



Orville Alton Turnquest

Chancellor, I present the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, His Excellency Sir Orville Turnquest, Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St Michael and St George, Queen's Counsel, Justice of the Peace, Barrister-at-law. History has not recorded whether, when he was a boy at Mrs Maude Wright's Kindergarten and Primary School on Delancy Street, Nassau, that goodly lady saw in him the future Governor-General. What is certain, however, is that he brings her with him now into the limelight of his achievement.

Sir Orville's assumption of office as Governor-General in 1995 marked the apogee of a long life of distinguished public service, in the law, in politics, and in the church. Called to the Bahamas Bar in 1953, he entered private practice and was senior partner in the highly respected law firm of Dupuch and Turnquest. He has served as President of the Bahamas Bar Association and Chairman of the Bahamas Bar Council. He was for many years a member of the Examining Board for admissions to the Bahamas Bar.

The law could not fully satisfy his desire to be involved in the life of his country, and so he entered politics from early. He has made a difference, whether as Member of Parliament between 1962 and 1967, and again from 1982 to 1994, or as Leader of the Opposition Free National Movement in the Senate between 1972 and 1979. Between 1992 and 1994 he achieved the peak of his political career, being simultaneously Deputy Prime Minister, Attorney General and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Chancellor, a witty and cynical author once posed the question: "When Church and State collaborate, what land can keep her virtue?" Sir Orville embodies the possibility that refutes that cynicism. He is a churchman who brings the virtue of his religious conviction to the practice of statecraft, and a statesman who brings his statesmanly dignity to his service for the church. For nearly four decades he has been Chancellor of the Anglican Diocese of Nassau and the Bahamas, including the Turks and Caicos Islands. He has been a member of the Finance Committee and the Diocesan Council, the Anglican Central Education Authority and the Provincial Synod of the Anglican Church of the West Indies.

When he became Governor-General, Sir Orville chose not to see his position as a sinecure, a comfortable pasture in which to idle away his retirement. He set about using the position as a new arena for further active, creative service to country and community. He has been a leading promoter of "One Bahamas," a movement for greater unity among the people of his island chain, and in this regard has worked to make "the family islands," which used to be misguidedly called "the out islands," feel more and more integral to the Bahamian family as a whole. Himself an exemplary family man, his high-achieving children are an extension of his contribution to the greater good of his people. He has made education one of his passionate concerns. Since becoming Governor-General, he has set himself the objective of visiting every school in the islands. This in itself has established him as an icon of Bahamian unity and hope for the future.

But if Sir Orville is a true Bahamian patriot, he is also one of the foremost advocates of Caribbean unity, and of that unity as being in the self-interest of the Bahamas. He has to be a Caribbean man; after all he is an avid lover of cricket, and is not infrequently to be seen at Test matches at Sabina Park. In this passion he has good company, in the person of his friend and fellow Governor-General Sir Howard Cooke, and must obviously be delighted not only to have Sir Howard here to applaud him this evening, but even more to share the stage with Mr Courtney Walsh.

Sir Orville's Caribbean vision has had good effect through his role in the association of Governors-General and non-executive Presidents of the Caribbean. His colleagues will not take umbrage if it is said that he is one of the true leaders of the group. In that forum, his erudition, his capacity not only for analysis of ideas, but also for collation and synthesis, his wit and humour, his ability to treat comfortably with people at all levels – these are some of the hallmarks of the man to which his peers will attest.

Sir Howard Cooke sums him up in a simple, definitive sentence: "He is a good fellow." As we have heard, Sir Orville is also "no ordinary fellow." For instance, he even boasts the title "Past Exalted Ruler of the Elks Lodge." If, Chancellor, Sir Orville's exaltedness among the elks is a thing of the past, let him not be daunted: he is about to ascend to even higher exaltation, for I invite you now, by the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate of the University of the West Indies, to confer upon Orville Alton Turnquest, patriot and public servant, spirit of the Bahamas, the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*

Mona
3 November 2000.