

THE LOCAL CHURCH IN THE ANGLICAN/ ROMAN CATHOLIC CONSULTATION: TYPE AND ANTITYPE

The title of this paper is intended as a kind of deliberate irony. "Antitype" is being used in an English sense, as it were, rather than in a Greek sense. What is implied is not the stamp of the *typos* impressed upon the die of the *antitypos*, but rather the notion of contradiction. We might better speak of ideal versus reality, or perhaps of theological theory versus intractable sociological fact. However much the local church might exist in the mind and intention of God as an expression of the Mystical Body, the quotidian Church we have to deal with daily is, to my mind, quite another matter. The theologians do well to keep before our minds the *typos* of the local church, if only to correct our impression of what is with what ought to be. But if we are to be realistic in our ecumenical encounters, or even in our pastoring within our own respective communions and to our own people, then we had best remind ourselves that the local church, however real it may be in the deepest and most important sense—which is to say, the sacramental sense—is, nonetheless, in terms of this-worldly ecclesiastical organization, something of a fiction. There is a real sense, I shall contend, in which, alas, the local church is too often a paper church.

I must begin this paper with a disclaimer. In the first place, though the Oxford theological M.A. still implies, I hope, some degree of formal theological training, I am not a "professional theologian" in the sense most of you are. I earn my bread and exercise my ministry entirely as a parish priest, and not at all as an academic theologian. This has its advantages, I suppose, though not so many as are commonly thought. It is the prejudice of the *laos* in this anti-intellectual age—the *laos*, that is to say, in its fabled aspect as the average man—that somehow such a one as I must have a better understanding of "real people." This is, of course, poppycock, especially since I am well aware that many of you, if not most of you, will mingle pastoral responsibilities with academic ones. On the contrary, I am mostly conscious, not of the superiority of "the real world" over the mythical ivory tower, but simply of my own inadequacies. I speak as an amateur to professionals, and speak, therefore, diffidently. If I bring a certain freshness to your discussions, therefore, I hope it will offset a certain naïvety and innocence of expression.

Secondly, my own area of academic expertise, to the degree that such can be claimed at all, is in the area of Holy Scripture, not of ecclesiology, and certainly not of ecumenology, if such a term even exists. My interest in ecumenical dialogue has been largely personal and has only very lately become official. I come late, therefore, to the world of reports and statements and the official responses of this body or that to what has already been said. Of course I was aware, as one not uninterested in the ecumenical hope, of the major advances and major setbacks—such as might be important enough to reach the press. Certainly I had read the three Agreed Statements of the International Commission, and had even taken part in colloquia on two of them. But it is only recently that I have begun to be in anything like intimate touch with the ongoing process of formal Anglican/Roman Catholic Dialogue. And it became quite apparent, after I had accepted this assignment and had begun to prepare for it, that the mass of material which has accumulated since the Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey in 1966 was simply, in the time reasonably available for the task, indigestible. And much of it was not, frankly, readily accessible in any event.

It became very clear, therefore, that I could not bring to bear on this question of the local church in Anglican/Roman Catholic Dialogue anything like the exhaustive analysis of the documents I could reasonably expect from my learned colleague, and it seemed wise, as time went on, not to try. I have therefore felt it best to leave that important and necessary task in Father Jelly's capable and expert hands and to concentrate, for my part, on some general observations and reflections based on the intuitions of a "front-line" priest as he confronted such basic documents as were available to him.

The notion of *typos*, of course, comes from Cardinal Willebrands' celebrated address at Great St. Mary's Church in Cambridge in 1970—given a year before the immense breakthrough of the Windsor Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine. In that address, Cardinal Willebrands spoke of the local church as a *typos* of what has classically been called—though he did not use the word—the Great Church. He spoke "of the *typos* in its sense of general form or character, and of a plurality of *typoi* within the communion of the one and only Church of Christ." He went on to draw a distinction, it is true, between the *typos* of a Church and the idea of the local church as defined by the Vatican II Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church. There the local church is identified as the diocese, and is defined as,

that portion of God's people which is entrusted to a bishop to be shepherded by him with the cooperation of the presbytery. Adhering

thus to its pastor and gathered together by him in the Holy Spirit through the gospel and the Eucharist, this portion constitutes a particular church in which the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative.

It is difficult, however, to see precisely in what his distinction lies, except that his notion of *typos* seems designed to encompass more than a single diocese and appears to contain within itself the notion of unity in diversity which is so dear, at least to Anglican hearts. He instances, for example, the Eastern and Western Churches, as they existed still in communion before the tragedy of 1054, as *typoi* of the Great Church. Quoting from the Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism, he characterized them as being "bound together by a brotherly communion of faith and sacramental life" *even though*, to quote further, they "went their own ways," developing different traditions of liturgy, theological method and vocabulary, and even psychology. And yet, if Willebrands can see a *typos* of the Church which is broader than the formal definition of the local church laid down by the Vatican Council, still it seems to me that the local church too, even according to that definition, fulfills the condition of a *typos*: which is to say, that the local church is a microcosm of the great Church. Where the bishop is, with his presbyters, deacons, and laos, there the fullness of the Church Catholic is also. The local church contains within itself, that is, all the essential marks of the Church Universal, provided, however much local diversity there might be, that unity is maintained in essential teaching and sacramental life with the Body in its broader aspect. It is a fact of history, of course, that Roman Catholics have seen this unity essentially to inhere in the universal jurisdiction of the Roman Pontiff. It is equally an historic fact, of course, that Anglicans since the sixteenth century have rejected that universal jurisdiction as, from their understanding, unscriptural and unprimitive.

Whether one accepts the universal and immediate jurisdiction of the Roman Pontiff or not, however, it is clear that unity is not to be identified, as perhaps the Fathers of Vatican I were too ready to grant, with uniformity or with a monochrome sameness. It is no accident that Willebrands closes his historic address with a quotation from Pope Gregory the Great's famous letter to Augustine of Canterbury, as given to us by Bede:

My brother, you are familiar with the usage of the Roman Church, in which you were brought up. But if you have found customs, whether in the Roman, Gallican, or any other Churches that may be more acceptable to God, I wish you to make a careful selection of them, and teach the Church of the English which is still young in the Faith, whatever you can profitably learn from the various Churches. For

things should not be loved for the sake of places, but places for the sake of good things. Therefore, select from each of the Churches whatever things are devout, religious, and right; and when you have arranged them into a unified rite, let the minds of the English grow accustomed to it.

By the same token, Pope Paul VI of blessed memory, in his remarks at the canonization of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales—an event which so nearly became a fresh occasion of estrangement, but which was turned by the tact of that underestimated Pontiff into an occasion, instead, of reconciliation—went out of his way to insist that “there will be no seeking to lessen the legitimate prestige and the worthy patrimony of piety and usage proper to the Anglican Church when the Roman Catholic Church—this humble “Servant of the servants of God”—is able to embrace her ever-beloved sister in the one authentic Communion of the family of Christ: a communion of origin and of faith, a communion of priesthood and of rule, a communion of the saints in the freedom of love of the spirit of Jesus.”

But if Cardinal Willebrands, and Paul VI too, were speaking of *typoi* in some sense larger than the local church—were speaking, indeed, of something approaching the idea of a National Church, though that word was carefully avoided because, no doubt, of its historical implications—still, there seems to be no reason why *mutatis mutandis*, the same thing might not be said of the local church in the sense our documents give the term: that is, of the diocese as a microcosm of the Great Church, the bishop representing and embodying, for that portion of Christ’s Church which is his special charge, the rule and character of that same Christ whose *episcopē* he exercises. There too, there seems to be no need for uniformity or sameness, nor any need to “lessen the legitimate prestige and the worthy patrimony of piety and usage proper” to each of the local constituents of the whole.

That this might be so is borne out especially by Section III of the Agreed Statement on Authority in the Church—the so-called Venice Statement. It is this document, of all those which came under my purview, which discusses the notion of the local church most clearly and most extensively. Thus in Paragraph 8 we have a remarkable definition, which is quoted extensively in Father Jelly’s paper, *infra*. Furthermore, in Paragraph 9 we read that “The decisions of what has traditionally been called an ‘ecumenical council’ are binding upon the whole church; those of a regional council or synod bind only the churches it represents. Such decrees are to be received by the local churches as expressing the mind of the church. This exercise of authority, far from being an

imposition, is designed to strengthen the life and mission of the local churches and of their members." Whether this has always been so in fact, of course, whether one speaks of the exercise of authority by Rome or by some other judicatory, might well be open to question.

None of this is to suggest, to be sure, that a bishop in his diocese—the irreducible minimum, at least in theory, of the local church—is totally autonomous, or that he exists in a vacuum, or that he can function without regard to the whole of which he is a part. One might observe parenthetically, by the way, that if it has been a Roman temptation to override the local church from the center, it has been an Anglican temptation, and perhaps particularly in the American Church, that is, the Episcopal Church, to atomize the universal Church from the fringes. Episcopal bishops have too often acted as if they were responsible to no one but themselves, or perhaps in some ultimate sense to God, which has given rise to the kind of colorful eccentric indulging his personal religious idiosyncracies who is so inevitably attractive to the media. Perhaps this is inevitable in a church whose constitution on the national level presupposes that it is neither more nor less than a federation of essentially autonomous dioceses—for complicated historical reasons the Episcopal Church never having developed the notions or the machinery of the kind of primacy discussed in the Venice Statement as being the common heritage both of Anglicanism in general and of the Roman Catholic Church. In this respect the Episcopal Church is not representative of Anglicanism as a whole. On the other hand, of course, we have at times in Roman Catholic history seen the bishop of the local church reduced to little more than a bureaucratic functionary of the Vatican. Fortunately, I see some growth in collegiality and mutual responsibility among the bishops of my own Church, and we are all aware of the very serious and important efforts of the Second Vatican Council to restore a proper balance between the Bishop of Rome on the one hand and the bishops of the local churches on the other. In this regard, in Paragraph 17, the Venice Statement speaks of the Roman Church as *itself* a local church, which came in time to feel a special responsibility as a local church for the welfare of the *other* local churches—a primacy which *in intention*, however much marred in historical fact, was a primacy of love and service, in which the local church in Rome, together with its bishop, saw itself as *servus servorum Dei*, as the servant, not the master, of its peers.

It is precisely to maintain the balance between the local church and the universal Church that Paragraph 10 of the Statement exegetes *episcopē*, that is, "oversight." the quotation is:

This form of *episcopē* is a service to the church carried out in corresponsibility with all the bishops of the region; for every bishop receives at ordination both responsibility for his local church and the obligation to maintain it in living awareness and practical service of the other churches. The church of God is found in each of them and in their *koinonia*.

In the light of this *koinonia* even Vatican I (Paragraph 12) is understood to have intended its pronouncements on the universal and immediate jurisdiction of the pope, not to override "the authority of the bishops in their own dioceses," but "explicitly . . . to support them in their ministry of oversight." The document goes on to say:

The Second Vatican Council placed this service in the wider context of the shared responsibility of all the bishops. The teaching of these councils shows that communion with the bishop of Rome does not imply submission to an authority which would stifle the distinctive features of the local churches. The purpose of the episcopal function of the bishop of Rome is to promote Christian fellowship in faithfulness to the teaching of the apostles. . . .

. . . [T]he primacy, rightly understood, implies that the bishop of Rome exercises his oversight in order to guard and promote the faithfulness of all the churches to Christ and one another. Communion with him is intended as a safeguard of the catholicity of each local church, and as a sign of the communion of all the churches.

Yes, but as an intervening paragraph admits:

The theological interpretation of this primacy and the administrative structures through which it has been exercised have varied considerably through the centuries. Neither theory nor practice, however, has ever fully reflected these ideals. Sometimes functions assumed by the see of Rome were not necessarily linked to the primacy; sometimes the conduct of the occupant of this see has been unworthy of his office; sometimes the image of this office has been obscured by interpretations placed upon it; and sometimes external pressures have made its proper exercise almost impossible.

This is a frank admission for a document which sometimes borders on the disingenuous. In Paragraph 11, for example, speaking of primacy in general (and not that of the Holy See in particular), the Venice Statement says the following:

The bishop of a principal see should seek the fulfilment of this will of Christ [for *Koinonia*] in the churches of his region. His duty is to assist the bishops to promote in their churches right teaching, holiness of life, brotherly unity and the church's mission to the world.

When he perceives a serious deficiency in the life or mission of one of the churches he is bound, if necessary, to call the local bishop's attention to it and to offer assistance. There will also be occasions when he has to assist other bishops to reach a common mind with regard to their shared needs and difficulties.

How splendid that sounds! But does it sound at all like anything we remember from history? Does it sound like the way

Canterbury and York dealt with each other during their long mediaeval quarrel over precedence? Does it sound like the bishops of the East in their endless squabbles and bitter intrigue throughout the dying days of the Byzantine Empire, extending even into modern times? Was this the way the Council of Tyre dealt with Athanasius? Is this how Hildebrand imposed his (admittedly very necessary) reforms as Pope Gregory VII? Alas, human sin being what it is, this calm, rational, and human description of a brotherly primacy of service describes the exception rather than the norm. It was, after all, a great modern Roman Catholic layman who said, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely."

This is not, of course, intended to attack the notion of primacy in the Church, and I should like to emphasize again, in any event, that my remarks are a rueful reflection upon the primatial system as such, from within, by one who is part of it; they are emphatically not directed against the particular kind of primacy exercised by the Roman Pontiff, which has been neither more nor less abused, historically speaking, than any other kind of primacy. Certainly such abuses are not lacking in Anglican history, and it is to the immense credit of the modern papacy, especially as it developed in the pontificates of John XXIII and Paul VI and coinherited in the Second Vatican Council, that it has taken the lead in Christendom precisely in emphasizing again the fundamental understanding that for Christians rule and primacy are validly exercised only in ministry and service. The modern papacy has been, in this regard, determinedly non-triumphalist. Whether this impetus can be maintained, of course, in the face of some very real counter pressures, remains to be seen. The recent experience of the Dutch episcopate, from an Anglican perspective, however understandable, is nonetheless in this regard somewhat troubling.

My essential problem with the local church, however, as it emerges from the pages of the Venice Statement, and also from other documents and the writings of the theologians, and especially from the Vatican Council decree quoted earlier, is not that its individuality has, historically speaking, occasionally been overridden, justifiably in each case or not, either by the Roman Primate or by some other representative of the species, but rather that I discern a real gap, at least in American church life, between what the theologians rightly define as the local church and what our people experience as the local church *to them*. And I think this problem is common to both our churches, even given the rather more centralized nature of Roman Catholic dioceses in comparison to Episcopal ones. What you gain from centralization we make up for, largely, by our smallness in size. I have vastly easier access

to my bishop, for example, than I suspect most of you do to yours. And yet the problem remains the same.

It is the problem, essentially, of parochialism. We all know from our training and reading that in churches which claim the Catholic tradition the local church means the diocese, whose essential minister and chief pastor is the bishop, of whose ministry the rest of us are fundamentally representative and, indeed, derivative. The parish is simply the crystallization in a particular place, as it were, of the local church in its broader sense. And yet if we were to ask a thousand laypersons what they meant by local church, I dare say that nine hundred and ninety-nine of them would respond instinctively with the name of the parish where they personally attend Mass. To say this, of course, is merely to state the obvious, but it illustrates the degree to which what we write as theologians is not realized in the actual life of the Church as it is lived out in the present time. For most of our people the bishop is a remote ecclesiastical bureaucrat, and diocesan headquarters and diocesan staff are inevitably referred to as "them." The concomitant of this is parochialism in the popular as well as in the technical sense: the vision of the Church is narrowed to the immediate prospect, to "my" church, "my" priest, "my" neighbors, "people just like me."

To say that this is an ecumenical obstacle is something of an understatement. Indeed, this is the ultimate ecumenical obstacle, far surpassing such formal barriers as the validity of Anglican Orders or the ordination of women, swamping in its complacency any number of Agreed Statements on this or that. Our problem is not on the level of the theological discourse—and this is true, I find, to a much larger extent than many of us perhaps realize even for the theologians of the distinctly Protestant churches—not on that level at all, where there has been, thanks to a mercifully real dedication to honest scholarship, a remarkable convergence over the past fifty years. Our problem is on the level of instinctive inertia, of inherited and unexamined religious presumptions, of a religion of the gut rather than of the head.

This is one reason why, sadly, the Agreed Statements—which I very largely agree with and rejoice to see—have about them an air almost of unreality. I am sure we should all agree that in any event they are but a first step, however significant. And yet, I think the questions must fairly be asked whether they have made any difference *at all* in the life of the laity. Oh yes, there have been a number of joint conferences of this and that, and in many dioceses there have been local level ARC groups, which in many cases have included lay participation, and there have been here and there

occasionally "covenanted parishes"—though covenanted to do what is not always very clear—and there are even one or two shared parishes, like the celebrated one in Norfolk, held up before our attention for a week or so in the media and then forgotten by all save their constituents. But is any of us so sanguine as to think the basic inertia has been touched? Are we off dead center so far as our people are concerned? Are not even the Agreed Statements to a sad extent merely the conversations the experts have among themselves? And when the laity have run ahead of us, as often enough they have, is it because they have been spared our narrowness of professionally conditioned vision, as is often claimed by those who like to romanticize about the laity? Or is their practical ecumenism simply religion of the lowest common denominator, disdainful of rule and order, espousing the basic creed of real American religion, the Pelagian notion that what matters at bedrock is "deeds not creeds"? Plato once observed that correct opinion is not the same as wisdom or reason. One may stumble on an opinion, or an attitude, or a course of action, which in fact is objectively correct, and yet have no knowledge or understanding of how one got there, nor know the reasons why. Thus, while some of the laity have remained mired in simple prejudice, others have embraced a simple comraderie which is based not on charity nor a unity of faith, but upon sentimentality, upon the pluralist assumption that religion is a matter of purely private pursuit, that it does not, in the end, matter what you believe, so long as you are sincere and abstain from the grosser and more obvious sins.

This is not to disparage the theological task. If I did not think it important, I should not be here. On the contrary, I think it supremely important. But I think we must be aware of the task before us, for we do not theologize for ourselves alone, but for the whole Church and People of God. Somehow, we must translate what we do in our studies into the minds and hearts of the Christian folk. But let us not deceive ourselves by the ideal pictures we paint. It is important that we continue to hold the ideal before the Church, but let us not delude ourselves that the reality either of history or of church life in the present age is anything like the beautiful and tranquil portrait of the local churches existing in harmonious and beautiful balance with the Church Universal which is so lovingly described in the Venice Statement nor even in the Vatican Council decrees. That, no doubt, is how it should be. But it remains our task as Christian persons, as baptized members of the Body of Christ, to make it so. And, whether in your Communion or mine, I do not think we have even begun that task. May God help us in the years ahead to address it more fully, more honestly, more faith-

fully, and more truly, that the world may see in us the image of his Incarnate Son. Amen.

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