



ADDRESS

BY

THE PRESIDENT OF ICELAND

ÓLAFUR RAGNAR GRÍMSSON

UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

FOUNDER'S DAY CELEBRATIONS

9 May 2001

Vice-Chancellor
Distinguished professors
Ladies and Gentleman

It is with humility and gratitude in our hearts that we receive this honour which the University has bestowed upon us. We will strive to be worthy of these distinctions and serve the University to the best of our abilities.

The anniversary which the University of Manchester now celebrates – one hundred and fifty years of learning and discoveries, teaching and research – embraces momentous contributions not only to the growth of this splendid city but also to the scientific community in Great Britain and to international co-operation and progress.

We who came from afar to study at the University of Manchester in the formative years of our lives were fortunate to find teaching and scholarly endeavours of the highest quality and also an open and democratic community which excelled in extensive debates on issues of relevance in the fields of scientific progress and social advance.

The University provided us not only with knowledge and training but also with experience of the true academic spirit which establishes the relentless search for the essence of any issue and experiment as the criterion of successful performance. Thus we were given a vision broader and deeper than any specific knowledge which was tested by the examinations. Indeed, as years go by and life has provided us with both opportunities and responsibilities, this vision has proved to be a gift of ever increasing importance.

The University is thus not just an institution. It is above all a community of people moulded by tradition and culture, inspired by the principles of democratic discourse, devoted to the eternal search for the true meaning of the world around us and the universe created by our own thinking. Only by remaining faithful to these ideals can a university survive the transformations and the upheavals which over time have challenged almost every accepted wisdom and behaviour.

The University of Manchester has for a century and a half been faithful to this vision. The expansion of the faculties and the extensive and ever-growing work which the University now embraces are indeed manifestations of how successful this journey has been.

At the opening of the 21st century the University can draw strength from this long experience and be confident that it is well equipped to meet the fascinating tasks ahead. Never before has knowledge been such a cornerstone in human advancement and never before has the true essence of a university as a community of scholars and students been of greater importance. May the heritage which made this University prosper continue to inspire generations to come.

We who are honoured here today are both grateful and proud to be associated with the University of Manchester in such a distinguished way.

For me this has also been an emotional homecoming. I departed with my first degrees more than thirty years ago, uncertain about the future, hoping to utilize my knowledge and skills to further the making of a better world.

Returning now to receive this honour makes me realize once again how deeply and profoundly the University has influenced my life. The spirit and the vision which have inspired this community for more than a century provided me with principles and guidelines which have served me well on a long and often difficult journey. I can truly say that any contributions I have been fortunate to make have largely been due to the insights and wisdom which were instilled here. For that great gift I am deeply grateful and I hope that I will be able, together with the other honourees, to show the University my appreciation in some significant ways.

Thank you again for the honour you have shown us here today.