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Parochial Ecology on St Briavels Common: Rebalancing the Local and the Universal in Anglican Ecclesiology and Practice

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ABSTRACT

The rise of the global market economy has advanced forms of centrist, corporatist and statist rule that are insensitive to local indicators that this novel social order is ecologically, and socially, unsustainable. For many political theologians, and for secular political ecologists, the related crises of species extinction and climate change, combined with structural economic crisis, require a fundamental relocalization of the global economy and of the harvesting of natural resources. The contest between the political economy of global 'free' trade and a relocalized economy and polity bears analogies with debates around the relation between the local and the universal in Christian ecclesiology. In the eucharistic body politics of Saint Paul Christian communion is focused in the eucharistic gathering. However, centrist tendencies in ecclesiastical polity emerged in fourth-century accounts of the universal church. The subsequent doctrine of the primacy of Peter gave a powerful push to centrist over localist accounts of the esse of the Church in the West, and the contest between local and universal in Anglican and Catholic ecclesiologies continues to this day. Orthodox theologians Zizioulas and Afanassieff, describe and fill out the doctrinal implications of a primitive ecclesiology in which 'the eucharist makes the church'.² This recovery of a local eucharistic ecclesiology offers valuable resources for thinking about the nature of communion between Anglicans

1. Michael S. Northcott is Professor of Ethics in the School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, and a Priest in the Scottish Episcopal Church.

2. Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1998).

in a Communion increasingly riven by controversy, and for thinking about the nature of the parish in a Church of England prone in the last forty years to centrist and managerial conceptions of the Church, and to the denigration of the local parish church as the *esse* of the ministry and mission of the Church in England.

KEYWORDS: local, universal, ecclesiology, church, England, parish, place, commons, ecology, polity, covenant

The diversity of creatures in England and beyond is in the midst of a collapse which is unprecedented in the 120,000 year history of *Homo sapiens*, and which scientists are calling the 'sixth extinction'.³ Agricultural practices, climate change, deforestation and industrial-scale hunting have led to dramatic declines in numbers of wild species, and to the extinction, or threat of extinction, of many. The gathering pace of extinctions has not been halted by conservation efforts in England or globally.⁴ The increase in the human population is clearly a factor in the decline of species. However, the modern industrialization and globalization of the production and supply of food and other goods is the greater driver of species decline. As food, fibre, fuels and minerals are harvested on a global scale by large corporations, in concert with government agencies, habitats are destroyed, wilderness and wastelands are urbanized or cultivated, and diverse forests and grasslands are converted to chemically controlled monocrops.

The political form that advances this tide of human destruction is the global market economy in which the 'free' movement of goods is governed and promoted by powerful multinational institutions including the World Trade Organization, the European Commission, large private corporations, global stock markets, and markets in commodities and futures.⁵ I have argued elsewhere that the reduction in species diversity – and the larger ecological crisis – can only be reversed with a significant relocalization of the factors of production

3. Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin, *The Sixth Extinction: Patterns of Life and the Future of Humankind* (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

4. Roger Lovegrove, *Silent Fields: The Long Decline of a Nation's Wildlife* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); see also Norman Maclean (ed.), *Silent Summer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

5. See further Michael S. Northcott, 'The World Trade Organisation, Fair Trade and the Body Politics of Saint Paul', in John Atherton (ed.), *Through the Eye of a Needle: Theology, Ethics and Economy* (London: Epworth Press, 2007), pp. 169–88.

where economic exchange is re-embedded in local communities of place.⁶ This relocalization requires not only a revival of local civil society – as is mooted for example by advocates of the ‘Big Society’ in England – but the recovery of local agency and ownership of use rights over nature from economic corporations and the global market in communities of place. Such recovery requires an alternative vision of political economy of the kind promoted by distributists such as Belloc and Chesterton, and in more recent times by Paul Hirst, Edward Goldsmith and others.⁷ Critics of this proposed repair of global civilization argue that it is backward looking and romantic and that only free trade pursued on a global scale can provide sufficient wealth to feed seven billion people.

The contest between the modern global market economy and efforts to relocalize political and economic exchange is reminiscent of a long-running ecclesiological controversy between and within Anglican, Catholic and Orthodox over the relation of the local and the universal church, a controversy which is also evident in growing divisions in the contemporary Anglican Communion. The global market economy is a secular simulacrum of the Christian Church which from the first century gradually spread across the globe a form of universal political society. The citizens of this new earthly political form, which Augustine famously named the *Civitate Dei*, are members of it not by virtue of birth, class or race but through their baptism into the body of Christ, and their participation in sacramental communion. However, the concept of Church as a Universal Church whose *esse* and flourishing is sustained by a unitive political order, and whose head is in Rome, is the form of the City of God that is promoted in the West from the fourth century onwards. The Reformation involved a number of attempts to resist and revise the global character of ecclesial communion and authority in the West. Nonetheless, the idea of the Universal Church as a centrally ordered polity with a unitary authority remains Catholic orthodoxy, and continues to hold sway in modified forms among Anglicans, Lutherans and in some other Reformed traditions. Against the idea of the Universal Church first

6. Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

7. For an influential series of essays by first- and third-world scholars on relocalization see Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith, (eds.), *The Case against the Global Economy and for a Turn towards the Local* (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 1996). See also Paul Hirst, *Associative Democracy: New Forms of Economic and Social Governance* (Cambridge, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994).

advanced by Cyprian, the Greek Fathers maintained that the *esse* of the church remained the local church gathered around the episcopal celebration of the Eucharist.

In this paper I argue that there is a close analogy between ecclesiological arguments over the local and the universal church and arguments concerning global and local governance in modern political economy, and in particular those concerning the urgent ecological repair of global industrial civilization, and the global market. I argue that the needful turn towards the local in political economy finds analogy in the seminal role of the parish in Anglican ecclesiastical polity, an analogy which elsewhere I identified with the phrase 'parochial ecology'.⁸ And I propose that contributions to the long-run ecclesiological controversy between local or 'bottom-up' and universal or 'top-down' accounts of the *esse* of the Church by Orthodox theologians John Zizioulas and Nicholas Afanassieff offer important resources for rethinking both the nature of Christian ecclesiastical polity in the contemporary Church of England, and in the global Anglican communion, as well as the modern forms of global economic management and political economy.

Parochial Ecology in St Briavels Common

At the outset it will be helpful to clarify the meaning of the word 'local' in the present essay. As I explain at greater length elsewhere, for me 'local' means face-to-face communion, exchange and relationships between persons, and between persons and species, in particular communities of place.⁹ To indicate the ecological and ecclesiological significance of this description of the local I will commence with reference to a visit I made in 2008 to a group of villages, known formerly as the Hundred of St Briavels and now foreshortened to the Hudnalls, in the Wye Valley, up the river from the ruins of Tintern Abbey, in Gloucestershire, England.¹⁰ This small group of villages is set in the midst of steeply wooded slopes, and is comprised of a

8. Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 262–67, and Michael S. Northcott, 'From Environmental U-topianism to Parochial Ecology: Communities of Place and the Politics of Sustainability', *Ecotheology* 7 (2000), pp. 71–85.

9. See further Northcott, *Environment and Christian Ethics*, pp. 219–319.

10. C.E. Hart, 'The Origin and the Geographical Extent of the Hundred of St Briavels in Gloucestershire', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* 66 (1945), pp. 138–65.

scattering of smallholdings in which are preserved a diverse and species-rich landscape which is part of the once great Royal Forest of Dean. It was to this iconic valley that the romantic vision of nature as landscape attracted many as they took the Wye Tour in the eighteenth century, including Ruskin, Pugin and Wordsworth. When Wordsworth wrote of this area in *Lines above Tintern Abbey* he described the deep hedges that divide the small fields above the Wye as 'little lines of sportive wood run wild'.

The Hudnalls contains a common of the parishes of St Briavels, Hewelsfield and Brockweir where use rights of the forest, for grazing and fuel, go back to pre-Norman times. The preservation of these privileges was hard won, not least against Oliver Cromwell who sought to usurp them but was effectively resisted. Their preservation is associated with a ceremony which endured until the 1960s in which pieces of bread and cheese were distributed to the parishioners of St Briavels after evensong on Whit Sunday in the parish church of St Mary.¹¹ Each inhabitant contributed a penny annually to pay for the cheese and so secured their use rights.

Before the nineteenth century the three parishes comprising the Hundred of St Briavels was mostly comprised of a wooded common. Population expansion and the conversion of some forest areas into pasture led to the gradual settlement of the common, with villagers adopting and improving wastelands in what was effectively a land grab by local residents. In 1825 the Squatters Rights Act was published by the Enclosure Commission and offered squatters the ability to purchase the freehold of their land on payment of a fee of three guineas. Since that time common woods remain on the steepest slopes and residents have rights to cut, copice and pollard trees for fuel and timber. While few now exercise these rights they are among a large catalogue of such common property use rights registered under the British Parliament's Commons Act 2006.

In the 1930s and 1940s some of the common land was used for growing oats and swede for animal feed and for animal grazing while the smallholdings were used for the growing of vegetables and fruit as well as animal grazing. Today there are few grazing animals left, and many private fields have returned to grassland. Because of the lack of intensive farming in the area a uniquely large range of plant, insect and animal species thrives which also reflects the variety of habitats and soils in the area. This variety in turn sustains a good range of wild

11. E.M. Clifford, 'St Briavels', *Folklore* 55 (1944), pp. 169-70.

mammals and insects in the area including lesser horseshoe bats, polecats, otters, minkjack deer, and more common species such as badgers, hares and the long tail field mouse. Among rarer insects are the glowworm, butterflies such as the Peacock, Red Admiral and the Mottled White and moths such as the speckled yellow, the Cinnabar and the five spot Burnet. And this array of insects supports an impressive range of birds including green and spotted woodpeckers, tree creepers, the wryneck, redstarts, kestrels, little owls and the merlin.

With the growing bureaucracy of farming, including the rise of national regulatory regimes related to Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy and Foot and Mouth Disease, many residents have ceased farming activity on their fields, including renting them for grazing animals. Grazing, along with small-scale horticulture, helps promote plant diversity as compared to mechanical mowing and chemical spraying, and hence with the decline of farming the area is at risk of losing part of its rich species diversity. In an effort to conserve and enhance the distinctive nature of the area, and its biodiversity, a group of residents established a Parish Grasslands Project to assist residents in the management of their fields in ways that would conserve the rich range of flora, and associated fauna, that are characteristic of the area. The project is a grassroots initiative based on mutual assistance and self-help within the community, with a modest amount of seed funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the local authority. Villagers have also organized themselves to create a village shop and café in the absence of any remaining commercial premises in the vicinity. The shop sells local produce and locally produced crafts and artwork thus contributing to the local economy. It also sells stamps once obtainable from the now defunct village post office.

The Forest of Dean is a remnant of a royal forest whose use rights have long been negotiated between the Crown and local residents. Established use rights represent a form of ownership and governance of commons which, while largely abolished through the successive Acts of Enclosure of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England, nonetheless remains as a form of governance in various small patches of remaining 'wastes' and common land – including forests and heathland – in rural England. The governance of these commons is administered by local inhabitants under the oversight of government-appointed commissioners who continue to assist local people in the maintenance of common lands. In 2006 the House of Parliament passed a new Act redefining the law of the commons in those parts of England, Scotland and Wales where common lands and rights have survived the many acts of enclosure, private and public,

which presaged the dramatic urbanization of much of the population of this island from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.¹² However, few acknowledge the wider validity of collective forms of commons governance beyond these vestigial leavings of the numerous Acts of Enclosure of the English, and later British, Parliament.

Enclosure, the Rise of the State and the Demise of the Commons

The replacement of the open field and commons system of land management by a new private property regime was justified in terms of agricultural improvement and efficiency to meet the rising demand for food of a growing population. But the Enclosures continued the gradual loss of local power over land, and its concentration in large state and aristocratic landholdings which began with the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, in the course of which between a quarter and a third of the land of England, Scotland and Wales was turned over to the Crown which frequently then gifted it to the nobility as favour for their support of the Crown.¹³ The successive Acts of Enclosure – passed by a parliament dominated by the nobility – continued the process and fostered a new class of landowning farmer while peasant farmers were dispossessed from the land, and from that form of agricultural tenure that had before given the majority of peasants use rights to land sufficient – when harvests were good – to sustain their families without need of wage labour. The enforced destruction of these arrangements fostered the creation of a centralized state with a landowning class who dominated Parliament, often owned houses in London as well as the country, and who increasingly controlled the land and its production of food, fuel and fibre. The process led initially to enormous suffering and impoverishment, both in England and Wales, and then in the territories annexed by the English crown from Ireland and Scotland to the overseas colonies. As peasants lost their ability to work for themselves they were forced into industrial slums and factories where conditions initially led to increased mortality and ill health. Gradually through protest, and Act of Parliament, conditions in slums and factories improved and health increased, albeit that much factory work remained monotonous and unfulfilling. In the present day much of the factory work has been exported and millions of the descendants of the victims of Enclosure find themselves yet again without secure employment.

12. Commons Act 2006 (London: HMSO, 2006).

13. See further E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London: Merlin Press, 1991).

The capture of land use rights for private benefit was not, however, just concerned with the transition from feudalism to capitalism. It also reflected the gradual re-emergence of Roman and classical ideas about private property with the rediscovery of classical literature in the late Middle Ages and the recovery of a Roman – as opposed to Christian – account of property rights. Against Rome Augustine had argued that since property originates in the divine act of creation, the ownership and use of property should always be related to a divine and transcendent conception of justice in which God gives to each sufficient to meet their needs. In the Middle Ages Thomas Aquinas elaborated the implications of this Augustinian view when he founds his account of natural right and property on its derivation from providential relations between creator and creation, and between creatures. In Thomist political thought property involves responsibilities to uphold the common good, as well as rights to individual use, for if it is used in such a way as to deny the sufficiency of others then its original ordering to the individual by providence is undermined. In these circumstances the householder whose children are hungry for want of sustenance acquires a divinely given right to take bread from a person who has excess of bread who loses the right to call such an act theft.¹⁴ For Aquinas the act of taking what is needed by he who lacks does not involve a foundational conflict since the individual property owner is not an autonomous rights holder but steward of that which emanates from the providence of God and that remains part of created order, and not just a humanly constructed domain.

Mediaeval advocates of the natural law tradition set property and its enjoyment within a structure of duties to the creator, to neighbours and to other creatures which are ‘versions of an agrarian ideal which emphasised sound environmental management, and sanctioned waste’.¹⁵ But with the late mediaeval recovery of the Roman doctrine property ownership becomes absolute and this in turn promotes the theory of the absolute state and the absolute individual. After the Renaissance, philosophers in Britain and Europe – including Hobbes, Grotius and Locke – adopted the Roman account of property rights and helped establish new legal definitions of private property in English and European law in which property rights are abstracted from historical or

14. For a fuller account see Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

15. Sean Coyle and Karen Morrow, *The Philosophical Foundations of Environmental Law: Property, Rights and Nature* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2004), p. 212.

theological context: such rights may be exercised without reference to duties to the natural created order and to the welfare of others. As Joan O'Donovan argues, in the face of these new and recovered ideas the earlier account of non-proprietary use, as enunciated by Augustine, and in the thirteenth century by Saint Bonaventure, gradually disappears.¹⁶

The new theology of property as absolute ownership arose not only under the influence of newly translated classical texts but also of the late mediaeval enhancement of Papal power and propertied dominion, and the fierce theological contest between Franciscan and Papal theologians concerning the issue of dominical ownership. Against the Papal position that property could be owned outright by the Church, and even by the Franciscans as a corporate order and despite their vows of poverty, Bonaventure argued for the continuing validity of the Augustinian account in which property is always seen in relation to the ordering of all goods towards the love of God.¹⁷ In this essentially spiritual account of property 'God is "possessed" as the transcendent, universal and supreme Good and all created goods are possessed in their relational being, meaning, and worth'. For Augustine's mediaeval successors, including Aquinas and Bonaventure, this issued in an account of human dominion in which all forms of ownership and use were modelled after this spiritual concept of possession. For O'Donovan the most lucid late mediaeval defence of this approach is that of John Wyclif who argued that all propertied relations are shaped by the 'nonproprietary dominion by grace' that is implicit in Augustine's account of spiritual possession: 'for Wyclif the essence of humankind's original lordship over creation, renewed in Christ, is God's gift of Himself as the love of Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit'.¹⁸ This Trinitarian self-giving issued in a practice of communal sharing of spiritual things that was non-proprietary and just; Wyclif turned the contemplative orientation of Augustine's account of graced possession into an account of spiritual community in which material things are also infected by their providential spiritual ordering by God whose penultimate end is just sharing in their communal possession and use.

O'Donovan's account of Wyclif is an account of theology from the side of the losers and not the winners. In theology, and in political theory, the winners in the Renaissance and the Reformation shaped an

16. Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, 'Natural Law and Perfect Community: Contributions of Christian Platonism to Political Theory', *Modern Theology* 14 (1998), pp. 19-46.

17. O'Donovan, 'Natural Law and Perfect Community', p. 33.

18. O'Donovan, 'Natural Law and Perfect Community', p. 38.

intellectual and legal framework that was Hobbesian and Lockean and not Augustinian or Wyclifite. The consequence is that land comes to be seen as an object of human ownership, without acknowledgment of its ultimate divine ownership. Hence limits on its 'private' use were increasingly described as positivist rules imposed by the state on prior natural, and eventually human, rights rather than as emanating from its ordering to God, and to communal justice.

Although the law and political theory in Britain and Europe after the Reformation increasingly reflect the Hobbesian and Lockean account of property we can discern in long-enduring common property regimes, of the kind that persist in residual common lands in parts of England, and more extensively in parts of Europe, an earlier pattern of property use and rights that reflected a longer tradition of Christian thought and practice in relation to the environment and property. As Elinor Ostrom shows in her account of commons institutions most Alpine terrain in Switzerland is managed under a property regimen that manifests a complex array of rule-governed customs that impose a range of responsibilities upon owners of private houses and fields in alpine areas. Such arrangements have endured for centuries in Swiss cantons where 'alpine grazing meadows, the forests, the "waste" lands, the irrigation systems, and the paths and roads connecting privately and commonly owned properties' have been collectively managed since the thirteenth century.¹⁹ Only resident citizens have use rights and common use is managed in such a way as to balance the needs of present users with the need to conserve common property for future users. Four-fifths of alpine terrain is managed in this way and 'overuse of alpine meadows is rarely reported'.²⁰

Time spent in governing such arrangements has been shown to be a benefit rather than a burden. Participation in face-to-face arrangements that build community and promote a sentiment of collective justice around collectively used spaces has been shown to promote well-being whose levels are reportedly higher in Swiss cantons than in many other settings.²¹ Typically such arrangements involve days of individually assigned as well as shared work, as well as meetings in which work is assigned, and then also days of shared festivity in which the fruits of shared work are themselves shared. Participation

19. Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 62.

20. Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*, p. 64.

21. Bruno S. Frey and Alois Stutzer, *Happiness and Economics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 144–45.

in such arrangements moreover fosters the practice of justice as a virtue which is not honoured in a non-participatory bureaucratic procedure such as a redistributive tax but is agentially engaged in. Sharing in the praxis of justice enhances rather than diminishes individuals' sense of freedom as agents since the praxis is consensual and not imposed from outside by a bureaucratic agency or top down regulation or treaty. Thus political and economic freedom and the quality of a society's social institutions are shown to be closely related. And hence where genuine democratic participation of this kind is high so also is reported well-being and the sense of being engaged in a shared set of just and participatory institutions.²²

In her extensive account of commons institutions Elinor Ostrom, like Alasdair MacIntyre, identifies a failure in contemporary politics of both left and right to advance the common good and collective well-being with a shared inability to escape the polar divide of the state and individualized private actors in relation to collective action.²³ The archaeology of ancient and vestigially enduring commons governance arrangements offers an opportunity to escape the narrow terms of modern liberal political debate and to construct a genuine alternative approach to moral and political agency than that of the State, the market, economic corporations and 'private' individuals. The ritualization of such arrangements in local religious traditions – as in the ceremony at St Briavels or in Swiss Cantonal festivities – indicates the role of religious communities in sustaining such arrangements. However, it must be said that the Church of England in its own governance structures, and implicit ecclesiology, has not proven to be the bulwark against the centralizing powers of the state, and the large landowning class in whose interests these powers were principally exercised, this might suggest. To discern the reasons for the demise of a local and parish-oriented ecclesiology will involve some investigation of ecclesiastical polity within and beyond the Church of England. And the appropriate place to commence such an investigation is Richard Hooker.

The Decline of Anglican Parochial Polity from Hooker to the Ramseys

Since the dissolution of the monasteries and the Elizabethan Settlement the Church of England has increasingly come in its own

22. Frey and Stutzer, *Happiness and Economics*, p. 154.

23. Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good', in Kelvin Knight (ed.), *The MacIntyre Reader* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), pp. 235–52.

governance arrangements to mirror the centrist English State, not least because of the claims to supreme authority – both in State and Church – exercised by Henry VIII and his heirs. Nonetheless, Richard Hooker adumbrated an account of participation and sovereignty in the affairs of the church which resisted this tendency, as is revealed particularly in Book VIII of the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. In this long suppressed work Hooker argues against the imperial tendency for centralization of the supreme power of the monarch in matters both secular and ecclesiastical. For Hooker the best state of affairs is one in which the end of political life is not in submission and survival but, as Aristotle has it, ‘living well’. Living well involves mutual subjection to laws – divine and municipal – that advance the condition of intercommunion – or ‘coagmentation’ – wherein ‘the lowest be knit to the highest by that which being interjacent may cause each to cleave unto the other and so all to continue as one’.²⁴ That state is to be preferred then in which the law is owned willingly and consensually by the people in each place as their King, rather than in which the King is the law. As Bruce Kaye argues, in his account of law, locality and living well ‘Hooker adds to the sixteenth century idea of the supreme authority of the crown an emphasis upon the actual role of all of the community in the exercising of any authority’.²⁵ In this way Hooker retrieves within Anglican ecclesiology the Augustinian, and Thomist, account of human relations, including property relations, in which relation to God, and duties to the creator, trump individual, or corporate, claims of right.

Local participation in governance acquires in Hooker an important theological affirmation that undergirds the long-standing pattern of self-governance of the Church of England by Assemblies, or Synods, as well as by Parochial Church Councils, Cathedral Chapters, and other intermediate bodies. But from Tudor times such intermediate bodies and arrangements have been under continuous attack, by the monarch, by parliament and by bishops. Whereas Hooker enunciates clear political and theological grounds for resisting these tendencies, twentieth-century theological accounts of the being and structure of the church were significantly shaped by attempts to redescribe the church as a universal agency which partnered, albeit critically, the emergent secular universals of state, market and corporate rule.

24. Richard Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book VIII, 2.2 cited in Bruce Kaye, ‘Social Context and Theological Practice: Radical Orthodoxy and Richard Hooker’, *Sewanee Theological Review* 45.2 (2002), pp. 385–98.

25. Kaye, ‘Social Context and Theological Practice’. See also Bruce Kaye, *Introduction to World Anglicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Particularly since the Second World War reports on the governance and structure of ministry in the Church of England reveal an increasing capitulation to the assault of modern political economy on the local participative character of politics, including ecclesial polity.

Empirical work which I conducted in the 1970s into urban industrial mission in the Northeast of England revealed this tendency particularly sharply. I examined a number of forms of church organization intended to meet the challenge of secularization in the region during the episcopate of Ian Ramsey. My two principal case studies – of the Sunderland Deanery and Teesside Industrial Mission – were both instances where senior clergy had sought to reorganize ministry in a manner that de-emphasised local worshipping congregations and put the focus instead on a functional mirroring by the Church of the sectors of society – commerce, education, health services, industry, leisure, local and regional government, retail, transport – into which secular society was increasingly ordered. The result was a theology and a practice of ministry that far from resisting secularization internalized secularization into the Church and church order.²⁶ Those who fostered the theology of the secular in the north-east of England included senior clergy, and above all Bishop Ian Ramsey, who represented the high watermark of theological liberalism in the English Episcopate, and whose most enduring legacy is his report *The Fourth R* on religious education in England, which anticipated the subsequent loss in the national school curriculum of a significant focus on Christianity as the key historic root of England's laws, customs and traditions and its replacement with a pluralist approach to the study of religions.²⁷

The Demise of the Parochial and the Rise of the Managerial Church

Ramsey's approach found considerable affirmation among liberal clergy within and beyond the Diocese of Durham. Trained in the dismal philosophy of religion of postwar empiricists such as Ayer and Flew, and the dessicating biblical criticism of New Testament theologians such as Nineham and Bultmann, and the Anglo-American doctrinal liberalism of Tillich, Niebuhr and Wiles, this generation of clergy had lost confidence in the ability of the Church to speak from Scripture and tradition to secular power and to challenge the growing culture of

26. Michael S. Northcott, *The Church and Secularisation: Urban Industrial Mission in Northeast England* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1990).

27. Ian Ramsey, *The Fourth R: Durham Report on Religious Education* (London: SPCK, 1970).

individualism and practical atheism. Revelation for an industrial chaplain in this era could take no more authoritative a form than the complex chemical processes of an oil refinery or the management procedures of a large chemical company.²⁸ Against the power of the secular to reveal and unfold the future, Scripture and tradition as filleted and traduced by liberal theologians came in a poor second place.²⁹

This loss of confidence in Scripture and tradition was matched by a loss of faith in the spiritual, in transcendence and in worship as the realm in which the New Creation, the new realm of being ushered in by the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ is enacted and participated in by the people of God. Liturgy – praise, prayer, word and sacrament – began to lose their authority as the fulcrum of Christian action in the world in the secular theologies of the 1960s and 70 s. Hence there emerges a growing denigration of the local worshipping community as the source of the Church's life and *esse* in this era which is powerfully encapsulated on the ecumenical scene by the WCC report on the missionary structure of the congregation which coined the dismal liberal slogan of the trendy vicar that 'the world sets the agenda'.³⁰

In the Church of England this period saw the commissioning and publication of a succession of reports calling for root and branch reform of the parish system from the Paul Report to the Tiller Report. Tiller was the most radical of all, suggesting that clergy should no longer be attached to particular parish churches but instead be appointed as members of Diocesan or Deanery teams, deployed as the need arises, to lead ministry, mission, social action or worship as determined by the middle managers of the church such as Area Bishops, Archdeacons and Area Deans. Resistance from parish clergy as well as some senior clerics ensured that Tiller's vision on a national scale did not come to pass. But there remain in many parts of England new rationalized ministry structures that are designed to stretch clergy and ministry resources across a number of churches in both urban and rural areas. In rural areas in particular this produces what I call a fossil-fuelled ecclesiology. A clergy person is

28. Northcott, *Church and Secularisation*, pp. 88–107.

29. See further Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).

30. *The Church for Others: A Quest for Structures for Missionary Congregations/ Final Report of the Western European Working Group and North American Working Group of the Department on Studies in Evangelism* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Department on Studies in Evangelism, Western European Working Group, 1967).

appointed to the charge of groups of six or more parish churches and drives by car from one to another, using the speed of spatial movement the private car and the road system confer to preside at three or four Eucharists on any one Sunday.

The latest phase of this erosion of parochial identity and governance occurred under the managerial reforms undertaken as a consequence of the Turnbull Report, commissioned under Archbishop George Carey, in which the identity and authority of the Church of England was invested in a wholly new and unprecedented way in a novel 'Archbishop's Council'. The writ of the new council was so extensive that it was able to impose a new corporate logo on the Church of England that many Dioceses, and parish churches, have adopted, so supplanting long-established local symbols and more traditional ecclesiastical heraldry.³¹ While the Archbishop's Council remains in existence under Archbishop Rowan Williams, he has identified as the seminal project of his own arch-episcopate in England the advancement of another striking national innovation - Fresh Expressions - which emerged out of the report *Mission Shaped Church*.³² This report uncritically adopts Church Growth strategies into Church of England practice at the core of which is an understanding of church as a gathering of people brought together not by proximity in place, but by shared cultural and class backgrounds. This report shows as much disregard of the intrinsically local and place-based character of parish ministry in the Church of England as did earlier reports and reforms of Paul, Tiller, Turnbull and Carey.³³

The Eucharist Makes the Church in Each Place

The denigration of the local church as the *esse* of Church is by no means confined to the modern era. It may even be said to be the logical outcome of shifting theological accounts of the relation between the local and the universal church that go back to the

31. For an incisive critique of these reforms see Richard H. Roberts, 'Ruling the Body: The Care of Souls in a Managerial Church', in Richard H. Roberts, *Religion, Theology and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 161-89.

32. *Rowan Revealed: A Wide-ranging Conversation with Canon John Young* (York: Diocese of York, 2009). See also Rowan Williams, 'Introduction', in The Archbishops Council, *Mission Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004), pp. vii-viii.

33. See the excellent critique by Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank, *For the Parish? A Critique of Fresh Expressions* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

fourth century. John Zizioulas, Bishop of Pergamon, argues that for the first three centuries the Church in each place was contiguous with those who gathered around the presiding bishop for the Eucharist every Sunday.³⁴ There were not churches in Corinth or Ephesus or Rome but one bishop, one Church and one eucharistic gathering in each place. The Eucharist was almost invariably presided over by the bishop whose defining role in early Christianity was to preside at the Eucharist. Presbyters were primarily teachers in the first centuries though they were permitted to stand in for the Bishop when he was elsewhere or indisposed.

Zizioulas argues that the eucharistic assembly was the Church in the first three centuries with reference first to the Epistles of Paul, and then to those of Ignatius and Irenaeus. While Saint Paul refers to many groupings of Christians in the large Christian centres such as Corinth and Rome, Paul only ever refers to one household church in each city. In Rome there is the 'church in the household' of Priscilla and Aquilla, who had formerly hosted the church in Corinth. In Corinth, where he wrote the Epistle to the Romans, Gaius is the host both of St Paul and of 'the whole church'. In Colossae the church is hosted by Philemon, and in Laodicea by Nymphas. And the church in Jerusalem was no exception. It too met in one household, and not many, as clearly indicated by the usage of *kat oikon*, and not the plural *kat oikous*, in Acts 2.46.³⁵ Whereas in the conventional modern view there were many house churches in large cities such as Rome, Zizioulas argues that the historical evidence indicates that there was only one in each place and it is this which makes sense of the foundational unitary significance of the eucharistic gathering for St Paul: 'for we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread' (1 Cor. 10.17). The many are related to one another through their mutual participation in the one divine Eucharist in each place. There is on this account no prior source of unity attaching to what is later called the 'catholic church' or the 'church universal'. The original ecclesiological relation of the one and the many occurs through shared communion in the body and blood of Christ in the local gathering of Christians under the presidency of the bishop of that place.

In the second century Clement, Justin and Ignatius all witness to this early local ecclesiology of eucharistic gathering. In the trial

34. John Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop and Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist* (Brookline, MA: Holy Orthodox Press, 2001).

35. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop and Church*, pp. 90-91.

preceding his martyrdom Justin is asked repeatedly by the Roman prefect to indicate where the church meets and he says he knew only one location where it meets, this being the house of Martinus which is close by the Timotinian baths in Rome and he furthermore indicates that there is only one gathering 'in the same place' of all Christians living in cities or country areas on Sundays. Ignatius is distinctively Pauline in his identification of the one gathering of Christians in every place as the Church, for the divine Eucharist is the body of Christ, and hence the very flesh and blood of Jesus Christ which, through mystical participation, takes sacramental form in the local church gathered for the Eucharist Sunday by Sunday.³⁶ And for Ignatius it is clear that this gathering may not take place in multiple locations or under multiple presidents for it is only the eucharistic gathering when it is presided over by the bishop:

Let no man deceive himself: if any one be not within the altar, he is deprived of the bread of God. For if the prayer of one or two possesses such power, how much more that of the bishop and the whole Church! He, therefore, that does not assemble with the Church, has even by this manifested his pride, and condemned himself. For it is written, 'God resisteth the proud.' Let us be careful, then, not to set ourselves in opposition to the bishop, in order that we may be subject to God.³⁷

For Ignatius there is no clear distinction between the local church and the Universal Church. As Zizioulas puts it 'the local church is the whole church'. The bishop and the church are also one so that Ignatius can say that 'where the Bishop is, there is the multitude'.³⁸

On this early view, the local church lacks nothing in its *esse* as the true church provided it has a bishop presiding, the presbyters, deacons and people in that place gathered, the Word preached, and the Eucharist celebrated. For Ignatius the idea of the *kath olou* or generic church is that it is complete in every particular episcopal and eucharistic instance of the incarnation of Christ in the new creation which is the church in each physical location in creation. It is in this sense that the church achieves the fullness or *pleroma* of Christ in each place. And it is in the *pleroma* of Christ in the Church that the recapitulation of creation finds temporal form after the Ascension so that the second Adam, the new creation, takes bodied and historical

36. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop and Church*, p. 93.

37. *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* 5.2-3, A. Roberts and R. Donaldson (eds.), *Anti-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, CO: Christian Literature Publishing Co. 1885), pp. 45-49.

38. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop and Church*, pp. 114-15.

form in geographical place and space. It is therefore in the *geography* of the church that the larger cosmos, and hence the creation as a whole, may be said to be being remade, recapitulated, through its participation in the Second Adam, and not through some overarching Teilhardian style cosmic principle which is operative apart from the local gathering of the people of God around the eucharistic table.

In an influential essay on the primacy of Peter, Nicolas Afanassieff revises and supplements in important ways the account given by Zizioulas. Afanassieff argues that the concept of primacy emerges as the logical extension of the doctrine of the Universal Church, which is begun by Cyprian in the third century.³⁹ Over time Afanassieff argues that the emergence of the Roman Catholic account of the primacy of the See of Peter – which Cyprian did not advocate in its later form – gradually transforms Cyprian’s early account of the Universal Church as emerging from each local church, which is nonetheless complete in itself, into a doctrine of the Universal Church as an organic unity of which each local church and diocese are splinters or parts. This is not, Afanassieff argues, the worldwide account of the Church developed by Cyprian for whom ‘the Church is one because Christ is one’. For Afanassieff, as for Saint Paul, the empirical *esse* of the Church does not arise from an organizational unity centred on Rome. According to Paul’s doctrine of the body of Christ each local church, and the members of it, is conceived as the limbs or members of the body which is the Church of which Christ is the Head. Taken together the local churches all constitute the ‘Catholic’ Church and the empirical Catholic Church is therefore the sum of its parts, but not existing apart from them:⁴⁰

in the apostolic age, and throughout the second and third centuries, every local church was autonomous and independent – autonomous, for it contained in itself every thing necessary to its life; and independent, because it did not depend on any other local church or any bishop whatever outside itself.⁴¹

Thus while each church is headed by a bishop, and the unity of bishops mirrors the unity of local churches, there is no valid episcopate without a local church, and no valid church without a bishop as its head.

While this is the position that Cyprian held, nonetheless the conclusion that eventually emerged from Cyprian’s incipient doctrine

39. Nicolas Afanassieff, ‘The Church which Presides in Love’, in John Meyendorff (ed.), *The Primacy of Peter: Essays in Ecclesiology and the Early Church* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1992), pp. 91–144.

40. Afanassieff, ‘The Church which Presides in Love’, p. 92.

41. Afanassieff, ‘The Church which Presides in Love’, p. 107.

of the Universal Church – albeit one which Cyprian resisted – was that Rome was the head of the Church as the principal episcopate. Thus a theory grounded in the local church comes to identify the guiding light – and ontological source – of the church in each place not in its local origins, and eucharistic gathering, but in the primacy of the Petrine supra-local head. While it must be said that Cyprian acknowledged the primacy, he nonetheless resisted the idea that the primacy is a necessary completion of his account of the universal church. For Cyprian, the Church is complete in the assembly across the world of its local parts, albeit that these parts are held together by ecumenical accord between bishops among whom the occupant of the See of Peter is primary.

The introduction of the note of primacy into Western ecclesiology is part of a larger hierarchical shift that reflects growth in numbers and the imperial alliance of the Western Church with Rome so that power gradually seeps away from the local church to the Diocese, the Archdiocese and Rome. This abstraction is further driven by the emergent distinction between *presbyters* and *episkopoi*. Until the third century the evidence is that in each town or city there was one church or eucharistic assembly, presided over by one bishop. As numbers of Christians grew, however, and were widely dispersed in rural areas, it was impractical for all to gather in one place for episcopal eucharistic celebrations. Instead presbyters presided at rural Eucharists and the present model of parish church – as distinct from the basilica or cathedral – was born. In order to ensure physical union was maintained with the episcopal gathering the consecrated elements were most often carried physically from the urban to the rural assemblies in a practice known as *fermentum*.⁴² Eventually presbyters were given independent sacramental authority which meant in effect that they shared fully in the ministry of bishops. As Afanassieff notes, there is strong evidence that until the fifteenth century abbots – who were always priests – could ordain other priests just like bishops. Hence the confining of the sacrament of ordination to bishops after the fifteenth century is a recent innovation, and a disciplinary rather than an ontological matter. Priests and bishops therefore share the same grace of ordination, but a bishop is someone ‘who has been given wider powers in the sphere of jurisdiction’.⁴³ Hence when Ignatius summed up the essential unity of the church in the maxim ‘One God,

42. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop and Church*, pp. 115–21.

43. Afanassieff, ‘The Church which Presides in Love’, pp. 104–105.

one Christ, one faith, one altar, and one bishop', he envisaged not the later idea of the Universal Church but the local church present in each place with the bishop 'presiding in love'.

From this more primitive account of the Church Afanassieff argues the need to reach back before Cyprian's invention of the Universal Church to recover the near autonomy of each local church and presbyter. The Catholic position implies that without the Universal Church – and the associated primacy of the See of Rome – the earliest churches did not truly constitute the Church. And this would indicate that the churches in the apostolic and post-apostolic eras were defective, which cannot be the case. Even the See of Peter traces its authority back to the churches of the early Christian era. If the churches of the first three centuries were complete then their completeness rests on 'the fact that each local church is the Church of God in all its fullness', which presents an 'ecclesiological system, from which the concept of the Universal Church (at least in its existing form) is absent'.⁴⁴ Afanassieff argues for the recovery of the Pauline account of each local church as constituted by the Eucharist:

Every 'local' church is the Church of God in Christ, for Christ dwells in His Body in the congregation at the Eucharist, and the faithful become members of His Body by virtue of communicating in the Body of Christ. The indivisibility of Christ's Body implies the fullness of the Church dwelling in each of the 'local' churches. This view of the Church is expressed in another of Paul's formulas: 'the Church of God which is (or dwells) at Corinth,' or anywhere else local churches are to be found.⁴⁵

On this account Paul's eucharistic ecclesiology excludes the later idea of the Universal Church as a prior reality on which the ministry of each local church, and presbyter, is dependent. The Universal Church as a more than local reality is none other than a word for the sum of the parts:

Eucharistic ecclesiology teaches that the unity and fullness of the Church attach to the notion of a local church, and not to the fluid and indefinite notion of the Universal Church. The Eucharist is where Christ dwells in the fullness of His Body: the Eucharist could never have been offered in a local church if it had been no more than one part of the Church of God. Where the Eucharist is, there is the fullness of the Church; vice versa, where the fullness of the Church is not, there no Eucharist can be celebrated. By denying the idea of 'parts,' eucharistic

44. Afanassieff, 'The Church which Presides in Love', p. 107.

45. Afanassieff, 'The Church which Presides in Love', p. 108-109.

ecclesiology also excludes any concept of the Universal Church, for the Universal Church consists of parts, if it exists at all.⁴⁶

This is not to say that there is no unity or concord existing apart from the local church. The essential unity of the church does not then arise from above in a hierarchical relation of local churches to the Universal Church. Instead the *esse* of the church derives from the love of God, poured out by the divine Spirit since Pentecost, and which is made flesh at every Eucharist at which the bishop, or the presbyter where the bishop is not present, presides in love. But this does not mean that the local church is or can be closed off from other local churches, for it is in the relations between local churches that the Church Universal has its being and substance:

Though a local church did contain everything it needed within itself, it could not live apart from the other churches. It could not shut itself in or refuse to be acquainted with happenings in other churches: for anything that happened in other churches, as well as in its own, happened in the Church of God, the one and only Church. All the multitude of local churches forms one union founded on concord and love. Every local church must be in concord with all the other churches, because within the Church of God, ever one and only one, there can be no discord. This means, empirically speaking, that every local church accepts and makes its own anything that happens in other churches, and that all the churches accept everything that happens in each fellow-church. This acceptance (its regular designation is the word reception or *receptio*) is the witness of a local church indwelt by the Church of God, witnessing the work being done in other churches also indwelt by the Church of God – the Spirit bearing witness of the Spirit.⁴⁷

The ancient claim that the church is where the bishop is, is on this account not a legalistic or juridical claim, as some Protestant historians and theologians maintain. It is instead a mystical claim. If the Eucharist is the Incarnation in each particular place, and this Eucharist is episcopal in essence, then the bishop is in each particular place the head of the church in place. The point here is the theological significance of *place*, not of juridical power or Episcopal authority.⁴⁸ This is what gives this eucharistic account of the polity of the church its distinctive character, and why it represents a significant counter to the increasingly dominant forms of global economy and statist polity that are emergent under the influence of the market state in the

46. Afanassieff, 'The Church which Presides in Love', p. 110.

47. Afanassieff, 'The Church which Presides in Love', p. 112.

48. See further John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place: Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

twenty-first century. Furthermore this ecclesial and mystical polity of place resists the corrosive effects of modern political economy on the communitarian, ecological and geographical character of human life and creaturely being in particular geographical places.

But how theologically are we to characterize this place-oriented polity? On the one hand history has bequeathed to us a Protestant provincialism where German places, or Scandinavian places may be parochially Lutheran, Scottish places parochially Presbyterian, English places parochially Anglican. On the other, we have the enduring claim of Roman universalism, mapping Petrine supremacy onto every place. Roman universalism was modified at the Second Vatican Council under the influence of the *nouvelle theologi* of Henri de Lubac and Yves Congar. The emphasis of de Lubac and Congar on an ecclesiology 'from below' in which the *esse* of the church is described as the 'people of God' encouraged a greater flexibility in the interpretation of church law and custom after Vatican II, particularly concerning matters such as the reception of divorced and remarried people, and of non-catholics, at Mass.⁴⁹ However since John Paul II, and despite important interventions by Cardinals Kasper and Martini on behalf of the local authority of the bishop and of local custom and interpretation in parishes, Cardinal Ratzinger as head of the Sacred Congregation of the Faith reasserted the claim that 'the universal church (*ecclesia universalis*) is in its essential mystery a reality that takes precedence, ontologically and temporally, over the individual local churches'.⁵⁰ As Pope Benedict XVI, Ratzinger has underlined his position against Kasper and, while not accepting that his approach represents a reversal of the Second Vatican Council, at local level, as Kasper argued, this is how the revival of Rome's centrist tendencies are perceived.⁵¹

Eucharistic Ecclesiology and Global Christian Communion

If the Roman Church has reaffirmed the supremacy of the Universal over the local church under Benedict XVI, then the Orthodox recovery

49. Walter Kasper, 'On the Church: A Friendly Reply to Cardinal Ratzinger', *The Furrow* 52 (2001), pp. 323-32.

50. Cardinal Ratzinger, 'The Local and the Universal Church', *America: National Catholic Weekly* 4 (2001), pp. 2-9.

51. See, for example, Benedict XVI's comments on the original universality of the Church Catholic from the first Pentecost in Benedict XVI, *God Is Reason, God Is Will, God Is Love, God Is Beauty: Benedict XVI's Pentecost Homily* (Rome: Vatican City, 2011).

of an ecclesiology in which 'the eucharist makes the church' may be perceived as an anti-ecumenical move that only widens the millennium-long rift between East and West. But from an Anglican perspective the Orthodox recovery of the ontological priority of the local church has great benefits. It represents a genuine recovery of that which was lost in the Romanization of ecclesiology in England in the late Middle Ages, and which, despite Hooker's attempts, was hardly revised by the centrist Tudor state, and the bishops it promoted. While it returns spiritual force to the local over the universal church it also has the great merit of returning to the Eucharist something that was lost in its increasing clericalization and domestication across two millennia.⁵² From an Anglican perspective this eucharistic ecclesiology also requires a critique of the Tractarian or High Anglican dogma of Apostolic Succession whose advocates sought to replicate in Anglican orders the Roman doctrine of the Universal Church, and the implied Primacy of Peter. It was under the influence of this project to become another Rome – or at least a broken branch of Rome, as Michael Ramsey put it⁵³ – that the Anglican Church was conceived as a global Communion in the nineteenth century, first among High Anglicans in the United States, and subsequently in England, Ireland, Scotland and the other colonial domains. The phrase 'Anglican Communion' was first coined in 1847 by Horatio Southgate in North America. It was under the influence of this colonial conception of an 'Anglican Communion' that the idea of the Archbishop of Canterbury as *primus inter pares* grew in England, and thence the mainly decadal gatherings of the Lambeth Conference. It is one of the ironies of history that just as it was North Americans who invented a conception of global communion, requiring the creation of new instruments of communion, analogous to those of Rome, it is North Americans whose autonomous actions on well-known matters are now said to threaten the integrity of the global Anglican Communion.

If, as Afanassieff argues, recovering a primitive eucharistic ecclesiology involves putting aside Petrine primacy, it also involves a rethinking of the analogous Anglican doctrine of *primus inter pares*. It also calls into question all modes of hierarchical governance practised in the name of sustaining global Christian communions, for it represents

52. See further Tissa Balasuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (London: SCM Press, 1977), and Timothy Gorringer, *The Sign of Love: Reflections on the Eucharist* (London: SPCK, 1997).

53. Michael Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (London: Longmans Green and Co. Ltd, 1935).

these as disorienting and unnecessary accretions rather than Spirit-inspired doctrinal developments. This approach, I suggest, would be a valuable step in addressing many of the current difficulties in the Anglican Communion, and one more likely to produce a viable conception of the Anglican Communion, recognized by all provinces, than that advanced by the effort to use the modern instruments of communion to impose a centrist 'Covenant'.

The approach I am arguing for would also help to refocus the being and ministry of the Church of England on eucharistic celebration, and on viable gatherings of Christians in particular places, rather than on the historic heritage of buildings and traditional parish boundaries. From this approach some mediating space might also be found between the 'fresh expressions' approach to new forms of ministry and the existing heritage of parish church buildings and parish boundaries. Given that resources to maintain many church buildings, and to provide stipendiary ministry within them, are now so thinly stretched – particularly in rural areas – a eucharistic ecclesiology would imply a new model not of teams of clergy and lay readers running groups of parish churches – alongside a para-parochial 'free expressions' ecclesiology which further undermines the parochial character of the Church of England – but a more radical move to close churches where eucharistic celebrations do not occur Sunday by Sunday, and to remap parochial boundaries on those local eucharistic celebrations that are sustained.

This approach has the merit – unlike the team-ministry approach or the fresh expressions approach – of sustaining and recovering what I am arguing is the counter-modern, traditional understanding of ecclesial polity as a cooperative union of local communities which have the ecclesial form of face-to-face eucharistic gatherings in place, and in each of which the essence of the Church is fully present. This approach would also aid in the recovery of an ecclesiastical polity where power is situated not in managerial Diocesan structures and episcopal authority – which merely mirror the managerialism of the market state – but in episcopally valid eucharistic ritual gatherings in particular geographical places. The power of such gatherings to sustain forms of collective action in place is indicated in the role of ritual in legitimating and sustaining the governance of common land at St Briavels.

Local governance in place – of the kind illustrated in the Parish Grasslands Project – is a secular recovery of the more ancient eucharistic polity elaborated by St Paul in the first century, recovered in the West from Roman centrism in the sixteenth by Richard Hooker,

and in the East in the twentieth century by Zizioulas, Afanassieff and others. It remains all the more socially significant as a site of resistance to the collusive forces of atomistic consumerist individuation and corporate-led economic globalization in which the middle – the place of empirical gathering, and deliberative political meeting – disappears.⁵⁴ Empirically it is the case that many lay Anglicans retain a sense for the priority of the local church over the Diocese, or Province or Communion. But so long as theologians and the church hierarchy hold to a centrist ecclesiology of the Universal Church they will misperceive this sense for the priority of the local as a form of parochialism that is not worthy of respect. In so doing the central contribution the Church as polity has to make to a world characterized by increasingly totalitarian, and crisis prone, forms of rule – both economic and ecological – is in danger of being lost.

Against coercive, centralizing, totalitarian power the Church offers the rule of charity in which the bishop presides in love. Sadly and ironically the rule of love is increasingly undermined by disunity in the global Anglican Communion. But the response to this disunity from the centre has been an attempt to preserve and extend the centrist instruments of communion which ape the mistaken Roman ontological priority of the Universal over the local church. If the plan to impose a Covenant on the global communion wins through, Anglicans will see another form of Roman centrism in the form of an Anglican *magisterium*. In this way the cause of unity will give further power to managerial structures, and centrist instruments of communion that merely succeed in mirroring the managerial and centralizing powers of secular ideologies rather than in sustaining the distinctive Christian rule of love. And Anglicans are not alone in this. As Afanassieff observes:

Unity of faith still reigns within the Orthodox Church, but without union in love; and neither exists between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches. Why is this? Surely because the mind of the Church has become unaware that the Church of God should be directed by a local church, one church among all the others. They all possess

54. John Milbank makes a related argument for the significance of what he calls 'complex space' in the context of a political economy which is increasingly centrist, corporatist and statist: Milbank, 'On complex space' in John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theory, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 268–92. I am grateful to John for his comments on an earlier version of this paper. For a related approach by an American Catholic theologian see William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (London: T. and T. Clark, 2002).

catholicity; but priority of authority, by giving witness about events in the Church's life, is something that belongs only to the church 'which presides in love'.⁵⁵

The church as eucharistic gathering offers a way through our present discontents which neither colludes with the post-local fetishization of church as cultural ghetto, as adopted in much that goes under the name 'fresh expressions', nor insists on the continuing inviolability of the evolved structures and formalized inter-relations imposed under instruments of Communion old and new. The church as eucharistic gathering is a genuinely middle way, a true mediating polity which challenges both the extreme individualism of religion as consumerism and the centralism - and secularism - of global ecclesiastical managerialism.

55. Afanassieff, 'The Church which Presides in Love', p. 118.