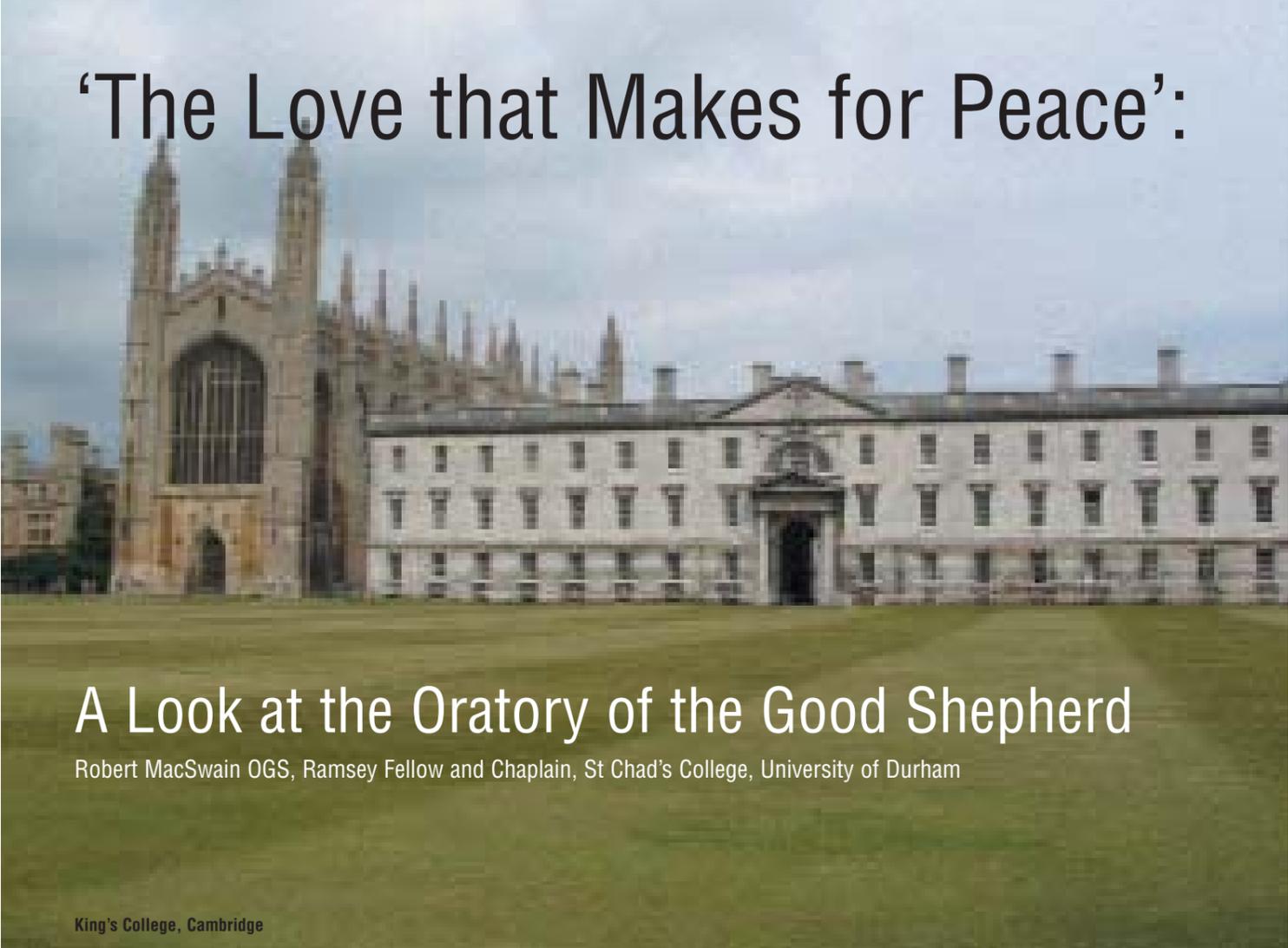


‘The Love that Makes for Peace’:



A Look at the Oratory of the Good Shepherd

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Most Anglicans know that in the 1530s King Henry VIII dissolved all the monastic orders in England. For three centuries the Church of England was thus without any witnesses to the traditional 'religious life' of vowed poverty, chastity, and obedience. But fewer Anglicans may be aware that, in the wake of the Oxford Movement's Catholic revival of the 19th century, numerous orders were established to restore this traditional religious life to the Church of England. For the first time since Henry's dissolution of the monasteries, Anglican monks and nuns and friars and sisters began to enrich the Church with their distinctive gifts. Some of these orders were founded along existing Roman Catholic lines—such as the Benedictines and Franciscans—whereas others were distinctively Anglican in origin—such as the Community of the Resurrection or the Sisters of the Love of God.

As the religious life re-entered the Church of England, it took various forms and modes. Some priests, inspired by the ideals of the Oxford Movement and feeling called to a disciplined life of prayer, study, and celibacy, began to found societies which—while not strict monastic orders—attempted to bring

elements of the religious life into their ministry out 'in the world'. One of those societies was the Oratory of the Good Shepherd. It is now one of the largest such societies in the Anglican Communion.

The Oratory was founded in the University of Cambridge in 1913 by three chaplain-dons: Eric Milner-White of King's College, John How of Trinity College, and Edward Wynn of Jesus College. Their idea was to share a rule of life, to meet daily for Eucharistic fellowship, and to commit themselves to prayer, study, and celibacy—but to remain resident in their own colleges. They did not surrender all their worldly possessions and live under the same roof, or adopt a monastic habit, but they sought to live as simply as possible within the urbane and relatively comfortable world of the university. And while monastic orders gradually move their members toward making permanent life vows, the Oratory has rather emphasised an annual commitment which is then renewed (or not) after individual and communal discernment.

Aside from devotion to Christ the Good Shepherd as their pastoral ideal, what united these three men more than

anything else was a common vision of Christian discipleship. This vision was expressed in 'The Seven Notes of the Oratory,' which are Fellowship, Liberty, Stewardship, Labour of the Mind, the Love that Makes for Peace, Discipline, and Joy. Each Note consists of a paragraph which spells out the significance of the specific term or phrase for the Oratory's existence.

For example, Note 5, 'the Love that Makes for Peace', reads:

The foundation of Oratory life will be that mutual love which has always been the essence of community life in the Catholic Church. The unflinching love of its members one towards another will be increased by extending this love to all men, whether within the Church or without it. Members will have a concern for living interests and problems in Church and State, and in discussing opinions which differ from their own will avoid harsh judgments. Brethren must try to understand these differing opinions, in the hope that they may help to restore the unity of all Christian people in the spirit of charity and peace. They will recognise in all men those for whom Christ died, and will treat them with the courtesy and reverence due to his great love.

Each Note is essential and only collectively do they express the Oratory's ethos. However, it may well be that this Fifth Note best articulates the significance of the Oratory's history since 1913.

That is, from its very beginning the Oratory has attracted into its fellowship both clergy and laity with widely different opinions, outlooks, personalities, abilities, and temperaments. All would, of course, share a basic commitment to Catholic or 'High Church' Anglicanism, but after that almost anything goes.

For example, Oratorians have occupied both liberal and conservative positions in theology and politics. They have disagreed strongly on many crucial issues facing the Church of England and the Anglican Communion. Ordained members have been parish priests, deans, bishops, chaplains (military, hospital, prison, school, and university), teachers, professors, and missionaries. Lay members have occupied numerous other walks of 'secular' life. From its exclusively English origin the Oratory has grown to encompass African, American, Australian, Canadian, and European members. And yet despite all these differences the Oratory remains committed to an unflinching mutual love, to the avoidance of harsh judgements, to the challenging task of understanding differences, to the restoration of Christian unity, to charity and to peace.

In making this commitment central to its very existence, the Oratory risks total failure. For to fail in 'the love that makes for peace' is to fail its *raison d'être*. If members of the Oratory cannot continue to love each other across their

differences, then this calls in question the Oratory's right to carry on as an Anglican religious society at all. But, in this respect, the Oratory is really no different than the Anglican Communion itself, or indeed any other Christian community.

All Christian communities are called to the love that makes for peace. 'I give you a new commandment: love one another; as I have loved you, so you are to love one another. If there is this love among you, then everyone will know that you are my disciples' (John 13.34-35). 'We love because he loved us first. But if someone says, "I love God," while at the same time hating his fellow-Christian, he is a liar. If he does not love a fellow-Christian whom he has seen, he is incapable of loving God whom he has not seen. We have this command from Christ: whoever loves God must love his fellow-Christian too' (1 John 4.19-21).

For the past nine years, the Superior of the Oratory (an elected position) has been the Rt Revd John Salt, Bishop of St Helena in the Province of Southern Africa. The current Superior is the Revd Canon Carlson Gerda, Canon to the Primate and Presiding Bishop of ECUSA.

For further information on the Oratory, see the resources at www.ogs.net

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The Oratory is no different from any other Christian community, but has simply chosen to explicitly incorporate this basic requirement into its self-understanding. By so doing, it hopes that its collective life will witness to the patient, searching, tireless love of Jesus the Good Shepherd.

Aside from the three founders, some significant names associated with the Oratory of the Good Shepherd have been: **Wilfred Knox** (d. 1950): Chaplain of Pembroke College, Cambridge; author of several works of New Testament scholarship—including *St Paul and the Church of the Gentiles*—and *Meditation and Mental Prayer*. One of the four remarkable Knox brothers, the youngest of whom was Ronald Knox.

Alec Vidler (d. 1991): Dean of King's College, Cambridge; Warden of St Deiniol's Library in Wales; Editor of *Theology*; author of numerous studies in church history and theology, including *The Church in an Age of Revolution and Soundings*.

Eric Mascall (d. 1993): Professor of Historical Theology at King's College, University of London; author of numerous studies in philosophical, systematic, and ecumenical theology, including *He Who Is, Christ, the Christian, and the Church*, *The Openness of Being*, and *The Recovery of Unity*.

Robert Selby Taylor (d. 1995): Archbishop of Capetown and Metropolitan of the Province of South Africa.

Victor Preller (d. 2001): Professor of Religion at Princeton University and Master of the Graduate College; author of *Divine Science and the Science of God: A Reformulation of Thomas Aquinas*



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