Brief Sketch of David Sheppard’s Life and Formation (1) 1929 - 1975

David Sheppard’s life offers us a case-study in the pros and cons of strong leadership. He says himself he was programmed to achieve¹, and achieve he certainly did –through determination, self-discipline and ambition, values he learned in preparatory and public school. He continued learning throughout his life. Self-directed ‘formation’, drawing on the expertise of others, came naturally to him (even on retirement he arranged supervisions for himself on modern history²); personal ‘formation’ involving his emotional life was more difficult.

Sheppard was 8, when his father died. His mother taught him his father’s favourite Bible text: Joshua 1.9: “be strong, and very courageous, for God will be with you, wherever you go.”³ He did grow strong, not least by suppressing his feelings; and he was courageous. You needed courage to face Australian fast bowlers, (or Mrs Thatcher, for that matter), or when refusing to play against apartheid South Africa⁴, or leading the vote of no confidence in the MCC, in the d'Oliviera affair⁵.

No doubt about his courage, nor about his self-discipline and ambition⁶ – not least in mastering the art of batting. It was cricket that taught him his style of leadership: captaining Cambridge University, Sussex and then England –bringing to the England captaincy at the prompting of the Archbishop of Canterbury, no less, the strong moral tone that the team

¹ SAHS p.13
² SAHS p.331
³ SAHS p.10
⁴ SAHS p.84
⁵ SAHS p.85ff
⁶ “One of the God-implanted drives in human beings is the ambition to get things done, to achieve and to change. We need to acknowledge that ambition is there….“ BaaC p.238 (NB 1974)
needed. Captaining England, said Dr Fisher, would itself be work for the Kingdom of God\(^7\)–as indeed it proved to be, -in resisting apartheid.

He was 10 when the war started. Boarding at Prep School, and then in 1942 at Sherborne, provided some continuity –while his mother was driving ambulances at the docks in London\(^8\). 1947 he started his National Service; played various sports, always excelled at cricket. Then back to a more familiar world: Trinity Hall, Cambridge, to read history.

Then came something unexpected. He’d always been a believer, but in a typical public school way: ‘Be strong, and very courageous’; service of others, especially the under-privileged. Faith itself? Not much spoken about.

But an evening evangelistic event at Great St Mary’s confronted him with the reality of God. He returned to his rooms, knelt down and asked Christ to come into his life, as his Friend and Master. He remembers praying “Lord, I don’t know where this is going to take me, but I’m willing to go with you.”\(^9\)

His studies continued, as did his cricket; he graduated with a second ‘II 2’, in history. He began training for ordination at Ridley Hall, joined in Christian Union preachments, took part in public school evangelistic camps. Maurice Wiles showed him how the Old Testament prophets linked the knowledge of God with justice for the poor. He came to see

\(^7\) Letter written by Dr Fisher to Sheppard at Ridley Hall; reproduced in full: SAHS p. 34
\(^8\) Referred to by Mrs Mary Maxwell, Sheppard’s elder sister
\(^9\) PP. p44
this as central to Jesus’ proclaiming the Kingdom. So: ‘yes’ to personal salvation, but ‘yes’ too, to liberation of the poor from oppression\textsuperscript{10}.

We mustn’t forget, at ordination to his curacy at St Mary’s Islington, he was already extremely well known. He’d captained England; soon he would write for The Daily Mail, then for Woman’s Own. People have said he was actually quite shy. But he had to learn to deal with the media, to embrace publicity. -Not much later he’ll publish his first book: Parson’s Pitch, re-issued 6 times. It speaks to cricket lovers, as well as to evangelical Christians. It’s unashamedly autobiographical: he’s on the cover, confident, self-assured, wearing clerical collar and suit, bat in one hand, cricket gear in the other.

Into this high profile life comes Grace Isaac, daughter of strong evangelical parents\textsuperscript{11}. As his curacy ends, they marry. Grace, to whom he dedicates Parson’s Pitch, becomes “the best partner in my life”. And so she proved to be, in a partnership that involved them both in very steep learning curves, and was essential to his personal formation.

The honeymoon ended in disaster. Grace got chicken pox, had to remain in Italy, in an isolation ward, while her husband returned to play cricket for Sussex, prior to selection for the England team. Shortly after returning home, Grace collapsed in the Underground, was taken to hospital with a catastrophic panic attack –while her husband was preaching in St Paul’s Cathedral. She recounts the event in her book: ‘An Aspect of Fear’\textsuperscript{12}.

\textsuperscript{10} See the chapter in SAHS “Not only…but also” pp.136 – 147  esp. p.144
\textsuperscript{11} “When I told Bash [leader of public school camp] that we were engaged, he said: “Good evangelical stock!” SAHS p.28
\textsuperscript{12} Grace Sheppard  An Aspect of Fear  p.1f
She needed psychiatric help for agoraphobia and depression. Sheppard writes: “There has been much for me to learn from weakness, illness and failure that would never have been learned any other way”\(^{13}\).

They moved to Canning Town, where Sheppard became Warden of the newly named ‘Mayflower Family Centre’. This would be different from the top-down middle-class ministry of his curacy, which never seemed to result in genuine working-class conversions.

Mayflower was outside the pastoral parochial system – apparently had no direct relationship to St Luke’s, the local parish church, nor to its highly successful youth work, run by the legendary Father Goose at ‘The Boyd’.

Sheppard could attract money and people to work with him, as he engaged directly with local people at their level on their agendas. He had much to learn himself, hence another partnership\(^{14}\). George Burton was a Glaswegian, working-class, little formal education, but a calling to work with young people.

Their was a stormy relationship: two strong leaders; Sheppard the ‘skipper’. He acknowledges how much he learned from Burton –as from many other local people who joined groups at Mayflower. He became convinced Christianity had to be as relevant to the dockers’ secular world as to their personal lives –he learned they made decisions in groups, not individually.

\(^{13}\) SAHS p.40; see also: WHioH p.104 [re Grace’s illness]: “I regard that time as a major growth point in my understanding of how vulnerable we human beings are”

\(^{14}\) SAHS pp.42ff
They left Mayflower in 1969, with their daughter Jenny. Grace, learning to cope with her fears, had successfully undergone a life-saving operation for cancer.

Sheppard succeeded John Robinson as bishop of Woolwich. This meant not only joining the heady world of South Bank religion, but also re-joining the C of E’s official structures, moreover as a bishop.

And Mervyn Stockwood, bishop of Southwark, was replacing one radical John Robinson with a Captain of England and leading evangelical. Sheppard had been part of John Stott’s ‘Eclectics’, reacting to ‘Honest to God’. That had led to questions about ecumenicity and faith, to Correspondence for Christians in industrial areas, to the Frontier Youth Trust and the Evangelical Urban Training Project.

As bishop of Woolwich Sheppard’s formation continued. With the ecumenical South London Industrial Mission, he followed Robinson’s pattern of regular one to one sessions with the Mission’s leader. Peter Challen appreciated Sheppard’s openness to learn, but found site visits with him frustrating, as their hosts would insist on ‘putting on a good show’ for such a celebrity. This made it difficult to focus on their actual concerns and issues. But Sheppard became a champion of Industrial Chaplaincy, run ecumenically. He came to appreciate the French Catholic worker-priests15, and attended meetings of the Catholic Young Christian Workers.

15 BaaC p247f
South London was multi-racial. So Sheppard enlisted Wilfred Wood’s help in understanding the black communities of the urban world. Confronted with the racial discrimination that compounded their experience of unemployment and poverty, he came to see anti-racism as a crucial aspect of his emerging social and political ethics. He supported the introduction of comprehensive schools in London, coming to the view that Public Schools should be incorporated into one State-run comprehensive school system.

Part of Sheppard’s job was visiting the parishes in his area. He would stress the importance of the local church becoming a real ‘neighbourhood church’, as concerned with the problems and wellbeing of the neighbourhood as with internal church life. In the neighbourhood were to be sought ‘signs of the Kingdom’, ‘flickers of hope’. Crucially, the Pauline doctrine of the body: “we are all members one of another” applies as much to the neighbourhood, as to the church community. All these themes (plus his criticism of the language of ‘scroungers’) are brought together in his major work “Built as a City” 1974, written with the research assistance of Jacky Burgoyne, project officer for the Evangelical Urban Training Project.

Sheppard was supportive, encouraging, directive, towards his clergy. He and Grace invited them to their home for ‘networking’ parties, bringing

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16 BaaC p.195f; for a fuller exposition of Sheppard’s position, see BTTP ch.4: “Black is Vulnerable pp58-78 and ch.5 “Solidarity” pp79-90
17 Important dimension of Sheppard’s social – political theology: see BaaC p.40, 170, 183,204; BTTP p.177, 207; [with Worlock] BT p.60, 145, 237; WHioH p.34,55
18 BaaC p. 194: “(though ‘scrounging’ never costs the state a fraction of what tax evasion does”). Sheppard saw ‘welfare dependency’ as an improvement on earlier dependency on charity or casual inner-city employment, which had itself replaced earlier agricultural unemployment.
together clergy and lay people with secular responsibilities. When someone disagreed with him, he could assert his authority with some sharpness, even anger, -conscious, now, of being: ‘bishop’.

(1,376 words apart from the notes)
Brief Sketch of David Sheppard’s Life and Formation (2) 1975 - 2005

2.1

The Sheppards arrive in Liverpool in 1975; Worlock 1976. Their partnership grows quickly, coming to express the life of the Churches on Merseyside for the next 20 years. In Liverpool they embody a new vision of what the city, despite everything, could become. They are ready to stand up for its people\(^{19}\), and put their issues first. They become an inspiration for thousands, way beyond Merseyside.\(^{20}\)

How did they do it? Their working relationship became a deep friendship, nurtured by Grace Sheppard, involving holidays and pilgrimages together, travel to South Africa, Northern Ireland, meeting up in South America, joint preaching engagements. They even produced two major books together about their time in Liverpool, stating where they disagreed, as well as the faith they shared. A unique achievement ready to become the stuff of legend—as if they achieved it on their own.

\(^{19}\) Eg over against the police at the time of the Toxteth riots 1981; over against the Westminster government, frequently; in support of what became the Eldonian Community (WHioH p45), over against the Militant majority Council in Liverpool 1985; against factory closures eg 1976 and later; in support of the Liverpool 8 Law Centre and the Liverpool 8 Defence League etc etc

\(^{20}\) E.g., a tribute from a working-class active Trade Unionist, stonemason in Shropshire, unemployed in the 1980’s, moved to Somerset, where he now works as a hospital porter: “I thought he [David Sheppard] was a good and decent man. Pretty genuine too. I’m no churchgoer, but I remember him first for the cricket, -he captained England, didn’t he? But he also seemed to be someone who gave ordinary people a voice, and stood up for workers’ rights, at the time that was very important, what with the recession and all the strikes and Maggie Thatcher. This made him stand out, even to an ordinary working-class bloke like me.”—given to me by his daughter, The Revd Dr Vicky Johnson.
2.2

But of course they didn’t. They had Free Churchmen with them, like Norwyn Denny, John Newton, Eric Allen, Keith Hobbs. But they captured the popular imagination, and were ready to run with it, on behalf of the Christian community, and for the sake of Merseyside’s poor. In fact their ecumenical partnership was built on the work of many others.

Archbishop Michael Ramsey had charged Edward Patey, a committed ecumenist, before he set foot in the Anglican Cathedral as Dean in 1964, to develop relationships with Roman Catholics in the North West. The building of the Metropolitan Cathedral was an opportunity enthusiastically grasped, - at both ends of Hope Street.

Worlock and Sheppard’s respective predecessors had developed their own partnership. The city’s sectarian past demanded ecumenical endeavour. People like Baptist Minister David Savage, chosen in 1974 by Catholic, Anglican and Free Church representatives to serve the Merseyside Churches Ecumenical Council, and later Michael Wolfe, Patey, Bob Andrews, Kevin Kelly enabled the ecumenical flowering of the 1980’s.

So Sheppard, Worlock and Denny could preside over the Ecumenical Garden within Heseltine’s International Garden Festival of 1984, and

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21 It is worthwhile setting out the rules they developed for the level of ecumenical partnership they sustained: essential to maintain good communication, taking time over it; always joint planning of diaries and always plan ecumenical initiatives from the beginning together; always appear in (secular) public events together; be prepared to drop one’s own diary commitments in favour of acceding to requests to speak or stand or march together (see WHioH p.20f)
22 Edward H.Patey: My Liverpool Life  Mowbray 1983, p. 83f
23 Patey op. cit. p.85-87
2.3

with three other Church Leaders sign the 1985 Covenant\textsuperscript{24}, which created MARCEA in 1986/7.

The Merseyside and Region Churches Ecumenical Assembly, set up when Militant were running the City Council, expressed contemporary ecumenical energy and ambition. It was largely lay; had a lay Speaker, Alfred Stocks, Chief Executive of Liverpool City Council, and five Departments: Ecumenical Affairs, Social Responsibility, Ministry, Education and International Affairs\textsuperscript{25}, and met twice a year serviced by the Ecumenical Officer. Sheppard, Worlock and Denny presided. It ran ecumenical training opportunities, and developed working groups on Unemployment, Racial Equality, World Development, Inter-Faith.

Was it sustainable? Were the denominations going to allow it to dictate Ministry or Education? In 1993 MARCEA was reviewed\textsuperscript{26}. The Departments were re-affirmed; a stronger Standing Committee recommended. But the Review added: “the retirement of the present three Presidents will pose …. a severe test of MARCEA’s survival.”\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{24} This was the result of the Report ‘Called to Partnership’, chaired by Bishop Michael Henshall; the Church leaders were: Norwyn Denny, Trevor Hubbard, Douglas Rayner, David Sheppard, John Williamson, and Derek Worlock
\textsuperscript{25} Some departments worked better than others; e.g. International Affairs expressed a strong condemnation of the First Gulf War—probably against the opinions of the Church Leaders
\textsuperscript{26} “The Need to Consolidate – MARCEA Revisited” A Review of MARCEA by John Nelson 1993
\textsuperscript{27} Review p.27
2.4

The Church Leaders needed their own decision-making meetings; they had to respond immediately to events in Liverpool or Westminster. Sheppard and Worlock had their own ‘Michaelmas Group’ of ‘movers and shakers’, they left running MARCEA to others, but while they were around, they inspired it. David Sheppard was hard to follow: witness the Mayflower, or Michael Marshall’s time in Woolwich, or here in Liverpool.

Sheppard himself retained his disciplined (‘driven’?) life-style, dividing his time systematically between family, diocese, Merseyside, House of Lords, Westminster, many outside commitments, study, and sabbatical. He had times when people could see him, eg 8.0 am; he was in daily communication with Worlock. He was very good with those in a crisis, and would see them at 10.0 pm. He kept in touch with people, eg in 1980 welcoming the new Head Teacher at Paddington Comprehensive School, situated at the flashpoint of Liverpool’s racial tension. He and Grace supported the Ecumenical Shop at Huyton.

He continued learning, naturally from Worlock, from other Catholics such as Austin Smith in Toxteth, and Gerard Hughes, taking ‘God of Surprises’ on a life-changing sabbatical. Grace herself, finding her

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28 First brought together in September 1984: WHioH p.33
29 Peter Watherston “A Different Kind of Church” p. 97f
30 Sheppard draws on Austin Smith’s language of signs of the Kingdom as “a creation thing” (BTTP p.56 and see too BT p.74); he marks out Smith’s sentence: “the liberation of the powerless is the liberation of us all” in his reading of “Journeying with God” (1990)
31 Gerard Hughes, God of Surprises Darton, Longman and Todd 1985;
32 The effects of this 1989 sabbatical on Sheppard’s emotional learning are set out in the sermon entitled “The Waiting Father in Holy Week”, prepared for Liverpool Cathedral on Maundy Thursday 1989. He identifies himself with the Prodigal, and then with Peter: “Then, great spiritual warrior that I claimed to be – exhausted, falling asleep while He watched and prayed.” He then identifies himself again with the Prodigal Son, discovering that his father was waiting for him…”And we know, wonder of wonders, that we are accepted and valued.”
2.5

way towards full health, was helping him affirm his emotional side. ‘Achieving’ had to give way to ‘being accepted’ deep down; from there, with Worlock, to embracing the centrality of HOPE. Sheppard’s been called ‘a control freak’. Perhaps ‘heavily defended’? Many could not get close to him. –some amongst his close colleagues could, or in the support group ‘Baker’s Dozen’ to which he and Grace belonged. Highly respected by almost all, certainly loved by some –Grace by more? He remained the Bishop, reverting sometimes to being ‘Captain’, together with his Suffragan, Michael Henshall, quite capable of issuing a severe reprimand, without the recipient ever really knowing why. Did his own leadership style inhibit the potential of others?

Occasionally in the Diocese he took his eye off the ball: two inner city deaneries needed re-organisation, but parishes first heard of their impending closure on television. Sheppard faced a rebellion and had to back down; Area Deans absorbed a lot of anger. Eventually the deaneries themselves produced a better plan.

Simultaneously Sheppard was lecturing and writing. “Bias To The Poor” (1983) followed “Built as a City”. Focussed on Liverpool, it engaged with Liberation Theology and racial justice, always building on the ‘terms of reference’ of Jesus’ own mission: Isaiah 61, and Justice ‘toppling over’ in favour of the poor. He insisted resources in Church
2.6

and State be shifted to favour the urban poor, at the cost of ‘comfortable Britain’.

Sheppard’s commitment to those he called “the left behind”\(^\text{35}\), shines out in the Report ‘Faith In The City’\(^\text{36}\). He was Vice Chairman. It’s worth re-reading. It is passionate, outspoken, but always claiming to be evidence-based.

It was leaked, so its publication became a tumultuous salvage operation. Sheppard himself returned from appearing on Newsnight and a subsequent row with Norman Tebbit, deeply hurt. The Report was hastily and stupidly dismissed as Marxist. It was critical of much Government policy, but explicitly recommends some Government policies “to the attention of Church and society.”\(^\text{37}\)

It made people look afresh at England’s UPA’s; the resultant Church Urban Fund should be seen as part of Sheppard’s legacy. Much of its descriptive analysis still has relevance. But by arguing that re-distribution of resources was as important as wealth creation, it was proposing solutions to which contemporary dominant ‘New Right’ philosophy could never agree.

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\(^{35}\) Sheppard writes of “communities of the left behind”, who are no longer able to participate in the decision-making processes of society, and are therefore powerless.

\(^{36}\) The Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Commission on Urban Priority Areas

\(^{37}\) Chapter 8 of the Report predates the conservative Government by building on the analysis of the 1977 Labour Government’s White Paper entitled “Policy for the Inner Cities”. It also uses Sheppard’s language of the ‘left behind’ (1.14, and 45), and “the common good” (3.17, 3.22, 5.86, 8.11), and draws on the Pauline teaching of ‘being members one of another’ (5.89)
2.7

In the 1990’s Sheppard was involved in a major ecumenical report: Unemployment and The Future of Work. He chaired the Sponsoring Group, setting up the Working Party with characteristically meticulous care for ecumenical balance. The final text owes much to the economist Andrew Britton, secretary to the Working Party. It is a more closely argued and carefully presented report, but is actually more radical. It questions the inevitablity of unemployment. Because unemployment is so destructive, positive policies should and can be developed to re-create “full” employment. In promoting the Report, Sheppard must have re-visited his earlier view that some long-term unemployment was unavoidable, and therefore his defence of welfare in terms of Job Seekers’ Allowance etc.

Finally, how did the positions Sheppard and Worlock expounded on political and social theology relate to Catholic Social Teaching and the Papal Encyclicals?

It appears today’s answers may be different from those given in the 1990’s. The earlier Encyclicals are now read in the light of more recent ones by Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict who move away from Natural Law, and ground Catholic Social

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38 An Enquiry for the Churches. 1997 Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland. Worlock was also a member of the Sponsoring Body, until his death in 1996, when his place was taken by Bishop John Jukes. See Appendix A for an account of the moves (including a Worlock – Sheppard initiative in Liverpool) leading up to the establishment of the Enquiry.

39 Sheppard praises the Report in SAHS p.301, for recognising the need to “move beyond the idealised call for justice and the Christian promise of future deliverance into grappling alongside others with the detail of how justice was to be made a practical reality.” (my italics, SAHS, p.301)
2.8

Teaching in Scriptural tradition, Christology and the coming Kingdom\textsuperscript{40}. In which case Worlock and Sheppard were both loyal to their own traditions when asserting a basic Christian position which includes ‘a bias to the poor’. Such debates continue I’ve no doubt within this University, itself perhaps the greatest legacy of their partnership. But their courage to stand up for the poor and the voiceless remains integral to the pursuit of ‘The Common Good’.

(1,394 words, apart from the notes).

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        second impression 1970  
Sheppard D  Built as a City (BaaC) Hodder and Stoughton  first printed 1974  
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