

ADDRESS BY
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE L. B. PEARSON,
PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA,
OFFICIAL OPENING OF GLENDON COLLEGE
TORONTO, SEPTEMBER 30, 1966

Those of you who are now in your second, third or fourth year at Glendon College will be intrigued to learn that the College is being officially opened today.

Nevertheless, my pleasure at being here is in no wise diminished by the realization that it is unusual to open something that has been a going concern for some time.

That pleasure is increased by the fact that the invitation came from your Principal, Mr. Escott Reid, an old friend and former colleague in diplomacy. I have long worked with him, and always to my advantage. I know him well, from "way back".

I don't need to tell you that, as long as Glendon College has Mr. Escott Reid as its Head, it will be place where ideas will ferment; where intellectual experiment and enterprise will be encouraged, while the best of old traditions will be cherished.

You are greatly privileged in being here; at a small college, with such lovely surroundings, dedicated to the humanistic concept of education.

It is also your good fortune not merely to be attending a college, but to be creating one.

You are the heirs of educational experience going back to the beginning of society, but you are also the "founding fathers" of something new and exciting.

I know of only one thing better than observing old and good traditions; it is creating new and better ones. You are doing that, as members of a college with the academic design of Glendon; with the educational ideals that inspire it and will guide it.

Today the cult is of "bigness" and "immediacy". But Glendon is right in its determination to develop as a small residential college where there will be time and occasion for milling over ideas, without the compulsion to change into instant action.

You will have the opportunity here to discover that a most important part of the educational process is to sit back and think.

In an age where turmoil and swirling movement is often mistaken for progress, where the urge, the demand, is to do something, anything, just do!, there is another injunction that often makes sense:

"Don't stand there doing something, just stand."

The fact that, today, I must speak, as well as stand, gives me an opportunity to re-state my personal testament to my country and to its youth. Believe me, it is no testament of despair or discouragement; but one of faith and hope.

Wordsworth wrote, in the first brilliant flush of revolutionary promise in 1789:

“Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive
But to be young, was very heaven.”

If to be young today is not exactly heaven – there is not much heaven on earth these days – it does pose the greatest test – and the greatest opportunity – that any generation ever faced.

To meet it successfully will require an act of faith which springs from that maturity of mind that is the hall-mark of the educated man.

I can see nothing which should prevent this act of faith in Canada. Notwithstanding the doubters, the pessimists, the men of small vision and large prejudice, the worries and the grumblers, of whom we have more than our share, Canada remains a land of hope and promise. We should rejoice in being citizens of this great land. We should scorn the defeatists and the whiners.

So far as I am concerned, as one Canadian faced every day with practical and pressing problems of politics and government, my faith in the Canadian people – French and English-speaking – is deep and strong, as they face hard and complicated national problems; as they adjust to a dangerous but challenging world where the atom and the rocket symbolize all that the mind of man has gained for human advancement or human destruction.

I have to believe in the great destiny of Canada just as I have to believe in the meaning of my own life if it is to be an acceptable human experience. I invite you to share with me this exercise of Canadian faith, in the confidence that we are a “nation” worthy of our heritage; that we have a rich past on which to build a great destiny for all the members of the Canadian family.

Equally important to me is my testament to youth. I do not judge this generation by “mods” in “mini” costume, and “rockers” on roaring motorcycles; or by the tales of delinquency in great cities; or the occasional outbursts of the younger generation in their frustrated search for answers that cut through pretensions and platitudes. For every such evidence of the troubled teens and twenties, there are a thousand witnesses to the possession by our young people of a social conscience which asks only for a chance to be heard, and to act, on the many stages of an anxious nation and a world in need.

Yours is an opportunity to enter into the kind of adventure and effort, at home and abroad, that expresses faith in the future, faith in the ultimate resolution of the major social problems that beset mankind on this small and crowded planet.

Mine is the opportunity, this afternoon, to express my faith in you, my belief in our capacity to wear conscience and involvement as a mantle of honour; my belief also that your generation of restless social activists will find the resources of mind and heart to translate your hopes into positive lasting achievement wherever there is a human need – and that is everywhere.

Today I wish to acknowledge the contribution that a college like Glendon can make to this creative process by helping its students develop an informed and active interest in public affairs; by encouraging them to become committed to improving the community in which they live; the country of which they are citizens; and the world which they occupy with two billion neighbours.

My own experience in public affairs covers more than fifty years as a student, a teacher, a Civil Servant, a diplomat, a Foreign Minister, a Leader of the Opposition and a Prime Minister.

Which role did I like the best? Perhaps, when I have both greater leisure and more freedom, I will answer that question.

But I bear grateful witness here to the deep satisfaction that comes from a life in the public service, including service in politics and Parliament as an elected representative of people.

Service to your community and your country does not, of course, require you to become a public servant in the official or elective sense. But I hope many of you will make such service your life work.

Professor James Eayrs wrote not long ago:

“The public service is no place for the intellectual. The intellectual cannot do it justice. The environment is alien; particularly the environment in which foreign policy is made.” And

And he went on:

“The whole ethos of the profession (of diplomacy) is designed to quell the moral sensibilities of its members”

No – not at all – not any more so than business, broadcasting, engineering, teaching theology or being the principal of a liberal arts college.

One might as well say that the football squad is no place for the honour student in English because “the environment is alien”.

In its concern for education for public service, may I congratulate Glendon on making provision for its English-speaking students to become fluent in French, the mother language of millions of their fellow-citizens; and for making possible access to the rich cultural heritage of France which all Canadians should be able to enjoy.

This is no more than acknowledgement of the fact that our country has two founding language groups, that this is recognized in our constitution and must so remain as the foundation of federal unity.

I congratulate the College especially in its decision – if I may be permitted to use a sporting expression – to concentrate on the fundamentals of education, the most fundamental of which are the capacity to think honestly and straight; to appreciate the beautiful and the true; to exchange, rather than impose, ideas; to show the tolerance and understanding that come from mental maturity. It is also

fundamental – as your College stresses – to possess a facility and clarity in the use of the English language, something which is becoming all too rare.

In my work as negotiator and seeker of agreement, I have seen more misunderstanding and mischief caused by sloppy and ambiguous use of words to express thought than by any other single cause, unless it is by the insistence on having a document ready for signing in an hour when, in less frantic age, a day would be required to ensure careful editing and drafting.

In short, I express my appreciation of the fact that Glendon is dedicated to the pursuit of academic excellence, to a design for living where democracy does not reject distinction; and which sees more ultimate hope for humanity in a sonnet than in a rocket. If this leaves you open to the charge of becoming “a school for snobs”, this is a burden that you should easily be able to bear.

I am sure that in the College both teaching and learning will be a very human, if you like, a spiritual process, in which nothing will take the place of the impact of a mind on a mind; or of a mature and wise personality on one seeking that maturity and wisdom.

I do not wish to depreciate the new techniques, the new mechanics of educational progress which can extend the boundaries of knowledge without stripping the soil. But some manifestations of the new educational methods leave me with an amazement that is mixed with anxiety.

I read this the other day in an article on the new education:

“The engineers can program and automate almost anything... So they will beget new types of pedagogues and they will radically alter the learner’s relation to his teachers. It is possible that for many children the home television set, the programmed book, the teaching machine and the computer will provide a large part of routine instruction.”

All hail to the educational engineers! But not to the point where, instead of being enrolled at Glendon College, you will be able to become a freshman at I.B.M. without leaving your air-conditioned, automated, food-injected living cell two thousand miles away.

So I hope this College will retain the personal bond between teacher and student in an age where we look for technology to supply the answer to every problem, many of which are so novel and complex as often to induce bewilderment and, at times, despair.

But there is no cause for despair.

Every age has had problems that were unprecedented and some that seemed unsurmountable. Every age seemed filled with tension and conflict to those who were part of it, however calm it might seem a century later.

Minds are unable to grasp the upheavals in which they are immediately immersed, so they look for new doctrines, new guide posts, new teachers, to reconcile disturbing innovations with what has gone before. New leaders and new wise men are sought to interpret the present, predict the future, in comforting terms of the past.

It has always been thus – I know. But I hasten to add that today the speed and immensity of every kind of change is more staggering than ever before.

So, many of the questions asked today – in spite of the continuity of historical experience – will be beyond the bounds of any past experience. If, however, you despair at getting the right answers, you can take comfort from the fact that rarely has there ever been a dogmatically right answer to any human problem. You can take comfort also from the fact that there are certain principles, certain values, that do not change and will be as helpful to you, when you wonder what to do about a current problem, as they were to Adam when he wondered what to do about Eve. Certain things of the mind and spirit are immutable, and they have an almost incredible gift of survival over neglect, derision or attack.

So do not be discouraged at the complexity of today's life and the seeming impossibility of coming to terms with it.

In his book, "Adventure of Ideas", the philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead, had this to say:

"Every age has its character determined by the way its populations react to the material events which they encounter. This reaction is determined by their basic beliefs – by their hopes, their fears, their judgments of what is worthwhile. They may rise to the greatness of an opportunity, seizing its drama, perfecting its art, exploiting its adventure, mastering intellectually and physically the network of relations that constitutes the very being of the age. On the other hand, they may collapse before the perplexities confronting them. How they act depends partly on their courage, partly on their intellectual grasp."

My wish for the College itself is for many years of service in the cause of education that is true and good; education that will stimulate the creation of "finer human hungers" and never become a mere mechanistic search for knowledge.

I now formally declare the College open.