

AT NO STAGE IN MY LIFE HAVE I ENTERTAINED ANY AMBITION TO BECOME SOUTH AFRICA'S ANSWER TO BOB HOPE, OR EVEN TO BECOME KNOWN AS A WITTY AFTER-DINNER SPEAKER. BUT, BY PURE COINCIDENCE, IT SEEMED APPROPRIATE IN THE PAST FEW YEARS TO REFER TO THE BACKGROUND AND ATTRIBUTES OF OUR HONORARY GRADUATES IN A LIGHT-HEARTED AND, PERHAPS, A HUMOROUS VEIN.

THIS YEAR, MY CONTEMPLATION OF THE CAREERS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF OUR HONORARY GRADUATES EVOKES RATHER MORE SERIOUS THOUGHTS THAT ARE UPPERMOST IN MY MIND AT THIS MOMENT, AND PARTICULARLY SO WHEN I CONSIDER THE SIMILARITY OF THE FACTORS AND FORCES THAT HAVE OPERATED IN THE LIVES AND THE EXPERIENCE OF ALL THREE OF OUR GRADUATES. IN EITHER A FIGURATIVE OR A LITERAL SENSE, EACH OF THEM HAS BEEN CONCERNED WITH CONTRASTS, WITH CLASHING TIDES, AND WITH A BATTLE BETWEEN OPPOSING FORCES, AND EACH HAS SUCCEEDED IN IDENTIFYING AN AREA OF RECONCILIATION WITH A NEW AND INTERESTING CHARACTER OF ITS OWN.

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IN THE LITERAL SENSE, THAT SURELY DESCRIBES THE WORK ON ESTUARINE ECOLOGY OF DR JOHN DAY, AN OLD RHODIAN ON WHOM WE WERE PROUD TO CONFER A DOCTORATE AT THIS GRADUATION. THE WORK THAT HAS EARNED HIM INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM HAS SPANNED OVER A WIDE FIELD OF THE LIFE-SCIENCES, BUT IT IS HIS WORK ON MARINE BIOLOGY, AND ESTUARINE ECOLOGY IN PARTICULAR, THAT CAPTURES THE IMAGINATION. IN THE INTER-TIDAL ZONE, WHERE THE ENDLESS BATTLE BETWEEN THE OPPOSING FORCES OF TIDES AND CURRENTS RAGES BACKWARDS AND FORWARDS, AND WHERE THE CONTRAST OF SALINE AND FRESH-WATER CONDITIONS IS CONTINUOUSLY EXPERIENCED, THE VERY CONFLICT OF FORCES HAS PRODUCED, UNWITTINGLY, A NEW ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT SUSTAINING NEW AND ATTRACTIVE VARIETIES OF LIFE - A PRODUCTIVE ZONE CREATED BY DESTRUCTIVE FORCES.

IN A DIFFERENT FIELD, AND IN THE FIGURATIVE SENSE, DR JACK COPE, THE AUTHOR OF WIDE RENOWN ON WHOM RHODES THIS DAY CONFERRED ITS HIGHEST HONOUR, HAS BEEN IMMersed FOR A LIFE-TIME IN THE SWIRLING TIDES AND DIVERGENT CURRENTS OF CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE. THE PUBLICATION "CONTRAST", WHICH HE EDITED, WAS APTLY NAMED, FOR IN IT WERE BROUGHT TOGETHER THE THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS OF WRITERS FROM CONTRASTING BACKGROUNDS OF RACE, LANGUAGE AND TRADITIONS, REPRESENTING THE ON-GOING CLASH OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL VIEWS AND IDEOLOGIES. AND AS MIRACULOUSLY AS IN THE TIDAL ESTUARIES, THE INTER-ACTION OF THESE FORCES, THOUGH OF UNDIMINISHED DIVERGENCE, PRODUCED IN OUR LITERARY WORLD A ZONE OF RECONCILIATION WITH A NEW CLIMATE IN WHICH SOUTH AFRICAN CREATIVE WRITING COULD ACQUIRE A NEW AND INTERESTING CHARACTER OF ITS OWN.

DR LUCY MVUBELO, HIGHLY RESPECTED ORGANISER AND LEADER IN THE FIELD OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, WHOM WE WELCOMED INTO THE FAMILY OF RHODES UNIVERSITY TO-DAY, HAS WITNESSED FOR YEARS, IN THE AFFAIRS OF MEN, CURRENTS AND FORCES AS STRONG AS ANY FOUND IN NATURE'S ELEMENTS. SHE HAS SEEN THE TIDE OF HUMAN ASPIRATION INCHING ITS PAINFUL WAY TOWARDS THE SHORES OF A PROMISED LAND, IMPEDED BY UNYIELDING ROCK AND SAND. SHE HAS LIVED WITH THE CONTRASTS OF POVERTY AND WEALTH, OF POWER AND DEFENCELESSNESS, OF THOSE WHO HOPE FOR TO-MORROW AND THOSE WHO CLING TO YESTERDAY. AND HERE ALSO, WHILE THE CLASHING FORCES AND INTERESTS HAVE NOT CHANGED, A NEW ENVIRONMENT HAS SLOWLY EVOLVED, IN WHICH A NEW INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY CAN DEVELOP AND THRIVE - AN AREA, AT LAST, OF RECONCILIATION AND ACCEPTANCE.

HOW REMARKABLE IT IS THAT THE SAME MESSAGE SHOULD COME TO US TO-DAY FROM THE WIDELY DIFFERENT CAREERS OF ALL THREE OF OUR HONORARY GRADUATES! AND JUST IN CASE THERE WAS ANYONE HERE TO-DAY WHO IRREVERENTLY INTERPRETED MY OPENING REMARKS TO MEAN THAT "LAST YEAR'S HONORARY GRADUATES MADE ME WANT TO LAUGH, WHILE THIS YEAR'S HONORARY GRADUATES MAKE ME WANT TO CRY", LET ME POINT OUT THAT THERE COULD HAVE BEEN NO HAPPIER OR MORE INSPIRING MESSAGE GIVEN TO US THAN THAT WHICH SPEAKS TO US TO-DAY FROM THE LIFE AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF DR COPE, DR DAY, AND DR MVUBELO - A MESSAGE THAT HOLDS OUT TO US A SHINING HOPE FOR THE FUTURE. WE ARE NOT ONLY THANKFUL FOR THEIR MESSAGE, BUT ALSO FILLED WITH ADMIRATION FOR THEIR PART IN IDENTIFYING AND INTRODUCING TO THE WORLD THE MIRACLE OF PEACEFUL EQUILIBRIUM BORN OUT OF CEASELESS CONFLICT.

IT IS WITH GREAT PRIDE IN OUR NEWLY CEMENTED KINSHIP WITH THEM, THAT I ASK YOU TO RISE TO THE TOAST OF 'OUR HONORARY GRADUATES'.