Article Review

William Temple: Pioneer and Pillar of Christian Unity

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William Temple (1881–1944) is universally acknowledged as the leading thinker and leader of the Christian world, outside the Roman Catholic Church, in roughly the second quarter of the twentieth century. Temple was a colossal figure in several arenas of public discourse: philosophical theology, apologetics, devotional writing, Christian social thought and socio-economic reform. Appointed Bishop of Manchester in his late thirties, he went on to become Archbishop of York and, all too briefly, Archbishop of Canterbury (1942–44). He was the dominant presence, influence and source of energy in the Church of England in the twenty years before his untimely death, in harness, in his early sixties. The Church of England, the Anglican Communion and the wider church were stunned and dismayed by his loss. It was said at his funeral: ‘Today we are burying the hopes of the Church of England.’ He had burned himself out in selfless service. Few have so fully deserved the kind of adulatory tributes

that have been given to Temple. It was said of him as a young man that he could do no wrong. More relevant is the fact that so much that was right and good and helpful flowed from his working life, from beginning to end.¹

William Temple was an unlikely candidate for the title 'the people's archbishop'. He was 'born to the purple', being the son of Archbishop Frederick Temple (1821–1902). He grew up enjoying the company and conversation of many of the 'great Victorians' at his father's episcopal residences. He was educated at a public (i.e. private!) school (Rugby) and Oxford University (Balliol College, followed by The Queen's College where he taught philosophy). Temple spoke with an upper-class accent and had little idea of practicalities, such as how to make ends meet financially. Although he was conscious of possessing exceptional gifts, an unselfconscious simplicity, humility and sincerity marked his character. One of those gifts was the ability to communicate the Christian message convincingly to 'all sorts and conditions' of people – in beach missions, university missions and radio talks, as well as to clergy and churchgoers. The Pathé Newsreel of his enthronement in Canterbury Cathedral in 1942 is available on the internet; it is a window into a past era of English Christianity: male, clerical, formal, hierarchical, class structured – but deeply moving and impressive for all that.

There have been major studies of Temple's social thought, his philosophical theology and his ecclesiology,² but his contribution to Christian unity – to the nascent, emerging ecumenical movement of the 1930s and 1940s – has so far lacked a comprehensive and critical treatment. Edward Loane has now provided just such a study: clear, thorough and based on an impressive range of archival and secondary sources, as well as Temple's own vast published output. Until there is a new, critical biography of Temple, on the grand scale that he deserves, this volume will stand as the fullest account of Temple's role in the ecumenical movement and the convictions that he brought to that role. It is a key resource for the study of the Church of England, the Anglican Communion and the ecumenical movement from the early 1920s to the early 1940s.

1 The official biography is F. A. Iremonger, *William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury: His Life and Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948). An authoritative study is Stephen Spencer, *William Temple: A Calling to Prophecy* (London: SPCK, 2001). A stimulating general assessment is John Kent, *William Temple* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Stephen Spencer (ed.), *Christ in All Things: William Temple and His Writings* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2015) is a helpful selection of Temple's writings with an excellent introduction.

2 Alan Suggate, *William Temple and Christian Social Ethics Today* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987); Owen Thomas, *William Temple's Philosophy of Religion* (London: SPCK, 1961); J. F. Padgett, *The Christian Philosophy of William Temple* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974); Wendy Dackson, *The Ecclesiology of Archbishop William Temple, 1881–1944* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2004).

Loane teaches at Moore Theological College in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, Australia. A researcher from such a conservative evangelical stable, coming to the study of William Temple and Christian unity, might be forgiven for expecting to find Temple's approach to Christian unity seriously deficient – perhaps theologically woolly, doctrinally indifferent, too pragmatic, and so on. If perchance that was Loane's situation, he may have been won over, as so many have been, by Temple's equable and lovable personality, as well as struck by his awesome self-abandonment to the service of God's cause in the world. Temple was not turbulent and morbid like Charles Gore (1853–1932), one of his three main mentors, together with his father, the Archbishop, described as 'granite on fire', and Edward Caird (1835–1908), idealist philosopher and Master of Temple's undergraduate college, Balliol. At any rate, Loane's criticisms are few and restrained. In one place he makes a throw-away remark about 'the insidious nature of late Victorian theological liberalism', but it is not clear which manifestations of multi-faceted liberalism he has in mind or why they were 'insidious' (p. 16). He reports without comment Temple's conviction – nearly a century ago! – that there were no convincing theological arguments against the ordination of women (p. 200). Loane also plays a straight bat when discussing the way that Temple dithered over a plan to visit Pope Pius XII during World War II. He quotes Temple's private comment to Bishop George Bell, shortly before Temple's death in 1944 (so roughly twenty years before Vatican II): 'I do most profoundly believe that the development of the Papacy has been on the whole the greatest corruption of the Gospel in the history of the Church, when taken along with the background that necessitated it and the consequences that have flowed from it' (p. 195).

Temple is difficult to categorise in terms of 'churchmanship', but he can perhaps best be described as a Broad Church Catholic Anglican with liberal inclinations and infused with evangelical fervour. The ideal that he espoused was 'Evangelical Catholicism' (p. 89). But there was nothing otherworldly about Temple; for him social justice was part of the faith and social action to realise it was an aspect of evangelism. Loane does not mention the difficulties over the young Temple's ordination because of some hesitancy over Christology. But he makes it clear that Temple insisted on unrestricted critical discussion of Christian beliefs and that he believed in a generously comprehensive church, provided that the fundamentals of the faith were secure. Strangely, Loane does not discuss the revolution in Temple's thought at the end of the 1930s (of which he spoke in his Chairman's Introduction to the 1938 report of the Archbishops' Commission on Christian Doctrine and in the 1939 article 'Theology Today').³

3 *Doctrine in the Church of England: The Report of the Commission on Christian Doctrine appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in 1922* (London: SPCK, 1938); republished

Temple saw the need to shift the theological goal from the construction of an incarnation-centered 'christocentric metaphysic', within a fundamentally rational and harmonious universe, to which he had devoted his intellectual energies for most of his life, to a more redemptive, eschatological focus, like that of his mentor Charles Gore and also of Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr and Edwyn Hoskyns (to all of whom he was indebted), with the cross and resurrection at its centre and leaving much that remained incomprehensible and unreconciled in the world. Temple recognised that in taking this fresh direction, in 'sounding the prophetic note', he would be coming closer to the New Testament itself. In the face of war with all its horrors, the coming together of the churches in solidarity was all the more imperative.

Temple attended the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 as an usher and as far as unity in mission was concerned he never looked back. He helped to drive and shape the Faith and Order Movement. He was a key player in discussions with the British Free Churches, believing that their ministries were 'spiritually efficacious', and was instrumental in bringing the British Council of Churches into being, being elected its first chairman. He took the lead in the creation of the World Council of Churches in 1942 and chaired it in its embryonic form. I would not describe Temple as an accomplished ecclesiologist: no competent ecclesiologist could ever say, as Temple once did, albeit for rhetorical effect, 'I believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and regret that it does not yet exist.' But he was a passionate, theologically informed advocate of Christian unity – of organic unity on the basis of credal orthodoxy, sacramental generosity and episcopal order.

Temple was a dyed-in-the-wool Platonist and his conception of Christian theology was refracted through a Platonic lens. (I am not implying that that was a bad thing, since all constructive theology presupposes a metaphysic of some kind.) He was deeply versed in the works of St Thomas Aquinas, whose theological system draws all things into harmony and union with God where they find their ultimate and eternal fulfilment. Aquinas is not mentioned in this book (and is not in the Index). Temple's Platonism gave him his central, unwavering vision of unity at the heart of creation. In his Gifford Lectures of the early 1930s, *Nature, Man and God*, he speaks of 'a sacramental universe'.⁴ Temple sought to bring all thought, all human life and the Christian church itself into unity. His vocation was as a reconciler; his public mission – to explain, to teach, to convert and to lead – was in the cause of ever-deepening unity in

with a introduction by G. W. H. Lampe in 1982; Archbishop of York [William Temple], 'Theology Today', *Theology* xxxix, no. 233 (November 1939), pp. 326–33.

4 William Temple, *Nature, Man and God* (London: Macmillan, 1934).

Christ. Temple was not temperamentally equipped for the rough and tumble of ecclesiastical politics. As Loane brings out, even at the height of ferocious public and parliamentary agitation over the proposed revision of the Prayer Book in 1927–28, Temple was still insisting that the unity of the Church of England was growing stronger. For him, the glass was always half, and more than half, full (not half, and more than half, empty, as it typically was for Bishop Gore).

Temple was a representative and accomplished exponent of the philosophical tradition of Personal Idealism. He was enthralled by the ideal of persons in free and willing fellowship with one another and in communion with God. It is an attractive and compelling vision. In British thought it stems from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who imbibed early German Idealism, and after him Frederick Denison Maurice, and it was then mediated to Temple's generation by Brooke Foss Westcott (Bishop of Durham), Henry Scott Holland (Canon of St Paul's) and Charles Gore (bishop consecutively of three sees, latterly of Oxford). Coleridge is mentioned once in passing (p. 23) and B. F. Westcott not at all. But their influence, even indirect, is important in explaining one of Temple's deepest convictions: the ultimacy and therefore the imperative of unity.

Like Coleridge (who wrote in one of his Notebooks, 'When I worship, let me unify') and like Maurice after him, who was consumed by a thirst for unity, and like the Broad Church tradition generally, including Thomas Arnold and F. J. A. Hort, Temple believed that strongly or widely held convictions could not be without their element of truth. Individuals were often on the right lines in what they strongly and sincerely affirmed, but went wrong when they attacked what they understood to be the views of others with whom they disagreed. Temple confessed, in a memoir of his long-standing friend, the philosophical theologian Oliver Chase Quick, written a few months before his own death, that his 'temperamental disposition' – fortified by the teaching in logic of Edward Caird – was to begin an enquiry by assuming that 'every conviction strongly held is at least partly true, and that, as a rule, our wisdom is to find out, if we can, where this partial truth fits into the whole fabric'. And, further, that if two groups of good and sincere persons, such as Roman Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth century, differed violently, that was almost certainly due to a misunderstanding between them or an error common to both.⁵

For Platonists, as for Christians, truth is a unity, so every fragment or facet of truth, wherever found, must belong to the whole. As God is one, truth is one and the church, 'the pillar and ground of the truth', must be one also. This is

5 Archbishop of Canterbury [William Temple], 'Memoir', in Oliver Chase Quick, *The Gospel of the New World* (London: Nisbet, 1944), p. xii.

perhaps as close as we can come to Temple's basic mindset and motivation. He employed it, as many testified, with exceptional perceptiveness and empathy with regard to the views of others. To understand him and his unflagging pursuit of unity, we need to address the philosophical-theological tradition in which he stood – perhaps in its last, and by no means least, flowering. But Loane is right to say that Temple did not do full justice to differences (what Loane sometimes calls 'error', on the grounds that if there is truth, there must be error). In the much more pluralist world and a more diverse and divided world church of today, the issue of difference looms larger than it did in the mid twentieth century. Temple rode out the parliamentary Prayer Book crisis of 1927–1928, where a visceral backwoods Protestantism was the main obstacle to revision. But as Archbishop of Canterbury, he was eventually ground down by Anglo-Catholic factionalism over proposals for a United Church of South India, where a transitional period had to elapse before all its clergy would be ordained by bishops within the historic episcopate. Temple carried the enormous burden of correspondence and conversation, but was exasperated and exhausted by what he regarded as unreasonable and intolerant opposition. I imagine that this episode hastened his death.

Loane does not have much time for what he calls Temple's 'complementarian theology'. Applied to Anglicanism, this is the notion that the Church of England (and Anglicanism generally) holds together Protestant and Catholic elements, along with with the distinctive appeal to sound learning and openness to fresh knowledge that it inherited from Renaissance Humanism and the Reformation. Applied to ecumenism, it means that the major traditions, however obvious their differences may be, cannot be ultimately irreconcilable. Temple understood this mixture in the light of Hegelian dialectic of thesis, antithesis, synthesis – giving rise to a new thesis, and so on. The synthesis was strong enough to include oppositions or antinomies. But I doubt whether Temple worked it out with much theological or philosophical rigour. In his more popular accounts he could give the impression that Anglicanism 'sat on the fence' between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism or split the difference between them.⁶ But that way of explaining the Anglican experiment is patently inadequate and lacks theological rigour. Coleridge worked with the notion of polarity; F. D. Maurice had a dynamic concept of the Anglican synthesis (though one difficult to grasp), as did Michael Ramsey, a generation after Temple, with his notion of the 'binding together' of disparate elements, above all in liturgical worship (Temple himself believed that worship, and above all

6 William Temple, 'The Genius of the Church of England', in id., *Religious Experience and Other Essays and Addresses*, ed. A. E. Baker (London: James Clarke, 1958), pp. 87–96, at p. 88.

adoration, unifies). And recent ecumenical theology and dialogue has employed the concept of 'differentiated consensus', which is an agreement on the major principles, but not on all the details. Its major fruit, so far, is the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, signed on Reformation Day (31 October) 1999. Loane rejects the notion, which he ascribes to Temple, that 'complementarian ecclesiology' is authentically Anglican (p. 207). However, the need to reconcile divided Christian traditions in the unity of Christ's body, and therefore for some form of theological synthesis, cannot be in doubt. The challenge is to find a form and method of reconciling theology that has moral and theological integrity.

Some secondary points. (a) The expression 'the Anglican Church' occurs frequently. But in fact there is no 'Anglican Church', only individual, self-governing Anglican churches ('The Church of England', 'The Anglican Church of Australia', 'The Church in Wales', and so on) and the worldwide Anglican Communion of those churches, which is not itself constituted as a church. (b) The Anglican Communion is described as 'impaired' (p. 218) because of impediments to unrestricted sacramental communion and interchangeable ordained ministry as a consequence of issues on which there is not Communion-wide agreement (the ordination of women; human sexuality). But it is the communion between the constituent churches that is impaired, not the Anglican Communion as such. As far as I know, the Anglican Communion has not been described as 'impaired' in any official statements, such as the reports of the Eames Commission.⁷ The impairment is relational, not institutional. (c) Loane states (p. 218) that there have been no serious attempts at organic reunion between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain since 1980. Here he surprisingly overlooks the Anglican-Methodist Covenant of 2003 and the substantial ecclesiological work that has flowed from that by both churches and which is still active.⁸ (d) The anti-Fascist, anti-totalitarian movement set up during the War by the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Arthur Hinsley, 'The Sword of the Spirit', which attracted support and cooperation from Archbishop Temple, Bishop George Bell and the Free Churches, is consistently referred to as 'The Sword and the Spirit' (pp. 187, 253), which besides being inaccurate, loses its biblical resonance (Ephesians 6.17: 'the sword of the Spirit which the word of God'). (e) Finally, the author

7 *The Eames Commission: The Official Reports; The Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Communion and Women in the Episcopate* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1994).

8 *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant: Common Statement of the Formal Conversations between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House; London: Church House Publishing, 2001).

attributes (pp. 50, 210) to Temple a superior and 'triumphalist' view of Anglicanism, compared with other traditions, and singles out the word 'genius' in Temple's essay of 1928, 'The Genius of the Church of England'.⁹ It is true that Temple's essay is tinged with complacency about Anglicanism, though ecclesiastical humility is also present there. But the point is that 'genius' is being used here by Temple in the correct sense of the distinctive, prevailing or presiding spirit of an institution or tradition, just as it is Geoffrey Rowell's edited collection *The English Religious Tradition and the Genius of Anglicanism* (1992), where the concluding essay, by Stephen Sykes and under the same title as the book, is largely an exercise in Anglican and personal self-flagellation.¹⁰

9 See footnote 6.

10 Geoffrey Rowell (ed.), *The English Religious Tradition and the Genius of Anglicanism* (Wantage: Ikon, 1992); Stephen Sykes, 'The Genius of Anglicanism', in *ibid.*, pp. 27–41.