

Chairman of the University of The Bahamas Board of Trustees
Dr. Earl A. Cash
UB Charter Ceremony and Inauguration of Dr. Rodney Smith as President
10th November, 2016

Before proceeding with the inauguration of the first President of the University of The Bahamas (a singular privilege indeed), as a former member of the College Council for some 14 years and the Chairman of the University's governing body at this most auspicious moment in the journey of our national tertiary-academy, I offer the following few thoughts on leadership in the academy, as a statement of an important aspect of the leadership ethic I think should be adopted by all persons (including governing board members) who aspire to leadership positions in the academy.

Professor Ronald Dworkin, a leading legal philosopher, shocked the postmodern and pragmatist world of jurisprudence in the 20th, when he contended that in *hard cases* – that is – in cases where either there are no relevant rules to determine how a legal dispute should be resolved, or in cases where the relevant rules are contradictory or lead to patently absurd outcomes, judges do not exercise discretion or rely on extra-legal factors in their judgments; rather, they reach the only right legal decision that can be reached.; thus, avoiding violating the principle of Separation of Powers. Dworkin's thesis was that, in hard cases, Judges have to take on the *Herculean* task of decoding the moral principles of a society from the institutions of that society and then integrate them into the matrix of ordinary legal rules of the society to create a coherent structure of legal rules and principles. Armed with *Law's Empire* of legal rules and principles, the judge in a hard case can always find the one true legal answer to the problem in the hard case. Central to Dworkin's argument, was that Judges have the capacity to be *Herculean* in the exercise of their powers of legal reconstruction of the Rule of Law.

The academy, like the corporate world or the public sphere of governance, will often have to confront hard cases of their own – where the sound, irrefutable justification – Dworkin's one right answer - for a decision appears so out of reach and unobtainable. In these situations, it seems increasingly the case, in a world grown tired of the quest for the truth, to settle for the route of skepticism and reduce decision-making to

the furtherance of special interests and personal advantage. This is an understandable reaction if, indeed, we have allowed deliberative processes to be hijacked by special interest pleaders masked as truth tellers.

Arguably, the effect of decision-making skepticism on the academy is more acute because the academy is supposed to be a sanctuary for students and academics engaged in the joy-filled and fulfilling task of invigorating their minds in the quest for the truth. The governors of the academy who deal in skepticism and who are not intensely committed to the quest for truth in their decision making, who are unwilling to attempt to be *Herculean* in the exercise of their capacity to aim the deliberative process at nothing less than the truth object, infect the academy with mental lethargy – the antithesis of the lofty mental life the academy is supposed to embody. We shouldn't expect our students to be interested in knowledge and truth for its own sake, not merely as a means to obtain a grade or money at the end of the day, if the governors of the academy regard knowledge merely as an instrument themselves. The captains of the university must model the zeal for searching for the right answer they should expect their students and faculty to emulate. And here I would like to emphasize the importance of the thirst, hunger and commitment behind knowledge-truth exploration, not the content of knowledge-truth *per se*. Arguably, this is consistent with what the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) points out is one of the basic responsibilities of the academy's governing board, which is to ensure that the "boards business is conducted in an exemplary fashion ... adhering to the highest ethical standard."¹ The AGB goes on to make the point that the "quality of a board's conduct of its own affairs should provide a model that guides the rest of the institution, setting standards that invite emulation throughout campus governance and management"² - and I would add - that invites emulation by students and professors in the carrying out of the core mission of the academy – the nurturing of passion for the search for knowledge, truth and intellectual discovery in all of its wondrous, myriad of forms. A similar concern was emphasized in one of the seminal reports, which laid the foundation of the university transition

¹ Association of Governing Boards (AGB): *Effective Governing Boards: A Guide for Members of Governing Boards of Independent Colleges and Universities* (2010) AGB Press: Washington. p. 10.

² Ibid

process. In the 2007 Keva Bethel Report, ***commitment to excellence*** was considered one of the major principles that the University of The Bahamas should embody:

*The Committee recognized that, in a society that was all too often accepting of mediocrity, the University of The Bahamas must in all aspects of its work demonstrate an uncompromising commitment to standards and quality performance that would meet or surpass both national and international criteria. Such a commitment must be clearly reflected in the practices adopted in the governance of institution ...*³

That the writers of the Keva Bethel Report understood the link between commitment to excellence and the truth-knowledge mission that should be at the core of the university mission was reflected in the articulation of the ***integrity and ethics principle*** for the University:

*Without exception, the various stakeholder groups ... identified the scrupulous demonstration of integrity and ethics as being key among their expectations for the University and its people. The governance of the institution must clearly be grounded in these principles (that are already reflected in the motto of the College: **Knowledge, Truth, Integrity**).⁴*

The motto of the University, I am so happy to say, remains “Knowledge, Truth, Integrity.” I thank all of the unsung past and present heroes in the academy who have zealously guarded these ideals along the way to this way-point in the journey of the Bahamian academy; charge the President with their care; and pledge that I will support and conduct the affairs of the University inspired by the awesome responsibility that each of us should carry in our souls – the nurturing and care of the desire for discovery.

³ Keva Bethel Report, p. 26

⁴ Ibid, p. 27.

I end with a few lines from the T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* to inspire us all on this beautiful and special occasion:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*