

A St George's House Consultation

Malvern 2017- Faith, Belief and Nation-building – What sort of Britain do we want to build for the 21st Century.

Thursday 1st – Friday 2nd June 2017

Briefing document

Current Partners: William Temple Foundation, Saltley Trust, Warwick University, University of Birmingham, University of Chester, University of Worcester, Culham St Gabriel's.

Aim of the Consultation

The consultation aims to curate a strategic and deep conversation about nation building and the role of institutional faiths and belief (both religious and non-religious) in that task.

Context for the Consultation

This consultation takes place in the context of a deep sense of fragmentation that was highlighted by the Brexit vote, but which has deeper and longer roots. It will be taking place approximately a year after the Referendum vote on June 23rd 2016, and this will engage with 12 months of national and international reflection following this momentous event. Fragmentation is between and within localities as well as regions and nations within the UK as well as running along demographic fault lines such as class and age. A salient parallel to the original Malvern consultation in 1941 is that the stability and security of Europe feels directly under threat – not so much from a global war as from a series of destabilising globalising trends, including terrorism, economic uncertainty and nationalism. The time is ripe to develop a deep and critical sense of multiculturalism about what it means to be British and European in the 21st century. This, we suggest, starts with a shared imaginary of what this means, rooted in religious and philosophical traditions, out of which might emerge a sense of shared narrative of what the United Kingdom is, and the ethics upon which that narrative is based.

The original Malvern Conference of 1941

The Malvern Conference was convened in the depth of winter in early January 1941 – in other words, literally the darkest days of the war. The instigator and convenor of the conference is Archbishop William Temple, then Archbishop of York, but shortly to be elevated to Archbishop of Canterbury. Temple knew that unless a new story is constructed about connectivity and relationality at the heart of the United Kingdom, then there would be another catastrophic European and global war within a generation; what he referred to as 'the vicious circle of war and menacing instability' (1941, x)



But this was not a conference about solutions and technical fixes. It was a conference about asking the right questions, the deepest questions it is possible to ask; namely theological and philosophical questions.

The Malvern Conference was entitled 'The Life of the Church and the Order of Society' and had three aims. The first was 'to consider how far the Christian faith and principles based upon it afford guidance for action in the world today' (1941, vii). The second was to 'encourage Christians to think about the general implications of these fundamental Christian principles in relation to contemporary needs' (1941, vii). This task was to be undertaken by the application of what Temple (developing a methodology proposed by the convenor of Oxford Ecumenical Conference, Joseph Oldham in 1937) called middle axioms; i.e. 'maxims for conduct which mediate between fundamental principles and the tangle of particular problems' (1941, vii). This would, in Temple's thinking, develop a third aim; namely, that in the light of such maxims, '... Christians should think out actual political programmes or support those drawn up by others which in their judgement give effects to these fundamental principles'. (1941, viii)

Temple's famous six middle axioms, which he articulated most succinctly in his book *Christianity and Social Order* (CSO), written a year or so after the Malvern conference, have their genesis in the themes and debates generated by the Malvern conference. The six middle axioms appear as a single page appendix in CSO and are modestly entitled 'A Suggested Programme' (1976, 101-110). They are:

1. Every child should find itself a member of a family housed with decency and dignity ...
2. Every child should have the opportunity for an education till years of maturity ...
3. Every citizen should be secure in possession of such income as will enable [them] to maintain a home and bring up children in conditions described in paragraph 1 (above) ...
4. Every citizen should have a voice in the conduct of the business or industry which is carried on by means of [their] labour ...
5. Every citizen should have sufficient daily leisure, with two days rest in seven... for [them] to enjoy a full personal life with such interests and activities as [their] talents may direct.
6. Every citizen should have assured liberty in the forms of freedom of worship, of speech, of assembly, and of association for special purposes.

In essence, what is created out of this process of reflecting on a deep social imaginary for the sort of social order Temple wanted to lead the building of, were the broad policies, set out on a single sheet of paper that became the basis of the comprehensive and universal welfare state.

Our task, in the present era, is to return to this foundational process and respect its contextual roots, but with a contemporary methodology that widens the process to engage the true diversity of religious, spiritual and philosophical sources of wisdom, imagination, experience and expertise contained within the diversity of the United Kingdom's public sphere.



Structure of the Consultation

A St Georges House Windsor model and approach, namely: a 24-hour consultation with 25 – 30 invited contributors who would respond to and debate (in the presence of rapporteurs) the input of 8 keynote presentations (15 mins) which will address foundational aspects of British society, culture and public life. Each keynote contributor will be invited to address the following questions in as precise yet thought-provoking way as possible from their own disciplinary perspective/experience.

1. What sort of our nation are we?
2. What sort of nation could we be?
3. What values and beliefs sustain your vision?

Outputs and impacts

A substantive 40 page report will be produced immediately following the consultation which will be freely available on the Partners' websites. Plans are already underway to create a series of more public regional events where the ideas generated by the report will be discussed and debated during 2017 and 2018.

