



Rev. Canon Professor Kortright Davis

Chancellor,

Have you ever had the experience of reading the biography of someone you've always admired only to discover that the more you learn about him, the less you like him? The renowned statesman who turns out to be pettily vindictive in private, the brilliant writer who also happens to be a domestic thug: the truth is, Chancellor, as Lord Acton pointed out long ago, great men are not necessarily good men.

But sometimes, happily, they are. And the Rev. Canon Professor Kortright Davis is not only a great man but an outstandingly good man too. Despite being for many years one of the world's pre-eminent Anglican theologians, his leadership skills and erudition in constant demand at the highest levels of academia and church governance, Prof. Davis has never neglected his original calling as a humble minister, nor forgotten that at the heart of the word *ministry* – both etymologically and practically – is the concept of service, service above all to those most in need: the sad, the sick, the destitute, the oppressed.

Prof. Davis's life-story (his "still-unfolding" life-story, as he puts it) began on the beautiful island of Antigua. After six years at the venerable grammar school in St John's he set sail for a St. John without an apostrophe: our parish of the same name here in Barbados. As a seminarian at Codrington College he passed the General Ordination Examination *cum laude* in 1964, and the next year gained his Bachelor of Divinity as an external student of the University of London. In 1966 he was ordained as Priest, followed by an MA in History from UWI in 1976, followed in rapid succession by a DPhil in Religious Studies from the University of Sussex in 1979.

From his earliest appointments in the Eastern Caribbean (he served as Deacon in Antigua, as Rector in St.Kitts and Montserrat and was both Vice and Acting Principal at Codrington) to his current positions as Professor of Theology in the School of Divinity at Howard University and Rector at the Holy Comforter Episcopal Church in Washington DC, Prof. Davis has demonstrated an extraordinary ability to inhabit two worlds – academia and the church - combining profound scholarship with pastoral care and finding exhilarating synergies between them.

To adapt Shakespeare's vivid metaphor from *Julius Caesar*, Prof. Davis bestrides these two worlds like a colossus.

Colleagues and peers praise the exceptional range, stylistic panache and critical rigour of his academic publications. His many books, including such titles as *Cross and Crown in Barbados* (1983), *African Creative Expressions of the Divine* (1991) and *Serving With Power: Reviving the Spirit of Christian Ministry* (1999) are acknowledged classics in the field of Afro-Anglicanism and emancipatory theology.

They speak of the lucidity of his theological vision, and of his organizational expertise (he has, for example, served as the Archbishop of Canterbury's personal representative on a number of Church Commissions and was the Associate Director of the Caribbean Conference of Churches).

Friends and parishioners, meanwhile – and no less emphatically – speak of his unwavering personal warmth, his generosity, his kindness.

Chancellor, there's a revealing passage at the start of Prof Davis's seminal text *Emancipation Still Comin'* (1990) in which a young man stands alone on the lawn at Codrington early one morning, looking out to sea. I wish I had the time to quote the passage in full, but here's a taste of it:

I stood high over the Atlantic, and looked out toward the East, facing the rising sun.... No land came between the shores beneath me and the shores of Africa. If only I could get into a boat, I thought...a boat capable of taking me across the sea, I could reach the shores of the mother country, Africa, over which the sun had already risen that morning.

The youth in this evocative, beautifully-written paragraph was young Kortright Davis himself, right at the start of his career. He comes back to us this evening not at its end (the story is still unfolding, remember) but beyond any doubt at the peak of his profession, having spent his life in scholarship and prayer, crossing many seas, indefatigably and exuberantly celebrating Africa's contribution to Anglicanism.

In 2009 this founding member and stalwart of the Washington Chapter of the UWI Alumni Association was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Divinity by the Virginia Theological Seminary. It is with the greatest pleasure that I now invite you, Chancellor, by the authority vested in you by the Senate and Council of the University of the West Indies, his cherished *alma mater*, to confer on the Rev. Canon Professor Donald Henry Kortright Davis – this distinguished theologian, dedicated minister, illustrious UWI alumnus and thoroughly *good* man - the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.