

## Semiotics and Daniel Hardy's Eucharistic Theology

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The eucharist, without doubt, was important in Daniel Hardy's ecclesiology. In *Wording a Radiance* he describes the eucharist as "the defining measure of the church." According to Hardy, the eucharist is the "practical activity which founds church society" and the means through which "Christians share in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ." This sacrament is, therefore, the reenactment and recalling of the "pure primal event by which righteousness was constituted in Jesus' time."<sup>1</sup>

Hardy contends that by attending to the strictly local context of the performance of the eucharist one can discern the manner in which it contributes to the formation and renewal of any given community, by presenting them "with themes and counter-themes of human existence, and stimulat[ing] them to a new course of social life—a new enactment of meaning that approximates to goodness in their place."<sup>2</sup> This is because in the eucharist many different people come together, called together by the goodness of God's revelation, seeking to discern the manner in which their life together can be renewed and shaped by God's purposes—that is, the "the extensity of participants' life in the world and its time . . . are stimulated to courses of action that more closely approximate to the intensity of goodness."<sup>3</sup> This movement of the community in relation to its discernment of goodness contributes to the formation of the social life of the community: it enables "socio-poiesis," or "the generation and shaping of relations," and therefore

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel W. Hardy, with Deborah Hardy Ford, Peter Ochs, and David Ford, *Wording a Radiance: Parting Conversations on God and the Church* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 65.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel W. Hardy, *Finding the Church: The Dynamic Truth of Anglicanism* (London: SCM Press, 2001), 247.

<sup>3</sup> Hardy, *Finding the Church*, 247.

facilitates the ongoing formation of the community.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, for Hardy, the eucharist, as the reenactment of the primal event of Jesus' life that constitutes the church and as the activity that enables the ongoing growth and movement of the social life of the church, "measures the Church by measuring the progress of each member's pilgrimage to God within the sociopoiesis of a given church and in the sociopoiesis that gathers all churches and all creatures in God's creation."<sup>5</sup>

Hardy's suggestion that the eucharist is a "measure" of the church is part of his attempt to overcome the seeming divide between the natural sciences and the humanities and theology. In the face of the sciences being often thought of as "measuring" the outside world and society by seemingly fixed and objective means, the humanities and theology seem to Hardy to have turned inward in an attempt not to lose their identity.<sup>6</sup> This, he believes, need not be the case. Hardy posits that increasingly the humanities and the sciences recognize the relational character of much of what we know. In this context, all creatures of God come to the fullness of their being through their interrelatedness to one another as the result of the primordial event of creation itself. Given the interrelatedness of all that has been created, the eucharist is indeed a measure of the church, not in terms of providing some fixed, absolute form of measurement, but rather as a way through which the variable and interrelated life of the church in the world can be understood in relation to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ at the heart of the church's identity. In other words, the eucharist as "measure" enables the social relations that form the communal life of the church to be seen within the context of—that is, in relation to—the "primal event" of the church, the life of Christ. By thus bringing the life of the church in relation to the revelation of Christ and facilitating the ongoing formation of the social life of the church, raising people to "flourishing as a society,"<sup>7</sup> the eucharist can be understood as a "measure" of the church.

Hardy suggests that "abductive" reasoning lies at the heart of the capacity of the eucharist to be a measure of the church. Hardy is influenced by Coleridge's understanding of "abduction" as a mode of

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<sup>4</sup> Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 49.

<sup>5</sup> Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 66.

<sup>6</sup> Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 60.

<sup>7</sup> Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 51.

reasoning that “generates probabilistic claims about the world,” noting that for Coleridge “every knowing and all love involve abduction, from chaotic spontaneity . . . to the highest form, which is love.”<sup>8</sup> Influenced by such an understanding of abduction, in his own theology Hardy defines abduction as “our capacity to turn away from self-engagement back to our primordial attraction to others and to God . . . extending the fields of attraction that generate and coordinate ever-expanding circles and patterns of relation.”<sup>9</sup> Inasmuch as the eucharist is a measure of the church and the sacrament that witnesses to the interrelatedness of all in the life of the church, it is an act of worship that encourages abductive reasoning in our encounter with the “other.”

Hardy is indeed aware that abduction as a form of reasoning was developed by Charles Peirce. Peirce is well known for his contribution to “semiotics”—that is, the philosophy of signs. Semiotics, as a philosophical tool, has a great deal to offer Hardy’s desire to develop a theology of the eucharist that enables this sacrament to be the means through which the church discerns its relations with the “other” and with God. To the extent that the eucharist utilizes signs to proclaim the ongoing presence of Christ in the church, needless to say, this sacrament is pregnant with semiotic potential. Adopting a eucharistic approach to one’s encounter with reality can be more thoroughly developed from a semiotic point of view. It is this that will enable this sacrament to be truly the measure of the church in the modern world.

What is distinctive about semiotics that enables it to complement Daniel Hardy’s theology of the eucharist as a measure of the church? In order to understand this, I think it is worth considering the thoughts of John Deely, a semiotician who too was influenced by the philosophy of Charles Peirce.

John Deely’s approach to the philosophy of signs is based on the basic premise that “the action of signs” is irreducibly “triadic.” The sign is a form of relation where a “sign-vehicle” stands for an “object”—which is something other than itself. The third element in this triadic relation (the “interpretant”) is the one for whom the sign-vehicle signifies the object. While the relations between the sign-vehicle and the object, and the sign-vehicle and the interpretant, when taken separately, reveal a dyadic characteristic, Deely nevertheless

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<sup>8</sup> Hardy, *Wording a Radiancy*, 49–50.

<sup>9</sup> Hardy, *Wording a Radiancy*, 50.

contends that the *action* of signs—in order to be properly semiotic—ought to be conceived as triadic. By the “action” of signs, Deely alludes to the combined relation that exists between the sign-vehicle, the object, and the interpretant—the one for whom the sign is a sign of the signified.<sup>10</sup>

Take, for example, the relation between smoke and something burning. When this relation is conceived as dyadic, smoke is simply caused by that which is on fire. However, in order for smoke to be a sign-vehicle of fire, it ought to have the capacity to stand for something other than itself. When this capacity exists without entering the experience of one who is able to realize that as a sign-vehicle of fire smoke stands for something other than itself, smoke is understood to be a sign-vehicle of fire potentially or “virtually.”<sup>11</sup> The capacity of smoke to be a sign-vehicle of fire, therefore, exists virtually in such a case. Yet, when smoke stands as a sign-vehicle of fire within the experience of one capable of understanding it as such, the potentiality of smoke to signify fire becomes actualized. On the whole, therefore, for smoke to function as a sign-vehicle of fire it ought to be part of a web of relation wherein it stands for that which it itself is not (fire) for someone else—a third, the interpretant.<sup>12</sup>

If the action of signs encompasses the three elements of the object, the sign-vehicle, and the interpretant, it can be seen that the sign-vehicle is at the heart of enabling the particular form of relation to come to pass between the object and the interpretant. The interpretant becomes oriented toward the object through the sign-vehicle. In the case of the eucharist, one can say that the bread and wine are sign-vehicles of the life of Christ (the object) for the congregants, who are the interpretants.

Given that he was influenced by Peirce, Deely contends that relation, as a category of being, ought to be understood ontologically. Relation as a category is often understood simply as an “accident,” that is, basically as something that inheres in any given subject. Deely suggests that the distinctive feature of relation is the fact that it does not inhere in any subject, but is *between* subjectivities. Relation, in

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<sup>10</sup> John Deely, *Basics of Semiotics* (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2004), 33.

<sup>11</sup> Deely, *Basics of Semiotics*, 34.

<sup>12</sup> John Deely, *Semiotic Animal: A Postmodern Definition of “Human Being” Transcending Patriarchy and Feminism* (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2010), 88.

other words, is *intersubjective* when it occurs between subjectivities. For example, Deely suggests that parenthood is a relative form of being that is “over and above” the individual parents in a given parental relationship.<sup>13</sup> Here the relation of parenthood is not something that can be exclusively identified with any one of the parties involved—in fact, a parental relation even transcends the two individuals who beget a child in that it cannot be said to exist without being oriented toward an offspring as another individual. Consequently, the relation of parenthood cannot be simply identified with the individuals who, through their particular characteristics (as mother or father or child), become related to—or oriented toward—one another in this form of relationality. Rather, it is irreducible to the particular individuals who form as part of the relationship.<sup>14</sup> The ontology of parental relation can therefore be argued to be intersubjective—existing between the subjectivities of the persons involved.

Furthermore, Deely argues that relation as a category of being is not *only* intersubjective, but also suprasubjective. That is, relation as a category of being has the capacity to exist over and above the subjectivities between which it exists in reality. Deely develops this notion through the philosophy of Peirce and his discovery of the late Latin scholastics' understanding of the capacity of relation to transcend the division between “mind-independent” reality—that is, reality as it exists subjectively without us—and “mind-dependent” reality—that is, reality as it exists in our own objective, cognitive worldview, as known by us. The significance of this view is that relation, or the state of being toward, has the capacity to be unaltered when a mind-independent relation becomes part of our mind-dependent cognitive worldview. In fact, Deely argues that the peculiar characteristic of humanity is the capacity not only to sense and perceive its relatedness to external reality, but, uniquely, to be able to understand the manner in which the subjectivities that one encounters in mind-independent reality remain related to one another. It is this ability to understand the manner in which things relate to one another that enables human beings to manipulate the relatedness of things in the external environment, not simply for the purpose of survival, but also for the sake of developing culture. This suprasubjective characteristic of ontological relations can be considered using the example of friendship.

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<sup>13</sup> Deely, *Basics of Semiotics*, 37.

<sup>14</sup> Deely, *Basics of Semiotics*, 38.

Consider the friendship between, say, X and Y. To the extent that X and Y are both alive, and thus exist as subjects in the mind-independent realm, the friendship between the two, as a form of relation that exists between their subjectivities, can be understood as being intersubjective. However, should X die, then he can no longer be said to exist in the mind-independent realm, and the friendship that existed between him and Y then exists only as a relation in the mind-dependent realm. In this case, the memory of her friend X might enable Y to remember the friendship that once existed between her and her friend X. Here, the relation of friendship no longer exists in the mind-independent realm, intersubjectively. Rather, it exists cognitively, in the mind-dependent realm of Y. Consider further the case when both X and Y are dead. Now, a third-party observer, Z, might come to learn about the famous friendship that once existed between X and Y. Z might be able to consider the manner in which the two friends related to one another. In this case, once again, the relation between X and Y cannot be said to exist in the mind-independent realm, but in Z's contemplation of the once existent friendship between X and Y, the relation between X and Y exists in the mind-dependent realm of Z's thought. In this case X and Y exist "purely objectively"—that is, devoid of subjective, mind-independent existence. Therefore, the friendship of X and Y, as a relation of "towardness" whereby the two are related, can be said to exist "*purely* objectively" when it does not exist in the mind-independent realm as well as the mind-dependent realm.

Appreciating the nature of relation in this particular way enables the development of a holistic approach to the manner in which humanity relates to all that is created. If human beings have often been understood as rational animals, then, in this semiotic point of view, the distinctiveness of being human lies in the latter's capacity to understand and reorder the relatedness of all that is part of the created order. Indeed, in being able to develop culture through its semiotic capacity, humanity is able to order all that it finds in external reality in such a way that this reordering enables the gradual progression toward the future. In other words, humanity, as interpretant, is able to reorder external reality such that the latter becomes a sign-vehicle of the future. In our ceaseless reordering of all that is around, in the pursuit of technological, scientific, and economic developments, semiotics highlights the fact that the present is a sign of the future. The

task of developing the present's potential to be the sign-vehicle of the future is a very serious one—after all, our present ordering will affect the way in which the future unfolds. Ethical discernment of the way in which we order the present is, therefore, undeniably important.

If the ethical shaping of the present is vital for the way in which we shape the relatedness of the created order and affect the life of future generations, then, Hardy's suggestion that the eucharist is a measure of the church seems uncontroversial. After all, the eucharist encompasses the reordering of the relatedness of created matter for the purpose of sustenance and enjoyment (in the case of the bread and wine used at the eucharist, respectively). However, this sacrament also highlights the fact that this reordering is not simply for individual benefit—rather, through this reordering one expects the encounter with the risen Christ, the one who was condemned and categorized by us and who confronts and challenges our preconceptions. This sacrament, as one that highlights the church's dependence upon Christ as its righteousness and sustenance, brings about a particular form of being related toward the "other." The "being toward" or relation that the eucharist develops is one which encourages the importance of the reality of the other; the other cannot be categorized by our own standards. Furthermore, inasmuch as relation is something which transcends the divide between the mind-dependent and mind-independent realms, the relation developed through the eucharist affects both our mind-independent encounter with the signs of bread and wine and our mind-dependent processing of what this encounter means. By coming into relation with Christ as other through the signs of bread and wine, our mind-dependent cognitive faculties are also moved toward encountering the other as we reorder the relatedness of the created order for our purposes. Even when we come to be related to the other, we cannot claim to capture their subjective reality in our mind-dependent realm. Consequently, rather than seeking to capture the other through our mind-dependent thinking, the eucharist encourages us to become related to the other as real and moves us to think outwards, beyond our own rationalizations.

If the eucharist is understood as a measure of the church, then, through semiotics one can see how this measure not only overcomes the seeming division between mind-dependent and mind-independent realities—a division that has vexed modern philosophy until recently—but is also necessarily ethical and shapes one's

cognition of the other. Furthermore, inasmuch as this sacrament looks forward to the eschaton, it acts as a measure that shapes our reordering of things in the present with a view toward the future. The eucharist, as a measure of the church, highlights the fact that the church is a community brought together by the “primal events” of the death and resurrection of Christ. These primal events reveal the extent to which we can fail to appreciate the other—as in the case of the death of Jesus—and the concomitant need to remain open to being surprised by the other—as revealed in the unexpected resurrection of Christ. The eucharist as measure, therefore, encourages the reordering of the present to be open toward encountering the “others” of the present and the future.

If Hardy highlights the eucharist as measure given his appreciation of the interrelatedness of all that is part of the created order, then, a semiotic point of view entirely complements such an approach toward reality. Semiotics reveals that humanity does not stand over and above creation, but rather depends upon it even for the sake of cultural development. In fact, the use or abuse of creation will have a direct effect on human development in the future and the consequent development of culture. Semiotics, therefore, highlights the need for precisely the sort of measure advocated by Hardy for the sake of moderating human culture in its development.

Through semiotics one can appreciate the holistic manner in which the eucharist as measure enables abductive reasoning, in the words of Hardy, “into ever new relations with the other and with God.”<sup>15</sup> A “eucharistic semiotics” is one that is necessarily incomplete but, as a form of being toward the other, that is, as a form of relation, it is one that is entirely open to the other while being aware of the self’s insufficiencies. Eucharistic semiotics also enables us to move beyond modern rationalism, highlighting the fact that humanity’s distinction from other creatures is rooted in its semiotic awareness and the concomitant recognition of the need for good ethical thinking. In today’s world, where the interrelatedness of all things and humanity’s capacity to shape relations is widely recognized across the disciplines, the eucharist, given its semiotic potential, can indeed be seen as a measure of the church.

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<sup>15</sup> Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 67.