

The Love that makes for Peace

A Reflection on the Note on the Love that makes for Peace by David Johnson, OGS

In his Report on the Visitation of the Oratory, the Visitor says, 'The beating heart of the Oratory ... is to be found in the Notes of the Oratory. That is the real treasure'.

He also writes on page 32, 'Brethren may be reticent in expressing how much they value each other, but each is truly valued as part of the Oratory family – expressed in help and support readily given when a brother is in need and a real sense of loss whenever a brother leaves the Oratory'.

The Visitor continues, 'Despite the many differences in background and culture, and the differences of opinion the brethren may have on many issues, it is **the love that makes for peace** that gives the Oratory its binding unity'. (page 32)

Help and support given to me by members of the Oratory in the past, have been very important. During the period 1988 to 1999 I was vicar of a parish on Merseyside. The volume of work was very high and the politics of the church council were very trying. The support of several members of the Oratory – some of whom have since died – was a great help.

More recently, several periods of illness, with periods in hospital, have been overcome by sympathy and encouragement from Companions as well as professed members of the Oratory. I have appreciated many 'Get Well' cards from members, including some from abroad.

When we look at the pages of the Bible, we read about God's love for the whole of creation, and of our need to love one another, following the example of Christ. Note 5 – The Love that Makes for Peace – is obviously more to do with the latter.

Of course, there're many examples I could quote from the Gospels and the Letters. In John's Gospel, Chapter 13, Jesus washes the feet of the Twelve as an example of loving service. In verse 34 Christ says, 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another'.

The New Testament also records disagreements amongst the early Christians, notably in Corinth. St Paul forcefully condemned the factions that had arisen, which we read about in the first Chapter of the First Letter to the Corinthians. (1 Cor 1:10f)

There have always been disagreements in the life of the Church, even at Little Gidding. In his book, *Nicholas Ferrar and Little Gidding*, Robert Braun (a professed member of the Oratory for over 30 years in Australia) describes the creation of the Community at Little Gidding in the 1620s/1630s during the reign of King Charles I (The King visited the Community on at least two occasions). Based on the work of A.L.Maycock (*Nicholas Ferrar of Little Gidding*, published in 1938), Robert describes the household centred on the Ferrar family. This included Nicholas's mother (Mary Farrar) – his father had died in 1620 – his brother John, and his wife Bathsheba, and

their children; and his sister, Susanna and her husband, John Collett, and their children.

Robert writes, 'The dynamics within the family were not without difficulties John Farrar's wife Bathsheba, an unwilling and disgruntled member of the household, had great antipathy to Nicholas and his schemes, and there were confrontations....At one stage Bathsheba went up to London and stopped there, causing the family some anxiety' (p. 18)

So, community life isn't always harmonious. More recently, the *Community of the Sower* at Little Gidding broke up and its members dispersed.

The history of the Oratory since its birth in 1913 also exhibits times of tension and disagreements. Of the Founding Fathers, Bishop John How left to get married, and Dean Eric Milner-White left the Oratory because he felt it had changed in a way that he no longer approved of.

But, to return to the Visitor's Report on his Visitation between 2014 and 2016 – let me say this. There are controversial matters in Church and State which test our willingness to be tolerant, patient and compassionate. I'm thinking in particular of the ordination of women as deacons, priests and bishops. There are also issues to do with human sexuality – same sex marriage for example – which divide us.

However, as members of the Oratory of the Good Shepherd – whether professed members, Companions or Associates – we don't allow our differences to poison our fellowship. We do respect one another and our differing opinions. And that is how it should be.

Note 5 says, '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'.

I'm reminded of the ten and a half years I spent on Merseyside. The history of sectarianism goes back many years. The conflicts between Roman Catholics on one side and Anglicans and Protestants on the other were once very serious. There was a time when Protestants would stone trains going to Southport on Catholic festival days, and Catholics would stone trains going to Southport on Protestant outings. That happens no longer.

Bishop David Sheppard and Archbishop Derek Worlock did a lot to change attitudes by working together. They wrote a book, *Better Together*. It set out the priority of co-operation and reconciliation. Pope John Paul II's visit to Liverpool in 1982 confirmed their work of reconciliation, tolerance and co-operation.

In his conclusion on page 37, the Visitor says, 'As a religious community, the Oratory offers to the Church the uniqueness of being an international dispersed community ...' He goes on, 'It offers both to the Church and to the world an example of how people of different cultures and views can exist together through the spirit of

love that makes for peace'.

May it continue to do so.