

The Gifting of Responsibility: Learning How to Persist with the Ecclesial Task in the World

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Introduction

On June 17, 2014, Canon Nicholas Sagovsky hosted an Open Anglicanism Study Day at Roehampton University. The aim was to interrogate and reflect on the work of theologian Daniel W. Hardy from the perspective of those seeking to practice what Hardy called “the dynamic truth of Anglicanism.”¹

To engage with Hardy’s work in this way is to continue a conversation that was in one sense disrupted by Hardy’s death in November 2007, but in another sense is being deepened as former students and colleagues revisit his words and enter into discussion with others. We are living out his legacy, which is a tremendous gift and also a responsibility. The gifting of responsibility is a phrase Hardy used in *Word-ing a Radiance*, as he considered how we participate in divine light without having to possess it.

This article explores the nature of this “gifting” in relation to the church’s task in the world. By weaving together Hardy’s narrative of pilgrimage with images evoked in lines from Micheal O’Siadhail’s poem “What If?”, key theological concerns in his work are illuminated: his attention to God and his deep engagement with the world; his commitment to dialogue; and his vision for the church.² The challenge for us in this gifting of responsibility is something that we face theologically and pragmatically in our own contexts. We cannot do

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¹ Daniel W. Hardy, *Finding the Church: The Dynamic Truth of Anglicanism* (London: SCM Press, 2001).

² Micheal O’Siadhail, ‘What If?’ in *Our Double Time* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1998). The text is reproduced at the end of the article as an Epilogue. Quotations from that poem are included in italics.

that through our own self-sufficiency, but rather in the power of the Spirit, which reflects Hardy's pneumatological emphasis.

A Narrator and the Poet

The record of Hardy's pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2007 reveals, in his daughter's words, that something "big" happened to him, something that he was able to share in glimpses and fragments with others.³ *Wording a Radiance* powerfully reflects the imaginative liberation and theological distillation of his ecclesiology of pilgrimage. This Spirit-led theology is a gift in itself, but also a gifting of responsibility. We are challenged to think through *and* live out that vision for the sake of God's kingdom. Stephen Pickard's *Seeking the Church* and the collaborative project resulting in *Generous Ecclesiology* are attempts to do just that, always mindful, in a Hardy-esque fashion, of the complexity of that task.⁴ Nevertheless, in the words of O'Siadhail, what is *often no more than a glimpse* captures something *full and glorious in our finitude*, as God draws all things to himself.

Hardy's narrative is full of light and darkness; human relationships and divine purpose; transformation and energy. He writes of waters bubbling up and encircling; of being incorporated and engaged; of power and embrace; of struggle and regeneration. His account is deeply attentive to place and people and utterly theocentric. At the headwaters of the Jordan, pilgrims entered into the drama, being "incorporated into something beyond." The way Hardy *saw* things was that "the light going really deep into people and transforming them from within"; in a characteristically intense turn of phrase, the light was "irradiating them."⁵

This way of seeing captured a moment of relationship, of communion between God and other people. It was a moment of renewal "when the pilgrimage really began."⁶ There is a radiance, an aura. Hopes and memories tell *some unique story your life is trying to*

³ Daniel W. Hardy (as told to Deborah Hardy Ford), "Holy Land Pilgrimage," in 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), 24.

⁴ Stephen Pickard, *Seeking the Church: An Introduction to Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 2012); Julie Gittoes, Brutus Green, and James Heard, eds., *Generous Ecclesiology: Church, World and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 2012).

⁵ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 25–26.

⁶ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 25.

shape / This journey to whatever end will be our own. For Hardy the play of light facilitated a new way of relating within the group; openness and engagement followed from this renewal of vows.

In Jericho and Jerusalem, in places of struggle, Hardy poses the challenging question of what it is to be measured for God's purposes. He wonders if "creation of light brings darkness, perhaps holiness creates envy—or greed—a claim to a right of possession and a need to possess God, to be God." In contrast, divine measurement is relational, fluid, and dynamic. We need to enter into this dynamic which would be a "shift in emphasis and understanding."⁷

The contrast between a human economy of "equivalence and exchange" is contrasted to the divine economy of "abundance and excess."⁸ Entering more deeply into God is not about loss or restriction; yet the tragedy of our extensity is that we are caught up in things, drawn away from the light. There are moments when we recover glimpses of *chosen innocence*, of *worlds of munificence* when *everything is given*. Lavish open-handedness is God's nature; there is *expenditure at our core* too—in birth and death and loving. O'Siadhail's poetry recognizes this depth. Despite business being business, the paradox remains that the spendthrift grows richer: *As though the more we give the more we thrive, / Our loss-leaders in delicate economies of gift.*

Despite "the heavy imprint of materialism" we are attracted to something better.⁹ The power of God's light and energy is at work in places where people stop to pray. This is not a human gift to possess. For Hardy it is "the *repository* of God's light" which embraces, probes, and penetrates; "the Goodness simply draws [us] to something *fuller*."¹⁰ This is the beginning of an enabling process; a move from extensity into intensity.¹¹ God longs for us not to be distracted; his light lifts us, from within. This is what Hardy calls abduction.¹²

⁷ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 27.

⁸ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 27.

⁹ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 30.

¹⁰ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 28–29.

¹¹ "Extensity" names the way in which our creaturely freedom means that we get caught up in things, living dispersed and fragmented lives, losing the sense of God's presence. "Intensity" describes God's self-movement of love toward the world in creation and redemption.

¹² Hardy uses Coleridge's term "abduction" to describe the dynamics of human attraction to God.

This light is not something that we can contain: instead, we are gifted with responsibility.

The Gifting and the Task

What is this gifting of responsibility? Hardy likens it to having a child. We cannot possess the life entrusted to us; it is a gift that changes us. It is also a responsibility to encourage and allow for the flourishing of life in all its fullness. It entails tremendous risk of love in frustration and delight; forgiveness, attention, and letting go. Whether as carers, godparents, or teachers, we recognize that gut-wrenching moment. O'Siadhail describes it as *a child / So fresh-skinned, eager, that first day he outran / His father*. Hardy knew it too in his work with graduate students—"gently edging forward the things that are being prompted in them."¹³ All this is rooted in divine activity of creative and redemptive generosity.

Gifting of responsibility is about participating in the light: we are "regenerated—transformed and rebuilt—from deep within."¹⁴ Participating in the depths of God's goodness "indefinitely and infinitely" is exciting; God is "fathomless," "dazzling"; we are invited to get "caught up in the re-creative Spirit of the divine: the Trinity."¹⁵ The potential of God's Spirit at work within and among us is huge. Here Hardy is honest about how easy it is to get "stuck," as he puts it; to miss the wonder and glory of God. We need to be attentive to the world, "to be clever in the ways of the world and to see what's gone wrong—and even perhaps why."¹⁶ We also need to attend to God to restore our vision.

Some of those blocks are the *fear of rivalries, of eye for eye, / . . . as if we rely / On victims to unite us and keep feuds at bay*. Yet there is a "strong temporal thrust of movement forward, a perfecting movement towards the fullness of God's creation and God's work, far beyond what we can see."¹⁷ Hardy is concerned with the question of what attracts and limits the church: identifying an over-concentration on inner meaning as the point at which we get stuck; perhaps the zero

¹³ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 36.

¹⁴ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 30.

¹⁵ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 31.

¹⁶ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 31.

¹⁷ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 32.

sum games of ecclesial life. That being the case, how do we learn “to persist with our task in the world”?¹⁸

The essentials are characterized in Hardy’s double attention to God and the world; the church is constituted both by worship and by mission.¹⁹ If the task of the church is to open up “the true potential and resources of human life,” Hardy’s phraseology echoing the gifting of abundant life in John 10:10, then liturgy has a key role to play.²⁰ In worship we face the holiness of God. As Hardy expresses it in *Finding the Church*, in worship we are moved forward by God’s holiness to the good; such attraction is formative, freeing, and energizing.²¹ Or as he puts it in *Wording a Radiance*, liturgy facilitates, helps, and irradiates.²²

Pilgrimage took Hardy to the Monastery of the Divine Fire. In contrast to the concrete wall which cuts off communication, this place was filled with connections between Jew and Christian. He describes the burning, living bush as a “bore-hole into the divine fire.”²³ The eucharist serves as the refining fire of Christ in our own particular place; it enacts connections between God’s holiness and the layers of social, political, economic, and cultural actions. In bread and wine, God’s self-giving love and holiness forms us, shaping our freedom that we might persist in our task. This dramatic enactment forms society and builds up trust; it opens us to what Hardy calls “moral density.”²⁴

Gifts entrusted to the church in worship, including the traditional marks of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity, are for the sake of the world; the gifting of responsibility and social vision builds up the kingdom. Hardy affirms that ways of opening up the potential of human life are not exclusive to the church. We need, he says, “to recognize and interpret them in public life. It’s about how the Church relates to the world.”²⁵ This affirms the world as the arena of God’s activity; this vision of *Finding the Church* is given diagrammatic substance in Hardy’s expression of abduction and “sociopoiesis”

¹⁸ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 32.

¹⁹ Hardy, *Finding the Church*, 38.

²⁰ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 106.

²¹ Hardy, *Finding the Church*, 20.

²² Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 32–33.

²³ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 34.

²⁴ Hardy, *Finding the Church*, 23.

²⁵ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 106.

in *Wording a Radiance*.²⁶ As Hardy develops his ecclesiology of pilgrimage, he says that the different ways that people “are raised to flourishing as society” is an acknowledgment of the divinely infused reasoning at work in the world.²⁷

Sociopoiesis refers to the capacity “for generating ever-expanding orders of relation”; it applies not just to the church but to the whole of creation.²⁸ This should encourage the church in its task. It is rootedness in the life of the Trinity that draws us into God’s being, activity, and purposes; incorporation into this drama enables us to point beyond the inhibiting factors of self-absorption toward a recovery of attraction to God, and all others. In the power of the Spirit we are to witness to God’s generous love in Christ Jesus.

The scope of this work is immense. The vision is to seek the fulfillment of all features of life, in anticipation of the time when all things are recreated by the light of God. The perspective is eschatological; the purpose is “to make it possible for the light of God to embrace and transform human life in all its dimensions,” says Hardy in *Finding the Church*. In *Wording a Radiance* he describes this healing light as “a gentle infiltration from within” rather than a ton of bricks from without.²⁹ At the conclusion of his pilgrimage narrative Hardy focuses his attention on the way in which Jesus *met* with people: he walked alongside and interacted with them; he opened out the light of things and people by “just being there in the flesh with them”; he embodied a presence in the land.³⁰ This model opens up a bigger space for us to walk with others. Jesus’ “love statements” open out the light in people and things, “just being there in the flesh with them.”³¹ Such statements reveal the ultimate source of energy, and answer the “what if?” with the *rhyme is love*.

The church’s movement into the world flowing from eucharistic encounter is a conduit of forgiveness and reconciliation: gifts received, practices learned, and ways of being embodied. The church walks in the world for the sake of the kingdom. The recognition and interpretation of opening up of potential in public life will look different in our

²⁶ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 48. Hardy uses the term *sociopoiesis* to describe the way relationships are generated and shaped in relation to the divine.

²⁷ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 50.

²⁸ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 53.

²⁹ Hardy, *Finding the Church*, 25; Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 36.

³⁰ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 58.

³¹ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 36.

own contexts. As a Residentiary Canon at Guildford Cathedral, the task for me involves a commitment to dialogue and the pursuit of wisdom with colleagues at the University of Surrey: public lectures exploring political, ethical, and social visions of a “Peaceable Kingdom”; hosting a “Question Time” event for sixth-form students to deepen their engagement with issues of power, culture, moral decision-making, and the Christian story; building trust and understanding within a diverse diocese by hosting a panel discussion on “Something about Mary”; welcoming Young Enterprise Companies and celebrating their entrepreneurial endeavors and skill in design and innovation.

Before talking about the gifting of responsibility, Hardy talks about being measured for God’s purposes. The church is measured in a hopeful and generative way by scripture and eucharist. Such measuring is healing and refining, drawing out the capacity of attraction from deep within. That shapes our way of *seeing* and acting. In *Wording a Radiance* Hardy describes these measures as the “showing of the end of the journey, . . . the most intimate relation with God, with all humans and all creation.” While scripture “discloses the Kingdom and the fullness of God’s purposes,” Hardy contends, the sacrament of eucharist is “the all defining measure.”³²

Hardy describes the eucharist as that which gathers all aspects of social meaning in the world into an event in which the full truth of God is made explicit. The extensity and brokenness of our social life is confronted with divine intensity. In the context of worship all those dimensions of human life in the world are caught up in the grace-filled anticipation of the kingdom. The reality of our embodied existence in the world is set on a trajectory toward the fulfilment of God’s purposes. Transformation extends beyond the individual to others in the world, attracting each person inwardly to God.³³ This happens in particular places, moments in time, and face-to-face encounters when we see people light up within: recognizing, delighting, glimpsing an aura, a radiance.

Is This an Anglican Way?

What then is this gifting of responsibility, this Anglican way of learning and persisting with a task?

³² Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 65.

³³ Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, 70–71.

First, it is deeply committed to and engaged with the life of the world, as the realm of God's activity. God's light is refracted in the world in "bands of color" with varying degrees of intensity, but it bubbles up prayer, in openness, in compassion.³⁴ The church meets others by moving through the world as Jesus did. To walk in the world, to be a "wandering" church, is risky, gracious, challenging, and transformative. The church is not something "done," set out and completed; rather, it is "conducted" as a work in progress. A wandering church trusts in the capacity of the divine to transform all humanity.

Second, it is attentive to God in word and sacrament; these are the primary measures of the church's life. In worship, lives are refined and reshaped; our vision is restored. Hardy describes the eucharist as the gathered "interval" in the scattered life of the church; it is an interval in which we are measured and reshaped.³⁵ Such practices enable attentiveness, stability, and faithfulness.

Third, such double attention to God and God's world is a gifting of responsibility. The recognition that we cannot possess the divine light engenders a capacity to listen, to continue in conversation; this demands patience, especially in the face of disagreement. Yet, the process is rooted in the hope of healing, a vision of the eschaton, which we glimpse when it breaks in.

Fourth, persisting in the ecclesial task in the world means taking seriously structures and patterns as means of grace. They act as our "measures." It also demands a creative, imaginative, and dynamic living out of them, rather than becoming focused on our own inner meaning.

The church is rooted in Jesus' ministry; it is rooted in the generosity of God in creation; it is rooted in the life of the Spirit. The church witnesses, proclaims, and walks. Transformation occurs in encounter with God and the other, as the body of Christ walks in the world. It is a creative, demanding, and joyful vocation for the sake of the kingdom. This is the gift of responsibility, the task we are called to persist in: learning in liturgy; learning in public life; learning in the power of Spirit. This is the rhyme of love known intensely in sacrament and refracted in the world:

³⁴ Daniel W. Hardy, *God's Ways with the World: Thinking and Practising Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), x.

³⁵ Hardy, *Finding the Church*, 243.

*I know the layers of things unconscious or hidden,
 How in our brokenness we travel from dust to dust.
 And still. And still. Those times push came to shove
 From nowhere that warm embrace, the hug of trust.
 There's some bigger engine unbiddable and unbidden.
 What if, I ask, what if the only rhyme is love?*



Epilogue: "What If?" by Micheal O'Siadhail

1

After deep honey-like sleep I sometimes sense,
 As I think I did as a child, everything is given;
 I'm waking once more to worlds of munificence
 Before barter, trade-offs, hard bargains driven.
 Sun and shadow. Yet a chosen innocence prevails,
 A kind of delight in open-handedness, a Maecenas
 Garden of bestowal. Some lavish lop-sided scales.
 Business is business but things go deeper in us.
 Giving birth or heart of giving up the ghost.
 All this expenditure at our core. I'm sure I've
 Begun slowly to understand how the spendthrift
 By some paradox keeps growing richer, almost
 As though the more we give the more we thrive,
 Our loss-leaders in delicate economies of gift.

2

Often no more than a glimpse. Just a side-glance
 At a passer-by and yet that sense of a life-span
 Rerun in flash-back. Is it an aura? A radiance?
 This frail nobility in the gaze of one old man?
 You know for sure you knew him once as a child
 So fresh-skinned, eager, that first day he outran
 His father. You remember how his father smiled
 A sort of flash forward to this passing ageing man.
 Moments double and never again can you escape

A feeling that in a stranger's face a light is thrown
On all your hopes and memories, even things rued,
On some unique story your life is trying to shape
This journey to whatever end will be our own.
Small and bereft. Full and glorious in our finitude.

3

For some that fear of rivalries, of eye for eye,
Coheres us and whatever goaded Cain to slay
We exorcise in scapegoat rituals, as if we rely
On victims to unite us and keep feuds at bay.
For others all the checks and controls; of course,
If it comes to the push, then, always the stronger.
Cohesion of threat, weights and balances of force.
Can it really be, I wonder, so simple any longer?
I know the layers of things unconscious or hidden,
How in our brokenness we travel from dust to dust.
And still. And still. Those times push came to shove
From nowhere that warm embrace, the hug of trust.
There's some bigger engine unbiddable and unbidden.
What if, I ask, what if the only rhyme is love?