

# 14th Viscount Bennett Memorial Lecture

by Allan Carter

John D. Whyte, dean of law of Queen's University gave the 14th annual Viscount Bennett Memorial Lecture last Thursday evening in Ludlow Hall. His lecture, which was presented by the law faculty was called *Nation, Minorities and Authority*.

When asking the question "where is the source of understanding", Whyte expresses, with making references to the book of Job, that the secondary answer to this question is within human modesty.

Illustrating that autumn is a time of change and the coloring of leaves is a sign for anticipation and preparation, Whyte explained "the purpose of life is

to prepare for the transformation that must come."

Whyte believes we "must start by stating what we are," he feels we should not "feel forced to articulate new conceptions in our community."

He continues by saying that since we are "born to our place" and "we may not be blessed with the gifts that our community needs, but we have no choice, but to act as if we were." Whyte argues "a strong community is one who's members remember its needs rather than wonder about its worth."

"The real end of the nation may come with the lost of the natural world," says Whyte. "The domination of technology is not utopian, but hellish," Whyte feels "human ascending

over nature destroys nations because it destroys imaginations."

Speaking about moral and political authority and returning to his first idea of modesty, Whyte reminds the audience that the book of Job "reminds us to be modest." Yet if we are modest and make only these claims that we can stand up for - common experience, romantic hope for a nation - we may have not made claims strong enough to bind."

Whyte ended the first part of the lecture by saying "whether we find a stronger authority is the problem we must confront."

After defining minorities, Whyte continues by saying that minorities "are a challenge to a nation." The choice of liberalism is "the constitutional

principle under which minorities are to be accommodated - or not accommodated" will run the risk of producing tragedy.

In order to "entertain the claims of minorities in constitutional arrangements," Whyte argues we must gain wisdom by looking at the history of community found in the Bible and the history of Canada's confederation.

Expanding on the history of the Biblical community, Whyte explains three ways in which a community is liberated: revolution, dynamic, and remnant, "or a status that allows a community to maintain the integrity of its covenant relationship with God."

Referring to the Exodus story, Whyte explains "the lesson of the story is not the improvement of a people, but is the removal of ties that do not belong."

Returning to his first statement about accommodation and minorities, Whyte argues that the concern is not initially about accommodation, but about escape.

Whyte claims one "might see the Charter as not truly liberal, instead expressing a high level of ambivalence through granting fundamental value to both group rights and to individual human right."

Although Whyte admits his evidence is scant, he suggests that the "homogenizing and actualizing effect of liberalism has not necessarily been a force in Canada throughout its history."

Touching on Meech Lake, Whyte feels that perhaps "Meech Lake is a process that helped

produce the situation we have today." In addition, perhaps Meech Lake "can be faulted for having forgotten the lessons of Common-law and lessons of ambivalence."

Whyte believes a strong national voice will be needed. "Our national sense is, I think, weak." "But if this is the moment to create a new constitutional arrangement that reflects true social commitments then we must proceed."

"Quebec and aboriginal peoples must be allowed to liberate themselves into separate societies and these acts of liberation can change the structure (i.e parliament) that we know." Whyte says that this does not mean a separation of Canada, only a "recognition of the right to form a new basis of membership."

The time to reconfigure Canada seems to be coming soon, and Whyte feels that either, "we shall be a bitter, threatened, fragmented people or we shall be a positive people". Whyte argues we can be positive because we have the resources, strong tradition and a sense of a common purpose.

Near the end of his lecture, Whyte expresses the importance of the regional local sense of the constitutional value and says: "it is the provinces and the communities that widespread popular participation must confirm Canada and Canadian membership."

Ending his lecture, Whyte says there is a hope "for a change in sense of the nation" and "a sense that we can forestal tragedy."



At the lecture: (from L to R) Premier Frank McKenna, UNB president Robin L. Armstrong and lecturer John D. Whyte

Photo by David Smith




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