

WILLIAM TEMPLE 1881- 1944

I came across the name William Temple at quite an early age but it was in my early twenties when I was Chairman of the Anglican Student Federation that I met people from the pool of recent Anglican graduates who had gone on to membership of the William Temple Association. His reference to the Church being the organisation that exists for its non-members is often quoted, but it is the slogan of the Association which has travelled with me all my adult education life "Towards a well-informed and responsible laity".

As a convinced lay man I have been interested in exploring how discipleship comes from working out the faith/life questions. As I read Temple I find the equipment he used to do that exploring still making sense, so it was a great relief when I drew Temple's name out of the hat at Stannington.

William Temple was born in 1881, the son of an Archbishop of Canterbury. He and his father are the only father/son Archbishops of the Church of England. From the time of his birth in Exeter, he grew up seeing how the Church functioned. He went to Rugby School and Oxford, married in 1916, became Bishop of Manchester at the age of 40 and was less than 50 when he became Archbishop of York. He went to Canterbury as Archbishop for two years dying unexpectedly in 1944. For me his most important legacy is the energy he put in to understanding how the Church functions a- in society b- in relation to other religions, c- with other churches.

He seems to be working whenever I read his writings for a greater understanding of "the whole". His Gifford Lectures at Glasgow University (1932-4) are in his great work, "*Nature, Man and God*" which has two sections:-

The transcendence of the Immanent.

The immanence of the Transcendent.

In writing about the latter he says: *"The more we become aware of God immanent, the more we become aware of God transcendent, The Truth that strikes awe in the scientist is awful because it is His thought; the Beauty that holds spell-bound the artist is potent because it is His glory; the Goodness that pilots us to the assured apprehension of Reality can do this because it is His character; and the freedom whereby man is lifted above all other nature, even to the possibility of defying it, is fellowship with Him. 'Heaven and Earth are full of His glory'; but He is more and other than all that is in earth and heaven"* (Nature, Man and God p 270)

Although he existed before that wonderful invention "The General Synod" came in to being, he was at home as a conference attendee. In fact he was a great gift to conferences. A wise man goes to bed early at a conference to avoid having to help with the drafting of the final statement or the press announcement. Big conferences have the process carefully prepared for and Temple was a great help when it was his task. At the Jerusalem Conference of the International Missionary Council in 1928 – it had previously met in Edinburgh (he had been there) in 1910 - he wrote the Council statement that is at the end of the report. It was an attempt to be hospitable to ideas that were prevalent in the secular world as well as ideas that were held to be important by adherents of other faiths.

It is he who writes: *"We rejoice to think that just because in Jesus Christ the light that lighteth every man shone forth in its full splendour, we find rays of that same light where he is unknown or even rejected. We welcome every noble quality in non-Christian persons or systems as further proof that the Father who sent his Son in to the world, has nowhere left himself without witness"*. (The Christian Message. Jerusalem Meeting Report p 490)

William Temple was Archbishop of York for more than a dozen years but Archbishop of Canterbury for only two. It was the middle of World War 2 and he concerned himself with issues to do with the reconstruction of the nation after the end of the war, whenever it would come. His understanding of the mission of the Church to the nation fitted him well for this task and it is his understanding of the Church-State relationship that has been valuable during the last seventy years.

His initiative, The Malvern Conference of 1941 was a part of this preparatory work. He said there "*Our whole social life is sick and in great need of a physician*". The remedy was to him in the aim of Christian social order which entailed the fullest development of individual personality in the widest and deepest possible fellowship. He saw unemployment as one of the greatest evils because it inevitably engendered from the unemployed self-centred value judgements which he denounced as "*non-social in essence and anti-social in effect; for they bring men in to rivalry with one another*"

(Social concern in the thought of William Temple, Robert Craig p 135)

A cartoon by Low for the London Evening Standard is as relevant today as it was then. A rural scene shows Temple approaching a man in the "economic fields" who is pointing out a sign that says that trespassers will be prosecuted.

[See image on following page]



He had just addressed in April 1943 a large audience at the Albert Hall about the Church looking forward to the post-Second World War world. He had made some controversial remarks about the moral duties of banks and the terms on which they should lend money. Many from the City thought his ideas were naive. Others accepted that his remarks pointed to the need for social justice in the post-war reconstruction. He raised the public profile and moral influence of the Christian gospel. This approach has lasting effect and it was around when Giles Fraser spoke out at St Paul's last winter - an opportunity to contribute to the debate that Temple would not have missed .

Edward Heath wrote a foreword to the 1976 edition of Temple's *Christianity and Social Order*: *"The impact of William Temple on my generation was immense....he...was foremost among the leaders of the nation, temporal or spiritual, in posing challenging questions about the nature of our society. Most important of all, he propounded with lucidity and vigour his understanding of the*

Christian ethic in its application to the contemporary problems which engrossed us all".

(William Temple: A calling to prophecy. Stephen Spencer p ix)

Edward Heath would have been comfortable with the ideas behind David Cameron's "Big Society" (and he would have been better at doing the joined up thinking!). A recent book by John Atherton, Christopher Baker and John Reader refers to William Temple's thinking as it helps us understand future social and welfare policy.

They see his ideas as being highly pertinent. Writing in the 40's as the war with the totalitarian ideology of the Nazis was raging it's not surprising that Temple wrote that "The state exists for the citizens, not the citizens for the state". He had great fears when people posited a big state. He believed that the state existed to promote the development and capability of each individual citizen". The individual's response was to be seen in his commitment to the social order which is described in a series of interlocking relationships and communities, be they familial, local, regional, national, or global. Human life is the most valuable currency that we can work with and it happens on all these different levels. Christian Revelation and Natural Law are the two things that inform Temple's thinking. Of course, since Temple's death, the Welfare state came in 1948 and there have been massive changes in our lives since then. Yet despite the changes, and the move from a social democratic model to a liberal economic one where we have a mixed package of delivery systems and the marketization of both benefits and structures, his principles continue to resonate. The recent authors I have mentioned earlier list them as: -

*His commitment to partnership working

*His commitment to identifying common ethical values as the basis for identifying and working towards the common good.

*His analysis of the debilitating social and educational effects of an unequal society

*His recognition of the importance of Christian vocation as the root cause of Christian participation

*His recognition that the state is a community of communities in which it is important to foster a sense of belonging and responsibility.

*His acute sense that public life at all levels needs to be supported by a Christian vision of hope, transformation and justice, including where necessary direct political action. (Christianity and the New Social order p 105)

I was ending there but on holiday last week I was reading John Peart-Binns biography of Ian Ramsey and a reference to the death of William Temple in 1944. He records that the Cabinet Secretary at the time Sir Alexander Cadogan wrote in his diary "News came of death of Archbishop of Canterbury. PM delighted"

So I went back this morning to my unsuccessful search for William Temple anecdotes on the internet. I realised that there were not nearly as many as for his successor Michael Ramsey. But there were two quotations to add to the well known one about the Church existing for its non-members.:-

One for Andy Murray, *"One who faces his own failures is steadily advancing on the pilgrims' way"*.

And one for all of us,

"Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself than of other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about yourself one way or the other at all."

The last quotation sent me back to Iremongers biography where he quotes from Temple's book *Christ in His Church* written in 1924 when he writes about the virtue it was his hope to achieve;-
"Humility means that you feel yourself, as a distinct person, out of count, and give your whole mind and thought to the object towards which they are directed, to God Himself in worship and the fulfilment of His will in Christian love; and humility, in that sense, is quite plainly a source of effectiveness" (Quoted in William Temple, *Iremonger* p 503)

Perhaps that's the thing about Temple that Churchill didn't comprehend!