

Raoul Wallenberg 60th Anniversary Memorial

The Faculty Club, McGill University, Montreal

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Address by

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

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellency, distinguished guests, and friends of Raoul Wallenberg: I am honoured to have been invited to speak to this gathering, and thank you for your invitation and welcome. While I am no longer a Montrealer, I lived for 20 years in this city. For all of those years I worked closely with the Jewish community, and for many of them with the Friends of Raoul Wallenberg. With Your Excellency I share the privilege of being a member of the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation, and was happy to visit the Foundation in New York recently. In fact Mr. Baruch Tenenbaum had hoped to be here for this event, and sends his greetings.

It was on March 19, 1944 that Hitler invaded Hungary, and set in motion in that country the events that bring us together sixty years later in Montreal, and in at least thirteen other cities around the world. I believe it was George Santayana who first said, "Those who do not remember history are condemned to repeat it". He refers of course to those moments in history in which our very humanity has been utterly betrayed by fear, or by arrogance, or by ambition gone wild. Such were the events 60 years ago in Europe, and many there are who are still with us, whose lives were marked indelibly by those events, as they remember the millions who did not survive what was the most dreadful human holocaust of the whole stretch of recorded history. People who are alive cannot help but remember. Rather, the story must be told in all its horror, even as elements of it are repeated on the African continent, and elsewhere.

We are here to remember a Swedish diplomat, whose exemplary heroism in the face of evil made of him a citizen of the world. He was Canada's first, and, until joined by Nelson Mandela, only honorary citizen. In the United States he shares a similar honour with Sir Winston Churchill.

Within weeks of the invasion of Hungary the deportations to Auschwitz-Birkenau began, under the direction of Adolf Eichmann. From the beginning, the Swedish embassy in Budapest did what it could, issuing some 700 passes, but it was obvious they had not the capacity to cope with an almost unimaginable surge of desperate need. The World Jewish Congress, meeting in Stockholm that year, the Swedish Red Cross, and the War Refugee Board established in the United States, collaborated to mount a massive rescue operation. Raoul Wallenberg, who had made many trips to Hungary in the course of his business, was recruited as First Secretary to the Swedish Legation in Budapest. He arrived at his post, armed with extraordinary powers from the Government of Sweden, in July 1944 at the age of 32. By then Eichmann had already

deported some 400,000 Jews. It is estimated that no more than 230,000 remained. Other names stand out for remarkable efforts on behalf of the Jews – Per Anger, a secretary at the legation, and Valdemar Langlet of the Hungarian Red Cross among them. It was Wallenberg; however, who took the entire operation to a new level, with dedication, imagination and daring, placing himself in harm's way. He designed the famous "Shutz-Pass" that was a legal fiction, yet saved thousands from certain death. He used every imaginable political and diplomatic intervention, personally appearing, in at least one case, to prevent whole trainloads of deportees from moving. In others, he moved along the boxcars distributing passes and taking deportees from the train. He recruited a vast team to support this work – some 340 in his department at the legation, not to mention the many who kept the 30 safe houses sheltering at one time over 15,000 people, in addition to the 700 housed at the legation itself. (A member of that support team was the mother of one of the Anglican clergy here in Montreal).

In January 1945 Wallenberg learned of a plan to annihilate the population remaining in the two ghettos of Pest. He intervened so forcefully with General August Schmidhuber, Commander-in-Chief of the German troops in Hungary, that the massacre was called off. He assured him he would hang for war crimes if he followed through on his plan. Two days later the Russians arrived, to find 97,000 Jews alive in the ghettos, who might very well not have been, had it not been for Wallenberg's swift and insistent action. Wallenberg was invited to see the Soviet General Tchernishev to present to him plans for post-war relief. On January 17, 1945 he was escorted with his driver, Vilmos Langfelder, to Debrechen, and nothing further has been heard from either of them since.

When a committee headed by the late Alan Rose of the Canadian Jewish Congress called on Mr. Lantz to create a bust as a memorial in Montreal to Mr. Wallenberg, they could not have chosen better, not only for his artistic excellence, but because he was himself a survivor. The hope was to erect his monument on a public thoroughfare for maximum exposure. The policy of the City of Montreal, however, required proof of the date of his death. Since it has never been officially established that he is dead or still alive, the city would not permit the installation. (If still living, Mr. Wallenberg would have been 92 in March last year). My friend Eugene Riesman, took up the cause following Mr. Rose's death. He asked me to consider installing the monument in the courtyard behind Christ Church Cathedral, which I was happy to do. It stands under a star of David window high in the cathedral wall, and carved in stone on the Chapter House and Cathedral wall are the words, *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May they prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and happiness within thy palaces.* The monument is a focal point in the courtyard, now re-named "Raoul Wallenberg Square". Passengers from the many tour buses that visit the precincts of the Cathedral each year pause to read his story, and to remember. The citation under his bust bears an inscription from the Talmud,

*He who saves a single life, it is as if
he had saved the whole world*

To remember Raoul Gustav Wallenberg is to remember the events against which his heroism shone. Those memories, though painful, are important for us all – Christian and Jew alike – and they will be very different for each. I can speak only of the Christian perspective. I am reminded of how misguided Christian fanaticism led us to unspeakable crimes against God and against humanity. As a Christian leader I am ashamed of that dark legacy, and the price the Jewish community has paid for it. We bear a terrible responsibility into eternity for that. Yet in the legacy of Wallenberg there is a flame of hope. While whole nations remained in denial of the horrors of the holocaust, and thereby in tacit complicity, this one Christian's humanity and passion for justice made such a difference for so many, and allowed a new day to dawn for them. He is not alone, and he reminds us of the many for whom the light of faith enabled them to set aside self interest in the name of humanity, and at great personal risk were moved to heroic deeds of self-sacrifice. Hundreds are remembered with him in *The Avenue of the Righteous* at the *Yad Vashem* memorial in Jerusalem. May the trees that bear the names of each of them grow and provide shelter, beauty and inspiration for generations to come.

We live in a world that has not learned the lessons of history well, as the names Burundi, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone , and indeed Israel/Palestine remind us. That we learn those lessons now is more urgent than ever. The advancement of communications, travel and immigration make of the planet the global village of which Marshall McLuhan spoke, in which all are vulnerable. Never has it been more important to remember the lessons of Wallenberg, and those who have followed his example, and to learn how to apply those lessons to the needs of our time.

The recent tsunami that caused such shocking human loss so suddenly has taught us that we are capable of a collective humanitarian response that transcends almost all that divides us. The losses from man-made and preventable disasters, however, are greater by far – genocide, the AIDS pandemic, child warriors, starvation. Can we not learn the value of a massive humanitarian response in securing our future together on planet earth?

We offer the memory of Raoul Gustav Wallenberg to this generation as an example of those who have responded to the call of the prophet Micah,

*You have heard, O man, what is good,
and what does the Lord require of you,
but to do justice, to love mercy, and to
walk humbly with thy God.*