

Dr YL So's Speech Delivered at the Foundation Dinner 2013

Dear Fathers, Guests, Teachers, Colleagues, Parents and Past Students:

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to this meaningful gathering. Tonight we

- Commemorate the founding of our School in 1919
- Celebrate its 94th anniversary, and
- Thank the many people, including every one of you here tonight, who have contributed one way or another to its achievements.

Recently, I received an old book from a gentleman called Mr Joseph Ma from London. He bought it in an old book store in the UK, read it, and thought it would be good to donate it to WYHK. This book, called "*Jesuits Under Fire in the Siege of Hong Kong, 1941*" was published in 1944 and it was written by Fr Ryan. I skimmed through it and found that many names and places familiar to the Wah Yan community featured prominently in the book. They include Fr Daly, Fr Kelly, Fr Gallagher, Fr Bourke, Mr Corbally, Wah Yan College, HK and Kln, Ricci Hall, St Joseph's College, etc. Here I would like to read a passage towards the end of the book. Remember this book was published in 1944 so the war had not ended:

"Our material losses were heavy. The entire content of Loyola and Wah Yan College, Kowloon, were gone. Ricci Hall was badly damaged, and a great deal that was of value in it... was gone. Our work would suffer in consequence.

But our work would suffer through more than material loss... The work with which we were most concerned was work for youth, done through educational means, and now all our educational activities... had to cease... The Wah Yan that was flourishing for many years, and the new Wah Yan that was beginning, had their doors closed. Our past students... were scattered. The thousand pupils who had been with us, absorbing a culture blended of much that was best in the East and the West, and building up a tradition which was growing into something worth preserving – these too were dispersed... They were the worst part of the blow that the war dealt to us. Yet again, the consciousness of Divine Providence working in our regard had been borne in us so strongly that we felt quite confident that it would still protect and direct us." (pp.173-174)

Now, looking back with hindsight, we know Fr Ryan was correct about Divine Providence. The Jesuit's educational work (and the "tradition" that Fr Ryan was so concerned about in the quoted paragraph) survived and thrived after the war.

As I reflected on the history of Hong Kong and the world at large in contrast to the history of our dear school, I could not help but marveled at the persistence of the Jesuit ideal in educating the young and the resilience of Wah Yan. Look, so much has changed around us. Look at China: from the warlords in the early 20th Century, through KMT and then Communist rule, it has undergone tremendous transformations in the last 94 years. And look at the Japanese: they were here and gone, twice, first militarily, then economically. (Still remember the book “Japan as No.1” in the 1980s?)

Yes, so much has changed in the last 94 years. Yet the two Wah Yans have endured through all these years, continuing with conviction our unique Jesuit approach, educating boys into young gentlemen who would go on to contribute and even to shape the world around us. How can we not be deeply touched and grateful?

In the end, it comes down to people (not “materials” the loss of which Fr Ryan lamented in the paragraph quoted), for such a remarkable achievement would not be possible without the efforts of all who have gone before us: the Fathers, teachers, office staff, janitors, parents and students of WY. Neither would it be possible without each and every one of you here tonight, who have given so much in carrying on this Jesuit mission.

While we speak of history in which years, decades, even centuries fly by as if in an instant, the actual educational work that you are engaged in has to be diligently and faithfully undertaken on a daily basis. [and by “educational work”, I mean work by both teachers as well as by non-teachers who’ve made the teachers’ work possible – janitors, office staff, construction workers, coaches, music tutors, donors, past students volunteering for the school, etc.] Yes, it comes down to your work carried out day in day out. And while we speak of history as if we know full well how one thing leads to another, we never have that kind of certainty about how each child would develop as a consequence of our educational work. But ever persistent, ever hopeful, and ever dedicated, you have carried on this meaningful work nonetheless.

So may I take this opportunity to once again express my deep gratitude to you all for believing in the educational ideal of Wah Yan and the Jesuits, and furthermore, believing in yourself, that guided by this ideal, you can make a positive difference to the life of each young gentleman that goes through Wah Yan!

Let me end with the last few words in the book by Fr Ryan:

“The most remarkable feature of all our experiences during the war in Hong Kong was the way in which Providence made this contact; and it was with feelings of nothing less than awe that we often saw ourselves made the medium by which it was brought about. Grace was poured out abundantly in the time of Hong Kong’s greatest trial. It was

lavished in ways we could never have anticipated. It makes us hopeful of the future and very ready to trust in the guidance of Divine Providence, where it may lead.” (p.175)

Back to 2013, we live in less dramatic times, but the challenges we are facing are no less difficult. However, with your continued hard work and dedication (to quote Fr Ryan again): “...[i]t makes us hopeful of the future and very ready to trust in the guidance of Divine Providence, where it may lead.”

Thank you.

YL So, 2nd December, 2013