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**Tertiary education in evolution
Tenth Dr. Alister Francis Memorial Lecture**

St. Johns, Antigua and Barbuda*

First let me thank the Antigua State College and its Principal, Mr. Hiram Forde for doing me the honor of inviting me to give this tenth Alister Francis Memorial lecture. I must also thank the Antigua Commercial Bank for its sponsorship. I think it is a marvelous memorial to Dr. Francis to have initiated this lecture series. I cannot recall interacting with Dr. Francis although I may have met him in one of my visits to Antigua or on one of the occasions he participated in the University Council. But everyone who takes the time to read about higher education in Antigua and Barbuda will have encountered the name of Dr. Alister Francis who is rightly credited with being the father of the Antigua State College-overseeing its start from the merger of two institutions to the situation today when it is firmly situated within the educational landscape of Antigua and Barbuda and indicating its intention of proceeding to full university status.

Dr. Francis was obviously a remarkable man who combined the apparently innate qualities of the good teacher with the skills of a manager and the vision of a seer. I was intrigued to note in the brochure for the inaugural lecture that he was variously likened to Bartolome de las Casas, the Man from La Mancha and the Jamaican Anancy. These personalities cover a wide range of skills and talents. You will have to imagine one person having the commitments of a Dominican friar and arguing passionately for human rights, having given up his belief in the need for African slaves and at the same time quixotically tilting at windmills and dreaming the impossible dream while possessing the cunning and scheming of the polymorphic spider man. Perhaps the job of being president of a tertiary institution or being a Chancellor does demand this combination of talents-of advocacy, dreaming and wile, if indeed they can be regarded as talents. I note that it was said that one of his dreams was to see the College evolve into an independent degree granting institution with accreditation from the University of the West Indies and other tertiary level institutions. It is clear from his words and actions that he was a confirmed regionalist and saw tertiary education also from a Caribbean perspective.

I was alive to the injunction given by the Minister of Education at the inaugural lecture that these should serve *“not only to bring attention to the Antigua State College and tertiary education but to education in general”*. When one looks at the caliber of the previous lecturers in this series and the topics they have addressed there is no doubt that

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the organizers have wittingly or unwittingly followed the injunctions of the Minister. I trust that these lectures will be put together in a single volume as they will be valuable to all those interested in Caribbean education. This evening I propose to reflect on the nature and purpose of tertiary education, the extent to which it is evolving and how it shapes and is shaped by societal forces. I will of course do this in the context of the relevance of the University of the West Indies and the possible relations between UWI and tertiary educational institutions in the Caribbean to which Dr. Francis referred, as well as educational regionalism. I will also refer to some of the standards we should seek to establish and preserve. I am sure that Dr. Francis would have agreed that I should observe the time tested biological and evolutionary dictum that not only does form follow function, but that institutions in classical Darwinian logic must evolve or find themselves extinct.

The standard dogma of today, indeed for the ages is that institutions of higher or tertiary education, whether or not they be universities have as their essential function, the generation and dissemination of information that leads to knowledge. But the essential purpose of that function and the structures to carry it out has changed over the years and has influenced the evolution of tertiary education. Indeed it has been my experience that much of the discussion on tertiary education at this time focuses more on the mechanisms and mechanics of that transfer and dissemination-the necessary structures and processes and less on the rationale for choosing these structures and processes.

Perhaps because of my own training and work in the clinical and basic sciences, in discussions of knowledge I frequently revert to another illustrious Francis-Francis Bacon, whose concept of the production and utility of knowledge has been the bedrock of the empiricism that has dominated scientific thinking for five centuries. Bacon would postulate that human beings only know through and from the results of experiment and observation and the knowledge, or rather information so gained may be disseminated to others, but the real value lay in its use for the benefit of human kind and the possibility of changing the human condition for the better. Education should produce new knowledge that is useful.

I do not wish to draw too sharp a distinction with the ideas of Bacon, but much of the debate about the purpose of tertiary education evokes thoughts of another major influential figure-Cardinal Newman, founder of Trinity College Dublin, one of the world's old Universities. Newman saw a University as being focused on students and dedicated mainly to the pursuit of truth and debate about its meaning as being important in and of itself and not really instrumental. The scholarship from universities was intrinsically important and served to create the good and beautiful in society and enlarge the mind.

That debate plays out today in the discussion about the value and place of different disciplines in institutions of tertiary education-whether they should focus on preparing the human capital that the market needs and to the extent that we are in what has been called the post-Fordist world in which there is less emphasis on making and more on knowing, concentrate on producing legions of knowledge workers. Of course

there should be no need for a binary approach and tertiary education has evolved into valuing and encompassing the Baconian approach to empiricism as well as accepting some aspects of Cardinal Newman's approach.

This is not in contradiction to the oft expressed view that in the Caribbean in today's globalized world where it is the rapid transfer of information that is the real driver of that phenomenon, the ability of our nations with scarce natural resources to compete will depend in great measure on the general level of education and more specifically on the quantity and quality of the output from the tertiary education institutions. Several but not all Caribbean nations have surpassed the goal of having 15% of the eligible cohort in tertiary education by 2005 set by the Heads of Government in 1997. But it is estimated that in the OECS less than 15% of secondary school leavers go on to pursue post-secondary education and fewer than 10 percent of adults have completed tertiary education. This emphasis on tertiary education is a global phenomenon. It is estimated that in 2009 there were 170 million persons enrolled in tertiary education globally which represented a 160 % increase over the previous 20 years. The fact that this increase is greater than the increase in the eligible cohort indicates that increasing numbers of the cohort are accessing tertiary education.

The expansion from a state college to university status was one of Dr. Francis' dreams which I understand is about to be realized. But he must have examined the rationale for such a move. Being the patriot that he was, he must have seen some advantage to Antigua and Barbuda and perhaps to the Caribbean coming from this evolution. There must have been desirable functions that only such a structure could fulfill. I am sure that he would not have belonged to the school that saw a university in terms of its being merely a national symbol, a source of pride, and one of the symbols of nationhood like a flag and an anthem. He and those who have pursued his dream must have been convinced that Antigua and Barbuda needed the physical presence of a university to benefit from what will inevitably be the essential functions of such an institution of tertiary education.

Almost 30 years ago Professor Dore from the University of Sussex set out some essential functions of Universities for national development to which I have referred frequently in modified form. These were mental development or a pedagogical function; enhancing national prestige through the output of its staff; value affirmation as being a guardian of social values and mores; social criticism or being a repository for a diversity of ideas; social order or preparation of the social elite; knowledge production; rationing of professional licenses and screening talent through a credentialing function. It is worthwhile reflecting whether there is still today a geographical imperative for these functions. Perhaps Dr. Francis would have opined that geographical presence was essential if the country was going to benefit from having an institution of tertiary education produce the research and knowledge that was of indigenous value-that there was a need for physical presence for the function of the documentation and preservation of the mores and values of the society as well as the social criticism function. Certainly it cannot be the credentialing or pedagogical functions, as it has been shown on numerous occasions that the ease of communication in this digital age makes it perfectly possible to

have these functions performed at a distance. Every society and especially the developing ones have to decide on the essentiality of those functions and determine whether it is critical to have its own university to carry them out. I make the distinction here between a University and institutions of tertiary or higher education.

Part of the evolution in tertiary education is the growing appreciation of the need to maintain diversification in the educational offerings at that level and avoid what has come to be known as academic drift. First, students entering the academically eligible cohort have a range of aptitudes, personal backgrounds and interests and need a variety of academic "homes". Diversified systems are also better able to respond to the varying market needs that are present even in the developing countries and are no reflection of the size of the market. In addition a diversified system allows for the recognition and validation of skill sets that are not the product of education at the university level. There are vocational skills that can be inculcated outside of a university framework and indeed it has been said that non-diversified systems end up with an overall reduction in the quality of tertiary education itself. Thus the question that has to be asked in the development of new national universities is whether the country as a whole will be able to maintain a diversified system. There is concern in some countries that there is an increasing tendency for educational institutions that served these vocational and like needs to seek to modify their academic offerings in terms of disciplines, curricula and length of study to imitate the more established research universities with the consequence that instead of being more egalitarian the tertiary educational sector becomes more stratified and there is a reduction in quality all around. The more enlightened approach is to maintain the universities and the more traditional vocational schools separately, emphasizing the quality of the output from both.

The OECS's Education Sector Strategy 2012-2021 has as one of its strategic imperatives to *"provide opportunities for all learners in Technical and Vocational Education and training (TVET). It goes on to say:*

"Both internationally and regionally, educational theorists and researchers are now recognizing that TVET has a value, at least equivalent to academic education. International perspectives on the importance of TVET demonstrate the increasing need for developing a skilled and competent work force across all areas of economic development".

I note the implicit separation of institutions of tertiary education from academic institutions. Of course this is in no way contradictory to the idea of having institutions uniquely focused on technical education being called Universities. In large societies like the United States, there is a clear differentiation between the universities and the community colleges and the argument is put that many students at certain stages of their academic and personal development find a better home in the community college than in the more complex university system which incidentally is very much more expensive.

The extent to which the pedagogical and credentialing functions can be performed at a distance brings into focus the role of the University of the West Indies and particularly its Open Campus in relation to tertiary education in the Caribbean. A strong relationship with the University of the West Indies was one of Dr. Francis' dreams and at the level of the Heads of Government, there has been a call for UWI to be re-engaged in meeting the tertiary education needs of the OECS member states. The OECS Education Sector Strategy 2012-2021 points out that *"A cost-effective and sustainable framework for tertiary education in the OECS will require stronger partnership and collaboration between UWI, the national colleagues (sic) and the private sector"*. I am indebted to Professor Hazel Simmons-Mc Donald for sharing her concepts of these relationships with me.

I find the various possible methods of cooperating particularly with the countries of the OECS especially interesting. There is the possibility of franchising programs to the local institution as has been the practice for years. Students in the local college might avail themselves of courses offered by UWI as part of the requirements for the local degree or possibly qualify for a UWI degree after having taken programs for 2 years at the local college. There are some difficulties as regards the length of study at one or other institution, but the general principal of taking advantage of UWI approved courses is the important one. The other is for a more formal arrangement between two degree granting institutions, with the possibility of the local institution being the University College of Country X. This might take the form of the kind of arrangement that existed between the University College of the West Indies and the University of London in the fourteen years before UWI achieved full university status. There are numerous details that would have to be clarified, but let there be absolutely no doubt of the enthusiasm of the University of the West Indies for and commitment to assisting its member countries to satisfy their needs for tertiary education. One evolution that may need discussion is the relationship between the local university and any other local tertiary education institutions. Will both the UWI and the local university be able to franchise courses to other local institutions? But these are all possibilities to be explored to increase the numbers of persons accessing tertiary education.

In my first University of the West Indies Council meeting as Chancellor in 2003, I raised the issue of the lack of any organized system of tertiary education in the Caribbean. I am pleased that our Vice-Chancellor, Professor Nigel Harris, has argued persuasively in CARICOM for a regional tertiary education system. Let me quote from the paper he presented to CARICOM.

"While there has been general understanding and promotion of growth of the tertiary education sector in CARICOM, expansion has taken place in a somewhat chaotic and unplanned way leading to unnecessary duplication, uncertain quality control, inefficient linkages between education programmes and societal needs, variation in policies with respect to financing and insufficient attention to the roles the various sectors of society might play in such financing"

I regret that I have seen no serious effort to advance this idea although there is agreement on its merits. Regrettably also with the exception of Medicine, the proposals for a regional accreditation system enshrined in the Agreement establishing the Caribbean Community Accreditation Agency for Education and Training has not flourished, with the result that there are numerous tertiary education institutions in the Caribbean whose quality cannot be guaranteed. This expansion of tertiary education into the Caribbean is another evolution that has its origin in the commercialization of tertiary education as one manifestation of the growing tendency for internationalization of the educational product. I am sure this would have been a matter of great concern to Dr. Francis.

Finally I wish to address one of the other evolutions in thinking about tertiary education that has particular salience for us. When the University of the West Indies was established in 1948 there was general acceptance of the thesis that such an institution should be funded primarily by governments. Over the years there has been a steady decline in government support to our university's budget except perhaps for two countries. Some of the rationale for this lies in the debate as to whether tertiary education is a private or public good. Indeed it is both and there would be no debate that it is the government that should pay for that fraction represented by public good and the beneficiary should pay or be helped to pay for that which is private good. The nub of the problem is that no one can find a formula for establishing the ratio and the payment systems depend on the fiscal possibilities of the governments and the ability of the student to find the necessary means to pay. Analysis of the situation in the USA shows that in spite of the increasing price of tertiary education to the individual, there has been no diminution of demand, putting into question the price elasticity of tertiary education with consequences for equity and efficiency. This aspect of funding is one which should be considered carefully with the establishment of new tertiary education institutions.

Mr. Chairman:

I hope I have given some ideas about the evolution of thinking and practice with regard to tertiary education and the institutions concerned with it. I hope that some of these ideas will be of use as you develop the tertiary education sector in Antigua and Barbuda. As I posited earlier, institutions like other organisms evolve or become extinct and you owe it to the memory of Dr. Francis that extinction should be expunged from your education lexicon.

I thank you.