



From Winchester to Westminster

by Jonathan Aitken

WESTMINSTER ABBEY HAS BEEN crowning and burying England's monarchs for 11 centuries. But it rarely pays spiritual homage to anyone else apart from occasional statesmen, warriors, or poets of great eminence. So it was an unusual honor when the abbey recently held a special service of thanksgiving for a billionaire philanthropist and Wall Street fund manager whom *Money* magazine in 1999 called "the greatest global stock picker of the century." He was the American-born Sir John Templeton, who died last year aged 95. As the packed congregation attending his memorial service discovered, there was a lot more to Templeton than his stellar achievements in wealth creation. For he was also a scholar, original thinker, and philanthropist in the realms of spirituality and science, with views that may be coming into increasing acceptance.

John Marks Templeton was born in Winchester, Tennessee, in 1912. As a Yale student during the Great Depression, he received a letter from his father saying that parental support for his education was no longer affordable. This acted as a spur to redoubled academic effort. Templeton graduated close to the top of his Yale class in 1934 and won a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford, where he achieved an MA (Honours) in law.

As an investor Templeton thought differently from his competitors. He was often a counter-cyclical optimist when markets were in free fall. At the outbreak of World War II in 1939 he picked 100 stocks trading at under \$1 and made multiple

returns on 94 of them. He pioneered global diversification into emerging economies and owned the first leading mutual fund to take big positions in the postwar Japanese market. He disdained technical analysis and charts for stock trading. Instead he



searched for value by concentrating on personal study of company fundamentals. As a result his Templeton mutual funds were remarkably successful. Yet his triumphs in the world of Mammon were secondary to his calling from God. For in 1992 Templeton sold his group for \$440 million in order to concentrate on the work he considered to be of primary importance: the advancement of spirituality and religion.

At the Westminster Abbey service every attendee was given a digest of readings from Templeton's book *Riches for the Mind and Spirit*. Part anthology, part autobiography, the excerpts encapsulated Sir John's quest for spiritual wholeness. Many of the themes were familiar Christian territory (love, forgiveness, humility, perseverance, hope, courage, prayer, thanksgiving) but were tackled from angles that combined vibrancy of expression with originality of thought. Here is the author on the important subject of gratitude:

Thanksgiving opens the door to spiritual growth. If there is any day in our life which is not thanksgiving day, then we are not fully alive. Counting our blessing attracts blessings. Counting our blessings each morning starts a day full of blessings. Thanksgiving brings God's bounty. From gratitude comes riches—from complaints, pov-

erty. Thankfulness opens the door to happiness. Thanksgiving causes giving. Thanksgiving puts our mind in tune with the Infinite. Continual gratitude dissolves our worries.

Exploring ways of being in tune with the Infinite was an important priority for John Templeton. Although dedicated to his Christian beliefs, he was open to the benefits and values of other faiths. He was also full of optimistic curiosity about the possibility of new discoveries in the field of religious and scientific advancement. He argued that theologically minded scientists should utilize the meticulous techniques of their research to make progress in spiritual exploration.

When Templeton first began voicing his thoughts on this largely unknown area of religio-scientific study some luminaries of both establishments thought he was a fringe or even beyond the fringe eccentric. But times and views are changing. One of the many interesting features of the Westminster Abbey memorial service was the galaxy of distinguished scientists and theologians who came to it. In conversation at the reception afterward one nuclear physicist praised Templeton's pioneering work and linked it to the thesis set out in a potentially important book due to be published in the U.S. in July, *The Evolution of God* by Robert Wright.

This work, by a secular author well known for his work on free trade, is skeptical about much past and present religious doctrine. But it suggests that God may best be understood in the future by the evolution of human knowledge of the divine. It is surely an argument that would have had some resonance with John Templeton. For why should divine truth, however once revealed, stay permanently static in earlier time warps of historical and theological thought? Doesn't it make more sense at least to be open to the possibility that evolving knowledge may help us to uncover greater truth about God? He is eternal. We human beings are temporal. That makes us potentially fallible to theological misunderstandings of yesterday yet capable of better understanding today as a result of new discoveries and explorations.

EMPOWERING EXPLORATION OF divine truth is an important part of John Templeton's legacy. He gave much of his wealth to the foundation that bears his name. One of its major goals is to proliferate financial support for spiritual discoveries. The Templeton Foundation encourages research

into and discussion of "Life's Biggest Questions" by awarding grants to institutions, individuals, and organizations that pursue the answers to such questions through "explorations into the laws of nature and the universe and into questions on the nature of love, gratitude, forgiveness and creativity."

Your High Spirits columnist is currently reading all Sir John Templeton's writings and lectures with enthusiastic interest. Through the Trinity Forum in Europe (a long-established Scottish educational charity of which I am executive director) we are running a Templeton-supported program in Oxford, Edinburgh, and Westminster for tomorrow's leaders, with special focus on Rhodes and Marshall scholars, graduate students, young faculty members, and young comers in parliament and government. I knew from previous experience that studies of "Life's Biggest Questions" would go down well in an academic environment. But I had qualms about whether the rising generation of politicians and government appointees would take the time and trouble to travel on Templetonian journeys of spiritual exploration. How wrong I was! The early gatherings of our new Westminster Forum are heavily oversubscribed by the best and brightest. It's a case of standing room only at our forum on "The Importance of Gratitude" led by Prof. Roger Scruton (well known to *TAS* readers), and the same looks like it will be the case for all our summer and fall forums on subjects such as "Forgiveness in the Criminal Justice System," "Forgiveness in Parliamentary Life" (a hot topic since a mass of MPs have recently been caught red-handed breaking laws and expending regulations on their allowances), "Forgiving Former Enemies in Northern Ireland," and "The Limits of Science."

These events are taking place in rooms a stone's throw from Westminster Abbey. So I like to imagine Sir John Templeton looking down on our deliberations from some celestial vantage point in the Abbey's soaring transepts of King Henry VII's chapel, which he loved. I hope he will be pleased that his life's work of spiritual exploration on the themes he championed is flourishing today in 21st-century Westminster. ❁

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