

PRIZE DAY ADDRESS - FRDAY 11, FEBRUARY 2000
TRINITY COLLEGE - KANDY

Dr. Breckenridge, Reverend Sirs, distinguished members of the Governing Board, respected members of the staff, dear Parents, fellow Trinitians and friends,

Prize Day is not an inappropriate occasion to ponder on what education and school is about, and the extent to which Trinity has succeeded or failed in its role and mission.

It is tempting to assume that education and schools are synonymous. For Trinity this is so. But universally, perhaps not. One recall the remark attributed I believe to Mark Twain, who asserted "I never allowed my schooling to interfere with my education.

Education is a life long process and fashions the total man. School is but a phase- albeit a crucial one.

A growing child is exposed to three distinct components of the environment - family, school and the larger society outside. Their- influences integrate in creating the final product – ideally, a competent, responsible and decent member of society. Numerous attributes of character and outlook combine.

School represents a child's first exposure to a, society in which he interacts with his peers in competition - free from the protective cocoon of parental care. Where he discovers bonds of friendship, loyalty and wholesome rivalry. Early steps in evolving a personality fitting him for life outside

School is also an early opportunity where the child identifies himself firmly with a group the school crest, the school song, the flag and school colours are powerful symbols of belonging. They are an injunction to dignified conduct. That endows his membership with distinction. The school tie will always endure!

Health and education in the colossai state budgets allocated annually. It implies that health and upbringing of the mind and upbringing of the mind are regarded as important as physical well being. Attendance at school up to a point is compulsory. Society has a right to demand commensurate returns for this investment and national hope. An eventual test is the current state of our society.

Disappointment on this account is justifiable. The degradation is tragically manifest on all sides. The prevalence of crime, conflict,' corruption, poverty and its attendant ills, violence, drug addiction of life is as alarming as it is appalling. The past is often tinged with-rosy hues. But my generation would be hard put to deny that our, childhood was spent in a far less aggressive and much more wholesome way. Society has brutalised and diminished itself in, many ways. These are heavy challenges to the school system.

The pressures of increasing numbers and enhanced expectations impose heavy demands on the school. Tomorrow's needs to be technically competent, while being morally and mentally committed yield to the practices of a society increasingly inclined towards corruption and decay. To maintain poise and decency amidst such strains is the challenge of education and of College.

Much is said of impending educational reforms. I have, not seen them., If such reforms are to be sufficiently far reaching and not merely cosmetic adjustments, I believe they need to consider two, fundamental factors. Examinations are perhaps a necessary evil. The intended focus on continuous assessment is a salutary change. However is it not an alarming reality that is taught is largely what can be easily examined? Is it excessively cynical to suggest that curricula are designed more for the convenience of examining rather than for the purpose of student enlightenment?

With the advances in information technology, the media, Internet and the web, the methods of teaching warrant change. Whereas a generation ago, the acquisition of information was paramount, today's priority-is, to teach selectivity. To insulate young minds from the incessant bombardment with what is, less desirable -violent, vulgar or vile, diminishing rather than roving.

Education is more about values than facts. Fashioning that intangible yet beautiful quality that we call character or personality.

Sadly, with overwhelming competitive demand for employment and vast technological advances, emphasis shifts strongly towards the mere acquisition of job competence. Liberal arts and aesthetic pursuits have consequently become depleted. Leisure has grown scarce. The terrible scourge of private tuition all but devours non-school time. No longer does it supplement school for the weak -, it supersedes it for all. In its naked preparation of examinees so successfully it eloquently exposes the weakness of the education system. Growing minds and bodies have little time to engage themselves in what is enjoyable -and productive. The rat race is relentlessly on. It cannot but damage the development, of confident and composed attitudes and minds to rob youth of the exhilarating enjoyment of life is a tragically harmful thing. -But, is there hope for our poor country, which brings forth nearly seven hundred children born -every day? This would require a school the size of Trinity every four or five days? Crowding corrodes and corrupts.

The story of our College is sign-posted with events of immense significance. In its relentless pursuit of the goal of grooming gentlemen and in engendering a culture deeply rooted in the indigenous, it is probably a school without equal. If Trinity is not unique-it is incontestably, special!

Let us recall but -a few of these landmarks. Half a century before it was recognised by law, Fraser in his Prize day address of 1908 dared to declare that “A thorough knowledge of the mother tongue is indispensable to true culture or real thinking power .men who are isolated from the masses of their own people by ignorance of -their language and thought, can never fulfil the part of educated citizens or be true leaders of their race”. At that time this would have been courage, bordering on heresy!

To assimilate what is best of the Western Christian tradition and blend it with our own culture and inheritance has been a hallmark of Trinity. What better example than the College Chapel. In designing this tribute to God, that remarkable Fraser find – The R Reverend L.J. Gaster brilliantly integrated the best of sinhala architecture to create a world class masterpiece. In the murals, David Paynter depicts Christ and the biblical characters in an unmistakably Sri Lankan form.

There are also landmarks, which lend consistency to the deepest concern for the less fortunate members of society. The Social Service Union is the finest example. Begun in 1911, it has tended slum dwellers, beggars and vagrants, the sick, prisoners, street children and the disadvantaged a variety of ways

Recognising national priorities, Trinity’s long involvement with agriculture – symbolised by the renowned College Farm – had its beginnings in the Young Farmers Club founded in 1925.

The Sinhala Literary Union had its beginnings in 1913 and the Tamil Literary Union just six years later. Debating skills were honed in the English Literary Association (later the TCLA) which is probably the oldest such in the country'- dating back to 1875.

As was totally understandable for a school, founded in the Christian missionary tradition, the earliest curricula (1858) were heavily laced with the study of the Scriptures. It is a tribute to the vision and liberalism of College that progressively, other faiths were recognised and, Buddhist students' Hindu Students' Islamic Students,' Movements began –preceding the invention of fancy words like “Multi Religious” and Multi-ethnic”!

The happy blend of community and competition is nurtured through the large part that sports have always played in the school. Our performances in team sports have ranged from the legendary to the pathetic. Trinitians have always been good losers having had much practice in this in recent years. This sportsmanship was well captured in a remark by one of our fellows. Not long ago was dejectedly drowning our sorrows at the merciless drubbing Royal had inflicted upon us in both legs of the Bradby. While all lamented the loss, our bright optimist dispelled the gloom by his remark "Look at it this way – after all we were the runners-up"! Spoken like a true Trinitian!

May be it is not without significance that while College has produced a galaxy of stars in team sports, hardly any have, excelled in sports where individual performance is the basis of recognition.

Leadership qualities are consistently encouraged through such devices as the Prefect and Monitor system (1905), the House System (1910) the Cadet Corps (1890) and Scouting (1909).

In moulding the complete man, College has found space to promote photography, astronomy study science research, farming and many more.

Woodwork, printing and book binding music and art Kandyan dancing, and weaving, metal work and motor mechanism bird watching and cookery have all figured at one time or another in curriculum. A rich menu, for a boy with an appetite.

But what of the future?

Recently, I had occasion to serve a few years abroad. Beneath a thin layer of apparent acceptance, it was clear to me how obliquely, our citizens are viewed. It seems that all are potential illegal immigrants. This is perhaps justified but nevertheless demeaning. The greater pain is to see how poorly we treat each other in our own country. We inflict upon ourselves enormous suffering and humiliation. The studied indifference of the official, paid to public service, oblivious to the frustration of the queue patiently standing before him. The abrasive, arrogant and aggressive behaviour of drivers on our roads. The rudeness, insensitivity and deceit that we see around us all seem to add unto one thing. That we simply do not treat each other well enough. This is not as it should be and starkly contrasts with the norms in many other countries.

We are constantly reminded that life is a matter of give and take. Unfortunately, in an intensely competitive society the focus is much on the take and less on the give. Pursued for too long, this must surely lead to degradation and eventual collapse of the system.

Units - be it family, school, or community - that function in reverse, with members striving to give more than they take, are destined for equally sure progress. We in College need not look far – a succession of principals and staffs have been exemplary models. Service without thought for reward was their credo.

All of our great religions have extolled the virtues of service, of sharing and of charity and warned against the evils of greed, avarice and selfishness. Caring and sharing are deeply ingrained in the traditions to which we are heirs.

Sadly, unfettered ambition and overwhelming competitiveness have all but eroded the values set for us by our forbears. All is, not lost but altruistic service is becoming hard to come by.

The exhortation by President John F. Kennedy to his people - "ask not what your country can do for you but what can you do for your country" - suggests that this is not an exclusively Sri Lankan malady.

Equally serious is the distressing lack of a work ethic. In the Sinhala idiom, reference is made to "bhaya" and "Lajja"- fear and shame. These are emotions as important for mental well being as pain is for physical health. In their absence, there is a collapse of integrity. Sadly, it seems, every stratum of, our society has taken leave of these vital restraints. In the absence of feelings, of fear, shame and guilt - a kind of "moral leprosy" is inevitable.

What should be the vision for Trinity of the future?

I need to do no more than quote from the words written by one of our former Principals the late Mr. Lionel Fernando "the characteristic inspiration of the past must lead us to pioneer new fields of endeavour and challenge us to fulfil the vision of an independent Lanka. This needs sons who could match dedication with self discipline and enterprise with discretion, upholding faith untarnished by fanaticism, service rather than self and community before the individual We need also 'to be mindful of the conscience of our country and our people'"

It has been a nostalgic return for me to Trinity. To walk again even briefly in the halls and grounds of this great institution has been exhilarating. I am deeply indebted to the Principal and Board of Governors for bestowing upon us this great honour which my wife and I cherish so much

Speaking of Mr. Fraser's choice of Mr. Campbell as his successor, Adigar Ratwatte is reported to have declared that "among the many good things that Fraser had, done, the best was his choice of Mr. Campbell." I am confident that the Board has done itself an exemplary favour in the choice of Dr. Breckonridge. The distinguished son of an illustrious father - a gentleman at whose feet and occasionally at the receiving end of whose cane - many a Trinitian has learnt worthy lessons for life! I sense that Trinity is destined for great and good things under the stewardship of the younger Breckenridge.

To the boys- I say - success in all your endeavours and go out into the world as upright, decent gentlemen - steeped in the rich traditions of incorruptibility, compassion and competence - thus re-affirming with clarity and confidence - that Trinity is indeed the Best School of All!

I Thank You.