

THEOLOGICAL TRENDS

The Church and the Churches: Recent Roman Catholic Ecclesial Trends

THE THEOLOGY OF THE LOCAL church was not specifically developed in the early centuries of its history. Rather it would appear to have been taken for granted as something so much part of the life of the people that such elaboration was unnecessary. When St Paul addressed himself to the 'church of God which is in Corinth' he felt no need to explain what he meant to his converts. During the long history of the Church between the first century and the second Vatican Council, however, this understanding of the Church, and especially of the relationship between the local and the universal Church, was eclipsed. Many historical factors coalesced to bring this about, none more powerfully than the steady growth of the authority of the papacy and the increasing centralization which this brought in its train.

Vatican II saw the need to provide a corrective to an ecclesiology which appeared to be based on a concept of papal monarchy which grew up over a considerable time but which reached its peak and was reinforced by the definition of papal infallibility by Vatican I. In such an ecclesiology the bishop had little importance except as a functionary concerned primarily with administration, and his office derived from papal selection, not directly from Christ through membership of the college of bishops. This diminished role for the bishop meant the virtual extinction of any concept of the local church. In fact, even today, many members of the Church would have difficulty in defining such a concept, still more in finding any correspondence between it and the actual experience of being Church. For most Roman Catholics 'church' meant the hierarchical apparatus centred on Rome. Their parish, the unit most familiar to them, appeared to be an administrative division of 'the Church' and did not itself constitute church in any real way.

Examining the concept of the local church immediately reveals a maze of definitions and distinctions which compel one to undertake one's own attempt to define the term. All this is a long way from the simplicity of the biblical tradition. When Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica or Corinth there was no question about the status of the recipients. Debates about the priority of universal or local, or theological disputes about what constituted a church, all lay in the future. Among the earliest New Testament writings, when Paul writes to his converts the word 'church' is used frequently, and nearly always refers to local communities, though there is also a different use of the word in 'I persecuted the Church' (Gal 1:13).¹ In deuterio-Pauline writings this emphasis on the 'Church' began the process of weakening the role of local churches in ecclesiology, a process which developed throughout the ensuing centuries. The result of this was that the references to the local church by Vatican II had the

impact of novelty: 'local church' was not an expression in use among ordinary Christians. Yet it is clear that the Church is realized where the Word of God is proclaimed, the eucharist celebrated and the group where this occurs is united in charity. These remarks illustrate the confusion which exists in this area, and it is necessary to begin by listing the terms to be used so as to clarify their precise meaning.

For reasons which will become apparent I have elected to follow Henri de Lubac,² who brings some order into the prevailing muddle. Though de Lubac prefers to speak of the 'Catholic Church' rather than the 'universal Church' he knows that the generally accepted term is 'universal', meaning the ensemble of the churches viewed as a whole. De Lubac poses the question: how are we to understand the relationship between the Church universal and the diverse local or particular churches? There are then two epithets, local and particular – often used as synonyms or interchanged indiscriminately. De Lubac has examined historical and theological writings of this century, especially the decrees of Vatican II and the documents of the 1969 Roman Synod, and finds both expressions used with equal frequency. Such a church could be quite simply defined as a group of Christian disciples gathered round a bishop in order to receive through him word and sacrament. However, because the concept of local church is today undergoing continuous extension, de Lubac feels a need for greater precision in the terminology. Although he finds that Vatican II's use of both terms, 'local' and 'particular', is not entirely coherent, he bases his vocabulary on the conciliar texts and finds that 'particular' is the normal designation of a diocese committed to the care of a bishop. *Lumen gentium* and *Christus Dominus* both have this usage, but in *Lumen gentium* there is also reference to groups of particular churches of a country or a whole region which the Council terms 'local'. Of course each particular church is local in the sense that it exists in a place, but the distinction is a useful one and offers a description of such regional groupings as, for example, episcopal conferences. It is useful since it includes both the ancient patriarchates and also diverse groupings which have emerged in the course of history. This terminology is schematic and somewhat arbitrary but is nonetheless an option which assists the effort to develop a consistent vocabulary.

De Lubac points out that there is always a double movement within the Church – the local church is always made up of particular churches – and that there is always a centripetal tendency and a centrifugal tendency in every church. The local church does not arise from the administrative division of the whole Church. In this respect de Lubac finds the use of the word 'diocese' unfortunate since it calls to mind the administrative districts of the Roman Empire. Christianity inevitably took over words of pagan or Jewish origin in an effort to forge its own language. Sometimes, also, the geographical and historical influences that shaped the areas in which churches developed meant that a diocese was coterminous with the previous district.

Much of the discussion of the local church has centred on the relationship between the local church and the universal Church, and there have been

attempts to assert the priority of one over the other. Herve Legrand has pointed out that it is important to exclude such an approach since it creates a false dichotomy. There is, in fact, a perichoresis between the two: they are always coexistent in a relation of reciprocity. Congar³ has stated that it is the local church, especially its eucharistic worship, which constitutes the immediate datum of Christian experience, but that the People of God realized in different places always retains the consciousness of a transcendent bond of unity. Both experiences reflect the fact that the underlying reality of the Church is spiritual but that this is translated into structures which are social, sacramental and canonical. The Church exists through a union of these three planes of reality.

The task of ecclesiology as Congar understands it is to reconcile these two strands of development. He maintains that from the second century the Church had its structure of life and canonical existence as a communion of particular churches personalized in their respective bishops, but also a structure of ecclesial life and canonical existence as one, unique Church with universal extension and its centre of consciousness in the Roman see. This was a point of reference and already, to some degree, of normative regulation. Two lines thus developed concurrently, illustrated in the laws which regulated the communion of churches grouped round their bishops and local or regional synods. At the same time there developed the law of the universal Church under the ecumenical authority of the pope, who, in time, was often in conflict with the Emperor. The Western Church recognized increasingly that papal authority was the principle of the public law of the Church which was truly Catholic. The West realized the demands of universal unity in visible structures most effectively but in so doing left certain aspects of its own tradition in obscurity. The *ressourcement* which fed into Vatican II led to the rediscovery of ecclesial realities which were seriously diminished in the medieval period and almost completely obliterated in the nineteenth century by the growth of papal power and increasing centralization fostered by Rome.

Now I turn to Vatican II itself. One of its tasks was to offer an ecclesiology which considered the Church on a basis other than the social and juridical which had predominated for so long. Vatican II does not treat the theme of the local church in a systematic fashion, nor indeed does it always offer a consistent vocabulary. It does provide some useful leads for future development, though Karl Rahner was to deplore the overall concentration on the universal Church with accompanying centralization and uniformity, and to make clear that this does not represent the only possible view. Nonetheless there are pointers to a theology of the local church. Rahner also said that Vatican II represented the coming to be of world Church. Here the local church is crucial. Since the universal Church exists only as a communion of local churches the local church is necessarily diverse culturally and historically. As *Ad gentes* said: 'New particular churches with their own traditions will take their place in the communion of the Church'. In this way the full catholicity of the Church becomes a reality and ceases to be a somewhat abstract concept of the universal. Catholicity and unity are not to be opposed, they are correlative concepts.

Catholicity is a work of the Spirit who 'distributes gifts without destroying the unity'.⁴ The legacy of Vatican II's references to local and particular churches was sufficient for such churches in the course of their reception of the Council to work out the specifics for their own lives.

Vatican II was still a Eurocentric council and one of the presuppositions on which it operated was that Europe would continue to hold a pre-eminent position. In 1968 the bishops of Latin America met at Medellin. The theme they proposed to develop was 'the Church in the present-day transformation of Latin America in the light of the Council'. Here immediately was an example of a local church taking responsibility for the implementation of the Council within its own social and cultural situation.

When we come to ask what Vatican II actually taught about the local church we find ourselves in an area of considerable ambiguity. The relevant articles are *Lumen gentium* 23 and 26, and *Christus Dominus* 11. Article 23 of *Lumen gentium* deals with the relationship of each bishop to the whole Church and to his own and other local churches – in other words, the collegiality of the episcopate. In this passage the dioceses are referred to as 'churches', emphasizing the fact that they are not mere administrative regions of a 'perfect society'. While each bishop has authority only within his own diocese, as members of the college they are 'bound to have care and solicitude for the whole Church', thus exercising that collegiality. This leads to further remarks on collaboration and the article concludes with a very important section:

It has come about through divine providence that in the course of time different churches, set up in various places by the apostles and their successors, joined together in a multiplicity of organically united groups which . . . have their own discipline, enjoy their own liturgical usage and inherit a theological and spiritual patrimony . . . This multiplicity of local churches unified in a common effort shows all the more resplendently the catholicity of the undivided Church.

The last sentence of *LG* 23 speaks favourably of the contribution of episcopal conferences to the collegiate spirit. Rahner,⁵ writing the commentary on chapter three, singles out the first sentence quoted here as important since it sees the historical development of which it speaks as marking a special divine providence. The principle is important since it makes clear that such churches could also be formed in the future by 'divine providence', for example, in Latin America, Asia or Africa. This suggests much room for growth and in the intervening years such indigenous groupings have emerged with somewhat varied results, as we shall see.

The next passage in *Lumen gentium* concerned with our theme is Article 26. It deals with the bishop's office of sanctification, but after the first sentence there is a somewhat arbitrarily placed interpolation. In the Vorgrimler Commentary Rahner makes only a brief comment, but writing later in an essay on 'The new image of the Church',⁶ he takes up the question at greater length, clearly feeling

able to express his own opinion with greater freedom. During the Council it had been pointed out that the whole of *Lumen gentium* was too one-sided. It dealt only with the Church as a whole, and left out the concrete life of the Church and the whole biblical treatment of the relationship between 'church' as the local community, 'body of Christ' in word of God and eucharist, and 'Church' as the unity of communion of such churches in Christ. Rahner makes the point in his later essay that the view of the Church as a whole on which *Lumen gentium* concentrated does not represent the only possibility. An equally valid starting point is that in which the Church is regarded primarily as it exists in the local community. The concern expressed at the Council that the concrete church in everyday life was not sufficiently represented was met by the somewhat clumsy insertion of a paragraph following the first sentence of LG 26. Rahner describes how Mgr Philips himself told him that a place had to be found to fit in this passage, though the place chosen was not ideal. The conclusion Rahner draws is what matters: 'The concept of the church as a perfect society is quite inadequate to provide a basic model for a theological understanding of the church'. The constitution clearly states, harking back to the witness of the Acts and Paul, that at the level of preaching the word and of the eucharist the church is truly present and achieves her fulness. '*Haec Christi ecclesia vere adest in omnibus . . . congregationibus localibus.*' Further, Rahner indicates that the future as far as we can foresee it will accentuate the characteristics of the local church: poverty, smallness, and what he calls its 'diaspora mode of existence'. With almost prophetic insight he looks forward to the form of the church of the future being experienced first of all in the local church. As such, local churches will be aware of being united with all others which are also church; thus the concept of communion will be very important.

Clearly this enhances the importance of collegiality and, more particularly, its manifestation in episcopal conferences. The guidelines for the establishment of such conferences are laid down in CD 38, which outlines the elements of a theology of these bodies. Both such conferences and collegiality are best understood in the context of an ecclesiology of communion. If de Lubac's terminology is adhered to then the bishops' conference represents the local church, a meeting of the bishops, pastors of particular churches in which they demonstrate that care and solicitude which the Council said they should extend to the well-being of all the churches, but especially towards their own region. Again CELAM springs to mind as an excellent example of the way in which this has been done for an entire continent. The United States Bishops' Conference has also made a positive advance in writing the joint pastorals after an extensive consultation with experts and laity. The result was a genuine expression of the mind of the whole local church. However, though the establishment of episcopal conferences was enjoined by the Council (CD 38), there are those in Rome who are uneasy about the way in which these conferences have developed, and this has led to attempts to question their status, especially their theological basis. Since Vatican II there have been two Synods of bishops which addressed the topic, in 1969 and 1985. The 1985 Synod's Final Report called

for a deep and extensive study of their theological structure and their doctrinal authority. In January 1988, at Salamanca, fifty theologians, canonists, historians and sociologists met for a colloquium which represented institutions in Europe, North America and Canada, and had the approval of the Congregation for Bishops. There were five areas for discussion, one of which was the theological status of bishops' conferences and their significance for local churches. These topics were addressed by Angel Anton SJ and Jean-Marie Tillard OP. The language groups then worked on the question in the light of the two presentations, and produced summaries followed by questions. It seems useful to refer to this in order to resumé their conclusions.

In the first place it is difficult to see how the mission of the Church, which is both intrinsic to and constitutive of its very being, could be carried out today without such conferences to co-ordinate and direct it. From the beginning the Church has had such groupings and such a body of churches expresses the essence of the Church. This means that episcopal conferences have to be interpreted in terms of the communion of particular churches and are necessary for the proper working of collegiality. Their sacramental basis lies in the rite of ordination of bishops where several bishops join with the main celebrant, bringing about a dynamic realization of communion and collegiality. Such groupings in the earlier centuries were based on historical, geographical and cultural foundations which are comparable with the anthropological presuppositions for grace.

Legrand⁷ in his reflections gives three examples of how bishops' conferences relate to the substance of the Church. First, there is the need to assure the inculturation of the gospel in a human space which rarely coincides with the territorial space of an individual diocese. Pentecost gave the Church its mission in the context of speaking many different languages – the need for particular churches to co-operate to bring this about is obvious. Second, the Church is, by her nature, a universal *koinonia*, her function to realize diversity in unity and unity in diversity. Third, the Church needs continuously to manifest her catholicity, something which *LG 23* sees as clearly realized in groupings of local churches. All these points are powerful arguments in favour of the status and necessity of episcopal conferences.

Before concluding this section I wish to return to Rahner, who offers some dogmatic considerations on this topic.⁸ He places these conferences in an intermediate position between the Apostolic See and the individual bishop, and finds parallels with the older patriarchates and metropolitan unions. Bishops' conferences, like these older entities, are important for an understanding of the Church in general. Rahner explains that the antecedent structures to which he refers were in existence and effective before the universal primacy of jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome was practically evident, even before Nicaea. However, since the Middle Ages their importance has been systematically reduced in the West while at the same time papal primacy was increasingly asserted and papal jurisdiction extended. Such universal jurisdiction reached its peak at Vatican I. Rahner gives a detailed history of episcopal conferences

dating from 1830 when the Belgian bishops met. He makes it clear that at the time he was writing (soon after Vatican II) these conferences had no canonical status, something he hoped to see remedied by the revised Code of Canon Law then still in the future. He turns to more dogmatic issues, arguing from the relationship which each bishop has to the whole Church and to the need for bishops to demonstrate shared concern for the kingdom in their wider surroundings, not only in their own dioceses. From this he argues that the notion of bishops' conferences springs from the very nature of the Church. He sees intervening structures between diocese and universal Church as no less *iuris divini* than individual dioceses.

Perhaps more interesting are the indications he gives regarding the probability of Rome actually transferring its competence in certain areas to bishops' conferences. He cites liturgy as an example, suggesting that decisions made in this way should not even require Rome's approval. He favours as much independence and autonomy as possible. He wishes to see a genuinely indigenous grouping able to grapple with the urgent pastoral needs and problems in so many regions.

When we move from such theory to the actual situation in various parts of the world the prospects are not encouraging. In fact it must be said that this is one of the areas where the reception of Vatican II has yet to be achieved. That this is so is not the fault of the local or particular churches; it is a result of the policies being pursued in Rome. There are two views of the Church in existence, and both are present in the work of Vatican II. Leonardo Boff wrote an article in 1989 in which he delineated the two views or models and the struggle going on between them. The article became one more reason why he was investigated by Rome, though it has to be said that the views he expressed were not his alone. They appear, for example, in a volume on the reception of Vatican II⁹ and in many other places. One of these models stresses the centre – the Vatican, Pope and Curia aiming at one single doctrinal vision, one form of liturgical expression, one moral code, one code of Canon Law: a hierarchical model bolstered by papal authority and infallibility, a highly clerical model with little room for the laity except in terms of obedience. The second model views the Church as decentralized, with faith embodied in various cultures, thus giving rise to diverse, regionally based forms of Catholicism. It gives value to regional theologies, creative liturgical ceremonies which celebrate the life of local communities, and puts a premium on evangelical life. The Church is understood to be a network of communities which together form the People of God and which are linked in communion with one another. Clearly, at the root of this lies the question of how authority is exercised. When Rome lays stress on its primacy and therefore the priority of the universal Church, this means in practice the right of the Vatican to intervene whenever it likes.

There are many examples of Rome's attitude to local and particular churches, as there are of what such churches themselves are attempting to do to implement their vision and find forms which express the diverse richness of this communion. Out of this wealth of material I wish to take just two, one local, one

particular, to illustrate both the possibilities and the setbacks of efforts to incarnate the faith in differing regions and localities. I shall draw on the experience of CELAM and especially on the recent Fourth Conference of the bishops of Latin America in San Domingo. And I will also examine the conflict which arose in Chur in Switzerland over the appointment of Wolfgang Haas, first as coadjutor, and then in May 1990 as bishop of that diocese.

I choose Latin America since the bishops there were the first to respond positively to Vatican II at Medellin, and despite obstacles have shown how (to quote Claude Geffré) 'the historical practice of a specific church can be an impetus for a new understanding of faith in Jesus Christ'. This has been important in causing the option for the poor to become determinative of Christian thinking when the majority of the world's population are poor and the North-South divide is increasing. Chur, on the other hand, is a particular church in the middle of Europe, in an affluent, neutral country, strong in its democratic tradition, one of the oldest dioceses in Northern Europe and jealous of its rights. It presents a strong contrast to Latin America. But though the history, culture and situation of these two churches are different, they both hold a common concept of the Church which, while rooted in the New Testament and history of the early Church, also derives its understanding of 'church' directly from Vatican II. This is a vision of Church as a collegial, participatory network of local communities in a communion of faith and love sustained by the eucharist, the ultimate symbol of this communion.

I have said something briefly about Medellin and need also to comment on the struggle to safeguard its perspectives and the later developments based on them at Puebla. Medellin itself had resulted in a 'curious dialectic between diffusion and resistance to its documents'.¹⁰ As at Vatican II itself there was an opposition – this opposition was to prove powerful and well organized. It was increasingly co-ordinated by Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, who rose rapidly from auxiliary Bishop of Bogota, to Archbishop of Medellin in 1979 to cardinal in 1983. In 1972 he was elected secretary general of CELAM, and became its president in 1979. By 1983 his followers were in place in the organization, poised to oppose the ideas of Medellin and of liberation theology in general. He recruited allies, notably the Jesuit Roger Vakermans and the Franciscan Bonaventura Kloppenburg. This group was able to take control of the preparations for Puebla. They also established links with conservative forces in Germany prepared to join an attack on liberation theology.

As Puebla drew near the Preparatory Document became the focus of the battle for control of the conference. The liberation theologians were excluded from the conference itself but worked with the bishops nonetheless. The Preparatory Document which had sought to control the proceedings was rejected even by conservatives among the bishops, but in the process it created widespread discussion throughout the continent, giving rise to a vast process of conscientization and many alternative agendas. In the event, the conclusions of Puebla demonstrated that this conference did not reverse Medellin but continued it, especially by stressing again the option for the poor. Meanwhile a

new pope, John Paul II, had appeared and Cardinal Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, entered the discussion of liberation theology. Liberation theologians were now publishing numerous works, which in translation were beginning to influence theology on a wider front. At the same time Gutierrez and Boff were under investigation in Rome.

The fourth conference of Latin American bishops was held in San Domingo in 1992. Little has been published as yet and I rely on the informative and critical articles by Francis McDonagh in *The Tablet*. Once again it is clear that attempts were made, as at Puebla, to impose a conservative agenda. The eventual document moved away from the position of the preparatory one, notably in describing inculturation as 'the encounter of a people's history with the history of the incarnation of the Word'. This, it continues, requires commitment to that history and to the community where faith and life interact most closely. The reference here is to basic communities as the expression of local or particular churches. Throughout there were efforts to manipulate the proceedings. The bishops were required to attend magisterial lectures. In an attempt to dictate the agenda, alternative texts were brought from Rome. No document could be published before the pope had seen it – a direct challenge to the status of such a conference. The pope himself spoke of the possibility of a future Pan-American synod, presumably in order to swamp CELAM in a wider meeting with very different concerns. McDonagh, writing shortly after the conclusion of the conference, stated that the dominant mood among the bishops was one of frustration; at one point draft documents were rejected by large majorities amidst numerous complaints. It would be premature to draw up a balance sheet. Some of the commissions which the bishops themselves controlled, on ecology, ecumenism, and women, did good work, but the framework throughout was one of abstract theology. On the five-hundredth anniversary of the continent's conquest, there was no public act of repentance for the evils and sufferings brought upon the indigenous population, only a hurried one in the chapel of the seminary where the meeting was held.

In relating all this, McDonagh makes a telling comment. Such manipulation, he says, raises important theological issues. Above all it exposes different views about the nature of the Church: on one hand a central authority 'possessing' the truth and circulating it to its local agents, or an alternative vision of a communion of local churches, each living the faith in its own situation. It is the crucial matter of the local church, its distinctive character, its freedom and autonomy that is under attack. If the bishops of such a church cannot conduct their own conference, organizing it themselves, and enjoying freedom of speech in taking up the issues which they consider relevant, there is not much hope for the realization of Vatican II. San Domingo was not all loss. The Final Document reaffirms the option for the poor, the value of democracy is proclaimed, ecology is discussed in a radically challenging way, and the native peoples are promised support in their desire for equality and recognition of their distinct identity. However, the section on ecology was edited to remove passages about the land which expressed such peoples' deeply mystical under-

standing of it. Finally, the very title of the conference was altered. The bishops described themselves as 'the bishops of the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean'. Rome changed this to 'the bishops participating in the fourth general conference of the Latin American episcopate'. As McDonagh says, this seems to remove the idea that this is the teaching of the churches of a region.

The second example I have chosen, that of Chur, raises the question of the appointment of bishops and their use to control episcopal conferences and steer them increasingly in a conservative direction.¹¹ This has happened in many areas of the world, but Chur provides an example which brings together several factors and illustrates many of the problems we have mentioned. The warning shots were fired in the autumn of 1990 when the Catholic University of Fribourg decided to award honorary degrees to Archbishop Weakland of Milwaukee and Albert Nolan OP. Rome banned both, and Swiss bishops seeking an explanation received no satisfactory answers. So much for the notion of subsidiarity, of local bishops determining at their level what is best in their own situation.

This was an ominous sign but worse was to follow. For fifteen hundred years the cathedral chapter in Chur had elected the bishop, a right only surrendered in 1948, but even then the chapter retained the right to choose from three names proposed by Rome. In 1987 the then bishop of Chur had announced that he intended to ask for an auxiliary; later in the year Rome decided to appoint a coadjutor with right of succession. All but three of the chapter objected, but in March 1988 Wolfgang Haas was appointed and despite protests succeeded as bishop in 1990. Once installed he set out to take control of the diocesan seminary by removing the group which ran it and appointing as Rector an Opus Dei priest.

This had been a model seminary. It trained laymen and women alongside candidates for ordination, preparing them for collaborative ministry in a future church where priests would be in short supply. It fostered ecumenism, the pastoral care of mixed marriages, and, most dangerous in Roman eyes, the presence of the laity had an effect on the context of its theology and the style in which it was communicated. Bishop Haas further angered the diocese by failing to reinstate the popular Vicar General whose appointment lapsed with the former bishop's retirement. A huge majority of the diocesan synod demanded the return of the Vicar General. Nothing happened. The churches in the canton of Zurich rang their bells in protest. The council of priests, the diocesan Pastoral Council – institutions derived from Vatican II – made further protests and the deans complained about lack of collegiality. Zurich went further and cut off funding: no salary or office would be found for a new Vicar General. Haas' only comment was that Zurich, now making moves to be established as a separate diocese, aspired to 'a degree of independence difficult to reconcile with the universal church'. Again it is the ecclesiology which is at the root of the problem; again, two conflicting views of the Church.

The dispute was drawn out over five years. Bishops met, journeyed to Rome, even met with the pope himself. Bishop Haas continued on his course, refusing

to confirm the unanimous election of a rector of the theological college while the council of priests passed a vote of no confidence in the bishop. Finally in July 1992 the Pope appointed Archbishop Karl Rauber as a special papal delegate to report on the crisis in Chur.¹² In 1993 the pope appointed Fr Peter Henrici SJ and Fr Paul Vollmar, provincial of the Marianists, as auxiliaries in Chur. Reports state that Rome had been amazed at the strength and duration of the opposition.

The outcome of the problem in Chur gives some ground for hope that Rome has realized the need to listen to the local church. The Swiss bishops in their conference and especially the clergy and people of Chur have been strong in their defence of the local and particular church. Perhaps only people as committed and as independently minded as the Swiss could have achieved this result. However, the whole episode, so destructive and contradictory of the whole being of the Church, arose directly from the Roman policy of central control and direction, one could say dominance and interference in the lawful acts of local churches and individual dioceses. No respect for ancient rights, no sensitivity or knowledge of local conditions and needs has been evident. Rome seems determined to crush any expression of variety and to enforce submission.

These are two examples. There are many more which could be cited. More recently we have news that the forthcoming African Synod is to be held not on that continent but in Rome. A disappointing decision for the Church in Africa which was seeking to demonstrate its own maturity and freedom from the western tutelage of its colonial past. The future course of the local churches therefore remains in the balance. On one hand there is development, new initiatives, growth in responsibility, rich diversity within a communion; on the other, the tendency to restrict and control which we have seen in our examples. I have not dealt with the category of communion at any length, but it is obviously important in the context of the local church. It is this idea, the dominant image of Vatican II, which is undoubtedly the solution to the dialectic between the Church and the churches. But much will depend on the interpretation given to communion by Rome, and the letter to the bishops on 'Certain aspects of the Church as communion' from Cardinal Ratzinger (16 June 1992) did not offer much hope. A communion ecclesiology offers a concrete universality. The cardinal posits abstract universalism, putting forward the idea of the Church as ontologically prior to the eucharistic communities and maintaining that this idea of Church is somehow incarnated in the ministry of the Roman pontiff. The similarity between such views and the policy Rome has followed in its dealings with local churches is clear. If the Church is ever truly to realize her catholicity, dialogue between churches and between churches and the Church in Rome is essential. The key role in such dialogue belongs ultimately to the Holy Spirit forming the Church as community, constantly renewing it, and continually sending it afresh to carry out its mission. Hope for the future must rest in this presence.

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NOTES

- ¹ Brown, Raymond, *The churches the apostles left behind* (Paulist Press, 1984), pp 49–59.
- ² De Lubac, Henri, *Les églises particulières dans l'église universelle* (Aubier, 1971), ch 1, 'Questions de terminologie'.
- ³ Congar OP, Yves, 'De la communion des églises a une ecclesiologie de l'église' in *L'épiscopat et l'église universelle* (Cerf, 1964), Part III, 1, p 227.
- ⁴ Zizioulas, J., *Being and communion* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), p 153.
- ⁵ Rahner, Karl, 'Dogmatic constitution on the Church' in *Commentary on the documents of Vatican II* (Burns Oates, 1966), ch III, 18–27.
- ⁶ Rahner, Karl, 'The new image of the Church' in *Theological investigations*, vol 10 (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973).
- ⁷ Legrand, H., 'Reflections on conferences and diocesan bishops' in H. Legrand, J. Marzananeo and A. Garcia Y Garcia (eds), *The nature and future of episcopal conferences: proceedings of the Salamanca Colloquium* (1988).
- ⁸ Rahner, Karl, 'On bishops' conferences' in *Theological investigations*, vol 6 (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969), pp 369ff.
- ⁹ Alberigo, G., Jossua, J. P., Komanchak, J. (eds), *The reception of Vatican II* (CUA Press, 1987).
- ¹⁰ Hennelly, A., 'Progress and opposition, 1968–1973' in *Liberation theology, a documentary history* (Orbis, 1990), Part III, p 121.
- ¹¹ See the series of articles in *The Tablet* by Scrutator, September – October, 1991.
- ¹² But see 'The Church in the world' in *The Tablet* (4.9.93).