

Considering the Church with help from Dan Hardy: talking, walking and loving in the light of Christ

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Introducing a conversation

‘One of the things I have particularly noticed about life in the Church ... is how little time people spend thinking about the nature of the Church’.¹ So said Dan Hardy in 1994; but this could not be said about him. Dan thought deeply about the Church, seeing it as ‘intrinsic to Christian faith, and indeed important to everything else’ though ‘not altogether as it should be’.² He carried on thinking hard about the Church until his untimely death in 2007, leaving his ‘Parting conversations on God and the Church’ in his remarkable final testament, *Wording a Radiance*. It is very fitting that the Society for the Study of Theology, a body that Dan played such a part in forming, should have chosen ecclesiology as its theme for this year’s conference. We could do with Dan’s penetrating analysis of the Church, his determination to discern its character and purpose, and his ambition to see its reach extended into the whole world; and just when we think we have grasped something significant about the Church and find ourselves saying with him, ‘That is truly exciting’³ we could also do with hearing him tell us that ‘There is much more to be said about all of this’.⁴

My paper will give only a glimpse of Dan’s panoramic vision of the Church. It is an attempt to bring Dan’s thinking of the Church into conversation with the doing of the Church in which I am engaged. However, that already risks polarising thought and practice in a way ill-disposed to the demands of ecclesiology and inimical to the way Dan exercised his theological responsibilities. Dan thought as hard about the Church as any theologian I know but his ecclesiology was worked out through deep involvement in the Church’s life. He combined active service in the Church with attentive observation and generous listening to the experience of others. His thinking and writing developed through engagement with real situations in the life of the Church.

Dan believed that ‘the Church was not first an idea or a doctrine but a *practice* of commonality in faith and mission’⁵. That is one of those densely stated comments of which this paper might be seen as an extended exegesis. At this point I only note that, as with Bonhoeffer, who is never far from Dan’s ecclesiology, the Church is most definitely historical. It is part of history, the history of God’s involvement with the world. The Church, therefore, is concrete and is only known in the actual life of people and places, sacraments and structures and in its political, social and cultural environment. In that sense, ecclesiology is the discipline of—to use the title of one of Dan’s books—*Finding the Church*. At the same time, though, because this living history of the Church takes place within the living history of—to use the title of another of his books—*God’s Ways with the World*, it is vital for the Church to strain every theological muscle to grasp ‘its own reality and dynamics’⁶, to uncover the ‘logic of the Church’,⁷ and not to attempt to do so alone but always by inviting ‘the Holy Spirit to stir its heart, soul, mind and strength’.⁸

¹ Daniel W. Hardy, *God’s Ways with the World: Thinking and Practicing the Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 217.

² Daniel W. Hardy, *Finding the Church: The Dynamic Truth of Anglicanism* (London: SCM, 2001), 239.

³ Hardy, *Finding*, 253.

⁴ Hardy, *Finding*, 126. For a succession of examples of Dan Hardy’s ability to attend to the thought of others, to affirm it and, at the same time, to suggest that even more thought is required, see his response to the twenty essays of his *Festschrift*, ‘A magnificent complexity: letting God be God in Church, society and creation’, in *Essentials of Christian Community*, eds. David F. Ford and Dennis L. Stamps (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 307–56.

⁵ Hardy, *Finding*, 29.

⁶ Hardy, *Finding*, 4.

⁷ Hardy, *Finding*, 79ff. (81).

⁸ Hardy, *Finding*, 4. For a significant study of Dan Hardy’s ecclesiology, Peter Ochs, *Another Reformation: Post-Liberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 167–94.

Essentially, for Dan, ecclesiology is the search for wisdom, ‘where the aspects of reality in their truth and goodness converge, not abstractly or through abstract connections, but concretely’.⁹ Such wisdom is the wisdom of God, as God’s life is bound up with the actual realities of world history through which such wisdom is known. It is not only wisdom about God but it is itself a share in the wisdom of God. It is receiving the life that God gives to the Church by the life of Christ in the person of Christ as its ‘inner reason’—an inspired, spiritual and sanctified reason.¹⁰

When commending this conference to other bishops in the Church of England, I have said something like: ‘as *practical ecclesiologists* it’s important that we’re there because we have a lot to learn and, perhaps, something to give’. But just as it would be wrong to describe Dan Hardy as a theoretical ecclesiologist with practical interests added on, I hope it is inaccurate to describe bishops and others as practitioners who occasionally do some so-called ‘theological reflection’ as an added extra. If God ‘has given particular ministries’ to serve the ‘royal priesthood’ of the Church, and if among these ministries, ‘bishops are ordained to be shepherds of Christ’s flock and guardians of the faith of the apostles, proclaiming the gospel of God’s kingdom and leading his people in mission’,¹¹ then bishops are called to be thinkers of the Church as well as doers. Admittedly, finding time for sustained study is difficult, but I have found that episcopal ministry, especially in a missionary age, requires constant thought about the reality and dynamics, the character and shape, the work and witness of the Church.

Every pastor recognises the truth in Dan’s words that the Church is ‘not altogether what it should be’. To be given oversight in the life of the Church, to be placed in a position where one not only *sees over* a range of manifestations of the Church but also has a responsibility towards them, certainly leaves one in no doubt that the Church seldom rises to its full stature. That has always been the case. From Abram’s treatment of Sarai to the Apostles’ neglect of the Hellenist widows, through the failings of the Church in every age, the people of God have always underperformed. That is simply the story of sin and grace. Nonetheless, there is something about a period of heightened missionary challenge when the culture in which the Church has ministered changes rapidly, when the number of Christians falls dramatically and when the reach of the Church into the fabric of the culture is reduced, that brings into sharp relief the distance between the call of the Church and its present life. I do not say this to complain about the Church but only to make the point that, specifically, when I look back over decades of the Church in retreat in Coventry and project only a few years into the future, it becomes very clear to me that some imaginative thought and practice of the highest ecclesial standard is required to discern the calling of the Church to the city and to (re)form the Church in all its multiplicity to fulfil its vocation.

Putting this more positively, in a missionary age ecclesiology comes into its own and is freed from more sterile forms of argument about the ordering of the ministries, worship and rules of the Church that have preoccupied other ages. Questions that surround those issues are not unimportant but neither are they ‘truly exciting’. Searching out the originating order, glory and canon of the Church in order to see more clearly how the missionary energy of the Church can be cultivated and liberated, is the sort of theological activity that is not only truly exciting but absolutely vital because ‘the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things’ is that ‘*through the church* the wisdom of God in its rich variety might be now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places’ (Eph. 3.10).

So, in these of all times and on this of all subjects, the need for partnership between ‘Church’ and ‘Academy’ cannot be overstated. If those with responsibility for the leadership of the churches and those with resources for deep, researched and scrutinized theological thought can find effective ways

⁹ Hardy, *Finding*, 43.

¹⁰ Hardy, *Finding*, 109, 141, 165. Of course, it follows that ‘whatever grasp [our theology] has of the truth of God, it still needs deeper formation’; see Hardy, *Finding*, 241.

¹¹ See the Church of England (*Common Worship*) Ordinal: ‘The Ordination and Consecration of a Bishop’ in *Ordination Services: Study Edition* (London: Church House Publishing, 2007), 55.

of—in one of Dan Hardy’s favourite images—animating each other, there is great hope for the renewal of the Church in our time. I hope that this paper will show how I have found extraordinary richness in the ecclesiology of one theologian and will illustrate the way I have drawn upon his thought to test and develop what I have been up to over the last seven years as a bishop and as I look ahead to what is to come. I begin my engagement with Dan with a particular piece of art in Coventry Cathedral that symbolises several of his ecclesiological themes.

Stalingrad 1942: light, life and love in and through the Church

Basil Spence, the new Cathedral’s architect, envisioned a building that would be ‘like a plain jewel-casket with many jewels’. The jewels were to be a series of striking pieces of art by some of the best artists of the time. Nearly thirty years after the consecration of the new Cathedral, a new artwork was given. It is more modest than the great works by Epstein, Sutherland, Piper and other giants of British art that formed part of the Cathedral’s original design. It is also only a copy of an original drawing by a little known German artist, Kurt Reuber, that hangs in the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche in Berlin, a church with a parallel history of destruction and rebuilding to Coventry’s Cathedral. Through the generosity of the Gedächtniskirche and Reuber’s family, copies were given to the Cathedrals of Coventry and Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad) as a sign of reconciliation between the three cities, once ravaged by war.

Kurt Reuber, the amateur artist, was also a pastor and a doctor. In 1942 he was buried, almost literally, in the Battle of Stalingrad, a battle that stole the lives of over two million people and probably cost Germany the war. In the worst of the winter, the city, by then occupied by the German army, was under siege. It was like a Kessel, a cauldron boiling with human suffering on the edge of hell: plunged into darkness, full of death and filled with hatred. Reuber was doing everything in his power as a doctor for all who came his way, Russian and German, but his powers were limited in such conditions. He was determined, though, that Christmas should be celebrated in Festung Stalingrad—Fortress Stalingrad. On the back of a Russian map he drew a woman holding her newborn baby in her womb-like embrace, shrouding the vulnerable baby with swathes of clothing and intense love. Around the picture are several words. The two I have mentioned already—Kessel and Festung (cauldron and fortress)—are a commentary on the context in which Christmas was to be celebrated. The words that speak out with striking simplicity on the right hand side of the picture are a commentary on the faith that Christmas celebrates: *Licht, Leben, Liebe*. Even here, the Christian Faith speaks of light, life and love.¹² The drawing came to be known as the Stalingrad Madonna. For me, it has become an important image of the Christian Faith and the place of the Church in it, even more so when I look at it with Dan Hardy’s help.

Fundamentally, the word ‘Church’ for Dan is ‘a collective designation for the varying social embodiments of Christian life in the world’.¹³ Human beings are created for social existence which, following Bonhoeffer, he likes to call ‘sociality’.¹⁴ Even in the midst of war with all its destructive capacities for the complete degradation of social existence, a group of people gathered in Stalingrad to give time and space to imagine a different sort of world. Few in number as these German soldiers were on this occasion, they were joined at one point by a sole Russian voice which they heard in the distance persisting with the carol that they found impossible to complete: a small sign of the reconciliation that the child of the first Christmas would seek to bring to a divided world.

For those celebrating Christmas in that place, there could be no doubt that Christian life is fully embedded in the life of the world, even when, as in the cauldron of Stalingrad in 1942, that life is

¹² Image available at ‘Stalingrad Madonna’, *Wikipedia*, accessed online at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stalingrad_Madonna> 10/3/15.

¹³ Hardy, ‘The missionary being of the church’, in *Finding*, 29.

¹⁴ See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009).

ebbing away. Dan would not allow the Church to escape from that world. He could speak more purposefully than most about the intensity of ecclesial life: how we are drawn here and now through worship, as they were there and then, into an *'intensity of participation* in the new life of Christ'. But he would speak at the same time, almost in the same breath (as he does in this quotation), of how we are propelled into *'the extension of its benefit'*¹⁵ to all of the dimensions of the world's life. In this way, the Church is both *'the embodiment of the intensity of God's Trinitarian self-determination in its social life'* and *'the embodiment of God's self-determination in the extensity of social life in the world'*.¹⁶ That is the faith that Reuber and his small congregation were celebrating. The life and work of the Church is *'directly connected with the Trinitarian life and work of God: the forms of social life are closely connected with the free self-determination of God in Christ; and their dynamic—how they move—is closely connected with the vitality and direction of God in the Holy Spirit'*.¹⁷

Here we are touching on the theological root of Dan's ecclesiology: the Trinitarian God *'is himself by the economy of his presence in the world'*. Dan located the Church in the divine life by his conviction that *'the primal divine drama'*¹⁸ of the immanent Trinity is lived out in the freedom of God's abundant love in relation to the world: *'the nature of God is to be God by being in the world to confer true order—in Jesus Christ—and movement—in the Holy Spirit—within it'*. God's *'free self-determination'* to *'maintain the consistency of his life in an ordered but energetic congruence with his world'*¹⁹, takes the Trinitarian God to the crib of Bethlehem and then to the cross of Jerusalem.

The intensity and extensity of the Church's life is, therefore, a share in the creative and redemptive work of God whereby the *'infinitely intense identity of the Lord'* is lived out in the *'indefinite extensity of the shaping of the world in history'*.²⁰ As hopeful as this sounds for the world, Stalingrad 1942 is one proof among many of that which Dan called *'the striking actuality of disruption, evil and suffering'*²¹ in the world which shows how far it is from the realisation of *'the purposes of God for the fulfilment of human life'*²² in the kingdom of God. The *'radical challenge of evil'*²³ is its capacity to distort and fragment human relationships that was experienced so cruelly in Stalingrad. It includes deep disruption of humanity's relationship with God and, as the scorched earth around Stalingrad showed, with the rest of creation. The fundamental propriety of human life—its holiness, or truest identity in the will of God, for true sociality²⁴—is threatened. However, God's propriety—God's holiness, God's truest Trinitarian identity—carries a *'fire in God . . . [which] . . . eventually refines even*

¹⁵ Hardy, *Finding*, 135–6.

¹⁶ Hardy, *Finding*, 34.

¹⁷ Hardy, *Finding*, 24.

¹⁸ It is worth putting this quote in its immediate context: *'Correspondingly, the immanent Trinity is "neither a formal process of self-communication, as in Rahner, not entangled in the world process, as in Moltmann".'* [Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama* vol. 4 (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1994), 322f.] Instead, the immanent Trinity is a *'primal divine drama'* in which the divine unity is not inert, but energetic and Spirit-driven, *'which is yet true to its initial conditions (what we designate by the word "Father") and ordered in its interactions (that which we call the "Son" or the "Logos")'*, in Hardy, *Finding*, 249. See also Hardy, *God's Ways*, 81.

¹⁹ Hardy, *Finding*, 220. The whole of the sentence is worth quoting: *'This God maintains the consistency of his life in an ordered but energetic congruence with his world, through self-restructuring in a free, coherent and abundant response to the perturbations (constructive or destructive) which occur in that interaction and in those with whom he interacts'*. (From an unpublished paper on *'The question of God in God's action in the World'* (1994), in David F. Ford, *'The architecture of life with God'*, in *Essentials of Community*, eds. Ford and Stamps, 1–20.

²⁰ Daniel W. Hardy, *'Receptive ecumenism—learning by engagement'*, in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, ed. Paul D. Murray (Oxford University Press, 2010), 428–41 (433).

²¹ Hardy, *Finding*, 67.

²² Hardy, *Finding*, 38.

²³ Hardy, *Finding*, 131.

²⁴ Hardy, *'Worship and the formation of a holy people'*, in *Finding*, 11–16.

that which opposes it, thereby healing the fragmentations introduced by those who resist it'.²⁵ This fire of God's holiness burns throughout the life of Christ and most effectively in his death on the cross. The cross is the point at which the resistance of humanity is met by God's resistance to resistance in (akin to Reuber's cauldron) a 'kind of crucible'.²⁶ Here the fragmentation of human life is burned away by the refining fire of the God who insists on maintaining his relationship with the world even when he is rejected.

Through his suffering and death, Christ reverses the 'human abuse of all that is "in the flesh"' and even revokes "'nature's" corruption'.²⁷ The disorders of human relations between people and their relations with the natural world and with God, which contaminate everything and are 'compounded in extreme forms of evil'²⁸ are suffered by Jesus on the cross through an intense 'identification in love',²⁹ by which the powers that oppose God are overcome and the forces that divide humanity are reconciled by the one in whom 'all things hold together', because in him, 'the fullness of God was pleased to dwell' (Col. 1.17, 19).

By means of Christ's action on the cross 'a new actuality of human life is opened from God and in God'.³⁰ This 'new actuality' is the life of Christ—the 'life which fulfils life itself'³¹—and it represents 'a complete expansion and transformation'³² of what had been previously. It is a '*new ecclesiality*' which lifts 'elemental social life to the actuality of true society'.³³ It is *Licht, Leben* and *Liebe*: light in the darkness into which the world is slipping; life in a world so enamoured with 'lifelessness' and expert in death; love in a world of serial divisions. It is the light of the life of the 'Word made flesh' through whom we have received grace upon grace (Jn 1.3, 14, 16). It is a new actuality of life in Christ that is opened up to us by the Holy Spirit through 'the movement of faith'³⁴ and it is lived out in the life of the Church as the embodiment of true sociality and, therefore (breathtakingly), as 'the life of God lifting the world by means of the Church'³⁵ to its 'full stature and promise'.³⁶

Kurt Reuber, as a 'carrier' of the characteristics of the Church,³⁷ was able, by the grace and mercy of God, to form the Church into a moment of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity; and, through the prophetic action of their Christmas celebration, these few Christians were able to be agents of God's purposes for the world, speaking a word of peace to a world at war. It was an extreme but inspiring example of what Dan was to call 'socio-poeisis', 'the self-making of society'.³⁸ It was also evidence of that which Dan (following Coleridge's use) called *abduction*—that process of divine action by which human life is not only lifted 'to a higher condition' in its present historical life but also drawn 'forward to the kingdom of God'³⁹ and, thereby, into a real participation in 'the theocentric dynamic'.⁴⁰ It is to the application of some of these themes in my own work that I now turn. I begin by returning to Coventry Cathedral, interpreted as an architectural example of Dan's ecclesiology. I then move onto the role of a bishop and the responsibility it carries for the socio-poeisis (formation of common life) in Church and society: through parish life, between different churches in a given place and in schools.

²⁵ Hardy, *Finding*, 17.

²⁶ Hardy, *Finding*, 17.

²⁷ Hardy, *Finding*, 130.

²⁸ Hardy, *Finding*, 17.

²⁹ Daniel W. Hardy, 'What Does it Mean to Love?', *Theology* 73 (1970), 257–64 (257).

³⁰ Hardy, *Finding*, 130.

³¹ Hardy, *Finding*, 52.

³² Hardy, *Finding*, 130.

³³ Hardy, *Finding*, 138.

³⁴ Hardy, *Finding*, 130.

³⁵ Hardy, *God's Work*, 222.

³⁶ Hardy, 'Receptive ecumenism', 433.

³⁷ Hardy, *Finding*, 250–1

³⁸ Hardy, 'Receptive ecumenism', 434.

³⁹ Hardy, 'Receptive ecumenism', 438.

⁴⁰ Hardy, 'Magnificent complexity', 348.

Reuber's Johannine themes (intrinsic to Dan's theology) of light, life and love pervade each level of activity.

Coventry 2015: forming the Church in the light, life and love of Christ and walking with Christ in the world

Cathedral

The art work for which Coventry Cathedral is best known is the Graham Sutherland Tapestry of the Ascended Christ at its east end.⁴¹ Like the other 'jewels in the casket' of the new Cathedral, the Tapestry is no later adornment but integral to the original design. Cathedrals are traditionally both the end-points of pilgrims' journeys and expansive spaces in which journeys take place as pilgrims follow their architectural and liturgical movements. All this is especially true for Coventry Cathedral. Pilgrims are drawn to the Cathedral because of its distinctive history of wartime bombing and peacetime rebuilding, and because of the iconic character it has assumed. At the same time, they are drawn (abducted) into a pilgrimage from the ruins of the old Cathedral into the vast dimensions of the new Cathedral rising out of the past into a more hopeful future. Sutherland's Tapestry provides their orientation. The extraordinarily beautiful face of Jesus beckons them forward. As pilgrims come close to the massive proportions of Christ in glory they see that his feet still bear the scars of the cross. They also catch sight of a smaller but still almost life-size figure and, in seeing him or her (the person's gender is indecipherable), they see themselves 'clamped between the feet of the crucified Christ',⁴² as Rowan Williams put it in a notable sermon in the Cathedral.⁴³

It is then as though pilgrims are *turned around* literally (perhaps it is the light behind them that does it), to look at everything anew from their new perspective. They see colour and light: colour from the stained glass visible only on one's return from the altar-table; light from the massive glass screen filling the space where one would expect to find the west wall.⁴⁴ Having been drawn towards the ascended Christ, pilgrims are now drawn into the life of the world, which they now see differently, eyes aligned to the sight of Christ. The screen is inscribed with John's Hutton's exquisitely fine drawings of saints and angels. Today's pilgrims are propelled deeper into the world in communion with the Church.⁴⁵ It is a broken world, as the ruins still testify, but is a world redeemed by the work of the cross and the reality of the resurrection, which the new Cathedral proclaims to the world.

Several of the deep themes in Dan Hardy's ecclesiology help me to make sense of the theological architecture of Coventry's Cathedral and the spiritual dynamics it engenders. Repeatedly, as we have seen, Dan writes about 'the *infinitely intensive identity of the Lord* and the possibility—no the actuality—of a mysteriously intensive sociality in Israel and the Church which embraces and brings reconciliation (through both reason and love) in the *indefinite and fragmenting extensity* found in the Church and in the world today'.⁴⁶ The Cathedral was built for worship, and especially for the

⁴¹ Image available at 'Coventry Cathedral', *Wikipedia* accessed online at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graham_Sutherland#mediaviewer/File:Graham_Sutherland_Tapestry_-_Coventry_Cathedral.jpg> 10/3/15.

⁴² Sermon preached by Rowan Williams on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Cathedral's Consecration, 25th May 2012.

⁴³ Image available at 'Paul Dykes', *Flickriver*, accessed online at <<http://www.flickriver.com/photos/paulodykes/3021777156/>> 10/3/15.

⁴⁴ Image available at 'Iconic Coventry Building to Host Business Awards', *Coventry Telegraph*, accessed online at <<http://i1.coventrytelegraph.net/incoming/article7072333.ece/alternates/s615/JS35957284.jpg>> 10/3/15.

⁴⁵ Image available at 'Roundup: Coventry Cathedral, the falsifiability of Christianity, racism, a child's letter, liturgy, and a "recycled orchestra"', *The Jesus Question* accessed online at <https://thejesusquestion.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/img_2309.jpg> 10/3/15.

⁴⁶ Daniel W. Hardy, 'John Macquarrie's ecclesiology', in *In Search of Humanity and Deity: A Celebration of John Macquarrie's Theology*, ed. Robert Morgan (London: SCM, 2006), 267–76 (275–6).

celebration of the eucharist, which Dan calls ‘the practical activity which founds Church society’.⁴⁷ The eucharist, as ‘the sacrament of the fulfilment or completion of life’⁴⁸ provides humanity with a concentrated process of that which Dan calls ‘relational abduction’⁴⁹. We are attracted to the intensive reality of Christ’s presence in the density of the sacramental action and, by its communal dynamics, we are drawn into a new, reconciled reality with other followers of Christ and we are compelled into a deeper responsibility for the ‘created and redeemed sociality’⁵⁰ of the world.

The Cathedral’s place in the *geography* of the city (there in its centre) in the *history* of the city (symbolising its destruction and rebuilding) and in the *identity* of the city (the ‘City of Peace and Reconciliation’), together with its design which opens the Church into the world and the world into the Church, make very clear one of Dan’s underlying theological principles that, always, ‘we are human beings *in the world*’.⁵¹ As Dan became very aware in his own pilgrimage to the Holy Land, it is a world through which Jesus walked. It is a world into which the ascended Christ draws us, in a shared journey of the ‘theandric community’⁵² through the world’s towns and villages, its fields and cities with their issues and institutions, their disciplines and demands, their fragmentation and coherence, their darkness and light. For, ‘ecclesiology is embodied: in Jesus’ walking’.⁵³

Fundamentally, therefore, the task of the Church is missionary. It is to be sent out from our journey into the intensity of God onto a pilgrimage into the extensity of God’s purposes for and participation in the world. As Hardy says, ‘we need to learn how to persist with our task in the world’.⁵⁴

Bishops

When I was sent to Coventry I was charged by the then Archbishop of Canterbury to:

Release the missionary energies of the Diocese of Coventry by building the capacity of the Church, and through your own teaching and preaching.

That is a very concise and clever piece of ecclesiology. It recognises that the ‘missionary energies’ of the Church are inherent to the Church as the community of the Messiah, the one who is sent by the Lord God in the Spirit. They do not need to be created by the Church, still less by its leadership. They are *given* to the Church as Christ calls people to belong to his body, which is energized by the Spirit. At the same time, there are certain capacities that, when built up, help to nurture those energies, so that the Church can function more fully as the Church.

Gardening has assumed a new place in my life since taking on this ministry and it has taught me a few things about our synergetic relationship with the creativity of God. ‘Look after the soil’, I was told by an old-hander, ‘and the soil will look after you’. That is what good farmers and gardeners do. They spend time tending the soil, ensuring that it is the best environment in which plants can grow. They build its capacity. That is what I am called to do as a bishop—to build up the capacity of the Church and, in so doing, release its missionary energy.

⁴⁷ Daniel W. Hardy, ‘Jericho: measuring God’s purposes’, in Daniel W. Hardy *et al.*, *Wording a Radiance: Parting Conversations on God and the Church* (London: SCM, 2010), 57–72 (65).

⁴⁸ Hardy, ‘Magnificent complexity’, 313.

⁴⁹ Hardy, *Wording*, 70.

⁵⁰ The title of a paper first delivered for the 1986 SST Conference, then later published in *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community*, eds. Colin E. Gunton and Daniel W. Hardy (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 21–47, and finally in Hardy, *God’s Ways*, 188–205.

⁵¹ Hardy, ‘Magnificent complexity’, 312.

⁵² By ‘theandric community’, Dan means the divinely constituted human life of the Church; see ‘Magnificent complexity’, 352.

⁵³ Daniel W. Hardy, ‘Jerusalem: Jesus’ steps, measuring the Church’, in *Wording*, 73–94 (83).

⁵⁴ Hardy, ‘A light in the tunnel under Jerusalem: a eucharistic pneumatology’, in *Wording*, 95–110 (106).

A little rider, if I may, before progressing, especially for the benefit of those from churches that live comfortably without bishops. Talk of bishops always assumes those with whom they share the *episcopate* of the Church. Bishops alone are little use but bishops who—within the collegiality of the Church—can signify and give some sort of steer to its missionary oversight and leadership have the opportunity to make a significant influence on at least some of the conditions that make for, as the *Common Worship Ordinal* puts it, the ‘beauty’ and ‘well-being’ of the Church.⁵⁵ It is in my own attempt to take hold of that opportunity that I have found Dan Hardy’s notions of socio-poiesis (the forming of society) enormously helpful.

There are many levels on which one finds oneself operating as an Anglican bishop in this country. Some of them concern the life of the whole Church of England. Others relate to the cultural, social and political environment in which the Church finds itself. Still others may even reach to the Universal Church. I would like to concentrate on the primary responsibility of a bishop, that portion of the Church over which he or she has an immediate relationship and some leverage. This means first the parishes of (in my case) the Church of England within the diocese, then the wider Christian communities in the towns and cities that make up the diocese and, finally, the schools for which the Church has some responsibility.

Parishes

Socio-poiesis is a recurring theme in Dan’s thought, and he expressed it most clearly in his final work: ‘socio-poiesis refers to the capacity for generating ever-expanding orders of relation’.⁵⁶ How is the local Church to be formed so that it is truly ‘the social form of the truth of the gospel’⁵⁷ and ‘a vehicle of true sociality’⁵⁸ to the world so that, by its own ‘graced sociality’⁵⁹, it may participate in the purposes of God to restore ‘the inherent sociality of all creation’?⁶⁰ How is the local Church, therefore, to be a sign and agent of the reconciliation with God and within humanity on which true sociality is based?

The beginning of an answer is through the more authentic conversion of individuals to Christ: their—our—more thorough transformation by the Spirit. But it is only the beginning of an answer because, as Dan repeatedly reminds us, proper Christian formation happens in community.⁶¹ There is a fine balance here, which Dan achieved in his writing and his life. *Wording a Radiance* is the final and integrative work of a systematic theologian. It is also a mystical journal. It recounts Dan’s encounter with the light of God, his experience of God’s abundant life and limitless love. As deeply personal as these experiences were, however, they happened within the practices of the Church: pilgrimage, prayer, eucharist, renewal of baptism, and all taking place with other people. One extraordinarily profound insight shows how Dan transposed the transformation of the soul into the formative key of the Church:

It is perhaps central to our ecclesiology: when a pilgrim’s openness to the Spirit is met by the Spirit and ‘other’ replaces self as the object of attraction’.⁶²

As the ‘towardness’⁶³ of humanity is restored in ‘singular human beings’,⁶⁴ so is the Church formed as the gospel is demonstrated in the reconciliation of human beings with God, with each other and with

⁵⁵ ‘The Ordination of Priests, also called Presbyters’, in *Common Worship: Ordination Services*, 31–52 (32).

⁵⁶ Hardy, ‘At the headwaters of the Jordan: the energetics of personal transformation’, in *Wording*, 40–56 (53).

⁵⁷ Hardy, ‘Magnificent complexity’, 319.

⁵⁸ Colin E. Gunton and Daniel W. Hardy, ‘Editors’ introduction’, in *On Being the Church*, 3–19 (5).

⁵⁹ Hardy, ‘Magnificent complexity’, 339.

⁶⁰ Hardy, *Wording*, 49.

⁶¹ See, e.g., Hardy, ‘Magnificent complexity’, 312–14.

⁶² Hardy, ‘Theology and spirituality’, in *Finding*, 95–113 (107).

⁶³ Hardy, ‘The grace of God and wisdom’, in *Finding*, 41–61 (47).

the whole of creation. By virtue of that reconciliation in and through the life of Christ, properly formed Christian people exemplify redeemed sociality and, sent by the Spirit, seek to extend it into the world. As Dan noted, 'Jesus' walking has to do with healing just one person at a time'.⁶⁵

Dan Hardy's calibration of the individual and the corporate reminds me of a missiological principle I learnt from Donald English, a brilliant Methodist leader who, like Dan, died all too early: 'whatever does not begin with the individual does not begin and whatever ends with the individual ends'. Christian socio-poiesis is the formation of Christians as social beings (or, perhaps, better, *social becomings*) within the life of the Church, which is itself being formed into a community that approximates more fully to Christ, whose body it is. As creative as Dan's ecclesiology is, he does not take us very far into more specific ways by which church communities are formed, beyond the foundational practices of worship, scripture reading, baptism, eucharist, committed conversation and education which are themselves entered into with certain attitudes such as seriousness, expectation and courtesy. We have found in our diocese that a wider set of practices and more particular dispositions need to be identified and then nurtured in a sustained way with as much support as possible. The principles and practices of *Natural Church Development* (NCD)⁶⁶ have been of significant help to us as we have tried to discern how we can better form church communities.

Drawing on an impressive weight of research across international church life, NCD proposes eight qualities that can be identified in healthy and growing church communities. They are in a very different language from Dan's and I sometimes wonder what he would make of them. I think, though, their ecclesial character would have intrigued him, and he would be impressed by the way they seek to form the church communities into a fuller ecclesial reality, generating growth. I like to call them ecclesial virtues. They are *empowering* leadership; *gift-based* ministry; *passionate* spirituality; *effective* structures; *inspiring* worship; *holistic* small groups; *need-orientated* evangelism; and *loving* relationships. As you see, they combine an ecclesial area of activity with a virtuous manner of enacting it. What counts, for example, is not just that leadership is being exercised but that it is exercised across the church community in ways that are *empowering* of others (Dan might have said 'animating'). The worship that takes place is *inspiring* for participants (Dan might have said that it leads people to the 'intensity of Lord'). The evangelism is *oriented to the real needs* of those beyond the immediate life of the Church in all their complexity (Dan might have said that it addresses the need for meaning and coherence in the 'extensity of the world').

Space does not allow for a more thorough analysis of how this pattern for the development of church life is strategically applied, resourced and then scrutinised in a diocese. We are ourselves in the early stages of doing so, and I am hesitant to make too many claims about its outcomes. But it is possible to say at least three things. First, I am content that systematic attention to the health of church communities is a responsible attempt at ecclesial socio-poiesis. Second, I see clergy and lay leaders in the diocese think more ecclesially. They are more ready to examine the corporate identity of their church communities,⁶⁷ considering not only the quantity of their activities but the qualities with which they are enacted. Third—and here, I confess, we have only just begun—the strategic use of these ecclesial virtues lend themselves not only to the sort of interrogation of church life and mission that arises from Dan Hardy's theology but also to the sorts of measurements of the Church that he started to suggest towards the end of his life. Such interrogation would be, as I have hinted above, essentially in terms of the intensity and extensity of church life. How far are church communities beholding the light of God in Christ? How much is that light of Christ manifested in their common life,

⁶⁴ Hardy, 'Magnificent complexity', 319.

⁶⁵ Hardy, 'The sociality of evangelical catholicity', in *Finding*, 79–94 (81).

⁶⁶ Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (Saint Charles, IL: Churchsmart, 2006); and *idem*, *Paradigm Shift in the Church: How Natural Church Development can Transform Theological Thinking* (Saint Charles, IL: Churchsmart, 1999).

⁶⁷ This is somewhat along the lines of what Bonhoeffer meant by 'objective spirit' and 'collective person'; see *Sanctorum*, 97–106.

exposing division and fusing unity through determined reconciliation? How far are church communities then propelled by that light into their wider communities, locally and beyond, so that they can both see where it already shines and make it more fully known where it is dim, as ambassadors of Christ's reconciliation (2 Cor. 5.19-20)? For, 'To receive this light is thus to share it'.⁶⁸

As far as I am aware, Dan's thought on ecclesial measurement came to him only at a late stage and, as such, remains undeveloped. That is a pity, because measurement is being increasingly used, at least in the life of the Church of England. Statistical analysis of the present state of the Church and statistical projections about its future are commonplace. Funding from the Church Commissioners to dioceses will become more and more subject to bids for particular projects, bids that will need to be measured for potential benefit. NCD itself is based on regular assessments of the qualities or characteristics of a church community's life, characteristics that, if they are enacted consistently—it is claimed—will lead to measurable outcomes of growth. None of this concerns me unduly. Wisdom requires information. At the same time, it will be important both within my own diocese and the Church of England as a whole, to develop properly theological tools of measurement. Dan's interest in the theme of measurement grew out of his own experience of walking, in imitation of Christ, through the villages and towns of the Holy Land. Perhaps speaking personally, he said, 'No longer trusting the adequacy of existing forms of measurement, the pilgrim seeks God's measure, alone'.⁶⁹

Knowing that the measure of the Church is the 'full measure of the stature of Christ' (Eph. 4.13), I suspect that a good place to co-ordinate our measuring of the Church is the walking of Jesus. It is interesting to see where that takes the adult Jesus in the early chapters of Luke's gospel: first into the intensity of light through John's baptism and the participative encounter with the Triune sociality of God; then into the wilderness and to confrontation with the forces of fragmentation and darkness; then to Nazareth's synagogue with its scripture reading, proclamation and rejection; then to Capernaum with its twin response of amazement and fear at his teaching; then the healing of a sick woman followed by withdrawal to a lonely place only to be searched out by the crowd; to Lake Gennesaret and the calling of the disciples, an encounter again marked by welcome and rejection; to another Galilean city and the healing of a person suffering from leprosy and another from severe paralysis (Lk. 3:1-5.26); and so the story goes on. Our measurements of God's activity in the Church will need to be both sensitive and sophisticated, perhaps as Dan suggests, 'defined only with respect to complex and variable relations'.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, it is reasonable to expect that those who follow Christ and participate in his encounter with God and with the world will show evidence of God's impact on their common life and God's influence on the world through them, for 'you will know them by their fruits' (Mt. 7.16).

Churches

It is sometimes said that we are living in an 'ecumenical winter' and that the bright possibilities of the 'ecumenical spring' in the 1960s and 1970s never quite came into flower. There is some truth in this on a macro, structural level across the great communions of the international church. But on the ground, in the micro-environment of the local Church, it is pretty hot at the moment, certainly in parts of Coventry diocese. I often call it a new ecumenism, relational rather than structural. It embraces charismatic, Pentecostal and ethnic churches, which either did not exist a few decades ago or which were at a very different stage of life. It leaves some more established partners behind. It is less concerned with doctrinal difference, and is much more interested in active, transformative involvement in local communities, combining social activism and evangelism in work and witness for the kingdom of God. It has the feel of the Spirit breaking open Christian communities to the

⁶⁸ Hardy, *Wording*, 105.

⁶⁹ Hardy, *Wording*, 67.

⁷⁰ Hardy, *Wording*, 67.

possibilities of engagement with the world. It displays ‘the new patterns of order and unity’⁷¹ which Dan called the Church to seek, and certainly requires the ‘ecclesial imagination’⁷² which Dan hoped would be awakened.

Within the city of Coventry itself, I have found that there is a place for the bishop as, in Dan’s terms, a ‘carrier’ of the marks of the (one, holy, catholic and apostolic) Church.⁷³ I would not describe it as proactive leadership with defined strategic intentions. There is a role for that sort of leadership, but it can only be properly expressed where jurisdiction is clear and concomitant checks and controls are in place. It is more of a reactive role, responding to invitations given, occupying space offered, using opportunities provided by the office one inhabits. It is a real role, nonetheless, and allows one the privilege of playing a part in the socio-poiesis of multiple churches across the city into more committed and common service to the light, life and love of God in their communities.

Much of this stems from an instinctive searching after *catholicity* among Christians, especially among Church leaders. People are eager to relate to each other, to be connected. That is where bishops can help: they are connectors within the Church, nodes of catholicity. Beyond connection to and care for the other, there is also a yearning for *oneness* that serves the kingdom of God. In Coventry there is serious talk about one Church in many congregations. Of course, it is a long way from some sort of Ignatian (of Antioch) idyll of one church gathered around the bishop but, providing other leaders can see that it arises from a genuine apostolic concern for the churches of a given area, there is a role for a bishop as an informal focus of unity and enabler of reconciliation as a gatherer of Christians. It is, though, *apostolicity*, that lies at the heart of the new ecumenism that I find myself encountering. It has to do not only with the desire for a world-engaged *holiness* in the Church but a fuller expression of the righteousness of God in the land, especially among the suffering. Here again there is a role for a bishop, ranging from encouragement and affirmation within the Christian community to providing a point of contact with the churches for other agencies and authorities.

Several of Dan Hardy’s categories help to make sense of what is currently happening among the churches and to give a steer to ways in which this Spirit-led socio-poiesis may be nurtured. Contemporary Church life in our towns and cities is a clear example of the Church embodying ‘God’s self-determination in the *extensity* of social life in the world’⁷⁴. It is evident in signs of God’s (holy) will for true sociality being lived out through reconciled relationships, as Christians work with each other beyond their usual boundaries. It is to be seen in churches reaching out to society, raising it to a fuller approximation of God’s will so that the hungry are fed (foodbanks), the homeless given refuge (night shelters), the unemployed helped into work (job clubs) and the indebted set free (credit unions and debt advice).

Dan, no doubt, would have welcomed the care for those in need that is being demonstrated by churches acting together and the careful conversations with local leaders, authorities and agencies, which are leading to a new settlement between Church and (local) State. At the same time, he would also challenge us to take a full and confident part in the actual construction of society as true, just forms of sociality by reasoned critique of and active participation in the institutions that shape society.

Schools

One such group of institutions is those providing statutory education. As an American, Dan was struck by the *embeddedness* of British churches in the nation’s cultural and civic life. In my own diocese—a relatively small one—we have over 17,000 young people in Church schools of one form or another. We all know, though, that the ground on which the country’s schools stand has shifted over recent years in

⁷¹ Hardy, *Wording*, 86.

⁷² Hardy, *Wording*, 86. For further comments on ecclesial imagination, see Christopher Cocksworth, *Holding Together: Gospel, Church and Spirit—The Essentials of Christian Identity* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008).

⁷³ Hardy, *Finding*, 250–1.

⁷⁴ Hardy, *Finding*, 34.

a way not seen since 1944, and that changes in this particular form of the relationship between 'Church and State' are still taking place. The stakes are high for the churches both in terms of increased risk of losing the control and even the influence over the schools they once counted as their own, but also in terms of the immense opportunities opening up both for the churches traditionally involved in education and for new alliances of churches working imaginatively together.

Dan gave a huge part of his life to tertiary educational institutions and a great deal of intellectual attention to the idea of the university and the potential for universities to manifest true sociality.⁷⁵ Understandably, he focused much less on primary and secondary education, especially after his Birmingham years.⁷⁶ But I suggest that it is here that optimal opportunities are available for the Church to fulfil its calling to move society, in the Spirit, towards the kingdom of God. I have been deeply moved by what I have seen of schools as colonies of the kingdom of heaven where the light of Christ is seen. I have been fascinated by the commitment of schools to themes of peace and reconciliation, locally and globally. I have been impressed by headteachers who, especially in tougher communities, reach out into the families and homes of troubled pupils as community pastors, helping to raise children and their households in the life of Christ. I have been challenged by the formative environments of schools that seek to be (in Bonhoeffer's highest definition of the Church) 'communities of love'⁷⁷ in which respect for others and wonder at the world is fostered on a daily basis. The capacity of schools for Christian socio-poiesis that has the potential for long-term influence on society makes them ripe for deeper ecclesiological attention and greater integration into the reconciling ministry and missionary strategy of the Church.

Continuing a conversation

As Dan would say, 'There is much more to be said, and all these matters need a lot of intense and careful thought'.⁷⁸ Certainly everything I have said requires more and better thought than I have given it. There is more to be said on the identity and institutions of the Church of England as a whole, their role within the extensity of the nation and their responsibility for demonstrating that sociality is possible in the Church through what Dan called 'Spirited response'⁷⁹ and 'relational abduction'.⁸⁰ There is much more to be said about the Universal Church and the place of Petrine primacy in these days of a Pope with Protestant and Pentecostal appeal. There is a great deal more to be said about the Church's responsibilities at every level to form sociality in wider society through conversation and collaboration with other faiths. At least, though, my omissions have left plenty of room for later discussion and I hope that that exchange may be aided by some of the ecclesiological categories derived from Dan Hardy's thought which I have been applying to the formation of authentic Christian community and, thereby, the mission that the Church enacts in the world, in parishes, schools and local collaboration between Christians.

⁷⁵ For example, Hardy, 'The public nature of theology', in *God's Ways*, 206–16; *idem*, 'Magnificent complexity', 349–50.

⁷⁶ It is worth noting that in Birmingham during the 1960s Dan played a pioneering part in the design and leadership of a Bachelor in Education degree. He also pitched into a very lively debate on Birmingham's RE syllabus which he regarded as seriously deficient (See David F. Ford, 'Introduction: the architecture of life with God', in *Essentials*, 10–11).

⁷⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 262–7.

⁷⁸ Hardy, *Finding*, 230.

⁷⁹ Hardy, 'Magnificent complexity', 317.

⁸⁰ Hardy, *Wording*, 70.