

"Insight"

Bradley offers Key to Success

The INSIGHT column in this issue reproduces an address delivered to the 1977 graduating class at Cardinal Gibbons High School, Raleigh, N. C., by Father John P. Bradley, President of the College.

I have given my address to the Class of '77 the title: "What's it all about, Alfie?" The modern songs don't hold their popularity very long, but I do hope the Class of '77 has at least heard of this song which was popular a few years ago. Anyhow, let me quote a few lines of it:

"What's it all about, Alfie?"

Is it just for the moment we live?

What's it all about when you sort it out, Alfie?

Are we meant to take more than we give?

Or are we meant to be kind?

"And if only fools are kind, Alfie,

Then I guess it's wise to be cruel.

And if life belongs only to the strong, Alfie,

What will you lend on the old Golden Rule?

As sure as I believe there's a heaven above, Alfie,
I know there's something much more ..."

That's my question for you graduates today: What's it all about, Alfie, Mary, John, Jane, or whatever your Christian names are. That is the ultimate, the most important question for each and every human being. And I have no hesitation whatsoever in telling you, now that you are about to set out on the next important part of your life, that you will be a success or a failure according to the way in which you handle this all-important question. What's it all about? What is the meaning of my life? Why am I here? This has always been a difficult question for human beings: all the great philosophers throughout the ages have asked it. All the great religions -- Judaism, Islam, Christianity -- offer their own particular answers to it. The one sure thing wise men in every age have known is this: that unless we do answer it in a way, that gives meaning to our lives, nothing but failure awaits us. I chose to speak to you about it today because I know, through my experience of dealing with college students, that because of the times we live in today, young people are more than normally confused about the Christian answer to what life is all about, and need much assistance and understanding if they are to avoid settling for the pagan answers so common nowadays that try to tell us life is either absurd or should be lived in a ceaseless search for pleasure.

What's it all about? Let me help you toward the true answer by telling you a true story. Shortly after World War II, when I was a student at Oxford University, a young man came to see me. He told me his name was Cheshire and that he wanted to discuss with me some plans he had for his future. His story was a remarkable one. When he was your age, he could find no meaning in his life and drifted aimlessly from one interest to another. Then, for lack of knowing what else to do, he joined the Royal Air Force. Soon after this Britain was at war with Germany and during the war years Cheshire

became a famous bomber pilot and rose to the high rank of Group Captain. Yet, he was as aimless as ever and, he said, still an irresponsible human being. He was chosen to be an RAF observer in the United States plane that dropped the first atomic bomb on Japan. As he watched that bomb drop and thought of the terrible destruction it must cause, he was shocked into really facing seriously for the first time in his life the question: What is it all about?

The war ended soon after this, and Group Captain Cheshire left the RAF. He told me he sought out a Catholic priest -- he had then no religion -- asking for help in finding an answer to this all-important question. He got his help and eventually became a Catholic. More important, he understood well and took seriously his new-found Christianity, and thus equipped with the Christian answer to "What's it all about?" he planned to use his life in a wonderful way. He told me he had been able as a high-ranking officer to save a good deal of money during the war years and that he intended to use this to establish a home for poor, terminally ill people who had no one to care for them. He would take care of them, feed them, wash them, and bury them. I told him that this was a wonderful plan, but I wondered when Cheshire left my room that day if he would have the enormous dedication needed to carry it out. I have never seen Group Captain Cheshire from that day to this.

Some twenty years later, however, I happened to be in London, and one day when I was asked to give a donation to the Cheshire Homes, I was struck by the name and asked for information. I was told that a Group Captain Cheshire, many years ago, had founded a home for poor, terminally ill people, and since that time he had opened many similar homes, not only in Britain, but also in other parts of the British Commonwealth. I'm sure I must have murmured "Thank God" to myself when I heard this, and ever since I have often thought of the fact that the Christian answer to the question "What's it all about?" had given Group Captain Cheshire the meaning in his life that provided him with the dedication and endurance to do the wonderful things he has done since that time, and, as far as I know, continues to do today.

I have told you graduates this true story to show you the power and strength of the Christian answer to the ultimate question. The answers you, in today's culture, are exposed to are for the most part pagan answers, wrong answers, answers that try to tell you to live for the moment, that this life is all there is, answers that you must avoid if your lives are to have the deep meaning you need. Unfortunately, too many today who regard themselves as Christians really do not know, or perhaps do not have the strong faith to believe, the Christian answer that Group Captain Cheshire found. Let me summarize this Christian answer briefly for you this way. You know that the word Gospel means Good News. Why is it called Good News? Because it gives you Jesus Christ's answer to the questions "What's it all about? What am I? Who am I?" It's Good News because it tells us that each one of us is of great personal worth, each of us is wonderfully important, primarily because through

Jesus Christ each of us has a spark of divinity, and, having this, we have a marvelous destiny, a destiny that carries us beyond this life on earth. This life here is not all there is. We are destined to an eternity of happiness if we follow His teachings. This is what it is all about, Alfie. This is the good news, the best news any human being can receive; this is the good news that can give you and me vibrant meaning in every moment of our lives here on earth, and thus furnish us with the motivation and purpose we need if we are to be good human beings.

Dear graduates, I have had the opportunity of obtaining many years of education at some prestigious universities, I have worked as a priest in parishes in Britain and in the United States, I have had various other assignments offering different kinds of experience, and, working as a teacher and administrator in college, have associated for many years with young people like yourselves. Drawing from all this experience, I want to tell you what I told my niece two weeks ago when she graduated at Belmont Abbey College. I told her that I can give her no better advice than this: in my life I have found that after all is said and done, what really counts is my faith in Jesus Christ and the answer His teachings, handed down to us by the Church, give us to the question "What is life all about?". No matter what lies ahead of you in life, if you have this, then you have all that matters. Without this, despite whatever kind of other success you may achieve, you really have nothing. This is the best advice I can give to you graduates today. In saying this to you, I am simply handing on to you the advice of the brilliant Saint Augustine, who said many years ago: "My heart was made for Thee, O God, and it is restless till it rests in Thee." The wisdom of this is underlined by the experience of those who imagine that the answer to the meaning of life can be found in material things. I call your attention to the unhappy life and the abject misery of the last months on earth of that pathetic, poor billionaire, Howard Hughes.

A final word. Whether or not you can really appreciate this advice at this point in your lives, you should today give a very special word of thanks to your parents and teachers. Through them you were able to attend Cardinal Gibbons High School and be-exposed to the kind of education that stresses the importance of our Blessed Lord's teachings. Thanks to them, in other words, you have had the opportunity of learning not simply the usual academic subjects, but also the answer that I, and millions like me for some two thousand years, have found to be the only thing in life that really counts: the answer that puts glorious meaning into a human being's life. So, what's it all about, graduates of the Class of '77? That's what it's all about, and I pray that as you move on now to the next stage in your lives, you will find, whatever success or failure is your lot, that happiness which can only come from loving and serving God, and with His help, loving and serving your fellowman.



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