

Introductory Remarks

Why a theological capstone?

An old joke about the Episcopal Church calls it “the Republican Party at prayer.” This makes more sense in a world where party affiliations generally reflect economic concerns and social class, rather than a collection of positions on radically divisive social issues. While most who know about the concerns and political leanings of today’s Episcopalians and Anglicans would laugh at such a characterization, there are many ways in which it still makes sense. Like the Republican Party, the Episcopal Church struggles to recruit as members and effectively serve the needs of people traditionally excluded from mainstream public life. Outreach specifically directed at racial and ethnic minorities and the economically disadvantaged remains a tremendous, largely unrealized goal. The Church, like the Party, retains an image as an exclusive organization for affluent Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Indeed more than anything else, the reputation for affluence and for an economic conservatism which seeks to maintain and expand that affluence dogs the Episcopal Church even in spite of a progressive stance on many social issues.

I lament this situation not simply because it paints my church as a cold, unwelcoming institution but because it neglects the important fact that the majority of the world’s Anglicans live in poverty. Indeed, “if there is such a person as an ‘average Anglican’ today, she would be 22 years old, live in sub-Saharan Africa, and must walk several kilometres daily to fetch water for her three or four children.”¹ Many others with whom I share a common tradition and a common faith endure some of the worst economic conditions imaginable. Even in the United States, many Episcopal parishes

¹ Reid, Duncan. *Journal of Anglican Studies*, 6 2005; vol. 3, pp. 126-127: book review of Douglas, Ian T. and Pui-Lan Kwok (eds.) *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism: The Anglican Communion in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2001.

persist in depressed urban areas which have been deserted by other mainline Protestants, and continue important social work among their poorest neighbors though they often fail (or fail to attempt) to make them parishioners.

These facts compelled me to search within the Anglican theological tradition for a Christian answer to the challenges and problems of poverty. When and where do Anglicans begin to confront these problems, and how do historical expressions of Anglican social thought interact with the challenges we face today?

Why Archbishop Temple?

I had heard of William Temple, 98th Archbishop of Canterbury, and of his most well-known book, *Christianity and Social Order*. I knew that he looms large even today in the minds of Anglicans as a figure committed to social and economic justice. Perhaps in Temple, who died in 1944 after just two years as titular head of the Anglican Communion and Primate of All England, I would find an Anglican articulation of the Christian approach to poverty. The opportunity to study a theologian from my tradition, writing with a hope that radical societal transformation would follow the violence and destruction of World War II, appealed to me very much. With this information and my rather unsophisticated interest to guide me, I began my search into the thought of William Temple.

I am simultaneously disappointed and inspired by what I have found. It did not take me long to realize that *Christianity and Social Order*, the most complete articulation of Temple's thoughts on economic justice, largely limits its scope to the theological justification for reforming our economic and social systems. As I intend to explain in

greater depth as this paper progresses, Temple cared deeply about the problem of poverty, but relatively little (it would seem) about the poor themselves. As a result, his writings and theological perspective have much to teach us, but must be significantly reevaluated in light of current experience living in community with the poor.

It cannot be overstressed that Temple's social thought, especially the fresh, unique course it began to take near the end of his life, focused on the post-war period. By the year of his death, victory, thought distant, became each day more realistic and probable. Thoughtful men and women, indeed most publicly-minded men and women, shifted the focus of their intellectual exertions to the world which would be created after the war ended. Therefore, one may safely assume that part of Temple's unwillingness to directly address the issues of poverty sprang from a sincere hope that post-war institutions would eliminate some of the most shamefully exploitative elements of contemporary society.

This defense encounters a reasonable limit, however, in Temple's stated unwillingness to allow hopeful possibilities to distract us from grim realities. He specifically articulates this objection in theological matters but it applies very appropriately here. Where then are the concerns of the poor in Temple's social order? They are present, to be sure, but underneath the surface. When they are explicitly discussed they are usually the socially-acceptable, easily admired struggles of the working poor, or the able-bodied and willing-to-work unemployed. This reveals perhaps some personal prejudices of Temple and his first readers but does not prevent the expansion and development of his ideas to include other, more brutally marginalized groups.

Though Temple's focus on economic systems initially discouraged me, a tendency he himself exhibits in his writing offered hope that his work speaks to the contemporary Christian concerned specifically with poverty. Temple strove to distill certain principles to which all Christians might be expected to subscribe. "Temple always took pains, however, to distinguish between his own specific judgments about social policy or legislation, with which, as he recognized, other conscientious Christians might very well disagree, and those basic social principles which, he felt, all Christians must acknowledge."²

As in *Christianity and Social Order*, he first carefully establishes a common Christian foundation and then proceeds to suggest ways to realistically build upon that. While striving to formulate broad principles that in general guide the conduct of Christians in the secular world, Temple's writings continually develop into practical suggestions and show realistic concern in the realm of economic justice. Though the problem of poverty forms only a small part of that realistic concern, we can (and do) infer much from his foundational principles. This remains true to the spirit and method of Temple's work in the same way that he himself develops ideas about economic justice from central, guiding principles whose relationship to economic justice is not immediately apparent.

In the short book *What Christians Stand for in the Secular World*, Temple perfectly exhibits his inclination to address principles and concepts, rather than to quibble over fine theological points. In one paragraph he sums up the Christian faith and then proceeds to explain what that faith forces the church to say to the world.

² Franklin Sherman, Introduction to *What Christians Stand for in the Secular World*, by William Temple (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), vi.

Central to all of Temple's social thought, and the foundation for any discussion of what that thought means to us studying poverty, is the idea that "the value of a man is not what he is in and for himself (humanism), not what he is for society (fascism and communism), but what he is worth to God."³ For Temple, this concept remains positively foundational though it endures many transformations and re-articulations. Elsewhere he calls it "the notion of human equality"⁴ and, excepting of course a vigorous belief in a God active and interested in human affairs, builds the greater part of his argument solely on that idea.

In reality, the two are of course linked. God "is impelled to make the world by His love,"⁵ and though each human being "takes his place as the centre of his own world"⁶ and therefore inherits Original Sin, God actively seeks and provides the means for reconciliation. Perhaps the speed and ease with which Temple glosses these concepts springs from his desire to be ecumenical. By simply presenting these as beyond dispute he can devote his time to serious points of contention, points which had not (unlike some basic doctrines) been argued about for centuries. He also seeks to expand his audience in this way.

Evidence exists that William Temple's theological views flow uninterrupted from his earliest catechism. He once wrote "I have been determined to be ordained longer than I can remember...before really knowing what it meant"⁷ a sentiment one cannot really fault in the son of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Yet that lifelong desire to serve the

³ William Temple, *What Christians Stand for in the Secular World*, 9.

⁴ William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (New York: Penguin Books, Inc., 1942), 15.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁷ William Temple in a letter to H. Hardy, September 1902. Quoted in F.A. Iremonger, *William Temple: His Life and Letters* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 37.

church in ordained ministry does not carry with it assurance of lifelong theological orthodoxy. Before his ordination to the diaconate took place, Temple wrote to the Bishop of Oxford, expressing “his uncertainties concerning the doctrines of ‘the Virgin Birth and the Bodily Resurrection of Our Lord.’”⁸ As a result of this admission the Bishop of Oxford expressed his sorrow that he could not ordain the young man.

Part I: A Brief and Relevant Biography of William Temple

Temple’s early life and education.

Perhaps this moment, when episcopal doubts apparently tested the firm resolve of Temple’s calling, offers a good opportunity to explore the background that inspired in him an abiding faith. Indeed, to begin to understand William Temple’s views of economic justice and poverty, we must at least briefly examine the greatest influences of his intellectual and spiritual development. As a result of his mother’s connections and background (his father Frederick Temple, though eventually Archbishop of Canterbury, came from a non-aristocratic middle-class family and was trained to be a farmer) Temple enjoyed the advantages of an English public school education. Twenty-five years after his father left the headmastership at Rugby School William Temple began his first term there. The impact of his experience, especially in matters of social thought, was deep and lasting.

One former headmaster in particular, besides his father, propagated certain views at Rugby that “became part of Temple’s mental furniture.”⁹ Thomas Arnold had been

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Alan M. Suggate, *William Temple and Christian Social Ethics Today* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 13.

headmaster for thirteen years in the mid-nineteenth century. His legacy as a social reformer left an impression on the intellectual life of the school almost as significant as the impression his legacy as an educational reformer left on the curriculum. Arnold strongly criticized the free market economy that reduced workers to mere ‘hands’ and encouraged men and women to subordinate their consciences to base desires. He believed it to be the responsibility of the Church to “introduce the principles of Christianity into men’s social and civil relations,”¹⁰ and condemned its failure to do so.

Evidence that these radical ideas remained a part of the climate of Rugby down to Temple’s day can be seen in the fact that the school itself “ran a club which enabled the pupils to do social work among the poor.”¹¹ Thus a concern for economic justice and even the conditions of the poor formed a substantial part of the educational agenda of young William’s schooling. When he went up to Balliol, Oxford (on promise rather than performance¹²), this fertile, freshly turned soil would be sowed by other influential men.

These experiences, which helped to develop a sense of community that would remain a significant element of Temple’s thought, were reinforced by some of the radical professors at Oxford. T.H. Green, influential professor of moral philosophy during Temple’s time at the university, was described by one of Temple’s mentors as having given “us back the language of self-sacrifice and taught us how we belonged to one another in the life of organic humanity.”¹³ This sense helped craft Temple’s foundational view of community and human interaction. Theologically, Green stressed the immanence of God which sharpened Temple’s developing sense of sacramental reality.

¹⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹¹ Ibid., 13.

¹² Iremonger, 16.

¹³ Suggate, 15.

If Green's ideas spread across the common life of the University, within Balliol itself the dominating figure of Temple's education was Edward Caird. The Master of Balliol brought philosophical vigor, clarity and effectiveness of expression, as well as social action and concern to young William's mind. While the content of the philosophical vigor did not entirely seep into the student's thinking (Caird was a Hegelian idealist, a position that Temple did not adopt fully,¹⁴ though he did learn to look for unity in apparent contradictions¹⁵), the Master's example confirmed and heightened remarkable skills of communication and compromise.

More importantly for our purpose, Caird had at his former position been "driven to contrast the material prosperity which marked the industrial progress of Glasgow with the horrible conditions under which thousands of the city's poor were forced to live."¹⁶ With a touch of that Victorian paternalism which causes the modern reader to cringe, Caird had devoted himself to advocating for "a fuller life for all who had nothing to occupy their leisure hours if these were to be enjoyed 'without orgies,'"¹⁷ articulating principles of social fellowship many years before Temple would make them central to his societal vision expressed in *Christianity and Social Order*.

All of Caird's social reform "experiences were reflected in his teaching at Oxford and confirmed, as nothing else could have done, Temple's innate sympathy with the poor

¹⁴ Temple explains his dissatisfaction with Hegelian thought in *Nature, Man, and God*: "The great principle of Hegelian dialectic has fallen into some discredit...because Hegel himself attributed to it a more universal applicability than it possesses." William Temple, *Nature, Man, and God* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1949), 57. This dissatisfaction grew, especially in the conception of a rational, ordered universe and by the end of his life Temple abandoned most of the Hegelianism he received at Oxford. One point to which he continued to cling, however, was the use of dialectic to shape his philosophical explorations.

¹⁵ Iremonger, 17.

¹⁶ Ibid., 19.

¹⁷ Ibid.

and the oppressed.”¹⁸ His relationship with his mentor reinforced to him the importance of human relationships generally, and from this rich vein his thoughts on social justice and poverty flow.

This “innate sympathy,” it must be emphasized, sprang from Temple’s upbringing and theological development. The heavily incarnational Anglicanism which he inherited from the nineteenth-century reinforced for him the idea that Christ’s advent sanctifies this fallen world and posits tremendous value in each individual human being. Indeed, each man or woman “has an infinite value because God loves him [or her].”¹⁹ As a result, Christians are called to view the world sacramentally, and have a significant responsibility to work for the elimination of injustice.²⁰

Temple as Educator: From the Public Schools to the Worker’s Educational Association

Washington and Lee University

These beliefs, combined with a highly developed personal spiritual discipline that impressed many who met him,²¹ carried Temple first into education. He became headmaster of Repton School in 1910. His personality and spirituality invigorated the school, and though he had doubts as to whether his calling really tended to education (he wrote to his brother: “I doubt if headmastering is really my line”²²) he threw himself into the task with great enthusiasm.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ William Temple, *The Church Looks Forward* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1944), 82.

²⁰ Temple, *Nature, Man and God*: “But God is immanent in he world, making Himself apprehensible through the Truth, the Beauty, the Goodness which call forth from men the allegiance of discipleship” (373).

²¹ A fellow delegate to the Edinburgh Conference of Faith and Order, an ecumenical gathering, wrote that when Temple conducted the final devotions of he meeting, “there was no mistaking the fact that in heart and soul we were being lifted up into the realm where he habitually dwelt” (Iremonger, 417-418).

²² Ibid., 39.

Teaching at the old, elitist public school was not, however, Temple's first foray into the educational field. After some years in Germany following his undergraduate years, Temple returned to England where he committed himself passionately to the efforts of the Workers Educational Association, founded in 1905. In 1908, upon the retirement of Dr. Albert Mansbridge, the man who had worked tirelessly for many years to finally establish the W.E.A., Temple was elected the organization's president. He would retain the title until 1924, and the impact his relationship with the Association had on his life and thought was tremendous. Indeed, the young Temple expressed his belief that the presidency of the W.E.A. "is bound, I think, to remain—the greatest honour of my life" and honored Dr. Mansbridge with the statement "he invented me."²³

The Association strove to provide working class men with an Oxford education. Most importantly, the experience that the W.E.A. provided "did not appeal to economic motives, but provided a humane education for those whose opportunities of obtaining it had been slight."²⁴ Workingmen did not receive through the W.E.A. a "practical" education or an educational experience designed to make them more efficient or perhaps more docile laborers. Instead, they received an education predicated on the belief that "there were treasures of learning yet to be revealed to the workers which could be of no conceivable use to them in their struggle for material contentment."²⁵

This grand experiment in a more universal, equitable system of education (and Britain's fine universities are very infrequently described as either universal or equitable) successfully impacted the lives of many working class citizens, but Temple's primary biographer dwells at length on the impact of the experience on the young priest's career.

²³ Ibid., 32.

²⁴ Ibid., 33.

²⁵ Ibid.

Indeed, this focus (and the apparent relationship between his work and my topic) causes me to pause here and reflect on the way in which his work at the W.E.A. influenced Temple's thought on poverty.

Temple's role at the Association is in many ways the exception that proves the rule. It represents his first significant contact with "adult handworker[s],"²⁶ and that that contact should be significant proves the extreme disconnect between the future archbishop and the actual poor. Even the contact he enjoyed (and that truly is the operative word, for he cherished his time with the W.E.A.) was almost entirely with the workers who, though not affluent, would certainly not all be considered poor. In this way his class consciousness, an inescapable mode of thought for any Englishman and especially an Englishman of this time period, was reshaped and refocused without any significant change to his thoughts regarding poverty and the truly marginalized. Temple's contact with the working class was important and encouraged his developing sense of economic justice; it highlights, however, his almost complete isolation from the poor.

Temple as Priest and Bishop

Temple served in but one parish before being elected Bishop of Manchester. His time at St. James's Piccadilly, filled with duties and persistently active, introduced him to life within a parish but not to the poor of London. Temple's was a privileged parish, one of the Wren churches built after the Great Fire, in a neighborhood changing even in those days from residences to offices. His time at St. James's did, however, give him ample opportunity to develop and showcase the skills that soon carried him to a bishopric.

²⁶ Ibid., 35.

The election and consecration as Bishop of Manchester added extraordinary burdens to the dynamic priest. Manchester was, at the time, a massive single diocese containing more than 600 parishes and nearly 3.5 million people.²⁷ Temple found himself faced with “Confirmations apparently incessant”²⁸ and an exhausting schedule of visitations. He grew into the office of bishop, working for the division of his massive diocese so that it might be more effectively managed, and proving himself an able pastor to the clergy under his care. While his leadership was appreciated by many laypeople, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Manchester wrote that “I fancy he was felt just a little too impersonal and intellectual for real warmth of intimacy.”²⁹ Indeed, vast industrial Manchester apparently loved their bishop but struggled at times to understand him.

Of course the very busy bishop did not abandon his intellectual life or his work on economic justice. He had helped conceive of the Conference on Christian Politics, Economics, and Citizenship (COPEC for short) in 1919 and in 1924 was pleased to look out from his place as chairman over a conference of “1500 delegates from almost all denominations.”³⁰ The mood and thought of the conference tended toward the optimism of the years immediately following the First World War, and though there was little criticism of the work accomplished, the criticism it did receive was pointed. Wrote one critic, members of COPEC had felt themselves “free to indulge the luxury of programme-framing without reference to those obstinate facts which a responsible statesman...must

²⁷ Ibid., 130.

²⁸ Ibid., 129.

²⁹ Ibid., 142.

³⁰ Suggate, 35.

needs consider.”³¹ It is significant to note that what some considered “one of Temple’s greatest services to the Church and the Kingdom of God”³² was considered by others too idealistic to be practically helpful.

COPEC “marked the rise of William Temple to ascendancy over the social teaching of the Church of England”³³ but the General Strike and Miner’s Strike of 1926 put the thought of COPEC to the test. Temple joined a group of bishops and leaders of the Free Churches to attempt to address the demands of the miners and the reservations of the coal company owners.

There was a great deal of confusion about just who held authority to conduct talks on behalf of the miners, and the church delegation found themselves undermined (if you will forgive the pun) by a group of economic experts working with another officer of the Miner’s Federation.³⁴ In the end, however, the ability of the religious leaders to adequately address the complex problems of the strike was criticized and questioned by many observers. Practical difficulties continually obscured the noble purposes of the clergymen. Charles Raven, one of Temple’s confidants from COPEC, said at the time that “some of my friends, not least [William Temple] the Bishop of Manchester, are very fond of talking about industrial problems as if all you had to do [to solve them] was to speak of them as vocation.”³⁵ Temple’s object and sympathies are clear, but similarly clear is his struggle to bring high-minded principles down to address complicated situations.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Iremonger, 155.

³³ Sugate, 37.

³⁴ Iremonger, 157.

³⁵ Sugate, 38.

Archbishop of York, then Canterbury

From Manchester, Temple was translated to the second highest post in the English Church, the Archbishopric of York, in 1929. With this new high post the concerns and business of the church nationally became a larger part of Temple's focus and consumed a larger part of his time. He still maintained an active schedule outside of his diocese, and even made a point to remain active in the Oxford and Cambridge Missions, through which he came into contact with many thousands of students. His influence through these missions, according to many letters from those who attended, was significant. The Vicar of St. Mary's University Church, the Rev. F.R. Barry, wrote that "it 'stopped the rot' in the Christian life of post-war Oxford."³⁶ Temple's commitment to mission left a deep and lasting impact on many people, and his renown for captivating an audience grew. There is, however, a pertinent detail from one occasion which reflects on our analysis of his views on poverty and bears repeating.

He spoke to a Student Christian Mission gathering as the final speaker in a series called "Why I believe in God." Those who were there record that he lacked his characteristic confidence, fumbled for his words, and "lost his grip."³⁷ When asked later by one of the organizers what had gone wrong, Temple replied, "You see, *I have never known what it is to doubt the existence of God*, and I felt I had no right to be speaking to that audience of young people!"³⁸ That is not to say that the Archbishop's belief sprang fully formed into the world at his birth. As mentioned above, on the eve of his ordination he had "intellectual reservations" regarding certain traditional Christian doctrines. But

³⁶ Iremonger, 170.

³⁷ Ibid., 171.

³⁸ Ibid.

that quiet confidence, undoubtedly a source of great personal strength and probably the foundation of Temple's much admired spiritual discipline, nevertheless causes us to pause when we approach his writings. The foundations are solid, but they feel untested. The Archbishop's faith is strong, but it seems a bit naïve as well. These concerns are treated more elaborately below as we move into a critique of Temple's views.

His general responsibilities increased exponentially with the outbreak of war in 1939. "On Sunday, 3 September, the Archbishop announced from his throne in the Minster that the country was at war"³⁹ and preparations began immediately to prepare York and Bishopthorpe, the archiepiscopal residence, for the rigors and dangers of wartime. With exceptional speed (at least in the world of conferences), a gathering was planned to discuss the new social order which would follow the war. Prebendary P.T.R. Kirk, General Director of the Industrial Christian Fellowship, had been working for years to "propagate the social message of the Gospel among employers and the employed"⁴⁰ and realized that the crisis of the war might offer a chance to effect substantial economic and social changes. Kirk realized that any gathering held by the I.C.F. would require a "big name" to gather attention, and so he contacted the biggest name in the Church on social issues. In spite of his duties and the stresses of caring for the spiritual troubles of priests and laypeople during wartime, Archbishop Temple accepted the chairmanship of the Malvern Conference.

We need not say much regarding the outcomes of this conference, because indeed Temple summarized that with which he agreed or disagreed in *Christianity and Social Order*. That short book, very widely read at the time, came out in 1942. In that same year

³⁹ Ibid., 173.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 175.

he was translated to Canterbury, becoming leader of the Anglican Church throughout the world. There were high hopes for the new Archbishop and many indications that Temple's views, which had been developing and changing especially since the beginning of his friendship with Reinhold Niebuhr, were entering a new period. Indeed, Niebuhr visited Temple at Canterbury and always presented a sharp challenge (Temple himself testifies) to the Archbishop's more idealistic or comfortable beliefs.

In this light, Temple's early death in 1944 seems all the more tragic. The gout from which he suffered his entire life worsened severely in his last days, and encouraged a dangerous infection. He died peacefully, however, of a pulmonary embolism on October 26. Even to the end of his life Temple was seeking a re-expression of his views, a more comprehensive "theology of Redemption rather than a theology of Incarnation; the Word as a dynamic force of judgement rather than a static principle of rational unity."⁴¹ While we can only speculate how a full articulation of these views might inform Anglican thought on poverty, Temple did leave behind a large body of work which, thought not without fault, does offer guidance to the Church in any effort to approach poverty theologically.

Part II: The Theology of William Temple

Temple's theological foundation: First Principles.

In each of Temple's books on the social order and the challenge of establishing a just society (especially in the aftermath of war) he devotes his earliest pages and chapters to a brief, broad gloss of Christian beliefs. Again and again, Temple stresses 1) the

⁴¹ Suggate, 211.

creative purpose of a sovereign God, 2) a humankind and world created perfect and just, and which falls into sin, death, and corruption though it is still meant solely for the Creator, and 3) the work of redemption performed by God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁴² As the work of redemption has been accomplished by Christ, the work of proclaiming this news and restoring humankind to perfect fellowship belongs to the Church. In this capacity, the Church confronts, convicts, and strives to change society.

“All Christian thinking, and Christian thinking about society no less than any other, must begin not with man but with God”⁴³ writes Temple before he embarks on an explanation of his social theology. Trinitarian theology informs him that God exists in community and that all creation flows from that essential community. “The world is not necessary to God as the object of His love, for He has that within Himself in the relations of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity; but [the world] results from His love; creation is a kind of overflow of the divine love,”⁴⁴ Temple asserts, simultaneously explaining the source and essential nature of all creation and especially human relationships. God creates humankind because His great love overflows the boundaries of the Trinity, and because the self-revelatory nature of His love demands objects. An absolutely essential element of Temple’s thought adds that the boundaries of individual human beings cannot contain this love any more than the Trinity can, and it therefore flows between human individuals, binding men and women to one another in community. Temple writes that

⁴² See the early chapters/pages of *What Christians Stand for in the Secular World, Christianity and Social Order, The Hope of a New World, The Church Looks Forward*, and in an expanded form, *Nature, Man and God*.

⁴³ Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, 40.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

“as a child of God, man is a member of a family, the family of God,”⁴⁵ and for the purposes of this discussion that concept cannot be neglected.

Original Sin

Temple’s use of an orthodox Christian view of the world (the basics of God, humankind, sin, and redemption), especially as it was defined in the middle of the twentieth century, demands that his appeal be taken seriously by Christians from wildly divergent backgrounds and perspectives. One of his earliest books, *The Faith and Modern Thought*, establishes the course which he does not abandon, even as his views mature and develop. The simple themes of traditional Christian belief, Anglican only in the conscious effort to be neither too Catholic nor too Protestant, permeate his work. The articulation of humankind’s sinfulness found in writings from 1910 (“Sin is the self-assertion, either of a part of a man’s nature against the whole, of a single member of the human family against the welfare of that family and the will of its Father.”⁴⁶) proves nearly interchangeable with that found in 1934 (“[Sin] is alienation from God, for it is the centring upon self of a life whose very nature requires that it should be centred upon God.”⁴⁷). That specific tenet, Original Sin and all its pernicious effects, provides much of the basis for Temple’s social thought. Sin interrupts the real community between all women and men by turning their focus inward on themselves and breaks what Temple calls the Natural Order.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁶ Temple, *The Faith and Modern Thought* (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1914), 124.

⁴⁷ Temple, *Nature, Man and God*, 398.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 58. The Natural Order or Natural Law will be dealt with below more completely.

According to Temple, this inward turn is actually the basis of all of our economic systems. “Self-interest is always exercising its disturbing influence,”⁴⁹ and pushing us to exploit our neighbors. “Politics,” he says, “is largely a contention between groups of self-interest—e.g. the Haves and the Have-nots,”⁵⁰ and by “politics” he means all of those little clashes and interactions which make up human institutions. At each point of contact, one human individual or group dominates another individual or group. For Temple, this defines injustice, and “the calamity resulting from self-centredness is evidence that the order of life proper to finite selves is co-operative in fundamental principle rather than competitive.”⁵¹ (This hints at Temple’s sense of community, which I consider to be the most valuable element of his thought and which is treated below in greater detail.) In *Christianity and Social Order*, Temple conceives of this exploitation mainly in terms of the conflict between labor and capital.

Washington and Lee University

What hope exists for humans?

Painting this rather bleak picture of humankind’s tragic fall from its intended place (indeed, the depiction is common enough to any evangelical tract, though Temple draws some unique, economically-minded conclusions), Temple proceeds to the only hope he perceives for humanity. This hope is informed and enhanced by his persistent incarnational bent. The work of God in Christ provides an escape for men and women from the vicious circle of consumption and exploitation. Though fallen, humans are “capable of response to the Divine Image in its perfection if ever this can be presented to

⁴⁹ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 43.

⁵¹ Temple, *Nature, Man and God*, 418.

[them]. This is the glory of the Gospel.”⁵² Further, because Temple believes that the destiny of humanity is to “see ‘the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,’ [so that humans] may be ‘transformed into the same image from glory to glory,’” he believes that that the social life of men and women, “so far as it is deliberately planned, should be ordered with that destiny in view.”⁵³ Who on earth ought to work for the achievement of this lofty goal?

Temple believes strongly that the task of the Church is to share with others this opportunity to enjoy the “benefits of Christ’s passion.” His overwhelmingly strong sense of community, however, extends that mission beyond the conversion of individual humans. As Temple writes in *The Church Looks Forward*, “we are concerned to insist that [the Church] also has its message for the ordering of society itself, and that the social structure, as well as the lives of individuals living within that structure, is subject to criticism in the light of Christian principles.”⁵⁴ Temple illustrates that historically, the Church played exactly this role.

What precedent exists for the interference of Christian principles in economic life?

“The two pillars of medieval theological economics were the doctrine of the Just Price and the Prohibition of Usury,”⁵⁵ and while Temple does not accuse the Reformers of inventing the present, unjust economic system he does criticize their willingness to soften the authority of the Church on these matters. Their actual conduct does not differ much from that of their medieval forebears, but they make “changes in the foundations

⁵² Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, 44.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Temple, *The Church Looks Forward*, 121.

⁵⁵ Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, 31.

which [affect] the whole structure.”⁵⁶ We cannot forget, of course, that sinful humans would actively seek to exploit each other without the invention of “such a monster as the Economic Man.”⁵⁷ Temple simply relates this bit of Church history to remind his readers that in the past the Church presumed to apply her principles to economic systems, and indeed continued to do so until the Reformers relinquished that power.

That is not to say that he believes the economic systems of the middle ages to have been pictures of justice and fair distribution. Temple merely mentions the authority claimed by the Church in the past as part of his effort to reassert and re-energize that authority in the present.⁵⁸ He very plainly believes that the Protestant Reformation, which of course coincides with and encourages the development of capitalism, went too far in condoning competitive practices. The call he makes in *Christianity and Social Order* he makes to the consciences of individual Christians, though it establishes broadly what he believes the Church (as the gathered community of individual Christians) and the State (the larger community consisting of Christians and others who must work together for mutual well-being) ought to do. If more individual Christians consider it their duty to check the celebrated capitalist profit motive through the power of the Church, Temple believes they would simultaneously do their duty as members of society and benefit some of the poorest among them. The benefits he believes may be gained by a renewed sense of ecclesiastical authority in economic life he expresses himself in the appendix of *Christianity and Social Order*: “It is not desirable altogether to eliminate the ‘profit motive’ . . . But it should be subordinated to the service-motive, so that the initiation or

⁵⁶ Ibid., 31.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁸ In his own life, his effort while Bishop of Manchester to address the coal stoppage, mentioned above, reveals how seriously he took that authority and how personally he felt that perceived obligation.

expansion of a business shall be governed more by public need than by private advantage when these two diverge.”⁵⁹

Our discussion cannot have any pretensions of being complete until we introduce the final element which particularly guides Temple’s economic beliefs. He writes that “in earlier times, Christian thinkers made great use of the notion of Natural Law” and then explains that for them, Natural Law meant “the proper function of a human activity as apprehended by a consideration of its own nature.”⁶⁰ Temple applies this view in two directions. First, it helps ground our understanding of the market place and all economics. People, whether organized into companies or acting on their own, produce so that their own needs and the needs of other people may be met. “Production by its own natural law exists for consumption”⁶¹ and this establishes the good of human beings, both producers and consumers, as the appropriate end of the economic order. “There is nothing wrong about profits as such”; however, when the individual consumer is treated “not as the person whose interest is the true end of the whole process, but only as an indispensable condition of success in an essentially profit-seeking enterprise”⁶² then the Natural Law is transgressed.

The Church must “insist upon the distinction between means and ends,”⁶³ by which Temple states that our current economic system constantly subverts the proper purpose of economic life. Perceived as an end, economic life can only ever encourage brutal competition. Temple cannot sympathize with this point of view, and states plainly, “material goods are limited in amount at any one time, so that it is true that the more one

⁵⁹ Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, 84.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Temple, *The Church Looks Forward*, 122.

has, the less there is for other people; and if these are what we are aiming at, one man's success means other people's failure."⁶⁴ Of course, this entire idea of scarcity presupposes a system in which women and men do not work for the good of their communities but for the most short-sighted individual gain. This presupposition entirely contradicts Temple's concept of the true ends of economic life: "If there is an obligation upon every man to contribute something, spiritual, intellectual, or material, to the common stock on which he draws to keep himself alive, it is also true that it is for the satisfaction of his needs and those of his fellows that the whole process of industry exists."⁶⁵ For him this view expresses itself in the idea of service and a calling.

Temple's great lack: Genuine community with the poor.

Temple strives to make his approach accessible to the Christian layman and those outside of the Church. The task to which he sets himself is a much needed (especially in the tumultuous time in which he writes) re-appraisal of the specific role of the Church in society and the obligation of the Church to correct injustice. The progression from his continually expressed "first principles" to a Christian socialist perspective flows quite easily for Temple. Fallen-ness is selfishness, and on the wide scale of human communities this selfishness manifests itself in exploitation and injustice. Following in the tradition of F.D. Maurice and other Christian socialists of the nineteenth century, Temple confidently asserts through most of his life that a changed society and a redeemed system will solve many of the problems faced by the poor. He directly affirms

⁶⁴ Ibid., 113.

⁶⁵ Temple, *The Hope of a New World* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1943), 51.

the importance of freedom, human fellowship, and the concept that community life cannot be founded on competition if the work of human redemption is to be achieved.

These principles make clear his purposes and the direction he believes a social order must follow. They also reveal a gap in his thinking. Poverty will fix itself, in a way, if only our economic system (with the strong encouragement and firm support of government) empowers the poorest by offering them good jobs and a say in the management of companies for which they work. Only toward the end of his life do we see Temple, clearly informed by his relationship with Reinhold Niebuhr, attempt to reevaluate his system on the basis of empirical evidence and a more complete understanding of human sinfulness. Temple called Niebuhr “the troubler of my peace”⁶⁶ and had the Archbishop lived longer it may well be that the thought of his American friend would have shaken him completely out of the peace of easy liberalism to confront the problem of poverty with all of his tremendous powers of cognition.

As it stands, those powers of cognition only partially addressed the intense reality of intractable sin, and an honest assessment of Temple’s work through the eyes of one looking for guidance on issues of poverty finds that he falls short of a powerful, universally applicable statement. He never gives up hope that the Church, by turning men and women into Christians and by critiquing society in light of Christian principles, will change the lives of the poor for the better. This hope, however, is not enough to equip concerned Christians today to aggressively address the problem of poverty.

The great gulf we see between this hope and the reality of poverty was made manifest earlier in our discussion of Temple’s desire to help the working classes through

⁶⁶ Suggate, 187. One specific challenge Niebuhr presented quite strongly is the tension between love and justice. Temple fails to adequately address the problem of sin, and too easily sees “smooth continuity between justice and love” (R. Craig, *Social Concern in the Thought of William Temple*, 99-103).

the W.E.A. The sincerity of his commitment and the vigor with which he executed the demands of his office as president of that Association cannot be denied. But the education he strove to provide workers did not address any capability deficiencies that prevented them from advancing in their line of work or in society. The students gained the benefit of “the traditional system” of education merely enhanced by elements of the modern because “the traditional type on the whole [stood] for spirit against machinery.”⁶⁷ One hates to contradict elegant ideas and genteel principles, but this sentiment plainly neglects the real needs of individual poor people. One biographer says that contact with the working class through his time at the W.E.A. led to “the emancipation of William Temple,”⁶⁸ from a traditional upper-class “We and They” mentality. Unfortunately, it did not address an essential lack in his experience: genuine community with impoverished people.

Washington and Lee University

The unfortunate hole in Temple’s thought and the frustrating contrast between mid-twentieth century hopeful idealism and twenty-first century disappointed cynicism is always before our eyes. As one biographer put it, Temple reflects “the confident optimism of the Edwardian era.”⁶⁹ This optimism skirted any direct discussion of the issues of poverty for reasons already discussed: a lack of contact with poor people and a genuine belief that improvement of the economic system would solve the worst problems of injustice and inequity. But what remains to be gleaned from Temple’s carefully articulated message? A narrow focus surely does not forbid comparisons and extrapolations. How might we receive and apply Temple’s message today?

⁶⁷ Temple, Presidential Address to the W.E.A. Summer School at Oxford, 1912.

⁶⁸ Iremonger, 36.

⁶⁹ Suggate, 25.

Part III: Discerning William Temple's Voice Today

What problems must be addressed and corrected?

Temple's thought benefits from a return to his own, plainly expressed "first principles." He states quite clearly that "its assertion of Original Sin should make the Church intensely realistic, and conspicuously free from Utopianism"⁷⁰ but then neglects to keep this assertion in mind in reference to the poor he wishes to benefit. Early in *Christianity and Social Order* he quotes a banner carried by unemployed British workers demonstrating in the first half of the twentieth century, who rejected efforts to simply placate them by providing for their needs out of common resources: "Damn Your Charity, We Want Justice!"⁷¹ Now, on behalf of the poor, we must raise this banner in the face of Temple's social theology. Damn the paternalistic attitude that looks only to the injustice of a broad system but does not consider the deep impact this injustice continues to have on generations of individuals. Damn the optimistic idealism that believes work and work alone will solve the problems of persistent, chronic poverty. Damn most of all a theology which cherishes community but which cannot realize genuine community with the impoverished.

Temple's theology stands condemned, but as is mentioned above, hope lies in a return to the basic elements. The foundation is solid (with some slight adjustments and subtle shifts of emphasis) and let our condemnation serve to burn away the straw and hay built upon it. Whether we can now build with gold remains to be seen, but Temple himself has left us the tools and the materials to at least frame a fine structure.

⁷⁰ Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, 39.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

The Christian principles with which Temple starts his works on social justice are sound. The primary criticism of Temple's foundation must be his inadequate treatment of the reality and problem of sin and evil. He constantly affirms his personal belief and the importance for the Church of believing in Original Sin, but his affirmation is too cold and intellectual. It may sound trite, but he stresses the doctrine of Original Sin not because he is convicted of his own wickedness or because he has seen firsthand the horrible exploitation and degradation of another human being. It would be unfair to imply that Temple never encountered such convicting experiences; however, his writings make quite clear that he accepts Original Sin because it is the explanation of the Church for how we arrive at this point in human history. Conceived thus the idea can never be more than a mere derivative insight and it loses force as a simple fact of our condition.

It may be that the Hegelianism Temple absorbed in his Oxford days from T.H. Green caused a reluctance or inability to adequately confront the problem of sin in the world. A rational universe populated by rational creatures leaves little room for the messy, terrifying absurdities of evil. Indeed, the intellectual threat which evil poses to a worldview founded on the concept of a rationally ordered universe is great, and perhaps great enough to push a thinker to leave it unaddressed rather than to attempt to answer it and possibly fail. One biographer calls Temple's "intellectual pilgrimage... a gradual emancipation from the spell of Hegelianism"⁷² but further notes that at the time of his death the pilgrimage had not been completed. Perhaps this incomplete emancipation is the source of Temple's first great error.

The ramifications of that error run deep in much of what the Archbishop writes. Most strikingly, we see that error in the rather superficial treatment of the working

⁷² Suggate, 134.

classes in his writing. Temple continually reminds us that all men and women are afflicted by the disease of Original Sin, but his writings about the working poor (the only poor about whom he writes) seem almost like caricatures of thoroughly good, simple people. In writing so frequently about the common human affliction of sin, and so imperfectly applying the sad results of that affliction to the poorer classes, Temple inadvertently dehumanizes the poor.

Therefore, to avoid falling into this manifestation of his primary error, we must rigorously maintain the fallen-ness of humankind. This maintenance does not come from any deep desire to believe men and women particularly wicked. Rather, it springs from the facts of the world, and contact with that world. Temple's view holds tenuously but insistently to human sinfulness and grounds itself in the hope of redemption and rational understanding which overcomes evil; experience forces us to reverse this relationship. Not pessimism but simple realism makes us cling to hope even as we ground our hard decisions in the lamentable fact of human sin.

This problem of inadequate, almost dehumanizing characterization of the poor in matters of sin leads nicely into a discussion of the second significant problem with Temple's foundation. We have seen several instances where Temple exhibits genuine concern for the disadvantaged. Indeed, the very fact of his several books written on the topic of economic justice speaks as plainly to his concern as his time at the W.E.A. or his efforts to encourage discussion of these issues at conferences like COPEC and Malvern. This concern, however, could not translate into genuine community or authentic solidarity with the oppressed. Perhaps this unfortunate distance can be accounted for in the structure of the Church of England.

A talented clergyman of Temple's birth, education, and inclinations simply would not encounter the ugly suffering and vicious misery of poverty. This explanation discourages any strong personal attack on Temple, but it cannot deflect a serious re-evaluation of his views in light of that lack of community. Our task is not to establish blame for deficiencies but to extract from Temple's thought a coherent Christian statement about the problem of poverty. This task forces us to acknowledge the lack of real community, address whatever distorting impact it had on the thought, and then proceed without further consideration.

The centrality of community.

Just as the beginning to a solution of the problem of sin in Temple's thought presents itself by faithful reliance on his own first principles, so too does the problem of any lack of community begin to evaporate under the force of Temple's extraordinary sense of community. His voice sounds a prophetic note, calling all of us into a deeper community than we are ever likely to achieve. Most importantly, community springs from the essential principles drawn from Christian tradition. However, unlike Temple's thoughts on freedom, the sanctity of personality, and service which develop out of philosophical conclusions or doctrinal statements, the essential reality of community informs our understanding and develops as a concept even as we receive it from other sources. It encourages (it demands!) the combination of *praxis* and theory, and seeks to blur the line between what we accept on authority or deduce rationally and what we understand from direct experience.

Humans are “incurably social.”⁷³ We are born into families and over the course of our lives become members, by choice or by necessity, of many different communities. As stated above, Temple considers this a function of, and our attempt of imitating in a fallen world, the perfect community found in the Trinity. “For the completeness of personality, there is needed the relationship to both God and neighbors,”⁷⁴ and whether or not we find ourselves in a position to order society around that goal, each individual Christian must set that goal before him or her. Therefore the most important task each individual Christian can undertake is to destroy the most damaging feature of impoverishment: isolation.

Temple’s focus on the social order as such detracts some from the point that *any* social order is actually the combined cry of a group of individuals against isolation and soul-starving individuality. This does not mean that we ought to abandon any sense of self and strive to grind down our respective personalities into a bland paste from which we can construct a perfectly miserable collective. Rather, this sense of community commands us to confront poverty in the most effective way conceivable: actively affirming the essential humanity of other human beings, and in so doing living fully into our own personalities.

Temple’s regard for the sanctity of each individual personality forces us to confront injustice on behalf of persons. It prohibits us from acting out of condescending charity or patronizing wisdom and forces us to acknowledge the value of another human being. But even that is too weak an articulation. It forces us to enter into genuine community with fellow children of God. Temple’s powerful sense of community compels

⁷³ Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, 47.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

us to confront the injustice which broods at the root of poverty and to transcend it. Only through this lens can we then properly understand the other orders of Temple's thought expressed in *Christianity and Social Order*. Fellowship requires our freedom because it invests us with duties and responsibilities outside of ourselves. Fellowship requires our service because it ties us to other creatures, fallen and wicked though they may be, yet recipients of God's grace and in need of our diligent work on their behalf. Just as a human's first obligation is to his or her family, then his or her municipality, then his or her state, and then the world, so too must our first focus be on the individual human, then his or her relationship to those with whom he or she lives, then to his or her neighbors, then to his or her countrymen, and finally to the whole of humanity.

What does this mean for us?

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It is true that to act in self-interest is a function of the fall, the turning self-ward of humans. However, the Christian remedy, as it calls people to check their self-interest and act as genuine members of a community, simultaneously calls on people to retrieve their genuine selves. These processes work in tandem, and one ought not to emphasize one over another. On community, the Archbishop's thought empowers and encourages. That he could not attain such community with the poor in his own life may be a function of the society in which he lived, but is inconsequential to our purposes. From his foundation, we are called to attack such seemingly unrelated sins (and they represent such an artificial, self-interested ordering of human affairs that they are certainly sins) as the persistence of ghetto poverty and the construction of gated "communities." Though Temple's writings fail to adequately address poverty or injustice, still they speak to us and demand that we

“not view with bleary eyes the faceless aggregate.”⁷⁵ For all his talk about social and economic orders, the clear note that sounds to us from out Temple’s work is a cry to behold with active compassion the faces around us of those in need. In need not of charity, or work, or welfare. In need not, in a broad sense, of justice. Rather, in desperate need of human community.

My exploration of Temple’s thought has been illuminating and challenging. I have progressed from almost no knowledge beyond the impression that he was a Christian thinker concerned with social justice, to a general understanding that tempted me to dismiss him as simply another optimistic, unrealistic liberal, to finally an appreciation of his almost tragic desire to free himself from the limits of his own early thought and confront effectively the challenges of the real world. Even as I lament the fact that he did not survive to re-evaluate and re-articulate his thought, I rejoice in the legacy William Temple leaves the Church today: a call to community so uncompromising and comprehensive that it invigorates and challenges from within even the broken shell of disappointed optimism.

The concept of genuine community cannot be predicated on pie-in-the-sky nonsense which allows comfortable American Episcopalians to give domestically or abroad and yet continue living in isolation from their impoverished sisters and brothers. To this order belong recent attempts by the Presiding Bishop of the United States to exalt the Millennium Development Goals of the UN as a kind of second Baptismal Covenant. Such silly, platitudinal efforts (one can almost hear echoing in the background the admonition to “think globally and act locally”) do not amount to much if our mission is to begin the redemption of human community.

⁷⁵ Sam Wilmoth, in a speech on the Shepherd Program at the Stackhouse Theater, March 30, 2007.

The Church must commit itself to the restoration of human relationships: first between God and human beings, and then between individual people. We can learn from people like the Reverend Lauren Stanley, a missionary priest who goes from village to village in her Diocese of Renk, which sits on the dangerous border of northern and southern Sudan, teaching reconciliation and sitting down with individuals to achieve it. The Church must challenge its members to engage in service, and service springing not from baptized condescension or pious pity. Christians must engage in service which recognizes the essential dignity of those they serve.

William Temple teaches us that the Church once presumed to actively inform economic life. His call to recover that authority and voice ennobles us, but it does not sanctify or redeem the interactions of human beings. The Church must elbow its way into the most complicated and convoluted relationships and strive to make men and women right with God and each other. This process must inevitably be slow, on a very small scale (indeed, person to person), and it will invariably be the source of much frustration. But it is the work of the Church and it is the fulfillment of the mission of Christ, the one whom God sent “to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, and to reconcile us to...the God and Father of all.”