



Senate of Serampore College

Founded by Carey, Marshman and Ward 1818
Incorporated by Royal Charter, 1827 and
Bengal Act IV of 1918 as modified
up to 1997 by the Govt. of
West Bengal

CONVOCATION ADDRESS OF

HIS EXCELLENCY SHRI M. M. JACOB, GOVERNOR OF MEGHALA

AT THE ANNUAL CONVOCATION OF THE SERAMPORE COLLEGE

HELD ON THE 10TH FEBRUARY, 2007 AT STUDENT'S FIELD, JAI AW, SHILLONG

I am thankful to the President of the Council of Serampore College, Dr. K. Rajarathanam, President of Senate Rev. Dr. John Sadananda and John Roberts Theological Seminary in Shillong for inviting me for the convocation of Serampore College. I consider it a privilege and honour to make this convocation address. This convocation is also very distinct that you have decided to confer Degree of Doctor of Divinity to eminent public figures whose services to the nation, community and the Church in India are outstanding, besides degrees and recognition to the students.

Everyone recognizes the contribution of this College to the cause of education in this country. It may not be out of place to say that Christian Missionaries and Educators of Serampore contributed largely to the introduction of modern elements of liberty, rationalism and democracy in the educational system in our country. Above all, education was made accessible to everyone without any barrier of caste, colour, religion and region.

I take this opportunity to pay my homage and respects to Dr. William Carey, the first President and his associates who continued throughout the rest of their lives, to minister to the needs of their brethren in Bengal and beyond, and to share with them their skill and knowledge, and above all, their Christian faith.

An educational institution of this kind becomes more relevant now due to its special capacity to combine intellectual pursuits with a spiritual dimension. In the twenty-first century, we cannot afford to be thinking of an ascetic or escapist culture, which is totally cut off from the mainstream social order ignoring the present world realities. We cannot simply preach religion and sermonize in the old fashion because the world has developed so much and the thinking and questioning capacity of its people as at its maximum due to the acceptance of democratic and egalitarian ideas.

Our country has the honour and distinction of an Asian Country adopting a path of liberal democracy in 1950 by the enactment of Indian constitution based on liberty, democracy social justice, equality, fraternity and secularism. In 1900, no country had universal adult franchise. All countries excluded significant groups from the right to vote, notably women and minorities. In 2000, the majority of the world's countries have universal adult suffrage and multi party electoral systems. During 1974-79 multi party electoral systems were introduced in 113 countries. Democratization has travelled from region to region.

India is one of the fortunate nations where the democratic institutions are functioning such as an elected Parliament and State legislatures, independent judiciary, independent Election Commission, Controller of Auditor General, Human Rights Commission, Guaranteed Fundamental Rights including Freedom of Religion and a free Press.

India is a sub-continent where most of the religions and faith flourish side by side. Our people by and large are spiritual though they may be the followers of various faiths and religions. On this occasion, we should remember Jesus Christ, about his mission in this world and what message he has for our modern world, especially for India. Churches and religious congregations have to face certain realities. The values that Lord Jesus Christ has taught the world are important for the wholeness of every society.

Asia has been and still is the greatest testing ground for the Gospel proclamation where the Gospel encounters millennia-old philosophies, theologies, cultures and religions. It is this continent that has consistently sought after salvation, liberation and wholeness in the absolute; because it is here the major religions of the world are born, finding expression in the spiritual dimensions of human life. One should not forget that Christianity, though a religion, the birth of Jesus and teachings originated in Asia.

The social and economic order had to readjust when radical changes are brought about. We should bear in mind that our society needs to be reviewed and nourished in its values so that we have the spiritual strength to turn material progress into a blessing rather than a curse. Destiny of a nation depends on the character of its people. Message of Jesus is the message love and compassion. Communal hatred finds no place in spiritualism as love, brotherhood, equality and peace are the essence of true religions.

Gandhiji's message of non-violence and peace has more relevance today to all citizens of this land, and these messages are a reflection of the Gospel's words. Christ's message is meant to remove and eliminate all the evils from the life of human kind. He wanted to make every human being feel that he or she is a child of God.

You are the messengers of peace and you have a great and noble task to perform. You are fortunate to have undergone theological studies in your institution. You must always remember this nation is one which shows utmost appreciation to religions that stand and work for human personality. In this context, I may remind you the words of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the philosopher President of India, comparing Eastern and Western approaches and attitudes to religion.

I quote.... "The characteristics of intuitive realization, non-dogmatic toleration, as well as insistence and universalist ethics mark Jesus out as a typical eastern seer. Jesus religion was one of love, sympathy, tolerance and inwardness" ...unquote. These words will certainly strengthen you in your noble work to spread the message of Jesus based on love and compassion to fellow humans.

The Indian Constitution has assured the world in categorical terms, that India respects all faiths and religions. One of the early writers, Max Webber in his treatise on 'Freedom of Religions in India' wrote, I quote..."Religions and philosophical thinkers were able to enjoy perfect freedom for a long period. The freedom of thought in ancient India was as considerable as to find no parallel in the west, before most recent age. A true reflection of Indian mind can easily be found when great scholars and thinkers, saints and statesman

appreciate the religious teachings of all great religions”...unquote. I mention this today, because there are groups and individuals without proper understanding of Indian spirituality, preaching religious intolerance.

Christians in India have learned to live with a deep respect for the religious identity of others without compromising their own mission, and this is exactly what we need today. What is called for today is not to reject religion altogether for fear of fundamentalist fanaticism, but to live the reconciling, healing and peace making potential of the religious traditions. Thus the churches all over the world and the Indian church in particular should make their presence felt in challenging all kinds of arbitrary indifference or intolerances and in witnessing the universal love of God in Christ through the ministry of humility and servitude.

We live in a time of religious extremism, where religion is being misused for political ends. This is a great danger for the integrity and reputation of any religion. I hope that the theological education will bring a more abundant life to the students by the development of character in the true sense of religion. I am sure the education must have combined ‘learning and piety’ enlightenment of the mind with the ‘salvation of the soul’ and educated the students to live up to the faith and high ideals which was the main aim of the founders of the College. The students should broaden their outlook, quicken their conscience and establish the true and right relationship between man and God and between man and his neighbour, and to carry the message of the Bible “Love the neighbour”.

On this happy occasion, I offer my warm felicitations to the young people who have received their degrees and distinctions today. This is a proud day for you, a day of joy and satisfaction after a period of hard work and much sacrifice. I hope that you would regard yourselves in later life in a manner worthy of a greater higher educational institution like this one. As the future preachers you have a great role and responsibility in moulding the character of the youth. Your credibility with the masses is much higher than any of us. The fast changing world will be difficult and challenging. However, with God’s grace and help you can overcome any problems by constant prayer.

I wish the Annual Convocation and the Serampore College all success in its future endeavours in the spirit of Christian charity and fellowship.

JAI HIND # THANK YOU # KHUBLEI # MITHELA