

FUNERAL ADDRESS FRIDAY 9TH JANUARY 2014

TREVOR FOULKES, 1931 -2014

The composition of this Service tells us a great deal about the person whose passing we have come to mourn today. From its spare and under-stated, yet carefully selected words, can be understood many of the essential hallmarks and qualities of the man. Trevor Foulkes was a person driven by clear beliefs, strong passions and lively enthusiasms. He sought to explore and understand the great issues; his true delight was to share the things he had learnt and believed with others, particularly - during his very distinguished teaching career – with his students. If he had been a painting, Trevor would have been composed of broad lines and interesting shapes guiding the scene clearly; there would be strong, forceful colours standing out too. And one of those would have been red!

Thus we see in this Service sheet many of his guiding principles and characteristics clearly illustrated. His respect for endeavour, for example, is shown in our first hymn: “To be a Pilgrim”. His constancy, his hard work – “he’ll labour night and day” describes very well his approach to any job which he undertook. And his irrepressible enthusiasm and determination is evident too: “Hobgoblin nor foul fiend can daunt his spirit”.

And also, in our reading and the choir’s piece (so beautifully sung) we see much of the essential Trevor. Love was central to his life. He had a huge capacity to offer love to others. If his intimidating voice and a certain formality, so much a product of his generation, could at times give a contrary impression, he was actually one of the warmest and most passionate of people. He was not to be granted any biological children and yet his approach throughout his life, but particularly during his time as Headmaster of Caistor Grammar School, was to treat all his students as if they were his own children. “Cavitas et amor” – “charity and love” sum up his philosophy of life as well as

any two words can. And his was a love that “always perseveres” and “always hopes”. He was certainly a person who “rejoices in the truth” and its pursuit.

He could not in his valiant, uncompromising and intellectually challenging lifelong journey find it within himself to believe fully in the Christmas message, yet few have embodied its virtues and disciplines in their lives more than Trevor did in his. As his close friend, Christopher, wrote: “Trevor, you have been a wonderful friend. I don’t think I know anyone with a higher degree of excellence in the difficult combination of Christian Love and Sensible Doubts about the Christian faith. You are certainly one who has “gone and done likewise” as commanded by Jesus himself. Bless you a thousand times.”

And his love for others, demonstrated so well by countless acts of unrecognised – but well remembered – kindness, has been returned to

him, ten-fold, one hundred fold. I can think of two particular occasions in his life when this has been so. At the time of his retirement in December 1995, in the immediate aftermath of our glorious first “outstanding” Ofsted inspection, Trevor was surrounded by a sea of appreciation – staff, students, parents and governors were united in recognising the magnificence of his service to our School. Those exceptional balmy days in late December were “love on stilts” and to be just a small part of it was a great joy. More recently, as Trevor’s life was drawing to a close, the word went round that it was so. Suddenly the wonders of modern technology produced a steady flow and then a rushing torrent, a deluge, of messages of goodwill and appreciation. And you can read an anonymised summary of these “parcels of love” at the back of our Service sheet to gain a richer, deeper understanding of how much he meant to so many.

Trevor had a very distinguished career as a teacher, built upon solid foundations: Head Boy of his school, Brentwood, a distinguished student of Mods and Greats at Brasenose College, Oxford and

carrying out National Service. He then made a tremendous hit in his first school, Lancing College, in 7 eventful years.

It was said of him there upon his leaving that “no young master has made a greater impact on our school”. The final paragraph in tribute to him in the School magazine read as follows: “We shall remember him for what he has done, but perhaps we shall remember him more for what he is. He exemplifies the great Roman virtues of gravitas and pietas. He is serious in the best sense of the word but has endeared himself to his colleagues and pupils by his ability to laugh at himself, by his modesty and utter freedom from affectation. If we have wanted to understand what Christianity in action means, we have known where to look.”

He worked at the Alliance High School in Kikuyu, Kenya for two years, where his characteristic generosity meant that he purchased a minibus for the students so that they could go on expeditions. He

then returned to the UK to be Head of English at Watford Grammar School, where he became the proud possessor of a customised Lotus Elan. Its colour was red! At about this time, he met and married a fellow English teacher, Estelle.

The 1970s were a time of upheaval and change in education and Trevor was much interested in developing the concept of the Sixth Form. He researched this for a year at Oxford, became Head of Sixth Form at Southgate Comprehensive, North London, and then moved on to be Vice Principal of Yale Sixth Form College, at Wrexham. All of which served as a very good preparation for his dream and career-defining job as Head of Caistor Grammar School.

Here, over 14 and a half memorable years, he stamped his mark on our School, bringing new ideas and new approaches and encouraging all manner of innovation. There were visits from many distinguished people, such as David Jenkins, the then recently retired Bishop of

Durham. His message to the School of promoting conviviality in our community and that we should all “strive to be our best selves” couldn’t have chimed better with Trevor’s own outlook. There was also occasional eccentricity. Not many schools have a rule which states “Playing pooh sticks in the stream is only allowed on Mondays”. And there was also reform! Not for nothing did he acquire the nickname “Red Trev”. Indeed, it is fortunate that the school colours were red and black when he arrived at CGS, because had they been green and grey, say, I suspect he would have wanted to change them. And what a storm of protest that would have produced!

Over the period of his Headmastership, our School grew and prospered. With the support of a dynamic group of governors, the School gained a new status as a Grant Maintained School. As such, we gained a Mission Statement too (written by Trevor and Deputy, Judy Howitt, on a train journey). It read (and still reads): “We seek to use lively minds, to work hard, to develop all our talents, and to grow through sharing.” How well that sums up Trevor’s own

approach to life! How well too it still sums up our School, today, demonstrating very effectively his on-going influence and enduring legacy to our School.

The most powerful witness to the contribution that Trevor made in his time at CGS is however, provided by the words of his ex-students.

They speak of his kindness, his caring, his tolerance, his sense of fair play, his ability to make every individual feel valued and recognised, and his strong desire to encourage each person to become an individual. Sometimes his kindness would lead to the anonymous paying for a trip for a needy student, or visits to offer sympathy to someone's house after a family bereavement. In one case it led to the virtual adoption of a student in need – Sarah, who has read to us just now. She wrote many years ago “He believed in me and believed that I should be given the chance of a good education. Trevor has gone out of his way to help me and has even opened his home to me.

However, I do not think that I am special, for if tomorrow Trevor were to meet a person with a similar background to mine, I believe

that he would do the same thing again and help them. That is just the kind of person he is”.

Mention must also be made of Trevor’s pursuit of academic excellence, both personally and as a teacher. At the time of his retirement, one student wrote as follows: “As a teacher he has the power to make children think and encourages them to find their beliefs and to defend them logically.” By setting the highest standards personally, Trevor encouraged all whom he worked with to ensure that Caistor Grammar School was successful in stretching its very able students. At the time of his retirement, Ofsted had graded Caistor Grammar School as “outstanding” and had coined a phrase for its students “pupils who relish their learning”. In those early years of League Tables, the School was already established as a Beacon in our region and nationally. In his final summer of examination results, CGS was ranked 7th in the country. Our ongoing and sustained academic success over the last 19 years owes much to Trevor’s drive for rigour and true scholarship.

We will all have our own special memories of Trevor and his kindness to us, of how he has influenced our lives individually for the better. One abiding memory for me of Trevor, was of him standing at the top of our terraces, deep in thought, with a look of great satisfaction as he surveyed the scene of our busy School rushing about its business all around him. “How wonderful, how wonderful” he could be heard to say, quietly to himself, as if he were not quite believing what he was a part of, what he had helped to create. CGS was a small and modest sort of heaven, but it was heaven enough for Trevor.

Thank you, Trevor, for a life so well lived in the service of others. Your love for others will live on and continue to multiply in the love which so many hold for you.