

Renison College, Waterloo – Convocation

January 16, 2005

an address by

The Most Reverend Andrew S. Hutchison, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada

Mr. Chancellor, Your Grace, My Lords, members, visitors and friends of the College:

I am deeply honoured that my first visit to the Diocese of Huron as the 12th Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada should be to accept the honour you have bestowed on me as an Honorary Senior Fellow of Renison College. It is 46 years since the College was established, and named in honour of a former Archbishop of Moosonee, and Metropolitan of Ontario. So I am particularly pleased that this should take place in the presence of one of his successors in both those offices, Archbishop Caleb Lawrence.

There has always been a close relationship between education and religion in Anglican tradition, and clearly the foundation of this College is an example of Anglicanism at its best. It was Herbert Spencer who said “Education has for its object the formation of character”. Writing in *The New Scientist*, B.F. Skinner has put it even better:

*Education is what survives when what
has been learnt has been forgotten.*

I must confess to having been impatient with my own formation process, and having taken far too much of the opportunities it provided for granted. Robertson Davies has raised the question in *A Voice from the Attic*,

*Of what use is a university education to
a young person unless he comes under
the influence of instructors who can
astonish him?*

Despite having had more than my share of such instructors, as I hope those of you who are students here have had, I was pleased to see the end of those years of formal education. The process of education, however, I

was to learn is truly a life long process, through which we are continually being transformed, as new challenges present themselves. I have acquired more degrees since leaving the university than I ever did while in the academy, and the learning curve leading to them has on occasion been very steep – perhaps never more steep than in the past six months. As Bishop of Montreal I found myself President of the Montreal Diocesan Theological College, and Visitor to Bishop’s University. Since becoming Primate I have visited St. John’s College in Winnipeg, Emmanuel & St. Chad in Saskatoon, the Vancouver School of Theology, Wycliffe College in Toronto, Renison College tonight, and later in the week I will be at Trinity College in Toronto. And recently the Archbishop of Canterbury invited me to chair the section on Theological Education in the Anglican Communion at the Primates’ meeting next month. You see just how steep the learning curve has been.

Some of you will be aware that one recent initiative of mine has been a monthly webcast entitled *Conversations with the Primate*. (If you haven’t found it yet, the address is www.anglican.ca, which will provide you with the link). My hope is to engage members of the Church across the country in conversations about the life of our Church, particularly in addressing issues in the society we serve, and issues within the life of the Church. I have been gratified by the email responses from coast to coast to coast. One in particular was from a young man in Fort St. John, B.C. He thanked me for my comments concerning the Anglican Communion, and the global context of our ministry, and said,

*It is said that mine is the first generation
to be obliged to think globally. In everything
we do, we must consider the impact on other
cultures and other parts of the world.*

I was very grateful for that insight, and I pray that many who graduate from Renison College and this University will share that sensibility. My predecessor, Archbishop Michael Peers was given to saying how important it is for Christians to think globally, and to act locally. The reality, however, is that we have done the latter, while ignoring the former. It was the attack on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre that shattered the American sense of impunity. Throughout their history and ours, we have been free to act without thought of consequence to ourselves, or others. But that is no longer so. The global village of which Marshall McLuhan first spoke, has

become reality. We are becoming painfully aware of our common responsibility for the welfare of the planet. The ozone layer protects us all, the harvest of the seas nourishes us all, and we all depend upon non replaceable resources of fossil fuels. The ease and frequency of international travel makes every disease and every problem in the food chain a potential threat. The reality of human genocide, child warriors, the violence of war and the extreme poverty of millions is now presented to us daily on the television screens in our homes. And the flow of immigration means that a disaster in the Indian Ocean has a direct bearing on many of our neighbours here at home.

And so it is in the Anglican Communion. Once a monolithic English Church, we are now a family of 38 independent Provinces (or national churches) operating in 164 countries, and a remarkable number of cultures, languages and histories. In fact the majority of Anglicans does not now speak English as a first language, and are not white. Add to that the instant communications of information technology, and we realize that everything we do is known instantly in all those cultures, and may indeed have an impact quite different from the impact here at home. When there are such significant differences of opinion as we have on such things as divorce, polygamy, the place of women in the Church, and now our approach to homosexuality, there is a severe test of Anglican accommodation. It is our baptismal profession to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being. At what point does a local Church decide that justice must be done according to their discernment of local needs, and at what point does the local Church await a broad consensus from the worldwide family of churches? How do we maximize communion within the family of churches in the face of significant differences? At what point are we prepared to recognize that a local break with tradition may be a prophetic act under the leading of the Spirit, and a model for the rest of the Church?

However we answer these difficult questions within the Church and in the society, I am convinced that including the widest possible representation in the conversations about them is an important first step. Recognizing the impact of our decisions elsewhere in the world is another. The second reading for Evensong today exhorts us to "Seek first the kingdom of God, and his justice". The new global sensibilities go on to remind us that justice must not be for "just us", but for all humanity. Not just for here and now, but for generations to come throughout the world.

Whatever may be your field of endeavour in the years to come, I pray that you will feel increasingly drawn into that quest, and that Renison College will continue to foster a broad world view through teachers that can truly astonish.