

ARTICLE

Wisdom Ecclesiology: Renegotiating Church in the World

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Abstract

This article seeks to articulate the ecclesiology of David Ford as one shaped by wisdom. Although central to Ford's concerns, the nature of his ecclesiology has not yet been explored. The task is approached first by outlining Ford's approach to theology found in his book *Christian Wisdom* and then detailing how his ecclesiology fits within his thinking in regard to wider concerns. I argue that key to understanding Ford's ecclesiology is to see it within a movement from *extensity* to *intensity* and back to *extensity*. I argue that Ford's ecclesiology represents a way of renegotiating the place of the church in the wider world. It is a significant contribution for the Anglican Church in Western settings which have seen widespread cultural changes. At the same time, Ford's ecclesiology is limited by its particular intensive contextual engagements which neglect wider contextual and ecclesiological concerns.

Keywords: Anglicanism, contextualization, ecclesiology, David Ford, Wisdom

A number of writers have proposed the theme of wisdom as one that brings together theology and practice in Christian lives lived well.² In contrast to some of the more abstract analyses of context this wisdom approach focuses on particular lives in a personalized contextual theology. The perfect theological ideals are brought into a deeper interaction with imperfect practice to form ways of living that move these communities into God's future. In terms of ecclesiology, wisdom brings together the idealized blueprint and concrete approaches to understanding the church that Nicholas Healy has identified.³ In addition, wisdom approaches seek to draw together the particular and the universal: the individual and the local church; the local and the universal Church; and the church and the wider world. Such wisdom approaches to theology are only just being explored in regard to

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²For example, Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

³Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

ecclesiology and this article contributes a study of the wisdom ecclesiology of David Ford.

Ford explores theology as wisdom for living in the twenty-first century, particularly in his work *Christian Wisdom*.⁴ While there are many understandings of wisdom available to theology today, Ford's approach resonates with that suggested above that is of particular relevance to ecclesiology. In this article I outline his approach to wisdom theology and then situate his thinking on ecclesiology within this broader picture. This is appropriate as Ford has not directly developed an ecclesiology although it is central to his thinking and practice. Specific insights are detailed in a variety of places with a notable contribution on the Eucharist in *Self and Salvation*.⁵ I want to suggest that Ford's ecclesiology represents a way into renegotiating the role of the church in the Western world by way of wisdom. It is a way that resonates with pressures faced by the Anglican Church in which Ford is involved. This wisdom ecclesiology is drawn into critical conversations with a number of issues and approaches in wider ecclesiology, enabling us to evaluate the strengths and limits of Ford's contribution. In concluding and in line with Ford's approach, I then suggest the outline of an ecclesiology that improvises on that suggested by Ford and modified in the light of critiques.

This article seeks to articulate Ford's ecclesiology which has not been fully appreciated to date and suggests how some of the important ideas he raises might be developed in the future.

Wisdom Theology

Ford's theology begins by paying attention to people in biblical, historical and contemporary settings. He argues that wisdom is particularly to be found in attending to the cries that come from their lives. Life is lived with an abundance of experiences, passions and joys that run deep through the different seasons of life in the world.⁶ To gain wisdom amid these depths requires the discernment of cries: the words said by people that connect profoundly with the heart and seem to break the bounds of the limits of speech.⁷ These cries that speak of both suffering and joy can be pointers to God's wisdom for future living. Ford tends to draw on cries of both extreme suffering and ordinariness filtered through the poems of his friend Micheal O'Siadhail. More recently he views these within the theme of drama that enables him to integrate story, cries and the face-to-face encounters that are prominent in his earlier work.⁸ The drama of our lives within history connect us with one another in relationship.⁹ It is this personal and relational approach that grounds Ford's approach to theology.

⁴David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁵David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁶Practical experiences of overwhelming begin Ford's work on personal spirituality, David F. Ford, *The Shape of Living: Spiritual Directions for Everyday Life* (London: Fount, 1997), pp. xiii-xxi.

⁷Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 19.

⁸David F. Ford, *The Drama of Living: Becoming Wise in the Spirit* (London: Canterbury Press, 2014), pp. 1-23; Ford, *Self and Salvation*, pp. 17-29.

⁹We might detect here some of the emphasis on 'realistic narrative' by Hans Frei with whom Ford met regularly while at Yale (Ford, *Drama of Living*, p. 53). We might also note Ford's doctoral research on Barth

Such a personal approach embraces both the inner and outer lives of people. There are complex inner lives that are represented outwardly through the 'face' and the 'cries' people make. It is through the complex metaphors of face and cries that Ford connects his focus on external living with the inner life of people that is harder to analyse.¹⁰ It is only through attending responsibly to the faces and cries of others that we can resist totalizing impersonal systems and grow in wisdom.¹¹ We need each other in ever-widening circles that never lose their personal particularity. This is a personal, relational, contextual and open-ended approach to theology that is always ready to learn from the abundance of life beyond that which we have encountered to date. It is a theology that generates a moral responsibility for life in a world shared with others.

To start theology with the face and cries of human life is natural to the extent that Jesus is primary in the shaping of our theology. From the start of his ministry with the cries of John the Baptist we find Jesus surrounded by and contributing to the cries of people and communities. So Ford argues that Jesus' 'wisdom is shaped through the passionate multiple intensities embodied in all the cries that have pervaded his ministry'.¹² Here is a deep immersion in history but one oriented towards the promises and purposes of God. It is a history of lives of ordinary people, often struggling or rejoicing, not always seen or heard as significant and yet key to the way of Jesus. We are not limited in this to those who are part of churches or who call themselves Christians but embrace the wisdom only possible in attending to all people. Yet alone the cries of people do not constitute wisdom: differing cries need to be brought together (in relationship) alongside Scripture in discerning God and God's future.

Christian discernment inevitably draws us into the way of Jesus that came to its climax in his passion and death. At the cross we find a crisis and challenge to our existing wisdom and it is from the standpoint of the cross that the differing cries are interrogated.¹³ From the cross we have to discern the wisdoms of reserve and ramification: of being careful not to say we understand more than we do, and yet allowing the implications of the cries to speak wider than we might expect. Wisdom 'at the cutting edge of life now is continually challenged, stretched and opened up in contradiction, paradox, offence, agony and exultation'.¹⁴ As it matures so it also leads to as many affirmations as critiques of our previous wisdom but we need to pause the rush to easy answers that simply repeat the past: the cross stands against the wisdom of every age.

and *God's Story* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1985) and how he brings some of Barth's approach into a fuller engagement with history.

¹⁰Here Ford is perhaps developing the work of Frei who explored the importance of lives lived outwardly in history rather than through an inward connection to God (Mike Higton, *Christ, Providence and History: Hans W. Frei's Public Theology* [London: T & T Clark, 2004]).

¹¹See Ford's appreciation of Levinas in Ford, *Drama of Living*, pp. 58-61. Also, note Ford's critique of 'epic' approaches in his *The Future of Christian Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 24-27.

¹²Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 33.

¹³Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, pp. 33-34. This approach to the cross resonates with those like Rowan Williams who sees the cross as the critical point of judgement (*Open to Judgement: Sermons and Addresses* [London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1994]).

¹⁴Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 41.

This pausing at the cross is not the end of the journey but the means by which *desire* is stimulated. The cries of the present stimulate discernment at the cross that renews an eschatological desire, ‘immersed in history and oriented towards the fulfilment of God’s purposes’.¹⁵ Wisdom moves people onwards in the direction of the coming kingdom of God, shaping the desires, aims and ways of life in line with this.¹⁶ Such onwards movement requires God’s nourishment to be sustained and this is evident in the resurrection and the receiving of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ We cry out for wisdom and receive both empowerment and responsibility to live wise lives. This life in the Spirit immerses us in Scripture, tradition and worship as we place our cries within the desire for God’s wise purposes. The Spirit improvises on the past to draw us forward into uncharted territories.¹⁸

Lives shaped in wisdom by the Spirit are characterized by love, particularly in the ‘love of God for God’s sake’, a favourite summary phrase of Ford that develops from the idea of ‘fearing God for nothing’ in the book of Job (1.9).¹⁹ As the story of Job shows, love is not a simple emotion but is arrived at through the wisdom of cries interacting with others and God. Love involves concern for others more than self, with the practices of praise a vital expression of this in relation to God as it is at the climax of Job.²⁰ The love of God is joined with the love of others within the membership of the church which should not be separated from Christian theology.²¹ Ford sees the church as ‘a school of desire and wisdom’ in which collaborative conversations take place.²² It is not that Christians belong exclusively to the church but that the communal practices of the church are essential in developing Christian wisdom and connecting ordinary lives with the ‘God of blessing who loves in wisdom’.²³ It is this drawing of life into the practices of the church that enables a Christian contribution to wider civil society and this can take a variety of forms.²⁴

Ford tends to mark out directions to guide theological method rather than settle on one particular approach and has a number of lists of maxims to this effect. This means there are different ways to interpret his method and here I have chosen to follow through the argument of *Christian Wisdom*.²⁵ On this basis I suggest that for Ford theology requires us to: (1) attend to the cries of people, particularly those of suffering; (2) engage with the way of Jesus in Scripture and as lived through history; (3) discern God and God’s purposes from the place of the cross, with appropriate

¹⁵Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 50.

¹⁶Ford, *Shape of Living*, pp. 26–28.

¹⁷Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 38.

¹⁸This is one of the themes in John’s Gospel that is taken up in Ford, *Drama of Living*. See also the reflections of Ben Quash, ‘Wonder-Voyaging: The Pneumatological Character of David Ford’s Theology’, in Tom Greggs, Rachel Muers, and Simeon Zahl (eds.), *The Vocation of Theology Today: A Festschrift for David Ford* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), pp. 146–62.

¹⁹Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, pp. 90–120.

²⁰Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, pp. 237–38.

²¹Ford, *Future*, pp. 90–94.

²²Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, pp. 252–54.

²³Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 239.

²⁴Ford, *Future*, pp. 104–29.

²⁵Another approach is to pick out particular focus themes, as Iain Torrance does with ‘friendship’ in his summary of the book, ‘Friendship as a Mode of Theological Engagement: David Ford’s Exploration of Christian Wisdom’, *Modern Theology* 25.1 (2009), pp. 123–31.

reserve and ramification; (4) consider how individual lives might be lived creatively in the Spirit with desires shaped towards God's future; (5) articulate fresh communal practices that enable lives to be lived in love for God's sake; and (6) develop Christian contributions to wider society. These can be seen as overlapping and interweaving aspects of theology that provide ways into the abundance of God. Attending to each enables wise Christian living within history until all becomes love.

It is worth noting that Ford is writing as an Anglican and this shapes his thinking, even if he does not interact in depth with historic Anglican theologians.²⁶ This is seen in his practical rather than speculative approach to theology, with theology evidenced in the lives of Christians and their practices of worship.²⁷ Such lives are embedded in particular historical situations and this contextual concern for history resonates with the historical shaping of Anglican theology and ecclesiology, particularly through times of conflict.²⁸ Alongside and in tension with this historical emphasis is a deep engagement with the biblical narratives and teaching, evident in the reformed and evangelical strands of Anglicanism.²⁹ Ford's emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in shaping personal spirituality resonates with the charismatic experience within Anglicanism, even if he emphasizes the regular practices of faith rather than the more unusual gifts of the Spirit.³⁰ Life, history, worship, context, Scripture and the Spirit loom large in Anglican approaches to theology and it is not surprising to find these being returned to in different ways by Ford who attends Anglican worship and has been drawn into theological discussions within the Anglican Communion.

Wisdom Ecclesiology

The order of Ford's theology in *Christian Wisdom* clearly leads towards ecclesiology and its communal practices outlined in the chapter on 'Loving the God of wisdom'.³¹ Thus ecclesiology can be seen as the climax to a wisdom approach to theology that integrates all else and drives Christian engagement in world history. In this chapter the practice of praise is particularly important in Ford's understanding of the church, as mentioned above: praise of the Creator whose very being is love, a love that culminates in the cross of Jesus. This is both a practice and an exploration of the doctrine of God which leads Ford to consider the church through the book of

²⁶A point made by Benjamin J. King, Robert MacSwain, and Jason A. Fout, 'Contemporary Anglican Systematic Theology: Three Examples in David Brown, Sarah Coakley, and David F. Ford', *Anglican Theological Review* 94.2 (2012), pp. 319-34.

²⁷Anglican themes noted by Paul Avis, *The Identity of Anglicanism: Essentials of Anglican Ecclesiology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2008), p. 15.

²⁸Significant in the Anglican approach of Mark Chapman, 'The Church', in Ralph McMichael (ed.), *The Vocation of Anglican Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2014), pp. 201-202.

²⁹For example, the evangelical approach of Colin Buchanan, *Is the Church of England Biblical? An Anglican Ecclesiology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998).

³⁰This can be compared with the Anglican charismatic David Watson, *I Believe in the Church* (repr.; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2nd edn, 1982 [1978]).

³¹Chapter 7 which correlates to aspect (5) above. This represents the culmination of Ford's presentation prior to three case studies in the following chapters.

Revelation.³² Here the cries of joy and suffering mingle in the singing and praise of the wise God. The church is called 'to bear the name of Jesus Christ and his Father worthily'.³³ It is in praise that we enact the theological basis of the church in God, the God known in Jesus who acts in the world.³⁴ Such praise becomes a listening to the Spirit who transforms personal desires within community so that they may be oriented (eschatologically) to the Father's future. The church is a school of wisdom that draws all together, 'the whole ecology of reality', by the transforming Holy Spirit.³⁵ It integrates the different aspects of Ford's theological approach for the good of all.

The church is patterned on a Christology of wisdom and desire that draws together Scripture and reality in a community of love that overflows in mission to the world.³⁶ This is not worked out in detail but rather Ford explores some themes within the creedal marks of the church as 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic'. For each of these the biblical witness is placed alongside the contemporary reality which results in cries that stimulate the desire for more of God. For example, Ford considers the unity of the church as developed in the book of Ephesians, which given the divided nature of the world church calls for cries that re-energize the desire for unity. It is in regard to catholicity that Ford calls the church to take account of the cries of the world. Apostolicity requires the church community to get involved in the history of all nations for God's sake. The church thus is a stimulating place that serves God's future for the world.

Looking more broadly I want to tease out of the complicated interweaving of two tensions evident in Ford's approach to ecclesiology: between the universal and the particular; and between the perfect and the suffering reality. There is a universal desire to engage with the lives of all people, whatever their faith and engagement with the church, that their cries might be heard. Yet there is also a particular focus on developing the church as a school of desire and wisdom rooted in its Scriptures and praise of God in Jesus. This is articulated elsewhere in terms of the *extensity* and *intensity* developed by Dan Hardy who has influenced Ford in many ways.³⁷ The ordering of *Christian Wisdom* suggests that an awareness of the *extensity* of God and all people needs to be brought into the *intensity* of the church in its search for wisdom and ordering of desire so that it can get involved in God's *extensity*

³²Worship, for Ford, brings together all the major aspects of theology as noted in the brief study of Owen F. Cummings, *Canterbury Cousins: The Eucharist in Contemporary Anglican Theology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007), pp. 122-28.

³³Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 252.

³⁴See the important article by David F. Ford, 'Why Church?' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53 (2000), pp. 51-52, which explores this through 2 Corinthians 1.

³⁵Ford, 'Why Church?', p. 55. See also his earlier use of the term 'economy' to encompass all life centred on God, David F. Ford, 'Faith in the Cities', in Colin E. Gunton and Daniel W. Hardy (eds.), *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), pp. 227-30.

³⁶The emphasis is on praise although the three themes come together in David F. Ford and Daniel W. Hardy, *Living in Praise: Worshipping and Knowing God* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2005), pp. 185-87.

³⁷Ford was a colleague of Hardy's in Birmingham and became his son-in-law. These themes are present in the conclusion of Ford and Hardy, *Living in Praise*, pp. 200-203. See also Daniel W. Hardy, Deborah Hardy Ford, Peter Ochs, and David F. Ford, *Wording a Radiance: Parting Conversations on God and the Church* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

in the history of nations. In other language we might say that the church is situated between the cries of the world and a mission to all. The church is deeply rooted in Christ and yet in being so its boundaries are transformed and expanded to better appreciate the 'breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love'.³⁸ The practices of the church need to stimulate disciplines of intimacy and excess that deepen its *intensity* and stretch its *extensity*.³⁹

There is a secondary tension between the *suffering reality* and the *perfect biblical ideal* both of which Ford gives detailed attention to. The church cannot hide behind its Scriptures or a presumed perfection but neither can it deny biblical wisdom and the desire for holiness as it seeks to contribute in the world. Praise draws suffering and the perfect together: praise of the perfect from within imperfect reality reorients our desires, by the Spirit, and affirms our responsibility to work with others in the direction of the perfect.⁴⁰ There is a prophetic element to this as praise of the perfect brings to light and confronts all that negates joy.⁴¹ Biblical wisdom stimulates humble action to better the world for God's sake, even if this is not easy for us. The church does not exist for itself but in service to God and hence to all in history. This is the case even if it does not reap many benefits and may indeed find itself crying out more from places of weakness. It remains on a journey characterized by a praise of the 'God of blessing who loves [a suffering world] in wisdom' and this brings real joy that anticipates the coming kingdom.⁴² Thus suffering and the perfect are held not so much in unresolved and unchanging tension but rather as a *polarity* in which each feeds into a fresh understanding of the other in ways that motivates action. Polarities are common in theology and the Holy Spirit can be seen to hold both sides together in creative ways without them being reduced to a dualism.⁴³

Ecclesiology draws together Ford's theological themes and provides the basis in *Christian Wisdom* for then engaging and contributing to wider communities in the world. Here we have the drawing together of faiths, disciplines and people as Ford provides chapters that seek engagement with the *extensity* of those of other faiths, the university and those with learning disabilities. We are back to the primary polarity in Ford's writing. In regard to learning difficulties he suggests that the L'Arche communities work as a 'school of desire and wisdom' inspired by Christian Scriptures, despite not being churches.⁴⁴ These communities of faith have much to contribute to a wise understanding of what it is to be church: the *extensity*

³⁸Cf. Rom. 8.39. This image is used by Ford in considering the community of the heart that each person carries with them, Ford, *Shape of Living*, pp. 21-22.

³⁹Here I am linking *intensity* and *extensity* with Ford's consideration of personal spiritual disciplines in *Shape of Living*, pp. 78-106.

⁴⁰See here the theme of 'perfecting perfection' in Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, pp. 237-38.

⁴¹Ford and Hardy, *Living in Praise*, p. 186.

⁴²Ford and Hardy, *Living in Praise*, pp. 32-40; Ford, *Shape of Living*, pp. 158-80; Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 264.

⁴³On polarities see John McIntyre, *The Shape of Pneumatology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), p. 211; Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002), pp. 106-109. I have explored the use of polarities in the church's mission in Andy Lord, *Spirit-Shaped Mission: A Holistic Charismatic Missiology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2005).

⁴⁴Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, pp. 371-72.

contributing to the *intensity*. The church is never alone or withdrawn but always in active relationship with others across the world, particularly those who cry out in praise and longing. Such people often provide a critique of the church as well as affirming goodness. In a world that desperately needs wisdom the church should pursue learning alongside other wisdom-seeking traditions.⁴⁵

We can discern a similar move in Ford's earlier *Self and Salvation* where he reflects on the nature of self through dialogues with Levinas, Jünger and Ricoeur before exploring a 'journey of intensification' through a focus on the worshipping self in Christian Scripture and practice.⁴⁶ The practices of facing Jesus, singing and sacrament come to the fore. Ford's aim here is to consider how the self is transformed in worship rather than to develop an ecclesiology but this sheds light on what he considers essential to the life of the church. The Letter to the Ephesians provides a focus, linking its extensive view of all things to the intensive meaning of what it is to be a particular person in relation to God and other people.⁴⁷ This link is made real in the practices of the Christian community, the church, notably 'blessing, proclamation, praise, thanks and intercession'.⁴⁸ Imaginative immersion in the abundances of such practices generates 'the continuities and innovations needed for the present and the future'.⁴⁹ The goal is to grow into the fullness of Christ, the *pleroma* that characterizes the God of Ephesians in relation to salvation ultimately seen in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is a filling with the Spirit and indeed the Holy Spirit is ultimately recognized in the faces of the saints, those living before the face of Jesus engaged in the reality of history.⁵⁰ Ford explores this, as he often does, in the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer which is here placed alongside Thérèse of Lisieux. Extensive dialogues lead into the intensive joyful fullness of particular Christian lives shaped by church practices who then engage extensively in history.⁵¹

The importance of the church in all this is emphasized by the 'high' Christology and ecclesiology of Ephesians. Care needs to be taken, however, not to suggest therefore that particular intensive understandings of the church and its message are to be forced onto the extensive lives of others outside the church.⁵² This has sadly been the case through Christian history, raising the question as to whether the centrality of ecclesiology leads inevitably to a lack of tolerance for others. The realities of the Holocaust give a particular challenge to our ecclesiology.⁵³ To this Ford would reply: not if when we speak of the church we speak of people shaped by and following Jesus. Given the scriptural story of Jesus' life and death those who follow should be shaped by love and peacemaking rather than division and force. Love changes the boundaries of community and forces a more radical equality and inclusion

⁴⁵Ford, *Drama of Living*, p. 38.

⁴⁶Ford, *Self and Salvation*, pp. 7-11.

⁴⁷Ford, *Self and Salvation*, pp. 107-108.

⁴⁸Eph. 5.18-21, Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 109.

⁴⁹Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 111.

⁵⁰David F. Ford, 'Holy Spirit and Christian Spirituality,' in Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 269-71.

⁵¹The theme of joy in ecclesiology is developed in Ford, 'Why Church?' pp. 56-60.

⁵²Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 132.

⁵³Ford, 'Why Church?' p. 62.

of all people, promoting justice. A church rooted in the intensity of Jesus finds itself driven to a greater extensity however much it might try to set firm boundaries. It is forced to acknowledge Jesus as over all creation (Col. 1.15–20) bringing unity to all (Eph. 1.10). Just as Christology draws us into conversations and debates over intensity and extensity so does ecclesiology, and Ford seeks to bring them together through church practices and lives.

The practice of the Eucharist above all brings together the intensity and extensity of the church and its Christ, being the principal act of worship for most Christians.⁵⁴ There is the particularity of the story of Jesus that is ‘remembered’ and enables an improvised foretaste of the coming extensive kingdom of God that will be characterized by ‘inexhaustible feasting’.⁵⁵ This happens in many different ways as there is no one way to celebrate the Eucharist, and this testifies to God’s abundance and creativity. Ford deliberately does not address common themes in eucharistic theology but stresses how this intensive encounter with Christ radically enables vocation in the world. He does this through a close reading of the biblical witness to the Eucharist. In the Eucharist the worshipper encounters the imperatives to take, eat, drink and do this. This shapes a vocation to life even in the face of death, as was the context as Jesus first celebrated it. There is a radical edge to the Eucharist which involves a willingness to be exposed to danger of sometimes extreme kinds.⁵⁶ It forces the Christian outwards into the world nourished by an intensive encounter with Christ. At the same time it feeds the intensive life of the Christian community through the ordinary elements of food, drink and shared meals. Through the Eucharist the ordinary is blessed and people are incorporated into a community of Jesus. The Eucharist draws together, in mutual coinherence, all the intensive practices of relating to form a ‘socially informed body’ in which all aspects of life are drawn together in places and times of blessing and command.⁵⁷ The extensity is drawn into an intensity that feeds great extensity as we saw in *Christian Wisdom*.

Interrogating Ecclesiology

I have suggested that the polarity of *extensity* and *intensity* is central to understanding Ford’s ecclesiology. This is particularly developed through his desire to engage in the public life of nations and, at the same time, strengthen the church. From his Western perspective Ford engages with the increasing presence of people of other faiths, the changing power dynamics affecting universities and a greater awareness of those with disabilities and the victims of atrocities. His theology is rooted in a changing cultural context that has also forced changes in the church’s self-understanding. The Church of England, of which Ford is a member, has seen in the last 50 years greater engagement with those of other faiths, a lessening of its power in community and nation and a challenge from those often treated badly. Over a longer time frame the Church of England has gone from the exclusive church

⁵⁴Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 137. The centrality of the Eucharist to all doctrine and aspects of life for Ford is noted by Cummings, *Canterbury Cousins*, p. 125.

⁵⁵Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 144.

⁵⁶Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 147.

⁵⁷Ford, *Self and Salvation*, p. 143.

for England to one of many with few attending regularly.⁵⁸ In this context it is not surprising to find Anglican theologians reflecting on the relationship between *intensity* and *extensity* given that the reality of each has changed so significantly in a relatively short period of time. How is the church to relate to the nation when it is growing weaker overall and is often sidelined into a 'private' sphere? Ford represents one creative way of deepening the intensity (of the fewer people who are engaging with the church) while refusing to neglect the extensity at the heart of Christian faith (if applied to changed nations). His concern is more for the quality than the quantity of Christian life and Ford seeks a more deeply open Christian way of life in a changing context.⁵⁹

The changing context for the Church of England also requires an engagement with suffering in the world and the suffering caused by the church in the world.⁶⁰ The tension between deep suffering and the desire for perfection in which all are valued and affirmed is one that runs through the political life of nations. How can a failed church contribute to the perfecting of struggling nations? Ford answers: only by a deeper attendance to Christ and by living in the Spirit. Ecclesiology needs shaping round the passion of Christ and the Spirit poured out following the resurrection. The way of Jesus is one of humility and loving service rather than hostility and violence. Such a christologically grounded and pneumatologically enabled ecclesiology is open to receive critique yet not bound by this to stop contributing to the common good. The Scriptures and worship central to the church contribute to both the critique and the enabling required for responsible engagement in a nation. Underlying this is an understanding of creation which is both positive and uniting and yet also failed and suffering, although Ford does not develop this.

It is important to consider some critical questions that might be asked of Ford's approach while acknowledging that he does not seek to present a detailed ecclesiology. We turn first to consider Ford's theological outlook identified earlier. In listening to cries in the world it is inevitable that a selection has to be made and Ford makes choices based on his experience with others. While understandable, an approach to context that focuses on personal stories can miss the wider aspects of contextual study that seek to bring together different experiences. A deeper engagement with sociological and practical theological studies would enable Ford to better address the concrete nature of ecclesiology. As it stands, his insights remain somewhat removed from the experience many have of church life. That is not to say that Ford has not been deeply involved in the life of the Anglican Church because he has been immersed in many of the debates of recent decades.⁶¹ Rather, it is to recognize that his writing is shaped more by his involvements with the leadership of the Anglican Church across the world

⁵⁸Latest statistics for 2015 show that less than one million of the 53 million people in England regularly attend a Church of England church.

⁵⁹We need to recognize that Ford was brought up in Dublin where Anglicans were in a 3 per cent minority and does not comment so much on declining numbers than how Christians are to live in public, contested places.

⁶⁰Recent cases of abuse have highlighted this and render deep questions about the validity of the church.

⁶¹His reflections on Lambeth have been pertinent and practical, David F. Ford, 'A Wisdom for Anglican Life: Lambeth 1998 to Lambeth 2008 and Beyond', *Journal of Anglican Studies* 4.2 (2006), pp. 137-56. More recently, Ford has been involved in shaping a vision for the Church of England's involvement in education: Church of England, *Church of England Vision for Education: Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good* (London: Church House Publishing, 2016).

than by the cries evident in ordinary congregational life. There is much more to be done in bringing these together as I am sure Ford would recognize.

There is also perhaps a temptation in Ford's ecclesiology to speak of a church of praise separately from the world of cries. The danger is that the church is seen as perfect in praise and the world imperfect in cries which results in a partial sightedness in regard to the sinfulness of the church and the goodness in the wider world. To see the church from the standpoint of the cross is to see its sin and failure for which Christ died, and to see the world from the light of resurrection is to see glimpses of renewed creation. While Ford's approach resists these dangers it is hard not to see them arising from those reading some of his work. It is the temptation of blueprint approaches that point to the ideal church over against other forms of community and limit critical voices on the church. The terminology of *extensity* and *intensity* may not help in this regard as they seem to promote a sense of movement between two distinct entities, the world and the church, which can then be seen as a movement from the bad to the good. We need to recognize that all people and communities, whether inside or outside the church, have aspects of *intensity* and *extensity* that are both sinful and grace-filled. Ecclesiology should encourage their greater integration for the sake of all.

Having said this, we cannot ignore the sense of movement there is in any ecclesiology between the church and the wider world. I have suggested that in Ford's ecclesiology this is seen in terms of a move from the extensive to the intensive and back to the extensive. This raises a question about the boundary between the extensive and the intensive, between the church and the wider world. Ford appears to want a deeply intensive church that requires clear Christian practices for those who have chosen to follow Jesus, while at the same time to keep a blurred boundary that stresses the extensive life of the world. These two somewhat conflicting desires are, I have suggested, held together in a polarity through the movement of the Holy Spirit. There is need for further exploration of the nature of the church and its membership and boundaries to clarify Ford's approach, perhaps through addressing the nature of baptism. The issue of ecclesiality, of what makes the church the church, has been much debated and could contribute to the nature of the intensity that Ford imagines.⁶² What might help here would be more detail on the nature of the eschatological vision underlying Ford's work. If personal desires are to be shaped in an eschatological direction then what does this mean for individuals and the nature of the church? Different views of the church (and those outside the church) in its eschatological reality do generate different views of the church in the present and Ford does not engage with such debates. More generally, the details of Ford's ecclesiology would be helpfully filled out and challenged through a more intensive engagement with common debates on issues such as presence, sacrifice, epiclesis and anamnesis in the Eucharist.⁶³

On this basis it is therefore appropriate to ask what wider debates in ecclesiology might inform and critique a development of ecclesiology in line with Ford's outline. Roger Haight seeks an ecclesiology of community in history that shares Ford's desire

⁶²For a summary of the debate and constructive recent proposal see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Hope and Community, A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), V, pp. 295-316.

⁶³A challenge noted by Cummings, *Canterbury Cousins*, p. 128.

to engage both the reality of lived faith and the revealed faith of the Scriptures. He does this through the symbol of 'community' which he describes as 'a kind of primal social sacrament'.⁶⁴ Haight's concern is for an ecclesiology from below through a detailed and interdisciplinary comparative study of ecclesiology as it has been through history. While Ford's approach is rooted in appreciating the abundance of ecclesiologies that exist, rooted in the generosity of God, he limits engagement largely to contemporary Western communities such as L'Arche. Haight would challenge him to look at different historical situations through the last 2,000 years. There is also an inherent challenge to engage with non-Western ecclesiologies and those shaped in reaction to colonial realities.

Ford's interest in Pentecostal and charismatic faith would provide a way into developing global ecclesiologies. These have tended to be shaped by Free Church ecclesiologies and it is worth contrasting Ford's outlook with the Free Church approach developed by Miroslav Volf.⁶⁵ In terms of context it is significant that Volf speaks from an experience of a people oppressed rather than from a position of a church declining in power.⁶⁶ Yet he shares with Ford a desire for ecumenical engagement and the formation of a church that serves the common good.⁶⁷ Volf starts with the essence of the church in eschatological perspective, rooted in God's new creation, as participating in the communion of the triune God.⁶⁸ This participation occurs 'where two or three are gathered in Christ's name' (Mt. 18.20) and so the local church has priority in approaching ecclesiology. However, at the same time each local church is catholic in the sense of having the fullness of salvation and a desire to engage with other churches and 'the entire breadth of cultural wealth in God's rich creation'.⁶⁹ Volf's eschatological approach does offer a challenge to Ford's starting with the cries of all creation and only later moving history in the direction of the eschatological through desire. Is it sufficient in places of oppression to start with creation? Might it not blunt the challenge needed, which an upfront eschatological approach brings? Many have been drawn to Pentecostal churches from places of poverty and oppression because of the strong eschatological message that brought about a new communal way of life that was more attractive than and challenged existing practices.⁷⁰

I am overplaying the differences here and Ford would stress the whole 'ecosystem' in which we simultaneously interact with the local church and creation, the joy-filled, the poor and oppressed. Yet in articulating an ecclesiology we need to start somewhere and there are good arguments for starting with an intensive understanding of the

⁶⁴Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History. I. Historical Ecclesiology* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. ix.

⁶⁵Now a member of the Episcopal Church, although he has not developed how Anglican ecclesiology fits with his previous thinking.

⁶⁶Miroslav Volf, *After our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 9-13.

⁶⁷On the latter see Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011).

⁶⁸Volf, *After our Likeness*, pp. 128-29.

⁶⁹Volf, *After our Likeness*, p. 278.

⁷⁰For the story in Latin America see Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (repr.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013 [2004]), pp. 71-91.

church rooted in Scriptures, the Trinity and an eschatological vision. It resists the unwanted assimilation of the church into oppressive patterns of life and stimulates a better extensive engagement in the world. It may be the case that this approach suits some contexts more than others. Starting with the intensive does often leave questions as to whether this does, in fact, lead to the extensive engagement hoped for. There is a danger that the nature of the church is seen in purely intensive terms without reference to the extensive. Here we have perhaps the classic tension between Anglican and Free Church ecclesiologies with Ford illustrative of the former but trying to deepen intensity and Volf illustrative of the latter but trying to deepen extensity.

The issue of relating intensity and extensity is one often considered using the language of mission studies and there are moves to connect better the practice and theology of mission. As David Bosch put it in his classic work on mission, 'Authentic theology . . . only develops where the Church moves in a dialectical relationship to the world.'⁷¹ Ford speaks of the church in mission although does not engage with such wider studies and there is much to be gained from deepening the dialogue. This is particularly the case with the growing emphasis in mission studies on the primacy of the triune God's initiatives in mission.⁷² Often theological studies seek to critique a view of mission that was dominant over 30 years ago and much internal critique and development has been done since in mission studies. How might Ford's theology engage with the contemporary practice of mission in the UK where he is based and across the religions and cultures that is his concern? A particular issue in mission that the Church of England has engaged with as a result of wider mission studies is that of contextualization.⁷³ Rather than be content with ecclesiologies settled in one culture, there are moves to plant churches adapted for other cultures (within and beyond the nation). Such approaches are seen to be rooted in the nature of God who sends and seeks to work incarnationally in love for all people.⁷⁴ They raise the question to Ford: is it possible to be a church moving between intensity and extensity without being reshaped and grown in the process? Ford's approach assumes contextual engagement and utilizes a contrast between epic, lyric and dramatic approaches but his discussion remains disconnected from the concrete debates currently shaping the Church of England.⁷⁵

Improvising Ecclesiology

Having offered some critical reflections on Ford's ecclesiology it is now important to consider how his proposal might be developed in the light of the critique. That Ford would expect his theology to be imaginatively developed is part of his theological method. This comes from his study of Scripture, particularly the Gospel of John,

⁷¹David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis, 1991), p. 25 as quoted in the more recent work of Charles Van Engen, *Transforming Mission Theology* (William Carey Library, 2017), pp. 12-13.

⁷²Van Engen, *Transforming*, pp. 14, 16-17.

⁷³There is a wealth of material that relates to Archbishops Council, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

⁷⁴For example, Van Engen, *Transforming*, pp. 407-35; George Lings, *Reproducing Churches* (Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2017).

⁷⁵Ford, *Future*, pp. 24-27.

which he sees as valuing root texts yet building on them imaginatively through an abiding in the Spirit.⁷⁶ Given the reflections above I want to suggest that an imaginative reworking of Ford's ecclesiology might take the form outlined below, to which much detail could be developed.

Of fundamental importance is that in thinking about the church we don't start with the church but the God shown in Jesus who is involved in the world. We start with God and God's actions in a deeply flawed creation and history and only in this context does the church make sense. These may be actions that bring joy and fulfilment to people, but they may also be those that inspire prophetic cries against oppression and injustice. The church is formed as people who live ordinary lives, crying out in joy and pain, come together in community around Jesus. To look at the church is to see Jesus, to see Him revealed to and living in those who in their imperfections are drawn together round the cross seeking the renewing of the Holy Spirit. This is captured in the foundational sacrament of baptism. The church is not primarily about buildings and clergy but a mix of people drawn together from different cultures and backgrounds. These people live facing Jesus and each other, caught up in the drama of God's life in history through the empowering Spirit.

These communities develop their lives together through worship, seeking wisdom and mission. Praise, Scripture and engagement in world history are vital to these three core practices of the church. They centre on the gospel story of Jesus and come together, above all, in the practice of the Eucharist. Drawn together from the extensity of life, the Christian community practises an intensity of engagement with its triune God shaped at the cross. Through these intense communal practices the Holy Spirit works to stimulate desires for a greater experience of the coming Kingdom of God. As people are filled with the Spirit so they also find themselves entering into responsible loving action on behalf of others. They also come personally face to face with the holiness of God, which searches and judges all actions of individuals and communities. The injustices of the world and church are keenly felt within the grace of God in ways that stimulate protest and action on behalf of the suffering. Christians find themselves willing to risk going out prophetically into extensive places of brokenness and even death. The saints who testify deeply to this joyful, loving, responsible searching of the Spirit are of particular importance as examples of wise living with God in the world.

This movement towards extensity is the apostolic mission of the church that overflows outwards from those intensely filled with the Holy Spirit. It is movement that turns desires into active signs of the kingdom and words that speak of the gospel of Jesus. In mission the church is forced to listen more deeply to all immersed in the history of the world within which God is always active. In doing so it will be both affirmed and critiqued in its life and witness, challenged afresh on its understanding and embodying of the gospel of Jesus and the kingdom. Those extensive to the church bring particular cries of challenge to the flawed life of communities of God. Thus mission movements naturally provoke a contextual reshaping of the

⁷⁶David F. Ford, 'Reading Backwards, Reading Forwards, and Abiding: Reading John in the Spirit Now', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 11.1 (2017), pp. 69-84. See also his examples of the continuing/ongoing drama in Ford, *Future*.

church.⁷⁷ All voices are sought to ensure the churches worship, wisdom and mission are embodied in ways that connect with God's actions in the world outside its boundaries. The ultimate vision of the church is one in which those from every kind of background, outlook and culture are brought together in a community around Jesus, and together energized by the Holy Spirit to loving service to the glory of the Father. This eschatological vision to which the church is moved in mission through intensive engagements with the triune God represents the catholicity of the church. Ultimately there is one church constituted through a diverse plurality of communities and communal forms that are held together in Jesus by the Spirit.

Such is the outline of an ecclesiology springing from Ford's understanding that continually interweaves intensity and extensity in the concrete practices of the church, continually critiquing and reforming the church, that the whole ecology of reality may know the embodied good news.

Conclusion

We have presented Ford's ecclesiology which does not come to the fore in his writings and yet is central to his theological project. I have suggested that Ford's contribution to ecclesiology is in regard to the way he renegotiates the relationship between the church and the world using the themes of intensity and extensity. Although he keeps aspects of extensity and intensity together I have suggested that his general approach to theology and his particular ecclesiology can be seen in terms of movements from extensity to intensity and back to extensity. Ford's approach arises out of a context shaped by the historic Anglican involvements in England and so speaks to the reshaping of the Church of England. Informed by Ford's involvement in the Anglican Communion his ecclesiology also offers much to all seeking a way for the church between withdrawal from world involvements and conformity to present cultural norms.

The theme of wisdom brings together theology and practice, community and mission, perfection and suffering, the ideal and the concrete. As such it takes forward Healey's proposals for a practical-prophetic ecclesiology, deepening the Scriptural basis and the breadth of practical world engagement. At the same time, the breadth of Ford's approach is in tension with the depth of practical engagement possible. The extensity can seem to dwarf the particular intensities considered, crying out for more detailed studies of different contexts that might contribute to and critique Ford's ecclesiology. Ford's engagement with a few contexts stimulates the desire for an exploration of how his ecclesiology might work in other contexts. It also demands a deeper consideration of issues in ecclesiology that are currently mentioned briefly, if at all. These directions for future work spring naturally from the desires stimulated within Ford's ecclesiology and show its energy in encouraging such work.

⁷⁷There are many approaches to contextualization and this outline assumes less extreme approaches but is not limited to one type of approach, Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis, rev. edn, 2002).