

The Most Reverend & Right Honourable Dr John Sentamu, Archbishop of York

Doctor of Divinity

Durham Cathedral, 9 January 2020

Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it.

We gather today in a Cathedral to which ancient paths have led. As we heard earlier, behind me lies the body of Cuthbert, the focus of pilgrimage for over a thousand years. Pilgrims have trod their way to this place seeking inspiration from a man who, by any account, walked a good way. People still come to this place today, from near and far, wanting to come close to an inspiring figure from history.

A university is, among other things, concerned with asking for – and critiquing - the ancient paths. Durham University rightly holds a reputation for ground-breaking future-orientated research, but this depends in significant part on learning from those who have gone before, those who have broken new ground and shown new paths to follow.

In granting honorary degrees a university gives recognition to those whose path has been an example and inspiration to others. So today we honour the path trodden by John Sentamu, who retires this summer after fifteen years as Archbishop of York.

In both this role, and in service before in Birmingham and London, Archbishop Sentamu's path has been distinguished in a number of important ways.

First, Archbishop Sentamu has been an example to others of breaking new ground in following a sense of vocation. Brought up in Uganda and achieving the high office of judge, Sentamu was arrested and tortured under the violent regime of Idi Amin and eventually forced to flee with his new wife Margaret. He pursued theological study up to doctoral level in the UK, receiving his PhD for his thesis *Some aspects of soteriology, with particular reference to the thought of J. K. Mozley, from an African perspective*; he was ordained deacon, priest and then bishop, becoming in time the

Church of England's first black Archbishop. It is a source of some shame to the Church that for many years Archbishop Sentamu was the only bishop from an ethnic minority, and we can only be thankful that Sentamu leaves his role with this no longer the case, but mindful that there is much more work to be done. Sentamu has shown a good path for others to follow.

Second, the Archbishop's path has been characterised by devoted service to the building up of community and the common good. Whether it was as an adviser to the Stephen Lawrence Judicial Inquiry or as Chair of the Damilola Taylor Murder Review, as a strong advocate of the Living Wage or, most recently, chairing an investigation into the impact of oil companies in the Nigerian Delta, Sentamu has demonstrated commitment to those whose voices are often heard least and last. His role in the House of Lords has been to speak truth to power, something for which he suffered as a young man in Uganda and which continues to inspire others today. And he was very proud to be voted Yorkshireman of the Year in 2007!

Third, Archbishop Sentamu's path has been shaped by a concern to see others develop and grow in their calling and service. The Archbishop of York's Youth Trust, founded by the present post-holder, has supported now 75,000 young people, and as Visitor of St John's and St Chad's Colleges here in Durham the Archbishop has strongly affirmed the vocation of this University to develop people from all backgrounds in knowledge, learning and service. Indeed it is appropriate that today we welcome so many graduands from across the churches in the UK who have been studying at Durham University through the Common Awards pathway. I know of at least one student at Cramer Hall within St John's College who would not have trained for ministry but for the personal encouragement of Archbishop Sentamu. Recognising him across a room, having not seen this man for years, the Archbishop made a beeline for him 'Now what is God doing in your life?' was the characteristically bold question. And it all flowed from there.

Finally, our honorary graduand's path has been characterised by a desire to commend in the public square what he believes to be the ancient – and good - way found in Jesus Christ. The quote at the beginning of this oration was from the prophet Jeremiah, and it served as the motto for the first of the Archbishop's missions, which

he led first in Sheffield in 2015 and subsequently in different places across the north of England. Following the example of Cuthbert and the other northern saints, he has led weekend missions visiting different communities – pubs and schools, parks and clubs - sharing a faith in Jesus which has proved for him such a good way. Just three years ago he led a service in this Cathedral for the Bishops' Mission in the Diocese of Durham, so today brings back I know happy memories indeed.

Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it.

Archbishop Sentamu has found a good way and walked in it. In this ancient place of learning and pilgrimage we honour his example and draw inspiration from his journey.

Chancellor, I present John Sentamu, the Most Reverend and Right Honourable the Lord Archbishop of York, to receive the degree of Doctor of Divinity, *honoris causa*.

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