

Valedictory Address

Remembering Archbishop Desmond Tutu 1931-2021

**The Road from COP 26: Economy, Justice and Peace in an Era of Climate Catastrophe Global
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**Social and Economic Action Research Centre at Hope (SEARCH) and Archbishop Desmond
Tutu Centre for War and Peace Studies, Liverpool Hope University**

John Nauright

**Dean of the Richard J. Bolte, Sr. School of Business
Mount St. Mary's University**

It is an honour to join you at the Social and Economic Action Research Centre and the Archbishop Desmond Tutu Centre for War and Peace Studies at Liverpool Hope University as you explore the Road from COP26. It is fitting that we remember a global hero and your namesake at this crucial time in world history.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak about the life and legacy of Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu, one of my heroes and leading international figures of the past half century. When I embarked on my Master's degree in African history at The University of South Carolina in the 1980s, the United Democratic Front had intensified the struggle against apartheid as international sanctions -- economic, sporting and cultural -- began to have an impact. The leading voice to emerge during this time was that of Desmond Tutu. He was instrumental in calling for an end to apartheid while Nelson Mandela and many of the African National Congress leaders remained either imprisoned or in exile. For his efforts and advocacy for peaceful protest, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984. I was fortunate enough to live in South Africa in 1990, the year Mandela was released from prison, and to witness the compelling force of both men firsthand as they led the fight for a democratic South Africa. Without their wise leadership, South Africa would likely have seen many more deaths in the transition to universal suffrage and moving beyond apartheid.

Desmond Tutu was, perhaps, even more significant as a national and global figure after the release of Mandela, particularly as head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which provided a forum for moving the atrocities of the apartheid era out in the open so that the nation could begin to heal. Tutu also held the new African National Congress led government to account and began to turn his focus increasingly to global issues. He spoke and wrote about

forgiveness, goodness and joy, as well as the compelling need for both social justice and environmental action worldwide. Thus, it is appropriate at this COP26 reflection conference at the Desmond Tutu Centre, that we remember his impact and continue promoting his legacy for decades to come.

Desmond Mpilo Tutu was born 7 October 1931 in Klerksdorp, Transvaal (now North West Province) in South Africa. His father was a teacher, and Tutu himself was educated at Johannesburg Bantu High School. After leaving school he trained first as a teacher at Pretoria Bantu Normal College and in 1954 he graduated from the University of South Africa. After three years as a high school teacher, he began to study theology, being ordained as a priest in 1960. The years 1962-66 were devoted to further theological study in England leading up to a Master's of Theology degree from King's College London. From 1967 to 1972 he taught theology in South Africa before returning to England for three years as the assistant director of a theological institute in London.

In 1975 he was appointed Dean of St. Mary's Cathedral in Johannesburg, the first black African man to hold that position. From 1976 to 1978 he was Bishop of Lesotho. In 1978 Tutu accepted an appointment as the general secretary of the South African Council of Churches and became a leading spokesperson for the rights of Black South Africans. During the 1980s he played an unrivaled role in drawing national and international attention to the injustices of apartheid. He emphasized nonviolent means of protest and encouraged the application of economic pressure by countries dealing with South Africa. The award of the 1984 Nobel Prize for Peace to Tutu sent a significant message from the world to South African President P.W. Botha's administration. In 1985, at the height of the township rebellions in South Africa, Tutu was installed as Johannesburg's first Black Anglican bishop, and in 1986 he was elected the first Black Archbishop of Cape Town, thus becoming the head of South Africa's 1.6 million-member Anglican Church. Tutu retired as Archbishop in 1996 becoming archbishop emeritus. In July 2010 he announced his intention to effectively withdraw from public life, though he said he would continue his work with the Elders, a group of international leaders founded for the promotion of conflict resolution and problem solving throughout the world.

Tutu famously summed up the South African situation during apartheid with his relentless humor. On whites arriving in South Africa, he said: "We had the land and they had the Bible. Then they said, 'Let us pray,' and we closed our eyes. When we opened them again, they had the land and we had the Bible."

More than the struggle against apartheid, however, Archbishop Tutu will be remembered as a man of joy, a champion of forgiveness and for how we can find goodness as human beings. In short, he taught us how we can all find our common humanity. As he stated:

"Despite all of the ghastliness in the world, human beings are made for goodness. The ones that are held in high regard are not militarily powerful, nor even economically prosperous. They have a commitment to try and make the world a better place."

Instead of leaving the limelight, Tutu became a moral guardian to what he proudly called the "rainbow people of God." He didn't shy from slamming the new government — or Mandela —

when he felt it necessary. Shortly after the 1994 elections, he publicly rebuked Mandela's government for "having stopped the gravy train only long enough to get on." The president complained, but soon announced salary cuts for himself, his cabinet and Parliament. In the following years, one of Tutu's greatest contributions was leading the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a statutory panel charged with investigating murder, torture, bombings, and other crimes by Black and white people committed during apartheid, the former white minority rulers' system of segregation.

As Tutu watched and often wept, perpetrators confessed to atrocities and victims forgave them in a wrenching process of national catharsis. "To preside over an attempt at healing the nation, that is the most humbling honor of all," Tutu told *The Times* in June 1997. He also used his independent stature to lament the state of his country, speaking out against crime, corruption and the ANC's failures on AIDS and poverty. He believed that many South Africans were too intimidated to speak out. Weeks before the country's 2009 election, he criticized the ANC, warning the party, "You are not God," and complaining that he was not looking forward to seeing Jacob Zuma become president. Zuma was later elected but resigned in 2018 after an administration marked by repeated corruption scandals.

After he retired, the archbishop emeritus criticized what he considered the inadequacies of South Africa's new leaders, especially their failure to alleviate poverty. He also continued his quest for global peace and social justice, joining The Elders as its founding chair. The Elders is a seasoned group of world leaders founded by Nelson Mandela in 2007 which has included leaders such as Jimmy Carter, Mary Robinson, Ban Ki-Moon and Kofi Annan. Current Elder Chair, Mary Robinson, in her tribute to "Arch," as Tutu was known to his friends, stated he was a driving force in making The Elders what it is today. One of the key activities of The Elders is focused on climate change. They state "The climate crisis poses an existential threat. We want to create political space for ambitious action, help ensure a just transition to the low carbon economy and encourage the scaling-up of support for particularly climate vulnerable communities."

Desmond Tutu and the Environment

"Arch" was a major advocate for transitioning to cleaner means of energy, and he worked hard to encourage others to join the fight against climate change. At the 2014 UN Climate Summit, he explained the importance of environmental intersectionality, making others aware of environmental injustices that so many minorities and vulnerable groups face on a regular basis. In 2015 he contributed a powerful op ed in *The Guardian* about our climate crisis. He wrote: "never before in history have human beings been called on to act collectively in defence of the Earth. As a species, we have endured world wars, epidemics, famine, slavery, apartheid and many other hideous consequences of religious, class, race, gender and ideological intolerance. People are extraordinarily resilient. The Earth has proven pretty resilient, too. It's managed to absorb most of what's been thrown at it since the industrial revolution and the invention of the internal combustion engine. Until now, that is. Because the science is clear: the sponge that cushions and sustains us, our environment, is already saturated with carbon. If we don't limit global warming to two degrees or less, we are doomed to a period of unprecedented instability, insecurity and loss of species." Archbishop Tutu, in one of his most famous statements, tells us

that to address problems effectively, “*There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.*”

In 2015, Tutu created a widely shared petition that called on various world leaders at the time, such as former US President Barack Obama as well as former UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, to fully transition to renewable energy. Calling climate change “one of the greatest moral challenges of our time,” it made a powerful impression on environmentalists everywhere.

The year 2015 was also the year that Pope Francis issued his encyclical *Laudato Si’* which compels all Catholics and Christians to hear the cry of the Earth and its people, to care for our common Earth and each other. These great men of faith powerfully show that for those who follow God, care for God’s creation is a paramount duty. Additionally, both men call for people of all backgrounds to come together to care of the world we share.

Both Archbishop Tutu and Pope Francis discuss the uneven impact of climate change on the poor. As Tutu wrote in 2015: “Reducing our carbon footprint is not just a technical scientific necessity; it has also emerged as the human rights challenge of our time. While global emissions have risen unchecked, real-world impacts have taken hold in earnest. The most devastating effects of climate change – deadly storms, heat waves, droughts, rising food and the advent of climate refugees – are being visited on the world's poor.”

As with the challenge of bringing down apartheid, Tutu was hopeful and proposed solutions. One of the key weapons he advocated was to boycott events where fossil fuel companies are sponsors, for us all to work at the same time to reduce our own dependency. Since governments, many significantly funded by fossil fuel interests, will not act, it is incumbent on people to create increasing, and urgent, pressure for action. Archbishop Tutu drew on the South African concept of *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* says in Xhosa “*Umntu ngumtu ngabantu*,” which approximates in English to “I am because you are. It says I am because I belong, and I need others to be truly human. My successes and my failures are bound up in yours. We are made for each other, for interdependence. Therefore, only by working together can we change the world for the better. Archbishop Tutu and Pope Francis agree that we are the ones who are responsible to preserve and protect the Earth, not abuse the Earth as humanity has increasingly done over the past 200 years. Through Tutu’s evocation of *Ubuntu* we can see a pathway forward for mutual wellbeing in creating a sustainable future for the world and all its people. It will not be easy, but we must continue to strive for mutuality and embrace *Ubuntu*.

Archbishop Tutu’s words, his life and his legacy will continue to inspire the world for years to come. According to Elder Chair and former Irish President Mary Robinson, “too often in 2021, leaders failed to act according to the values Arch spent his life advocating.” Global leaders did not act with boldness and urgency in addressing major global crises. “They did not constrain the aggressive nationalism and political cynicism Arch deplored, which have continued to drive conflicts and suffering worldwide: from Ethiopia and Afghanistan to Myanmar and Palestine. They did not respond to the global refugee crisis with the ambition, solidarity and empathy it deserves.” We must focus on tackling the root causes of global problems, to hold leaders accountable for their actions, and to speak truth to power, however unpopular that may be – as Arch always did. “It is certainly to be welcomed that, following the COP26 summit in

Glasgow last November, all countries now accept the necessity of being aligned to an emissions pathway that will keep global temperature rises to 1.5°C. To do so, the promises made at COP26 need to be kept, or faith in the multilateral process could be fatally undermined.” We owe it to Desmond Tutu and others to hold leaders accountable and to protect our world from destruction.

The best summation of how we honour the memory of Archbishop Desmond Tutu and his call for us to face our greatest human rights challenge comes from his good friend the Dalai Lama: “I am convinced the best tribute we can pay him and keep his spirit alive is to do as he did and constantly look to see how we too can be of help to others.” Whether fighting the injustices of apartheid, healing a nation through truth and reconciliation, combating poverty and championing the fight to reverse climate change, Archbishop Desmond Tutu was a true inspiration to us all. He lived filled with hope, compassion, and utter joy while calling on us all to be better children of God and to care for one another. A great man has died, his indomitable spirit never will! Let us commit ourselves to the spirit of *Ubuntu* and to never forget that we are all intertwined with each other and share our common home on this Earth.

About John Nauright

Professor John Nauright (PhD, Queen’s University, Canada) is Dean of the Richard J. Bolte, Sr. School of Business at Mount St. Mary’s University in Maryland, USA. He is the author and editor of many books and articles including *Long Run to Freedom: Sport, Cultures and Identities in South Africa*; *The Political Economy of Sport*; and *Sport in the African World*. He is Visiting Professor at universities around the world in Ghana, Barbados, Russia, Ukraine, and China. At Mount St. Mary’s he leads the *Laudato Si’* University commitment and established the Center for Integral Ecology, Economy and iMpact (CIEEM) to deliver on an integral ecology approach to business, society, and sustainability. He is advisory board member for the World Tourism Association for Culture and Heritage (WTACH); the Sacred Sports Foundation; the John Paul II Foundation for Sport; and the Center for Responsible Tourism among others.