**From the Editor**

**Reality and Form in Catholicity**

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The word 'catholic' has had a varied and often controversial history in Anglicanism. Its ordinary English sense is that of general and universal. One sees this historically in the growing medical literature of the seventeenth century in relation to cures or treatments that are said to be generally or universally applicable. Of course it had a specific application to Western Christianity after the Great Schism in 1054 when the Eastern churches generally became known as Orthodox and the Western as Catholic. At the time of the Reformation in England catholic was somewhat self-consciously used to mean all Christians in distinction from those churches under the jurisdiction of the Church of Rome. Elizabeth's injunctions in 1559 stated: 'You shall pray for Christes Holy Catholique church, that is, for the whole congregation of Christian people dispersed throughout the whole worlde, and especially for the Church of England and Ireland.' Similar usage is retained in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*. More convoluted usages appear in the nineteenth century in the context of the Oxford movement and the ritualist controversies. This phase has influenced current usage.

It is not a word that generally carries popular weight among Anglicans as part of an active understanding of church life. This is a loss since catholicity belongs as a vital element in the life of the church. Two elements are worth recovering; the idea that the local church belongs to a wider fellowship as part of its vital life of faith. The second element is that the wider church, whether within a specific tradition like Anglicanism or more generally, represents the reality of catholicity through a variety of institutional arrangements.

A brief narrative of these themes might help us to see how the reality to which catholicity refers relates to the infinitely varied form of organizations by which it has been facilitated.

The word 'catholic' does not occur in the New Testament at all yet it was a word commonly available at the time of the writing of the

New Testament documents. J.B. Lightfoot drew attention to other examples of the use of the word to describe something that is general or universal, all encompassing, the whole.[1] Ignatius's letter to the Smyrneans (8.2), probably written about 134[2] is the first use of the term in a Christian document. 'Wherever the bishop appears let the congregation (πληθοσ) be present; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the whole church (καθολικη εκκλησια).' Lightfoot points out that the meaning in this text is of the general or universal church as opposed to a particular body of Christians, a meaning that is obviously required by the context. The bishop, Ignatius argues, is the focus for each individual church as Jesus Christ is the focus of the universal church. Clearly in this letter the argument is directed to the group of dissenters in Smyrna who were arguing for a more docetic understanding of Christ. Cyril of Jerusalem uses the term in a similar way when he claims the church is denominated 'catholic because it is spread throughout the whole world from one end to the other'.[3] But in the latter part of the second century the term 'catholic' began to be used to designate what was sometimes called the 'Great Church' in contrast to the heretical sects against which the churches were reacting. Similarly, as apostolic texts were being collected into a canon of recognized texts, a New Testament, one criterion was that the texts were those received by the Catholic Church. We can see this formulation in the earliest such list of texts in the Muratorian fragment which probably dates from the second half of the second century. The use of the term 'catholic' in early church creeds appears only in the fourth century and, according to J.N.D. Kelly, it retained in many cases the simple meaning of all Christians scattered throughout the world.[4]

But this 'Great Church' itself is a reasonably loose-limbed affair especially in the East. There were priests and many congregations and we know there was a church building in Edessa in 201 AD because it is mentioned in an account of a flooding tragedy in that year recorded in the *Chronicle of Edessa*.[5] However, we have no text before

1.    J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers. Part II. S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp. Revised Texts with Introductions, Notes Dissertations, and Translations* (London: MacMillan, 1889), p. 310.

2.    Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, II, pp. 310-11.

3.    Quoted in Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, II, p. 310 from Cyril's Catechetical Lectures 18.2.

4.    J.N.D. Kelly, (trans), *Early Christian Creeds* (New York: D. McKay Co., 3rd edn, 1972), pp. 385–86.

5.    Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*. I. *Beginnings to 1500* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), p. 58.

the end of the second century that refers to a bishop[6] and 'it is difficult to prove the historic existence of ruling bishops in Eastern Syria and Mesopotamia before the year 300'.[7] Even one hundred years later the Eastern church was just beginning to establish an overall organization, in no small measure because of repeated bouts of persecution.

In 401 Isaac was elected Catholicos, a term roughly equivalent to Patriarch, and in a synod in the same year the creed of Nicea was adopted on the suggestion of a visiting Western bishop, Marutha. They also agreed on some organizational matters: one bishop per diocese, consecration by three other bishops and dates for major festivals of the Christian year. The synod went on to agree 21 canons on church order using Western examples but adapting them to local Eastern needs. The Eastern churches were demonstrating friendly interdependence.[8] A later synod (424 AD) called by Catholicos Dadyeshua, included six metropolitans and thirty bishops from Persia and set the tone of the independence of the Eastern church and its relations with the West:

> By the Word of God we define: that Easterners cannot complain against their patriarch to western patriarchs; that every case that cannot be settled in his presence must await the judgment of Christ … [and] on no grounds whatever can one think or say that the Catholicos of the East can be judged by those who are below him, or by a patriarch equal to him; he himself must be the judge all those beneath him, and he can be judged only by Christ who has chosen him, elevated him and placed him at the head of his church.[9]

This declaration focused on jurisdictional issues and was aimed at retaining the integrity of the Eastern church both internally and in relations with the West.

So the 'Great Church' did not have a unified coherent organization as might be suggested by the narrow Western historiography which Eusebius did so much to shape, not least with a heroic focus on the emperor Constantine as protector of the church.[10] Philip Jenkins has recently drawn attention to the narrow scope of this Western-focused

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6.    Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, p. 59.
7.    Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, p. 118.
8.    Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, p. 155–57.
9.    Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, p. 162.
10.    See the discussion in Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1st Princeton paperback print, with revisions and illustrations, Princeton Paperbacks, 1989).

historiography of early Christianity.[11] Much later in the middle of the fifth century Christianity was split across the whole known world by the Arian and Nestorian disputes. The Eastern churches remained Nestorian long after the Council of Chalcedon, which was supposed to have settled matters.

These inter-relationships in the early centuries of Christianity illustrate clearly how the identification of catholicity with definition and jurisdiction meant that the understanding of catholicity in the sense of mutual interdependence became ambiguous. The notion was further complicated after the Arab invasions of the Mediterranean world in the seventh and eighth centuries. These invasions meant that many Christians came to live under a Moslem Caliphate. Christians in Syria, Palestine, North Africa and Spain, where churches were not obliterated, found themselves having to live under very different political constraints. In this context the notion of a 'Great Church' as being the single and coherent repository of orthodoxy became extremely difficult to sustain. Peter Brown points out that in this period many Christendoms could be found in the northern perimeter of Europe including in Britain, each with their own traditions and sense of identity.[12]

The political landscape of Western Europe was changed dramatically by these Arab invasions. Fragmentation was apparent on all sides and the capital of the 'Roman Empire', Constantinople, was besieged by Arab forces. In the West, by the end of the eighth century, the Frankish rule under Charlemagne had extended its reach over most of Europe. Charlemagne had halted the Arab invaders at the Pyrenees. Gradually what appeared to be a new hegemony began to emerge in Western Europe, the rule of Charlemagne. But this was a different kind of empire from that to which ancient Christianity had so conveniently accommodated.

When Pope Leo crowned Charlemagne in Rome as emperor the event was full of complications and ambiguity.[13] Diverse interests were at stake and these differences, as they came together in the event in Rome on Christmas Day 800 AD, illustrate the changing character of

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11.    Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia – and How It Died* (New York: HarperOne, 1st edn, 2008).

12.    P. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity AD 200–1000* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), chapter 13.

13.    I am indebted in this analysis to the important essay of Peter Munz on this issue: Peter Münz, *The Origin of the Carolingian Empire* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1960).

the politics of late antiquity in Europe and the role of the church in these changes. Charlemagne as the central figure came with a number of concerns. This pious man saw his rule as in succession to that of the kings of the Old Testament and his rule as being legitimated by his judging justly. That is to say it was the quality of his rule rather than the consequences of his conquests that gave his kingship its integrity. He disliked the Byzantium habit of treating him simply as a king who had conquered rather than as a king with a divine and providential heritage of action. Charlemagne saw himself as a collegial ruler alongside the Byzantium emperors rather than a mere *rex* of derivative dignity. He had political advisers in his capital Aachen who were more brutally realistic and saw him as an Emperor in the Roman tradition since he had sway over all the old centres of rule of the Roman emperors. Alcuin on the other hand, though not present in Rome but active in the affairs of the court of Charlemagne saw him as the protector of a Western Christendom. Pope Leo was at the time preoccupied with his own position in Rome and in fear of threats to his own position. In different ways the coronation served these interests in large part by its very ambiguity. Leo gained Charlemagne as protector because he had crowned him and Charlemagne himself found recognition on a par with the emperor in the East.

But the central issue of what the coronation actually recognized in the West remained unresolved. Over what kind of empire was Charlemagne emperor and thus what kind of emperor was he? Alongside this, and for our purposes here, the equally important question was what kind of Christendom was signified. Peter Munz puts it this way: what was the

> meaning of the 'Empire' thus founded … a Christian city of God, a new universal Roman Empire, a mere rival to Byzantium, a Frankish overlordship, or a simple dominion over the city of Rome. … It seems to me that all attempts to explain what the 'Empire' was, are based upon the fallacy of misplaced concreteness for they assume that the 'Empire' then established existed apart from the mind and intentions of the people who established it and that it had a meaning over and above that imputed to it by the people concerned. By itself, the 'Empire' had no existence, and therefore no meaning.[14]

It seems to me that Peter Munz somewhat overstates the point here. It is not that it had no meaning. It did not represent an existent and visible empire, but it did provide a basis for the different parties

14.   Munz, *Origin*, p. vii.

involved to claim roles for themselves and others in the ongoing political and ecclesiastical development of this new Western and European phase. We might today call the coronation a rhetorical reality that provided a basis for understanding the present in multivalent ways and for shaping the future in different ways according to the interests of different parties. This coronation really marks the beginning of the Western Christendom which in due course was an important element in shaping the move of Europe from late antiquity to early modernity.[15]

Robert Markus pointed to the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh centuries as marking the end of an epoch he called 'Ancient Christianity'.[16] This turning point marked the 'end of the Western Empire, its fragmentation into the barbarian kingdoms of Europe'.[17] Charlemagne's coronation in 800 marked the beginning of a move to the formation of Western Christendom shaped by the very different kind of hegemony of Charlemagne and inbuilt different interests and centres of power, not least those of the Pope.

In many respects the new Christendom of Western Europe which emerged on these foundations was at once less coherent politically than Constantine's empire. It was a Christendom in which the Pope had to secure both ecclesiastical and political bases for his position. The character of ecclesiastical life as seen in the papacy of Gregory the Great (590–604) and the vastly more extensive institutional shape of the Roman church during the papacy of Gregory VII (1073–84) show how far things were able to move institutionally for both church and politics in Western Europe. In time this new Western Holy Roman Empire disintegrated as political life was shaped by the emergence of the nation state. On the other hand the international reach and character of the Roman Church was consolidated pursuing where it could the vision of Gregory VIII in which the Pope was seen as the successor of Peter and the representative of Christ on earth.[18]

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15.    For a consideration of the Muslim and Arab influence in relation to commercial practices and institutions see Gene W. Heck, *Charlemagne, Muhammad, and the Arab Roots of Capitalism (*Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Islamischen Orients; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006).

16.    R.A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

17.    Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, p. xiii.

18.    For an elaboration of this aspect of Gregory VII's approach see H.E.J. Cowdrey, *Pope Gregory VII, 1073–1085* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

Similar changes can be seen at work in the experience of the English Church. On the one hand there was national consolidation and acceptance of the idea of the nation and its national church as being self-sufficient. The recitals of the Henrican legislation in the sixteenth century represent simply an extreme example of a process which had begun 800 years before.

We can see this nicely expressed in the contest between King William I, aided by his archbishop Lanfranc, and Pope Gregory VII. Gregory was in trouble politically with the Holy Roman Emperor. The Pope sought financial support from William and also a declaration of fealty. William's reply is brief and to the point. In a letter probably written in 1080,[19] he reports that he had been asked to pay the back amounts of Peter's pence and 'to profess allegiance to you and your successors'. He will pay Peter's pence because while he had been away the collection had been slack. However, 'I have not consented to pay fealty, nor will I now, because I never promised it, nor do I find that my predecessors ever paid it to your predecessors'. He goes on to say in the best diplomatic terms that 'it is our most earnest desire above all things to love you most sincerely, and to hear you most obediently'.

It is remarkable how William has entirely declined the terms in which Gregory put his case. Peter's pence is not a feudal obligation. It is help. Fealty is a question of tradition and it fails altogether on that score. We long to hear you obediently but, by implication, this means that we need to hear you in terms and on assumptions that are appropriate to the tradition of our relationship. William will have nothing of Gregory's revolutionary papal empire.

This correspondence between William and the Pope illustrates a significant distinction between a respectful relationship and a jurisdictional relationship. William accepts respect and fellowship and indeed is willing to pay back payments of Peter's pence, but he will not give fealty to the Pope. That is to say he will not submit himself as a Christian king of a Christian country to the jurisdiction of the Pope.

In British Christianity, the antecedents to what could later be called Anglicanism, the political entanglement of the church with the state has been a central issue for well over a thousand years. As the political framework has changed over the centuries so the conception of what is an appropriate entanglement for Anglican Christianity has had to

19.    D.C. Douglas and    and G.W. Greenaway, (eds.), *English Historical Documents* (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1953–56), II, Doc. 101.

adjust. It has been a mixed story. Indeed it could not have been otherwise. For in its own national tradition this Anglican Christianity must of necessity relate to the society and politics within which it lives out its Christian and ecclesial life. What is thinkable in one century may not be thinkable in another. The domestic imperialism of the Tudors shaped the understanding of the nature of ecclesiastical polity at the time of the Reformation. Even such a resourceful theologian as Richard Hooker could not get his mind beyond a national horizon to a universal sense of the church with which there might be some kind of interdependent relationships.

This long and ambiguous narrative illustrates very well that institutional arrangements can shape interdependence of the kind we find in the earliest days of Christianity for both good and ill. The issue is not that there must be a certain form for these interdependent relationships but that the reality of the relationships and the attitudes of the local church are the keys. It is not the existence of a single great church to which others relate and on which they depend. Rather it is the universality of the Gospel which expresses itself in different circumstances and creates an ecclesial life in those local circumstances which needs the influence of catholic interdependence for its prospering and faithfulness.

In other words catholicity is a dynamic of church life that is necessarily local. It contradicts the autonomy of the life of faith of a church in a particular locality. Rowan Williams has consistently over the years made this very point in his appeal for the enhancement of the life of the Anglican Communion. He returned to it in his 2011 Christmas letter to Primates in the Anglican Communion.

> Throughout the time of my service as Archbishop I have tried to keep before my own eyes and those of the Communion the warnings given by St Paul about the risks of saying 'I have no need of you' to any other who seeks to serve Jesus Christ as a member of His Body. I make no apology for repeating this point. Advent is a good time to recall that we all live in imperfect churches, that we all must draw together in hope for the fuller presence of Our Lord, and that we all therefore must be willing to receive from each other whatever gifts God has to give through them.[20]

This theme can be found in the report of the first Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, *For the Sake of the Gospel*, and

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20.    *Archbishop's Letter to Anglican Primates*, 30 November 2011, para. 8. Available at: http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2268/archbishops-advent-letter-to-anglican-primates (accessed 10 January 2012).

was revisited in the last report of the IATDC, *Communion Conflict and Hope*.[21] Under the heading of dynamic catholicity the recent report states, 'From the first, the local church has had a catholic dimension; it relates to the wider body of churches in space and time. Without such relationship it cannot function healthily as a local church.'[22]

This kind of catholicity contradicts the autonomy of the life of faith of any particular church in Anglicanism. That means any particular parish, diocese or province. It assists the gift of faithfulness in the diversity of locals that need other locals in order to nourish and sustain the life of Christian faith in their own local church, parish diocese or province. The framework for this kind of catholicity in the life of the Church underlines that that life is marked by Grace – what we have we have received from God – and humility – what others have they have also received from God. Such a conception of catholicity as interdependence inevitably entails argument as to the nature of faithfulness. Such argument is an enduring feature of such interdependent ecclesial life. Unity, in the sense of agreement on a wide front, is not the crucial issue, though from time to time it might be an outcome of the central and vital mark of church life. The central mark of faithfulness in our confession of Jesus Christ in personal and ecclesial life is the gospel virtue of love.

In this context catholicity is a quality of the life of the local church and is a vital means for the cultivation of the virtues of humility and love. Such an ecclesial insight means that any local arrangements for the cultivation of an effective catholicity should be shaped so that they promote these virtues.

The text 'I have no need of you' used by Rowan Williams comes from 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul famously uses the image of a body for the life of the local Corinthian church. In that body the various parts, and the way they work together, is a metaphor for the exercising of individual contributions in the church. The church as body says that the ecclesial community does not consist of one member but of many. God, Paul says, has arranged each member of the body as he chose. So where there is one body and many members one of those members may not say to another 'I have no need of you'.

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21.    Anglican Consultative Council and Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, *For the Sake of the Kingdom: God's Church and the New Creation* (London: Published for the Anglican Consultative Council by Church House, 1986) and Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, *Communion, Conflict and Hope* (London: The Anglican Communion Office, 2008).

22.    IATDC, *Communion, Conflict and Hope*, para. 45.

Towards the end of ch. 12 Paul goes beyond this image of the body in order to indicate that there is a certain priority in the gifts that have been given by God in the church. He tells his Corinthians friends to strive for the greater or higher gifts.

Clearly the body image is one way of looking at the church, albeit a somewhat static one and he wishes to move beyond that point to make a further and more fundamental point, namely that the essential character of the church's life is the central gospel virtue of love. He says 'And I will show you a still more excellent way' and thereby introduces what we know as ch. 13. In that chapter love is what gives each of the gifts their significance, indeed their very character as gift. Love is also characterized as patient, kind, not envious or boastful arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable resentful, it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. Love never ends, indeed it goes beyond our final days, so he says faith, hope and love abide, but the greatest of these is love.

The unity which makes the church community a Christian community is the unity of love. The test of institutional arrangements within the church and between churches from this perspective is, will they facilitate these dynamics and virtues? If the question is will they settle this or that question, and not all questions are capable of settlement in the sense of agreement, then the arrangements may only complicate matters and deflect the community from its more fundamental Christian vocation. From one point of view, the peaceable kingdom of a Christian community may often look like a shambolic confusion of arguments. What makes it a peaceable kingdom is not the absence of agreement but that these Christians love each other. That is the unity which makes a church community Christian. The interdependence between churches, and indeed between Christians, is a catholicity that derives from the effectiveness of the Gospel in different circumstances and it is a manifestation of the gift and grace of God. The truth of that catholicity can be seen when it produces the virtues of love and humility. To put it more bluntly, it is the reality of catholicity as mutual interdependence that matters. The form taken at any given time or place by institutional arrangements to facilitate such catholicity is secondary and variable. It is the reality that counts, not the form. It is in the service of that reality that the *JAS* seeks to foster scholarly conversation on Anglican beliefs and practices.