Temple Tracts: Issue 2, Volume 2

# Religion, Government and the Public Good

Craig Calhoun

William Temple Foundation

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Foreword by Chris Baker

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# Foreword

It is a huge pleasure and a privilege to be able to offer as our next *Temple Tract* a text by one of the most prolific and influential social thinkers and theorists of our age. Professor Craig Calhoun, currently Director of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), brings to this text many years of innovative anthropological and sociological research and thinking from around the world. He has observed how ideas and ideologies have deeply shaped political movements for both progressive and regressive change, including more recently, the Occupy movement and the Arab Spring, and currently, the emergence of new citizen movements in China. In this text, a version of which was originally offered as the keynote to our Manchester based conference in October 2014, which marked the 70th anniversary of William Temple's death, Professor Calhoun specifically turns to the role of religion. He considers how religion might have an increasingly significant role to play in the way we imagine and construct political futures for the UK, and indeed the world. The searching text that lies at the heart of this tract is 'the truth of the world depends on how we imagine it'.

In other words, to give our society coherence, shape and a sense of commonality that binds us together, but is capacious enough to allow diversity and plurality to flourish, we need spaces and times of convergence where we can reflect on and remember what it means to be human beings in solidarity with one another and the divine. This is because, Calhoun suggests, we have created a social order that can only respond reactively to events, that can only think of the immediate, and that seems able to promote only anthropology of individualism and technocratic solution.

While technology is important, it can only become a force of good if there is a strong social and political imagination that can support it. Calhoun uses the NHS, the United Kingdom and Europe as case studies of what can go wrong when we stop seeing these statutory and legal entities as embodied parables for progressive social change and justice, and instead only see them from the narrow perspective of individual entitlement.

Religion in the modern era, he says, provides a means of binding society as a whole together by offering ideas, narrative and imaginaries that call us to a higher and deeper vision. This is not a hubristic religion 'out-narrating' other narratives or ideas, but generously (what I called in another *Temple Tract*) 'curating' new spaces and rituals where these narratives can be shared in a spirit of politically astute, but non-partisan, leadership and facilitation.

This was precisely the vision that Temple had of both the state and the church. In increasingly large and complex societies he said, both have a role to play in facilitating good relationships and organising what Calhoun calls, 'purpose and solidarity on a large scale'.

As the UK and Europe continue to reel from both severe external global events (global terrorism, mass migration) and internal fragmentation due to continued austerity and financial downturn, Calhoun's clear message for a revived social imaginary that religion can facilitate into a political reality is as urgent and pressing as it was in Temple's day.

I hope the thoughts and words of this *Temple Tract* inspire many of us from across all types of political and/or religious belief, to reflect on what we can do both to join, and foment, progressive social movements of change and transformation.

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# Religion, Government and the Public Good

By Craig Calhoun

We live in an era that is shaped by three difficulties in being articulate. These are difficulties in saying things that we want to say but can't quite get out, things that we know at some level but have trouble making explicit. Articulacy depends on language, on narratives, on the way we represent the world to ourselves. But we have trouble putting things properly in the focus of attention. We find it hard, I'd suggest first, to articulate a sense of purpose greater than instrumental self-interest. Second, to articulate a shared identity that is strong enough really to bind us to each other and at the same time capacious enough to recognise differences among us. And third, to articulate our relationship to history and the future, and thus to time beyond the most short-term, immediate and even ephemeral engagements.

You may say, we do all of these things. And at some level we do. But it seems to me we do them less effectively than we might, and that our struggles with being more articulate are, in part, struggles about a limited vocabulary – a limited social imaginary, to borrow a phrase, and I'm particularly evoking Charles Taylor's use of it. And they connect us to a larger question about religion in the public sphere. In each of these cases, religious discourse, religious narratives, texts and ideas performed much of the role of making us articulate. And as we have become less articulate about religion in the public sphere, we have lost some of our capacity to be articulate about these three things even in ways that exceed religion or relate to matters that are not directly religion.

## Three difficulties in being articulate

### Going beyond instrumental self-interest

One way in which William Temple shaped discourse about religion in the public sphere was to distinguish the things that religion brought, from the problems it didn't solve. It didn't offer another technology for doing engineering. It didn't offer another economics for achieving prosperity. But it did offer a broader understanding and ability to situate these more technical specialised capacities.

In modern life, the tacit context and orienting principle for each is instrumental self-interest. Problems and limits to this are manifest; you'll all be aware of the extent to which we have trouble getting beyond instrumental self-interest and articulating a greater sense of purpose. This is a problem not only from religious vantage points but also in terms of values presented in completely secular, non-religious discourses. But it is a problem that has become more acute as religion has played less of a role in public discourse. It has not been replaced by other, comparably rich sources of shared articulacy. Socialism and secular discussions of community can put similar issues on the table. We can try simply to broaden accounts of the way in which markets work; we can try to broaden the understanding of human well-being or even happiness that underpin economic analyses. But we face the issue of impoverished ability to articulate broader public interests at every level from personal life to very large-scale economic and socio-technical systems. We have a hard time getting beyond the idea that we should think in terms of self-interest.

In politics, the Labour movement long articulated a vision of society that was greater than merely self-interest. It did suggest that workers' self-interests would be served by the Labour movement, by trade unions and then by Labour government in power. But it also sought the building of a better society for all its members. William Temple very early in his career talked about socialism as a Christian ethic put into practice. He helped shape the idea of the welfare state by translating the German term

*sozialstaat*. I don't want to argue the case for socialism. What I want to point out is that the Labour articulation was of a solidarity and an idea of community and a notion of how society worked that couldn't be derived just from instrumental self-interest. Workers had instrumental self-interest in shorter working days or in good pensions on retirement or in adequate healthcare – a variety of them. But these instrumental self-interests didn't constitute the whole of social needs, or dictate addressing these in the form of community with others. They didn't give us the ideas of equality and justice as part of what we value, and as commitments for the way in which we pursue instrumental action to meet our needs.

We should not try to wish away the instrumental, but I think we do wish for something more than merely instrumental self-interest. However, we have a hard time describing this. Indeed, it has become harder over the last 40 years as thinking in terms of private interest has been reinforced as natural and normal and thinking in terms of the public and social has been made to seem artificial. Margaret Thatcher epitomised the trend in her famous 1987 line that "there is no such thing as society".

One of the reasons to reread Temple, and also much else in cognate religious traditions, is to look for ways to articulate a sense of purpose greater than self-interest and to be able to go beyond this. This links to a whole series of different issues, where we have trouble now finding that purpose: to challenges of security, sustainability, international cooperation, new technology, welfare and safety nets, and the very geography of economic dynamism and thus the availability of jobs. Even what were once more radical and visionary discussions about things we'd want, now get reduced to instrumentality. The National Health Service, for example, was introduced as part of a deep agenda for the strengthening of the country and its communities, but discourse about its costs and potential reform today tends to be limited to fairly narrow instrumental questions and a calculation of individual benefits. These are not all faulty questions. We do need to ask whether you or your children can get the healthcare they need. But the debate shouldn't have only those questions, right? It needs to include questions about what it means to be a people, to care for each other, to live in healthy communities. It's important, in the concept of the National Health Service, that it makes health service available to all. A guiding principle is that it is important that everyone share in this good. It is truly a public good: a good for the public and a good provided publicly.

## Creating a shared identity

The second articulacy problem I pointed to was achieving shared identity that is strong enough to really bind us to each other and at the same time big enough to bridge differences. We know very clearly today that we have this problem. We want to claim a common identity, but we don't want to repress difference – OK, fine. Now, how do we take hold of this? How do we build a thick enough sense of commonality that we matter to each other? We need ways to recognise that it is important to each of us that the others exist. It is importantly on this basis that we are willing to contribute to the pursuit of equality or justice. These are not just abstract norms but mutual commitments. And indeed, the very idea of "binding together" is one of the core meanings of the word religion.

In the modern world, to a very large extent, we get these identities strong enough to really bind us together at two extremes of scale. Temple himself tended to think at these two extremes – family and the nation. We're pretty clear that we are devoted to each other in families; we will sacrifice for each other and we don't feel that we are well off if other members of our family are not. So we contribute to a shared welfare. In a much more attenuated way we still tend to think this about the nation, though we're slightly embarrassed about it most of the time – except Remembrance Day, to which I shall

return. The issue comes up in a negative way in debates about immigration, Europe, and security. But most of the time, we are better at voicing a sense of threat than clarifying what values really unite us. The issue is one of being able to feel strongly enough about shared belonging to the nation that we would do things like have a redistributive policy to achieve social equality. Because any kind of redistributive policy, whether we're talking about gender equality or class equality or any other kind of equality, any kind of ideal of common citizenship strong enough to pursue an agenda of equality requires quite a lot of commitment to each other.

In the last 35-plus years, we have lived through an extraordinary increase in inequality. We've lived through it in a way that both reflects our difficulty coming up with a shared identity and furthers the problem, reinforces it. It is important to establish a sense of citizenship that is strong enough that each of us is committed to the collective, even when we don't get our own ways on this issue or that. We see increasing frustrations in political public life. Too many people say, "No, I didn't get what I wanted the last election. I'm fed up with the lot of them!" We have a very hard time moving forward on broad social agendas without that.

Religion is certainly not a guarantor of harmonious community. To counter that illusion, we have only to recall the violent conflicts between Catholics and Protestants that shaped British history, not to mention others in different places and times. And individual religious communities can be split by doctrinal or other divisions. The point, rather, is that religion provides a reminder that community matters and a language in which to talk about its importance.

## Connecting with history

Third, the issue I raised about history, the future and time sounds very vague and abstract. But I think it's among the most important points. It is evident, for example, in one of our biggest failures: we are not really dealing with climate change. We're just not. We aren't even really talking about dealing with climate change. It's just sort of there in the news and on the list of problems that make us nervous. We kind of know about it. When it's brought up, we say, "Yes, don't want that." But we have very little sense of how to connect this to action. In this regard, it's one of many instances, albeit one of the most cataclysmic, in which we are not very clear about our relationship to the past and the future.

A long-standing Christian tradition speaks of shared stewardship of the Earth. Buddhism has strong articulations not just of care for nature but oneness with it. But outside of or only overlapping religion, local communities often have strong relationships to their pasts that include the history of the local landscape. A sense of continuity in ways of life, indeed in lives, is very important to helping us grasp the nature of problems that we face at the level of the country or indeed globally. This sense of continuity is often grounded in cultural traditions, in relations to place, and in the shared relationships of communities. Without it, we have difficulty properly valuing not just the past, but also the future.

Our own sense of embeddedness in personal pasts – biography and ancestry – informs how we attend to future generations lives, our children's and grandchildren's. We may do better or worse at seeing the connections of these personal histories to the larger histories of communities, peoples, causes, and nations – or even the world. This informs not only how we contemplate the future but also how we live in this world. It informs how much or how little we value our children's and grandchildren's and future generations' lives. And though I think in passive contemplation we do value them, in our public lives and economic behaviour we do not show this very much. In many ways we treat those future lives as without value and proceed on calculations of very short-term self-interest. That's pretty worrying.

## Learning from Remembrance Day

In various ways, these issues come to the fore on Remembrance Day, which makes this a good moment to think about these. Now, today[1] actually falls between the two primary celebrations, so in a technical sense it's not Remembrance Day – that was either yesterday or tomorrow.

The most historically specific Remembrance Day is tomorrow, with the echo of the signing of the World War I armistice on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. And it's a bit more on our minds than it has been in recent Remembrance Days because we are in the year of the 100th anniversary of 1914. This makes for a variety of more specific remembrances of battles and moments of failed diplomacy, with books published, academic conferences, and television programmes calling attention to World War I. This brings back, I think, some of what was quite extraordinary and quite heroic and quite awful and unheroic at the same time. It helps us feel somewhat connected to a past that we don't think about too much if we're not historians. There is even a history to the use of poppies in fundraising and remembrance. And now there are objections that wearing poppies glorifies the war – though I think this need not be so; remembrance can be of war's evil and suffering, and even of pacifists as well as soldiers.

But the main celebration is no longer the 11th November. It is Remembrance Sunday. And this is so, of course, because of how we have come to organise the working week and standardise holidays. It allows celebration on the weekend when people aren't working. Of course, this is in-turn a reflection of the once strictly observed Sabbath in what is now an almost completely secular calendar. The demand for historical commemoration to be organised in terms of desire for time off work is, in a sense, an intrusion of secular, short-term time spilling into something longer term and arguably once sacred.

Neither version of Remembrance Day – yesterday nor tomorrow – is strictly a religious ceremony or a religious holiday. Each is quasi-religious, a quasi-religious public occasion. After the main wreath-laying ceremony at the Cenotaph yesterday, for example, the Bishop of London presided over a brief church service. And this is a not uncommon pattern, but it is in a sense ambiguous. It is a civic ceremony but then there is the question, is the church service civic or is it a 'real' church service? The commemoration at the Cenotaph for the Queen and presided over by the Bishop of London was actually a celebration of a Church of England service; the Book of Common Worship includes prayers and liturgy for Remembrance Day. And it is an example of religion playing an important public role in a mostly secular society.

But there are also many quasi-sacred ceremonies of remembrance in localities around the country that are announced and conducted simply as civic ceremonies. These often draw language and ritual and emotional tone from more explicitly religious ceremonies. Religion provides the most familiar and evocative ways to recognise memories and meanings that even non-religious people may consider sacred or at least special. And in drawing on religion, there need be no desire to make sectarian distinctions. On the contrary, Remembrance Day is clearly for people of different religions and no religion at all who are joined in this moment of remembrance. Civic dignitaries, politicians, most importantly the Queen, participate in this. But this idea of civic services of remembrance is significant. It's partly significant because we don't have very many civic rituals of this kind. And it is informed by

[1] This text is based on a lecture, presented on 10th November 2014. The lecture was the keynote address at 'Reclaiming the Public Space: William Temple 70th Anniversary Conference' held at the People's History Museum, Manchester, UK.

religious traditions (and religious traditions are inevitably the traditions of specific religions not of religion in general).

We don't have the kind of public religious engagements we once had; religion has been partially privatised. But we don't have very many of these emotionally meaningful, solidarity-enhancing civic ceremonies either. So where do we contemplate, produce and reproduce this common understanding? Sitting by ourselves watching the same TV programmes? Possibly. But it's not quite the same. A lot of people imagined, a hundred years ago in the 19th century and on into the early 20th century, that while religion might fade, it would be complemented by a growth in these kinds of civic rituals of mutual engagement. Religious attendance has declined for many groups, but we haven't very successfully produced this kind of alternative.

That's what I mean by a loss of articulacy. We've lost one of our ways of talking about what it means to be us, talking together in a largely religious language and through largely religious services. We might renew that. One possibility is that we might recover more of direct religious engagement. There might be a reversal in the decline in church attendance. Another possibility is that there will be the creation of a variety of other kinds of civic engagements – but I don't see all that much of it - although there is a bit more sense of the meaning of Remembrance Day this year than in some years. But in between those two possibilities is something very important about religion and the public sphere – the possibility of religion informing the secular public sphere. This possibility was very important to William Temple. The impact and importance of religion is not felt just in opportunities for people to be religious in compartmentalised ways – Sunday morning services for most Christians - but also when religion provides vocabulary, narratives, ideas that matter in other contexts and even to other people. Temple, in several books, made slightly snide remarks to the effect that nobody reads history anymore. Anyone who reads history would understand this or that, he would say. And anyone who reads history should understand that religion has for a long time and to an enormous extent, influenced public life, well beyond any particular form or institutional version of religious participation.

The history of low-church Chapels, of Methodists and Baptists and Christianity's impact on the working class movement is one profound example. It was an impact achieved not just directly through being religious, though many workers were, but indirectly through things like learning to speak publicly in church, organising in church, extending that into other spheres of life. Taking Biblical quotes, taking imagery from the Bible that could be changed beyond any recognisable orthodoxy as you move into William Blake and his inheritors and the Antinomian tradition, there is a religious sensibility that infuses everything. Why do we speak of building a new Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land? This is not a doctrinal, sectarian position. And throughout the history of much of these movements and public life it has been important. It's important not only for specific movements, say the Labour movement which happens to interest me – and is probably on my mind because I'm back in Manchester and my first book was a study of early 19th century workers in and around Manchester – but it's significant for all sorts of other things as well.

Remembrance Day is, as it long has been, a national day. It is moreover a British national day, not English. It survives as British amid the decline of British national identity, in an era when English and Scottish and Irish and Welsh national identities are being evoked more. To inhabit a national identity depends, in part, on the reproduction of nationality in a 'social imaginary'. That is, Britishness isn't just there to be picked up like an overcoat. It is part of a way of understanding the world that also gives shape to the world. It was more important when empire helped to constitute a specifically British relationship to the rest of the world. It persisted through the Commonwealth and great national institutions like the BBC. But imagining solidarity as British always competed with the other nationalities of the UK, and support for that imaginary came not least from sports loyalties. it

attenuated when people began to ask, what matters more, the United Kingdom or individual nations? How do they matter and what's going on? What policies, what programmes do we share within one or another national frame that encourage us to act on that sensibility? How are these created, evoked, and changed? The answers lie partly in ways of imagining the world that link symbolism to sentiment and very material conditions.

This idea of a social imaginary is very important. As we get caught up in our short-term instrumental objectives and our business as usual, we tend to be absorbed into a very immediately material ontology, or sense of reality. That is, we forget that the world is the way it is because, in part, of how we imagine it. I don't mean by imagination what we often mean – a fantasy, something that's not true, or even a mistake. The truth of the world depends in part on how we imagine it. A social imaginary is an established way of imagining that reproduces ways of thinking and acting with a high degree of regularity and thus gives them material force. The reproduction of this imaginary comes through text and language, narratives and rituals and constantly repeated practical experience. Much of what gives the world shape is held among us in forms of understanding.

Religious traditions can be powerful shapers of such understanding. They influence how we understand not just God or angels or the power of prayer. They also influence how we understand moral obligation and social relationships. Religious imaginaries can make marriage more than merely a contract between two individuals because it is a sacrament and embedded in a community. They can impose a sharp differentiation between the sacred and the worldly. They can encourage a relationship of either stewardship or dominion in regard to the earth. This suggests why it is misleading to try to reduce religion to a set of propositions about the world that are either true or false. That misses the extent to which religious understandings, embedded in practice as well as thought, are constitutive of the world.

Let me make the point in a not specifically religious example for it is not only in religion that social imaginaries are reproduced and have influence. The corporation – a dominant modern form of organising business firms – actually does come in part from the historical understanding of a bishop as "corporation sole" in medieval theology, the owner of church property. Bishops and kings were held figuratively to have 'two bodies' – one private or personal, an ordinary human body, and other public, an embodiment of their position and the social organisation over which they presided. But although there is a religious background, religion is not a major part of how corporations are imagined and understood today. Still, the imagining of the corporation, its acceptance as real, is part of what enables firms to exist and be organised with limited liability for investors and the capacity to 'live' long after those who founded them have died. Corporations are not material things, like cars or tables. Their existence depends on our continuing to imagine them as real. But this dependence on imagination does not diminish their material force in the world.

What is a corporation, then? There are various formal ways in which corporations can be established, mainly by a legal agreement or a concession from the Crown. An 'act' of incorporation allows a new 'body' to be formed. Corporations are sometimes seen as artificial persons. There can be a lawsuit between you and a corporation – though you should try to avoid that as the corporations have more money and the ability to wait through long legal proceedings. A corporation can sign a contract or own property like a person can. In my home country of the United States, the Supreme Court has recently indicated that corporations have the freedom of speech to which the constitution says all citizens are entitled.

Or, think of nations again. We all know intuitively, in a vague way, what a nation is and which one we think we belong to - unless we happen to be stateless people, like refugees. But we are hard-pressed

to go beyond that. Referendums get held about breaking up the United Kingdom. In the recent case, English reaction to the Scottish referendum may do more to break up the United Kingdom than the referendum itself did. But the idea that the United Kingdom can be 'broken up' is a reminder that it exists partly in how it is imagined, though of course imagination needs constantly to be refreshed and reproduced and made salient or it loses its capacities to endure. What is the United Kingdom? It is a legal construct, a state. But it's also an act of imagination that we produce and reproduce amongst ourselves when we believe in it, when we are British, when we care about each other in this. How we accomplish that is an issue.

The Remembrance Day services in which the Church of England figures prominently are a pretty thin ground on which to base nationality. But they're a strong pointer to the issue. They both reinforce nationalism, for which they are sometimes criticised, and help to make nationalism something more than mere sectional prejudice. Nationalism need not be only narrow self-interest embodied in phrases like "I don't like Europeans coming in to steal our jobs" or "I don't like having to pay taxes to support Scotland." How do we get beyond that? Largely, I think, through a language of community, solidarity, higher purpose that comes often from religion. This makes belonging to a nation not just a matter of resentments of others but importantly of a willingness to share internally – for example to support a social safety net or institutions organised to serve all citizens equally (not just on their different abilities to pay in a market). Recognizing this helps to make sense, among other things, of why a major religious leader like William Temple would play a major role in creating Britain's welfare state. Unfortunately, religion may not be helping us as much as in the past to develop the inclusive social imaginary of the nation that can underpin greater shared welfare, though it could do more and better.

Remembrance Day is sometimes a controversial event. As some allege, it identifies Britain too much with the history of its majority population. Others claim that it glorifies war. Each of these can be true but does not need to be. This is a holiday (not the religious history of the word) that we can make into what we believe it is. If we believe it can become more inclusive, and I think it has, if we believe it can become something that reminds us of the evils of war, not just the glories, that's up to us. That's the power of the social imaginary. Remembrance Day reaches back specifically to the horrific losses of World War I and it reminds us how extraordinarily horrific they were, with hundreds of thousands and in some cases millions dying from such a wide range of countries that it came to be called a World War. Britain went into the war thinking that it would last only a few months. That was just an error, perhaps, but it was also built into imagining it. So were old-fashioned ideas of heroism and glory, a class distinction between officers and enlisted men, and an ideal of obligation not just to an abstraction of the nation but also to fellow citizens.

Remembrance Day, especially poignant to this anniversary year, is important to us partly because it commemorates those who gave their lives in that horrific conflict, in wars ever since and those who are overseas today, and it calls attention to ongoing conflicts at the same time that it calls attention to the past. It's up to us to determine whether it is glorifying war or making us recognise the nature of sacrifice, whether we at the moment believe in the cause that was being fought over between 1914 and 1918, or not. But the idea that some people were prepared to sacrifice their lives is important, not just for thinking about war but for understanding a sense of national belonging that can also be important to building shared institutions. It is not an accident that the welfare state was built in the wake of two world wars.

Remembrance Day speaks to each of the three difficulties in articulacy that I mentioned; about purpose, about solidarity and about time. It also introduces several important themes for thinking about religion, government, public space, public good, the very idea of public-ness, which I'm going to come back to.

## Religion and contemporary public life

Remembrance Day is a meeting point of religion and nationalism in the public sphere. I want to shift now to speaking more about public life.

My first point is implicit in what I said about Remembrance Day. We tend to think of belonging to a nation in all or nothing terms, and with a focus on more or less unanimity – or at least the majority. People imply that if we're going to have British – or for that matter an English - national identity, then we all have to be the same, at least up to a strong common denominator. But would the elimination of regional accents really strengthen British or English national identity? Or is it possible to have national identity organised partly through belonging to different communities that are part of the whole? A whole country is not simply a bigger version of a family. It is constituted at least partly through communication and performance in public. Public life involves both commonality and diversity. It requires shared capacity to communicate but not complete agreement – partly because it is organised through argument as much as agreement. Public life – I wish 'publicness' were a common word - is how people who don't know each other personally, who are strangers to each other in that sense nonetheless relate to each other, discuss, make decisions, join in inhabiting something like a country together.

Publicness depends on interactions and social relations among strangers. It thus thrives in cities as well as through the media. This isn't a theme that Temple particularly stresses but though in the background I think it is integral to Temple's thinking. If we weren't strangers, we wouldn't need the public sphere to relate in. Publicness thus responds to growth in scale of society. This is not just a matter of wider social networks of personal sociability, but of embeddedness in national and global economic relations and reliance on large-scale media. We live different lives because of this. And one response to this – one to which Temple was integral – is to build institutions that provide care and support and indeed social infrastructures and capacity for shared prosperity that cannot be provided adequately by local communities or families alone.

This creates occasion for public life to matter in a new way and to a new extent. Moreover, participation in public life doesn't just follow from already having something in common, like nationality, or language though these may facilitate it. It builds solidarities. Participation in public helps to create a stronger shared identity and set of shared capacities. Our very arguments and debates can connect us to each other in public – but only if they are well-organised and inform mutual understanding. Alas we aren't very good at that right now. We're not doing a great job of joining around the major issues that are shaping us.

Take an important example. Britain may leave the EU in a year or two. And whether you're for or against it, you ought to pause and ask, have we really had a public debate about this? Have we really had a rich public discussion? Have we asked what's the higher purpose here? Or are we just mad about something? Are we just whingeing, "oh, it's too bureaucratic"? Have we asked how we're bound together? Have we asked about the long-term?

Now, I think honest people could reach different conclusions about the European Union. I'm not arguing one side. I'm arguing that it's pretty shocking that we could make such a basic decision without having a public debate in which we establish higher purpose, and do it in a way that binds us together and gives us a sense of the longer-term. Yes, it will just be a day's vote but it will be a very enduring decision.

Before I go further with this, let me evoke William Temple briefly. In his most famous book, *Christianity and Social Order*, Temple offered a distinctive and interesting exposition of the vexed idea of original sin. I bet you didn't think the Director of the LSE would come here and talk about original sin – let alone try to link that to the Brexit/EU debates. Don't tell my colleagues!

I have to say as an interjection that the idea of the LSE as always and perfectly secular is an illusion, right from the beginning when the Bishop of London laid its cornerstone, right through William Temple's involvement with people like William Beveridge in building the welfare state, and right through the creation of our new Faith Centre. But that's just an interjection.

In *Christianity and Social Order*, Temple located the idea of original sin in human beings' inexorable tendencies to see the world only from where they stand. He actually starts without even standing – the baby, the infant, can only see what's there in its field of vision. And he says, yes, as we get older we can see a bit more but that doesn't change the basic point. We can only see from wherever we are and what surrounds our field of vision. We only can get perspective from that field of vision. We lack something basic in our ability to see the world. We can only judge things, or we do only judge things, by how they affect us. So we start out with these two built-in inexorable tendencies that shape the idea of original sin. For Temple, this is the tendency always to judge things in terms of how they affect us and to always see things from where we're standing. Just think about what it means for a moment. No eyes in the back of your head. You see the things you're looking at – you don't see other things. And Temple says this is sin because it means we are confusing ourselves for God when we think we know what the world is like and we think we know the value of things. We are putting ourselves in God's place because only God has that kind of perspective on the world.

Whether or not you believe in a panoptic vision from God, Temple's point is important. It is that each of us has a radically limited ability to know the world and to judge things by ourselves. We have to get that somewhere else. We can get that from God, and he says a relationship to God is crucial, but the religious tradition also shapes our access to God and offers an understanding of the larger reality that we cannot see from narrowly individualistic standpoints. We also get broader vision from other people, from scholarship and science, and from participation in public life. But when we confuse our particular perspectives for the whole of reality, we put ourselves in God's place and that is sin.

In this way, Temple points to a continual struggle that human beings must face simultaneously to overcome the limits of selfish views of the world and the hubris of claims to know it all. We have to overcome that because we have this in-built tendency. We kind of do this automatically. We say, "Yeah, I saw it, I know it's true" or "Yeah, you say a lot of those fill-in-the-blank people are really nice but I know this one jerk and he did this." We overestimate what we've seen and what we think we know: a basic hubris. And we're very selfish in what we see in the world. Similar points have been suggested in other ways. David Hume, for example, did not work with the idea of original sin. But he wrote about how people in Edinburgh would react to an earthquake in China. For a very short period of time, they would say, "Oh, that's terrible!" But by the next day, the tens of thousands dead in China would not bother them any more than if they suffered a cut on the end of their little finger.

Now, the world has changed in certain ways. It hasn't eliminated original sin in Temple's sense. It's given us new communications media and we feel closer to those earthquake victims in China. We send humanitarian assistance to people around the world and yet we often don't see the suffering, don't see the poverty, don't see things next door, and we see part of what's going on in the world in each of those big cases.

Faith, Temple suggested, is rooted in the exaltation of God. And here he says the key thing – God is really different. The exaltation of God is not just praiseful worship of God; it is adoption of a radically different perspective on the world. Temple located this shift in perspective as the idea of God but then it extends from an anthropomorphic notion of God to the very capacity to know the world in that way. This in turn informs recognition that one's own individual and self-interested purpose cannot be the larger purpose of life or the world. Temple's main message is not that we can know precisely what God's purpose is - he says we can't. It is rather that we should achieve both humility and greater understanding by recognising our limits.

This informs Temple's larger argument – to be a person rather than just an individual is to be social. Temple dwells a fair amount on this distinction. He doesn't like the idea of the individual as it's embodied in the *homo economicus* of modern economic theory. The rational, choosing individual; the inquisitive, possessive individual; the individual who is the actor of microeconomic theory is a construct (recall my discussion of influential social imaginaries). This construct often turns on the idea of a representative, rational individual agent. On this basis big models are built but they all leave something out. They leave out the fact that nobody becomes a human being without other people, without family, without personal relations, but also without a wider culture, without a wider set of relations and a variety of organisations. All of these, moreover, exist not in a discrete present tense, but in at least some degree of continuity with the past and the future.

Temple, as I said, tended always to cite family and nation as examples of this 'embeddedness' but he also brought in intermediate associations. He also brought in that we become who we are and we become human in our engagements with other people. And since his time, we've had an explosion of opportunities to do this in a variety of different kinds of organisations and movements and media and actions. But we have to ask how much and how well we are doing it.

To be a person is to be able to relate to other people. You have language, you have understanding, you can look people in the eye. Humanness, Temple says, doesn't lie solely in individuality and in the separateness of that. It lies in the capacity to build relationships. And a crucial dimension of this is expressed in achieving social order, including the state. A key point for Temple is that directly interpersonal relationships can't add up to solving all of our problems in modern societies. We need complex, more formal organisations, we need the kind of 'big state' he proposed. This would be created in order to enable good relationships with other people, not just for self-interest. To have good relationships. To be able to do on a large scale what we would do in family or community, which we can't do by means of family and community for millions of people at a time.

The dignity of each human being, according to Temple, was rooted in relationships to both God and other people. And these relationships are not entirely chosen. God is there whether you decide He is or not. That's part of Temple's message. But so are other people. So is your family. You can choose to not have anything to do with your family if you don't like them. If your sister annoys you that much, you can move away. Migrate to Australia. But you still have a family. You grow up in it. And you are who you are because of it. But how you imagine and understand it shapes how you act in relation to it.

Temple speaks of human destiny for fellowship with God. This isn't just a choice, in his view, it is human destiny in an important sense. Note that here we get that forward long-term sort of idea. Temple doesn't say all people have a good relationship with God. He says this is destiny. This is the *telos*, it is where people are headed and what we ought to work for. In the same section, he speaks of family and nation and the wide range of intermediate associations in which people basically find themselves and in each other. And I think part of the message here about getting involved in charitable

activity, getting involved in a social movement, in a campaign, in any of these kinds of things is that in addition to accomplishing instrumental goals, you find yourself and you find other people. You find yourself in the relations to other people, in the action that's being done. Man, Temple says in the language typical of his time, man is self-centred, but he always carries with him abundant proof that this is not the real truth of his nature. Our first impulses are usually selfish. Too often these are the dominant impulses – we're self-centred, we're selfish. But if we reflect enough, if we pay attention enough, we have the resources to know more, to know another truth. This shapes an understanding of human life as engagement with reaching beyond the illusions of a selfish understanding.

The exaltation of God thus issues in a call for a life of service to other people. So we proceed from exaltation, through humility – seeing the difference between yourself and God – to the notion of service to other people as the way that you can respond to that original sin and existential dilemma. Recognition of the dignity of human beings for Temple underpins both freedom and social fellowship. And this was not a narrowly personal message. He also argued, as I said, that in a modern complex society, real service required enlisting the state on behalf of social needs. So he would have resisted, I think, the tendency to say, "Oh, you went and served in the soup kitchen – that's service. You paid your taxes? That wasn't service." I think Temple would have said that was service too. I think part of the point is that if there is to be care, it requires organisation and it has to be paid for. Go back to the National Health Service example. There have to be professionals, they have to be educated, hospitals have to be built. In a modern complex society, service to other people cannot be fully effective if it is only done in direct, interpersonal interactions. It requires larger organisations. And then we are called upon to support these, to make them better, to make them work for us. We are as called upon to make the state work well as we are to be individually and personally charitable, according to Temple. That's hard. Because we can't control the state the way that we at least think we can control things close to home.

Most of the kinds of examples we could find of organisations in public life didn't exist when Temple was writing. One of the big differences between 1941 and today is an explosion of NGOs and activist-oriented organisations and media voices; ways to connect to other people. We are not without means. But we are somehow without an adequate social imaginary to guide our collective, public life. We have a shortage of integrative moments and reach beyond the immediate. We get that capacity, partly through social imaginaries, and through the language with which we understand things.

## Final Thoughts

Social theorists have recently been surprised by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, a very secular not a religious person, getting interested in religion. There are various things going on in this. But one of the things Habermas says is a memorable point. He says the secular left has run out of ways to imagine liberation. Ways to get personal motivation connected to higher purpose. And maybe religion can help renew our very vocabulary. Maybe terms like "redemption" matter.

Now go back to Remembrance Day, and go back to thinking about all of those losses. What's the vocabulary? It's loss, it's mourning. Is there an obligation to redeem the sacrifice in a better society? Do we share in this? Is religious vocabulary one that can inform secular discussions? A language or term like "redemption" can be used by people who've never read the Biblical passages it's taken from, people who will, when you give them a Biblical and Shakespearean quote think one is the other – most of us, probably. This language can inform us in trying to achieve higher purpose, greater solidarity and a sense of time.

The now largely secular discourse of human rights can have similar engagements on the global stage. And it calls to mind a second thing – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was written seven years after *Christianity and the Social Order*, so just in the wake of World War II. It's not a religious document at all. Yet it draws on the world's religions for the ideas of human dignity. The key founding precept is human dignity, and it's an idea that came from religious discourse into the secular discourse and the interfaith discourse that led to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the enormous flourishing of human rights thinking and struggle we have seen since.

We're now in a period when human rights look challenged all around us, when the world looks pretty gloomy, when there are many reasons to be pessimistic and finding an orientation to the future, finding a way to really think. Some optimism, perhaps, but a sense of continuity, a sense of the world going forward is basic. Because it's very hard to take constructive action, if you're caught in the immediate and you have no strong sense of future. And to have a strong sense of future you need some sense of the past, you need some sense of carrying on, you need some sense of other people, because they will be part of that future, and indeed carry it on beyond us.

The global world doesn't figure very much in Temple's writings at all. His account is of how big and complex Britain has come to be, so it requires the state. I'm going to close with a different sort of point. One of the crucial questions about how to organise purpose and solidarity and the future for Britain, must be about how Britain is inextricably connected to the rest of the world. The same way that Temple said, while he was Bishop of York, that you can't solve problems in York without solving them in Britain, we have to say we can't solve a lot of our national problems without attending to global problems. We are so interdependent that we need to complement the big state with the idea of the globally interconnected world and figure out these questions about what we're trying to accomplish, our higher purpose. About our relationships with others in ways that now connect us, very abstractly and distantly through modern economies, but also through warfare, also through environmental crisis, and see that as basic to a future which is ours – ours to ruin, ours to save.

# Further Reading

Craig Calhoun (2013) “The Problematic Public: Revisiting Dewey, Arendt, and Habermas,” in The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, vol. 32, 2013: 67-107.

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Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, eds. (2011) The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere. New York: Columbia University Press.

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