

Address to OLO reunion September 2017

It is a special privilege to be here this afternoon in our School Chapel, a unique and fine memorial to the pupils who died to protect the freedom that we have enjoyed ever since, and a part of the school that has been a focus of life for pupils and teachers - for *us* in *our* time at the Grammar School and for many more right up to the present day in the Priory School.

A school chapel is central in so many ways to building community. We used to come here and sing heartily together to mark the start and finish of terms – the rhythm of the passing of our schooldays as we grew in knowledge and as we each gained confidence in what we could achieve and what we could contribute for others. Regular assemblies here offered the opportunity to reflect on aspects of Christian faith – or, for the doubters or unbelievers, a chance to reflect on the social and moral values that are so important to upholding the life of a community. And, through choir and organ, this chapel has enriched the musical lives of countless pupils. We can rejoice especially today in our new organ scholars. I was specially pleased earlier today to hear Charles Whitham's appreciation of Brian Richards: he meant a lot to me too, having introduced me to church choral music and organ music in the choir at Seaford where he was organist and choirmaster. When I came here, there was no doubt I should join the Chapel Choir.

Now, I'm not one for nostalgia, but I'd like us to spend a few moments reflecting on some of the changes we have seen over the years and on which present life is built. I'll be highly selective, no doubt idiosyncratic, in what I call to mind; but here goes.

My generation grew up as children in the shadow of war: I recently found my sister's ration book (she was only three years older than me), I can remember playing on bomb sites (perhaps not the safest of playgrounds, but exciting places in which to build a secret den away from the grown-ups), and then there were the supplementary "aunties" - war-widows adopted into the family (I had two of them). Sadly, conflict has continued around the world, but we have been blessed with peace at home, and the fruits of peace – for instance, raised living standards and the benefits of new technology and medicine - are everywhere to be seen. There has been a shift in what we do for a living, manufacturing has largely been automated and much of it, for better or worse, has moved abroad – certainly Rolls Royce makes its high-tech jet engines here, but, instead of making our Morris and Rileys, our Hillmans, Triumphs and Sunbeams, we import cars or else assemble them from parts brought in from abroad. Employment and the economy have come to depend increasingly on the service industries, the financial sector, and on new technologies. We have a pressing set of fundamental challenges to face: how shall we protect the future by developing new energy sources, how can we manage the earth's physical and biological resources against the rising demands of modern life

and a growing population, how shall we avoid the medical catastrophe threatened by antibiotic resistance, how shall we look after our ageing population, and most of all, a depressing constant in history, how can people of different races, cultures and religions find a way live together in harmony? The answers to these questions will be as diverse as the questions themselves, but I've no doubt that, to underpin them all, the provision of the best possible education for our young must be a priority.

When we look back at our time here, we see how very fortunate we were: we picked from a broad range of subjects, and our teachers, able and dedicated, obviously enjoyed teaching. Chemistry was fun when smells and explosions were allowed, even encouraged: "Sir, what would happen if we dropped lithium or sodium into alcohol instead of water?" – "Well, let's try it and see!" "And suppose we used a bigger piece?", well that ended up through the window flaming on the tarmac path outside - not what might be seen as best practice now – no more, I suppose, than the threat of the plimsol to focus attention in Latin lessons; but it all served us tremendously well. And then there were extracurricular activities – cross-country running and, as Colin Silk would cry out, "Gentlemen, Rugby football!". They were character-forming – well, perhaps for everyone but me. There was an additional sport for those of us who travelled in from Seaford or Newhaven, schoolboy pranks on the train journey gave further opportunity for self-development (undoubtedly a trial to decent members of the public and I'm sure best not gone into in detail in chapel). And then there was the lunchtime madrigal group which met in chapel, a blessed mixed activity that became possible when the sixth forms of the Girls and Boys Grammar Schools were brought together to form the Upper School of the new comprehensive (you might think madrigals would be a safer topic for contemplation this afternoon, but barely so: the risqué lyrics were most certainly not lost on our adolescent minds). We worked hard and we played hard and had a glorious preparation for life, which is the purpose of education.

My heart sinks when government ministers increasingly talk of education, particularly university education, as preparation for employment – it has to be so much more. Even if a course is vocational – and I've spent much of my working life teaching medicine – the need is to help students to think critically and independently and to ensure they are adaptable; medical practice is ever-changing, and nor can we assume that every medical graduate will spend all their time in practice: some move to pure research, some to the pharmaceutical industry, and some become writers, politicians, and even opera producers. Increasingly people move between different jobs, and having the flexibility to do so is essential in a world where innovation and change have come to the fore. Aiming simply to meet the immediate employment needs of new graduates – an imperative of those who seem to think higher education should be a consumer-led industry – will serve no-one well in the long term.

That is not to say that specific skills do not need to be taught for employment, but school and university may not be the best place to teach them. How to strike the

right balance and provide an education that best serves both the individual and the country as a whole, and how to make good education affordable for all individuals and for the state, are difficult matters, and so it is not surprising that we seem always to be experimenting with new school curricula and placing new expectations on universities. Many see education as a tool for directed social engineering, but that is to miss the point, what we owe to our young people is support in finding and achieving their potential so they can each be fulfilled in their lives and make their contribution – whatever form that may take – to society. That is, I believe, the principle of the education that we received here and which, I'm glad to see, lives on in the Priory School.

We started this service by remembering the ultimate contribution made by the 55 Lewesians who died in the war. In our chapel this afternoon, we can thank God that we have not been called to such heights, and we can pray that today's pupils will be spared any such sacrifice. This chapel must live on as a war memorial and reminder to all of the consequences of war, and, looking to the future, it must serve Lewes, the Priory School and its young people. Early on this afternoon, we heard Will Walshe Grey playing 'Go tell it on the mountain' – a Christmas carol which reminds us that faith can help us find our way through life and which reminds us always to make our contribution with humility – it says:

When I am a seeker,
I seek both night and day;
I seek the Lord to help me,
And He shows me the way:
He made me a watchman
Upon the city wall,
And if I am a Christian,
I am the least of all.

It was Neville Bradshaw who shaped the Boys' Grammar School, and I can only regret that I never met him – he'd left before my time here. When he conceived this chapel, he knew what he was about. He made sure a fine chapel was built and brought into good use. He showed himself to be a man of immense vision: his legacy is lasting, and we are all greatly in his debt.