

Editorial

Each local church practices its mission and witnesses its faith uniquely due to the distinct context in which it is situated. This is also true of the Church in China. At the same time, however, the various local churches are united together as the universal Church with the Pope as its head. The Catholic Church forges a relationship with and joins in communion all the local churches.

The ecclesiology of Vatican II (1962-1965) reflects this more humble and ecumenical church by stressing equality among the faithful and shifting focus to the church's sacramentality and mystery. It affirms that the one and universal Church is realized in and through the variety of local churches (*LG*, 23). Local churches are genuine churches formed after the image of the universal Church. In numerous texts, the Council has shown great respect for particularity and diversity. Yet the actual relationship between local and universal Church has inspired discussion, even controversy. What light does such discussion shed on our understanding of local churches and the universal Church in general, and the relationship between the Church in China and the universal Church in particular?

Among the Asian churches, rich discussion centers on the notion of local church from a theological perspective. In the first plenary meeting of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences in 1974, for instance, it was pointed out that “[t]he local church

is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions – in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own” (FABC I, no.12). Thereafter, FABC meetings have involved more nuanced interpretations of local church and its relationship with the universal Church, underscoring the value in considering from an Asian perspective what is meant by local church.

With its special political context, the Church in China is often regarded as unable to forge a normal relationship with other local churches and the head of the universal Church. The religious policies and bureaucratic structure in China may hinder the Church in carrying out its mission. Despite the restrictions, both the official registered church community and the underground church community look for ways to actualize their mission. What can we learn from their experiences?

In this issue of *Tripod* we explore some of these questions as we focus on the theme Local Churches and the Universal Church. We invited several theologians and religious studies scholars, both local and overseas, to share their research results and valuable opinions with our readers. Eight thematic articles in this issue are divided into two main sections: theoretical exploration and ecclesial realities.

The first section contains three articles, each examining the notion of local and universal church from a theoretical

perspective. The first article, “Relationship between Local Churches and the Universal Church: from the Perspective of Communion Ecclesiology,” is written by Sr. Maria Goretti Lau, an expert in ecclesiology from Hong Kong. Employing French theologian Henri De Lubac’s communion ecclesiology, Sr. Lau clarifies the definitions of “universal Church,” “local church” and “particular church,” and their relationships as stated in the documents of Vatican II and the 1983 Code of Canon Law. She also uses the debate of Ratzinger and Kasper to differentiate the main elements and characteristics of the two tendencies of communion ecclesiology, that is, the universalist tendency and the particularist tendency. Highlighting the bishop as the leader of a particular church, Sr. Lau argues that the bishop should maintain communion with other bishops and the Pope, the head of the universal Church. To this end, she reflects on the Provisional Agreement on the appointment of bishops between the Vatican and China.

The second article also discusses the ecclesiology of communion. In “Priority of the Universal Church over the Particular Church? A Ratzinger-Kasper Debate,” Rev. Dr. Ambrose Mong highlights the features of a church in Ratzinger’s communion ecclesiology demonstrated in the Ratzinger-Kasper Debate. The features include a valid ministerial order, papal approval for bishops’ consecrations, a valid Eucharist, and above all, communion with Rome. The debate, moreover, carries implications for the Church in China regarding both the appointment of bishops and papal authority. Rev. Mong argues that Ratzinger’s ecclesiology, insisting as it does that the universal

church has priority over the local church, can be accommodated within the Chinese context through dialogue and compromise. On the other hand, Kasper's ecclesiology, with its emphasis on the role of local churches, may strike a more consonant chord within the Chinese ecclesial reality.

Moving to the Asian perspective, Rev. James Kroeger, an American missionary in the Philippines and a scholar of mission studies, explores the notion of local church in his article "Asia's Missionary Local Churches: FABC Perspectives and Insights." This article presents the FABC's transforming vision of the local church: its role in theology and pastoral life, in dialogue and evangelization, in spirituality and social justice, and in shaping a truly inculturated faith community.

The section on ecclesial realities features five articles. Here, each author illustrates an example of the local or particular church in Europe, China, or Hong Kong, either showing its relationship with the universal Church and its head, the bishop of Rome or the Pope, or its relationship to the State. In "Communion and Tensions between the Roman Bishop and the Local Churches through the Lens of History," Fr. Jacob Kwok demonstrates through two historical events how the Roman pontiff, as leader of the universal Roman Catholic Church, concerns himself with the growth of local churches as well as the response to conflict. These events let us see the challenges faced by church leaders and how to deal with them.

The next three articles address the Church in China. Professor Ying Fuk Tsang sets the context of the Church in

China in his article, “China's Religious Control System under the One-Party Leadership.” Whether it is an officially registered community or an unofficial community not recognized by the government, the Church in China is under the Chinese Communist Party’s religious control system enabled by the one-party State. We can gain a better understanding of the functions and operation of the Church in China, Professor Ying urges, if we take this religious and social control system into consideration.

In “Examining Catholicism in China from Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium*,” lay Chinese scholar Gui Ren discusses the reception of Vatican II of the Church in China with focus on *Lumen Gentium*, the dogmatic constitution on the church. He examines the main elements of this document and evaluates its implementation through research data, observation and analysis. Two issues appear central. The first concerns the relationship between the Church and the world, relevant to the discussion of localization or sinicization of the Church today. The second relates to the relationship within the Church, which requires maintaining a balance between the two ecclesiastical models of “the Church as a mystery” and “the Church as the people of God.”

Rev. Dr. Peter Zhao lends a historical perspective in “The Episcopal Ministry in China.” Though faced with challenges and difficulties across different periods of Chinese church history, he writes, the Chinese episcopal ministry maintains some link to the universal Church represented by the Pope. The survival and development of the Church and the mission of evangelization in China have consistently been the key considerations of the Chinese clergy.

The final article in this second section focuses on the Hong Kong Church. In “The Development of the Rural Church in the New Territories of Hong Kong: A Case Study of St. Joseph’s Church in Fanling,” Mr. Matthew Tang, a church history researcher, examines the development and modernization of St. Joseph’s Church during the urbanization process. Tang points out that the development of the parish resonates with the overall evangelization strategy of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong which follows the spirit of Vatican II. Vatican II’s spirit and legacy, including lay participation, youth pastoral care, and faith formation among lay people, are the very achievements of the interactive development of the Diocese and the parish.

From the above articles, we can see that the relationship between local churches and the universal Church is complicated by internal understandings among church members and external factors such as the relationship with the State. With its own specific context, though always in communion with the universal Church, each local church has its particular way of carrying out mission.

In addition to these eight thematic articles, *Tripod* offers Rev. Tommy Murphy’s book review of *People, Communities, and the Catholic Church in China*, edited by Cindy Yik-yi Chu and Paul P. Mariani, SJ, as well as a review of the major events of the Church in China in 2020 with an analysis. Like churches in other parts of the world, the Church in China experienced ups and downs in the past year due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Good and bad news coexist, reminding us that no matter what challenges we face, God is always with us and gives us strength.

Last but not least, I extend heartfelt thanks to all the authors for contributing their insightful articles, the scholars for reviewing the articles, and the editorial team for editing and proofreading them. On behalf of the editorial committee, special thanks go to Dr. Cynthia Pon and Fr. Peter Barry who, having served on *Tripod* and the Holy Spirit Study Centre across many years, will retire after the publication of this issue. Fr. Barry has been with us from the very start of the Centre's establishment. With his passion for China, he has contributed his talents and skills to *Tripod* and the Centre for forty years, and we are grateful to have had him with us. Fr. Barry will soon return to the United States to tend to his health. We wish him all the best. May the Lord bless him with abundant grace.

Mary Yuen

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