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**Voices of the Pelican
(Barbados)***

It is said that the extent of a person's happiness is in direct proportion to the depth of his or her capacity for gratitude. If that were indeed so, I must be the happiest of men at this moment, as the predominant emotion that washes over me is one of deep gratitude—gratitude to the Council of the University of the West Indies for having appointed me its Chancellor—gratitude to my wife and family who have made all this possible—gratitude to my teachers, my colleagues and my students—gratitude to the numerous persons who have congratulated me—and gratitude to you who have come from far and wide to be part of this ceremony of my installation as Chancellor today. This gratitude is made even deeper and the sense of responsibility that devolves upon me made more acute by the appreciation that I am the first of the products of the Pelican to hold this office. I am proud of my academic heritage and roots and am conscious that I am the same George Alleyne to whom Princess Alice handed a diploma on February 15th 1958. Therefore it is all the more meaningful for me to be able to play some small part in my University's further development and repay with interest what it so generously gave to me.

This pride is mixed with the humility that comes with the knowledge that I am the inheritor and beneficiary of a tradition of class and excellence in the office. Our University has been particularly fortunate in its Chancellors. Our beginnings were enhanced and embellished by the generosity and dignified presence of Princess Alice whose watchful eye and deft hand helped to guide us and open many doors that would not normally have been opened to a fledgling colonial institution. The "*Last of our Beginnings*" was ushered in by Sir Hugh Wooding and the West Indianness of the office was consolidated and given even more luster by Sir Allen Lewis and our Chancellor Emeritus Sir Shridath Ramphal. Our three West Indian Chancellors were men of rare distinction—all eminent jurists and scholars, and all with the deep conviction that our University was not merely another institution of higher learning but also had a special place in the development of the consciousness of West Indians as to what it meant to have a West Indian persona. They, like the other patriots of their generation appreciated the fundamental need for a social setting in which the activities of West Indian production and learning would flourish. I knew them all; I thank them all and. I hope and pray that I can be worthy of that tradition of excellence of service.

* Installation address, The University of the West Indies, 13 December 2003

We processed this afternoon to one of my favorite pieces of music, “*By the Rivers of Babylon*” –the musical version of Psalm 137 which is one of the most poignant expressions of lament and longing for liberation, both physical and spiritual that I know.

“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.

For they that carried us away captive required of us a song: and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying sing us one of the songs of Zion.

But how shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?”

But of course you know the more popular version!

This psalm has been a source of immense comfort to me over the years as in moments of uncertainty I struggled with the complexity of the world around me and the meaning of what I was doing. I would come back to the conviction that although we too were carried away into captivity and for many a day could not really sing our song, today we can. Today we have voice, and the fact that I and many like me have a voice and can sing our song in any land is because of the University of the West Indies.

There was a time when our voices were indeed few and muted. One hundred years after manumission our liberation had not come. But after a century of summers of discontent an explosion of violence marked a new beginning. And even then in the midst of the turmoil and turbulence, it was clear that education was a crucial ingredient for our liberation and a trampoline for our social progress. Here in Barbados Clement Osbourne Payne, one of our national heroes said, “*educate, agitate but do not violate!*” The dust settled and the recommendations of the Royal Commission that came and saw the conditions of health and education that had been the result of benign or malignant neglect were the starting point of fundamental reforms in health and tertiary education. The Commission conceived the creation of an institution that would indeed educate a new breed of Caribbean leaders.

How our face has changed! We began with a mere handful of starry-eyed ingénues: now we are twenty-eight and a half thousand and every year our enrolment increases. There were ninety of us in my graduating class; this year there were six thousand. And how our voices have swelled! We have had an impact in politics, economics, culture, education, health-indeed in every sphere of Caribbean life and in addition have been teaching countless others how to sing in the Caribbean choir. The nature of the institution has changed with an expansion that is both physical and academic, and with a world class staff – both intra and extramural.

But as in every good institution this pride in the past must not be hubristic and no sense of triumphalism must enter into our contemplation of the future. It is not given to us to create the future, but examination of the possible scenarios can I believe, help us to see the dangers ahead and create the desired future.

The decade of the seventies was a time of stress for many universities and we did not escape the ideological polarization that gripped most of the world. The decade of the eighties saw much academic ferment around the concepts and consequences of modernism and post-modernism. Today all of academia has to confront what is truly the defining reality of our time and age—the reality of globalization. We have to do this while battling the tensions that have been with us almost from the birth of the modern university. There is the tension between the creation of knowledge for its sake and the need to innovate to keep societies vibrant. There is the tension between excellence for a few and general training for many. There is the tension between the preservation of beliefs and values and the normal development of knowledge that lead to paradigmatic shifts.

There are many aspects to globalization, but the critical feature is the vertiginous increase in connectivity that has changed the face of the earth and has initiated or intensified a complex set of technological, political and cultural processes. The romantics say that from their very inception the universities through their interchange of scholars have been a symbol of globalization. The more pragmatic among us point to the academic virtues that derive from the recent ability to disseminate information with unprecedented speed and dream of its genuine democratization. The rapid sharing ideas will make it easier to unlock and probe the secrets of nature. But there are others who posit that a prime concern of universities and especially those in developing countries is the consequence of the diffusion of an ideology that leads apparently to an inexorable rush toward the organization of society according to the dictates of the liberal market orientated democracy.

I have in the past ascribed to my own area of health two essential functions or modes—the instrumental and the constitutive. The same can be said for university education and there is a constant struggle to keep the two in balance. In the case of health the constitutive has for long held dominance and health was regarded as something important in its own right, almost a precious gift from the Almighty and it was bordering on the obscene to consider or to try to measure the instrumental function. That has of course changed, and what a joy it was to hear the Heads of Government declare in Nassau that “*The Health of the Region is the Wealth of the Region*”. In the case of tertiary education and specifically in relation to universities, globalization may emphasize the opposite—a stress on the instrumental to the detriment of the constitutive. There are proponents of the thesis that our output in terms of teaching and research should serve predominantly and uniquely the needs of the market and many scholars worry that the

private sector and the state may combine to ensure that there is exclusively an instrumental role that serves those needs.

Of course our university must see its products contributing to the basic freedoms that are at the core of our Caribbean development. We have to produce the human resources and the research to strengthen our capacity for economic growth, for improving the health of our people, for protecting our environment, for improving our stock of human and social capital and for enhancing the capacity of individuals and communities to embrace democratic principles and uphold human rights. The only concern is that these must not be seen as inimical to the constitutive value of education.

A university affirms the reverence for the world of ideas, a place where we never forget the imagery conveyed in Isaac Newton's memorable words:

"I don't know what I may seem to the world, but as to myself I seem to be like a boy playing on the seashore and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or prettier shell than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me".

This search for what lies in that ocean of truth and the urge to transmit the inquisitiveness to the young has marked all the companies of masters and scholars that have constituted the great universities through the ages. In saying this now, I but echo what Princess Alice said at her installation as Chancellor. She said to us;

"You are part of a system, a great system, covering the whole civilized world, hallowed by the traditions of centuries, governed and inspired by a unity of purpose which is your common heritage. That purpose never changes and it can never be less than the training of the human mind to search out and to know the truth".

So was it then, so is it now, so shall it be for all time!

I would caution about the myth that globalization and the interconnectedness driven by modern technology of communication is like a net. It is not. In many cases it is more like a spider's web in that there is a defined center and there are strands at the periphery. The non-neutrality of the technology is leading more and more to a homogenization of practices and values and they are not of the south. One of our roles in our lands is to raise our voices and try to resist those aspects of the homogenization that do damage to the values that define us as a people.

Large countries have several institutions like ours, but we have a special remit as the university for a Caribbean that is enriched by its diversity. In their "*Grand Anse*

Declaration and Work Programme for the Advancement of the Integration Movement" of 1989, our Heads of Government made the historic decision that "in view of the major role which the University of the West Indies is being called upon to play, it should remain a regional institution indefinitely". This was a source of great relief and comfort to those of us who had dreamed of it as such, who entered it as such and who have always regarded the regionalism that was nurtured in it as one of our most precious gifts. I believe that history has never given enough credit to Sir Alister McIntyre for the role he played in that decision. But there is another aspect of the declaration that we should heed. The preamble noted as follows:

"Aware that tertiary education institutions have a pivotal role in enlarging and improving education, training and retraining opportunities in all of the countries of the region, and in this context, acknowledging that the University of the West Indies must give leadership in these efforts".

We have made valiant attempts to give this leadership and we must continue to strengthen them. The world is moving to a plurality in tertiary education as in other fields, and we can be no different. In the United States only 20% of students in higher education are enrolled in universities. Large countries perhaps can afford to take literally the dictum of Chairman Mao to let one hundred flowers bloom, perhaps unattended. We do not have this choice and the Caribbean has to re-examine the complex of actual and virtual tertiary institutions that are operating here with a view to defining a tertiary system. The University of the West Indies will not seek hegemony, it acknowledges that it can not and should not be the sole purveyor of specialized information in this age of knowledge, but instead must assist our countries in rationalizing their efforts to increase the numbers of Caribbean young people who can have access to tertiary education and sing King Alpha's song.

One of the practices of the north that is increasingly attractive to us and others like us is the commercialization of tertiary education. Universities are becoming more entrepreneurial, driven by the need for funds and the patent inability of the states to bear the ever-increasing costs. I was intrigued and amused by several comments by Derek Bok, past president of Harvard University in this regard as he questioned what in the modern universities was not for sale and said "*Universities share one characteristic with compulsive gamblers and exiled royalty: there is never enough money to satisfy their desires.*" But our university does have to consider the possibility of generating income from some of our products and some of the aspects of our academic offerings that are tied to our cultural advantages.

Bok warns against excesses thus:

“By compromising basic academic principles, universities tamper with ideals that give meaning to the scholarly community and win respect from the public. These common values are that glue that binds together an institution already fragmented by a host of separate disciplines, research centers, teaching programs and personal ambitions. They sustain the belief of scientists and scholars in the worth of what they are doing. They make academic careers a calling rather than just another way to earn a living”.

I believe that we have done well so far, but one of the best guards against malignant entrepreneurship is to secure a stable base of funding. All great universities count on their alumni to help to ensure some of this base. According to our Charter, the Chancellor presides over the Guild of Graduates, and as an alumnus, I take it as a special charge to try to mobilize our alumni and have them even more involved in our affairs. The various branches of our Alumni Association have some fine accomplishments, and we must see how we can build upon them. I recall with fondness my presidency of one of those branches and the Pelican Award it gave me thirty five years ago is one of my most treasured possessions.

The regional university to which I am committed must foster the spirit of a Caribbean community through its study and personal interaction. When I saw the distribution of students on the three campuses recently, with the overwhelming preponderance of nationals of the host country, I agonized over the need to find some mechanism to ensure that there is more interaction among our young CARICOM citizens. My reasoning is perhaps selfish and unapologetically nostalgic, but I believe that it is this interaction that has made many of my generation into West Indians who believe that there are more things that unite than separate us. It is this interaction that makes for the feeling of community that I often find in the diaspora. The University in paring away our superficial differences has been a most powerful instrument for piercing the penumbra of parochial nationalism and making us understand and appreciate one another. We sing better when we know one another. But conversely, it will be the success of the instruments and enterprises of the Caribbean Community in creating an appropriate framework and environment that will facilitate the continuation of the University as a regional institution indefinitely. Our future lies not only in ourselves but also in the extent to which the spirit and practice of a community flourish in the Caribbean.

What can you expect from me as Chancellor? Fortunately I do not have the authority that Pope Gregory XI gave to the Chancellor of the University of Paris in 1231. He

“shall swear that in good faith, according to his conscience he will not receive as professors of theology and canon law any but suitable men, at a place and time, according to the condition of the city and the honor and glory of those branches of learning; and he

will reject all who are unworthy without respect to persons or nations”.

That was before the days of Selection Committees! But you can expect that I will honor the commitment I have given and will be faithful to the Charter, Statutes and Ordinances of the University. I will do everything in my power to enhance the standing and reputation of the institution not only because it is my sworn duty, but also because I love it.

That love is of course sprinkled with nostalgia and laced with sentimentality. But it is also hardened by the deep and sure conviction that the actual and potential energy of my University-our University, that light from the west, represents one of the best and surest hopes for illuminating a Caribbean future that is brighter than our Caribbean present.

For as our own Philip Sherlock and also Winston Churchill would quote from Arthur Hugh Clough:

*And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward, look! The land is bright.*

I thank you and let us all sing together.