

# Harold Wilson Commemoration Speech 18 October 2014

by Canon Keith Lamdin, Principal of Sarum College

I am so glad to welcome you all formally. I hope you have been able to find your old room and at least see what has happened to it while you have been away. I hope that some memories have flooded back, both happy memories and outrageous ones and memories of struggle. You will see what we have done with the building. I have had regular correspondence with someone who was at some time the sacristan and who still is worried that what he called the Wells chalice has gone walk about. And you will see what we have done with the Sarum Cross as it has morphed through the decades. I do not think we still have the processional cross.

I am very happy to welcome you with news that we are now well down the road to a merger with the Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme (STETS) so that after some 25 years of not being allowed to train ordinands we will be starting again. Isn't it great that having banned colleges from doing part time training the national church now thinks it's a good thing!

I also want to thank those of you who badgered me to think again about our room names and plaques in the chapel. A confession to start off with. When Robert came and started on at us I just slightly wondered what we might have let ourselves in for. Retired clergy I thought were often a pain in the butt for parish clergy and I wondered what a group of them might be for us here. Surely I thought they should be out trimming their hedges for the third time in the week.

I repent of those thoughts for this day and its preparation has taken me back to the early days of my own ministry and to the work of Harold before he came here. I trained at Bristol Baptist College 1966-69. I did a youth work placement with a man called Andrew Aldrich who I found out yesterday came to work with Harold here while he was the first warden at Ammerdown.

I was 22 and just ordained and received as part of post ordination training an invitation to a group work course. We all arrived at Victoria Methodist Church in Bristol, were put into groups with one of the leaders - for me it was Jean Robinson a Methodist Deaconess. We sat in a circle and then the magic words - *'The task of this group is to study its behaviour as it happens'*. As a young man who did his best to keep his thoughts and his feelings sealed off from each other it was like the sinking of the titanic as the iceberg of group relations tore apart the water tight compartments. So now 45 years later I can say that what happened on that course opened a door to what has been the main source of my ministry and make sense of the direction my vocation has taken me.

Later on you are going to hear of Harold's time here but I want to set his influence in a longer time frame and a wider ecclesial perspective. In the early 1960s a revolution began to take place in the Church's understanding of education both for the ordained and for lay people in parishes. Harold Wilson was in the heart of the small group who created and led this revolution.

Before the 1960s education was conceived as knowledge transfer and instruction. This was true in schools and universities and in training centres for the new industries. Yet in the maelstrom of the second world war different ideas about selection and training had found new life. The Church of England based its new clergy selection conferences on methods developed for officer selection by the War Office, and some years later strange news came from the USA of education that had come to give credence to experience.

Harold had been a youth enabler in the diocese of Sheffield, when at the same time Leslie Hunter his bishop was developing the whole idea of industrial chaplaincy. Both were attempts to relate Christian faith the lived experience of people in their working lives. These passions Harold took when he was appointed to the post of secretary for lay training at Church House in 1959. There he worked alongside people such as Mary Drinkwater and Joyce Harding, and built links with close collaborative working partnerships with people such as John Adair, Terry Waite, Dick Herrick and Bruce Reed among many others.

One of my academics found this in our library from Terry Waite's autobiography *Taken on Trust* talks of hitchhiking to visit his unwell father in Cheshire. A small estate car stops and they get talking about education and who should it be but Harold. This led to Terry and Harold working together, and Harold taking part of Terry's wedding.

There was a growing interest in the role of lay people both in the world as disciples and in the church as sharing in the development and leadership of parish life. It was the decade of Parish and People, a parish programme developed with Eric James. There were lots of Parish Life conferences and leadership training seminars. John Adair, a young graduate who had been at Westcott, worked with Harold in those early days and went on to become an internationally renowned writer and teacher in leadership.

This approach was innovative at the time, and moved from a sense of monologue to that of dialogue and group centred learning. John and Harold learned about groups relations training

from visit to workshops in the US and were two of the facilitators in a large Episcopal conference in Toronto in the early '60s

Harold linked in with what had begun to happen in the Episcopal Church in the United States. There had been a conference known as the Kings Lab when Americans from Bethel National Training Laboratories, in 1957 came to the UK. The church of England was frightened to death of this kind of stuff and for some years not much happened but Harold stayed in touch with George Peabody and Carmen Hunter and others. In 1962 Harold brought together all those involved in lay training from the dioceses and trainers from the US to Elfinward, the retreat house of the Diocese of Chichester. This was the beginning of flip charts and masking tape but it was also about breaking new ground, and was the springboard for a number of significant creations. Dick Herrick, with Wesley Carr established the Chelmsford Cathedral Centre for Research and Training. Bruce Reed developed his work with lay people and established the Grubb Institute for Behavioural Studies, and the Board of Education for the Church of England developed a coherent set of training events in groups relations, and parish life conferences.

The people I have talked with who remember the times are all very clear that Harold had the vision and the pioneering spirit, that he was the lynch pin to this whole new area of learning. At the same time people talk about him as being such a nice and gentle man. His secretary, Judy Bridger, talks of working for and with him being a delight. She was trusted and valued and it was such fun to work with him. It was this culture of learning and exploration that he brought to Salisbury in 1965, and which so many of you remember with such affection.

It is worth perhaps just pausing a moment to think about the significance of all this, and it relates to the importance of experience. In classical education experience is to be trained and shaped by knowledge and tradition. Experience is embodied and emotional and bodies and emotions are not to be trusted. Experience may open up Pandora's box of desire and difference and diversity and is to be schooled and disciplined into submission.

Once experience can be unleashed from its guardians a whole new horizon of enquiry opens up. What might it mean to be straight or gay (although that was not the language of the time)? What might it mean to be black or working class or female in the world of the church?

I have a wonderful story of a young black female ordinand here after the days of Harold, when day after day her things were taken from her pigeon hole and thrown on the floor. She hid herself

away and had a camera and photographed the culprit and confronted him when the prints were developed. It stopped thereafter.

What might leadership and authority mean and how can we examine them and learn about them? If experience can be trusted can we learn from one another or only from the teacher? What might it mean to create a community of formation or learning and how best might the Principal behave and function in such a community?

Salisbury and then Salisbury and Wells became a centre of theological training that was unique. Perhaps it was because of the innovation and risk that his time came to an end in the ways that they could back then and Harold was moved to St Paul's where I have heard today he was heard to say 'I am bloody bored', and George Reindorp, bishop at the time, was heard to say that he wanted the next principal to be married and have children. he wanted to see nappies on the line in the principal's garden.

It was not until 1982 that the now Ministry Division collaborated with the Board of Ed to produce a short document Occasional Paper No 11 called Learning and Teaching in Theological Education. It reads:

For some 15 years there has been considerable divergence between the approach to theological education commonly practised in theological colleges and courses and the approach to lay training officers in dioceses. The approach of colleges and courses has been commonly thought to be largely in terms of teaching about the claims of the theological tradition, while the approach of adult education offices has been commonly thought largely in terms of learning from one's own experiences.

This was written 18 years after Harold came to Salisbury and 10 years after he left, almost as if the educational community here at Salisbury had never existed.

Grant me the indulgence of saying something about Sarum now. I have written a small piece which we have entitled Holy Ground which is on your seats but I want to say some other things. We have a vision of this place as a place where we can learn to nourish the human spirit, and of course experience lies at the heart of this enquiry. We have a sense about what it might mean to each of us and maybe to humankind as well when our spirits are fed. We think it has to do with wisdom and courage.

Wisdom provides us with the open minded capacity

- to explore a issue from every angle,
- to bring all our hermeneutic skills to a problem,

- to explore it both intellectually and from the depth of our emotional experience,
- to allow the stranger and alien to challenge any tentative conclusion we come to, to stay provisional and at the same time decided. As someone said to live as if it is true knowing that it might not be,
- to live with the languages of poetry and metaphor as well as that of scientific materialism.

And courage has to do with our ability in the face of risk and disappointment to say what we think and to stand and maybe to act.

We have shaped these ideas into our values which we have become very explicit about.

We have four values:

- **All are welcome - people of all faiths and none** - This is part of our Benedictine hospitality that was clearly part of Harold's life and work amongst you. It is enhanced by the coming here of the Benedictine monks from Pershore, Nashdom and Elmore, now living in the principal's house as St Benedict's priority.
- **We learn together and from each other** - This is a very interesting value. We do not believe, any of us, that we are better doing it on our own. And this stems from educational policy that Harold was at the heart of all those years ago. Learning and formation happens in the gaps as much as in the formal lecture, in the meal time conversations and the late night parties. So it is here, not only among the staff but on our MA modules.
- **We are committed to Sarum because we love it** - This is quite hard to say because it could be romantic tosh, and it could be quite oppressive. But what surprised me was how soon I found myself loving the building and the Close, and the community of staff here. And how obvious it is when someone does not fit it, or pull their weight. It is not just the place, and the building and the people - there is something extra when these things come together. We might just find ourselves talking about holy ground.
- **If we can we will.** - Here is a spirit of endeavour and risk and adventure. It is part of the Benedictine welcome for you may be the Christ today for us.

You will see how these shape our education programmes in our brochure and in how we use this building for learning and prayer and hospitality. But I also want to say something else.

I think it is fair to say that when I came here six years ago the college was running at a significant loss and the future of the college was uncertain. In that first year we were hit by a visit from Wiltshire Fire Brigade who rightly said we were a fire risk and would be closed if we did not spend what turned out to be £70k. Last year we turned in a small surplus. Part of this is due to the moving of the Benedictine community from Elmore here to buy and develop the Principal's house.

But most of it has to do with the fantastic staff we have here, from the kitchen to the domestic to the hospitality and the academics. And last but absolutely not least I want to honour our architect Keith Harden who knows every stone and tile and bend in a pipe.

In the last 25 year we have spent over £3.5 million pounds to bring the building to be what you see today. Many generous friends and grant-making bodies have helped us on the way. It is not easy with the Cathedral so close as a major draw for donations and funds. We do our best to make this place pay for itself but the building is a constant source of need. When we think about fundraising and friends everybody asks us about our alumni - people like you and me who have been serving in the Lord's vineyard with stipends and small pensions. So we do not have dinners for the millionaires who once studied here (that is unless a couple of you are). We do need your prayers and we do need your money as well, small widower's mites as well as significant donations and legacies.

Let me say something about legacies. We received two last year, one for £65k and one for £10. I cannot tell you how much they lifted our spirits, and when you come next our library will have new lighting and new carpets. It lifts the spirit because it comes a pure gift.

There are two routes to giving. The first is to tell you about our need, and the second is to do with generosity out of gratitude. As I have been having these discussions with people who know Harold and connecting it to my own story I found myself deeply grateful to a man whom I never knew, and almost without thinking decided to make a donation, myself. Given, not really because of need but out of gratitude.

And I hope that having been here and felt something of our vision and aspiration you might want to do the same.

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