



ON PATRICK MANNING

by

Dr. The Hon. Ralph E. Gonsalves

Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

[On the Occasion of the Launch of the book
MANNING: FAITH AND VISION, authored by Professor Bridget Brereton,
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[FORMAL GREETINGS!]

INTRODUCTION

I begin by thanking my dear friend, Hazel Manning, widow of my loved brother and comrade-in-arms, Patrick Manning, for the opportunity to speak at this official launch of Professor Bridget Brereton's recently-published introductory biography of Patrick entitled Manning: Faith and Vision. I thank Hazel, too, for allowing me to write the Foreword to the book. My remarks this evening are supplementary to the Foreword and my various commentaries hitherto on the life and work of Patrick Manning.

Previous speakers on this evening's programme have essayed excellent overviews of the book, so I do not intend to add in that specific regard, save and except to say that upon reading it my

attention was riveted at Dr. Brereton's succinct and probing offering, in the bringing of Patrick Manning's magnificent life and work to our Caribbean and the world, especially to the attention of our young people. As I read the prose of Dr. Brereton, memories were renewed and tears flowed. The historian's scholarship, faithful to her craft yet sympathetic to her subject, evoked in me appreciation, love, and an overflow of emotion.

What, thus, can I say, summarily? There will never be another Patrick Manning. The prophet Jeremiah's rendering of the language of the Divinity is apt: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." He was special; though not of the manor, he was to the manor born; a man of the people, for the people, doing God's work in politics with tolerance, bountiful achievements, and love, devoid of malice. He was special; one of a kind, "sui generis", as the Latin scholars say.

ENTRANCE INTO THE POLITICAL MAELSTROM

Patrick Manning's entrance into the maelstrom of parliamentary politics, at the age of 24 years in 1970, at the behest of Eric Williams and the People's National Movement (PNM), at the height of "Black Power" activism, ideational turmoil, and revolutionary hankerings on an influential fringe, reflected his visionary outlook as a young man, yet grounded in realism and pragmatism. Worthy ambition must have played a part, but he was unable to resist the clarion call to service. After all, he was PNM to the bone; he was born into this great party with its intention, backed by history, always to prevail despite its occasional hiccups.

To be sure, in 1970 – 1971, he wore his dashiki and embraced a sartorial elegance with a Caribbean sense and sensibility, but he did not abandon his jacket and tie; he was not bothered by some of the superficialities of the period; he knew that most of the metaphoric crookedness and artificial straightenings, were in the colonial mind, the colonial tongue, and in the mimic men and women who themselves, oft-times trafficked in hypocrisy.

In 1970 while he appreciated the power of symbolisms, he assessed that the outpourings of the yard and the cane field, long pent up, had to be expressed and addressed practically; in some cases, with surgical correction. He was clear on one thing: Although the people of Trinidad and Tobago were not better than anyone; no one was better than his people, possessed of a nobility and authenticity, and a trajectory for further ennoblement.

Early, too, Patrick Manning realized the truism uttered by the 26th President of the United States of America, Theodore Roosevelt, in a speech on “Citizenship in a Republic”, at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1910:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena.”

These early settlements, and more, in Patrick's being and persona, endured, matured in their refinement, and were made manifest in his 44 years of parliamentary service over eleven successive general elections. Professor Brereton has explored it all.

MAN OF FAITH AMIDST CONCEITS AND DECEITS OF POLITICS

As a man of faith, in the turbulence of politics, with its conceits and deceits, Patrick Manning embraced reassuringly the Psalmist's teaching that: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all. He keepeth all his bones; none of them is broken."

Dr. Brereton's book contains revealing confessions and praises from many in the Opposition who actively plotted his demise, and his hurt. In their coming to redemption, seemingly, I urge that we adopt the caution issued, over four centuries before Christ, by the ancient Greek historian Thucydides: "The living have their rivals and detractors, but when a man is out of the way, the honour and goodwill which he receives is unalloyed."

More pleasing are the legions of Manning's genuine friends and supporters, in whose hearts and minds reside unwritten memorials of his kindness, his generosity, his selflessness, his committedness to his people, his love for them, his towering contributions to Trinidad, Tobago, and the Caribbean. They truly know that, amidst all his human weaknesses and limitations, were his immense strengths and possibilities which led him to internalize and hold aloft the requisites proclaimed by the Hebrew Prophet Micah: To do justly, to love mercy [goodness], and to walk humbly with his God!

MEMORIALS FOR PATRICK

It may be impertinent for me to suggest, but I nevertheless consider that it will be proper, in Patrick Manning's homeland, for the unwritten memorials in his people's hearts and minds, to be engraved, permanently and appropriately, in marble and in stone, by columns and inscriptions. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, I have ensured that his life and work will be forever remembered: There is a residential community, in the constituency that I have represented

in Parliament for over 30 years, thus far, which is grateful for his beneficence, called “Manning Village”, a lived memorial of his generosity and goodness. And in our Argyle International Airport, a large photograph of him is prominently displayed alongside those of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez — three Caribbean titans whose leaderships contributed immensely to our airport’s construction, which has, in turn, prompted, markedly, a paradigm shift towards a modern, competitive, many-sided, post-colonial economy. Our nationals and visitors pose before these photographs for their own personal memorials. It is part of life’s irony that this very international airport has facilitated the construction of the recently-opened US \$250 million 5-Star Sandals Resort of 302 rooms, suites and cabanas, environmentally friendly, originally intended for Tobago, currently employing, directly, nearly 1,000 workers, and creating enduring value. Its construction was aptly managed and overseen by a Trinidadian, a master engineer, Terrance Des Vignes.

OUR FRIENDSHIP

It is well-known that Patrick Manning and I were friends from our undergraduate days at UWI, Mona, Jamaica, including playing in the same pan-side; and we grew very close together as Prime Ministerial colleagues. I oft-times teased him that I was his student leader who persuaded him, and thousands of others, to participate in a massive protest march on October 16, 1968, against certain actions of the Jamaican government, and in the process ensured that he got his first teargassing and beatings from the Jamaican police and military. As he correctly reminded me, that was his first and last taste of teargas and licks, but it was not mine; I was a sucker for blows; I still am; after all, not-too-long ago, someone “buss me head”, with a thrown missile, on my way to Parliament. But “I ain’t going no way” yet! I still have work to do for Patrick and me, but do not expect me to do 44 years as Patrick did.

The University of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica, in the late 1960s, contributed immensely to the moulding of Patrick and me. It was a time of intellectual ferment and activism; the times, they were

a-changing. Indeed, the class of 1969 produced three Prime Ministers: Patrick, Bruce Golding of Jamaica, and me; a record thus far.

A SAMPLE OF PERSONAL REMEMBRANCES

I have so many wonderful tales to tell about Patrick. He was a great leader of whom much has been written; and, as many who knew him have confirmed, he could be so playful and mischievous. For example, at a coffee-break one day, during a CARICOM Heads of Government meeting in St. Lucia, he slapped me on my shoulder, nearly making me spill my coffee, and in his Trini drawl: “How is the Comrade, the man who mastered the 27-note tenor pan?” I dryly replied: “Twenty-eight notes!” We debated the issue with reference to memories galore, like the exquisite renditions of Sparrow’s “Congo Man” and “Hallelujah Chorus”. In order to resolve the controversy about the number of notes on the tenor pan, Patos proffered a bet: “*Comrade, if you right, I’ll give you an oil field; if you wrong, I want one of the islands in the Grenadines.*” I said: “*The bet is on; I getting the oilfield. This pan I know like the back-ah-me-hand; it was invented*

by Invaders and perfected by Desperadoes, with the big “F” sharp in the middle of the pan to make it easier and sweeter to do the runs in ‘G’. He laughed, but still dogmatically, and vigorously disputed me in our numerical controversy. Caribbean people really don’t know what their leaders “get up to” when we meet! In the case of Patrick and me: Much love, plenty work, and joyous banter.

On Patrick’s return to Trinidad, he summoned the advice of the leader of Desperadoes; I believe that it was Rudolph Edwards at the time. It was confirmed that I was right, and he, Patrick, was wrong. So, he called me promptly with the news; with mock solemnity I asked him about my oilfield; he laughed uproariously: “Comrade, this bet is unenforceable in law.” On that he was right!

Owen Arthur, the distinguished deceased Prime Minister of Barbados, a leader of the highest quality, manufactured a lot of disagreements with Patrick; he gave Patrick much unnecessary angst. I always acted like the metaphoric “balm of Gilead”; my role irritated Ken Valley, then Patrick’s side-kick and Minister of Industry. Valley would intone: “*Comrade, don’t hold back Patrick, let him cuss*

Arthur.” Patrick was bewildered by Owen Arthur’s belligerence towards him. I explained it simply and humorously. I told Patrick that he must think of Trinidad and Tobago as a big bank and Barbados as a snow-cone vendor; the bank pulls the snow-cone vendor into its orbit, not the other way around. I said to Patrick: *“Trinidad buy the Barbados National Bank; all yuh buy their soft-drinks factory, close it down, and force them to buy Busta from Trinidad; and now Trinidad wants to purchase “the Big Six” companies in Barbados. So, what you expect?”* Additionally, and amusingly, I told Patrick: *“Listen to me, Owen is a short man who thinks that he is Napoleon Bonaparte; leave him alone in his fantasy.”* I advised further that there should be an international law to prevent any man who is shorter than Napoleon to become Prime Minister or President. At that he laughed uncontrollably. I shared all this with Owen Arthur who loved it. I am sure my perspective helped him and Owen Arthur resolve their big bassa bassa” about the famous/infamous Bajan migrants, those sentient flying fish, in Tobago waters.

A few days before the 2007 general elections in Trinidad and Tobago, Patrick called me to report that he was pleasantly surprised that Owen had telephoned him to urge him and the PNM onto victory. Patrick averred: “*Ralph, Arthur is a strange man*”. I assured him that Owen Arthur truly admired him; that he considered Panday to be a “lovable and unreliable maverick”, and that he had a genuine preference for the PNM over the UNC.

MANNING’S POLITICAL PRAXIS

Patrick Manning’s political praxis encompassed, and flowed from his Christian faith, the tried and tested uplifting values of our Caribbean civilisation, the core philosophy of the PNM’s social democracy, the traditions of the PNM, and the visionary ideals of Eric Williams, Founder of the PNM and Father of the Nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

Patrick oft-times remarked to me about his indebtedness to Eric Williams’ ideas and teachings. Patrick told me that his profound sense of commitment to Trinidad and Tobago, his nationalism, his legendary regionalism, anti-colonialism, and anti-imperialism were

largely shaped by Williams' teachings, writings, and actions. Etched in Patrick's mind was the 1960 march in Chaguaramas against the Americans; he spoke to me with deep feeling about his father taking him as a 14-year-old on that early-morning journey to Chaguaramas, and the march in the rain.

Patrick Manning lodged his political praxis in the genius of the ordinary people of Trinidad and Tobago, "the unadorned", to use the telling poetic formulation of the Tobagonian Eric M Roach in "Homestead"; the folks who reckoned weather in their heads, who wore the ages on their faces, felt to their bones the sting of the sun and the whip of the rain, who saw the quality of the morning, treasured the sunset mask of the evening, who laboured and yearned for just economic rewards for their labour.

At his trial in 330 BC, the Greek, statesman and orator, Demosthenes, declaimed that:

"Two qualities every citizen of ordinary worth ought to possess: he should both maintain in office the purpose of a

firm mind and the course suited to his country's pre-eminence, and on all occasions and in all his actions the spirit of patriotism."

These dispositions were found, on a true and faithful reading of Patrick Manning's life and work, absolutely inherent in him!

Reflecting on the biblical core of Patrick Manning's political praxis, it appears to have come straight from the three lessons of the 25th chapter of the Book of Matthew: As in the parable of the virgins, he planned carefully; he put a little oil in his lamp and kept it burning; as in the parable of the talents, his message was: From each according to his ability, to each according to his work; and he summoned the social solidarity infused in Matthew's injunction to take care of the least of our brothers and sisters, and separate the needy from the greedy, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

HIS INSTINCTS, WISDOM, DISAPPOINTMENTS

Patrick Manning knew instinctively that if you want to be right in the future, you have, occasionally, to accept not to be in fashion. He knew, too, from life and experience, that human beings, by and large, overwhelmingly live, to a greater or lesser extent, in a condition of permanent dissatisfaction. He was fully cognizant, also, of Christ's warning about false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous as wolves, and that by their fruits they would be known. And he was aware, as John Adams did, that facts are stubborn things and that neither one's wishes, inclinations, and dictates of passion can alter the state of facts and evidence.

So, why did he call the 2010 general elections way before the constitutional deadline? Because the ceaseless propaganda of falsehoods, untruths, downright lies, and malicious innuendos were getting to him, especially when he knew that he had done nothing of any consequence to injure the common weal. And because he trusted the people to do the right thing by him; thus, his search for a renewed mandate.

But his people for whom he had given his blood, sweat, and tears, disappointed him. All of a sudden, a mania had overtaken the land; a mythical “warrior queen” had arrived; a “*dea ex machina*” had been contrived by some with ignoble agendas; people were unfortunately led to believe abominable lies about a truly decent and honourable man being personally mired in corruption and cover ups, and exhibiting, allegedly, autocratic tendencies. All of a sudden almost every barber, taximan, seamstress, two-bit lawyer, rude mechanic, and editorial writer knew how to run the country better than Patrick Manning. And their verdict was damning.

In this milieu, even his own sought to cannibalise him. This story of irrational crowds is as old as the hills: When Julius Caesar was assassinated, the story is told that angry mobs were searching the streets of Rome for conspirators; they espied someone named Cinna who was mistaken for “Cinna the conspirator”; in vain he pleaded that he was Cinna, the poet. The vexatious mob-on-the-move shouted, “Tear him apart nevertheless for his bad verses.” Patrick Manning was not the enemy of the people; he was their dutiful

servant, and the victim of a grotesque conspiracy against truth, decency, and the people's interest. And he possessed no bad verses!

Of course, in a democracy, the people are always right. But they were soon to discover the error of their ways, as is their right, too. An opportunistic partnership based on sinking sand, crumbled; those who expressed dismay at Manning now offered mealy-mouthed excuses; those who loftily saw themselves in a guardianship were quickly humbled; and those who held up the mirror of corruption swiftly saw their own faces, writ large, in reflection.

MAN OF FAITH AND VISION

Bridget Brereton is correct: Patrick Manning was a man of faith and vision. I continue to hail this visionary and dreamer. In his masterly poem, "Looking at Your Hands", the Guyanese poet laureate, Martin Carter addressed this precisely:

"I have learnt

From books dear friend

*of men dreaming and living
and hungering in a room without a light
who could not die since death was far too poor
who did not sleep to dream but dream to change the world.*

*“And so
if you see me
looking at your hands
listening when you speak
marching in your ranks
you must know
I do not sleep to dream but dream to change the world.”*

Patrick Manning undoubtedly helped to change the world of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean for the better. Dr. Brereton’s book details all this.

BEFORE HE PASSED AWAY

A few days before Patrick Manning died, I went to see him at the hospital in San Fernando. He talked aplenty to me, on matters political and otherwise, in the presence of his beloved Hazel, to whom he was absolutely devoted. Neither Hazel nor I, have ever spoken publicly, and we are unlikely ever to so speak, of Patrick's compelling opinions of this and that matter of real moment. As time passes, one assumes a patience and a calm, sun brightens stone, the greener leaves explode, and all the rivers burn.

I TREASURE PATRICK

I shall forever treasure Patrick Manning. His vision remains, for me, a beacon of hope which guides us to fresh horizons. To be sure, practical politics engenders ebbs and flows, but with Patrick it is always a time of fresh hope, of respair, not despair. The Mexican Nobel Laureate, Octavio Paz, says it well in his poem, "Release":

*“Beneath the rain of drums
The flute’s black stalk
Grew, withered, and sprouted again.
Things cast off from their names
I flowed.
At my body’s edge
Among the unbounded elements.”*

And so, Patrick’s recitation of optimism and faith comes to the fore:

*“Morning by morning, new mercies we see; all that we need thy hand
has provided; great is thy faithfulness.”*

Thank you!