge the chasm between black and white Anglicans in South Africa. His office as Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg was of short duration, as in 1986 he was elected Archbishop of Cape Town. In electing him, the Anglican church placed its trust in him as its spiritual leader and showed its confidence in his pursuit of racial justice in South Africa. In 1987 he was elected as President of the All Africa Council of Churches.

Before the unbanning of the African National Congress and other political organizations in 1990 there were many critics of Archbishop Tutu who, despite his protestations to the contrary, predicted that he would enter political life. These critics have been proved wrong. He has not sought political position. Instead, he has become a principal mediator and conciliator in this difficult period of our history.

Archbishop Tutu's links with this university are very close. He has been a member of the Board of Control of the Centre for Applied Legal Studies since its inception in 1978, and in this capacity he has played a leading role in the direction of the Centre. He has also participated in the general life of the University by giving advice to staff and students and by addressing innumerable meetings. In 1982, when Archbishop Tutu was prevented from visiting the United States to receive the award of an honorary degree from Columbia University, this university acted as host to the conferment of the degree by the President of Columbia University.

Archbishop Tutu was elected a Fellow of King's College, London in 1978. He is Chancellor of the University of the Western Cape and a member of the Council of the University of Fort Hare. He holds honorary degrees from a number of universities, including Harvard, Columbia, Aberdeen, the Ruhr and Kent. He has received many prizes and awards in addition to the Nobel Prize, notably the Prix d'Athene (Onassis Foundation) (1980); the Family of Man Gold Medal Award (December 1983); and the Martin Luther King Jr Nonviolent Peace Prize - Atlanta, Georgia, USA (January 1986).

Before 1990, Archbishop Tutu's vigorous advocacy of social justice made him a figure of great controversy. Today he is seen more as an elder statesman with a major role to play in reconciliation. He regularly appeals to the South African Government, the African National Congress and the Inkatha Freedom Party for peaceful, non-violent change in South Africa. He is one of the very few people who appear to have the standing to effect reconciliation between white and black. By conferring an honorary degree on Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu, this university recognizes the important contribution he has made to spiritual and educational life and to the cause of social justice in South Africa. At the same time it demonstrates its confidence in a man of peace and the cause of non-violent change in South Africa.