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The Faith of our Founders in this Jubilee Year

Cave Hill, Barbados*

Welcome!

This is the Jubilee year of the Cave Hill campus—a time for joyful celebration. It was fifty years ago on the 12th of October, 1963 that the College of Arts and Sciences was inaugurated at its temporary headquarters at the Harbour Site in Bridgetown. Those who spoke on that day enunciated the visions they had for the institution and I am pleased that Sir Hilary has collected those addresses and some others equally germane to our origins in a booklet which I hope is read widely both within and outside the University community. They are all gems, but I wish to refer more specifically to the stirring address given by the Vice Chancellor Sir Philip Sherlock, one of the founding fathers of the University and a true West Indian patriot. He spoke of the origin of the College and his vision of what it should become and do. He spoke of two central problems of the twentieth century—the problem of human relationships and man’s mastery over technical knowledge. He pointed to tasks which confronted us in the West Indies—the urgent task of increasing our knowledge and mastery over material things and at the same time carrying further that destruction of prejudice which once marked our society.

In his typical magnificent peroration, Philip applied the words of Milton to the Caribbean

“Methinks I see in my mind a mighty and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep and shaking her invincible locks. Methinks I see her mewling her mighty mouth like he eagle and gazing with undazzled eyes at the full noonday sun”.

And he invited the undergraduates and the whole university to share and realize that vision.

I have reflected on how satisfied Sir Philip would have been if he were alive today. How satisfied would he have been that the institution which he helped to bring into being had fulfilled in plenitude the aspirations he had for it and more specifically had it contributed to that mastery over material things and to destroying our protean prejudices. To what extent in doing so had we

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freed ourselves from the prisons of our past and as Sir Hilary in like vein wrote in the foreword to that booklet “*driven our societies from their colonial scaffold*”?

I believe and can show without fear of contradiction that this Campus has made its contribution to the mastery of material things through its contribution to the world’s corpus of knowledge in the social as well as the physical and biological spheres. It has produced social and basic scientists, bureaucrats and technocrats that can and have held their own nationally, regionally and globally. It has grown physically to be a mighty structure upon a hill. The number of students has grown from just over 100 when Sir Philip spoke to just over 8000 today.

This year there will be just over 1800 graduates-the highest number in several years, with 343 postgraduates and almost 1500 first degrees. We should congratulate 154 of these who got First Class Honors and the 3 who achieved Honors in Medicine. I am pleased to see the increase in the number of PHDs-16 this year. I wish also to congratulate our hard-working Faculty on these results.

The jubilee celebrations will climax at the end of this year with the appropriate ceremonies, but at this stage it is well to reflect on some of the achievements of this academic year which are indicative of current efforts as well as a justification of what the founders envisaged for us. The Campus’s operations were assessed as part of an institutional accreditation process conducted by the Barbados Accreditation Council. Cave Hill was accredited for six years, and officially presented with its Certificate of Accreditation on July 16, 2013. The Campus was highly commended for, among other things, its management of the UWI enterprise; the strength of its leadership and the confidence reposed in it by the UWI community; the coherence and integration of its policies; the strength of its program to enhance the pedagogical skills of faculty; its preparedness to deal with the economic recession; and the excellent relationship which it had forged over the years with governments and the corporate donor community. The rigor of the Campus’s quality control systems came in for high commendation from the accreditation team which described the Campus’s program approval systems as “sound and meet[ing] best international practice”. This is worthy of commendation.

Despite severe resource constraints, faculties were able to bring on-stream a number of enterprising new programs and courses across the various disciplines. The sport initiative which included the rebranding of the program at Cave Hill with the establishment of the Academy of Sport was continued. Investment is being made in state-of-the art facilities such as the Ryan Brathwaite Athletic Track, and complemented by stadium facilities which are intended to support a track and field program to be launched later this academic year.

There were significant achievements of the youngest Faculty at Cave Hill - the Faculty of Medical Sciences. The Clinical Skills building located close to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital was completed with a \$6.0 million grant from the Barbados Government. A Memorandum of Understanding detailing the framework for collaboration between the UWI and the Barbados Government with regard to the Faculty’s teaching at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital was executed last month, finally meeting an outstanding condition of the Faculty’s earlier accreditation. A significant milestone was achieved in the completion of the MBBS by the first cohort of Cave

Hill's students; 91 percent of the Cave Hill students were successful in the final examinations with three receiving Honors, the highest number across the UWI campuses.

The UWI-wide re-designation of the science faculties as Faculties of Science and Technology served to give focus to and support strategic goals being pursued by Cave Hill. The renewable energy initiative was launched officially on November 20, 2012. It included the installation of hybrid systems across the Campus and the outfitting of a renewable energy laboratory with various exhibits highlighting technologies in the field.

The Campus continued to strengthen its internationalization program aimed at attracting exchange and foreign students to the institution and similarly offering UWI students opportunities for study-abroad experiences. An MOU with the Caribbean Court of Justice set out the terms for a relationship with that body and the Faculty of Law, Cave Hill. Among other things, the CCJ will provide personnel to conduct workshops/seminars for students and academic staff as well as internships for students. The Faculty of Law will provide assistance in the continuing legal education program, and will be available for consultations in matters relating to Caribbean and other regional legal systems and international law.

I wish to thank the international, regional and local donor communities which have continued to support the Campus's programs and projects and I must emphasize how empowering the support of these partners has been in these challenging times. I will refer to just one of the larger donations. SOL Caribbean Ltd. has entered into an agreement to provide BD\$300, 000.00 yearly for three years to fund training within Bachelors, Masters and PHD programs.

The Office of the Deputy Principal through the Office of Student Services commenced preparation of a framework document for a proposed Cave Hill disability policy in recognition of the need for a structured response to students with special needs. Preliminary and design work was also commenced on a proposed Alumni Circle which will give recognition to UWI graduates pledging funds to the Campus for various projects.

The Campus's sporting teams enjoyed extraordinary success at the local level. The Sagcor UWI cricket squad won all three major cricket titles in the 2012 Barbados Cricket Association (BCA) cricket championship (the elite division, 50-over competition and 20/20 competition). Its win in the 3-Day Elite Division was its fourth consecutive in this category and represented the first time that a team had achieved this feat in the 100 year history of the BCA.

These are all highly laudable accomplishments and worthy of the encomiums of a supporting public, but I ask myself whether we have been as successful as Sir Philip would have liked in tearing ourselves away from the colonial scaffold and reducing the prejudices in our society. Have we as an institution been successful in advancing human rights in our Caribbean? There is frequent questioning of the extent to which the research and teaching of human rights melds with the practice of human rights. I have heard activists complain that scholarship and practice need to come together more closely, that the teaching and the discourse around moral,

philosophical and constitutional niceties do not relate to the daily infringements suffered by minorities in our societies.

It is in this context that I wish to refer to the negation of human rights of a specific minority in our Caribbean societies. Professor Rose-Marie Antoine and I have just published a book “HIV and Human Rights” which resulted from a Symposium held at Cave Hill 3 years ago. This brought out clearly the degree of stigma and discrimination against persons living with HIV/AIDS and minorities such as homosexuals and many were appalled to know that eleven of our CARICOM countries are the only ones in the Western Hemisphere which still have laws on their books that criminalize consensual homosexual sex in private. Their presence is a clear indication of the disjuncture between the criminal codes and the principles of respect for human dignity and essential freedoms enshrined in the Caribbean constitutions.

They are a reflection of the savings law clause which, as written and understood, insulates laws which were in existence at the time of independence from constitutional challenge. We should note that they are relics of British laws of 1876, and Britain has long repealed such law. Of course, Parliaments if so inclined could amend or repeal these laws by an ordinary majority. However, given the difficulty of parliamentary action, the only recourse for change is through litigation.

It is sometimes suggested that these laws are not enforced and therefore pose no problem, but the evidence is clear that they contribute to the stigma and discrimination suffered by lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgender persons. Not only is such stigma and discrimination inimical to the public health efforts to prevent and control HIV, but they affront the basic rights which are enshrined in the constitutions of our countries.

Given Sir Philip’s injunction that as an institution we should be concerned with the elimination of prejudice, I ask what our University does in this field. I am aware of the programs in human rights which are well supported. But is the culture of our institution such that there is intolerance of intolerance and the infringement of the rights of minorities? Should our institution simply be a reflection of the prejudices of the rest of the community or should it by precept and word speak to the injustice that attends the negation of human rights of a minority? Should it be a leaven of change in the bodies politic?

I am pleased that the Faculty of Law has been proactive in this regard, mixing scholarship with practice and has formed a Rights Advocacy Project whose main objective is “*to promote human rights and social justice in the Caribbean through pivotal public interest litigation and related activities of legal and social science research on the situation relating to human rights in the Caribbean and public education*”. As I understand it, two of their major efforts now are in relation to the denial of human rights to a specific minority, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. I wish them well and trust that their work gets widely known throughout the University. I think that if Sir Philip were here now fifty years later, he would be proud of this work.

At its foundation, many referred to the generosity of the government to the Campus and to the University as a whole. It is a source of immense pride and satisfaction to me that in spite of the vagaries of politics and economics, in spite the many wars and rumors of wars, the Caribbean governments have been constant in their support for the University and the Government of Barbados has never wavered in its support for this campus and what it does. Its support has been like Caesar,

*As constant as the northern star,
Of whose true-fixed and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament.*

In a public lecture I gave a couple years ago I posited several reasons for government support to public universities such as ours. Among them was the ethical, moral rationale-it was a matter of social equity. In addition, to the extent that the university supplies public goods, whose provision cannot be left to the market, there should be government support. But tertiary education also represents a private good in that there is direct benefit to the individual. In the past few decades there has been intense discussion in higher education circles about the funding of universities, given the increasing costs, the increasing demand and changing global environment. In the case of the public universities there is growing consensus that to the extent that the product is a public good, there should be government funding, but the students should also contribute to the cost of the enterprise given the benefits they derive from the institution's provision of private goods. Although this principle is widely accepted in most countries, including many at our stage of development, there is no agreement on a formula for apportioning the funding that should come from government and the fraction that should derive from other sources including students' fees. As one review of worldwide trends in Financing Higher Education stated:

“A combination of moderate tuition fees, means-tested grants and moderately subsidized student loans is necessary for the cost-effective use of public higher educational revenue in the policy pursuit of expanding accessibility”

I wish you new graduates well and will not add to the many bits of advice you have already received. I only ask that you be good ambassadors for this Campus and the University of the West Indies as a whole. Be good alumni in the sense of remembering your alma mater and taking an interest in what she does. I would only quote for you a comment made by Prime Minister Errol Barrow as he gave the graduation address in 1968.

“If the graduates we turn out upon our societies are not conscious of those who in the words of the historian Polybius supplied the luxuries and comforts, those from whose harvests or cargoes the money for the taxes came, then the University will have failed the society-it will have failed the people.”

Thus, failure or success is in your hands and we depend on you to ensure that the final verdict will be one of success.

Finally, let me thank your loved ones who have come to share this day with you. We hope they are satisfied and that they too will be champions for our University.