

## Westminster Abbey Centenary of Lady Margaret School 17-x-2017

1917 - the year of the school's foundation. The slaughter continued on the Western Front and London experienced its first day-light bombing raids. Bread rationing was introduced and in a glimpse of the shape of things to come, Ernest Rutherford observed a nuclear reaction, identifying and naming the proton.

In this, the worst of times, Enid Moberly-Bell was determined to do the best of things. She founded a school on Parson's Green.

Schools are places where we seek to go beyond the present and incubate a better future.

Schools are places where we prepare to go beyond the conventional vision of today. Who knows whether out of the ranks of those in the Abbey today, those who scored such a success in Tomorrow's Engineer's Lego Robotics Competition, may emerge someone who will transform our understanding of the world.

From the very beginning the school has had proper academic ambition symbolised by the choice of Lady Margaret Beaufort as your patron. Erasmus in his inscription on her tomb in this Abbey Church records that as mother of Henry VII she

used her wealth and position to promote learning in various ways including opening a grammar school, establishing two professorships in divinity at Oxford and Cambridge where she also founded two colleges, Christ's and St John's.

Over the past hundred years Lady Margaret School has lived up to the vision of its founders and is today an outstanding academy with a mathematics and computing speciality.

I note however that you are also a specialist centre for music. Part of the challenge we face a hundred years on is the dominance of a way of thinking that is entirely number based and divorced from other legitimate ways of arriving at truth. Music transcends the exclusive number-based approach to truth in its union of numbers and harmony.

Again and again in the history of this school you have been confronted by men from central offices with a number based approach to the re-organisation of the educational system. They have analysed population projections and sought to achieve efficiencies by mergers and more rational use of buildings. Hats off to successive governing bodies for their resistance to anything that would dilute the ethos and damage the organic growth of Lady Margaret's school!

This is a day for celebrating the friends and supporters of Lady Margaret over the years beginning with the great Enid Moberly-Bell and her friend Anne Lupton. I think also of successive Bishops of Kensington including my friend Bishop Graham, who took on the controversial and dangerous task of judging the Bake-off competition in your recent hundredth birthday party and I also salute our Royal Patron for her sustained support and friendship since opening the new school buildings in 1965. Most of all I thank God for the contribution of successive members of staff and pupils, for whom Miriam, Claire and Harriet have spoken most eloquently.

This is a school for all abilities where young women can acquire the skills necessary for an impressive c.v. and a successful career. It is a competitive world. It is not ignoble to want to build, create, produce and discover things.

But to be balanced and rounded people we must have the ambition not only to do good but to be good. The skills help land you the job; your character is what people talk about at the end of your life when how you did in GCSE design and technology is of very little interest. Any school worthy of the name has to be serious about both aspects of education, skills and character.

The logic that is proper to the realm of skills is found in economics. “Effort leads to reward. Pursue self-interest. Maximise your utility. Impress the world.” But there is also a moral logic proper to the realm of character. “As you give you find that you receive. As you liberate yourself from addictions you discover true freedom.” As you develop wisdom you see that success can lead to arrogance and a sense of entitlement which is the seedbed of corruption. You must be able to use failure to develop humility and discover that in order to find yourself, you have to lose yourself. “Live in harmony with one another, do not be haughty but associate with the lowly.”

Our society is dominated by technology which has opened up new possibilities but we need to re-discover our heart. If we want to avoid moving into and ice age of humanity we must give more weight to reasons of the heart.

People have been working to develop a computer that can think and there are signs that it can be done. But no one has suggested developing a computer that can love.

But the fulfilment we enjoy or the misery we suffer here on earth does not depend on what we know or do not know but rather on whether we love and on whether we are loved.

It is not difficult to see why we are so keen to widen our knowledge and why we are so little concerned to increase our capacity to love – Knowledge translates directly into power; Love translates into service.

We are commanded to go beyond ourselves to find the centre of our lives beyond the ego, in God the beyond all and in our neighbour, the beyond self. And the mystery is that the more we go beyond ourselves the more we find ourselves and our true spiritual beauty is revealed.

“Of the making of many books there is no end; much study is a weariness of the flesh” but the way of Jesus Christ, the human face of God who so loved the world that he was generous and gave himself to us in his Son on the cross - that is the way to life in all its fullness.

You have always been determined to maintain your heritage as a church school, offering not a restricted education but a broader and more humane experience. The students’ decision to support SACCA in its works with vulnerable young people in Rwanda reflects the truth that you cannot be a follower of Jesus Christ without being generous and concerned for others.

We do not face a situation as dire as 1917 but as it said in our first lesson, “the idols are legion that many run after”. There is greed and short termism; a poverty in our international vision. There is a lack of understanding that the project of growth without limit with no end in view except “more and more” is imperilling our planet. This school, as it has always been, should be a place where a better future is being incubated.

So you have a goodly heritage indeed but I shall end with the forward looking words of Enid Moberly-Bell herself at the conclusion of her school history. “There is another thing about heritage. You receive it and hand it on. Today the school is entrusted to us, it is a living growing thing. It will become what we make it. When the day comes for us to hand it on may we have deserved the blessing pronounced on the good and faithful servants who have increased the talent entrusted to them.” For the past hundred years of Lady Margaret School – thanks. For the future – yes.