

One of the glories of the Church in which many of us grew up was the fact that it is a universal church, present all over the world. Despite that fact it is still very much a Roman church transplanted into various cultures. That is to say that the ideal of every local church is to model itself on the forms organisational, liturgical and theological of the mother church of Rome. Indeed, the prevailing ecclesiology, best articulated by Joseph Ratzinger, then Cardinal, is one which asserts that the universal church precedes the local church and thus gives it life and form. The local church has nothing to contribute to the life of the mother Roman church.

Ian Linden, former Director of CIIR now Progressio, is professorial research associate at SOAS, University of London. He has written a book which can be of great benefit to members of NJPN. He gives us an analytical overview of how the Church has lived up to the promise of Vatican II. In religious terms the only entity with the same global ambition of universality is Islam. Linden wants to investigate how the Church has dealt with issues of modernity, pluralism, cultural diversity, different spiritualities, different models of church, the meeting of North and South and the birthing of a new christendom.

Linden begins by speaking of four Roman Catholic Churches. The first is that gathering of 1.3 billion human beings who share a common religious identity within the global community. The second is the Church and the story it tells about itself: founded by Jesus Christ, a nation of pilgrims in and for the world. This is a more theological construct. The third is the Church you and I know: a more mundane gathering trafficking between the “City of God” and the “Earthly City”. Our experience is different from that of our head, the Pope and his Curia. In their universe of 104 acres what is reality within must be so beyond. If it is not then it damn well better be. The fourth church is the church the world sees with its power and majesty, its corruption and dysfunctionality, its situation in and relevance to society.

They are not separate churches. Rather they are constructs which are theological and ideological, yet also real and historical. Linden gives an interesting account of the development of the modern church, its fraught relationship to the modern world and the pioneers who wished to build a church in dialogue with and in service to the world. He recalls thinkers of the calibre of Chenu, Congar and Rahner who withstood the suspicions and reproaches of Rome to lay the foundations of what we call today the post-Vatican II church.

That church, however, was a predominantly Western church, deeply embedded in the history of the development of western civilisation. Belloc could say at one point that Europe was the faith and the faith was Europe. Our present pope is anxious to make the Church once again the soul of Western Europe. Western Europe does not seem to have the same anxiety. Our church has been a Roman church for at least 1000 years. Some want to keep it that way. But there are newer realities, namely the arriving at adulthood of numerous Catholic churches, especially in Africa, whose own experience of Catholicism is very different from that of the mother church.

Those newer, younger churches are now producing their own theology, liturgy, spirituality as well as producing their own leaders and in some cases their own martyrs and saints. Linden succeeds very well in making us acquainted with the younger churches and their contribution to the wider universal church.

In Latin America, for example, he will recall to our minds the conflictive history of the liberationist church of that continent. That history of social change and confrontation, guided by the initial intuitions of the Theology of Liberation, has permitted us to retrieve Biblical themes of justice and peace, of Evangelisation for the life of the world as sign of God's inbreaking Reign, of theology as reflection on praxis for social justice and "integral human liberation". That experience has given us saints and martyrs of the greatness of Oscar Romero. But the Roman church has been suspicious and critical of that experience and its theology. That suspicion endures up to the present moment.

Yet from Rome have come documents that have had a huge impact on the Mission of the church in the wider world. Linden points to two of them. They are *Justitia in Mundo* and *Octogesima Adveniens*. In the latter Pope Paul VI recognised the "widely varying situations" in which the different local churches found themselves. They had to discern for themselves the signs of the times and to elaborate their own pastoral strategies to engage with their reality. The author refers to the examples of South Africa and Philippines where the church played a central role in the political struggles of those peoples. In the former the Pope makes a profound impact on the mission of the Church when he says that the Good News of Justice is entirely constitutive of the preaching of the Gospel.

I found the author's chapter on Africa most enlightening. I had not been well informed on the struggles of the African church alongside and among the poor and oppressed of several countries of that afflicted continent. It was good to get to know the historical background of events that have made headlines recently.

Linden ends his book pointing out that our European church is in culture shock. Post-modernity does not want to listen to meta-narratives and regards truth as relative and individualist. We are on a desert of atheism and disbelief with no Moses to challenge or guide us. We are in an age of endings and new beginnings. Linden points out that the Church is out of its depth. It is unable to craft a message which can challenge our malaise and throw light on our perplexity.

The Church must function as a global community. She must find ways of speaking in the 10,000 languages that convey the experience of her global congregation. Here in Europe the Catholic population has gone down by 400, 000 since 1900. In Africa the Catholic population has ascended by 7,000%. The days of the Eurocentric Church are coming to an end. In future the voices of Latin Americans, Africans and Asians will preach, sanctify and rule.

Frank Regan  
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