

Faith/Secular Partnerships in a Post COVID-19 Policy Landscape: A Critical Case Study of Deepening Postsecularity in the Temple Tradition

Christopher Baker 

The Blackburn Conference sought to understand the efficacy and relevance of Archbishop William Temple's political theology and social thought for nation building in the context of the early 2020s in recognition of the eightieth anniversary of his seminal book *Christianity and Social Order*. Temple's work, through the effective deployment of middle axioms, was instrumental in defining the contours of what would become the post-war universal and comprehensive "welfare state" (his term) in Britain. It also made the moral, social, and economic case for such a state on key doctrines within Christianity and Western philosophy. A key aim of the Blackburn conference was to ascertain the extent to which the legacy of the Temple tradition has anything useful or strategic to say in the current context of the many public spheres in which we now live, in particular those spheres characterized by deepening interfaith relationships between Christian, Muslim, and Jewish traditions as well as other faith communities.

The case study that I would like to explore for this critical task involves national research analyzing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ways partnerships evolved between faith communities and local authorities, as the latter scrambled to meet the unprecedented demands made upon them and other public service providers—a situation that was likened at the time to being on a war footing.¹ This case study therefore looks at faith/secular attempts to rebuild the public square following both the pandemic and now the cost-of-living crisis. The faith/secular nature of the case study invites us to consider the extent to which the postsecular—or indeed ideas of postsecularity—have anything to offer as a critical lens by which to examine this experience. In particular I want to reflect on the idea of "deepening postsecularity." I will then move on to identify themes or tropes with the Temple tradition that might illuminate further this case study in "deepening postsecularity" and which help us to understand the measure of what is required to build lasting and sustainable partnerships across difference for the common cause of rebuilding public life in the context of ongoing trauma and struggle.

From Ideas of the Postsecular . . .

The idea of the postsecular emerged at the dawn of the new millennium from the analysis and thinking of the social theorist Jürgen Habermas. He first appeared to develop the term in a speech on the occasion of the awarding of the Frankfurt Peace Prize of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association on October 14, 2001, in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 catastrophe.

¹ Edward Malnick, "Boris Johnson Puts Industry on War Footing to Equip NHS for Coronavirus Battle Ahead," *The Telegraph*, March 14, 2020.

Many consider this moment to mark a decisive “theological turn” in his theoretical work. In this speech he states his belief that 9/11 must mark a moment of profound self-reflection on the condition of modernity. In particular on the assumptions of the type of secularism and rationality on which it is based so that, in his words, the European West can “realize what secularization means in our postsecular societies” and prevent the risk “involved in a secularization miscarrying in other parts of the world.”² He continues,

We do not want to be perceived as crusaders of a competing religion or as salespeople of instrumental reason and destructive secularisation. . . . This image is inconsistent with a postsecular society which adapts to the fact that religious communities continue to exist in a context of ongoing secularization.³

He develops these ideas into a more structural critique, implying that some of the key foundations of a hitherto conceived mono-culturally secularized public sphere need to be “re-imagined” to better represent the diversity and plurality of a set of public spheres “in which the vigorous continuation of religion within a continuously secularising environment must be reckoned with.”⁴

Within this act, the first re-imagining is a *democratic* reformulation. The wells of democratic and participatory action by which the Enlightenment project of the nation-state continues to survive, and indeed, thrive, are replenished by a renewed respect for the wisdoms and epistemologies of “prepolitical” religious traditions. Habermas claims—in a dialogue with Cardinal Ratzinger (before he became Pope Benedict XVI)—that these traditions reinforce notions of sacrifice and solidarity that “promote common interests” that are sorely lacking in the current iteration of the liberal state by which citizens have been “turned into isolated monads acting on the basis of their own self-interest.”⁵ Religious ideas and practices of solidarity are a culturally enduring source of “social solidarity, indispensable for both individual psychological and spiritual well-being as well as for the civic health of democracy.”⁶

This point about civic health relates not only to ideas of solidarity but also participation. At the heart of Habermas’s plea for religious citizens to participate in modern liberal democratic states is the idea of understanding the public square (or squares) as “a polyphonic complexity of the range of public voices.”⁷ He is concerned that the experiences and perspectives of religious and secular citizens receive mutual (rather than at present, one-sided) accommodation, even though at the end of the day he assumes that religion will have to “modernize” in order to be accommodated into the polity of a modern state.

The second postsecular re-imagining that is required is a *moral* reformulation. This is based on a “post-metaphysical” understanding that religious ideas and practices are not irrelevant in a modern, pluralistic society, but rather do speak truth. Religious language is the “bearer of semantic content that is inspiring and even indispensable” in the modern era, not least in ability to “resist translation into reasoning discourses.”⁸ From this position of speaking “indispensable” forms of truth in a modern society, religion derives considerable ability to also speak moral truth in a context of Enlightenment rationality that reinforces individual rights at the expense of fostering impulses to solidarity. Habermas argues that a considerable deficiency of modern rationalism is an iteration of reason “decoupled from worldviews” which consequently does not have “sufficient strength to awaken, and keep awake, in the minds of secular subjects, an awareness of the violations of solidarity throughout the world, and awareness of what is missing, of what cries out to heaven.”⁹

² Jürgen Habermas, “Faith and Knowledge,” in *The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writings by Major Thinkers*, ed. Eduardo Mendietta (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 328.

³ *Ibid.*, 328–29.

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, “Equal Treatment of Cultures and the Limits of Postmodern Liberalism,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (2005): 26.

⁵ Jürgen Habermas, “Pre-political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?,” in *The Dialectics of Secularisation: On Reason and Religion*, ed. Florian Schuller and Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006), 30, 31.

⁶ Giorgi Areshidze, “Taking Religion Seriously? Habermas on Religious Translation and Cooperative Learning in Post-Secular Society,” *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 4 (2017): 727.

⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Europe: A Faltering Project*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009), 76.

⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. W. M. Hohengarten (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 51.

⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *An Awareness of What is Missing*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), 19.

...to a Deepening Postsecularity

The category of the postsecular has always been contested. Early critiques suggested that it is too generalist or is a proxy term for an uncritical desire to rediscover faith in Western society and institutions.¹⁰ More recent critiques refer to the Western-centric and colonial origins of the term, as it tends to diminish non-Christian faiths (particularly Islam) as co-opted members in the fight against secularization theory rather than seeing them in their own terms within the context of a genuinely pluralized public square. This itself can be a problem within the context of universalizing narratives of secularity.¹¹

Despite these contestations, I would argue that the idea of postsecularity has an ongoing salience in the West. As developed by me and other colleagues in human geography and urban studies, “emergent postsecularity” refers to the daily and literally mundane performances of faith/secular *rapprochement* that occur within the contexts of pluralized urban societies.¹² This is a different understanding to the postsecular, which, as already suggested, leads to a somewhat de-contextualized, and abstract theorizing on the evolving relationship between the religious and the secular. Postsecularity, by contrast, inductively theorizes on these evolving relationships from emerging data and experience rather than the other way round. Crucial to this perspective are theoretical insights derived from new materialism, actor–network theory, and assemblage thinking, which sees religion and belief as an actant that both shapes but is shaped by the assemblage of any particular public and urban setting in which it is embedded.¹³

Later thinking in this area of emergent postsecularity understands religion and belief to be interacting in and on

...myriad and increasingly pluralised sites of subjective and subaltern cultural reproduction as well as more traditional institutions. Rather than focussing on supposed moves from the religious to the secular or vice versa, we seek to shift the emphasis of these debates towards the particular sites where diverse religious, humanist and secular voices come together dialogically and enter into a learning and experimental process in which secular and religious mentalities can be reflexively transformed.¹⁴

It is on one such emergent site of dialogical and experimental postsecularity that I will now reflect from the lens of the Templesque tradition. However, I have referred to this as a case study of *deepening postsecularity* because, as I hope to show, this example is a more consciously strategic attempt to turn an emerging space of faith/secular *rapprochement* into something that is potentially more impactful and structure changing.

Keeping the Faith: Partnerships between Faith-based and Secular Actors as a Response to COVID-19

The basis for the case study I want to develop is two reports I wrote as a part of research commissioned by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (henceforth APPG) in Faith and Society. It analyzed the impact of the pandemic on partnership working between faith groups and local authorities. The first report *Keeping the Faith 1.0—Partnerships between Faith Groups and Local Authorities During and Beyond the Pandemic* was published in November 2020.¹⁵ Its purpose was to

¹⁰ James A. Beckford, “SSSR Presidential Address Public Religions and the Postsecular: Critical Reflections,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51 (2012); Khaled Furani, “Is There a Postsecular?,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83 (2015); Aamir R. Mufti, “Antinomies of the Postsecular,” *Boundary 2*, no. 40 (2013).

¹¹ Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

¹² Paul Cloke, Christopher Baker, Callum Sutherland, and Andrew Williams, *Geographies of Postsecularity: Re-envisioning Politics, Subjectivity, and Ethics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2019); Paul Cloke and Justin Beaumont, “Geographies of Postsecular Rapprochement in the City,” *Progress in Human Geography* 37, no. 1 (2012): 27–51.

¹³ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010); Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: an Introduction to Actor Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London: Continuum, 2005); Colin McFarlane, “Assemblage and Critical Urbanism,” *City* 15, no. 2 (2011): 204–24.

¹⁴ Cloke et al., *Geographies of Postsecularity*, 1–2.

¹⁵ Christopher Baker and Stephen Timms, *Keeping the Faith 1.0: Partnerships between Faith Groups and Local Authorities During and Beyond the Pandemic* (All Party Parliamentary Group Faith and Society, 2020), <https://www.faithandsociety.org/keeping-the-faith/>.

measure the *quantity* of pandemic response work undertaken by local authorities and faith groups during the first UK lockdown which lasted with varying degrees of restriction from March 23, 2020, to October 31, 2020. The report recorded the response activity through a bespoke survey. All 408 local authorities across the UK were contacted in the summer of 2020, and 194 valid responses were returned (i.e., 48 percent).

The report also sought to record the *quality* of the experience generated by the pandemic which it did via fifty-five semi-structured interviews with local authority leaders and faith group/faith-based organization leaders/managers in ten local authority areas. The intention of combining this mixed methodology of research was to ascertain the extent to which any increase in pandemic-focused activity also led to a change in the relationships between local authorities and faith groups, or had the crisis simply consolidated existing ways of working.

Key findings from this report suggested that 67 percent of local authorities reported an increase in partnership working since the pandemic started while 91 percent said their experience of pandemic partnership working with faith groups/faith-based organizations was “very positive” or “mostly positive.” Significantly, the perceptions of the amount of partnership working and the positive experience associated with it was directly correlated with areas of high as opposed to medium or low religious diversity as measured by 2011 census data.

Other significant data that emerged was the extent to which traditionally awkward or difficult aspects of working with faith groups seem to have been laid aside on account of the exigencies of the pandemic. For example, variables normally associated with negative experiences of working with faith groups appeared low down a list of general variables based on previous research in the field in the early 2000s and which contained both positive and negative elements. Just 3 percent of local authorities said that the prospect of proselytization characterized their experience of working with faith groups during the pandemic “to a great or some extent.” Only 7 percent of local authorities said the same regarding experiencing faith groups as socially conservative, and 9 percent felt that they had safeguarding concerns, and a higher number but still relatively low, identified the lack of engagement by women and young people as a defining characteristic of their relationship (17 percent). Based on previous research, one would have expected these concerns to have much higher scores on terms of “secular” experience of working in partnership with the faith sector.¹⁶ In contrast, the five variables that most definitively characterize the experience of local authorities of their faith-based partners “to a great or some extent” were: adding value due to longstanding presence in local community (88 percent); providing pool of volunteer resources (79 percent); improving access to hard-to-reach groups (79 percent); acting as a source of local leadership (78 percent); and articulating and promoting social transformation (62 percent).

Further evidence of a trend towards a deepening postsecularity is apparent in some of the ideas offered in the survey for future collaborations between local authorities and faith groups that might build on the opportunities for deeper collaboration brought up by the pandemic. The five most relevant options selected by local authorities were working together to raise awareness of issues of food justice/poverty (97 percent); wider sharing of best practice in coproduction (93 percent); increased resources to develop partnership working (83 percent); safe spaces for honest discussion regarding religion and belief (83 percent); and establish and revitalize work of local interfaith forum (77 percent).¹⁷

Identifying a “New Normal” for Partnership Working

What was evident from the data in this report is that the pandemic had opened up a new space to talk authentically and strategically about the role of faith-based care and innovation in the context of providing resources, expertise, and ideas that proved not just desirable but essential in facing the challenges of that period. Based on this evidence, we identified the emerging contours of what we named (after the common parlance that developed during the first lockdown) a “new normal” which might serve as a framework for future policy and practice. This emerging framework contained three key elements: (1) *relationship building*, commitment to understand and explore further the more honest and authentic relationship building that has already occurred; (2) *resources and innovation*, renewed appreciation and understanding of

¹⁶ Richard Farnell and Joseph Rowntree Foundation, “Faith’ in Urban Regeneration?: Engaging Faith Communities in Urban Regeneration (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2003).

¹⁷ Baker and Timms, *Keeping the Faith*, 35–36.

the resources and innovation that faith groups brought to pandemic response and a commitment to share in the future; (3) *vision and strategy*, a commitment to a more active co-production model of partnership focusing on shared visions for improvement and strategies required to fulfil them.

These elements reflect a consensus across both secular and faith actors that, while the pandemic was a searing and awful experience for many, a positive by-product was how levels of trust, meaningful communication, and innovation were created in record time. The pre-pandemic “old normal” way of doing things, including stuffy protocols, bureaucratic language, and traditional hierarchies based on who is seen as the “expert” and who is the “volunteer” were no longer fit for purpose, nor were the timeframes usually associated with their decision-making practices. Instead, new clusters of decision-making and hubs of distribution were quickly formed to coordinate responses. In some instances, faith leaders and groups coordinated responses on behalf of local authorities with other private and public actors. Far from being intimidating, working in this way was liberating. If this was the new normal, then people wanted more of it. As one senior local authority manager said in our first report:

The main thing I will keep coming back to is relationship, and that I suppose is about a commitment to a way of working that is open and inclusive and collaborative and code-signed and doing our best to understand each other’s worlds. I think all partners and indeed our own staff found that way of working to be liberating and empowering in the emergency phase.¹⁸

Embedding a New Normal in Faith/Secular Partnerships

A second *Keeping the Faith* report covered the experiences of the second and third lockdowns (the period from October 2020 to February 2022) when the UK had different tiers of restriction in response to emerging new variants of COVID-19 including the omicron variant.¹⁹ As its title “Embedding a New Normal for Partnership Working in Post-pandemic Britain” suggests, its purpose, via thirty-five in-depth interviews with both senior faith-based and local authority leaders and managers, was to reflect on how the partnerships forged in the “heat of battle” during the first lockdown period had been sustained and developed during the subsequent lockdown periods. At the heart of the report’s findings were nine commonly agreed elements, or “hallmarks,” that were considered essential for sustaining the possibility of a new normal. These were developing trust; cultivating transparency; sharing values, ethos, and motivation; embracing new mindsets, including reimagining the structures of governance and finance; a commitment to talking honestly about conflict and misunderstanding; a willingness to communicate regularly; coming with data-backed solutions; developing shared goals (derived from shared values) and action plans; and, telling good stories and celebrating achievements.²⁰

The shared values that emerged out of the experience of the pandemic, and which were seen as integral to building trust and cultivating transparency included kindness, empathy, compassion, motivation, hope, friendship, and social justice.²¹ The recognition of these shared values became the explicit (rather than implicit) basis on which knowledge was shared and decisions made, and created the conditions for effective decision-making and changes in policy and infrastructure to meet the demands but also opportunities of the new situation.

Principles for Institutional Practice of the New Normal in the Risks Beyond the Pandemic

Ongoing discussions on the reports’ findings with government ministers, civil servants, think tanks, combined local authorities, as well as faith groups have distilled these nine hallmarks into

¹⁸ Ibid., 42.

¹⁹ Christopher Baker and Stephen Timms, *Keeping the Faith 2.0: Embedding a New Normal for Partnership Working in Post-Pandemic Britain* (All Party Parliamentary Group Faith and Society, 2022), <https://www.faithandsociety.org/keeping-the-faith/>.

²⁰ Ibid., 37.

²¹ Ibid., 39.

three key elements or principles summarizing the potential of a new normal approach to policy development and community resilience.

Discerning Shared Values across Difference

The first principle is the importance of shared values as being the foundation for trusting and effective partnerships. As relayed by many in the research, the pandemic forced all of us to focus on the vulnerability of our shared humanity, not how much things cost. Rather than difference, the pandemic encouraged key respondents to the pandemic to discover and own what they had in common. And the recognition and expression of these shared values (see above) did a number of things. It reconnected policy with higher order questions like “What are we being called to do in this situation? What is God calling us to do? What is the city calling us to do?” Devising policy responses to major crises from the starting place of call or vocation also, the research discovered, aligns our actions to our core values and beliefs, and reduces the risk of burnout or resentment. Finally, as one interviewee for the second report said, “shared values lead to shared outcomes.” The reports are full of innovative, streamlined, robust, value for money services because the partnerships that have created them are on the same page when it comes to outcomes, even though the philosophical or ideological routes to those shared outcomes will be different.

Examples of deep collaboration and planning between faith groups and local authorities during the pandemic included: linking social care referrals to natural spaces of community gathering such as hair dressers, cafes, pharmacies, and corner shops; local authorities purchasing housing stock for faith groups to run safe houses for domestic abuse victims on the back of data-backed evidence of effectiveness and value for money; and faith groups managing existing local authority landlord contracts for asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Hong Kong. One London borough developed a faith strategy in which the capacity and resources of faith groups are woven into four key policy strategies including information sharing; shaping neighborhoods; learning and development; and health and wellbeing.

As Britain moves from a pandemic into a cost-of-living crisis combined with climate change and new culture wars over immigration, my observation is that we are going to need more of this new normal, not less. As I observed recently in a public lecture in Leeds, “coming together on the basis of shared values across difference will be a major policy tool as we seek to rebuild a shattered politics and restore faith in our public life.”²² This activity can no longer be the domain of niche spaces such as debating societies or interfaith fora. The only way our society is going to meet the extraordinary challenges facing it is to reconnect key policy aims and ambitions to those deep drivers for vision and change and the values and beliefs that shape them.

From Co-production and Co-creation

The second principle emerging from the *Keeping the Faith* discernment process is the shift from co-production to co-creation. Extensive literature on this theme dates to the late 1980s but hit a peak in the early 2000s.²³ There is some debate as to the extent to which the two terms are interchangeable, or whether co-creation is a facet of co-production that tells us more about the nature of the latter. It has been applied to a number of different economic and policy settings, for example: luxury hospitality; eco-tourism and restaurant sector; health care; digital technologies; and public sector reform.²⁴ In business settings, the concepts are used to understand the power of the

²² Christopher Baker, “Partnerships for Real Change: Harnessing Political and Spiritual Yearning in an Age of Uncertainty” (2022 Hook Lecture for Leeds Church Institute, November 2, 2022).

²³ William H. Voorberg, Viktor J. J. M. Bekkers, and Lars G. Tummus, “A Systematic Review of Co-creation and Co-Production: Embarking on the Social Innovation Journey,” *Public Management Review* 17, no. 9 (2015): 1333–57.

²⁴ Tracey Harkinson, “The Use of Co-creation within the Luxury Accommodation Experience—Myth or Reality?,” *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 71 (2018): 11–18; Jinyoung Im and Hailin Qu, “Drivers and Resources of Customer Co-Creation: A Scenario-based Case in the Restaurant Industry,” *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 64 (2017): 31–40; Karine Freire and Daniela Sangiorgi, “Service Design and Healthcare Innovation: From Consumption to Co-production to Co-creation,” *Proceedings of 2nd Service Design and Service Innovation Conference, ServDes. 2010*, 39–50; Veiko Lember, Taco Brandsen, and Piret Tõnurist, “The Potential Impacts of Digital technologies on Co-production and Co-creation,” *Public Management Review* 21, no. 11 (2019): 1665–86; Stephen P. Osborne, Zoe Radnor, and Kirsty Strokosch, “Co-Production and the Co-Creation of Value in Public Services: A Suitable Case for Treatment?,” *Public Management Review* 18, no. 5 (2016): 639–53.

end-user of a product in the creation of value. In public policy settings, the notion of end-user is usually transferred to that of the citizen.²⁵

The general consensus is that co-creation is a more active mode for delivering a service since it relies more explicitly on notions of mutuality and reciprocity between service provider and service user.²⁶ Further underpinning this approach is the idea of interdependence between different parties and recognizing its existence as part of a successful outcome.²⁷ A useful summary is delineated in *Co-production and Co-creation: Engaging Citizens in Public Services*.²⁸ This work breaks down the ideas of co-creation into the constitutive categories of co-initiation and co-design. I summarize this typology in the following ways in the *Keeping the Faith 2.0* report as a way of explicating the ways partnerships had evolved between faith and secular actors under the exigences of COVID-19:

Co-production is traditionally a bureaucratic and technical process whereby stakeholders and/or consumers are involved in the delivery of a service, and usually at a later stage in the production cycle. Co-creation on the other hand, demarcates a more radically open space, whereby citizens are not merely co-implementers of a service. They are also co-initiators (i.e., identifying the problems that need to be addressed) as well as co-designers (of the goods or services proposed to meet the challenges created by the problems). In the spirit of the several examples uncovered by this research, we suggest that the idea of co-creation is more redolent of a ‘new-normal’ rather than the ‘old normal’ policy framework.²⁹

A Kenotic Approach to Leadership

The third and final principle I want to address is that of leadership. Leadership is a golden thread that runs through these two reports. This is because without a certain type of leadership institutional structures and economic models always defer to the old normal. One key aspect of leadership identified in the APPG data that allows the new normal to flourish is the ability and willingness to acknowledge that one no longer has the definitive answer to the questions being raised or the solution to the problems. Perhaps this is harder for local authorities and the public sector to contemplate than the faith sector, because under the conditions of the old normal, they are inevitably cast in the role of experts in their function as budget holders. Faith groups (and other community and voluntary sector groups) are invariably cast as supplicants. For example, take existing procurement models used by local authorities to provide outside goods and services. They reinforce a static and embedded sense of hierarchy between the categories of expert and lay. These models deploy instrumental and technical language that does not connect with faith communities and that favors larger providers who can work to economies of scale, or those who already have existing contracts. This in turn harbors suspicion of favoritism and mistrust, as the process is usually highly competitive. Ultimately, this is a deficit-framed, rather than growth-framed, way of looking at how to solve the increasingly challenging problems facing both local and regional communities.³⁰

According to the interviews conducted for the second report, a more effective form of leadership is called for in these situations. This involves a deliberate stepping aside (even if only temporarily) in order to move out existing paradigms and mindsets that are not capable of delivering what is required. It involves divesting oneself of an institutionally nurtured need to come up with the solutions and instead reflect on what are the right questions and identify the ideas and people who understand and can work with the grain of the new normal. Asking the right questions as

²⁵ Voorberg, Bekkers, and Tummers. “A Systematic Review,” 1333–57.

²⁶ Robert F. Lusch, Stephen L. Vargo, and Matthew O’Brien, “Competing through Service: Insights from Service-dominant Logic,” *Journal of Retailing* 83, no. 1 (2007): 5–18; Coimbatore K. Prahalad and Venkat Ramaswamy, “Co-Creating Unique Value with Customers,” *Strategy & Leadership* 32, no. 3 (2004): 4–9.

²⁷ Prakash Chathoth, Levent Altinay, Robert James Harrington, Fevzi Okumus, and Eric S. W. Chan, “Co-production versus Co-creation: A Process-Based Continuum in the Hotel Service Context,” *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 32 (2013): 11–20.

²⁸ Taco Brandsen, Trui Steen, and Bram Verschuere, *Co-Production and Co-Creation: Engaging Citizens in Public Services* (Taylor & Francis, 2018).

²⁹ Baker and Timms, *Keeping the Faith*, 43.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

opposed to coming with tailor-made solutions was considered to be more effective in unlocking resources, motivation, and expertise in the context of something as upending as a pandemic.

The new normal I am suggesting challenges us to consider a new modality of leadership that has strong theological resonances. As someone inhabiting a public theology perspective these resonances intuitively lend themselves to defining the sort of leadership that had emerged during the pandemic. The idea of the Greek word *kenosis* (κένωσις) literally denotes “an emptying” and is derived from the verb *kenoein* which means “to empty.” It is closely associated in biblical theology with the idea of Jesus’s “self-emptying” (as in a laying aside of divine privileges in taking human form, and embracing the death and suffering that entails) in order to fulfil God’s purpose of the salvation of humankind contained in Philippians 2:5–7.³¹ I therefore define kenotic leadership as a laying aside of an institutional perspective in order to let new perspectives emerge. This form of leadership will inevitably involve an element of risk-taking and openness to experimentation and, therefore, failure. It also models two other aspects of leadership that were seen as integral to successful partnership working: modelling relationality, authenticity, and partnership; and creating hospitable and safe spaces for the practical sharing and application of beliefs, values, and worldviews.

Reciprocity as the Basis for Policy Formation and Leadership—Temple’s Legacy for a Post-Pandemic Public Square

Having outlined the contours of an emerging policy framework for future faith/secular collaborations, we now come to the central question raised by the Blackburn conference: how effective and relevant is the Temple tradition for adding value to this notion of deepening postsecularity and informing the deepening partnerships that emerged across religious and secular sectors in response to the pandemic? I will outline three emerging areas of overlap before offering a critical conclusion. The unifying thread behind these three overlaps is the core principle of reciprocity. There appear to be few if any explicit references to this word in Temple’s *oeuvre*. And yet, whether he is talking about global Christian unity or the arguments for a just social order, the notion of reciprocity is at the heart of it because it is in this concept that Temple’s theology begins.

A Theology of Reciprocity

At the heart of Temple’s vision for a just social order is the covenant relation between God and his creation. The essence of God is to pour out God’s love into the created order, as expressed in the doctrines of creation and incarnation. Every person is created in the image of God (the doctrine of *imago Dei*) and the incarnation for Temple expresses a theology of redemption from the reality of human sin. But the incarnation at a wider cosmic level also represents the sacramental nature of all creation. For him, the material essence of all things is deeply impregnated with the divine—the Word made flesh. As I have written previously, “the doctrines of *imago Dei* and Incarnation expresses the profound reality that we are all deeply connected to the divine: to use a more biblically based metaphor favored by Temple, humankind, along with the rest of the created order, are children of God.”³²

This belief for Temple is the primary principle of any social order—the fact of divine unconditional love which becomes the basis of the very highest order of human social interaction, existence, and relationality. Human beings are called therefore to respond to this gift by acting in their freedom as creatures made in the image of God, namely replicating as far as they can ethical and political systems of thinking and living that confer, as an act of gratitude and worship, those very same rights to unconditional love and the ability to flourish.

Temple expresses these rights as derivative principles—i.e., principles that are derived from the primary principle as part of that reciprocal expression and discipleship of love. The first is the

³¹ “In his very nature he was God. Jesus was equal with God. But Jesus didn’t take advantage of that fact. Instead, he made himself nothing. He did this by taking on the nature of a servant. He was made just like human beings. He appeared as a man. He was humble and obeyed God completely. He did this even though it led to his death. Even worse, he died on a cross!” Philippians 2:5–7 (NIRV).

³² Chris Baker, “Faith in the Public Sphere—In Search of a Fair and Compassionate Society for the Twenty-First Century,” *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 37, no. 3 (2016): 261.

principle of “respect for every person simply as a person” which therefore confer “the fullest possible scope to the exercise of powers and qualities that are distinctly personal.”³³ Temple defines this as the principle of *freedom*.

The second is the “right to social relationships,” because it is only in dialogue and relationship with another that we reach our full God-given potential and completeness. Here Temple follows the thinking of French philosopher Jacques Maritain who refers to this process as essential for attaining our true “personality” rather than the mere expression of an “individualism.”³⁴ For Temple, individualism does not bring us true freedom as it is predicated on separation *from* the other. True peace and freedom can only occur when we allow ourselves to be free *for* others—in other words, freedom that is based on reciprocal relationship. Temple defines this as the principle of *fellowship* and clearly it is a prerequisite for the principle of *freedom*.

The third derivative principle is the notion of *service*. For Temple, service represents the practical civic, political, and social outworking of the principles of freedom and fellowship. Temple refers to this outworking as “responsible citizenship” which forms a reciprocal act of engagement in acknowledgement for a welfare state which will provide all the means necessary for the flourishing of individual lives and intermediate groupings.³⁵ The scope of this “responsible citizenship,” Temple suggests, can take place at many levels: neighbor, community, nation, and God.

A Leadership of Reciprocity

Stephen Spencer is correct when he says that Temple’s multiple talents as a public, spiritual, intellectual, and church leader that saw him attain the very highest levels of achievement in all these fields make it difficult to offer a neat assessment of his leadership style.³⁶ However I can detect three elements of reciprocity in Temple’s leadership that speak into the model of a post-pandemic kenotic leadership that I see as essential for sustaining a new normal in public policy.

The first is his ability to have a commanding vision of justice and wellbeing which sees the bigger picture, a perspective on the whole system, and is then willing to “call out” any impediments to that justice and wellbeing without fear or favor. Kenotic leadership is about using one’s authority to identify and then delineate a space which others can populate with their own ideas and experience. However, the timing and the way these issues are called out requires great discernment.

Spencer identifies two such moments in Temple’s tenure as Archbishop of Canterbury. One is in the House of Lords in 1943 when he challenged the government and wider society’s general apathy to what was happening to Jewish people in the Holocaust. Spencer surmises that Temple knows that there is little he can politically do to alter the government’s position on winning the war at all costs and not being diverted by humanitarian issues. But his conscience will allow him to do no other than make the moral case for relief and to highlight to a forgetful world the full atrocity of what is occurring. In a memorable speech which has resonated powerfully and set the tone for future generations to respond to, he said:

We know that what we can do is small compared with the magnitude of the problem, but we cannot rest so long as there is any sense among us that we are doing all that might be done. . . . We at this moment have upon us a tremendous responsibility. We stand at the bar of history, of humanity, and of God.³⁷

The other event occurred a few months earlier, at a packed Albert Hall in 1942, where Temple addresses an assembly of six thousand people and a stage full of church leaders and politicians. The meeting is part of a series of national events held under the banner of “The Church Looks Forward.” A *Pathe* news clip from that time cuts to the point where Temple does not just talk about “general political principles,” but in Spencer’s words, “takes aim at the economic system undergirding British society” with a generally recognized truth.³⁸

³³ William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (London: Shephard-Walwyn/SPCK 1942/1976), 67.

³⁴ Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, 48.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁶ Stephen Spencer, *Archbishop William Temple: A Study in Servant Leadership* (London: SCM Press, 2022), 187.

³⁷ F. A. Iremonger, *William Temple Archbishop of Canterbury: His Life and Letters* (Oxford: Geoffrey Cumberlege/Oxford University Press, 1948), 566–67.

³⁸ Spencer, *Archbishop William Temple*, 4.

There are four requisites for life which are given by the bounty of God – air, light, land and water. These exist before man’s labour is expended on them, and upon air and light man can do nothing except spoil them.³⁹

The middle section of his argument is arresting for its use of irony: “I suppose if it were possible to have established property rights in air, somebody would have done it before now, and then he would demand of us that we should pay him if we wanted to breathe what he called *his* air.”⁴⁰ This moment of ironic engagement allows Temple the opportunity to land the real intent of his message in a memorable way.

Well, it couldn’t be done, so it hasn’t been done. But it could be done with land, and it has been done with land; and it seems to me that we have been far too tender towards the claims that have been made by the owners of the land and of water as compared with the interests of the public, which need that land and water for the ordinary purposes of human life.⁴¹

However, as Spencer points out, these moments of vision shaping and space creating, of what we might call “authoritative leadership,” were probably all the more effective because of the authenticity and integrity with which they were offered. This authenticity for Spencer lies in a sense of natural humility that permeates the entirety of Temple’s life. Spencer outlines how disappointments in Temple’s earlier career, such as a disastrous spell as headmaster of Repton school and early rejections in his pursuit of ordination, accentuated a belief in the importance of developing trust and collaboration, and above all pragmatism and patience. It allowed Temple the ability to win over those who were not natural political or theological allies over several key areas of policy, including the development and delivery of key components that would eventually ensure the emergence of the post-war welfare state. So, a sense of humility is the second element of Temple’s leadership relevant to this debate.

A final element of Temple’s approach to leadership is his commitment to keep searching and reflecting. As Spencer points out, this approach to his own intellectual and spiritual development was linked to his overall humility. He was never content to rest “on the laurels of his major publications, but kept digging for the truth.”⁴² He was also prepared to critique his own thinking and set aside some of his earlier work in order for it to speak more convincingly into the moment. As Spencer explained, this involved moving away from an “early historicist and collectivist outlook” inspired by an Hegelian idealism, which sees an inevitable process of unity in the processes of history.⁴³ This somewhat “prescriptive” and “colonialist” view gave way to a more realist “responsive” vision as the storm clouds of the Second World War gathered pace before unleashing their full horrors.⁴⁴ The challenge for Temple was now to work in response to evidence of the full impact of human evil which required not only a full ontological appreciation, but also a pragmatic and collective political response to mitigating its worse effects. This resulted in the “Suggested Programme” appendix at the end of *Christianity and Social Order* which laid out a broad blueprint for the Welfare State, but in doing so, had to walk a very fine balance between radicalism and consensus.

Policy Formation as an Act of Reciprocity

The final element of the Temple legacy framing a post-pandemic postsecularity is the importance he attached to convening deliberative spaces across faith/secular perspectives for strategic reflection on the present challenges facing society. The intention behind these deliberative spaces is that enough of a shared vision might emerge that could galvanise new thinking and therefore new practice. One such example emerged in the depths of winter in 1941, when, in full blackout conditions, Temple convened the Malvern Conference, named after the venue, Malvern College. This was not a conference about solutions and technical fixes. Rather, it was about asking the right

³⁹ William Temple, qtd. in Spencer, *Archbishop William Temple*, 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴² Spencer, *Archbishop William Temple*, 189.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

questions about the sort of society Britain should be and what role [Christian] faith should play in shaping society to those desired ends. The three-day conference was therefore entitled “The Life of the Church and the Order of Society” and keynote speakers in front of an audience of 200 clergy and laity included the essayist John Middleton Murry (1889–1957), T. S. Eliot (1888–1965), Dorothy Sayers (1893–1957), Sir Richard Acland MP (1906–1990), the philosopher Donald MacKinnon (1913–1994) and social theologian V. A. Demant (1893–1983). By his own admission, Temple records that the “Conference attempted too much,” that “the programme was overcrowded” and that therefore participation from the 200 delegates was limited as there was “far too little time for discussion.”⁴⁵ There was also a criticism that the main speakers were not sufficiently “expert in their field” and that the ideas and values that were expressed “were futile unless those who speak organize themselves into a party or movement to give practical effect to their declaration.”⁴⁶

In a robust response, Temple argues that in a time of national crisis it was right to take as wide a view as possible as to challenges and opportunities for social, economic, and political renewal. He also said that due to the depth of analysis that was required, the overrunning of time was inevitable. As to the complaint about a lack of specific expertise Temple was of the view that “we need experts; but their function is to persuade public opinion, not to decide what shall be done. . . .” For him, the rationale behind the Malvern conference was to “register the convictions of a considerable body of interested persons” whom he divides into three camps: “some experts in different parts of the field surveyed, some practically experienced but not theoretical students, [and] some generally intelligent folk with a profound concern. . . .”⁴⁷

In other words, Malvern was intended as an exercise in participatory and democratic learning and sense forming—however top-down in the end it became. As to the final point about a lack of political heft and impact, Temple asserts that the real intention of the conference was to “act as a spur to thought to everyone who attended,” and he goes on to outline his belief that through this consciousness raising at a more grass roots and public level, one can exercise soft power on the influence of public opinion in a way which “gives direction to public action.”⁴⁸

Despite these self-acknowledged limitations, it was testament to Temple’s gifts as a leader that the conference did, in fact, strategically cover a number of key issues that the church needed to address. He concludes:

our discussion led us to suggest that the remedy must be sought in a new appreciation of the true relations between finance, production, distribution and consumption and adjustments of our economic system in the light of this; we further considered that a reform of the monetary system might be indispensable; and that rights of labour as compared with those of capital called for redress.⁴⁹

Although the Malvern process was undoubtedly flawed, the outcomes rippled out in powerful ways. Within a year, Temple had distilled the ideas generated by the conference into *Christianity and Social Order*. He had also, through the event, created a cohort of church leaders, lay people, public intellectuals, and politicians who caught the vision for the need for radical social reform and who were therefore willing to push for that agenda when the time came. Temple took the risk, in the middle of a national and global crisis, to lead a form of consultative learning and sharing across difference based on spaces of dialogue and reflection. It allowed people to step out of their institutional comfort zones and listen to other perspectives, and in doing so trust a wider set of options and principles their own. Rather than a luxury, he saw such processes as indispensable for generating new ideas, but also political momentum around a vision and agenda for radical change. These processes were clearly implicit in the ways that partnerships across religious and secular difference were deepened and made more effective in response to COVID-19.

⁴⁵ William Temple, “A Review of the Conference,” in *Malvern, 1941: The Life of the Church and the Order of Society* (London, New York, Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co), 215.

⁴⁶ Temple, “Review,” 215.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 223.

A Framework Fit for Use in Advancing Deepening Postsecularity, or an Exercise in Willful Nostalgia?

The aim of this article has been to identify processes of deepening postsecularity already present in diverse and economically struggling communities such as those showcased in the Blackburn colloquium, and to ask the extent to which these processes can still be usefully framed and assessed with regard to the Temple tradition. My case study was not based on a specific North-West example, but a national case study based on widening and deepening participation and partnership between religious and secular agencies in response to a global pandemic. A distillation of the learning emerging from this experience suggests that three dimensions—values lead to shared outcomes, co-creation rather than co-production, and a type of kenotic leadership—will in the future be indispensable to resilience and partnership working. Between them they represent the possibility of a new normal approach for policy and governance between the religious and the secular.

I suggested that all three of these approaches have at their heart the notion of reciprocity, and it is at this point that I am suggesting the Temple tradition has something to offer. I have articulated these overlaps in terms of a theological and philosophical vision (a theology of reciprocity), a style of leadership (a leadership of reciprocity), and a style of generating ideas based on different experiences and ideas which are intentionally designed to contribute new policy ideas, as well as the important process of widening participation (a kenotic form of leadership).

My conclusion, as recently stated elsewhere, is that Temple in so far as his memory is kept alive (and that inevitably comes more attenuated as the years pass) still has much to offer our modern policy context in terms of the questions that underpin his methodology and fact-finding. The Temple tradition is “most powerful [when it acts] as a general call to pay attention to how social orders are constructed and the political and spiritual importance of always imagining well-constructed alternatives that combine deep vision with political acumen.”⁵⁰

The actual content of that tradition is less likely to age well. It speaks both into and from an industrial society predicated on the “working man” (as opposed to a post-industrial one and increasingly post-digital one), a culturally monochrome society (rather than a radically diverse one), and above all a Christian-informed culture society (rather than a post-Christian one). The duty of those of us who still find the Temple tradition inspiring on the questions it is asking is to carry forward its essential (as opposed to contextualized) vision in new, exciting, and, above all, relevant ways.

Author Biography

CHRISTOPHER BAKER (BA, University of Manchester; BTh, University of Southampton; MTh in Liturgy and Pastoral Care (Distinction) Heythrop College, University of London (Distinction); PhD, University of Manchester) is Professor of Religion, Belief, and Public Life in the Department of Social, Therapeutic, and Community Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London, and Director of Research at the William Temple Foundation. He is the author, most recently, of “‘Building Back Better’ and the Search for Values: Critically Reclaiming Temple’s Social Thought for a Post-pandemic Policy Landscape,” *Theology* 125, no. 4 (2022); “Resisting the Transcendent?,” in *The Routledge Handbook of the Postsecular*, ed. Justin Beaumont (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), and, with Paul Cloke, Callum Sutherland, and Andrew Williams, *Postsecular Geographies: Re-envisioning Politics, Subjectivity, and Ethics* (New York and London: Routledge; 2019). He is the editor, with Beth A. Crisp and Adam Dinham, of *Re-imagining Religion and Belief for 21st Century Policy and Practice* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2019). His articles have appeared in *Sociology of Religion*, *Political Theology*, *Social Policy and Society*, *International Journal of Public Theology*, *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, and *Religions*, among many others. Baker’s primary scholarly interests include religion, belief, and urban development/urban studies; religion, belief, and public policy; and religion, belief, and political activism.

⁵⁰ Christopher Baker, “Welfarism and Legacies,” in *Re-Envisioning the British State in a Time of Crisis: A Critical Revisiting of the Balliol Connection of Temple, Tawney and Beveridge for the 21st Century*, ed. Chris Baker and Ryan Haecker (William Temple Foundation Temple Book 1, 2023), 67.