

Speech by Prof Elize Botha, Chancellor of Stellenbosch University at the installation of Prof Russel Botman, Vice-Chancellor on 11 April 2007-04-11

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Madam Minister of Education, Meneer die Premier, Madam Mayor, Meneer die Voorsitter van die Universiteitsraad, our many dignitaries, Botman-familie, dames en here...

Coming from the broader Afrikaans community, familiar with the struggle for existence of the poor and destitute, Russel Botman became their intercessor, a community person who early on, as early as in his student years, became a leadership figure and harnessed his gifts and powers for the benefit of the voiceless and the outcast, in their pursuit of human dignity and acknowledgement.

Simultaneously, he distinguished himself as an excellent student, and prepared himself to take a place in the front lines of his chosen field of study, theology. In time he became an internationally acclaimed theologian, and was called on to also play a leadership role there – in both academic and ecclesiastical circles.

This mobility displayed by our Rector designate throughout his life also made him aware of the manner in which the people for whom he had always shown so much care and compassion were accompanied and supported, particularly in the case of the gifted, like himself, who longed for a larger space in which they could fulfil their dreams. One example, among many other possibilities: it is known what a gifted communicator Russel Botman is, how he has shown himself to be someone who respects language and the importance thereof in the development of our understanding of ourselves, of our fellow humans and of the world – something he has also shown in his commitment to art festivals and to communication in the greater media world.

But it is of great importance that our new Rector is included in a special way as a theologian in a historic line of theologians at Stellenbosch University – a history in which a great diversity of people and ideas has come to the fore over the years. One would be able to call up images of the great dissidents who set themselves up against the prevailing ideas of the day, who did not shy away from considerable personal sacrifice, from vilification and from rejection. I still hear the voice of one of these, when, at a crossroads in his life, he quoted the words of the apostle Peter from Acts 5:29: “We must obey God rather than men.” From the earliest years of our University, there was place in the Theological Seminary (or *Kweekskool*), which Russel Botman joined in 2000, for the growth of diversity, and often even for dramatic conflicts of view. We can be sure that it was because of this tradition that he could come home.

There surely are different ways in which to summarise the course of Russel Botman's life. I have selected a few snapshots because I believe they contain elements that indicate how, throughout his life up until now, they shaped and prepared him for the place where Stellenbosch University currently finds itself.

There are many present here who will recognise the Vision Statement 2012 of Stellenbosch University in the selections I have made from Prof Botman's life story, hitherto. May I recapitulate the five components of this Statement: Stellenbosch University is an academic institution of excellence and a respected knowledge partner; it contributes towards building the scientific, technological and intellectual capacity of Africa; it is an active role-player in the development of South African society; it has a campus culture that welcomes a diversity of people and ideas; it promotes Afrikaans as a language of teaching and science in a multilingual context.

It is however of particular importance to realise that the University is recognised as a *value-driven* institution, and underlying this statement is a system of values, built, one could venture to say, on the age-old "cardinal virtues" of Prudence, Temperance, Justice and Fortitude: The values of equity, participation, transparency, readiness to serve, tolerance and mutual respect, dedication, scholarship, responsibility, academic freedom.

The translation of these values into deeds: this is the field of which Russel Botman will be custodian, and where his proven moral courage in leadership will flourish.

And it is for this quality of moral leadership that our South African society – and certainly also societies far beyond our borders – are in dire need.

Russel Botman, with his proven abilities as protagonist for moral values and as reconciler, is indeed a man for our time, a man of the moment, in a society that has such an outspoken, urgent need for moral leadership. But to the extent to which he shows the course for all the people of our University, his leadership will extend far beyond our surrounding mountains and hills, far beyond this moment. In keeping alive our values there is a promise, yes, even an assurance for the future of our greater South African society, and the entire larger sphere of influence that that will be touched, and maybe even be changed, by the people of Stellenbosch University as carriers of these values.

Thus Russel Botman reaches towards a greater space for the University, and thus – he is focused on the future.

This nurturing of values through moral leadership at our University, values asserting our common humanity anew, will mean that the principle underlying the drafting of our "Strategic framework for the turn of the century and beyond", accepted by Council in March 2000, will indeed acquire particular significance

beyond this place and time, the principle being: "...that (our) concern with knowledge is understood to include a **responsibility to serve** the well-being of the community".

It is therefore understandable that one finds Prof Botman joining his vision for our University to the widely accepted UN Millennium Goals for the well-being of communities, which, you will recall, entail the eradication of poverty and hunger; the empowerment of women and children, through education and health care; creating hope to live and dream beyond present miseries for the voiceless, the forgotten, the suffering; urging, inspiring the powerful and able to unite forces against decay and despair.

Already our University has proven our commitment to these issues over a broad spectrum. We eagerly anticipate the vigour with which Professor Botman will deepen, sharpen this commitment.

However, there is a different, higher focus on the future that I believe to be evident in Russel Botman. One could read from the very unique course of his life up until this point that he is spoken of as being a child of God. And because this is so, we know that, when he acts as curator, as protector of our value system here at our University, he does so in the light of eternal values.

And so it is, when we interpret the way in which Professor Botman has hitherto lived his life as a child of God, that we shall witness Professor Botman conducting his duties, indeed fulfilling his **calling** at Stellenbosch, *sub specie aeternitatis*.

We wish him, his wife Beryl and their family, every blessing. May your path, Professor Botman, together with that of Mrs Botman and your family, be blessed.

Mister Chairperson, members of Senate, ladies and gentlemen –

We will now proceed with the installation of Professor Russel Botman. Professor Botman, will you please rise?

You, Hayman Russel Botman, have duly been elected as Rector and Vice-Chancellor by Council in accordance with paragraph 4 of the Statute of Stellenbosch University, after consultation with Senate and the Institutional Forum.