

CHRIST AND ACHIMOTA

SERMON PREACHED AT THE
STAFF SERVICE ON JULY 8th 1945.

BY THE PRINCIPAL,

REV. R. W. STOPFORD.

CHRIST AND ACHIMOTA

We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 2 Cor. IV, 5.

Those words, which form part of Paul's description of his own ministry, may well serve as a statement of the essential duty of a Christian teacher. Daily it becomes more essential that we—teachers in a Christian school—should try to define our task, for we are now in an age of transition when events move so quickly, almost of their own momentum, that it is only by a conscious effort that we can pause to consider what are the principles which should guide their course. An age of transition—yes, for the Gold Coast not less than for the world as a whole, and, not least, for Achimota.

What will be the role of Achimota in the next ten years no one can say with certainty. When the Elliott Report is published we shall see something of the pattern. Yet week by week the demands made upon the College by the country are increasing. Changes there will be, perhaps more far-reaching than any since Achimota first began. It is the measure of what has been achieved in this place in past years that so much of the educational progress of the Gold Coast is bound up with Achimota. We do indeed stand on the threshold of a new period but we know ourselves to be often war-weary, strained and over-worked. How can

we meet the challenge of this time and the responsibilities of the future?

But just because we are short-handed, tired and beset with problems, we must try to think out the first principles of our task. This place was established on a firm Christian basis by its Founder; the first Principal and the early members of the staff saw to it that as it grew its Christian character was its essential characteristic. And what are the implications for us today? It was a main part of Guggisberg's intention that the education given here should be Christian in spirit; how do we interpret that today?

What do we mean by Christian education? We have seen in England in the last few years the reaction against a purely secular education and an official recognition that religion is an essential part of education. But to say that is not enough; it has still to be worked out how Christianity can have its proper place in school and class-room. We know that Christian management alone does not make a school Christian, nor does religious instruction, especially when it is one more subject added to an over-burdened syllabus. We know, too, that Chapel services, however prayer-fully planned and devotedly conducted can yet fail to have any real influence on the life of the school community.

What then is Christian education? Or rather let us first ask what is the task of the Christian school. To that question there are many answers, but I want to suggest to you just this—the building

up of our students as persons, persons integrated by the love of God and the sense of His continual Presence, persons so equipped with knowledge and skill that they may serve others with integrity and unfaltering industry. It is only in the following of Christ that our personalities are integrated and made whole; it is only through the peace that God gives that we can find peace in our own souls. And that integration transcends the individual and extends to the community. Here in West Africa the process of education must inevitably tend to produce disintegration; we hear of the clash of cultures, of a growing gulf between progressive youth and conservative old age, of a widening breach between literate and illiterate. Only a truly Christian education can make education at all worthwhile. And here I want to say, with all the seriousness I can, that there is a very real danger that if there is to be a University in West Africa it will be a purely secular University. That would be a disaster for West Africa as a whole; I would go so far as to say that if it is only on that condition that we can have a University, then we had better have no University. But whether or not such a University will be Christian will depend very largely upon Achimota; it will depend upon the strength of the foundations which we are trying to lay now. It is our responsibility, and a heavy responsibility, to see to it that in so far as we are called upon to do work in preparation for the University we shall make its Christian spirit so strong that it will survive whatever the future may bring.

That is our essential task—to teach not ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord—Lord of all life. And Paul suggests the means when he goes on to say “and ourselves as your servants for Christ’s sake.” The teacher must be the servant of his pupils; he exists for them, not they for him. What he is, they may be. On Christian teachers in these days of change does indeed lie a very heavy responsibility. May I read you part of a sermon preached by the late Archbishop of Canterbury to the University of Oxford? Achimota is not a University but the application to ourselves is obvious.

“We cannot restore a predominance of Christian influence secured by statute; nor should we wish to restore it. For freedom is the first presupposition of the Gospel, and the Kingdom of God accepts no unwilling subjects. But if Christianity is true, we can win a predominance for Christian influence by showing theoretically that the Gospel can restore the shattered unity of life, and by showing practically its achievement of this for our own departments of activity.

If this is to be brought about, certain conditions must be fulfilled. First, there must be a new and greater hazard of faith. Certainly we must be honest in thought and utterance, and not claim objective certainty where we have only subjective assurance. But let us avow that assurance where it exists; and let

us seek to extend it by resolute experimentation with those parts of the Christian tradition of which as yet we may lack assurance.....

Secondly, we must be conscientious in our witness. May I suggest that the resident Fellow of a College who, being a professed Christian, is not frequent and regular in attendance at the daily service in his College chapel, is a fraudulent trustee for the treasure committed to him in his own faith? It makes a great difference to the boys and girls who come up from school whether or not they find the senior members of their College habitually joining together in the College worship. Upon this may largely turn the question whether or not the College is in appearance and effect a Christian College.

Thirdly, and as a prior condition without which these two can scarcely be made actual, Christian members of the University must be very sure that their allegiance to Christ comes before every other loyalty. The member of a College, senior or junior, must not think of himself, or lead others to think of him, as first and foremost a member of the College who happens, privately and incidentally, to be a Christian, but must think of himself, and by his conversation and conduct lead others to think of him, as first and foremost a Christian whose sphere of active discipleship is the College of which he is a member... ..We shall need the impact of a real body of believers

upon the thought and work of the University if we are to recover for the Gospel in the new conditions and in this more Christian mode of pervasive influence, its former predominance and authority."

I make no apology for the length of this quotation for it puts, better than I can do, the thoughts that are in my mind. A greater hazard of faith, more conscientious witness, more faithful allegiance to Christ—these are the essential conditions. How far are we, as a staff, showing those conditions in our lives and work? In the past two months I have had several tributes to our old students in England. The Chaplain of a Cambridge College wrote to ask me how we taught Christianity at Achimota for our old students seem to have it in a "particularly attractive form." I answered that we did not exactly teach it at all, that it was partly due to our tradition of religious freedom, and partly to the Staff. But those students left here at least two years ago, and they had grown up here in past years. Their characters represent in part the gift of the Staff to Achimota in earlier days. Are we sure that we are giving the same gift to our students today?

To that question time and our own consciences alone can give the answer. We can—and should—thank God for what He has wrought in this place through us; we must pray that in the new era that lies ahead we all may not fall short of our responsibility.

This may be the last time that I shall speak to you at a Staff Service, and as I look back on what I have learnt here, there is one thing that I must emphasise as my last message to you. It is that on the quality of our personal lives and the strength of our Christian witness depends the very life of Achimota. We may improve our teaching, learn and adapt new techniques; we may make our equipment more generous and our administration more efficient. But it will all be worth nothing if we, as a staff, cannot make it our chief purpose to love God, to follow Christ, and by the power of the Spirit to lead our students to the knowledge and love of God in which alone they can find their purpose and fulfilment.

The quality of our personal lives and the strength of our witness—on what do these depend? Ultimately, I believe, on prayer and worship. Do we give enough time—make enough time—to our own private prayers and study of the Bible? It is through that that our spiritual lives are built up. “Our life has no foundation if it is not spiritual purpose that has been taught by our communion with God in prayer.” And let us remember what prayer really means. As Dr. Temple put it: “It is not that conduct is supremely important and prayer may help it, but it is that prayer is supremely important and conduct tests it.”

And what of our worship? Are we to be judged by our attendance at Morning Prayers and Sunday Services? Not judged perhaps, but certainly **tested**.

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And what of our worship? Are we to be judged by our attendance at Morning Prayers and Sunday Services? Not judged perhaps, but certainly **tested**.

Public worship is part of our sharing in the communion and fellowship of the Church Militant ; it welds us together and makes us one, and few things are more important for a Staff than its unity which is a large part of our corporate witness. Do you remember our Lord's words? "That they all be one ; as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us ; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me."

I believe that God has a plan for this place and that we have been called to high responsibilities as members of the staff. May we all be so defended by God that we may continue His for ever and daily increase in His Holy Spirit more and more ! May we never fail to show forth in our lives the fruits of His grace ! May we never forget to preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves be the servants of our students for Jesus' sake !

