

Liberty

A Reflection on the Note on Liberty by Br Michael Bartlett, OGS

Brethren I suspect this to be a little bit of a hotch potch revealing a little about my upbringing and early life and describing a few experiences. From this I hope that you will be able to deduce that I consider a necessity for there to be an ordered liberty not only for me in particular and the Oratory but in and for all the world

“The Oratory will allow full scope for the development of individual talents whilst insisting on fellowship as the first note of its life. It will encourage its members to develop their personal gifts and thus to enrich the offering laid at the feet of Christ. The same liberty will be claimed for an Oratory College as for an individual”.

One is reminded of the passage of Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians. (I will not read it all)

Paul wrote, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, I would not have you ignorant.. There are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit.” You know the passage better than I. “For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, or the word of knowledge; to another faith; to another the gift of healing, to another the working of miracles or prophecy; or the discerning of Spirits; knowledge and the use of divers kinds of tongues, or the interpretation of tongues; BUT all these worketh that one and the self same Spirit, ”. I Cor 12.)

I wonder what mention of Liberty in the Bible was in the memory and the minds of Eric Milner White and John How in 1919 at St Nicholas Guildford where and when the Manual was put together and the 7 Notes written?

Psalm 119 verse 45, “I will walk at Liberty for I seek thy commandments.”

Or might it have been Isaiah Chapter 61 verse 1, quoted by Luke chapter 4 verse 18, “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim Liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” Oh how that fits in with the “aim of the Oratory,” which is, “The adoration of

God in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ and the imitation of His most Holy Life.”

Maybe it was Galations Chapter 5 verse 1, “Stand fast therefore in the Liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

So I choose, “Where the spirit is, there is liberty” 2 Cor 3 v 17.

To read the histories of the Oratory as written by George Tibberts and Henry Brandreth, and the addresses given at retreats by Michael Ramsey, George Tibbats and Wilfred Knox; to refer to the “Lists” of brethren, companions and associates, printed each year, one immediately becomes aware of the wide, varied and worthwhile Spiritual gifts which have been bestowed upon members of the “family”, by the Grace of God and which have been laid at His feet. I decline to name anyone for I know that each member present today will be calling to mind something of someone somewhere and sometime within Oratory life.

I must begin at the day +Dominic offered me the choice of subject, Fellowship or Liberty. I remember well reading the e mail for on that day, along with many others, had been a report of more people fleeing from Assyria, yet another boat sinking in the Mediterranean Sea with many lives lost, more trouble in the Yemen and the poverty with starvation in Ethiopia once more being headline news. I was immediately reminded that for probably the greater majority of the world’s population, the word LIBERTY meant little or nothing other than a desire, a wish and at best an HOPE. What is HOPE? It is not the certainty that what one wishes will come to pass but surely the conviction that whatever the result, it will make sense and be understood. Hope is therefore a fore taste of understanding. Sometimes of little interest to those in need.

My entry into the world of the Oratory began in South Africa. I first went there as a voluntary worker. All Saints East Finchley sponsored me through USPG. I was both ignorant and innocent with regard to the policy of apartheid, what it was and its meaning for the peoples of the land. I spent five years at St Mary’s hospital, KwaMagwaza before

having a motorcycle accident. Following two years convalescence in the UK I returned to assist at the Diocesan Retreat Centre, giving the warden a six months furlough.

At the age of 29 I had seen for the first time in my life what it was for people to have to carry an ID, under a "Pass Law", to be restricted in movement in their own country! To be denied entry into restaurants and bars.. and according to colour and race to stand in separate queues at banks and post offices and not to be permitted on some buses, or if so, to sit in different sections set apart for blacks or whites. To obtain employment one had to obtain permission from the Government if moving to another area. I learned about the policy of apartheid from what I witnessed not what I had read or had been told. It is something for which I have long given thanks, that I had gone to the country without any pre-conceived idea as to what I might behold.

The pass issued to black and coloured peoples in South Africa (that was the terminology of that era not mine today) did not have anything like that as in our own passports, "Her Britannic Majesty's secretary of State, requests and requires in the name of Her Majesty all those whom it may concern to allow the bearer to pass freely without let or hindrance and to afford the bearer such assistance and protection as may be necessary". Being without a pass book at any time and/or in an area not permitted the person was frequently put in prison especially if they were unable to pay the imposed fine. I soon learned that there was little if no freedom – liberty – for the majority of South Africans.

I was about to move from helping at the Zululand Diocesan Conference Centre to St James' Hospital, Mantsonyani, Lesotho in order to sort out their finances. Residing some 9,000 feet a.s.l. was going to be something of a change and a challenge. I would be living alongside sisters of the Community of The Holy Name. In a then recent issue of the SA Church newspaper, "SEEK", there had been a feature on the subject of the religious communities active within the The Church of the Province of South Africa (as she was then known).

Mention was made of the Oratory of The Good Shepherd, inviting laymen and priests to join. The person to contact was the then Venerable John Ruston I think at Bloemfontein (I might be wrong). I wrote to him and became a postulant.

It was Easter Day this year at 5 in the morning when I awoke and turned on the radio to listen to the news on BBC Overseas Broadcast. You are all aware of my frequent visits to Tunisia where I enjoy the sunshine, friends, a welcome at the Catholic Church of St Felix in Sousse, and of course the enjoyment of internal domestic flights between cities..Sfax, Gabes, Gafsa, Tabarka etc.

The headline was that some of the politicians and people in Tunisia were considering that the attempt in recent years to enjoy democracy had been a failure and that the country ought now to return to Sharia Law. Independence was given in March 1956 when a constitutional assembly was established and Habib Bourghiba became Prime Minister. The monarchy was abolished. Bourghiba took a secular socialist line. He permitted all faiths to practise in the country. In 1975 he became President for life and in spite of his efforts to raise the standard of living for all there was unrest in the late 1970s, violence flared in the late 1980s.. it all culminating in a bloodless coup in 1987 because the fundamental Islamic groups had become increasingly more influential. It appeared to me on Easter Day that the future of that country's peace hangs in the balance. I have witnessed demonstrations in recent visits.. police guarding buildings even the church on a Sunday morning. You are aware of the killings at the museum and on the bus in Tunis and on the beach at Port El Kantouri only a few yards from where I regularly walk.

Liberty? What liberty does the population of Tunisia now enjoy ? Precious little. In the same broadcast mention was made of the referendum to be held that day in Turkey, which with a tiny majority for the YES vote removed the position of Prime Minister, moved it to the Presidency and transferred much of the decision making from the people to the President.

I apologise not for having gone on so long and can hear you thinking "What is the point of this?"

The Oratory has membership around the world. Australia, South Africa, United States of America, Canada and Europe (not forgetting that Gregory and Walter of the North American Province are in Mexico and Monaco).

The history of all those lands have been littered with problems of slavery of one kind or another and a claim for Liberty.

Australia. The 20th century brought difficulties regarding the future of the Aboriginal population. The movement for Aboriginal rights grew after the second world war. The strike by them in 1946 brought a new phase in the conflict. It climaxed in 1966 when an Aboriginal in Northern Australia demanded equal pay and then a demand for land. There had been little liberty for the Aboriginal people of Australia. I remember, as maybe you do too, Bishop Ken talking about the subject and his involvement, at Chapter meetings both at Maryvale and Stagers. A number of years ago.

We move across the Indian Ocean to South Africa where I lived for ten years and have visited regularly in recent years. All are aware of the difficulties of that beautiful country past present and probably to come. The corruption at the moment is frightening. I summarise it with mention of the film, "A road to Freedom" the story of Nelson Mandela who incidentally was visited regularly by the then Archbishop of Cape Town, our Oratory member, Robert Selby Taylor. The Oratory has had involvement in the search for freedom and liberty.

We now cross the South and North Atlantic oceans to the Americas. One cannot begin without mention of the Statue of Liberty, which Carlson took me to see on my visit to him back in 2004....

In the beginning of the 18th century the movement against slavery was taken up by the Quakers and William Penn, who abolished slavery in Pennsylvania. Then in the early 1960s when civil rights were still high on the political agenda, amongst the people fighting for "liberty" was of course Martin Luther King. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 and sadly assassinated four years later. There had been many violent clashes between police and liberal protestors. There had been a

long and drawn out battle in the United States for freedom, liberty for the poor, homeless and marginalised.

For Canada, as in the USA, there had been difficulties with regard to the rights of the Indians, who in the sixties and seventies were seeking special rights and settlement of their claims. It took until 1982, with the exception of Quebec, for there to be a charter of “rights and freedoms” introduced recognising the nations “multi-cultural heritage”, affirming the existing rights of native people and the principal of equality of benefits to the country- liberty”

So we turn eastwards to the UK (not forgetting we have Peter in the Diocese in Europe).

Who am I to make mention of the history of our country! I failed the subject at school! So I refer to the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, “William Wilberforce, supported the movement for the complete abolition of slavery which was effected by the Emancipation Act of 1833, shortly before his death. In 1813 he had defended Catholic Emancipation, advocated the introduction of christian missionaries into India and long championed the cause of Sunday observance. He stood up for freedom and liberty. Due to ill health he resigned from Parliament in 1825.

What has all that to do with Michael Bartlett, his membership of the Oratory and in particular the effect the note on LIBERTY has had on his life?

What is freedom or liberty? Being born near the beginning of the Second World War I grew up amongst the bomb sites of Manchester. My first journey overseas was with the YMCA in 1955 some 10 years after that war. However the train from Hoek of Holland passed through the Netherlands into Germany. I remember well the difference; the wealth of Holland compared with the destruction and poverty of Germany as we passed southwards down towards Lake Constance. Though only 15 years old it hit me hard the - cost to both sides in terms of people and their lives – what could have been the fate and or the destiny of either country. When being read, the passage in Exodus chapter 12

relating to the instruction of children as to the history and meaning of the Passover makes me wonder as to whether or not we are teaching the children of today the wonders of the sacrifices our own men and women made to safeguard the freedom, the LIBERTY which we are gladly able to enjoy?

You all know that as a young lad I was a chorister at Manchester Cathedral. I remember the one Sunday the Choir was given to be "off duty". It was the occasion of the Premier in London and Manchester of the film "The Dam Busters". Canon Woolnough was our chaplain as well as being an RAF Chaplain. He took us all to that premier and we were given a short talk before the film about the IMPORTANCE of that raid and its contribution to the winning of the war – our freedom and Liberty.

Remembrance Day at home, the cathedral and at school was always taken very seriously. It is still good to see that a large number of people to this day still attend the services and ceremonies held in cities, towns and villages on Remembrance Sunday, thanking God for the sacrifices of many in the past providing us with a continuous Freedom and LIBERTY. When a town councillor I considered it an honour to process with others to the war memorial.

There are three liberties.. that of thought, of word and of deed.

According to Edmund Burke, 1729-1797, "The only liberty I mean is a liberty connected with order; that not only exists along with order and virtue but which cannot exist at all without them". ORDER.

Yehudi Menuhin was quoted in Theme and Variations 1972, "the price of freedom for all musicians, both composers and interpreters, is tremendous control, discipline and patience; but perhaps not only for musicians. Do we not all find freedom to improvise, in all art, in all life, along the guiding lines of DISCIPLINE?" DISCIPLINE.

President Thomas Jefferson in the original draft for the Declaration of Independence wrote, "We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable; that all men (and women) are created equal and

independent, that from equal creation they derive rights inherent and inalienable; among which are the preservation of life, and liberty and the pursuit of happiness” INHERENT RIGHTS.

The music “Liberty Bell” (March) was written by John Philip Sousa and was played in the USA at five of the last seven presidential inaugurations including Donald Trump’s. It is also the official march past for the Canadian Forces Public Affairs Branch.. therefore suitable for all the North American brethren.

Liberty within the walls of Oratory life expects of us loyalty order and the discipline of the rule. By our profession or admission we brethren and companions commit ourselves not just to a rule but an ordered and disciplined way of life. We have not had to follow the way of the slave, of Old Testament times, choosing to stay with the owner at the time of possible release, the year of jubilee, or by having an aul driven through their ear to the door (see Deut chapter 15) thus becoming the servant for ever.. No - for us it is a little less painful. The slave has committed his or her life to the master. There is the hymn, “

“So pierce my ear Oh Lord my God,
Take me to your door this day,
Now I will serve no other God,
Lord, I am here to stay.

For you have paid the price for me,
With your blood you ransomed me,
Now I will serve you eternally,
A free man I will never be”

So we have freely accepted and become committed to the rule and the Oratorian way of life with the aim being, “the adoration of God in the service the The Lord Jesus Christ and the imitation of His most holy life” as well as devotion to him and the service TO others.

Within the constraints of the laws of our land and when compared with many others, what a wonderful country we have for our home. What a wide embracing faith and Church is available to us. What a good society, community or family is the Oratory of the Good Shepherd. We

can, to a degree, be ourselves. What a wonderful opportunity there is for each member to use their talents to the Glory of God, the benefit of others and the satisfaction of themselves.

Whatever might be our moan or groan about the Church of England, Episcopal Church of Scotland, Church in Wales ie the Anglican Communion.. the wonder is that of the “freedom”, “Liberty” there is within her fold. From being that young choir boy in Manchester I had a slight understanding of the unity without uniformity. The Cathedral was “low church”.. surplice and stole and two candles. The parish Church, St Margaret’s Prestwich was “middle of the road”.. vestments and processions, candles and servers... but on High Days and Holy Days my brother John and I would, as servers, attend the GSS offices and meetings at St Gabriel’s enjoying all the smells and bells, the cotton and the lace, the antiphons and singing, processions and celebrations.

I remember the talk at the end of each term at school.. The Headmaster (Governor as he was called) said, “Go into the world and use the talents you have and for which you have been trained. Serve society BUT (and he emphasised the word) choose a profession or work you will enjoy.” Money never came into it.

Having recently read Andrew Brown and Linda Woodhead’s book, “That was the Church that was,” they made the following points. Within the Anglican Communion – the enthusiasm and pragmatism of the evangelicals has resulted in the growth of that part of the church. The Liberals have spread their wings rather wide because of their interest and note in the desires and necessities of the outside world. The High Church “catholic” element, though sometimes being slightly unnerving, due to her “other world spirituality” have provided for many and helped maintain a little “religion” in addition to the necessity of “faith”. I found the book of interest because I am an “Anglican” in the true meaning of the word. My book to my Godson Toby many years ago had three ideas.. Our faith has meaning, the Church has life and my religion has to be practised”.

Psalm 119 verse 96.. “I see that all things come to an end; but thy commandment is exceeding broad” I have always read and interpreted this verse, (rightly or wrongly) to providing the follower - Jew or Christian - with Liberty and Freedom to do anything according to

conscience..or in the words of the South African Book of Common Prayer, “to the maintenance of order and right living”.

I have attempted to live within the ethos of the Oratory of the Good Shepherd, with many faults, failings and sins, and will continue to use the well known prayer;-

“Accept Oh Lord my entire Liberty, my memory my understanding and my will. All that I have I give back to Thee to be disposed of according to thy good pleasure. Give me only the comfort of the presence and the joy of love. With these I shall be more than rich and shall desire nothing more. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord.

Amen.

And when I fly around the world I use the prayer of St Francis Drake.

Oh God, who hast given us to endeavour in any great matter, grant us to know that it is not the beginning but the continuation of the same unto the end which yieldeth the greatest glory through Him who for the finishing of Thy work laid down His life.. Our Redeemer Jesus Christ.

Amen.