



Sir Dwight Venner

Chancellor, the Caribbean has been richly blessed with men and women who are richly blessed with abundant talents. One such shining light, who is both a Caribbean man and a Renaissance man - one who typifies the Renaissance ideal of wide-ranging culture, learning and talents - is Kenneth Dwight Venner, Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire and Distinguished Graduate of the UWI. Even his name Kenneth, the Gaelic for “handsome”, registers one aspect of this bounty, while his brilliant career in international economics, central banking, finance and planning, his erudition and management skills and his wide-ranging interests and hobbies are the very model of a Caribbean Renaissance man.

Sir Dwight was born in Kingstown, St. Vincent on January the 21st, 1946, sharing a birthday with our National Hero, Right Excellent Errol Barrow, which must make him an honorary Barbadian. His father Noel Venner was a peripatetic economist from LSE, the London School of Economics, that famous cauldron of Caribbean economists and statesmen, including Errol Barrow, Michael Manley et al. After a stint as Federal economist for the Windward Islands in Grenada, he became Financial Secretary in St. Lucia, and so young Dwight acquired the best possible Caribbean school education, from Miss Lou’s school and the Boys’ Grammar School in St. Vincent, and Grenada Boys’ to St. Mary’s College in St. Lucia. One day Sir Philip Sherlock, an acknowledged founding father of UWI, addressed the Sixth Form of St. Mary’s College on the UWI and on being a West Indian; and in Sir Dwight’s words, at his magnificent Graduation Address here in 1997: “I have not been the same ever since, as it was one of the most profound turning points in my life, akin to Saul on his way to Damascus. From that moment on I became a disciple of the UWI.” That Damascene conversion led him to a BSc (Honours) in Economics in 1969 and an MSc in 1970.

He worked his way through posts of Research Institute and Junior Research Fellow at the

ISER, now the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies, to Lecturer in Economics at Mona. In 1981 he put his schooling - secondary, tertiary and research experience - to practical use as Director of Finance and Planning for the Government of St. Lucia. In 1989 he was the obvious choice for Governor of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, and he is still there, in St. Kitts, striving to weld together the fragile economies of the most beautiful string of pearls in the world. In his eloquent speeches and policies he constantly challenges the need for the scholar to understand his society and further its economic and social development, and he places UWI at the centre of the process of actively promoting the social, political, cultural and economic development of the region. He is a most committed counsel for a most active, creative, informed and responsible UWI, as the crucial instrument of regional development.

And his words are not just idle words, Chairman. He has written and published prolifically not only on banking and financial policies but on development, financial integration and Caribbean Unity. He never ceases to work and lobby as Chairman or member of numerous boards, such as the Expert Group appointed to review the impact of the FTAA on the small states of Central America and the Caribbean. We need to know if he is celebrating or mourning the collapse of the Cancun talks!

In spite of all this he has a baker's dozen of hobbies: no less than six sports, including daily jogging and regular cricket for the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, music and reading, travel, photography and collecting many things. His collection of paintings is a great joy, in the Bank and in his homes in St. Lucia and St. Kitts, so that he is never separated from his special Caribbean places.

You may well ask, Chancellor, how such a well rounded man, metaphorically, remains so lean and fit physically. The answer, no doubt, lies in his family - one beloved wife, Lynda, and between them seven, I repeat, seven children. You will have guessed that Sir Dwight is a devout Roman Catholic and you will agree that his cup overfloweth, as his children share diverse talents of doctor, accountant, pilot, economist and linguist. He has practised what he preaches as a banker - use your talents, and multiply them!

And so Chancellor, for the contribution of this talented Caribbean Renaissance man, as economist, banker, financial adviser, committed counsel for a united Caribbean and for a strong, pro-active UWI, I invite you to exercise the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate of this University and confer upon Sir Dwight Venner the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.