

# MONKTON COMBE SCHOOL

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The Address

given by

The Most Reverend F. D. Coggan, D.D.,  
Lord Archbishop of York

at the Centenary Service of  
Thanksgiving and Dedication  
held in St. Paul's Cathedral,  
on Wednesday, May 8th, 1968.

The 8th Psalm, at verse 4:

What is man that Thou art mindful of him,  
And the son of man that Thou dost care for him?

And the 1st Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John,  
and at verse 42:

Jesus . . . looked him in the face, and said:  
“You are Simon . . . You shall be called . . .  
Peter, the Rock.”

**T**WO steady convictions have motivated and empowered those who over a hundred years have had most to do in the making of Monkton Combe School.

The first conviction is this: the capacity of man to become.

The stuff, the material, in which schoolmasters work is the stuff of human nature. It comes to them, if the boys here today will allow me to say so, in the raw. Put it a little more politely, it comes in malleable form. The wax of character has not yet set. Sometimes it proves intractable, stubborn, recalcitrant. But there it is, in all its mystery and wonder. Yes—I repeat the word, wonder, for all too easily we forget it, when Smith is a nuisance or Jones a thorn in our flesh or Robinson a disappointment; you can change the names as you like. “What is man that Thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man that Thou dost care for him?” What indeed, what indeed, when you compare him with the vastness of the universe in which he is set? In those great whirling galaxies, he is less than a grain of sand or a speck of dust. His span of years is short. His life can be snuffed out like a candle. And yet—“Thou madest him to have dominion”—he can stand over against that universe, observe it, measure it and in increasing degree subdue it, while the rolling spheres cannot observe him. “Thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honour.” The Psalmist knew something about that, but we Christians know a great deal more. We know of a Son of Man who took human flesh, who was not ashamed to call us his brothers. No wonder we treat human personality with reverence! No wonder we step back in awe, when we think of the miracle that is man and of his capacity to become. . . . He can become what in the Mind of God he is destined to be, a son of the Most High. Or he can become—well, we know the dire possibilities; many of us here have lived through a war or two.

The second conviction that has motivated the leaders of this school is the power of Christ to make.

Now they base their conviction on two things: first, what they read in the New Testament and in history. In the Gospels they learn of one called Simon, shifting, sand-like, with a strong streak of the rash and of the cowardly in him. And the Master took him, spent a good deal of time on him and, maybe, some tears too, and—quite simply—made him; made him into Peter, the Rock-man, apostle, preacher, pioneer, traveller, martyr. “Feed my lambs, Peter. Tend my sheep”, and so he did—unto death. This same Jesus could take a slow learner like Philip (“have I been so long time with you, Philip, and yet hast thou not come to know Me?”), and patiently teach, and teach again, until the wonder of the Master-servant relationship began to dawn on him. He could take a Thomas, whose faith flinched under the sheer difficulties of belief without sight, and deal so tenderly and understandingly with him that at last

Thomas, at the Master's feet, cried out "My Lord and my God". Christ was the great Maker of men—and has been all down the years of the Church's history. The story of the Church, for all its shame, is lit up with millions of life-stories of men, women, youngsters, who have put the rough stuff of their characters into Christ's hands and been re-made. "You are Simon, Tom, Dick, Harry. You can't help that. That was largely given you by heredity, by environment, by family background. But you can help what you become—at least you and I can together. You are, but you shall become. . . . Come after me and I will make you. . . ."

The fun of the thing is that, when our Lord does that, the results are unpredictable and exciting in the extreme. History shows again and again that the affairs of men are changed for the good by a minority of men, re-made men, out of all proportion to their numbers. One with God is more to be reckoned with than all the big battalions put together. Little is much when God is in it.

The second thing, which has led the leaders of this School to believe in the power of Christ to make, is that they watch that power at work year by year. The story is by no means all a success story. Small wonder—for some of the boys come from homes where only two verbs ever seem to be conjugated, the verbs to get and to have—no attention is paid in these homes to the verbs to give and to be. Some of the boys come from homes where infinite care is given to the cleanliness of the silver and of the glass, but singularly little to the literature which lies around the place or the stories that are told. Teeth must be cleaned, but minds can feast on garbage. Even the power of Christ in a school has a hard job against that kind of background. But times without number, as the leaders of the School look back, they think of the boys who entered the School uncertain in faith, unstable in character, vacillating in allegiance; grew to maturity of personality and ripeness of faith; and went out into the world, not perhaps to earn a high salary, but to leave behind them a life which has enriched the world and won others to fulness of life in Christ. Such things—and this School has seen them in great numbers—strengthen our faith in the Maker of men, and nerve our will to carry on the work entrusted to us.

What is man? Well, he is a strange mixture! All of us are. But of limitless potential when the Maker gets a chance to re-make, and the Redeemer to redeem, and the Holy Spirit to sanctify.

What is the lesson of all this to teacher, parent, employer, friend? Just this, I think: we cannot, we dare not, seek to force our stamp, nor even the stamp of Christ, on the wax of the character of the youngsters within our reach. All we can do is to put them in the way of Christ, to give them a chance to meet Him in His risen power, to see the outskirts of His ways in the manner of our own living and teaching and example. That is all—but could we ask for more? "One of the two who followed was Andrew. The first thing he did was to find his brother Simon. He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked him in the face and said: 'You are Simon. . . . You shall be . . . Peter, the Rock'." And even then, when Simon found himself face to face with the Master, there was no compulsion. There never is. There never will be. "God asks our leave to bless us", said St. Augustine. How right he was!

We look back today over a hundred years of wonderful work at Monkton Combe School. In it we trace the good hand of God. We look forward to growth and development and even greater achievement in the century ahead. And we remind ourselves that the overmastering aim behind all our striving is the fashioning of character after the pattern of Christ. That way, the task of parent and schoolmaster becomes a vocation, and vocation becomes partnership with Christ. That is all that any man or woman can ask for—to be a fellow-worker with God.

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