

**ECCLESIAE SORORES AC FRATRES:  
SIBLING COMMUNION IN THE PRE-NICENE  
CHRISTIAN ERA**

My reflections span the years from the death of Jesus to the end of Emperor Constantine's reign, a period of three centuries. A more useful measuring-stick, I find, one more tailored to the human life-span, is not the century but the generation, understood as thirty-three years. This era then becomes nine generations stretching from A.D. 30 to 337. Since the first two generations, the period of the genesis and stabilizing of the New Testament texts, have already been discussed by Raymond Brown at this convention, we will concentrate on the third to the ninth generations, roughly from the composition of *I Clement* to the Council of Nicaea. An enormous revival of interest in this period, due in part to the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Gnostic library, but also due to fascination about church-state interaction, development of the liturgy, growth in moniscopacy during these generations, has rendered our task complex. Ignatius of Antioch, Marcion, Valentinus, Montanus, Tatian, but also Tertullian, Cyprian and Origen are among the many who are being studied anew. Knowing that researchers such as E. W. Benson even as Archbishop of Canterbury devoted some fifteen years of his life to one Father (Cyprian), one city (Carthage), one generation (the seventh), I will not attempt the impossible in one hour. But I wish to begin to take inventory.

CURRENT RESEARCH

Before addressing the gradual development from the self-contained city church under a single bishop to more interprovincial, Mediterranean-wide coordination of churches, I think it is well first to see where in fact research about these generations is being carried on today. Who is doing it, what are their principal concerns?

Christian theologians and church historians today are not working in isolation. Scholars in Judaism and Gnosticism, classicists, sociologists of religion, art historians, and New Testament exegetes are visible partners in some projects. Much of the work takes place in interdisciplinary seminars such as the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins (PSCO) which in 1966/67 launched a project to translate and interpret Walter Bauer's *Rechtgläubigkeit*

und Ketzeri im ältesten Christentum, a work destined to have tardy but significant impact in North America.<sup>1</sup> The PSCO's project in 1968/69 led to the publication of another joint study: *The Catacombs and the Colosseum*.<sup>2</sup> Another team has been a joint AAR/SBL group on the Social World of Early Christianity which concentrated especially on Antioch in the first four centuries including among its collaborators archeologists and numismatists. Not only the data is valuable, but the method discovered in collaborating has been enriching. The Seminar on the Origins of Early Catholic Christianity, founded by Albert C. Outler and William R. Farmer in 1966, has led now to the founding of a new journal, *The Second Century*, to appear under the editorship of Everett Ferguson at Abilene, Texas. Another example of interdisciplinary collaboration occurred in preparation for the exhibit on early Christian art, "The Age of Spirituality," displayed at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, in late 1977 and early 1978.<sup>3</sup>

At McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, assisted by a generous financial grant from Canadian sources, a team of scholars has been working on a description and analysis of Jewish and Christian normative self-definition, the first volume of which has recently been published as *The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries*.<sup>4</sup>

To Claremont's Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, under the leadership of James M. Robinson, we are indebted for the Coptic Gnostic Library Project and specifically the first complete critical translation of the codices into English.<sup>5</sup> Recently the Institute and persons trained by its methods are moving beyond dialogue with New Testament exegetes to include patristic scholars. The publication by PHEME PERKINS on *The Gnostic Dialogue* is

<sup>1</sup>Originally published in 1934; rev. ed.: Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1964. English translation: *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, trans. and ed. by R. Kraft and G. Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971). For further reflections on this work, cf. H. D. Betz, "Orthodoxy and Heresy in Primitive Christianity. Some Critical Remarks on G. Strecker's Republication of Walter Bauer's *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzeri im ältesten Christentum*," *Interpretation* 19 (1965), 299-311; D. J. Harrington, "The Reception of Walter Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* During the Last Decade," *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980), 289-98.

<sup>2</sup>*The Catacombs and the Colosseum: The Roman Empire as the Setting of Primitive Christianity*, ed. by S. Benko and J. J. O'Rourke (Valley Forge: Judson, 1971).

<sup>3</sup>*Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, ed. by Kurt Weitzmann (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978).

<sup>4</sup>*Jewish and Christian Self-Definition. Vol. 1: The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries*, ed. by E. P. Sanders (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

<sup>5</sup>*The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. by James M. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). On the background to the discoveries at Nag Hammadi, cf. John Dart, *The Laughing Savior* (New York: Harper, 1976).

a case in point.<sup>6</sup> The controversial but stimulating work by Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, invites church historians to reassess certain presuppositions about those early generations.<sup>7</sup>

Other collaborative ventures include the *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, and multi-volumed handbooks such as the *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, the *Histoire du droit et des Institutions de l'Eglise en Occident*, or *Die Kirche in Ihrer Geschichte*.<sup>8</sup> In such series special attention is directed toward formative factors such as accelerated growth, diversification of social strata in membership, and the cultural fabric and political stability of this period.

Interest in the pre-Constantinian era and in the life of local churches at that time has been sparked by new research among Roman Catholics, especially French and German scholars, concerning *communio ecclesiology*, primacy, episcopal collegiality

<sup>6</sup>*The Gnostic Dialogue. The Early Church and the Crisis of Gnosticism* (New York: Paulist, 1980).

<sup>7</sup>*The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979).

<sup>8</sup>Among the more recent publications found useful in the preparation of this paper are: Charles Munier, *L'Eglise dans l'Empire Romain (IIe-IIIe siècle)*, *Histoire du droit et des Institutions de l'Eglise en Occident* 3, 1 (Paris: CUJAS, 1979); also in the same series (3, 2): Jean Gaudemet, *L'Eglise dans l'Empire Romain (IVe-Ve siècle)* (Paris: Sirez, 1958); Leonhard Goppelt, *Die apostolische und nachapostolische Zeit, Die Kirche in Ihrer Geschichte*, Bd. 1, Lief. A, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1966), in English: *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times*, trans. by R. A. Guelich (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1970); Carl Andresen, *Die Kirchen der alten Christenheit, Die Religion der Menschheit*, Bd. 29, 1/2 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1971). A useful survey of modern studies is given in Frederic Manns, *Bibliographie du judéo-christianisme* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1979).

Among the older works the following are still very informative: Gustave Bardy, *La théologie de l'Eglise de saint Clément de Rome à St. Irénée*, Unam Sanctam 13 (Paris: Cerf, 1945); *Ib.*, *La théologie de l'Eglise de saint Irénée au concile de Nicée*, Unam Sanctam 14 (Paris: Cerf, 1947); James V. Bartlet, *Church Life and Church Order During the First Four Centuries with Special Reference to the Early Eastern Church Orders* (Oxford, 1943) [originally Birkbeck lectures, 1924]; Pierre Batiffol, *L'Eglise naissante et le catholicisme* (Paris: Gabalda, 1909); *Ib.*, *Cathedra Petri*, Unam Sanctam 1 (Paris: Cerf, 1938) [published posthumously]; F. C. Baur, *Das Christentum und die christliche Kirche der drei ersten Jahrhunderten* [original publication Tübingen, 1860] (Stuttgart: F. Frommann, 1966); W. H. C. Frend, *The Early Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965); Robert M. Grant, *Augustus to Constantine: The Thrust of the Christian Movement into the Roman World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); A. Harnack, *Entstehung und Entwicklung der Kirchenverfassung und des Kirchenrechts in den zwei Jahrhunderten* (Leipzig, 1910), in English: *The Constitution and Law of the Church in the First Two Centuries*, trans. by F. Pogson, ed. by H. Major (London: Williams & Norgate, 1910); Edwin Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches* (London: Rivingtons, 1882); Friedrich Heiler, *Altkirchliche Autonomie und päpstlicher Zentralismus* (Munich: Reinhardt, 1941); J. Lebreton and J. Zeiller, *L'Eglise primitive, Histoire de l'Eglise I*, ed. by Fliche/Martin (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1935); in the same series, vol. 2, *Ib.*, *De la fin du 2e siècle à la paix constantinienne* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1935); Hans Lietzmann, *The Founding of the Church Universal, A History of the Early Church, Vol. 2* (London: Butterworth, 1950).

and ecumenical unity amid diversity. Much of this activity among Catholics can be traced back to the years following John XXIII's announcement of a general council to take place in the Roman Church. One of the more successful cooperative works was that directed by Yves Congar, *L'épiscopat et l'église universelle* appearing in 1961-62. The masterful contribution of Cyrille Vogel, "Unité de l'église et pluralité des formes historiques d'organisation ecclésiastique du IIIe au Ve siècle," has been the cornerstone for much of what was to follow in the coming years.<sup>9</sup> Among publications by individuals two works are especially notable: Wolfgang Beinert's *Um das dritte Kirchenattribut*,<sup>10</sup> a study of catholicity which included a thorough analysis of what pre-Nicene writers meant by "the church catholic," and John E. Lynch's important canonical study of "Co-Responsibility in the First Five Centuries."<sup>11</sup>

Renewed interest in the concept of *koinōnia* brought readers back to earlier works, the well-known study on *communio* and primacy by Ludwig Hertling originally published in 1943 in German, translated by J. Wicks in 1972.<sup>12</sup> A German Lutheran, Werner Elert, studied approximately the same period with greater attention to the Eastern churches in his *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*.<sup>13</sup> Judged against more recent works the Hertling volume seems to have overestimated the explicit consciousness of primacy within the Roman see of the pre-Nicene era. In 1976 the Canon Law Society of America sponsored as one of its Permanent Seminars, an investigation into the historical origins of Christian *communio*.<sup>14</sup> Somewhat earlier as a follow-up to Vatican II an international symposium had been held in Rome on the origins of the idea of local church expressing *sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum*.<sup>15</sup> The prestigious *Istituto per le*

<sup>9</sup>In *L'Episcopat et l'église universelle*, ed. Y. Congar, Unam Sanctam 39 (Paris: Cerf, 1962), pp. 591-636.

<sup>10</sup>*Um das dritte Kirchenattribut. Die Katholizität der Kirche im Verständnis der evangelisch-lutherischen und römisch-katholischen Theologie der Gegenwart*, 2 vols. (Essen: Ludgerus Verlag, 1964), esp. pp. 36-77. See also his, "Die Una Catholica und die Partikularkirchen," *Theologie und Philosophie* 42 (1967), 1-21.

<sup>11</sup>"Co-Responsibility in the First Five Centuries: Presbyteral Colleges and the Election of Bishops," *Jurist* 31 (1971), 14-53.

<sup>12</sup>Ludwig von Hertling, *Communio: Church and Papacy in Early Christianity* (Chicago: Loyola University, 1972) [original text under the title *Communio und Primat*, appeared in 1943].

<sup>13</sup>Werner Elert, *Abendmahl und Kirchengemeinschaft in der alten Kirche, hauptsächlich des Ostens* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1954) in English: *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, trans. by N. E. Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia, 1966).

<sup>14</sup>Ed. by James Provost, *Jurist* 36, nos. 1/2 (1976), 1-245, especially the articles by Prusak, Fahey, and Lynch on historical issues.

<sup>15</sup>*Comunione interecclesiale: Collegialità—primato—ecumenismo*, Acta con-

*scienze religiose* of Bologna under the directorship of Guiseppe Alberigo directed a number of studies in the early church and has begun to publish in 1980 a journal *Cristianesimo nella storia*, interested in the status of local churches in the early period. Even the Pontifical Commission for the Preparation of the Codex of Eastern Canon Law supervised a new edition and translation of the canons and directives of early local synods and general councils.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, another stimulus to research arose from the founding of the Official Ecumenical Consultation between Theologians of the Ancient Oriental non-Chalcedonian Churches and the Roman Catholic Church which first met in Vienna in 1971, under the sponsorship of the Pro Oriente Foundation. In partnership with members of today's so-called Monophysite churches whose roots reached back to ancient Syria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Armenia, and later India, Roman Catholics were led to re-evaluate what the Mediterranean churches had been before the emergence of the patriarchal influence of Rome, Constantinople or other sees. Of special interest to our theme was its third consultation in 1976 devoted to "The Church of Christ as Local Church." Besides the interventions of Wilhelm de Vries, Paulos Mar Gregorios (Verghese), the historical study by Wolfgang Beinert on "The Church of Christ as a Local Church in the First Five Centuries" went beyond the earlier work of Vogel.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the first official dialogue between Rome and the Eastern Orthodox churches begun only in May 1980 at Patmos and Rhodes promises to be another source of theological reflection on the theme of this convention.

The academic and religious forces at work in studying the nature of local church in the second and third centuries originate in disparate sources. Few individuals have the synthetic powers, the linguistic skills, the time, least of all the libraries, to bring together what is rapidly taking shape as a consensus. The Catholic scholar needs humility and equilibrium not to be shaken by the force of

ventus internationalis de historia sollicitudinis omnium ecclesiarum, Romae, 1967, ed. by J. d'Ercole and A. M. Stickler, *Communio*, vols. 12 and 13 (Rome, 1972).

<sup>16</sup>P. P. Joannou, *Discipline générale antique (IIe-IXe siècle)* (Rome: Orientale S. Nilo, 1962-63); Fonti, Fascicolo IX: Tome I: 1ère Partie: *Les canons des conciles oecuméniques (IIe-IXe siècle)*; 2e Partie: *Les synodes particuliers*; Tome II: *Les lettres canoniques des Pères*.

<sup>17</sup>W. Beinert, "The Church of Christ as a Local Church in the First Five Centuries," in *Third Ecumenical Consultation between Theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church*, Vienna-Lainz, Aug. 30-Sept. 5, 1976, *Wort und Wahrheit*, Supplement No. 3 (Vienna: Herder, 1976), pp. 42-56. Unfortunately this garbled English version of Beinert's German text is almost unintelligible without reference to the original text that appears as: "Die Kirche Christi als Lokalkirche. Die Entwicklung in den ersten fünf Jahrhunderten," *Una Sancta* 32 (1977), 114-30. See also his "Dogmenhistorische Anmerkungen zum Begriff 'Partikularkirche,'" *Theologie und Philosophie* 50 (1975), 38-69.

confessional, apologetic, one-sided presentations of pre-Nicene church life that reflected (and still reflect in some corners) undifferentiated historical consciousness about ecclesiastical institutions. Re-reading the principal works that appeared between 1870 and 1950, specifically works by F. C. Baur, J. J. I. von Döllinger, Adolf von Harnack, and especially George LaPiana, to name but some of the historians once unpopular in official circles, the Catholic cannot but be stunned to note how much these men anticipated what would come to be standard fare in ecumenical consensus statements. Earlier unsympathetic reaction to much of German historical research, fears about the use of historico-critical interpretations of early Christian texts, the climate of anxiety at the time of the Modernist crisis, are ghosts which have not yet been completely put to rest.<sup>18</sup> Looking back over the last seventy years it is hard to imagine that the book on the Eucharist by Pierre Batiffol (1861-1929) would have been placed on the Index in 1907, and that a historian as balanced as Gustave Bardy (1881-1955) would have been delated to Rome in 1929. Of course, all was not grim, since work done by Hefele, Lebreton, Zeiler, Bévenot, and many others, was not challenged; they set the groundwork for new standards among Catholics for appropriating the early Church.

What came as a liberation for the Catholic community was a more complicated notion of the development of dogma, willingness to see institutions change and shift, realization that the dividing line between *jus divinum* and *jus humanum* was not easily drawn, in short, acceptance of trajectory thinking as a hermeneutical tool, along the lines suggested by Robinson and Koester.<sup>19</sup> But with any reconstruction of history, especially history as remote as that of the early Church, subjective elements and pre-conceived ideas can be pitfalls. This then is the rich context in which research has been situated. Let us now turn to those earlier generations and see if indeed these *ecclesiae* envisaged one another as *sorores*.

#### ECCLESIA MATER

My title speaks of *ecclesiae sorores* or, to avoid the charge of sexist language, *ecclesiae sorores ac fratres*. This terminology I have not found specifically in early patristic writings, but I find it useful to eliminate misunderstandings about how local churches perceived one another. Manual theology often suggested that some

<sup>18</sup> For a sober assessment of Catholic attitudes to church history in the 19th and early 20th century, see Hubert Jedin, "The Writing and Study of Church History," in *From the Apostolic Community to Constantine*, ed. by Karl Baus, *Handbook of Church History*, Vol. 1 (New York: Herder, 1965), esp. pp. 35-56.

<sup>19</sup> James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), esp. chap. 4.

churches related to a specific church as to a mother as early as the third or fourth Christian generations.

The historical origins of the expression *ecclesia mater* have been investigated in our lifetime by two men: first in 1943 Joseph Plumpe published his *Mater Ecclesia*,<sup>20</sup> and then in 1958 a German, Karl Delahaye, produced a work whose French version was entitled *Ecclesia Mater chez les Pères des trois premiers siècles*.<sup>21</sup> Their research shows that *ecclesia mater* finds its first explicit literary expression in a letter from the churches of Lyons and Vienne addressed to Christians in Asia and Phrygia and preserved in Eusebius.<sup>22</sup> Composed shortly after the martyrdoms in A.D. 177, this letter mentions the impact that the martyrs' faith had on converting the *lapsi*: "... there was great joy in the heart of the Virgin Mother [the Church], who was receiving her stillborn children back alive."<sup>23</sup> The title mother church is not documented in Rome in the second or third century: researchers have speculated that it originated in Syria or Asia Minor during the mid-second century.

With Tertullian and Cyprian the expression finds wide usage. One of the most sublime passages occurs in Cyprian's meditation on the Church in *De Unitate*, 5: "She spreads her branches in generous growth over all the earth, she extends her abundant streams ever further; yet one is the head-spring, one the source, one the mother who is prolific in her offspring, generation after generation: of her womb are we born, of her milk are we fed, from her Spirit our souls draw their life breath."<sup>24</sup>

The maternal emphasis is clearly mystical, spiritual; there is no organizational, governmental focus. In my judgment from the fifth to the ninth generations the title mother church emphasizes the soteriological power of Christ and the sanctification of the Spirit made concrete in the community. While it is true that the figure of church as mother could have been inspired from the personification of Israel as Bride of Yahweh, or Galatians 4:21-31 or the Book of Revelation 12, the image I feel is rather a basic, archetypal one, combining virgin, spouse, and mother and stressing the nurturing force of grace. It may even be a christianizing of

<sup>20</sup>Joseph C. Plumpe, *Mater Ecclesia. An Inquiry into the Concept of the Church as Mother in Early Christianity* (Washington: Catholic University, 1943).

<sup>21</sup>Karl Delahaye, *Ecclesia Mater chez les Pères des trois premiers siècles. Pour un renouvellement de la pastorale d'aujourd'hui*, Unam Sanctam 46 (Paris: Cerf, 1964). The original title was *Erneuerung der Seelsorgsformen aus der Sicht der frühen Patristik* (1958).

<sup>22</sup>*Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.1.1-2.8 (GCS 9, 1: 402-33).

<sup>23</sup>*H.E.*, 5.1.45 (GCS 9, 1: 420).

<sup>24</sup>CC III, 253, 1. 136ff.; Hartel (CSEL) 214.6. English translation from *Cyprian, De Lapsis and De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate*, text and trans. by Maurice Bévenot, S.J. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), p. 67.

imagery that related to Cybele or the *Magna Mater* whose cult was not unknown in Lyons, Carthage and Phrygia.

As a useful exercise in hermeneutics, one could profitably relate this text of Cyprian about the church as mother to a passage from a contemporary writing, Rosemary Haughton's recent *The Catholic Thing*.<sup>25</sup> In her attempt to clarify what it is to be Catholic, Haughton suggests that being Catholic involves learning to get along with two allegorical personages: Mother Church, the deeply concerned parent, the patient, imperturbable, domineering sometimes self-satisfied person, unwilling to allow her children to outgrow their limitations, but also Wisdom or Sophia, mistress of the unexpected, the lady well versed in the mystical, prophetic, spontaneous. Those North African and Gallic churches of the second and third centuries would not have made much sense out of that double description especially where the mother becomes a restraining influence. For them mother was not a regulatory image.

To understand the interaction of one city church with another (for in fact Christianity was at first largely an urban phenomenon) it is not the mother image that is useful. In fact, the communities perceived themselves as sisters or brothers of the same mother. Some of these cities had a highly diversified Christian population with personal ties to other city churches. For example, Rome, where Greek was the lingua franca for Christians until approximately A.D. 230, had, as George LaPiana has shown, a wide mixture of peoples.<sup>26</sup> Although large segments of Mediterranean men and women, including the Christian population did not travel distances, still a surprising number did travel for importing, trade, education, governmental assignments, wars, mail delivery. Arrivals and departures were matters of high interest and curiosity. The average dweller along the Mediterranean shores had a fairly sophisticated awareness of its major seaports.<sup>27</sup> Christians were helped to recognize many place names from hearing Paul's letters and Acts read aloud. While one can hardly speak then of religious wanderlust, pilgrimages to sites in the Holy Land such as later recorded in the *Peregrinatio* of Etheria (or Egeria) in the fourth century, still Christians were interested in the fortunes and misfortunes of other churches.

The formulations used by James McCue for the U.S. Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogue are useful ones. He asks: "To what

<sup>25</sup> (Springfield, IL.: Templegate, 1979), pp. 9-11.

<sup>26</sup> George LaPiana, "The Roman Church at the End of the Second Century," *Harvard Theological Review* 18 (1925), 210-77, and his "Foreign Groups in Rome during the First Centuries of the Empire," *Harvard Theological Review* 20 (1927), 183-394.

<sup>27</sup> See H. Marot, "Unité de l'Eglise et diversité géographique aux premiers siècles," in *L'Episcopat et l'église universelle*, pp. 565-90.



extent and in what ways were the churches united in the pre-Nicene period? What were the various means (assuming that there were more than one) used to secure this unity? Was it a matter of pressing concern? What expression do we find of being part of the single *world-wide* church?"<sup>28</sup> (My only reformulation of his questions would be to use the words "coordinated" rather than "united," and "coordination" rather than "unity" so as not to suggest more sameness than actually existed.)

There can be little doubt that the need to deal with various strands of Gnosticism, Montanism, Marcionism, or repentant *lapsi*, accelerated coordination. But the roots of this inner network were present from the beginning. Significantly communities used the term *paroikia*, temporary home, transient stopover, to describe their sojourning status. But every local church possessed all structures necessary for normal functioning. Once evangelized, equipped with supervisors, initiated into at least some of the Scriptures, taught the mysteries of baptism and Eucharist, the church in a city could manage on its own. This self-sufficiency did not eliminate interest in others. But in the early Church the phenomenon to explain is not how a local church became autonomous but how it felt the need eventually to group together into wider fellowships. The local church's *autarchia* did not imply sterile isolation. But in its self-definition it did not understand itself as a tiny parcel of something bigger; it was local church symbolizing we would say today sacramentally the world Church. In less than two or three generations Christians had developed a sense of being a third race, neither pagan nor Jew but Christian.<sup>29</sup> This consciousness seems to have paralleled the growth of the canon itself.

Contrary to what is often thought nowadays this sense of association with other churches was usually not, at least in the second century, expressed by the term "catholic." Beinert and Stockmeier have shown, for instance, that in Ignatius of Antioch and others the word catholic corresponds more to what we would call "complete" or "full" rather than to "geographically extensive."<sup>30</sup> Lack of catholicity meant originally the absence of a

<sup>28</sup>James F. McCue, "The Roman Primacy in the Patristic Age: The Beginnings Through Nicaea," in *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church*, ed. by P. C. Empie and T. A. Murphy, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), p. 44.

<sup>29</sup>The expression *Kainon touto genos* occurs in *Ad. Diog.* I; the term *triton genos* in the *Kerygma Petrou* (ca. A.D. 130) preserved in Clement of Alexandria, *Stromates* VI, 5 (ed. by Hennecke, 2nd ed., 1924, 143) and also in Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 10 (... *usque quo tertium genus*).

<sup>30</sup>Peter Stockmeier, "Zum Begriff der *katholikē ekklesiā* bei Ignatios von Antiochien," in *Ortskirche und Weltkirche. Festgabe für Julius Kardinal Döpfner*, ed. by H. Fleckenstein et al. (Würzburg, 1973), pp. 63-74. See also in the same volume, Jakob Speigl, "Ortskirche—Weltkirche. Einige Beobachtungen aus dem

quality that should belong to a church no matter where incarnated. Catholicity pertains to the local church but not merely because it was consciously or unconsciously part of the world-wide network of churches. Catholicity was a term that guarded the possibility of different emphases, particular traditions, rather than a force to level out idiosyncracies.

In studying sister or brother churches in the pre-Nicene period Western theologians have perhaps paid too much attention to the church of Rome. This is only natural in light of its position and what Rome became administratively after Leo the Great. More frequently today scholars are following a procedure exemplified paradigmatically in Walter Bauer, namely focusing on a spectrum of local or regional churches: the Osrhoëne and its capital Edessa, Egypt, Antioch, Western Asia Minor, Rome. A recent popular work by Sauser shows the importance of approaching the period by studying the wider family circle.<sup>31</sup> He would have us reflect on the experiences of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, Seleucia, Ctesiphon, and in the West, Lyons, Arles, Carthage, Trier, Spain, Ravenna, Milan and Rome.

#### COORDINATION FACTORS

What internal and social elements influenced the move toward closer collaboration among the sister churches in the pre-Nicene era? Six practices were influential: (a) eucharistic celebrations and sharing eucharistic bread; (b) installation of bishops by neighboring bishops; (c) convocation of regional synods; (d) exchange of letters and their circulation; (e) moves toward coordination by the bishop of Rome at least for Western churches; (f) the emperor's involvement in church affairs.<sup>32</sup> The list is not exhaustive: one might also mention missionary endeavors, martyr cult, formation of canon or creed.

#### *Eucharist*

Not surprisingly some of the most ardent descriptions of sister church awareness occur in liturgical prayers. By the third generation we have the famous passage from the *Didache* which may be an even earlier prayer: "As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains, but was brought together and became one, so let thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth, into

kirchlichen Altertum," pp. 75-86. W. Beiner, "Der Begriff 'katholisch' in der Patristik," in his *Um das dritte Kirchenattribut*, pp. 36-77.

<sup>31</sup>Ekkart Sauser, *Woher kommt Kirche? Ortskirchen der Frühzeit und Kirchenbewusstsein heute* (Frankfurt: J. Knecht, 1978).

<sup>32</sup>Vogel gives a slightly different list, p. 605.

thy kingdom, for thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever."<sup>33</sup> The same document contains a similar prayer: "Remember, Lord, thy Church, to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in thy love, and gather it together in its holiness from the four winds to thy kingdom which thou has prepared for it."<sup>34</sup> The local church did indeed express concern about its sibling counterparts in other parts of the world. Justin's *First Apology* records a similar awareness during the eucharistic liturgy: "And on that day which is called after the sun, all who are in the towns and in the country gather together for a communal celebration. And then the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the Prophets are read, as long as time permits. . . . Then prayers in common are said . . . for ourselves, for the newly baptized, and for all others wherever they may be."<sup>35</sup>

Within the celebration of the Eucharist, and to a lesser extent of baptism, a powerful dynamism was at work that led Christians to perceive themselves as a gathered people at praise and adoration. Anton Baumstark, a German liturgist, has identified in eucharistic worship a supra-temporal awareness of community (*überzeitliches Gemeinschaftsbewusstsein*) that brings persons into close inter-subjective communion with those who have gone before us in faith.<sup>36</sup> This blurring of the temporal is matched, I find, with a similar spatial inter-local consciousness (could we call it a *überörtliches Gemeinschaftsbewusstsein?*) that profoundly affects serious participants. Hence sibling communion.

Specific practices arose to express this awareness and concern for sister churches. To show communion with another church one sent it the consecrated bread of communion. Eusebius records this practice in citing a letter concerning the Quartodeciman controversy from Irenaeus to Victor, Bishop of Rome. Irenaeus wrote that earlier Roman bishops had not allowed the wrangle over the Easter date to interfere with the practice of sending eucharistic bread. "Never was this made a ground for repulsing anyone, but the presbyters before you, even though they did not keep it [the Quartodeciman Easter], used to send the Eucharist to Christians from dioceses which did."<sup>37</sup> We have to wait for Canon 14 at the fourth-century Synod of Laodicea, ca. 365, before the practice of transporting the eucharistic bread for that purpose was frowned upon.

<sup>33</sup> *Didache* 9.4 (trans. by Kirsopp Lake, Loeb edition).

<sup>34</sup> *Didache* 10.5.

<sup>35</sup> Justin I *Apology* 67.

<sup>36</sup> *Vom geschichtlichen Werden der Liturgie* (Freiburg, 1923), cited in T. Klauser, *A Short History of the Western Liturgy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 18.

<sup>37</sup> Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5.24.17 (*GCS* 9, 1: 496).

Another practice, sending the so-called *fermentum*,<sup>38</sup> seems to have been of Roman origin but was adopted by other cities. On feast days, as a sign of union, the bishop would send priests or bishops in outlying areas a fragment of the communion bread just consecrated, the *fermentum*, which in turn would be dropped into the chalice as a symbol of oneness. Even in the fifth century we read that the Roman bishop, Innocent I (402-417), used to send acolytes every Sunday carrying the *fermentum* to priests of titular churches.<sup>39</sup> The custom continued until the ninth century and has left traces in the Roman liturgy with the *commixtio* of the eucharistic bread and wine. Another practice still in use in many Eastern churches was sending *eulogion*, a piece of blessed bread not used at a eucharistic liturgy, as a sign of solidarity and *koinonia*.<sup>40</sup> The *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (no. 24) distinguishes between *eulogia* and *eucharistia*.

Further research also needs to be pursued concerning the practice of recording names on twin writing-tablets, known as *diptyka*. During the liturgy the names on the diptychs were read out, specifically names of persons to pray for. Hierarchical diptychs containing names of those who were in communion with a specific church were also used.<sup>41</sup> Jungmann tells us that "in the Oriental [Eastern] liturgies the reading of the [hierarchical] diptychs was correlated since the fifth century with the concept of ecclesiastical communion."<sup>42</sup> The question we address to liturgists and canonists is whether this practice can be presumed to have existed in the pre-Nicene period.

The role of Eucharist in fostering sibling awareness is now receiving greater attention. Instead of asking, for example, whether Cyprian was a papalist or an episcopalian, one writer has assessed Cyprian's model of church as basically the liturgical assembly.<sup>43</sup> John Lynch has also clarified various canonical prac-

<sup>38</sup>J. Jungmann, "Fermentum. Ein Symbol kirchlicher Einheit und sein Nachleben im Mittelalter," *Colligere fragmenta: Festschrift A. Dold*, ed. by B. Fischer and V. Fiala (Beuron, 1952), pp. 185-90. See also F. Cabrol, "Fermentum et sancta," *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* 5 (1922), cols. 1371-74.

<sup>39</sup>Innocent to Bishop Decentius of Gubbio, dated March 19, 416 (*PL* 20: 556).

<sup>40</sup>L. Voelkl, "Apophoretum, Eulogie und Fermentum," in *Miscellanea G. Belvederi* (1954), 391-414; A. Stuibler, *RAC*, vol. 6 (1966), cols. 900-28.

<sup>41</sup>F. Cabrol, "Diptyques (Liturgie)," *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* 4 (1920), cols. 1045-94; O. Stegmüller, *RAC*, vol. 3 (1957), cols. 1138-49.

<sup>42</sup>J. A. Jungmann, *Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development (Missarum Sollemnia)*, trans. by F. A. Brunner (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1951-55), Vol. II, p. 171.

<sup>43</sup>Bruno Renaud, "L'Eglise comme assemblée liturgique selon saint Cyprien. Ses caractéristiques, ses principes d'unité," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 38 (1971), 5-68. See also Victor Saxer, *Vie liturgique et quotidienne à Carthage vers le milieu du IIIe siècle. Le témoignage de saint Cyprien et de ses contemporains d'Afrique* (Rome: Vatican Press, 1969).

tices of excommunication in the early Church as basically limits of communion.<sup>44</sup>

### *Installation of Bishops*

When exactly each of the Mediterranean churches had adopted moniscopacy, the practice of appointing a single bishop, is difficult to determine with certainty. Few churches if any had not adopted the practice by the beginning of the fourth generation. Whether or not the bishop saw himself as a successor to the apostles, both he and his community were influenced by the social world in which Christianity was taking root, a world where monarchy was the rule.<sup>45</sup>

What developed then in the second century was a monarchical concentration of authority, an increase of power for the bishop.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup>John E. Lynch, "The Limits of Communio in the pre-Constantinian Church," *Jurist* 35 (1976), 159-90.

<sup>45</sup>Robert M. Grant, *Early Christianity and Society: Seven Studies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 13.

<sup>46</sup>For studies on episcopacy and ministry in the pre-Nicene period, consult the following works (arranged chronologically): Konrad Lübeck, *Reichseinteilung und kirchliche Hierarchie des Orients bis zum Ausgange des vierten Jahrhunderts* (Münster: Schönigh, 1901); Thomas Lindsay, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1903); Gregory Dix, "The Ministry in the Early Church," in *The Apostolic Ministry*, ed. by K. E. Kirk (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946), pp. 185-303; Hans von Campenhausen, *Kirchliches Amt und geistliche Vollmacht in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1953), ET: *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power* (London: A. & C. Black, 1969); Gustave Bardy, "Le sacerdoce chrétien du Ier au Ve siècle," in *Prêtres d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*, Unam Sanctam 28 (Paris: Cerf, 1954), pp. 23-61; Jean Colson, *Les fonctions ecclésiastiques aux deux premiers siècles* (Paris: Desclée, 1956); H. Bouësse and A. Mandouze, *L'Evêque dans l'Eglise du Christ* [Symposium Arbrèsle, 1960] (Paris: Desclée, 1963); P. M. Gy, "Notes on the Early Terminology of Christian Priesthood," in *The Sacrament of Holy Orders* (London: Aquin, 1962), 98-115; W. Tefler, *The Office of a Bishop* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1962), esp. pp. 158-86; Bernard Botte, "Collegiate Character of the Presbyterate and the Episcopate," in *The Sacrament of Holy Orders* (London: Aquin, 1962), 75-97; Jean Colson, "La communion interecclésiastique à l'époque pré-nicéenne," in *Communione* [see above n. 15], Vol. 1, pp. 205-19; Peter Stockmeier, "Congregation and Episcopal Office in the Ancient Church," in *Bishops and People*, ed. by L. & A. Swidler (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), pp. 71-86; P. Burke, "The Monarchical Episcopate at the End of the First Century," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 7 (1970), 499-518; John E. Lynch, "Co-Responsibility in the First Five Centuries: Presbyteral Colleges and the Election of Bishops," *Jurist* 31 (1971), 14-53; Albano Vilela, *La condition collégiale des prêtres au IIIe siècle* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1971); J. Martin, *Die Genese des Amtspriestertums in der frühen Kirche. Der priestliche Dienst 3. Quaestiones disputatae* 48 (Freiburg: Herder, 1972); Roger Gryson, "Les élections ecclésiastiques au IIIe siècle," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 68 (1973), 353-404, "Les élections épiscopales en Orient au IVe siècle," *RHE* 74 (1979), 301-45, "Les élections épiscopales en Occident au IVe siècle," *RHE* 75 (1980), 257-83; Pierre Nautin, "L'évolution des ministères au IIe et au IIIe siècle," *Revue de droit canonique* 23 (1973), 47-58; C. J. Botha, "The Offices in the Early Church History," *Neotestamentica* 10 (1976), 110-23; Gerard Luttenberger, "The Priest as a

With that went a sacralization of the office of *episkopos*, a phenomenon bolstered by a Christianizing of Old Testament texts, especially ones that referred to *sacerdotes*. Within the episcopate there gradually appeared a hierarchy too. Bishops even became involved in business or governmental positions. Cyprian was convinced that one of the reasons for the outbreak of persecution was God's punishment against those "*episcopi plurimi*" who were acting as Roman *procuratores*.<sup>47</sup> "They left their sees, abandoned their people, and toured the markets in other territories on the look-out for profitable deals" (*De lapsis*, 4).

The local church chose its candidate for bishop, as Cyprian again notes: "*plebs . . . habeat potestatem . . . vel eligendi dignos sacerdotes vel indignos recusandi.*"<sup>48</sup> Still because the actual installation or laying on of hands had to be done by bishops from neighboring areas, one local church interacted with another. Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition* mentions the requirement of having other bishops present. Shortly before Nicaea, at the Synod of Arles (A.D. 314) it was further specified: "*si tamen non potuerit septem, infra tres non audeat ordinare.*"

By the fifth generation the Church had begun to expand into the countryside. Christian communities were sometimes established at a distance from large cities which required a shift in ecclesiastical organization. Several possibilities emerged.<sup>49</sup> One was to have itinerant presbyters who went out as delegates of the bishop and returned. Such *periodeutai* or *circumeuntes* are mentioned in a letter of Phileas, Bishop of Thumis in Lower Egypt, written about 307 A.D.<sup>50</sup> Again it was possible to have resident presbyters, as in the district of Mareotis, Egypt, where there were

Member of a Ministerial College: The Development of the Church's Ministerial Structure from 96 to c. 300 A.D.," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 43 (1976), 5-63; Alexandre Faivre, *Naissance d'une hiérarchie: les premières étapes du cursus clérical*, *Théologie historique* 40 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977); C.-J. Pinto de Oliveira, "Signification sacerdotale du Ministère de l'évêque dans la Tradition Apostolique d'Hippolyte de Rome," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 25 (1978), 398-427; Maurice Bévenot, S.J., "Sacerdos as Understood by Cyprian," *Journal of Theological Studies* 30 (1979), 413-29; James Garrett, "The Pre-Cyprianic Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Christians," *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History* [Festschrift George H. Williams], ed. by F. F. Church and T. George, *Studies in History of Christian Thought* 19 (Leiden: Brill, 1979); Hervé-Marie Legrand, "The Presidency of the Eucharist according to the Ancient Tradition," *Worship* 53 (1979), 413-38; E. J. Kilmartin, "Ministry and Ordination in Early Christianity against a Jewish Background," *Studia Liturgica* 13, nos. 2-3-4 (1979), 42-69.

<sup>47</sup>Theodor Klauser, "Bischöfe als staatliche Prokuratoren im dritten Jahrhundert?" *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 14 (1971), 140-49.

<sup>48</sup>Ep. 67, 3 (Hartel 738.1).

<sup>49</sup>I am indebted here to J. G. Davies, *The Early Christian Church* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965), p. 135.

<sup>50</sup>PG 10:1566.

nineteen presbyters, all dependent on the bishop of Alexandria.<sup>51</sup> A similar arrangement existed in Upper Italy and Gaul. A third possibility was to have a bishop wherever there was a Christian community; this was the practice in North Africa and Southern Italy. In Syria and parts of Asia Minor a category of second-class or "country" bishops (*chōrepiskopoi*) was instituted.<sup>52</sup> These were limited in their jurisdiction as the Synod of Sardis (A.D. 344) legislated that for villages presbyters would suffice. The Synod of Laodicea (ca. A.D. 365) altogether opposed the institution of extra-urban bishops.<sup>53</sup>

Eventually what came into effect was more than calling upon neighboring bishops to perform episcopal consecrations. A new network took shape, creating so to speak older sisters and younger sisters. This led to territorial regroupings, or the emergence of coordinating churches. The formation of networks of episcopal communities was much slower in the West than in the East. Although it is premature to speak of patriarchates before A.D. 451, still some churches did have greater supervisory powers than others. Particular prestige was associated with certain local churches because of real or imagined apostolic origin, or because of prosaic reasons such as geographical setting, political relevance, prestigious leadership. By the third century, churches had begun to flourish outside the Roman Empire, in Persia, Iberia (Georgia), Armenia, Nubia.<sup>54</sup> About these churches outside the empire the Council of Nicaea made no decision except to say that they should follow their own traditions.

The Council of Nicaea did set up for some regions what came to be called a metropolitan structure. Canon 6 stated: "Let the ancient customs prevail which are in Egypt and Libya and Pentapolis, according to which the bishop of Alexandria has authority over all these provinces, for this is also customary for the bishop of Rome. In like manner in Antioch and in the other provinces, the privileges (*ta presbeia*) are to be preserved to the churches."<sup>55</sup> Still

<sup>51</sup> PG 18:577-81.

<sup>52</sup> Eusebius, *H.E.*, 5.16.17 (*GCS* 9,1:466). See on this, H. Leclercq, "Chorévêques," *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* 3 (1914), cols. 1423-52.

<sup>53</sup> Canon 57. Text, see Hefele, *Histoire des Conciles*, Tome I, Deuxième Partie (Paris: Letouzey, 1907), p. 1024.

<sup>54</sup> Paulos Mar Gregorios [Verghese], "The Development of a Preeminence of Some Churches over Others and the Reasons for This," in *Fourth Ecumenical Consultation between Theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church*, Sept. 11-17, 1978, Vienna, published in *Wort und Wahrheit*, Supplement No. 4 (Vienna: Herder, 1978), pp. 15-22, here p. 15. See also, André de Halleux, "Autonomy and Centralization in the Ancient Syriac Churches: Edessa and Seleucia-Ctesiphon," *ibid.*, pp. 59-67.

<sup>55</sup> *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. by G. Alberigo (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, 1973), pp. 8-9.

the council did not intend to set up any kind of supervisory government for the "universal" Church.

### *Synods*

A third institution that brought about greater contact and coordination among the sister churches was the multiplication of synods.<sup>56</sup> Councils or synods are first mentioned in the second half of the second century when the Christians of Asia conducted a series of open-ended meetings under Apollinarius of Hieropolis to deal with Montanism.<sup>57</sup> Also under the reign of Marcus Aurelius, according to Eusebius, bishops in Thrace met to discuss the problems of the Phrygian church and prepared a document.<sup>58</sup> Some fifteen or twenty years later, synods multiplied in attempting to achieve harmony about the date for celebrating Easter.

One of the obvious models for synods was the provincial assembly established by the empire. Certain procedures at synods dated back even to the time of the Roman Senate. We are remarkably well informed about these meetings that took place in North Africa, especially the synods of Carthage in the early third century. Since we have only *acta* or a secretary's minutes the synods seem quite dull. Neither the passionate exchange of conflicting ideas, nor the liturgical, religious atmosphere of these synods has been preserved.

Synod participants were not exclusively bishops, though naturally they dominated. Concerning one meeting in A.D. 256 on the baptismal controversy Cyprian wrote: "On the kalends of September a great many bishops from the province of Africa, Numidia, and Mauritania met together in Carthage, together with

<sup>56</sup>On synods in the early Church, see: C. H. Turner, *Studies in Early Church History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912), esp. pp. 33-70; J. C. Ayer, *A Source Book for Ancient Church History. From the Apostolic Age to the Close of the Conciliar Period* (New York, 1913; reprinted, New York: AMS Press, 1970); Hilaire Marot, "Conciles anténicéens et conciles oecuméniques," *Le Concile et les conciles* (Paris: Cerf; Chevetogne: Abbaye, 1960), pp. 19-43; John Zizioulas, "The Development of Conciliar Structures to the Time of the First Ecumenical Council," in *Councils and the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC Studies No. 5 (Geneva: WCC, 1968), pp. 34-51; A. Grillmeier, "The Origins of the Conciliar Idea," *Wort und Wahrheit*, Supplement No. 3 [cf. above, note 17], 108-33; H. J. Sieben, *Die Konzils-idee der altern Kirche*, Konziliengeschichte, Reihe B: Untersuchungen (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1979). For studies on the early synods in Carthage, see: Jean-Louis Maier, *L'épiscopat de l'Afrique romaine, vandale et byzantine* (Rome: Institut Suisse, 1973), esp. pp. 17-91; Joseph A. Fischer, "Die Konzilien zu Karthago und Rom im Jahr 251," *Annuaire historique conciliorum* 11 (1979), 263-86; *Ib.*, "Die ersten Konzilien im römischen Nordwest-Afrika," in *Pietas: Festschrift für Bernhard Kötting, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, Ergänzungsband 8 (Münster: Aschendorf, 1980), 217-27.

<sup>57</sup>*H.E.*, 5.16.10 (*GCS* 9,1: 464).

<sup>58</sup>*H.E.*, 5.19.3-4 (*GCS* 9,1: 480).



the presbyters and deacons, and a considerable part of the congregation (*plebis*)."<sup>59</sup> These synods, however, exercised only that binding force which individual churches wished to attach to them. Cyprian makes this quite clear in his opening remarks at that synod: "No one of us sets himself up as a bishop of bishops, no one of us compels by tyrannical terror any colleague to the necessity of obedience, since every bishop, according to his right of liberty and power, has the right to judgment; no more can be judged by another any more than he himself can judge another."<sup>60</sup>

The synods especially those of the seventh, eighth and ninth generations, created the conditions of possibility for Constantine's convocation of what came to be called an ecumenical council, the climax of long antecedent activities. These synods did much to foster close contact among sister churches.

### Letter Writing

Letter writing was still another powerful factor in establishing sibling contact and sharing.<sup>61</sup> Christians were familiar with ecclesiastical uses of letters from the time of St. Paul. Even among the oldest non-canonical Christian writings the letter was a favorite literary genre. A number of pagans among the ruling class and the educated had mastered the epistolary form and mastered a style that very few Christians, if any, could match.

Still, as Robert Grant has pointed out, Hellenistic Jews and Christians of the second century belonged to a sector of society in which literary education was highly valued.<sup>62</sup> A disproportionate number of Christians wrote books. We hear nothing of Mithraist leaders or devotees reading and writing books or letters. But it is reported as pious fact, which may well have been the case, that some Christians were converted while reading: Justin, Tatian, Theophilus. The African martyrs of Scilli (A.D. 180) are described as drawing courage before death by reading Paul's letters, presumably already in Latin translation.

The Christian letters were hortatory and informational, but they were not consistently edifying or inspirational. Letters included angry outbursts, threats, sarcastic, caustic passages. What

<sup>59</sup> *Sententiae episcoporum*, in *Opera Cypriani*, Hartel 3; 435.7ff.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 436.3ff.

<sup>61</sup> On the importance of letters in the early church, see: Pierre Nautin, *Lettres et écrivains chrétiens des IIe et IIIe siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1961); E. Lanne, "Eglises locales et patriarcats à l'époque des grands conciles," *Irénikon* 34 (1961), 292-321; Hertling, *Communio*, pp. 28-36; Elert, *Eucharist*, esp. chap. 12, pp. 149-59; Adalbert Hamman, *La vie quotidienne des premiers chrétiens (95-197)* (Paris: Hachette, 1971), esp. pp. 11-67.

<sup>62</sup> Robert M. Grant, "The Social Setting of Second-Century Christianity," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, Vol. 1: *The Shaping of Christianity*, p. 21.

is interesting is not only that so many letters were written, but that they were so carefully preserved, copied, translated when necessary and circulated. Eusebius had impressive dossiers of letters available to him from the past. Letters too were addressed to correspondents in faraway places. Thus Cyprian wrote to Christians not only in Rome, but in Cappadocia, Spain, Gaul and the farther reaches of West North Africa. Letters seem to have been delivered relatively quickly, few complaints are recorded of letters being stolen, or having sunk to the bottom of the sea.

Among modern church historians Adolf von Harnack provided some of the best catalogues of letters.<sup>63</sup> The extent of the list is imposing. More recently Vogel has identified their various literary genres.<sup>64</sup> The principal forms include *litterae pacis*, letters conveying absolution for sinners, especially *lapsi*; *litterae pacis ecclesiasticae*, permission from a bishop to visit some high dignitary; *litterae sustaticae*, letters for dignitaries about to embark on official business; *litterae communicatoriae*, notification to neighboring and distant churches about a bishop's election; *litterae festales*, data about liturgical calendars; *epistolae tractoriae* or *circulares*, encyclicals intended for a broad audience; finally the *contesseratio hospitalitatis*, a sort of passport for Christian communities, a letter of good conduct entitling the bearer to free room and board in a distant church, at least for a short time.

The *litterae formatae*, set in a fixed legal language to protect against forgeries, were the predecessors of the various church orders, canonical and liturgical collections of instructions, such as the *Apostolic Tradition* (ca. 215), the *Didascalia* (ca. 230-250), the *Apostolic Constitutions* (ca. 380). Even the council acts of Carthage (256), the *Sententiae episcoporum*, are influenced by letters. The habit of letter writing, and of maintaining mailing lists, did much to create intra-church contact. Those cities that wrote the most were destined to exercise the greatest impact in the Church's decision making.

### *Roman Leadership*

A fifth factor that contributed to contact among the sister churches in the pre-Nicene church, especially, though not exclusively, in the Western Mediterranean was gradual assumption by

<sup>63</sup> Adolf Harnack, *The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, trans. by James Moffatt (New York: Putnam, 1904-05), Vol. I, pp. 462-72 [Harper paperback edition, 1962, pp. 369-80]; German original, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 2 vols., 4th rev. ed. (Leipzig: Hinrich, 1924), pp. 379-89. See also his *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius*, 2 vols. in 3 parts, 2nd rev. ed. (Leipzig: Hinrich, 1904-58).

<sup>64</sup> Vogel, pp. 615-16.

the church of Rome of regulating functions.<sup>65</sup> From an ecclesiastical and cultural viewpoint, Rome seemed at first an unlikely candidate for this leadership. Yet its status as the empire's capital and its ability to achieve harmony among its own Christian population (a microcosm of the Mediterranean world) enhanced Rome's status. But North Africa up until at least the death of Augustine (430) was a much more vital center for much of Western church life and theology.<sup>66</sup> From Africa came the first Latin version of the Bible; here the liturgy first took on a Latin shape. Probably founded by Eastern churches, North Africa, especially Carthage, rapidly lost its Eastern character. It coined and discussed theological terms such as *institutio*, *disciplina*, *regula fidei*, *successio*, *sacramentum*, even *primatus Petri* and *cathedra Petri*, all the time while the church of Rome was still using Greek for worship and theology.

Still Rome came to be seen as a church enjoying a *potentior principalitas*; as a local church it was seen to preside in love (*prokathēmatenē tēs agapēs*). This happened even though Rome was slow to commemorate liturgically the deaths of Peter and Paul. A liturgical calendar and commemoration of these and other Roman martyrs was late in coming. Before the Council of Nicaea there was, of course, no juridical formulation of Rome's role, much less talk of jurisdictional primacy or ministry of a "universal bishop." Still several things happened to contribute to the increase of sibling communion under Rome's initiative. Rome's church intervened to restore order in troubled Corinth (*I Clement*); it exercised pastoral care for those troubled about penitential practices (Hermas' *Shepherd*); a Roman bishop undertook initiatives with certain Eastern churches to try to harmonize the date for Easter; Rome had its list of episcopal succession and eventually

<sup>65</sup> See E. Lanne, "L'Eglise de Rome 'a gloriossimis duobus apostolis Petro et Paulo Romae fundatae et constitutae ecclesiae,'" *Adv. Haer.* III,3,2" *Irénikon* 49 (1976), 275-322. Also, Robert B. Eno, "Some Elements in the Pre-History of Papal Infallibility," in *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church*, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VI (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), pp. 238-58 and 344-51; Hermann Vogt, "Necessity and Signs of 'Communio' between the Local Churches," *Wort und Wahrheit*, Supplement No. 3 (1976), 77-89.

<sup>66</sup> On North Africa see the recent Catholic study: Werner Marschall, *Karthago und Rom. Die Stellung der nordafrikanischen Kirche zum Apostolischen Stuhl in Rom, Päpste und Papsttum*, Bd. I (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1971). Earlier useful works: G. Bardy, *L'Afrique chrétienne* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1930); W. H. C. Frend, "The 'seniores laici' and the Origins of the Church in North Africa," *JTS* 12 (1961), 280-84; R. A. Markus, "Christianity and Dissent in Roman North Africa: Changing Perspectives in Recent Work," in *Schism, Heresy and Religious Protest*, Studies in Church History 9, ed. by D. Baker (Cambridge: CUP, 1972), pp. 21-36; W. H. C. Frend, "Jews and Christians in Third Century Carthage," in *Paganisme, judaïsme, christianisme. Influences et affrontements dans le monde antique. Mélanges Marcel Simon* (Paris: de Boccard, 1978), pp. 185-94.

drew ecclesiastical conclusions from that list; a person living in Rome composed the *Apostolic Tradition* that regulated liturgical practices; Rome undertook acts of charity, notably financial support toward other churches.<sup>67</sup> This sort of early Roman activity is underscored at Vatican II in the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*; a more nuanced statement occurs in the U.S. Lutheran/Roman Catholic statement on papal primacy.<sup>68</sup>

The third-century church of Rome in its own eyes and in the view of some other churches came to be seen as protector of antiquity. The remark of Pope Stephen I (254-57) is characteristic: "*Nihil innovetur nisi quod traditum est.*" It prompted Cyprian's retort: "*Consuetudo sine veritate, vetustas erroris est.*"<sup>69</sup> According to Batiffol, Stephen I was the first bishop of Rome to claim that he, as successor to the *cathedra Petri*, possessed special privileges.<sup>70</sup> Thus, as Koch observed in his book on Cyprian and the Roman primacy, Rome passed from the rank of sister to that of mother, or better yet passed to the rank of big sister.<sup>71</sup>

Possibly in reaction to the way Rome was understanding its function in the Western churches, Cyprian theologized on the churches' collective responsibility. The late Maurice Bévenot has assisted us in his various studies to appreciate better that when Cyprian writes of *primatus* he is not thinking of the primacy as such, but rather a primacy, a sort of honorary priority connected with the antiquity of the Roman church.<sup>72</sup> For Cyprian the passage Matthew 16:18 was not referring to initiating a Petrine primacy so much as a foundational act of the episcopacy. This was so because Peter was the first to receive what was subsequently conferred on all the apostles. Peter's vocation was to be the "*initium episcopatus et ecclesiae.*" Rome was an *ecclesia principalis*<sup>73</sup> but in the sense that it was founded by Peter who enjoyed chronological

<sup>67</sup> Vogel, pp. 623-28.

<sup>68</sup> The text of *Unitatis redintegratio* no. 14 perhaps states more than can be historically established: "If disagreements in faith and discipline arose among them [churches of East and West], the Roman See acted by common consent as moderator." The Lutheran/Roman Catholic statement is found in: "Different Attitudes Toward Papal Primacy: Common Statement," no. 16, in *Papal Primacy* [see above, note 28], p. 17.

<sup>69</sup> Ep. 74.9 (Hartel 806.23). The quote from Stephen is contained in Cyprian, Ep. 74.2 (Hartel 800.7).

<sup>70</sup> See P. Batiffol, *Cathedra Petri* [see note 8].

<sup>71</sup> Jean Colson, *L'Épiscopat catholique. Collégialité et primauté dans les trois premiers siècles de l'Église*, Unam Sanctam 43 (Paris: Cerf, 1963), p. 127. Colson cites H. Koch's *Cyprian und der römische Primat*, 1910, p. 148 which he incorrectly attributes to Harnack.

<sup>72</sup> See Bévenot, "'Primatus Petro datur': St. Cyprian on the Papacy," *JTS* 5 (1954), 19-35. See also, Ulrich Wickert, *Sacramentum Unitatis. Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der Kirche bei Cyprian* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971).

<sup>73</sup> Ep. 59.14 (Hartel 683.10).

pre-eminence over the other apostles. The *cathedra Petri*, therefore, was not restricted to the church of Rome but belonged to each local church.

Roman initiatives strengthened sibling contact and cooperation even though the self-understanding of some of its leaders was questioned and challenged by other local churches.

### *Emperor Constantine*

A final element to consider in our survey of factors that fostered sibling communion in the pre-Nicene churches concerns the policies of Emperor Constantine who reigned from 306-337. In a sense, this element was external to the churches because his motives were governmental and economic. Still the policies had enormous repercussions.

The so-called Constantinian turning point has been the object of considerable research over the last twenty years.<sup>74</sup> At the same time a fresh look has been taken at the persecutions that preceded Constantine's reign. Important as Constantine's role was we should not exaggerate the changes he effected nor paint in too contrasting colors the churches before and after the Edict of Milan (313). Whatever the earlier terrors of persecution, they were for the most part local pogroms, rarely affecting the whole Mediterranean. Periods of peace before Constantine covered whole generations, as the stretch from 260 to 303 A.D. Constantine did not give the Church its structures, they were already well in place before his decree of peace. What Christianity acquired now was some political force to achieve its goals. The emperor, perhaps out of a sense of destiny, was haunted by a desire to assist in the coordination of local churches. Thus he tried to achieve that through his influence and initiatives. He grossly overestimated his abilities to succeed, as is proven by his lack of success with Donatists and Arians. But it was he who ordered the synods at Rome (313) and at Arles (314) in search of harmony. It was he as an unbaptised catechumen who presided at Nicaea and gave its opening talk in Latin.

For Eusebius, Constantine was *episkopos tōn ektos*, bishop for the outside; he was also the fulfillment of several Old Testament messianic prophecies that Christ had postponed until the

<sup>74</sup> See: J. Vogt, "Constantinus der Grosse," *RAC* vol. 3 (1957), cols. 306-79; P. Stockmeier, "Constantinian Era," *Sacramentum Mundi* Vol. 1 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), pp. 416-21; A. H. M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (London: English U. Press, 1949); Norman Baynes, *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church*, reprinted, ed. by H. Chadwick (London: Oxford University Press, 1972) [a lecture first read March 12, 1930]; R. A. Markus, *Christianity in the Roman World* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1974), esp. chap. 5: "The Constantinian Revolution," pp. 87-104.

arrival of the Vicar of Christ, the Emperor. His influence was more as sponsor than legislator. His favors to the Christian churches made him a popular benefactor: confiscated property was restored, finances were available for church buildings, clergy were exempt from certain duties and taxes.<sup>75</sup> This was not yet the full flowering of the nomocanonical tradition, the wedding of church and state legislation that would come with his successors, nor was it strictly caesaro-papism.

As he tried to facilitate contact with sister churches and to settle arguments even within local churches, Constantine succeeded only partially. Still the increase in uniformity and homogeneity made it more and more difficult for the churches to remain comfortable with divergencies even in unessential matters.

#### CONCLUSION

We now conclude our overview of major elements that contributed to the coordination of sister churches before Nicaea. Some factors were principally religious, such as the celebration of the Eucharist, the sacramental installation of new bishops by neighboring bishops. Some were organizational and social, such as the convocation of synods or letter writing. Others concentrated coordination within one person or one institution, be it the see of Rome or the imperial court of New Rome.

Such moves toward greater coordination were inevitable, even desirable, for without it Christianity would have faced the same fragmentation that weakened Gnosticism. The motivating factors were not only religious ones. As early as the letter of Rome to Corinth (*I Clement*) a solid Stoic sense of order and harmony was one contributing element, together perhaps with Platonic political theory.<sup>76</sup> Also at work in inner church life and in its outreach was the fact, as PHEME PERKINS has noted, that Christianity freed pagans from being trapped in only those complex family and patronage relationships which regulated surrounding society.<sup>77</sup> Regional Christian loyalties were strong. Thus, for example, when Syrian or Egyptian Christians supported Monophysite formulations it was not so much adherence to an abstruse point of

<sup>75</sup>Perikles-Petros Joannou, *La législation impériale et la christianisation de l'Empire romain (311-476)*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 192 (Rome: PIO, 1972). See also Vogel, pp. 610-12.

<sup>76</sup>Theofried Baumeister, "Ordnungsdanken und charismatische Geisterführung in der Alten Kirche," *Römische Quartalschrift* 73 (1978), 137-51. See also J. Stelzenberger, *Die Beziehungen der frühchristlichen Sittenlehre zur Ethik der Stoa* (Munich, 1933); Michel Spanneut, *Le Stoïcisme des Pères de l'Eglise de Clément de Rome à Clément d'Alexandrie* (Paris: Seuil, 1957).

<sup>77</sup>Perkins, *The Gnostic Dialogue* [see above, note 6], p. 191.

doctrine, rather as loyalty to one's own church, one's own bishop, and one's own holy men.

A one-hour overview of seven generations in the pre-Nicene era is no mini course in patristic ecclesiology. At most we have only erected pathfinders for future surveyors. Still our study underscores certain valuable lessons for ourselves here and now.

Despite the beginnings of interdisciplinary work in this field we still need far greater cooperation with historians, classicists, liturgists, canon lawyers, New Testament scholars, and philosophers. The work of the CTSA proceeds separately from that of the Catholic Historical Association, the Canon Law Society of America, the North American Academy of Liturgy, as well as the AAR and the SBL, and indeed other professional societies. How can we better collaborate with persons who understand the social structure of the Roman Empire, the various strands of Gnosticism, the Mystery religions, Stoicism, etc.? The answer is not publishing more *Festschriften*; more appropriate might be undertaking a joint publication in the style of the *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*.

We need to keep in mind that history is one specialty among eight functional specialties, to use Lonergan's terminology. This history needs to be completed by dialectic, foundations, doctrines, systematics and especially communications. One possible creative undertaking would be to try to combine the wealth of historical data about the early Church amassed during the last one hundred years with the brilliant synthesis produced by Johann Adam Möhler in 1825 as *Einheit in der Kirche*.<sup>78</sup> A possible model would be to attempt for the pre-Nicene era what James Dunn has achieved for the New Testament period.<sup>79</sup>

As a collective body of scholars, we Roman Catholics of the West are subject to specific temptations, one of which is retrojection, distorting ancient thought-forms to have them correspond with our own present preoccupations. Many examples illustrate how over the centuries we have put our own meanings into what the early Church meant by *traditio*, *primatus*, *ordinatio*, *ecclesia catholica*, *ecclesia mater*, *episcopatus*. Even the questions we ask may not be the best ones to permit us to enter the Christian world before Nicaea. Preoccupation with ecclesiastical forms and structures obscures our appreciation of personal piety, eschatological hopes and religious aspirations among pre-Nicene Christians.

<sup>78</sup>*Die Einheit in der Kirche oder das Prinzip der Katholizismus, dargestellt im Geiste der Kirchenväter der drei ersten Jahrhunderte* (1825); see French translation, *L'Unité dans l'Eglise*, Unam Sanctam 2 (Paris: Cerf, 1938).

<sup>79</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament. An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977).

In this century as a Catholic community we have had to learn how to read the New Testament in a different perspective, with greater attention to literary genre, *Sitz im Leben*, and history-of-religions research. That same intellectual conversion is needed as we approach the corpus of pre-Nicene texts: tractates, letters, minutes, apocryphal stories, liturgical prayers. It would be ironic if, long after the waning of biblical fundamentalism, we were hindered by a literalist reading of Eusebius. We may object to Walter Bauer's facile use of the terms "orthodoxy" and "heresy," but we cannot afford to block out his perspective about the pre-Nicene churches.

Finally, and delicately, we must raise the most difficult question about the absolute character of our confessional allegiance. In other words, how unbending must our commitments be to specific developments in historic church orders, in conciliar decisions, in forms of fostering sibling communion. One testing ground for determining our flexibility about confessional allegiance will be the way we deal with the ancient Oriental churches and the Eastern Orthodox churches. Must we demand of these sister churches before we enter into full communion with them a level of agreement not demanded in the second or third century?

Karl Rahner, in a talk to an international symposium of Jesuit ecumenists held in Frankfurt in 1977, chose for his address the provocative title: "Open Questions in Dogmatic Theology Considered by the Official Church as Definitively Answered." Are we willing to commit ourselves to an ongoing project just beginning under a similar title: "Different Self-Definitions in Pre-Nicene Sister Churches Considered by the Modern Church as Decidedly Inadequate"?

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