

HONORARY GRADUATE

Denis Eugene Hurley

"Denis Hurley ... was not born in a lighthouse as some people imagine. His father was the keeper of the lighthouse at Cape Point, the guardian of the light that warns the sailors of dangers and guides them away from destruction.

"Now the son did not follow in his father's footsteps. But he became a lighthouse-keeper too; the guardian of the light that warns of dangers and saves us from destruction.... The lighthouse has become a symbol of light and hope and our Archbishop has been doing this work of warning and guiding for the greater part of seventy years."

Those were the words of Alan Paton. They were spoken in the Durban City Hall on the occasion of Archbishop Hurley's seventieth birthday in November 1985. Now the Archbishop has passed his seventy-fifth birthday. When he turned 75 he was the longest serving bishop still in office, of nearly 4 000 bishops in the Catholic world; then he reached the age of compulsory retirement. This is a fitting moment in his remarkable career for him to be honoured by the University.

Denis Eugene Hurley was born of Irish parents at Cape Town on 9 November 1915. After matriculating from St Charles College (Marist Brothers), Pietermaritzburg, in 1931, he entered the Novitiate of Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Ireland, in 1932. A year later he began his studies in Rome, where he obtained the Licentiate of Philosophy at the Angelicum (now St Thomas Aquinas University). This was followed by ordainment as a priest in 1939 and by his obtaining the Licentiate of Theology at the Gregorian University, Rome.

On his return to South Africa in 1940, he became first curate at Emmanuel Cathedral, Durban, and then Superior of St Joseph's Scholasticate, Pietermaritzburg. In 1946 he was named Vicar Apostolic of Natal with the rank of bishop; he had just turned 31 years of age. With his ordainment in March 1947 he became the youngest bishop in the world. Four years later, when Hurley was only 35 years old, he was appointed the world's youngest archbishop.

Archbishop Hurley's leadership of and service to the Church have been distinguished and lengthy. In 1961 he was a member of the Central Preparatory Commission of the Second Vatican Council (*Vatican II*) and from 1962 to 1965 he attended and played an important role in the Second Vatican Council. He was a member of the Commission for Priestly Formation and Christian Education from 1962 to 1965. Since 1964 he has been a member of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, of which he has been Chairman since 1975. He has been a member of the Liturgical Consilium, a Vatican body dealing with public worship; and of the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship. In 1967, 1974 and 1977 he attended and participated actively in the Synod of Bishops in Rome,

on two of these occasions being elected a member of the ten-man International Council charged with organizing the Synod.

In these clerical endeavours Archbishop Hurley earned high international regard and came to be recognized as one of the most articulate representatives of the English-speaking Catholic world. He is noted for his concern that the layman's Christian conscience be involved in his everyday secular life; and he has championed the role of the layman in the Church. With this orientation it is not surprising that he has devoted much time to the increasing dialogue between the Church and all people. Among the guides and mentors whose teachings shaped Hurley's theological development were, especially, Jacques Maritain and Teilhard de Chardin.

Archbishop Hurley was the founder President of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference from 1952 to 1961, and again served as President from 1981 to 1987. Under his leadership this body became an active force in the struggle of South African churches to alleviate the major social, political and economic problems of the underprivileged peoples of the sub-continent.

In 1970 Archbishop Hurley declared that Catholic schools should be open to all pupils, no matter what their race. Six years later the bishops issued an instruction that all Catholic schools must be open to all races, whatever the law might say. Archbishop Hurley realized the double risk that the Government might close schools and that white parents might withdraw their children and send them to government schools, but he said this was a risk that had to be faced.

In point of fact the Government took no action at all, nor did parents noticeably withdraw their children. Indeed, many welcomed the opportunity given to their children to mix with boys and girls of other groups. Nor did the standard of education suffer, which had been another fear. The Archbishop joined in pleas that all government schools should be integrated, and that there should be one Department of Education for all, instead of the wasteful and divisive system of a separate department for each racial group.

This brings us to the second sphere in which Hurley has displayed his remarkable leadership - the wider context of South Africa.

In 1965 and 1966 Archbishop Hurley was President of the South African Institute of Race Relations. His Hoernlé Memorial Lecture stands out as a significant sortie in the religious struggle against apartheid. It was largely owing to his initiative and his energies that in 1977 the Human Awareness Project of the Institute of Race Relations was brought into being. These concerns found further expression in 1976, when Hurley founded and became first Chairman of Diakonia. This ecumenical project, involving nine churches, promotes these churches' enhanced awareness of, and involvement in, the social problems of the greater Durban area.

Hurley was the chief instigator of the entry of the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa into close partnership with the South African Council of Churches, especially in the area of justice and reconciliation. In the executive and national conference meetings of the SACC his wise counsel often prevailed, and his joint leadership of a number of ecumenical delegations to the South African Government and abroad has been powerful proof of his personal commitment to ecumenical witness.

In his socio-political endeavours Archbishop Hurley has not hesitated to stand alone on occasion and even to court displeasure and censure. Once, when he was charged with an offence of allegedly making false statements about happenings in what was then South West Africa, the prosecutor announced that the State would not proceed with the trial, as the case was based on 'rumour and hearsay evidence'. On another occasion legal history was made when Archbishop Hurley's application to the Supreme Court led to the first court-ordered release of detainees held under section 29 of the Internal Security Act.

Despite the vicissitudes of these headline-catching events, Hurley has remained a thinker, a moral leader and an outstanding proponent of the civilized and humanitarian values that are the ethical underpinning of most societies. Nor has he abandoned his sense of humour, his ready wit, his ability to laugh at himself and with others. His interest in cricket test matches comes through at odd moments. His writings are compelling, memorable, lucid, his conversations impressive and persuasive.

Archbishop Hurley's courage and consistent witness to the ideals of justice, freedom, conciliation and love for all, regardless of race, his indefatigable contributions to society and to the Church, have been widely recognized. At a special meeting of the Durban City Council on 30 May 1972, Archbishop Hurley's name and citation were inscribed in the Civic Honours Book of that city. Three years later he was made a Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur of France. Honorary doctorates have been conferred upon him by at least eight universities in three continents.

It is indeed a privilege for the University to confer on so distinguished a person, a man of nobility of spirit, its degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*. In doing so the University wishes to recognize his sustained endeavours and achievements in the promotion of better human, communal and race relations, and his leadership in the cause of and contributions to justice and reconciliation in public life in South Africa.