

Address by Henry F. Hall, Principal, Sir George Williams University

At the Annual Convocation, Montreal Diocesan Theological College

May 4, 1960

Mr. Principal
My Lord Bishop, Reverend ~~Sirs~~, Members of the College, Ladies and Gentlemen:

My first word to you must be one of humble gratitude and appreciation for the great honour which the College has given me. I fully realize that in granting me an honorary degree, the Educational Council and the Board of Governors have departed sharply from tradition. In fact, insofar as this College is concerned, and I am sure the same applies to others, this action is unprecedented. *(Money)*

This, however, is not the only reason why I appreciate and value this great honour. Thirty-six years ago this month, I stood in this place and received a document from the hands of your Lordship's distinguished predecessor. *Rev. Roy C.F.* Not many are here tonight who attended that convocation in 1924, but one beloved figure stands out, that of our esteemed Registrar, Rev. Dr. Howard. *have* The fact that he has so graciously presented me and that you, my Lord, ~~has~~ conferred this degree gives it a value *to me* which it could not otherwise possess.

I have *an* indescribable and nostalgic affection for this institution. Here I spent, what in retrospect were in many ways, the four best years of my life. This is my alma mater. One of my favorite *anecdotes* ~~stories~~ is a certain small boy's definition of a mother as one who, "Knows all about you but loves you just the same." This, I feel, applies to me tonight and is symbolized by the fact that the Diocesan College has generously recognized a perhaps somewhat wayward son by this outward sign of distinction and, if I may say so, affection.

It would be easy to succumb to the temptation to be very reminiscent this evening. I must ^{try to} resist this, but would like to tell one little incident that perhaps no one else remembers:

(When I came to the College my position was somewhat anomalous. Since I was not a candidate for the ministry, there was some question as to whether I should be allowed or required to participate in the chapel services by taking my turn in reading the lessons. The Principal, the beloved Dr. Rexford, solved the problem with his usual tact by telling me that he would like me to do so. To this, I readily agreed. One afternoon, in the middle of the winter, I received a telephone message from the Principal to the effect that he was delayed at a meeting and that I was not only to read the lessons, but to take the service of evensong by myself. As I had never done this before, at least not in public, it was something of a shock, particularly as I was well aware of the ^{shock was deep} critical propensities of some of my fellow students. However, after reading the second lesson, I returned from the lectern to the prayer desk to say the concluding prayers, congratulating myself that I was getting along very well. But lo, pride goeth before a fall! I had just reached my seat, when all the lights in the area suddenly went out. If you have never been in our chapel at evensong time in the middle of winter with the lights and the street lights extinguished, you have no idea how dark it can be! I hopefully waited for a few minutes. Then I began to wish that I were a Presbyterian

or a Methodist, so that I might extemporize, for at that moment I could not remember a word of the whole Anglican liturgy. Finally, one prayer came to mind. This was appropriate; in fact, it was too literally appropriate. It was the Third Collect in Evensong, which, you remember, begins with the words, "Light our darkness, we beseech Thee O Lord." This I said in a weak voice, followed by the grace. Then, I crept my way out, almost feeling through the darkness the eyes of my fellow students and almost hearing their suppressed chuckles.)

I could tell many stories, but I must remember that this is not an occasion for the reminiscences of an old man. This occasion belongs primarily to these young men who tonight become graduates of this institution and who go forth from here to a new life of dedicated service. They and their friends are, of course, the center of tonight's ceremony, and I am pleased to salute them and their friends and relatives who have come to be with them. We must look forward and not back. The future is bright with promise and filled with opportunity for service to the Church of God and His people in our day.

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This is said to be the age of science; and who can deny it. As the church faces her task anew, the facts of the scientific revolution are surely an important part to the society in which she must operate and must, in my view, reclaim.

The impact of science is, at least twofold. In the first place, there is the unmistakable revolution in our lives which has come about through the applications of science. Ultra-rapid transportation and

instantaneous communication illustrate this, and the effects on historic religion are unmistakable. In the first place, it seems to me our modern desperate atomic age holds up for all men, who have ears to hear and eyes to see, the urgent necessity for mankind to embrace the kind of life which the church has always known since she received it from her Lord, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven."

It is, however, in the struggle for the minds of men and women that science makes its greatest impact. In a somewhat amateur and, I fear, ineffective way, I have been interested in this all my life. Someone asked me recently how I came to be so interested in Charles Darwin; and after thinking about it, I replied that it was because I was interested in religion. Perhaps I may be allowed to touch briefly, in the few remaining minutes I have, on certain, perhaps superficial, elements of this matter.

The practical conflict, or to use A. D. White's famous phrase, "Warfare between science and theology in Christendom" was basically *I think* in the area of literal interpretation. In spite of several warnings in the Scriptures themselves (e.g. "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.") there has been a marked tendency to accept the scriptural text, or even a certain translation of the text, in a deadly literal sense. Ancient writings when so interpreted are bound to conflict with current ideas regarding the nature of the universe. Naive people are prone to say that the Bible is either true or it isn't true. However, I still believe what was taught me here many years ago that the Bible is, "An autobiography of a spiritual evolution" and that there is no conflict between any reasonable interpretation of any part of the

Scriptures and the most advanced scientific discovery.

This, we are often now assured, is in the past and the great science-religion controversies, such as that of the heliocentric universe and that around evolution a hundred years ago, have long since passed into history. My contacts with young people of student age, however, make me wonder if this is true. What really disturbs me is the feeling I get from some of them on occasion that the whole issue is not an important one, or even that the science-religion controversy is over because science has won!

I don't propose to dig up the perhaps dead issue of evolution, but there are one or two points which I think thoughtful people of our day should remember. Paranthetically, may I say if I can with due humility that the field of evolution is one to which I have given some attention over the years. In the controversy there were faults on both sides, but I feel strongly that many of the scientists were, and still are, gravely at fault in at least two ways. In the first place, they failed to recognize, or even admit, the basic far-reaching principle of altruism or, if you like, love, or to use Henry Drummond's phrase, the struggle for the life of others. Secondly, they were so imbued with the fact that two and two make four that they failed to see that sometimes it does not. Many scientifically tough-minded people, as they call themselves, do not recognize that even comparatively simple things may be greater and quite other than the sum total of their parts. Thus we have the "nothing but" school which says that atoms are nothing but subatomic particles, the universe is nothing but matter and energy. From this is a short step to the dictum that man is "nothing but" an animal. Of course, man is an animal as a dissection of his tissues will show,

but that he is nothing but an animal is a denial not only of the greatest of our race, but of God himself who created man in His own image.

Suppose one hundred years ago someone had discovered a fully made television set. They would, no doubt, have taken it apart with care and would have finally said that, while very ingenious, it is really nothing but some wood, some metals, some glass and so on. But you and I know that the television set is much more than that, because we know that it focuses and gives expression to forces which one hundred years ago would have been regarded as mysterious and even of the nature of witchcraft.

This, nevertheless, is very elementary. I am sure the young men who graduate tonight have covered this ground many times. The great fact, and to me the great comfort, is that as ~~duNouly~~ wrote, "Any man who believes in God must realize that no scientific fact, as long as it is true, can contradict God. Otherwise it would not be true."

It was our own Dr. William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, who wrote, "It is a great mistake to suppose that God is only, or even chiefly, concerned with religion." This is to me at once a frightening but uplifting thought. It means, does it not, that the universe revealed by science is God's universe, and its laws His laws. I have always been impressed by the words attributed to John Kepler who when he discovered his third law of planetary motion, which says, incidentally, that the mean distances of the planets cubed are directly proportional to their periodic times squared, said, "O God, I think Thy thoughts after Thee."

The scientific atmosphere of our day tends to focus attention away from faith and toward the necessity for proof. A student recently asked

me how I could accept the testimony of the ancients about faith when I knew very well that they were wrong about everything else. There are two answers to this. Just because the ancients did not understand the nature of the atom or did not have television does not mean that they were wrong about everything else. One ^{has} ~~is~~ only to read the beauty of the ^{Psalm} ~~Songs~~, for example, or to look at a Grecian statue, or to appreciate the wisdom of Plato and Socrates, to realize that the ancients were not wrong about everything else. However, more important is the second answer and that is that faith does not depend only on the testimony of the ancients; and this my young friend could not see, and so it made me sad. The young modern, who wants scientific proof of the nature of God, would do well to go back to Elijah. You well remember, "And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle."

My contention, therefore, is simple, namely, that the scientist deals, as the theologian does, with the laws of God. At his best he, like Kepler and Newton and Pasteur, is well aware of this fact. About sixty years ago, within a few rods of this place, fundamental experiments were carried out on the nature of matter. This research by Rutherford, Soddy and their colleagues was among the fundamental work which brought in the atomic age. I think it was long enough ago that I may tell a confidential story told me by a revered professor at McGill, now gone many years. It was said that Soddy in a small group of friends, while

discussing his discoveries, remarked confidentially that the new concept of the nature of matter had transported him from the material to the spiritual, and that he was working with Him in whom we live and move and have our being. Thus, it seems to me, is science and faith related and thus the scientist should realize that he, like Moses of old, should not profane the holy ground, but that in reverence and humility he should remove his shoes, realizing that the ground on which he stands is holy. A great writer once said, "A catechist proclaims God to children, and Newton demonstrates Him to the wise."

May I, my Lord Bishop, in conclusion express to the young graduates on this occasion the hope and the faith of their elders that they, fully realizing the problems of the age in which they live and work, will go forward in the sure and certain faith that whatever happens, their message and their influence ^{are} ~~is~~ on the side of God and His Kingdom. May I add, too, another personal word that I shall henceforth attempt, in the short time I have left to serve, to be worthy of the trust which you have given me today.

"Pro Christo et Ecclesia."