

Dismantling the Monolith?

A Retrospective View of the Papal Visit

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In February of 1982 Cardinal Hume addressed a press conference on his hopes for the forthcoming papal visit to Britain. At that time the full horrors of the Falklands war were still lodged in the dim recesses of the Argentine military mind and the seemingly endless resources of British colonial nostalgia were still untapped. The Cardinal was able to speak of the renewal that the pope's presence and message would bring as well as the challenge he would present to pastors and people calling them to "a fundamental change of ourselves". In the euphoria that accompanied and immediately followed the Pope in Britain many people spoke of "things never being the same again". In a few short days of glorious summer weather he was said to have given the Church here a sense of renewed confidence, hope and pride in its own history and traditions. He proved sensitive to the needs and aspirations of the various national communities that form the United Kingdom. He was openly committed to ecumenical dialogue and the tone of his speeches was so eirenic and positive that Peter Nichols in *The Times* wondered "if we cannot start thinking about the weekend that produced John Paul III". Paradoxically this seems to point not so much to a renewal of the Church in Britain as to the personal conversion of the Pope to a new interpretation of the Petrine office. This interpretation has particular implications for the development of the theology of the Church as well as revealing not only the virtues of the Pope but the weaknesses of the Church in Britain. Until these implications are examined the renewal hoped for by the Archbishop of Westminster and his brother bishops in England, Wales and Scotland will be delayed if not altogether blighted.

During the course of the Pope's visit it occurred to me that he and the bishops were operating with different models of the Church. Many British observers were expecting an uncompromising restatement of the monolithic view of the Church, they were surprised and delighted with their disappointment. In their enthusiasm for papal moderation they seem to have overlooked the fact that whereas the Pope has abjured, or at least substantially modified this view, the bishops, or a party within the episcopal conferences

still hold to it. Indeed, if his welcome to the Pope at Westminster Cathedral is anything to go by, Cardinal Hume must be regarded as one of its clearest exponents. On 28 May the Cardinal referred to the bishops of England and Wales as "your bishops" giving the impression that they were papal representatives and totally dependent on the Roman Pontiff. The entire ceremony was a liturgical articulation of this view, with the Pope sitting on a replica of his own *cathedra* in the Roman Cathedral of St John Lateran and surrounded by "his bishops". It is all the more remarkable that the Pope should spend the rest of his time in England and Wales and some of his time in Scotland undermining this vision of the Church which has drawn so much centralised power to Rome and undermined the energy and responsibility of local churches.

The problem faced by the Church in Britain is partly the result of an historical dogmatic legacy. The theological tone of the monolithic model of the Church was set by the decree *Pastor Aeternus* of Vatican I and by its interpretation and implementation by ultramontane bishops and theologians. The outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war prematurely ended the Council and prevented the discussion of a draft scheme on the Church which would have considered the position of bishops. As a consequence the period that followed the Council was marked by an increasing ecclesiological imbalance. The *Magisterium*, interpreted as the Pope and the Curial Congregations in Rome, came to be seen as the only Teacher in the Church, whilst all other teachers were unofficial and if unofficial inauthentic and if inauthentic unnecessary and dangerous. Eventually the bishops emerged as vicars of the Pope rather than as vicars of Christ in their own dioceses. Gradually we can see a duality emerging in the Church, the Papacy, and to a much lesser extent the bishops in association with it, were presented as the *ecclesia docens* whose function it was to teach. It was the function of all other Christians, clerical or lay, religious or secular, to make up the *ecclesia discens*, the learning Church whose function it was to obey. Needless to say notions of communion and co-responsibility do not feature very prominently in this presentation of the Church.

The monolithic model of the Church has been succinctly described by Professor Nicholas Lash as "the idea of a single, worldwide organisation, with a single central administration". Neither is this "idea" as traditional as its advocates often suggest. Its development appeared clearly in the reign of Gregory XVI accelerated during the reign of his successor Pius IX and became firmly ensconced during the confrontation between Pius X and Modernism. Its weaknesses, and that is not to say that it did not have strengths were recently listed by Fergus Kerr in an article on Karl Rahner as, "a closed and narrow ghetto Catholicism, intolerant of internal dissent and fearful of critical reason" an era of "pious conformism. . . . which produced an unparalleled conspiracy between institutional authority and various forms of enthusiasm which was challenged only at Vatican II".

The challenge issued at Vatican II was directed towards the construction of a view of the Church which would be truly traditional, founded on the Word of God and the witness of the Fathers, a Church which would be pastoral, open and evangelical. In other words a Church with a mission that would not exist apart from the world but for the world, a space in which the world could find itself. The first steps towards dismantling the monolith may be seen in *Lumen Gentium*, the constitution on the Church, a document which Pope John Paul recommended to the cardinals on the day after his election as the foundation charter of all their activities. For the Pope there is no going back on Vatican II. His task is to apply the insights of the Council in guiding the Church away from a purely institutional view, which many still have and some regret losing, towards the presentation of the Church as the People of God with different ministries and charisms but with a shared dignity and responsibility.

His application of the insights of *Lumen Gentium* imply, perhaps contrary to popular belief, that the old distinctions between *ecclesia docens* and *discens* are no longer so rigid or closely defined. The constitution on the Church declared the laity to be sharers in the common priesthood of all the faithful and sharers in Christ's prophetic office (L.G. 10, 12). It is not simply the task of the bishops, priests and theologians to proclaim the gospel but belongs to the entire people of God. As the constitution on the Church in the Modern World states, "it is the task of the entire people of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish, and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine Word" (GS. 44). The entire people of God formulate the tradition then and this work of handing on is a work involving collegiality, co-responsibility and communion. The whole vision of the Church is changing therefore, but the changes are not

complete because the vision is yet shared by all of the members of the Church. The Pope sees it as his mission to spread this vision and to bring others to share in it. This seems clear from his pastoral visit to England and Wales, but perhaps less clear from his visit to Scotland. It is the disjunction that illustrates the Pope's own sensitivity as a listener and his belief in collegiality.

That there was a difference in tone between the English and Scottish visits is beyond dispute. The tone was set by the Pope from the outset of both visits. It was keenly appreciated when he kissed the soil of Scotland on his arrival in Edinburgh. If the Pope had intended to operate within the former universalising pattern of Catholicism we should have expected a universalising of his message also, a programme free from nuance with few concessions made to particularity of place, culture or tradition. We might have expected the old custom of standardisation and the tendency to play down differences for fear of Gallicanism. The differences between the English, Welsh and Scottish visits suggest that the Pope is a keen listener and that what is often thought of as the *ecclesia docens* is also the *ecclesia discens*.

Whereas the English visit was the result of definite pastoral strategy the Scottish visit came as something of an afterthought. The impetus for the English visit came as a means of setting the seal to the achievement of the National Pastoral Congress at Liverpool in 1980. The English visit was announced on 31 August 1980 a week after Cardinal Hume and Archbishop Worlock had presented the documents of the congress to the Pope. The newspapers and television broadcast that the Archbishops of Westminster and Liverpool had invited the Pope to visit Britain. They managed yet again to display that Anglocentric outlook which irritates and alienates Scottish opinion. No English bishop had any business inviting the Pope to Britain. The surprised reaction of the Scottish bishops prompted the suspicion that they had not been consulted about such an invitation and that some of them at least were less than warm towards the proposal. The Scots began with a disadvantage, then the visit caught them initially on the hop.

It is clear that the Pastoral Congress of 1980 was of immense importance in framing the experience of the Catholic Church in England and that the experience derived from it informed and underpinned the subsequent Papal visit. The central themes of the Congress, reconciliation, co-responsibility, listening, discernment and mission were all incorporated in the Pope's speeches. It is the constant stress on prayerful listening and mutual respect that characterises the documents of the pastoral congress. There are repeated references to the need for bishops to listen to their priests and people, for priests to listen to the laity and to allow them their

place in bearing pastoral responsibility. The documents emphasise that all have a definite and positive part to play in the mission of the Church, "the Holy Spirit works directly in the hearts and minds of individual Christians" and "the process of identifying the mind of Christ and the wishes of his Spirit often involves everyone's contribution" (44). It was these themes laced with his own views on collegiality and the pastoral responsibilities of bishops that recur in his own speeches. He incorporated not simply the ideas of the English pastoral congress but also phrases from the documents, even quoting in a close paraphrase Jack Dominion in his address on marriage at York.

The pastoral congress was very much the basis of the Pope's work in England and Wales yet it coincides closely with his own views on collegiality and co-responsibility. At the second synod of bishops in 1969 the then Cardinal Woytyla made a major speech on the subject of collegiality in which the authority of the pope and the collegiality of the bishops are understood in terms of complementarity with an emphasis on communion amongst the bishops as brethren. In all of his speeches, especially those to national hierarchies, the Pope stresses this point and gives to the bishops their proper title of Vicars of Christ, a title he does not reserve exclusively to himself.

In Scotland the Pope did not have the experience of a national pastoral congress to guide him. He was more than ever dependent on the advice of the local hierarchy. The framework of Scottish Catholicism is very different to that of English Catholicism, a difference which the English find difficult to recognise and accept. Scottish Catholics think of themselves as a more frontier community. There have not been the same ecumenical initiatives here as there have been across the border. Neither are there the same easy social relationships which seem to exist between the English Catholic bishops and their Anglican counterparts. Scotland's Christian community is still deeply divided, although it is a division characterised by mutual respect. The self-image of the Scottish Catholic Church is of an isolated beleaguered minority which has not received the whole-hearted acceptance of its fellow-citizens, many of whom still regard it as an alien force. This is most unlike the English experience which has seen the increasing respectability of Catholicism which is well on the way to becoming a national Church, as we may see from the coverage of the Papal visit and the social backgrounds of the English archbishops. There is an increasing identity of view between the English Catholic hierarchy and the national establishment which is not paralleled in Scotland. The line that major prelates in England took on the Falklands question was radically different to that of their brethren in Scotland

who saw it as an English war fought in the interests of private absentee landholders, a sector of society not terribly popular on this side of the border for reasons which should be obvious.

The Pope saw all of these differences, or rather had been well informed about them and tailored his message to the Scottish people accordingly. At the mammoth gathering at Bellahouston Park in Glasgow he spoke at length about the history of Scottish Catholicism, a history conditioned by hardship, sacrifice and persecution and loyalty to Rome. The emphasis on the links with Rome was overdrawn and in many respects historically inaccurate but it resembles closely the line taken by the Scots bishops in their addresses to the faithful. There was the same combination of *pietas* and ultramontaniam that was so much a feature of the celebrations for the restoration of the hierarchy in 1978. The picture the Pope painted was of a small, suffering community which through its endurance was growing and re-establishing itself in the national life. As he said Catholics are "assuming their legitimate role in every sector of public life and some of them invested with the most important and prestigious offices of this land". It may be asked if it is appropriate to illustrate the spiritual health of Scotland with the fact that the Chief Constable of Strathclyde is a Catholic. The immense crowd plainly thought it was since a great cheer lasting several minutes followed this remark. Scottish Catholics were experiencing a confidence and a boldness which was a kind of emancipation. It is a sad comment on the history of this country that only the Pope could give them this.

The overall impression given by the Pope in his speech, an impression confirmed by the reaction of the crowd, was that the model of the Church which informed his remarks was that of the institution, the juridical body, the fortress under threat from the world. A Church which was much closer to that of the Pian monolith than that model which was the basis of his speeches in England. The model of the Church he presented at Bellahouston was very much that of the Scottish bishops. It is a model that had been accepted as legitimate by the English bishops in their document produced from the pastoral congress. They described its strength as guarding against a too intense local particularity and contributing to the retention of the universal dimension of the Church. But they admit that such a model may give rise to an impersonal and remote institution, just such an institution that the Church in Scotland is in danger of becoming. The English bishops preferred to opt for the model of the Church as the pilgrim people of God. The Scottish bishops have remained with the monolith.

In England the bishops had made a conscientious effort to establish machinery for pastoral consultation. Steps had been taken

by bishops, clergy and laity to get to know each other in a new way to form one Church. The bishops, or some of them at least, made an attempt to inform themselves about what the clergy and laity were feeling, what the needs in the Church were and how to respond to them. The Pope came and spoke on all of these topics. He reminded the bishops and clergy that they were servants above all, at the service of unity, and he showed by his own example that as they were at the service of unity of the local church he was the servant of unity within the universal Church.

In Scotland such a machinery of pastoral consultation did not exist. It is a moot point as to how united the Church in Scotland is. The traditional antagonism between east and west in the country is not wholly absent from ecclesiastical matters, and questions of regional pride often threaten to suppress pastoral initiatives designed for the welfare of the Church. Whilst the bishops and clergy appear to be held in high esteem by a proportion of the faithful, progressive alienation from the Church makes its ministers more and more irrelevant. It is the shock of their irrelevance and their own sense of pastoral isolation that is the chief threat to the survival of priestly vocations. On closer examination the Church in Scotland would be seen to be suffering from widespread alienation between clergy and bishops, and clergy and people. The English Pastoral Congress acknowledged the need for reconciliation. The Church in Scotland would do well to follow its example. As things stand at the moment it is difficult to see how the element of co-responsibility and collegiality could be inserted into our own local Church. The Pope clearly sees this as a necessity. In his address to the clergy and religious at St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh, an address which was widely misunderstood and misquoted by the press, he said:

I encourage you to continue to develop among the laity a sense of shared responsibility for the liturgical and apostolic life of your parishes.

The laity are to occupy a place that most clergy are unwilling to grant them. But perhaps the laity should prove themselves worthy of that by engaging in theological study, not simply as a hobby but as an extension of the liturgical and religious life, and as a preparation and support for mission. It is the mission of the Church that is important, power-sharing is not the central issue, co-responsibility and collegiality means sharing the service of the gospel, not lording it over others as the pagans do.

The English Pastoral Congress was a listening device that worked. It was an attempt to apply the conciliar model of the Church. In Scotland it is doubtful if such a model could work at the mom-

ent because the bishops and most of the clergy operate with the terms of the duality between *ecclesia docens* and *ecclesia discens* described at the beginning of this paper. That there was a clear dependence on this pattern of ecclesiology again becomes clear from the Pope's key address at Bellahouston. In his speech there he referred to the many perplexing problems which make the Christian life so difficult and so exceptional. Such challenges would be too difficult to the faithful to face unaided. He then used a phrase which appears frequently in his speeches, especially those on collegiality, "You are not alone". He went on to refer to the extensive reformulation of Catholic doctrine in recent years, a reformulation which had precisely those matters that trouble man in mind. He listed the resources available to the ordinary Christian in forming his conscience, the pronouncements of the Popes, the Councils, the Synod of Bishops and the Scottish Bishops' Conference. There was no mention of the Word of God or the function of the entire Church in discerning the promptings of the Holy Spirit. What he proposed was the classically static model of the *ecclesia docens* addressing the *ecclesia discens*. The faithful were assured that they had no need to worry because the bishops were not unaware of their troubles. This is a bold claim for any minister to make, whilst I would like to believe that it is true, experience suggests that it is not so. There is no dynamic of listening and response, no tradition of dialogue and co-responsibility here, such a claim is unfounded then. We are faced in Scotland with the monolith, as inflexible as it always was.

Here we are faced with considerable difficulty then. It is usually assumed that a monarchical papacy, Roman interference, a directive policy on the part of the Popes are all bad things. The ideal is depicted as the local community presided over by its bishop with a considerable degree of responsibility for exercising the mission of the Church in a particular area. A Church which would be Catholic through its communion with the successor of Peter. The present Pope, following Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, shows his appreciation for the special qualities of the individual churches. He respects the office of bishop, calling the English bishops at Westminster vicars of Christ. He accepts the doctrine of collegiality framed by Vatican II, namely that the bishops form a body or college which, as a group, is responsible for teaching and governing the whole Church. Peter operates within the college and is assigned a special place in it. The bishop receives his authority directly from Christ, because of his membership of the college he is responsible for more than his diocese. He does not receive his authority from the Pope, despite what some bishops may seem to believe, neither is he in any sense a papal vicar. The problem the

Pope faces is attempting to get the bishops to realise this. He constantly refers in his speeches to the bishops to the need for them to act responsibly, to actualise their authority and to realise their dignity as vicars of Christ.

Examples of his and their attitudes may be seen in two small gestures. When he arrived at Westminster Cathedral the Archbishop of Armagh rushed forward, slumped to his knees to kiss the papal ring. This started all the other bishops off to the embarrassment of the Pope who had wished to embrace them. This was the last time such a thing happened to my knowledge anyway. At every other stop when the Pope gave his blessing the other bishops were invited to join in. It was to be the sign of the collegial bond.

The problem of the place of bishops, their responsibilities and their relation to the primacy of Peter are of crucial importance. The problem we face now is largely historical in its origins and development. The loss of responsibility from the localities and its concentration at the centre has been described as hypertrophy at the centre with atrophy at the periphery. The vitality of the Pope's visit to Britain suggests that the Church here has not yet atrophied but that it is not without confusion. It is difficult to see the ceremony at Canterbury as anything else but the result of pressure from the English bishops. That ceremony suggested the liturgical acceptance and presentation of the branch theory. It left me feeling extremely uncomfortable. The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith could hardly have been too happy with it either. But they may take comfort from the fact that whatever public gestures are made there will be no real unity whilst the monolithic model of the Church is in the ascendant in this country.

The irony is that the monolith seems to be fragmenting slowly from the centre. It may take some time for the movement to reach the periphery.