

although we weep for our sins and the sins of others, although we are saddened because of the lack of unity in ourselves and around us, we may be filled with the joy of His presence and the peace of His pardon. Jesus has overcome the world, sin and death. He joins us to Himself in His victory, so that all may be one.

RECONCILIATION IN THE EARLY CHURCH

by Hamilton Hess



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The history of the early Church unfortunately bears witness to numerous divisions among Christians, both individual and collective. Neither the prayer of the Lord for the unity of his followers (Jn. 17.11) nor the patristic symbol of the Church as the seamless robe of Christ were realized in fact during the early centuries any more than they have been in later times; but, in the manner of a paradox, the oneness of the Church was regarded both as a theological necessity and as a goal to be achieved.

The topic of this present study is the quest for reconciliation during the first five centuries and the ways in which it was pursued. While attempts toward union were frequently unsuccessful, certain principles and approaches were developed during the process which remain of interest today.

The nature of schism and the ways of reconciliation were recognized from the first century onward to be grounded in the nature of the Church. The essential oneness of the Church, its singleness in Christ, was a fundamental aspect of its nature which is clearly expressed in the New Testament. While both the Pauline and Johannine writings already recognized divisions among Jesus' followers (e.g. I Cor. 3:3-4,

3 Jn. 9-10), both provide basic models of the Church which powerfully express the inherent unity which is essential to its life and being. The Johannine "I am the vine and you are the branches" (Jn. 15:5), as a saying attributed to Jesus himself, and the Pauline model of the Church as a body composed of many members indwelt by the Holy Spirit and with Christ at its head, bespeak a common understanding of the Church as the intrinsic participation of the followers of Jesus in his own risen humanity.

The ecclesiology of the second and third centuries deepened and expanded the Apostolic understanding of the Church as the unique and singly identifiable organ of the risen Christ in the world. In about 107 A.D., Ignatius of Antioch referred to the Church as the means of union with God and asserted the impossibility of anyone inheriting the kingdom of God who separates himself from the Church.(1) Irenaeus wrote from Gaul at the end of the second century, "Where the Church is there is the Spirit of God, and where the Spirit of God is there is the Church and all grace. . . . Those, therefore, who do not participate in the Spirit neither feed at their mother's breasts nor drink the bright fountain issuing from Christ's body."(2) Tertullian in North Africa during the early third century states that just as there is one Lord, one faith and one baptism, there can only be one Church spread throughout the world.(3) We hear from Cyprian in Africa in the middle of the third century that "he cannot have God for his Father who has not the Church for his mother."(4) Even more pointedly, he pronounced that "outside the Church there is no salvation."(5) These were common teachings of the period.

Quite simply, the Church was understood to be a single, visible communion. To be outside this communion is to be outside the Church, to be apart from Christ, to be without the life of the Holy Spirit, and to be without hope of salvation. The separation of individual Christians or groups of Christians, both small and large, involved a total cutting off from the Church. There was seen to be no possibility of schism within the Church. One was either in and of the Church or not in and not of the Church. Dissident groups considered themselves to be the one true Church and the one communion of Christ in the world, just as the main body of Christians considered itself to be the true and only Church. Reconciliation between separated communions, as such, was not seen to be possible. Union, or reunion, could only be affected by individual conversions and individual submission to the one communion or to the other.

Although this radical distinction between church and non-church and

the impossibility of corporate reconciliation continued to be held in theory throughout the patristic period, certain significant modifications began to emerge during the third to fifth centuries. The first known step toward a recognition of the possibility of participation in Christ outside the visible communion in the Church was taken in 256 by Stephen, Bishop of Rome, in his recognition of the validity of baptism conferred in the rigorous Novationist sect. Novatian and his followers had separated from the main body of the Church in Italy and North Africa over the issue of the reconciliation of those who had apostatized in time of persecution. The policy advanced by Stephen was also expressed in a contemporary work, De Rebaptismate, but the novelty of his move was underscored by the opposition which it provoked from Cyprian, who was vociferously supported by Firmilian, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia. Firmilian wrote to Cyprian, "I am justly indignant with the open and obvious foolishness of Stephen. . . he . . . establishes the novel structures of many churches, inasmuch as he lends his authority to the validity of schismatical baptisms".(6) In this, it is presumed, Firmilian was generally representative of eastern thought on the matter.

The next development was provided sixty years later by a commission mandated by the Emperor Constantine, and which became by ecclesiastical refashioning the Roman Synod of 313 held under Pope Miltiades for consideration of the Donatist schism in North Africa. The Donatists were another rigorous group which claimed that the consecration of Caecilian, Bishop of Carthage, had been invalid because one of his consecrators had allegedly handed over the scriptures to the Roman authorities during the persecution under the Emperor Diocletian. In addition to Miltiades, the synod was composed of four Gallican bishops and fourteen Italian bishops. Twenty African bishops were present, with ten representing each side of the dispute. As a means of ending the division, which had become a severe problem for the African Church, the synod offered to receive the Donatist Bishops, inclusive of those who had been ordained in schism, into the communion of the Church in their episcopal rank and to assign an equitable division of churches between them and the Catholic bishops in Africa.(7)

This was a radically innovative step. While schismatic baptism had by the fourth century become generally regarded as valid, at least in the West, schismatic ordinations had not. Furthermore, by universal custom, bishops and other clergy who had entered into schism in the clerical state, and also those who had been ordained in schism, were required to seek admission to the Catholic community as public penitents because of the gravity of the sin of schism. Another generally observed

rule excluded public penitents from future service in ministry. In the interests of peace and pastoral concern, and undoubtedly under pressure from the Emperor, who saw divisions among Christians as a threat to the tranquillity of the state, the Roman Synod made a major disciplinary concession. But even more importantly, without justification or commentary, it implicitly acknowledged the validity of Donatist ordinations and the reality of their ministry. The solution offered by the commission-turned-synod was rejected by the Donatists, but the recognition given and the precedent set paved the way for further developments.

The same issues arose fifteen years later at the Council of Nicaea in dealing with the reconciliation of clergy from the Novatianist schism and from the Melitians in Egypt. In both of these cases the disciplinary barrier to ordination for clergy received was removed. For the Melitian clergy this seems to have been the basic concession that was made. Melitius himself, the leader of the schism and a former Catholic bishop, would be allowed to retain the name of bishop and presumably the pastoral function, but not to ordain. The bishops ordained by him in schism could be ordained as Catholic clergy (presbyters, presumably) and would rank after their bishop with capability of succession to his office if so elected.(8) With regard to the Novatianist clergy, Canon 8 of Nicaea ruled that they might be received into the Catholic communion with the "laying on of hands" and with the proviso that they would not displace Catholic clergy from positions of authority. There is some question in interpretation as to whether the laying on of hands was to be simply a sign of reconciliation, as was generally observed with the reconciliation of penitents, or whether it was intended by the bishops of Nicaea to be reordination. The North African Church interpreted it to be simply a sign of reconciliation, with the recognition that the clerical orders received in schism were valid, but there is evidence that the easterns generally understood the laying on of hands specified in the Nicene canon to mean reordination.(9) Whatever the intended meaning was at Nicaea, it is likely that the African interpretation was influenced by the decision of the Roman Synod of 313.

These developments witness to a growing recognition not only of schismatic ministerial order but also of schismatic churches, although such recognition was undoubtedly understood to remain in the realm of pastoral accommodation and diplomatic practice rather than of theological affirmation. St. Augustine, of whose efforts toward the reconciliation of the Donatists we will have more to say below, was the patristic writer most theologically articulate on these matters, but his

acknowledgement of the ecclesial reality of the Donatists' organization is at best questionable.

Before further pursuit of the Donatist question, it will be instructive to review the situation at Antioch in Syria during the fourth and fifth centuries, or, more precisely, the seventy years between 343 and 413. Throughout the period, at least two and sometimes three separate bishops and congregations not in communion with each other claimed to be the authentic Catholic Church at Antioch. The major sees of Christendom--Rome, Constantinople and Alexandria--and lesser sees as well, were for the most part in communion with each other during this tumultuous period, but they were frequently in communion with different bishops and congregations at Antioch.

The situation first arose when Eustathius, Bishop of Antioch, champion of Nicene orthodoxy and close associate of Athanasius, was deposed by a council of Arian partisans meeting at Antioch in 330 and exiled by the Emperor Constantine. While the departing Eustathius counseled his people not to perpetrate a schism but to remain faithful to the established church in Antioch, even under the bishops of Arian sympathies who were sure to follow, his advice was abandoned after 343. The Church of Antioch under Eustathius' Arianizing successor remained in communion with Rome, Constantinople and Alexandria until 335, and then lost communion with Alexandria only. In 343, Antioch also lost communion with Rome. Following the decree of deposition against Stephen of Antioch by the Nicene bishops at the Council of Sardica in 343, a scrupulously Nicean party at Antioch worshipped separately from the official church under the leadership of the presbyter Paulinus, but they refrained at that time from acquiring a bishop of their own. Melitius, Bishop of Sebaste, was appointed to the See of Antioch in 360, but was banished by the Emperor Constantius only a month after his installation because of his moderate views. When the Arian Euzoius was appointed as a candidate acceptable to Constantius, the majority of Antiochene Christians still adhered to Melitius, and the small Nicene party was still led by Paulinus. The West was now out of communion with all three groups at Antioch, Alexandria was in communion with Paulinus, and most of the East communicated with the followers of Melitius.

In the face of this tangle of allegiances, outside negotiations for the simplification of affairs at Antioch were initiated by Athanasius at the Synod of Alexandria in 362 and were continued intermittently by others, including the respected Cappadocians, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory Nazianzus. As an additional complication, Paulinus was consecrated bishop of the Nicene congregation still faithful to the

memory of Eustathius, following the conciliatory Synod of Alexandria. Later in the century, Alexandria was still in communion with Paulinus and with Damasus of Rome. Damasus was in communion with Paulinus and Nectarius of Constantinople, and Nectarius was in communion with Flavian of Antioch, Bishop of the party of Melitius. A final settlement with a single bishop and a single congregation was established under Alexander as Bishop of Antioch in 413.

Scarcely has there been a more complex situation and set of ecclesiastic relationships in the history of the Church. From it, we can make two important observations. First, although the ecclesial reality of one or another of the co-existent Antiochene congregations was as far as we know never directly discussed, all of them in fact could only be regarded as being in and of the Church simultaneously by a kind of mediated communion through churches in communion with them and with each other. Second, in the larger view, the protracted failure of reconciliation was a problem of greater magnitude than any one individual group or political force could hope to control. Personal and factional rivalries, the rivalries among major sees, doctrinal and disciplinary differences and misunderstandings, and the powerful and often shifting winds of imperial policy combined to provide a dynamic of alienation that could only be allowed to run its course, while moderated by patient negotiators as often as opportunity presented itself.

Apart from individual submissions to the Catholic Church and with some flow of conversions going the other way as well, the Donatist schism continued without resolution until the final eclipse of Christianity in North Africa during the seventh and eighth centuries which resulted from the Muslim conquest. Nevertheless, the attempts at reconciliation continued, and the role played by Augustine during the late fourth and early fifth centuries is of special interest because it shows a specifically theological development regarding Church and sacraments and ministry that did not emerge in relation to the Antiochene schisms nor elsewhere in the East.

The African Bishop Optatus of Milevis in the latter part of fourth century continued the case against the Donatists by arguing that sacraments are holy in themselves and not because of the holiness of the minister who celebrates them. He maintained that the sacraments are holy because God is holy and they are God's own actions. In baptism it is Christ who baptizes, not the possibly unworthy, faithless and schismatic minister.(10) Optatus developed this argument both as a means of refuting the Donatist teaching of sacramental defect by virtue of an unworthy minister and as a theological explanation of the then

universal recognition in the West of the validity of Donatist and other schismatic baptisms. Because of Optatus' assumption, still shared by all Christians in his day, that all congregations of Christians outside the one church must be non-church, his position was based on a consideration of sacraments and their ministers and not on sacraments and ministry as actions of God through the Church. It is presumably for this reason that Optatus did not take a position on, nor did he treat, the question as to the effects of schismatic baptism on the person baptized.

This provides the background to Augustine's more extensively developed theological approach to the question of sacraments and ministry, and to his implicit, but only implicit, recognition of the ecclesial reality of the Donatist organization. In the fifth century, Augustine, bishop of Hippo, was faced with a rival Donatist communion now a century old which continued to sap the energies of the Church and even to claim a majority of Christians in some areas of North Africa. Augustine's objectives were both conciliatory and controversial: controversial toward the refutation of the Donatist practice of the reordination of Catholic clergy who became Donatists, and conciliatory in terms of pastoral concern for Donatist Christians, many of whom he recognized to be good and even holy men and women. The positive effects of the faith of these persons could not be denied. But Augustine continued to maintain the traditional view of the sole identity of the Church with the one Catholic communion, and this gave rise to an aspect of his theology which ultimately called for further resolution. His developed position is as follows. The sacraments, he contended, are God's sacraments which he has entrusted to the Church. When they are conferred outside the Church they are still the sacraments of the Church and they are valid, but they are not efficacious; that is the effects or grace of the sacraments are not received. The effects are received only if and when the recipient enters the communion of the Church in which the life and gifts of the Holy Spirit are present. Augustine applied this argument to the sacrament of holy orders, giving theological justification and recognition to the practice of the reconciliation of separated bishops and other clergy to the Catholic Church in their former status.

Augustine's distinction between sacramental validity and efficacy did not withstand the test of time, involving as it does an intolerable tension between the sacramental sign of God's gift and the gift itself, and between the sacraments and the Church. This was later resolved by the distinction between validity and regularity. Implicit in Augustine, and even more clearly under the later distinction is the recognition of

the Church's presence and life in the separated community. While not developed in the East during patristic times (nor later, as it was in the West), the same theological approach would be applied to the Antiochene and other eastern schisms. As for the situation in North Africa, Augustine's thesis was sufficiently attractive to bring a number of Donatist bishops and clergy into the Catholic community.

NOTES

1. Epistle to the Philadelphians, 3.
2. Against the Heresies, III.24.1
3. Apology, 39.1
4. On the Unity of the Church, 6.
5. Epistle 73.21
6. Preserved as Epistle 75 of Cyprian.
7. See Augustine, Epistle 43.16.
8. Synodical Letter in Socrates, History of the Church, I.9
9. So Basil of Caesarea and Theophilus of Alexandria.
10. Contra Parmenianum, V.4.

PIUS VII, NAPOLEON, AND

THE CONCORDAT OF 1801

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In June 1800, Napoleon Bonaparte took the first step to come to terms with Pope Pius VII on the status of the Church in France.(1) The First Consul, a pragmatic deist and cynical moral relativist, was hardly motivated by religious convictions or by lofty ideals to make peace with the pope and put an end to the ten year struggle between Church and State in France. However, when he overthrew the Directory government