



McGILL UNIVERSITY
MONTREAL

6 April 1971

Mrs. Lois Winslow-Spragge,
2 Parkside Place,
Montreal, Quebec.

Dear Mrs. Winslow-Spragge,

It was kind of you to see me yesterday morning, and I will make every effort in the next few days to confirm the gist of our understandings in writing to you. Meanwhile, I forward a copy of Hugh MacLennan's paper given on 31 March 1971 which I'm sure will interest and intrigue you.

Sincerely,

John Andreassen
University Archivist

JA:md
encl.



MCGILL SESQUICENTENNIAL COMMITTEE

R. DAVID BOURKE
CHAIRMAN

MISS C. VAUGHAN
COORDINATOR

3587 UNIVERSITY ST., MONTREAL 110, QUE. TEL. 392-5491

April 5, 1971.

Mr. John C.L. Andreassen,
University Archivist,
Administration Building.

Dear Mr. Andreassen:

Mr. Bourke has suggested that you might be interested in receiving a copy of the text of Hugh MacLennan's speech, given at the March 31st Anniversary Dinner. I therefore take pleasure in enclosing a copy for your records.

Yours sincerely,

Heather Casey
Heather Casey.



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To THE SESQUICENTENNIAL BANQUET
McGill University, March 31, 1971
By Hugh MacLennan

Mr. Chancellor, Mr. Principal, Mé le Premier Ministre, Honoured Guests, Members of the University, Ladies & Gentlemen:-

I am more than honoured, I am almost overwhelmed, to be the speaker on the 150th birthday of our university. I do not understand why certain colleagues have selected me for their spokesman, but I do indeed understand that this is as responsible an assignment as I have ever undertaken. I love McGill. So do many thousands of others in many provinces and lands, I remember, as all here present remember, that two years and three days ago McGill had to be protected by the Montreal Police, (and they did a perfect job of it), from a march of thousands of frustrated youths who knew nothing about this university outside of the political context in which they were persuaded to regard it. This march, moreover, was organized and led by a young intellectual who had been on our own staff just before, and was still receiving McGill paycheques. Most people who knew him were convinced that he was sincere. So many people are sincere.

Because I am a native Nova Scotian, and a Laurentian only by adoption and affection, I have no false modesty about this university. I believe it is a great one in the truest sense of the word. I know it has been of priceless value to Quebec to all the other provinces of Canada and to some extent to the world. I will say more than this. I have the distinct idea that McGill, at least so far, has been of mild interest to God--and by this I mean to a God far more interesting and mysterious than the One I was told about in my youth.

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Now I am going to claim the novelist's right to be eccentric.

I know it is blasphemous to use the word "God" in learned circles today; the fashionable word is now "Nature". However, the God I believe in is the One who is implicit in the evolutionary process and I am going to suggest to you that He is the best hope, if not the only hope that this or any other university has of surviving in an age which seems to believe in nothing but its own skills. Up to the present we have done nothing but concentrate on His works. I believe the time has come for us to take a look at His style.

The Mathematicians assume, so I understand, that this God of ours thinks like a mathematician and that this explains mathematical miracles like the H-bomb and the moontrips, together with all the technological hardware which enabled the United States government, at an astronomical cost to its tax payers, to land on the moon one American atheist, one American Presbyterian and to leave in orbit one American Roman Catholic to recover the non-believer and the heretic after they had performed their task of planting the Stars and Stripes on that extinct planet. This was an example of real, down to moon ecumenicalism. Pope John XIII may have preached it, but it took the Americans to translate his sermon into applied technology.

Now my only criticism of mathematicians and technocrats is that the only God they study is a young God. If the sexual act is the elementary arithmetic of married love--chose très nécessaire--so is Higher Mathematics the elementary tool for the study of the works of the Creator in the days of His youth when he was orgiastically busy in creating the stars and the planets, the gasses and the invisible forces of gravity. But surely the evidence is clear that in His early middle age this same Creator became bored with mathematics and turned to living organisms. I cannot see how any reasonable scientist can raise any objection to this statement except in the basic sense that neither I nor anyone else can prove it.

The style of the Creator when he was young seems clearly to have been direct, gigantic and altogether noisy and awe-inspiring. But when He got older He seems to have mellowed and become infinitely more subtle. For when we examine His handiwork in human institutions--above all in those intended for His worship and for the education of His human children--I challenge anyone to deny that He takes a fiendish glee in mocking human planners of any kind you can imagine, and the bigger and more comprehensive their plans, the greater and

more comprehensive is His delight in making a nonsense of their original intentions. What kind of person, do you suppose, would he choose to invite to His table in the Hereafter? Colbert, or Sidney and Beatrice Webb? I doubt it, I think He would prefer Aristophanes, Rabelais and Molière, Shakespeare in his lighter moments, Johnathan Swift and perhaps-- if slightly below the salt--perhaps even our own Stephen Leacock and Camillien Houde.

All these things I am saying have a direct reference to the past, present and future of McGill.

Mr. Chancellor, Mr. Principal, M. le Premier Ministre--since we are here to honour the birth of this university, which in 1821 showed every symptom of being a mort né--a still birth--the question which must fascinate us is how this organism which on its paycheques is still called The Royal Institution for the Advancement of Learning, conceived and born out of James McGill's will, managed to survive an infancy so sickly that it took 34 long years before it could move its limbs or even talk, then suddenly began growing with such astonishing speed that by the century's end it was known all over the world.

The only possible explanation I can offer for this miracle is the one I have already suggested, which was perfectly described to me twenty years ago when by a Montreal taxi driver when I asked him why Duplessis was always re-elected. "Monsieur," he said, "le bon Dieu a des idées très singulières." This is a thought which must have occurred to many another politician on election nights, but curiously enough it is not a thought which has seemed important to those who write the histories of educational and religious institutions. Yet these are the very places to look if you are interested in studying the style of the Creator in his dealings with man. Let me give you a few examples.

In the ancient university whose motto is Dominus Illuminatio Mea, Balliol College is justly famous. It has lasted more than 700 years. Therefore we must assume that the Lord was truly the light of its founder. Yet in the year 1263, when Balliol College was born, this is how the founder of that college was described in 1263 by the Bishop of Durham:

"Inasmuch as Jean de Balliol did grievously vex, and enormously damnify, Mother Church, we, the Bishop Palatine, do decree that with fifty lashes he be scourged at the church door in the presence of the men of Durham, these lashes to be administered by ourselves and by the monks of Tynhurst, and we do further decree that the said Jean de Balliol found at Oxenford a college for 12 poor scholars. "In such fashion did the Lord become the light of Jean de Balliol and the Bishop of Durham.

Another famous college, my own Oriel, was known originally as Le Collège de Sainte-Marie d'aureole, as was natural in the days when the language of the English Establishment was French. It owes its birth to an occasion when Edward 11 was hiding in a cave, in terror of his life from the Scotch, in which situation did he grievously lament his sins and promise to make many recompenses therefore, one of them being the gift of all of 50 pounds for the founding at Oxenford of a college for poor scholars.

But these Divine singularities--what are they in comparison to the founding of the Church of England?

Historians now seem in reasonable accord that when Henry VIII was young he was a lusty man who enjoyed hunting and even loved his first wife. But one of God's creatures known to science as a spirochete entered Henry's blood stream somehow or other, and in his early middle age it lodged in his brain. It turned this erstwhile amiable man into a paranoid megalomaniac who not only beheaded two of his five wives, but--far more daringly--defied the Pope, accepted excommunication and made himself head of the Catholic Church in England; nay more, the Defender of the Faith. Whether Henry VIII was a good thing or not is still being debated. But it must surely be beyond any kind of debate that Henry's spirochete, by becoming the First cause of the Church of England, was the most important single microbe in the history of Bacteriology.

Returning to our own university we see the playful hand of the Creator busy as usual and this though, Mr. Chancellor and Mr. Principal, might be of some comfort to you in what I believe are called "The Hard Days Ahead".

The motto of James McGill, the poor Scotch exile who came to Montreal more than two centuries ago, made money in the fur trade and married a French Canadian widow with four children--the motto of this Scotch colonist was In Domino Confido--"I trust in God". All I can say is that James McGill would have done a hell of a lot better if he had continued to trust in God instead of entrusting his modest fortunes to the body of imbeciles who formed the majority of those who controlled The Royal Institution at that particular time. With the exception of Bishop Strahan and Bishop George Jehosophat Mountain, this was the laziest and most incompetent committee group that ever assembled in Montreal. For while it is certainly true that our university obtained its charter in the year 1821, only eight years

after McGill's death, it is equally true that when William Dawson arrived from Nova Scotia in 1855, there were practically no students and the buildings were in such disrepair that Dawson had to buy a shovel and with his own hands shovel his way into them through doorways choked with the debris left by the masons.

It was Dawson, of course, whose dedication and tenacity turned the Founder's dream into what eventually became a world-renowned reality. But chers amis, let us look at Dawson and marvel once more at the enigmatic behaviour of the Creator. Dawson also trusted in God; he never made an important consideration without entering into conference with Him on his bended knees. So completely did he trust in the Almighty, and so great was the Almighty's reward for that trust, that Dawson managed to live a long, active life in a state of perpetual shizophrenia without betraying the smallest trace of a Freudian neurosis. On the one hand he was a geologist--a geologist moreover, of such merit that his certificate to the Royal Society of London was signed by eminent men of science including the one he admired above all others. And guess who he was? He was Charles Darwin. Yet this same McGill principal who was a renowned geologist, and who revered the author of ORINGS OF SPECIES, was at the same time and to the end of his life a fundamentalist Presbyterian who believed, with apparent literalness, in the account of Creation given in the Book of Genesis.

In this rational age when the Book of Genesis has been replaced--at least temporarily--by The Big Bang--the old motto of McGill "I trust in God" has had to be translated into modern terms. Now it must read, "I trust in Prime Minister Bourassa"; and to this article of faith may be appended as a footnote held in reservation, "The day may come when I will have to trust in René Levesque"; and to this again might be appended still another footnote (though at present subliminally) "What will happen to me if I have to trust in Pierre Bourgault?" If therefore the God of Evolution who has worked in His own mysterious way in the past through Jean de Balliol, Edward II, Henry VIII, Sir William Dawson and so many others in so many other times and places---well, perhaps this is a sentence I had better leave unfinished.

The time has now come, if it is not long overdue, when I must return to what is called the solid ground.

Any university is as good or as bad as its teachers, its researchers and its students. This we all know. If the name of McGill has been respected for years throughout the world, it is because of its teachers, its discoverers and its graduates. Their names are legion

and it would be invidious to attempt any ranking of them. But how could anyone writing the history of Medicine without dwelling on the careers of Osler, Penfield and his associates at the Neurological Institute, and of Biochemistry without Collip? Of Physiology without Babkin? Of modern surgery without Meakins and Archibald? Of Physics without Rutherford? Of inorganic chemistry without Soddy? Of chemistry without Maass? Of Canadian Literature without Leacock? Of Canadian Legal thought without Frank Scott? Of Canadian Politics without Sir Wilfrid Laurier? Of British Columbia without referring to that huge university which in 1906 was known as "The McGill University College of British Columbia? Or again, of last autumn's crisis without mentioning the names of M. Choquette, M. Demers and last, but possibly in the future not least, M. Robert Lemieux?

One of the curious but not unnatural elements in our present Era of Technology is surely this--that never since the late Middle Ages has mythology been such a booming business as it is now. One of the myths current about McGill is that it is a wasp-establishment university, adoring royal tours, undemocratic, catering to the privileged classes and so on. At no time was it like that, though we must admit that before World War I Principal Peterson often wished that it was. It has never been less so than it is now, despite the propaganda of a handful of political activists on its staff.

The Registrar informs me that this year the total enrollment in all the faculties and institutes amounts to some 16,000 students. I know from my own experience that they come from every class of society. Of these, some 1600 are French Canadian fellow-citizens--in other words 11% of the total. Foreign students from some 50-odd countries account for 13.2% of the total. Always in the Law Faculty any student who wished to write his examinations in French was permitted to do so. In recent years students in any faculty may write their examinations in French. In one very large class in English Literature that I handle myself, or try to handle, an Anglophone student from Newfoundland, only last week, presented her term paper in French because she believed, and in this case rightly, that French is a more accommodating language than English in literary exegesis.

What kind of a job we present teachers are doing I cannot judge--I suppose it is variable as usual. But I can make some judgements about the students which completely confound the popular mythology about the modern university students in this year 1971. In spite of the overcrowding, and speaking only from my own experience, the work the best of them give me now is more mature, more original, more painstaking than I have seen in any other

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university before, including the McGill of the 1950s and the Oxford and Princeton of the 1930s.

I can make no accounting for this surprising excellence beyond suggesting that the challenge of the two cultures in our city must have much to do with it, and that the very real desire on the part of the vast majority of our students and staff to help make Canada grow, and help keep Quebec the vibrant core that it now is, must be the most important cause of all. When we stand on the portico of the Arts Building and look down to this changed and enormous city many of us miss the lovely trees which have been removed to give space to the new buildings. When we look at those new buildings, the thought comes to us that their modern design is unlikely to evoke in posterity the emotions we feel when we contemplate the Parthenon and the Taj Mahal. Whether this matters only time will tell. But time will never alter the truth that a university is not made by its buildings but by its people, and by the responsible curiosity of its people. And it is this last RESPONSIBLE curiosity--that the enigmatic force within the evolutionary process seems to value and prosper above all other things in our human species.