

OPENING ADDRESS TO CONFERENCE OF HEADMASTERS AND HEADMISTRESSES OF
PRIVATE SCHOOLS - 1977 26 August

You are meeting on the feast of St Bartholomew. But at the Eucharist this morning, the Old Testament lesson and the gospel were not about Bartholomew but were linked to an apostle named Nathanael. In the first three gospels there is a Bartholomew but no Nathanael. In St John's Gospel there is a Nathanael but no Bartholomew. In each case his name is coupled with that of Philip in the list of apostles. The very word Bartholomew, too, is not a name; it simply means Son of Tolmai. The possibility therefore has been suggested that Bartholomew and Nathanael are the same person. A hymn in Hymns Ancient and Modern, set for St Bartholomew's Day, poses the question:

"Was it he beneath the fig-tree

Seen of thee and guileless found;

Was it he who did all the things that Nathanael is recorded as doing?"

The last verse of the hymn opens "None can tell us" thus acknowledging the bankruptcy of historical research and Biblical studies - a humiliating and down-to-earth beginning for an educational conference I'm afraid!

But even though Bartholomew has a problem of identity (like many folk today), there is no ambiguity about the manner in which he and the other members of the apostolic band proclaimed the Good News or Gospel and performed works of healing of men's souls, minds and bodies, in the name of Jesus Christ, as we heard in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles earlier today, both activities, the proclaiming and the healing, being performed with an authority which produced results. The Church in those early days certainly knew clearly what it stood for and where it was going.

And that is an encouraging and strengthening thought with which to begin your conference, ~~because this is a Church conference & not only an educational one.~~ Although people sometimes speak loosely of a man of 23 or more "entering the Church" when he is ordained, we all know that he entered the Church when he was baptised, possibly in infancy. You in fact are the Church, and the real battles of the faith, the real conflicts between God and the devil, are fought out not in pulpits but in factories, shops, offices, farms, cabinet rooms, political party branch headquarters, in homes and newspaper offices, in the board rooms of industry and of television, and at headmasters' conferences, wherever in fact Christian laymen (who are the Church) have to work out the implications of being a Christian and behaving as a Christian in the particular and unique circumstances of their own daily job.

I particularly value the privilege of your inviting me to address you today, for I am among you as a layman when it comes to the field of

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education. I can state Christian principles. It is only you who can hammer out exactly how to apply them in a sinful situation. (Please note that I said "how", not "whether"!) Were I to try to make proposals in too great technical detail, they would probably deserve to be accorded the kind of treatment that a theologian might give to a proposal from a headmaster about the best way to revise the Nicene Creed !

If we look at the last two years in the history of South Africa it would be an understatement to say that this has been a period of great change. During this time the Angolan war has taken place, the war in Rhodesia escalated, Mozambique become independent and the Soweto riots (June 1976) have occurred. The Bishop of Natal described Soweto 1976 as "the great watershed". "Future historians", he wrote, "will surely find it an incredible coincidence that the two major historical foci of this country are exactly six months apart (December 16, the Day of the Covenant, and June 16, Soweto) dividing the year into two halves, as the events they commemorate and symbolise divide the people involved in them." Whatever we may think about the events leading up to Soweto, it is clear that Black student power has become a factor in the South African situation (whether we like it or not) and that many young Blacks are far more impatient and militant than their parents and are determined to have a say in the shaping of their future.

What the future pattern of South Africa is to be is not yet clear. Some see the future in terms of a more integrated and unified society; some see change as within sight, yet to be contained within the framework of a concept of "plural democracy"; some are still saying that there are no easy solutions and are hoping that a plan acceptable to all parties and to overseas critics will drop down out of heaven any year now! But whatever form you predict change as likely to take, it seems clear that there will be in the near future closer contact between different racial groups and that whites will have to accept blacks in positions hitherto reserved for whites.

Certainly change is coming. The Government has recognised this by relaxing certain regulations and speeding up the removal of petty irritants. The business sector has recognised the need for change by calling for the removal of job reservation. The Minister of Education has denied that it is the Government's responsibility to set the pace for change and maintains that much of the responsibility lies with businessmen. Sports administrators are endeavouring to remove exclusiveness in sport, and Churches have called for the opening of private schools to all races.

Not all change is progress of course - which reminds me of the bride to whom I offered the privilege of choosing the hymns at her wedding. "What about 'Abide with me'?" she replied, this being the hymn she knew best. "Sound doctrine", I replied, "based on our Lord's appearance to the two disciples on Easter Day on the road to Emmaus - with a slightly dreary tune - but my chief objection is 'What will you feel like on your wedding day if you catch the bridegroom stealing a glance at you as he sings 'Change and decay in all around I see'?'"

My point today is that whether we think that the changes which are coming are progress or "change and decay", they are coming inevitably. We are not going to be able to maintain the status quo. Nor indeed are politicians claiming that they want to. It is therefore not surprising to note from the agenda that during this conference the rôle of education in a changing society will be coming up under different aspects. You have discussed it, I know, on previous occasions and will doubtless do so again in the future.

It is often tempting to imagine that we can stand aside from politics. Many people in fact often expect both the Church and educational institutions to do so. If by "politics" they mean taking sides in party politics, there might be a good deal to be said in favour of remaining aloof. But those who want to eliminate politics from our thinking usually forget that the word "politics" in South Africa is commonly used to cover all kinds of activities, even matters of personal relationships, such as with whom we associate or play sport, matters which would not be regarded as politics in other parts of the world. In any case, the Christ whom we serve as God is Lord of every area of life, including the political. So we cannot stand aside.

Regarding the rôle of education in a changing society, does education bring about social change or does it merely tag along behind and take account of change once it has happened? I humbly suggest that both are true, and that our planning in our schools should not only adapt to social changes when they are made by others but should also aim at facilitating change.

As I have said already, I hesitate to suggest in detail the concrete ways in which this should be tackled, but it seems to me that a great deal more is needed than our being prepared to open our schools to all races when this becomes legal. By a "great deal more", I mean such things as:

- (a) the exposure of pupils to the problems confronting our society
- (b) the making of the curriculum relevant to the needs of our society and particularly

- (c) the education of staff, parents, governing bodies and pupils in the whole field of race relations, so that the spirit of superiority may be eradicated and Blacks accepted as first-class citizens because this is the land of their birth and because they are created in the image of God and redeemed by him.

In connection with this last need, I have no doubt that we teach our pupils to be polite to African staff, though I believe it is common practice in many schools still to refer to men who are parents and grandparents as "boys", a term which many Blacks see as the outward expression of a contemptuous attitude, needing change. And, even more important, what steps do we take to ensure that pupils, parents and governing bodies meet Blacks who are not domestic staff or peasants? Are we preparing and educating our people for the coming new society if the majority of them never meet such Blacks ?

I believe it to be one of our most urgent needs that we should plan and gear our curricula and extra-mural activities to the production of people who have a sense of the worth of people created by God and who are what I can only call "socially aware". Racial harmony can never be something only taught. It has to be learnt experientially. Example too counts, and it may be that what the teacher teaches on the subject during history or geography or divinity or biology lessons will be heard only when teachers themselves are seen to be working together in their own conferences across the colour and culture lines, more than is the case at present.

These are difficult days in which to experiment in such ways. When we try to do so we shall sometimes be rebuffed, humiliated or ignored. Black consciousness clearly rejects anything that smacks of paternalism. We shall need to be careful that offers that we make are of value to and wanted by Blacks themselves. Blacks do not want to be "used" by us for the salving of our own consciences. But there are resources which we possess that might be offered to and valued by other schools too. (I am thinking of such things as libraries and science labs - and the possibility of post-Matric pupils helping with tuition.) All these possibilities are a-political.

All too often the Church as an official body has criticised in her synods the governing bodies of private schools. I stand here this morning not as a critic but as one who shares your concerns and anxieties, as one who from experience for eleven years as chairman of a governing body is well aware of the very real fear of all governing bodies of a drop in numbers and income if a school follows too closely in her policy the mind of Christ. Perhaps this

bogey needs to be tackled squarely and put to the test. Maybe if we all act together in unison our fears may prove groundless. Maybe the number of white parents who desire their children really to be brought up as Christians is not as large as we had thought and some of our schools should cease to be Church schools. Certainly we need to be mindful of the reason for our founding, which was not to segregate pupils of a certain social background nor primarily to provide smaller classes and training in leadership, valuable as these things are, but to provide a Christian education - and that term refers to the values and outlook and practice of the schools in such matters as race relations and not only to what is taught in R.I. or R.E. or R.K. It means, primarily, facilitating encounter between all members of the school community and the living God who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ. It means facilitating such encounter in order that Jesus may be accepted as Saviour and Lord and in order that, through the enabling of the Holy Spirit, right relationships with fellow citizens may grow out of a right relationship with God.

So I welcome you warmly to Grahamstown. I pray for God's guidance and blessing throughout your deliberations. I thank God that your agenda includes again consideration of these questions vital to the future of our country as well as of our schools. I would like to encourage you, in conclusion - and challenge you - with some words spoken by our Founder, Jesus Christ:

"If anyone declares publicly that he belongs to me, I will do the same for him before my Father in heaven. But if anyone rejects me publicly, I will reject him before my Father in heaven."

(Matt. 10. 32)