

## Foreword

WHEN CHRIS FLETCHER FIRST outlined to me her thinking about Dorothy L. Sayers' theology of work, I realised that I ought to reacquaint myself with an author who I had read only sketchily many years before. Continuing the discussion with Chris whilst simultaneously reading the Peter Wimsey novels, *The Mind of the Maker* and other pieces gave a fascinating insight into the integrity of a life. For Sayers, theology, art and life were inextricably woven together and were shaped inexorably by her experience as a woman and a lay Christian. All these factors coalesce in her exploration of the nature of human work.

A woman, a lay (Roman Catholic) Christian, with extensive experience of seeking to live faithfully through a diverse working life, Chris Fletcher understandably found a natural affinity with Sayers. But her study here goes a very long way beyond sympathetic affinity. Whilst Sayers' fiction occupies the "mental landscape" of the between-Wars period when detective stories were enjoying their classic period, Fletcher locates her, no less strongly, in the wartime and post-War period of reconstruction which was a similarly classic period for Anglican Social Theology. From the Malvern Conference of 1941, through the birth of the Welfare State and into an age when prosperity was forcing the pace of social and moral change, the Church of England was connecting with public policy in a way which was unprecedented in modern times and which still constitutes an almost mythical "golden age" for socially-aware Anglicans. Fletcher locates Sayers very firmly within that genre of Anglican social thinking and thereby helps us see further into the interdisciplinary nature of that movement, here

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shown to embrace art and literature as well as economics, political theory, social sciences and theology.

Although this book is, in one sense, “about” Dorothy L Sayers, its significance is theological rather than biographical. Since the mid-Twentieth Century, and the period when Anglican theology appeared to be shaping Britain’s post-War reconstruction in many respects, it has generally been true that the church’s commitment to social action remained whilst its grasp of the theological foundations for that action withered. William Temple’s theological seriousness, and the deep philosophical, theological and social arguments that he and his associates (including Sayers) adduced for the church’s social engagement, were largely forgotten as the Church of England tended to seek relevance in preference to theological authenticity. This lack of theological depth made it easy for the church to revert to an inward-looking pietism from the 1980s onwards which had little if anything to say about the Christian vision of a good society. By turning the spotlight on Sayers’ contribution here, Fletcher shows how the theological seriousness of her period was not the preserve of bishops and clergy but could be, and was, integral to the reflections of a highly intelligent lay woman who saw very clearly how Christian faith could permeate the story of the world, humanity and the created order.

It is precisely this sense of a sublime and persuasive narrative of faith which has come back into fashion in contemporary theological movements such as Radical Orthodoxy. Owing much to the thinking of the Thomist moral philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre, Radical Orthodoxy has presented itself as an emphatic break with the past traditions of Anglican social thought. Fletcher shows that the tradition within which Sayers, along with Temple, stood was far from being disconnected from elements of Catholic Social Teaching and, hence, a lineage can be constructed, through Aquinas and MacIntyre, between apparently very different theological movements. Again, the seriousness and depth of the Anglican tradition to which Sayers contributed is very apparent.

But this book is of contemporary, as well as historical, interest. Human labour is part of the experience of almost every Christian and yet it has too rarely been a focal theme for Christian ethics. Most of what has passed for a “theology of work” in the UK and USA has, until recently, had the character of personal anecdote linked, more or less adequately, to sermonic reflection. Secular commentators have begun to take an interest in work—not least, the persistence of soul-destroying labour and inhuman

conditions in the most economically prosperous nations of all time. But if the problems around work are to be addressed, political ideology can only get one so far when unaccompanied by a more profound anthropology than secular managerialist theories can offer. Sayers was one of the few who tackled this theme. Perhaps, being a lay woman in a world where theology was the preserve of male clerics, she was one of the few with the courage and experience to do so. It remains that there have not been many who were willing or able to build on her theological reflections on work, and even what she did has largely been forgotten. Over fifty years after Sayers' death, Fletcher convincingly points us back to her anthropology and her grasp of how good work can mirror the divine nature. If this book can serve as a stimulus for new theological work about "work" – and new theology that will be duly cognisant of the resource which Sayers represents – it will have served the church and the academy well.

Working with Chris Fletcher on this project was not only intellectually exciting but a lot of fun—I hope for us both. We argued and shouted our way through hours of discussion, went back again and again to Sayers' books and enjoyed all the ecumenical tensions you would expect between a Roman Catholic and an Anglican post-liberal! I ended up with a much more profound respect for Sayers' contribution to Anglican social thought and some foundations for thinking further about the contemporary problems of work. Chris ended up with some more letters after her name and a challenging new job. You, the reader, end up with the work between these covers. I think it is original, timely and thought-provoking. I hope you do too.

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July 2012