

ADDRESS TO NEW STUDENTS - 11 FEBRUARY 1987

AS VICE-CHANCELLOR AND A FELLOW RHODIAN IT IS MY PRIVILEGE AND PLEASURE TO WELCOME YOU FORMALLY, BOTH TO THE ORIENTATION PROGRAMME, AND ALSO TO THE UNIVERSITY AS A WHOLE. ON THIS OCCASION I DO SO WITH A CERTAIN SENSE OF NOSTALGIA, FOR EXACTLY 40 YEARS AGO I TOO WAS ENTERING RHODES, AS A SOMEWHAT APPREHENSIVE FRESHMAN, WONDERING WHAT LAY IN STORE FOR ME, AND BUSY TRYING TO ESTABLISH HOW EVERYTHING FITTED TOGETHER. I THEREFORE HAVE SOME FELLOW FEELING WITH YOU. I CAN STILL RECALL THE MIXTURE OF EXCITEMENT AND NERVOUSNESS I EXPERIENCED, AS ONE'S FIRST GLANCE OF RHODES CAME INTO VIEW FROM THE TRAIN WINDING ITS WAY DOWN WEST HILL. YOU WILL DISCOVER HOW, IN AN AMAZINGLY SHORT TIME, IT ALL MAKES SENSE, AND YOU ARE ABLE TO ENTER FULLY INTO THE SPIRIT OF RHODES.

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IT IS ALSO A PLEASURE TO NOTE THE PRESENCE OF SO MANY PARENTS HERE THIS AFTERNOON. IT IS INDEED A MARK OF YOUR CONCERN FOR YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER FOR YOU TO HAVE TAKEN THE TROUBLE TO HAVE ACCOMPANIED HIM OR HER IN WHAT FOR MANY WILL BE THE FIRST SUSTAINED PERIOD AWAY FROM THE FAMILIARITIES OF HOME AND THE PLACES AND PEOPLE TO WHICH THEY ARE ACCUSTOMED. I AM SURE THAT THEY APPRECIATE YOUR SUPPORT. IT IS TO BE HOPED THAT RHODES WILL LIVE UP TO YOUR AND THEIR EXPECTATIONS, AT LEAST TO A GOOD MEASURE.

AS NEW STUDENTS YOU HAVE BEEN REQUESTED TO ARRIVE A FEW DAYS EARLIER THAN RETURNERS. USE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ACCLIMATISE YOURSELVES TO YOUR NEW SURROUNDINGS, ASK QUESTIONS, GAIN INFORMATION, CONSIDER YOUR OPTIONS IN ORDER TO IMPROVE YOUR CHANCES OF MAKING A SUCCESS OF THAT VITAL FIRST YEAR, DURING WHICH YOU HAVE TO MAKE SO MANY ADJUSTMENTS FROM WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ACCOMPLISH THIS BEFORE YOU ARE DISTRACTED BY SENIOR STUDENTS WHO KNOW, OR IMAGINE THEY KNOW, ALL THAT THERE IS TO BE LEARNT ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY.

THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE AND CONTRIBUTORS HAVE PRESENTED YOU WITH AN IMAGINATIVE AND WIDE-RANGING PROGRAMME, THE DETAILS OF WHICH ARE IN THE BROCHURE. THE BEST WAY IN WHICH YOU CAN SHOW YOUR APPRECIATION OF THEIR EFFORTS IS TO PARTICIPATE AS ENTHUSIASTICALLY AS YOU CAN.

SOME OF YOU, PROBABLY THE MAJORITY, HAVE FIRM IDEAS ABOUT YOUR COURSE OF STUDY. OTHERS ARE NOT SO CERTAIN, ESPECIALLY IF THE SUBJECTS YOU HAVE IN MIND ARE NOT A CONTINUATION OF WHAT YOU EXPERIENCED AT SCHOOL. INTRODUCTORY TALKS FROM ANTHROPOLOGY TO ZOOLOGY HAVE BEEN ARRANGED. GO TO SOME OF THEM. EVEN IF YOUR MIND IS ALREADY MADE UP

YOU WILL HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO APPRECIATE WHAT A VARIEGATED PLACE A UNIVERSITY IS, AND TO GAIN SOME INKLING OF WHAT YOUR FRIENDS ARE STUDYING.

EXERCISE SOME COMMON SENSE AS WELL. IF, FOR EXAMPLE, YOU HAVE A FIXATION ON A SCIENCE DEGREE, BUT ONLY MANAGED TO COLLECT E-SYMBOLS IN MATRIC MATHEMATICS AND PHYSICAL SCIENCE OR BIOLOGY, REVIEW YOUR INTENTIONS NOW, BEFORE YOU EMBARK ON A YEAR WHICH COULD TURN OUT TO BE DISASTER. EVEN MORE DRAMATICALLY, EACH YEAR SOME DOZEN TO TWENTY OUT OF THE 800 TO 900 ARRIVALS DECIDE WITHIN THE FIRST COUPLE OF WEEKS THAT IT HAS ALL BEEN A GHASTLY MISTAKE COMING HERE. IF YOU COME TO THIS DRASTIC DECISION, DO NOT FEEL GUILTY OR ASHAMED. IT IS BETTER TO GRASP THE NETTLE THAN TO SPEND A YEAR IN FRUSTRATION.

TAKE ADVANTAGE ALSO OF FINDING OUT ABOUT THE LIBRARY, THE ACADEMIC SKILLS PROGRAMME, THE SANATORIUM, SPORT FACILITIES, SOCIETIES, RAG ETC. ITS ALL THERE IN THE PROGRAMME.

BEYOND THE IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS OF ORIENTATION WEEK THERE IS OF COURSE YOUR FIRST YEAR OF STUDY AND AFTER THAT THE REST OF YOUR STAY AT RHODES. WHAT SORT OF A UNIVERSITY IS RHODES AND WHAT SORT OF PLACE IS GRAHAMSTOWN? ONE OF THEIR MOST OBVIOUS CHARACTERISTICS IS THAT BOTH ARE SMALL IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER UNIVERSITIES AND UNIVERSITY CITIES. WE BELIEVE THAT ON THE WHOLE THIS IS A VERY GREAT ADVANTAGE, BOTH SOCIALLY AND ACADEMICALLY. "SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL" IS MORE THAN A SLOGAN HERE: IT IS A WAY OF LIFE. YOU WILL NOT FEEL OPPRESSED AND OVERWHELMED, LIKE AN INSIGNIFICANT COG IN A VERY LARGE MACHINE. CLASSES ARE SMALL, ESPECIALLY TUTORIALS, RESIDENCES ARE SMALL, AND SO

YOUR PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION REALLY DOES COUNT FOR SOMETHING. BECAUSE EVERYBODY LIVES ON OR WITHIN EASY ACCESS OF THE CAMPUS, WE ARE VERY MUCH A 24-HOUR COMMUNITY AND NOT A NINE-TO-FIVE KNOWLEDGE FACTORY.

LET US CONSIDER BRIEFLY SOME STATISTICS. RHODES HAS OF THE ORDER OF 1 000 STAFF MEMBERS OF WHOM ABOUT 260 ARE ACADEMICS AND RESEARCHERS. THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY 3 000 FULL TIME STUDENTS IN GRAHAMSTOWN WHICH MAKES IT 1/5 TO 1/3 THE SIZE OF SOME OF THE ALTERNATIVES YOU COULD HAVE CHOSEN. THE STUDENTS COME FROM ALL OVER SOUTHERN AFRICA. THE WIDE SPECTRUM OF GEOGRAPHIC AND CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS OF THE PEOPLE YOU WILL MEET IS SOMETHING OF AN EDUCATION IN ITSELF. AT RHODES ONLY ABOUT 7% OF THE STUDENT BODY ARE "HOMETOWN BOYS AND GIRLS".

APPROXIMATELY 1/3 HAIL FROM THE EASTERN CAPE. THE REST COME FROM ALL OVER THE SUBCONTINENT, WITH A PARTICULARLY STRONG CONTINGENT FROM THE

TRANSVAAL. CONTRAST THIS WITH THE SITUATION AT THE LARGER UNIVERSITIES. IN THESE CASES 75-90% COME FROM THE IMMEDIATE METROPOLITAN AREA, AND TEND TO BE COMMUTERS WHO LIVE AT HOME. THESE VERY FACTS MAY BE AMONGST THE REASONS WHY YOU CHOSE TO COME TO RHODES.

WHAT ABOUT GRAHAMSTOWN ITSELF, THIS SOMEWHAT ISOLATED AND PROUD LITTLE CITY? IF YOU ARE SEEING GRAHAMSTOWN FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 1987 IT IS RATHER HARD TO IMAGINE THAT FOR A GOOD PORTION OF THE 19TH CENTURY IT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMUNITY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA AFTER CAPE TOWN. A SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNT OF SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY OF THE LAST CENTURY WAS ENACTED HERE IN THE EASTERN CAPE. PEOPLE IN GRAHAMSTOWN TEND TO BE VERY HISTORICALLY MINDED, AND IN SOME WAYS IT COULD STILL BE DESCRIBED AS A 19TH CENTURY COMMUNITY, AS WITNESS THE HIGH PROFILE ENJOYED BY DONKEY CARTS AND STEAM ENGINES. WHEN YOU HEAR TALK OF THE SIXTIES OR

SEVENTIES, IT IS NOT NECESSARILY ABOUT THE 1960'S OR 1970'S BUT QUITE POSSIBLY ABOUT THE 1860'S OR 1870'S. YOU WILL FIND BUILDINGS BOTH ON THE CAMPUS AND IN THE CITY THAT DATE BACK 170 YEARS. AS IS QUITE PROPER THERE IS A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF INTERESTING MUSEUMS HERE, WHICH ARE WELL WORTH YOUR WHILE EXPLORING. INDEED, SOME GRAHAMSTOWN-WATCHERS HAVE EVEN GONE SO FAR TO IMPLY THAT THE WHOLE PLACE IS A BIG OPEN-AIR MUSEUM. BE THAT AS IT MAY, STUDENTS SOMETIMES TEND TO FORGET THAT THERE IS SENTIENT HUMAN EXISTENCE OUTSIDE THE CONFINES OF THE CAMPUS, AND THAT CITIZENS AS WELL AS STUDENTS HAVE THEIR RIGHTS. IT IS ESPECIALLY EASY TO FORGET THIS AT RAG OR INTERVARSITY OR AFTER YOU HAVE CELEBRATED A BIRTHDAY OR OTHER IMPORTANT OCCASION IN YOUR LIFE.

THE ONE DISADVANTAGE OF SMALLNESS, BOTH OF UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY, IS THAT IT IS TOO FATALLY EASY TO FIND YOURSELF DISPLAYING A HIGH

PROFILE. FOR THIS REASON WHATEVER REPUTATION RHODES MAY HAVE FOR A
HYPERTHYROID SOCIAL LIFE, INCLUDING TOO CLOSE AN ACQUAINTANCE WITH
ALCOHOL, IS FAR FROM BEING ENTIRELY JUSTIFIED. IF YOU LIVE IN HILLBROW
OR SEAPOINT YOU HAVE TO DO SOMETHING REALLY BIZARRE TO BE NOTICED AT
ALL. HERE EVEN MILDLY EXTRAVAGANT BEHAVIOUR IS HIGHLY VISIBLE, AND
LIKELY TO FIND ITS WAY INTO PRINT, PARTICULARLY AS IT IS GRIST FOR THE
MILL TO ALL THE ASPIRANT INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS WHOM ONE FINDS SO
THICK ON THE GROUND AT RHODES.

WHEN ALL THAT IS SAID, WE ARE NONETHELESS DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE
ABUSE OF ALCOHOL AND OTHER FORMS OF ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR, SUCH AS
EXCESSIVE NOISE, EXPERIMENTS WITH PRESCRIBED NARCOTIC SUBSTANCES AND
IRRESPONSIBLE DRIVING.

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ANYONE WHO HAS BEEN VICE-CHANCELLOR OF A UNIVERSITY FOR OVER 10 YEARS,
AS I HAVE, EXPERIENCES SO MUCH OF HUMAN FOIBLES AND HUMAN TRAGEDIES
THAT HE TENDS TO BECOME CASE-HARDENED. ONE THING I CAN NEVER BECOME
CASE-HARDENED ABOUT IS THE PAINFUL DUTY OF WRITING LETTERS OF
CONDOLENCE TO PARENTS CONCERNING CAR ACCIDENT VICTIMS. WE AT RHODES
HAVE HAD SOME HORRENDOUS ACCIDENTS IN RECENT YEARS. IN NEARLY ALL OF
THEM THE ABUSE OF ALCOHOL HAS BEEN A KEY ELEMENT. IF YOU MUST DRINK,
THEN NEITHER DRIVE, NOR BE DRIVEN BY SOMEBODY WHO HAS BEEN DRINKING.
AS FEW AS 3 BEERS OR 3 GLASSES OF WINE CAN TAKE YOU BEYOND THE POINT
WHERE YOU ARE A MENACE TO YOURSELF, YOUR PASSENGERS AND OTHER USERS OF
THE HIGHWAYS. PHONE A FRIEND OR YOUR WARDEN. THEY WILL GLADLY ARRANGE
TRANSPORT RATHER THAN HAVE YOU RISK YOUR NECK. RATHER RISK SOME
TEMPORARY EMBARRASSMENT THAN PUT YOUR LIFE ON THE LINE. IF THINGS GO
ON AS THEY HAVE BEEN AT LEAST ONE STUDENT PRESENT HERE THIS AFTERNOON

MAY NOT MAKE IT INTO SECOND YEAR, NOT BECAUSE HE FAILED HIS EXAMS, BUT BECAUSE HE ENDED UP AS A ROAD ACCIDENT STATISTIC. MAKE SURE IT ISN'T YOU.

THE RECONCILIATION OF YOUR OBLIGATION TO STUDY WITH ALL THE OTHER CONFLICTING CLAIMS ON YOUR TIME AND ATTENTION IS NOT AN EASY TASK, PARTICULARLY WHEN YOU HAVE TO WORK IT OUT FOR YOURSELF. YOU WILL NOT BE PROGRAMMED, AS YOU WERE AT SCHOOL. YOU ARE NOW A STUDENT, NOT A PUPIL. YOU MUST SET YOUR OWN STUDY PATTERNS AND OVERCOME THE DIFFICULTIES. YOU WILL NOT FIND SOMEBODY BREATHING DOWN YOUR NECK EVERY DAY REGULATING YOUR LIFE. YOU ARE EXPECTED TO COPE. HELP IS THERE FOR THE ASKING - FROM THE STUDENT ADVISER, THE ACADEMIC SKILLS PROGRAMME, LECTURERS, HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS OR DEANS, THESE AUGUST GENTLEMENT ON THE PLATFORM WITH ME. BY AND LARGE, HOWEVER, THE

INITIATIVE LIES WITH YOU. IT IS A HARD AND DEMANDING THING TO LEARN, BUT YOU WILL NEVER BE A MATURE ADULT UNLESS YOU DO, AND YOU WILL BE OF LITTLE USE TO YOURSELF OR ANYBODY ELSE. IF YOU CANNOT ORGANISE YOURSELF YOU WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO ORGANISE ANYTHING ELSE.

WHAT I HAVE SAID DOES NOT IMPLY THAT THERE IS NO AUTHORITY EXERCISED OVER YOU. FAR FROM IT, BUT THAT AUTHORITY TENDS TO BE INDIRECT AND SOMETIMES A LITTLE DELAYED. WE PAY YOU THE COMPLIMENT OF ACCORDING YOU SUFFICIENT FREEDOM OF ACTION TO PROVE YOURSELF. OF COURSE, THE DAY OF RECKONING CANNOT BE PUT OFF FOREVER. WE DO INSIST ON CERTAIN MODEST MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS, SUCH AS THAT YOU PASS AT LEAST TWO OF THE FOUR OR FIVE SUBJECTS YOU MIGHT BE STUDYING, AND THAT YOU CONDUCT YOURSELF SUCH AS NOT TO INTERFERE WITH OTHER PEOPLE'S RIGHTS AND COMFORTS AND THEIR ENDEAVOURS TO STUDY, AND THUS DISRUPT COMMUNITY

LIFE. IF YOU CANNOT RECONCILE YOURSELVES TO THESE GROUND RULES, THEN EITHER YOU, OR PERHAPS WE, MIGHT DECIDE THAT RHODES AFTER ALL IS NOT THE PLACE FOR YOU. AT THE END OF EACH YEAR SOME 150-180 ARE NOT INVITED TO RENEW THEIR REGISTRATIONS THE FOLLOWING YEAR. OTHERS LEAVE OF THEIR OWN ACCORD.

THIS QUESTION OF THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS AND OF RESPECT FOR THE COMMUNITY LIFE OF THE INSTITUTION IS OF PARTICULAR RELEVANCE TO THE RELATIONSHIP OF STUDENTS AND POLITICS. THERE ARE THOSE WHO HOLD THAT STUDENTS SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON THEIR STUDIES, AND ONLY TAKE A MILD, IF ANY, INTEREST IN POLITICS. THESE VERY SAME PEOPLE NO DOUBT ALSO SAY "KEEP POLITICS OUT OF RELIGION" OR OUT OF SPORT. THE FACT OF THE MATTER IS THAT STUDENTS ARE GOING TO CONCERN THEMSELVES WITH POLITICS, SOME OF THEM VERY DEEPLY. IT IS ONE THING TO SAY THAT POLITICS CANNOT BE KEPT

OUT OF UNIVERSITY LIFE, AND QUITE ANOTHER TO INTERFERE WITH THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS TO IGNORE OR DISAGREE WITH YOUR PARTICULAR CONCEPT OF POLITICS, OR THEIR RIGHTS TO PURSUE THEIR STUDIES WITHOUT COERCION, MOLESTATION OR DISTURBANCE. THE ESSENCE OF A UNIVERSITY IS THAT INQUIRY AND DEBATE SHOULD BE CONDUCTED IN A CALM, DISPASSIONATE, RATIONAL AND TOLERANT MANNER. ALL POINTS OF VIEW MUST BE ACCORDED A HEARING, AND SPEAKERS, WHETHER MEMBERS OR DULY INVITED VISITORS, TREATED WITH DIGNITY.

I AM WELL AWARE THAT THERE ARE THOSE WHO ARGUE THAT, SINCE THE STATE OR POSSIBLY OTHER PARTIES OVER WHOM THE UNIVERSITY HAS NO AUTHORITY, SEEK TO PREVENT CERTAIN VIEWS BEING EXPRESSED OR PEOPLE BEING HEARD, THEY ARE JUSTIFIED IN DOING THE SAME. IN THE FORMER CASE, SINCE THE UNIVERSITY HAS NO JURISDICTION, IT CANNOT EFFECTIVELY ACCOMPLISH MUCH

MORE THAN VIGOROUS PROTEST. IN THE LATTER CASE, WHERE MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSITY ARE CONCERNED, IT HAS WIDER OPTIONS. IT CAN, FIRSTLY, ENDEAVOUR TO PERSUADE SUCH PEOPLE THAT THEIR PROPOSED COURSE OF ACTION RUNS COUNTER TO THE INHERENT NATURE OF A UNIVERSITY. IF, HOWEVER, THEY ARE NOT MOVED BY THIS ARGUMENT THERE ARE TWO POSSIBLE OUTCOMES: EITHER THE UNIVERSITY ACQUIESCES, AND THEREBY CEASES TO BE A PROPER UNIVERSITY BUT RATHER A TRAINING INSTITUTION WHERE CERTAIN VIEWS ARE TABOO; OR ELSE IT TAKES ACTION, WITH GREAT CARE AND CIRCUMSPECTION AND DUE REGARD FOR CIRCUMSTANCE, BUT NONETHELESS TAKES ACTION TO COUNTER SUCH TENDENCIES. FAILURE TO DO SO WOULD IN THE LAST RESORT BE A SERIOUS DERELICTION OF DUTY TOWARDS THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF ITS MEMBERS.

IT IS OBVIOUS THAT RELIGION, EDUCATION AND POLITICS HAVE LARGE OVERLAPPING INTERESTS. THEY CLEARLY CANNOT BE SEPARATED INTO WATERTIGHT

COMPARTMENTS. TO ACKNOWLEDGE THIS DOES NOT IMPLY THAT ONE IS COMMITTED TO ESPOUSING A CONCEPT OF POLITICS THAT CONCEDES NO PROPER AUTONOMY TO RELIGIOUS BELIEF OR THE ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE OR THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH. SUCH A CONCEPT OF POLITICS IS NOTHING LESS THAN TYRANNY, NO MATTER WHAT THE IDENTITY OF THE PRACTITIONERS. IT IS THE DUTY OF ALL OF US, BY VIRTUE OF OUR MEMBERSHIP OF RHODES UNIVERSITY, TO COMMIT OURSELVES TO THE CAUSE OF FREE INQUIRY AND UNFILTERED DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE. LET US BE WORTHY OF OUR CALLING.

WE AT RHODES ARE VERY PROUD OF OUR UNIVERSITY, ITS BEAUTIFUL SETTING, ITS HISTORY AND TRADITIONS, ITS SCHOLARSHIP, ITS STAFF AND STUDENTS, BOTH PAST AND PRESENT. IN A VERY SHORT TIME EACH ONE OF YOU WILL BEGIN TO FEEL THIS SAME SENSE OF PRIDE AND BELONGING, FOR IT IS AN INFECTIOUS VIRUS. YOU WILL BECOME AS ZEALOUS FOR THE REPUTATION AND GOOD NAME OF

RHODES AS ANY RHODIAN OF AN OLDER VINTAGE. YOU WILL WISH TO CONTRIBUTE YOUR FULL SHARE TO THE ACCUMULATED ACHIEVEMENTS AND SHARED EXPERIENCES THAT ARE THE LIFEBLOOD OF ANY INSTITUTION.

ON BEHALF OF ALL OF US ON THE PLATFORM, VICE-PRINCIPAL, REGISTRAR, DEANS OF FACULTIES AND SRC PRESIDENT, I SHOULD TO WISH EACH ONE OF YOU EVERY HAPPINESS AND SUCCESS AT RHODES, AND TO DECLARE YOUR ORIENTATION PROGRAMME FORMALLY OPEN.

D S HENDERSON
VICE-CHANCELLOR

11 FEBRUARY 1987