

An African in Rome

Victor I, the Date of Easter, and Pluralist Christianity

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Abstract

At the end of the second century, Christianity in Rome existed as a federation of individual communities, despite the narrative provided in the fourth century by Eusebius. There was a multiplicity of leaders, of social backgrounds, of languages, of beliefs, and of practices among the Christians of Rome. How did the church of Rome maintain unity internally and externally in the presence of such diversity? By the end of the second century, with Victor, that forbearance came to a dramatic end. The best-known example is the Quartodeciman controversy over the dating of Easter. Other examples include his reaction to Monarchians, Montanists, and Valentinians. In itself, this is not evidence that Victor was attempting to act as sole bishop of Rome, but simply that he used the structures of the pluralist communities to push for greater theological conformity, which contributed to the centralisation of leadership in Rome. As a qualifier, it will be argued that he was not opposed to pluralism *per se*, but was opposed to it when he became aware of any particular threat divergence presented to Christian life and thought.

Keywords

Roman bishops – Victor I – Hippolytus – Quartodeciman controversy – Monarchianism – Montanism – Valentinianism

1 Introduction*

It is now well established in scholarship that the portrait of the Roman church in the first and second centuries presented by, among others, Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Historia ecclesiastica*, with its succession of *monepiskopi* from the time of Peter, was a fourth-century reimagining and that the reality for those early centuries was more likely to have been a formed federation of individual communities each with its own *episkopos*.¹ As Wayne Meeks observed with regard to the earliest years of Christianity: “The number of such household

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- 1 G. La Piana, “The Roman Church at the End of the Second Century,” *HTR*, 18 (1925), pp. 201–277; G. Jay, “From Presbyter-Bishops to Bishops and Presbyters,” *SecCent*, 1 (1981), pp. 125–162; J.S. Jeffers, *Conflict at Rome: Social Order and Hierarchy in Early Christianity*, Minneapolis, 1991, who, on p. 190, dates the emergence of a single leader to the middle of the second century under Anicetus; A. Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension before the Emergence of a Monarch-Bishop* (SupVC, 31), Leiden, 1995, who, on p. 412, argues that monepiscopacy only became fixed in the middle of the third century under Cornelius; P. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, trans. M. Steinhauser, Eng. edn, Minneapolis, 2003, p. 397, who dates the emergence of an effective monarchical episcopacy to Victor at the end of the second century; and A.C. Stewart, *The Original Bishops: Office and Order in the First Christian Communities*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2014, p. 3, who carefully provides the definition of monepiscopacy used here of a sole bishop within a city with subordinate officers, and who, on p. 25, dates the emergence of a monepiscopacy in Rome to Victor. On p. 48, Stewart provides the definition of *presbyteros* and *episkopos* accepted here: “taking *presbyteroi* as a collective term for the individual *episkopoi* gather together.” An *episkopos* was the leader of a small household community, who was a *presbyteros kaka polin* when gathered with the other *episkopoi* of a city. See also J.A. Fitzmyer, “The Structural Ministry of the Church in the Pastoral Epistles,” *CBQ*, 66 (2004), pp. 582–596, here pp. 589–591. Cf. C.C. Caragounis, “From Obscurity to Prominence: The Development of the Roman Church between Romans and 1 Clement,” in: *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome*, eds. K.P. Donfried, P. Richardson, Grand Rapids, MI, 1998, pp. 245–279; B.L. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church* (Studies in Biblical Literature, 57), Bern, 2003, who argues that *episkopos* and *presbyteros* were interchangeable terms (whereas Stewart argues that they were used of the same person but in different capacities); and M. Reasoner, “A Traditional Response to Peter Lampe’s Picture of Christians in Rome,” in: *The First Urban Churches, 6: Rome and Ostia*, eds. J.R. Harrison, L.L. Welborn (WGRWSup, 18), Atlanta, 2021, pp. 427–449, who argues reasonably that ‘fractionation’ implies a breakdown of an original unity and that epigenesis may be a better term for presenting the multiple origins of Roman Christianity. He argues that Rome would have had a single bishop much earlier than Lampe would permit, in part based upon an argument about bishops and presbyters. The problem is Reasoner has not taken the refinements of Brent and Stewart into account. See P. Lampe, “From Individual Inscriptions and Images to

assemblies in each city will have varied from place to place and from time to time, but we may assume that there were ordinarily several in each place.”² What scholarship has concluded in recent decades is that this situation existed in Rome when Christianity was established and that it lasted for nearly two centuries until there was a united community under the leadership of a single bishop. At some point the originally disparate Christian communities in Rome, each headed by its own bishop, formed a coalition or federation while still maintaining their individual identities before then becoming one church with one bishop. These local communities were diverse in terms of social composition (rich and poor, local and immigrant, free and slave, young and old, male and female, Greek and Latin speaking) and in terms of beliefs and practices, given the presence there of individuals like Marcion and Valentinus. Only in rare circumstances, as with Marcion and Cerdo, was there any exclusion of anyone from fellowship.³

This attitude of tolerance changed with Victor who opposed not only the Quartodecimans, but Adoptionists, Montanists, and others as well.⁴ Who was Victor, what office did he hold, and to what extent did his desire for theological uniformity and rejection of pluralism have an impact on the pattern of ministry within Rome? Was his tough attitude and forcefulness of personality responsible for bringing about the emergence of a sole bishop in Rome?

The most recent and most extensive investigation into Victor, that of András Handl, argues that he was not the first ‘monarchical’ bishop in Rome in that he operated within a collegial setting and that he was not particularly strident against those who held differing views.⁵ This paper, while agreeing that he was not the first *monepiskopos* in Rome and did work collegially, will challenge Handl’s notion that Victor worked collegially with subservient presbyters by

Conceptual Issues: Response to Jutta Dresken-Wieland and Mark Reasoner,” in Harrison and Welborn, *The First Urban Churches*, pp. 473–483.

2 W.A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, New Haven – London, 1983, p. 76.

3 Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, pp. 392–394.

4 See F.S. Barcellona, “Vittore I, santo,” in: *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, 1: *Pietro, santo – Anastasio Bibliotecario, antipapal*, ed. M. Bray, Rome, 2000, pp. 229–234.

5 A. Handl, “Viktor I. (189?-199?) von Rom und die Entstehung des ‘monarchischen’ Episkopats in Rom,” *SE*, 55 (2016), pp. 7–56, here pp. 11–13. It is Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, pp. 397 and 402–403, who uses the term ‘monarchical episcopacy’ rather than monepiscopacy, so the statement in Handl on p. 8 “dass der *Übergang* vom ‘Monepiskopat’ zum ‘monarchischen Episkopat’ in Rom vergleichsweise spät, erst in der Amtszeit Viktors I.” (emphasis added), does not represent Lampe. It comes instead from G. Schöllgen, “Monepiskopat und monarchischer Episkopat: Eine Bemerkung zur Terminologie,” *ZNTW*, 77 (1986), pp. 146–151, but I fail to see it as a meaningful distinction.

maintaining that he worked with a college of fellow bishops. His last point will also be challenged by arguing that Victor was indeed a bellicose and intolerant leader – but only when issues were brought to his attention – who managed to impose his will upon those colleagues. A changed attitude towards religious pluralism most likely accelerated the process of unifying the church of Rome under a single bishop.

2 Victor's Background

In addition to Eusebius' *Historia ecclesiastica*, one of our other principal sources for biographical information about Victor is *Liber pontificalis*. Yet, like Eusebius, it is a terse and not unproblematic source. It is *Liber pontificalis*, initially composed many centuries later and sharing the same conceptual framework about episcopal succession with Eusebius, that reports Victor as having been born in Africa, the first of Rome's bishops to be born there,⁶ and that his father's name was Felix.⁷ These two names, if we accept the veracity of *Liber pontificalis* on this point, would suggest that Victor came from a Latin-speaking family. He would have been an immigrant to Rome but at what age he arrived, what his citizenship status was, how he identified himself, and how much he or others considered him to be a foreigner is not known.⁸ Although impossible to answer, these are factors that could have shaped Victor's sense of belonging in the Roman church and his attitude towards others. We can be confident that he belonged enough since he was able to achieve a position of leadership and prominence.

Liber pontificalis also reports him becoming bishop in 186 (the fifth consulship of Commodus and that of Manius Acilius Glabrio) and being in office for ten years and two months.⁹ Eusebius reports him becoming bishop in the

6 There would not be another, according to *Lib. pont.*, until the early fourth century with Miltiades.

7 *Lib. pont.* 15.1 (L. Duchense, C. Vogels, eds, *Le Liber pontificalis: Texte, introduction et commentaire*, 1, 2nd edn, Paris, 1955, p. 137). On *Lib. pont.* See R. McKitterick, *Rome and the Invention of the Papacy: The Liber pontificalis* (The James Lydon Lectures in Medieval History and Culture), Cambridge, 2020.

8 For a consideration of such questions applied to Tertullian, a contemporary African Christian, see D.E. Wilhite, *Tertullian the African* (Millennium Studies, 14), Berlin – New York, 2007. A. Handl, "All Roads Lead to Conflict? Christian Migration to Rome circa 200," *JAC*, 63 (2020), pp. 118–138, looks at the migration to Rome of some of the groups considered in this paper, but does not consider Victor as a migrant to Rome.

9 *Lib. pont.* 15.1 (Duchesne, Vogels, *Le Liber pontificalis*, 1.137). See P.M.M. Leunissen, *Konsuln und Konsulare in der Zeit von Commodus bis Severus Alexander (180–235 n. Chr.)*. *Prosopographische Untersuchungen zur senatorischen Elite in römischen Kaiserreich* (Dutch Monographs on Ancient History and Archaeology, 6), Amsterdam, 1989, pp. 130–131.

tenth year of the reign of Commodus (i.e., March 189 to March 190 if considering his sole reign).¹⁰ He ruled for ten years.¹¹ The Armenian version of Eusebius' *Chronicon* starts Victor's episcopate in the seventh year of Commodus (i.e., March 186 to March 187) and lasting for twelve years.¹² Jerome's statement that he ruled for ten years is probably derived from Eusebius' *Historia ecclesiastica*.¹³ Jerome also reports him as the earliest Latin-writing Christian, placing him before Tertullian.¹⁴ *Liber pontificalis* reports him as dying a martyr's death.¹⁵

In *Refutatio omnium haeresium* (also known as *Elenchus*), once attributed to Origen, then Hippolytus, but, in Allen Brent's reconstruction, probably composed anonymously in Rome along with several other works by the leader of one of the household-schools or Christian philosophical communities, whose successor, Hippolytus, revised or edited some of those works as well as composing his own, such as *Commentarii in Daniele* and *Contra Noetum* (who himself was followed by another member who composed some of the other works mentioned on the statue now in the entrance to the Vatican Library), we find our third source for the biography of Victor.¹⁶ I shall refer to the

10 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.22.1 (G. Bardy, ed., *Eusèbe de Césarée. Histoire ecclésiastique*, 2: *Livres V–VII* [SC, 41], Paris, 1955, p. 65).

11 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.28.7 (SC 41.76).

12 Eusebius, *Chron.* 930 (J. Karst, ed., *Eusebius Werke*, 5: *Die Chronik aus dem Armenischen übersetzt mit textkritischem Commentar* [GCS, 20], Leipzig, 1911, p. 223). On this work see R.W. Burgess, *Studies in Eusebian and Post-Eusebian Chronography* (Historia Einzelschriften, 135), Stuttgart, 1999.

13 Jerome, *De inlus. uir.* 34 (E.C. Richardson, ed., *Hieronymus liber de uiris inlustribus. Genadius liber de uiris inlustribus*, [TU, 14/1], Leipzig, 1896, p. 25). T.D. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study*, rev. edn, Oxford, 1985, pp. 7 and 193, dismisses Jerome's statement as being based on the erroneous assumption that because Victor was in Rome he wrote in Latin. I would not be quite so dismissive. That Victor's correspondence with the East is in Greek is not a surprise, but whether he wrote it himself in Greek (possible given that he seems to be the leader in Rome responsible for communicating with outside churches and knowing Greek could have helped secure this responsibility) or had someone translate it into Greek is unknowable.

14 Jerome, *De illis. uir.* 53 (TU 14/1.31–32).

15 *Lib. pont.* 15.2 (Duchesne, Vogels, *Le Liber pontificalis*, 1.137).

16 Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church*, passim (e.g., pp. 345 and 365–366). This is against the standard views of P. Nautin, *Hippolyte et Josipe: Contribution à l'histoire de la littérature chrétienne du troisième siècle* (Études et Textes pour l'histoire du dogme de la Trinité, 1), Paris, 1947, that the author of *Ref.* (Brent refers to it as *Elenchos*) and other works listed on the statue was a Roman bishop named Josephus (while the author of *Contra Noetum* was a bishop in the East); and v. Loi, "L'identità letteraria di Ippolito di Roman," in *Ricerca su Ippolito* (SEAug, 13), Rome, 1977, pp. 67–88; M. Simonetti, "Due note su Ippolito," in *Ricerca su Ippolito*, pp. 151–156; M. Simonetti, "Una nuova proposta su Ippolito," *Aug*, 36 (1996), pp. 13–46; and M. Simonetti, "Per un profilo dell'autore dell'Elenchos," *VetChr*, 46 (2009), pp. 157–173, that the two main blocks of works were each written by an individual named Hippolytus, one in Rome and one in the East. J.A. Cerrato, *Hippolytus between East*

author of *Refutatio* as proto-Hippolytus. Victor is presented incidentally in the midst of proto-Hippolytus' diatribe¹⁷ against Callistus, whom he accused of Sabellianism, monetary misappropriation, and stirring religious ferment and for which he was exiled to the mines of Sardinia.¹⁸ The story of Callistus' rehabilitation involved Marcia, Commodus' concubine, a non-Christian¹⁹ who wanted to do good works, who summoned (προσκαλεσαμένη) Victor, described as "bishop of the church at that time" (ὄντα ἐπίσκοπον τῆς ἐκκλησίας) and sought from him a list of 'martyrs' in Sardinia.²⁰ Victor provided such a list, which did not include Callistus' name since he considered him a villain.

and West: The Commentaries and the Provenance of the Corpus (OTM), Oxford, 2002, p. 122, agrees that there was an eastern Hippolytus who composed the biblical commentaries, but that the author of *Ref.* was not named Hippolytus at all. See E. Prinzivalli, "Ippolito, antipapal, santo," in Bray, *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, 1.246–258, who, as with Eusebius, projects the later reality of there being one bishop in Rome back to the beginning of Christianity in the city, and has to consider proto-Hippolytus an antipope. For a summary see G.D. Dunn, "Roman and North African Christianity," in: *The Routledge Companion to Early Christian Thought*, ed. D.J. Bingham, London – New York, 2010, pp. 154–171, here pp. 158–160. On the authorship of *Traditio apostolica*, Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church*, pp. 303–306, argued that the work is composite and multi-layered, reflecting the influence of both proto-Hippolytus and Hippolytus. A. Stewart-Sykes, *Hippolytus: On the Apostolic Tradition* (Popular Patristics Series), Crestwood, NY, 2001, pp. 22–32, agreed with his overall argument. P.F. Bradshaw, M.E. Johnson, L.E. Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition* (Hermeneia), Minneapolis, 2002, pp. 4–15, agree that the work is composite, but wish to unhitch it from any association with an Hippolytan community in Rome. See A. Handl, "From Slave to Bishop. Callixtus' Early Ecclesial Career and Mechanisms of Clerical Promotion," *ZAC*, 25 (2021), p. 61, n. 37. On pp. 54–55, he states his position on the authorship of *Ref.*, that it was not Hippolytus but an anonymous intellectual from an independent house community. This is different from Brent's view that there was a connection between this author and Hippolytus.

- 17 I note the objection of M.D. Litwa, trans., *Refutation of All Heresies* (WGRW, 40), Atlanta, 2016, p. xl, in identifying the author as being in any way connected with Hippolytus. Accepting Brent's reconstruction, 'proto-Hippolytus' seems to me an appropriate way to identify this author.
- 18 [Proto-Hippolytus], *Ref.* 9.11.1–9.12.9 and 9.12.16–26 (Litwa, *Refutation*, pp. 642–648 and 650–656). See R.E. Heine, "The Christology of Callistus," *JTS*, n.s. 49 (1998), pp. 56–91; E. Prinzivalli, "Callisto I, santo," in Bray, *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, 1.237–246; S. Gerber, "Calixt von Rom und der Monarchianische Streit," *ZAC*, 5 (2001), pp. 213–239; A. Handl, "Bishop Callistus I. of Rome (217?–222?): A Martyr or a Confessor," *ZAC*, 18 (2014), pp. 390–419, particularly for discussion about his death; and Handl, "From Slave to Bishop," pp. 53–73, who does not explore the question of monepiscopacy in Rome at the time.
- 19 So, Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, p. 336.
- 20 Is the absence of a definite article an indication that Rome had more than one bishop at this time? *Ref.* 9.12.22 (Litwa, *Refutation*, p. 654), with its reference to ἐπίσκοποι, could be read in support of multiple bishops at the one time in Rome. See Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church*, p. 434.

Having obtained the emperor's permission, Marcia sent the eunuch (and possible presbyter)²¹ Hyacinth to the governor in Sardinia who obtained the prisoners' release, which included Callistus, who had begged Hyacinth to be added to the list. Victor, though aggrieved, permitted Callistus to enjoy his freedom, but sent him to Antium (modern Anzio). After Victor's death, Zephyrinus, a man Callistus had long corrupted the text tells us, became bishop and Callistus was recalled to take charge of the cemetery on Via Appia, which still bears his name today, before himself becoming bishop after Zephyrinus.²² According to proto-Hippolytus, Victor's flaw was that he was too kind-hearted.²³

While a cursory reading suggests that each of these individuals is presented as sole bishop of Rome in succession to each other, there is nothing to contradict the idea that they were bishops only of one of the number of Christian communities that made up the church of Rome. Thus, it would seem that proto-Hippolytus was not what would come to be called an anti-pope, but was the legitimate bishop of his own community, just as Callistus was bishop of his own Christian community in Rome.²⁴ Why did Marcia approach Victor in particular if he were only one of a number of bishops in Rome? Perhaps Marcia had a particular connection with that community in Rome or Victor had a particular responsibility for dealing with persecuted Christians. At the same time we cannot dismiss Lampe's suggestion that Hyacinth was the connection between Victor and Marcia, but what was the connection between Hyacinth and Victor?²⁵ A connection with the imperial household might have given Victor a greater status when all the bishops of Rome gathered together as *presbuteroi kata polin*.²⁶ Stewart certainly sees within the later, imagined list of Rome's *monepiskopoi* found in Eusebius and elsewhere, the strong possibility

21 If Hyacinth were Victor's presbyter, as Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, p. 336, argues (and was the bridge between Marcia and Victor), then this is evidence of a change in the way *episkopos* and *presbyteros* were being used as argued by Stewart, *The Original Bishops*. This was not an issue he addressed.

22 [Proto-Hippolytus], *Ref.* 9.12.10–16. (Litwa, *Refutation*, pp. 648–650). On Zephyrinus see E. Prinzivalli, "Zefirino, santo," in Bray, *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, 1.234–237.

23 [Proto-Hippolytus], *Ref.* 9.12.13 (Litwa, *Refutation*, p. 648). Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church*, p. 527, thinks that assigning compassion to Victor may say more about proto-Hippolytus' polemic against Callistus than anything about Victor.

24 Cf. M. Simonetti, "Roma cristiana tra vescovi e presbiteri," *VetChr*, 43 (2006), pp. 5–17, who argues that Victor was sole bishop and that the Hippolytean community rejected his monepiscopacy and was small and insignificant.

25 Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, p. 336.

26 J. Wagner, *Die Anfänge des Amtes in der Kirche. Presbyter und Episkopen in der frühchristlichen Literatur* (Texte und Arbeiten zum Neutestamentlichen Zeitalter, 53), Tübingen, 2011, p. 300.

that around the time of Victor it contained succession within individual church communities (Anicetus and Eleutherus,²⁷ Zephyrinus and Callistus), and that “certain households may have had prominence within the gatherings of leaders from across the city ..., whether for reasons of social standing or claimed apostolic foundation, and that this in turn fed the diadochic claim that might be made for the emerging *monepiskopos*.”²⁸ Indeed, the way proto-Hippolytus presents it, it would seem that Victor, Zephyrinus, and Callistus belonged to the same Christian community in Rome, while proto-Hippolytus belonged to another.²⁹ Perhaps, as Handl suggests, the community over which Victor, Zephyrinus, and Callistus presided was the largest in Rome, even if it did not encompass the majority of Rome’s Christians.³⁰ If it were also among the oldest Christian community in Rome or had apostolic connections, this could suggest why, in later memory, after the other communities were united to it, it was remembered as the only Christian community of Rome from the start. To that idea I wish to add the thought that a changing attitude towards religious pluralism in Rome was another factor pushing Roman Christians towards a greater centralisation of their community structure.

We may turn now to consider how Victor reacted to some of the pluralism in belief and practice within the communities of the church of Rome and what that may tell us about changes in the patterns of ecclesiastical leadership in Rome at the end of the second century.

3 Victor and the Quartodecimans

The most notable controversy with which Victor involved himself concerned the dating for the annual liturgical celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus. *Liber pontificalis* noted the existence of Victor’s involvement, although obscuring any sense of controversy, observing only that he followed Eleutherus, his predecessor, in decreeing that Easter should be on a Lord’s day and that after holding discussions with bishops and presbyters and an assembly to which Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria, was invited,³¹ such a Sunday should be from

27 See F.S. Barcellona, “Aniceto, santo,” in Bray, *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, 1.222–224; and F.S. Barcellona, “Eleuterio, santo,” in Bray, *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, 1.226–229.

28 Stewart, *The Original Bishops*, p. 332.

29 [Proto-Hippolytus], *Ref.* 9.12.21 (Litwa, *Refutation*, p. 654). It should be noted that proto-Hippolytus expressed no dissatisfaction with Victor, only with Zephyrinus and Callistus.

30 Handl, “All Roads Lead to Conflict?” p. 119, n. 7.

31 Since the only known Theophilus of Alexandria, the uncle of Cyril of Alexandria, and opponent of John Chrysostom, was not bishop until the late fourth century, there is a

the fourteenth to the twenty-first day of the first lunar month.³² We have to turn to Eusebius to get any sense of how controversial a decision this was.³³

Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus,³⁴ wrote a letter to Victor, after the latter had thought (ἡξιώσατε)³⁵ a synod ought to be held in the East,³⁶ in which the eastern bishop reaffirmed the practice there of celebrating the end of the paschal fast on the fourteenth day of Nisan, as the Jews did with Passover, no matter what day of the week that was.³⁷ This seems to have been among the earliest Christian changes to help distinguish itself from Judaism, although how early Victor's community (and any others) in Rome under one of its earlier leaders had switched, and why the churches in Asia had not, is unclear.³⁸ Polycrates could point to apostolic precedent for the Quartodeciman practice, through Philip and John (via Polycarp).

We need not rehearse here the debate about the timing of the death of Jesus in relation to the Jewish festivals of Passover that commenced at the end of 14 Nisan (in that evening that marked the start of 15 Nisan) with the slaughter of the lamb and the eating of the Passover meal that marks the beginning of the week of Unleavened Bread (Exod 12 and 13:4–10; Lev 23:4–8; Num 28:16–25; and Deut 16:2–4 and 8). Here, I accept the argument of Raymond Brown that the

problem here. On Theophilus see N. Russell, *Theophilus of Alexandria* (The Early Church Fathers), London – New York, 2007.

- 32 *Lib. pont.* 15.3–4b (Duchesne and Vogels, *Le Liber pontificalis*, 1.137). Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.23.3 (sc 41.66), mentions a Theophilus of Caesarea Maritima.
- 33 See also Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 5.22.15–17 (G.C. Hansen, ed., *Socrate de Constantinople. Histoire ecclésiastique*, 2: *Livres IV–VI* [sc, 505], Paris, 2006, pp. 220–222), who depended upon Eusebius. For an assessment of Eusebius on this see W.L. Petersen, “Eusebius and the Paschal Controversy,” in: *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*, ed. H.W. Attridge, G. Hata (Studia Post Biblica, 42), Leiden – Boston, 1992, pp. 311–325.
- 34 Stewart, *The Original Bishops*, pp. 44–45 and 280, asks the question about Polycrates being *monepiskopos* in Ephesus.
- 35 The use of ἡξιόω (“think fit” or “require”) could be translated so as to suggest that Victor had authority over churches in the East, something that not even Eusebius would have countenanced, thus making it not the preferred translation choice.
- 36 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.23.1–4 (sc 41.66–67), indicates that other synods were held in Palestine, Pontus, Gaul, and Greece and that they agreed with Victor's position. Were these, like that in Asia, in response to a request from Victor? Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church*, p. 414, thinks that there is much creative writing in Eusebius' account of Polycrates' letter.
- 37 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.2–8 (sc 41.67–69).
- 38 M.A. Esswein, “The Johannine Tradition as ‘Apostolic’ Evidence for Early Christian *Pascha* Observance in the *Quartodeciman* Churches,” *Ecclesia Orans*, 34 (2017), pp. 461–494. Cf. A.B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2014, p. 230, who states that the Quartodeciman celebration emerged in the second century.

Johannine chronology of having Jesus die on 14 Nisan itself, while the lambs were being slaughtered (and before the Passover meal), is the most probable one.³⁹ Regardless of the day of the month, it occurred on a Friday, with the resurrection at the start of Sunday. Had a triduum of celebrations yet emerged by the time of Victor or were the Asians celebrating both the death and resurrection of Jesus on 14 Nisan⁴⁰ and/or was Victor celebrating both the death and resurrection of Jesus on a Sunday?⁴¹

Victor's response was to issue letters of excommunication of those churches in the East that followed that Quartodeciman practice.⁴² This prompted a response from many church leaders rebuking Victor and demanding that peace and unity required him to reconsider his position. Irenaeus of Lyon, although a supporter of celebrating the Lord's resurrection on a Sunday, was opposed to such highhanded action and wrote expressing his displeasure, evidence for which survives in Eusebius.⁴³ Scholarship today considers that

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- 39 R.E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, New York, 1994, pp. 1350–1373. See P.F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd edn, London, 2002, pp. 63–65. Cf. B. Pitre, *Jesus and the Last Supper*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, pp. 251–373, who accepts that the last supper was a Passover meal and that contradiction between the synoptic gospels and John is due to a misinterpretation by John of Passover terminology and chronology in that 'Passover' could refer to four different events.
- 40 Melito of Sardis, *De Pascha* (O. Perler, ed., *Méliton de Sardes. Sur la Pâque* [sc, 123], Paris, 1966), a Quartodeciman homily, would suggest that both death and resurrection were celebrated in the one festival at the end of 14 Nisan. See G. Rouwhorst, "The Quartodeciman Passover and the Jewish Pesach," *Questions Liturgique/Studies in Liturgy* 77 (1996), pp. 152–173; A. Stewart-Sykes, *The Lamb's High Feast: Melito, Peri Pascha and the Quartodeciman Paschal Liturgy at Sardis* (SuppVC, 42), Leiden, 1998; L. Cohick, "Melito of Sardis's *PERI PASCHA* and Its 'Israel,'" *HTR*, 91 (1998), pp. 351–372; L.H. Cohick, *The Peri Pascha Attributed to Melito of Sardis: Setting, Purpose, and Sources* (Brown Judaic Studies, 327), Providence, RI, 2000; M. Kerkloh, *Melito von Sardes. Passa-Homilie: Theologie der ältesten erhaltenen Osterpredigt des Christentums*, Munich, 2003; A.C. Stewart, *Melito of Sardis: On Pascha with the Fragments of Melito and Other Material Related to the Quartodecimans* (Popular Patristics Series), 2nd edn, Yonkers, NY, 2016; and Esswein, "The Johannine Tradition," pp. 485–493.
- 41 This is not a question addressed directly by T.J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, New York, 1986, pp. 5–18. See Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins*, pp. 179–182. See P. Jounel, "The Year," in: *The Church at Prayer, 4: The Liturgy and Time*, ed. A.G. Martimort et al., trans. Matthew J. O'Connell, Eng. edn, Collegeville, MN, 1986, pp. 47–53, for the lack of evidence of a triduum before the fourth century.
- 42 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.9 (sc 41.69).
- 43 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.10–17 (sc 41.69–71). Interestingly, Irenaeus referred to some of Victor's predecessors, all of whom tolerated the practice, (Anicetus, Pius, Telesphorus, and Sixtus) as presbyters. This is not surprising to me, following the arguments of Stewart, *The Original Bishops*, as it is to Handl, "Viktor I.," p. 35.

Eusebius was mistaken here and that what Victor did was to break off communion with the Christian communities in Rome of Asian origin that followed the Quartodeciman practice. This is derived from the fact that Irenaeus, through Eusebius, informs us that this was not just a dispute between Rome and East but that Christians from the East who lived in Rome followed their ancestral custom, so that it was also or even principally a local issue for Victor.⁴⁴

Eusebius states that locally Victor, unlike his predecessors, refused to send the *fermentum* to Quartodeciman communities, which could only be to local communities in Rome and certainly not to any in Asia.⁴⁵ According to Lampe, Blastus, mentioned in Eusebius, was leader of the Quartodeciman community in Rome.⁴⁶ Irenaeus also informs us that the dispute was not only about when the fast should end but how long it should last.⁴⁷ His point was that variety of practice had long been a reality within Christianity, even in Rome itself.⁴⁸ This issue had arisen before under Anicetus when Polycarp of Smyrna visited Rome, with each trying to persuade each other to change, but they had not let their disagreement fracture their unity.⁴⁹ Irenaeus urged Victor to continue that practice of tolerance of pluralism.

Of all Rome's church leaders at the time, why was it Victor who took the lead on this? Stewart suggests that Victor held the same responsibility as had Clement in the first century, being the presbyter *kata polin* for interacting with 'foreign' or more distant churches.⁵⁰ What we see in Victor is someone who was disturbed by a lack of uniformity within the city of Rome. Did Victor take it upon himself to initiate action against this divergent practice in Rome? That

44 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.14 (SC 41.70). See J.F. McCue, "The Roman Primacy in the Second Century and the Problem of Development of Dogma," *TS*, 25 (1964), pp. 161–196; Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church*, p. 413; and Handl, "All Roads Lead to Conflict?" pp. 121–123. Handl, "Vikto I.," pp. 29–42, argues that the conflict could have escalated as a two-step process from a local one involving eastern immigrants to a more wide-scale one once Polycrates became involved.

45 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.15 (SC 41.70–71). In a time before there was a sole bishop in Rome, who was sending the *fermentum* to whom and why?

46 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.15 (SC 41.45) and 5.20.1 (SC 41.60–61). See Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, p. 382, n. 7.

47 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.12 (SC 41.70). See W. Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments: Ecclesiastical and Imperial Reactions to Montanism* (SupVC, 84), Leiden – Boston, 2007, pp. 34–36, who, incidentally, considers Irenaeus to have written about a Lenten fast rather than a more specifically passion or Triduum fast.

48 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.13 (SC 41.70).

49 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.16 (SC 41.71). See F.S. Barcellona, "Aniceto, santo," in Bray, *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, 1.222–224.

50 Stewart, *Melito of Sardis*, p. 13.

is certainly the way Lampe, Brent, and Stewart interpret it.⁵¹ But to see Victor beginning to act as though he were the principal or sole bishop in Rome or as the only person responsible for making decisions is not the only way to read this evidence. It could be argued that most (but not all) of the other *episkopoi* in the city, when gathered together as *presbuteroi kata polin*, agreed with Victor, who might have been the driving force in having the matter considered. If he were the individual tasked with communicating with outside and divergent local churches, then it is little wonder that the spotlight fell on him.⁵² He might not have been so unilateral in his actions as Eusebius would have us believe, which modern commentators, even while arguing against Rome having a single bishop at this time, see as Victor's attempt to usurp such a responsibility. Indeed, the idea that Victor did not act unilaterally or as the sole bishop of Rome gains some support from some evidence in proto-Hippolytus who, as we have seen, came from one of the other Christian communities in Rome. He too rejected the Quartodeciman position most forcefully,⁵³ and presumably this had been the opinion of his community several decades earlier when Victor was alive. Further, seeing Victor the *episkopos* as one of the *presbuteroi kata polin* rather than as bishop leading a college of presbyters,⁵⁴ actually makes Handl's point even stronger: Victor did not have unilateral authority over the decisions of the Roman church. He might have been the driving force pushing for this restrictive acceptance of Christian practice regarding the date of Easter, but he still needed to persuade his fellow leaders to agree with him.

By itself the Quartodeciman controversy is not sufficient to show Victor, as one of the bishops of Rome, attempting to control the entire church of Rome as its only bishop. In this I agree with Handl. What it does show, I would contend, is that he, and many of the other Christian communities, could no longer tolerate this level of divergence and variety in the liturgical life of the church taken as a whole. The question it does not answer is about the extent to which Victor led this push and needed to persuade other local leaders to agree with him. If we look at other evidence of Victor's activities, we shall see that intolerance of diversity (but only when it became patently unacceptable) was characteristic of his ministry, which could well suggest that he took the lead in pushing for greater uniformity in Christian thought and practice within the city. The point that one would like to be able to determine is at what point any

51 Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, p. 382; Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church*, pp. 414 and 437; and Stewart, *The Original Bishops*, p. 25, but cf. pp. 44 and 81.

52 I agree with Handl, "Viktor I.," p. 33.

53 [Proto-Hippolytus], *Ref.* 8.18.1–2 (Litwa, *Refutation*, pp. 610–612). See Handl, "Viktor I.," pp. 25–29.

54 This latter is the view of Handl, "Viktor I.," p. 40.

diversity became intolerable for Victor. The most we can say is that it seems to have been lower than others had accepted previously. His forcefulness of personality might well have convinced a number of the Christian communities in Rome to unite with his community under his leadership, although this is far from proved.

4 Victor and Theodotus the Leather Worker (Dynamic Monarchianism)

It is also Eusebius who provides us with information, which might derive from a lost work of proto-Hippolytus, about Theodotus, the leather worker (σκυτεύς) (a tanner or a shoemaker), who is credited as being the originator of dynamic Monarchianism or Adoptionism, the theological position, later rejected as heretical, that asserted that Jesus was born only human and at his baptism was ‘adopted’ by God (through the Spirit when he became the Christ) to share to some extent in divinity.⁵⁵ Later supporters of this view held that it had been unchallenged until the time of Zephyrinus, something summarily dismissed in an unnamed treatise from which Eusebius quoted as contrary to evidence from the Scriptures, from earlier Christian writers like Justin, Miltiades, Tatian, Clement, Irenaeus, and Melito, and from the fact that Victor had excommunicated Theodotus as an exponent of this heresy.⁵⁶

Had Theodotus established a new Christian community in Rome or a new school or had he joined one that existed already? According to Eusebius, Natalius was persuaded by two of Theodotus’ disciples, Asclepiodotus and Theodotus the banker, to become “bishop of the heresy” (ἐπίσκοπος κληθήναι

55 See J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th edn, London, 1977, pp. 115–119; R.M. Grant, *Jesus after the Gospels: The Christ of the Second Century*, Louisville, KY, 1990, pp. 68–69; Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, pp. 344–348; P.B. Smith, “The End of Early Christian Adoptionism? A Note on the Invention of Adoptionism, Its Sources, and Its Current Demise,” *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 76 (2015), pp. 177–199, who denies that Theodotus was a real Adoptionist; and H.G. Snyder, “Shoemakers and Syllogisms: Theodotus ‘the Cobbler’ and His School,” in: *Christian Teachers in Second-Century Rome*, ed. H.G. Snyder (SupVC, 159), Leiden – Boston, 2020, pp. 183–204. T.E. Gaston, *Dynamic Monarchianism: The Earliest Christology?*, 2nd edn, Nashville, 2023, argues that, while similar, dynamic monarchianism and adoptionism were distinct. He discusses Theodotus on pp. 67–90.

56 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.28.1–6 (SC 41.74–76). See proto-Hippolytus, *Ref.* 7.35–36 and 10.23 (Litwa, *Refutation*, pp. 570–572 and 732), who saw Theodotus’ position as derivative from Cerinthus and Ebion.

ταύτης τῆς αἰρέσεως),⁵⁷ which suggests but does not prove that it was a new Christian school community rather than a pre-existing one.

Again, our ability to understand Victor's actions is clouded because it is presented through the hermeneutic framework Eusebius had applied to evidence of the workings of Christian leadership in the decades and centuries prior to his own time.⁵⁸ While Eusebius presented Victor's action as unilateral, we do not know if it was simply that or was the result of his particular responsibilities as presbyter *kata polin*, with or without consultation with the other *presbuteroi kata polin* (the *episkopoi* of their own individual communities). It is not clear if this was an issue where Victor took the initiative or simply executed the policy of his colleagues.⁵⁹ Further, if an earlier writer in Rome, like Justin, had warned against Adoptionism, why had no earlier Roman bishop (regardless of whether we are talking about a *monepiskopos* or multiple concurrent *episkopoi*) taken action against it prior to Victor? Was it something about the public profile of the group at the time or was it something about Victor himself that prompted the condemnation?

5 Victor and Praxeas (Modalist Monarchianism and Montanism)

We turn now to Tertullian's *Aduersus Praxean*, a work written about 210 or 211 or perhaps later.⁶⁰ Tertullian took aim at someone he named Praxeas, a name likely to have been a sarcastic nickname.⁶¹ The information we have from Tertullian is that this person came from Asia to Rome and was a confessor.⁶² Tertullian levelled two charges against Praxeas. The first was that he was a Monarchian in that he sought to defend the oneness or unity of God in too extreme a fashion, but he was what would later be described as a Sabellian

57 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.28.10 (SC 41.76). Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, p. 347, makes the appealing suggestion that there might have been some contact between the Theodotians and Galen.

58 Matters are complicated further in that we have to deal also with the hermeneutic framework of the unnamed author of the anti-Adoptionist treatise against Artemon, written about a century before Eusebius' work. Was it the author who called Victor the thirteenth bishop of Rome after Peter (ὁς ἦν τρισκαιδέκατος ἀπὸ Πέτρου ἐν Ῥώμῃ ἐπίσκοπος [Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.28.3 (SC 41.75)]) or was Eusebius paraphrasing?

59 Handl, "Viktor I.," pp. 22–25, concludes that we can really know nothing about the role of Victor in dealing with Theodotus.

60 Barnes, *Tertullian*, pp. 55 and 328.

61 E. Evans, *Tertullian Treatise against Praxeas*, London, 1948, p. 10; and Barnes, *Tertullian*, p. 279.

62 Tertullian, *Adu. Prax.* 1.4 (CCL 2.1159).

or a modalist Monarchian instead of a dynamic Monarchian like Theodotus. According to Tertullian, Praxeas' christology was that it was the Father who was born of Mary and who died and rose again,⁶³ hence the name of the heresy was Patripassianism in Latin. The unity of God was conceived in such a way that could not tolerate distinction between Father and Son (or Spirit presumably).

Before we consider Tertullian's second charge, let us add some relevant information from proto-Hippolytus in order to ascertain if and where Victor fits in all this. Proto-Hippolytus informs us that Noetus of Smyrna was a follower of Heraclitus and that Noetus' student, Epigonos, came to Rome and recruited Kleomenes and they spread the idea that the unity of God meant that Father and Son do not co-exist but are different ways of the one God appearing at different times. Zephyrinus (after a bribe) and Callistus embraced this heresy with enthusiasm (although with a certain lack of clarity so as to avoid being challenged).⁶⁴ They were opposed by proto-Hippolytus himself, as noted above, but they spread this belief to Sabellius, the most notorious exponent of this belief.⁶⁵

If Praxeas in Tertullian was a pseudonym, can he be identified with any of those individuals named in proto-Hippolytus? Callistus is the common conclusion in scholarship, although offered tentatively. We know Callistus was a confessor, but did he come from Asia?⁶⁶ As Barnes states: "Certainty

63 Tertullian, *Adu. Prax.* 1.1 (CCL 2.1159). See R.M. Hübner, *Das Paradox Eine: Antignostischer Monarchianismus im zweiten Jahrhundert* (SupVC, 50), Leiden – Boston, 1999; K.B. McCrudden, "Monarchy and Economy in Tertullian's *Adversus Praxean*," *SJT*, 55 (2002), pp. 325–337; and A. Handl, "Praxeas und die Ausbreitung des 'Monarchianismus' in Rom zwischen Migration, innerchristlichen Konflikten und der Entstehung," in: *Why We Sing: Music, Word, and Liturgy in Early Christianity: Essays in Honour of Anders Ekenberg's 75th Birthday*, ed. C.J. Berglund, B. Crostini, J. Kelhoffer (SupVC, 177, Leiden – Boston, 2022), pp. 250–282.

64 Indeed, [proto-Hippolytus], *Ref.* 9.11.1 (Litwa, *Refutation*, p. 642), seems to accuse Callistus of having no fixed belief but agreeing with everyone and thus pitting one against the other in order to grasp power. Thus, Callistus both embraced and rejected Sabellius. Proto-Hippolytus' accusation was that rather than correct Sabellius, Callistus merely antagonised him further.

65 [Proto-Hippolytus], *Ref.* 9.7.1–9.11.4 and 10.27.1–3 (Litwa, *Refutation*, pp. 622–644 and 734–736). See Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church*, p. 425.

66 Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church*, pp. 525–535, although he raises some objections to identifying Callistus as Praxeas, ultimately overcomes them and maintains this identification. This colours his further conclusions about what we read in Tertullian's pamphlet. This is accepted by A.B. McGowan, "God in Early Latin Theology: Tertullian and the Trinity," in: *God in Early Christian Thought: Essays in Memory of Lloyd G. Patterson*, ed. A.B. McGowan, B.E. Daly, T.J. Gaden (SupVC, 94), Leiden – Boston, 2009, pp. 61–81, here p. 62 n. 6. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, pp. 349–350 and 395, does not attempt to identify Praxeas with anyone. Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments*, p. 37, n.

is unattainable.”⁶⁷ Yet, Tertullian was clear: Praxeas was the first to import this belief from Asia into Rome,⁶⁸ while in proto-Hippolytus Zephyrinus and Callistus cooperated with what seems to be presented as a pre-existing school community established by Epigonos and Kleomenes. Here, in passing, I would like to revive the suggestion made over a century ago by Gerhard Esser that identified Praxeas with Epigonos.⁶⁹ What aligns best with Tertullian’s statement is proto-Hippolytus’ comment about Epigonos being the one who sowed the godless opinion in Rome.⁷⁰

The second complaint by Tertullian against Praxeas was that the latter was also anti-Montanist. Tertullian had a strong affinity with and shared much in common theologically and in terms of Christian discipline with Montanism or New Prophecy. We can characterise Montanism as a charismatic movement within the church in which the prophetic utterances of the Phrygian founders who believed themselves guided by the Holy Spirit (Paraclete), which emphasised strict adherence to Christian ethics, were more important than institutional leadership.⁷¹ In Tertullian’s complaint, when Praxeas went to Rome he managed to persuade the bishop, who initially had accepted the teaching of Montanus, Prisca, and Maximilla and had offered peace to the churches of Phrygia and Asia,⁷² that these founders of Montanism were false prophets, and

145, thinks the idea that Praxeas was Callistus is ‘far-fetched’, while Handl, “Viktor I.,” p. 43, thinks it unconvincing.

67 Barnes, *Tertullian*, p. 279.

68 Tertullian, *Adu. Prax.* 1.4 (CCL 1159): “*Nam iste primus ex Asia hoc genus peruersitatis intulit Romanae humo ...*”.

69 G. Esser, *Wer was Praxeas?* (Programm zur Freier des Gedächtnisses des Stifters der Universität Königs Friedrich Wilhelm III), Bonn, 1910, pp. 27–28.

70 Proto-Hippolytus, *Ref.* 9.7.1 (Litwa, *Refutation*, p. 622): ὃς τῇ Ῥώμῃ ἐπιδημήσας ἐπέσπειρε τὴν ἄθεον γνώμην.

71 Barnes, *Tertullian*, pp. 130–142; D. Powell, “Tertullianists and Cataphrygians,” *vc*, 29 (1975), pp. 33–54, here p. 33; C.M. Robeck, Jr, *Prophecy in Carthage: Perpetua, Tertullian, and Cyprian*, Cleveland, OH, 1992; C. Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy*, Cambridge, 1996; W. Tabbernee, *Montanist Inscriptions and Testimonia: Epigraphic Sources Illustrating the History of Montanism* (Patristic Monograph Series, 16), Macon: GA, 1997; Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments*; W. Tabbernee, P. Lampe, *Pepouza and Tymion: The Discovery and Archaeological Exploration of a Lost Ancient City and an Imperial Estate*, Berlin, 2008; W. Tabbernee, *Prophets and Gravestones: An Imaginative History of Montanists and Other Early Christians*, Peabody, MA, 2009, where on pp. 47–52, he presents Victor during the Quartodeciman controversy as sole bishop in Rome; and P. McKechnie, *Christianizing Asia Minor: Conversion, Communities, and Social Change in the Pre-Constantinian Era*, Cambridge, 2019.

72 Against Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments*, p. 39: “Indeed, he [Victor] was on the point of offering peace to all the Montanist communities in Rome for the sake of unity, when Praxeas, recently arrived from Asia Minor, informed him to the schismatic

he insisted that the bishop follow the latter's own predecessors in rejecting the Montanist version of Christianity and to withdraw those letters of peace, which he did.⁷³ The clear inference is offered that the bishop also failed to reject Praxeas' christology.⁷⁴

There are many points to observe and questions to raise about this statement. Of course, it is possible that Tertullian's report is not entirely accurate, either in his own understanding and presentation of the information he received in Carthage from Rome or because of bias or confusion in the information itself that was transmitted to him. Writing only a generation later, Tertullian seems clear that there was a *monepiskopos* in Rome. Indeed, Handl accepts this when he writes that Praxeas convinced Victor *and his council of presbyters* (whom I regard to be fellow bishops who all met together equally as presbyters) to take action against New Prophecy.⁷⁵ Tabbernee and Brent assert that the letters of peace were to Montanist communities in Rome (local churches of Phrygian and Asian origins) rather than in the East, which seems reasonable.⁷⁶ It is commonly accepted that the bishop who issued letters of peace was the same bishop Praxeas persuaded later to revoke those letters, but Brent does not think this is necessarily the case.⁷⁷ While that may be conceded grammatically, Praxeas' argument of pointing the bishop to his predecessors' hostility would have been weakened if that the bishop could have pointed to a sympathetic predecessor as a counter example, so it makes more sense to see the unnamed bishop initially as having changed a position held by predecessors and accept Montanism, and then being persuaded to change his mind

effect of the New Prophecy there. Victor changed his mind ..." (emphasis added), I would note that while *iam ... inferentem* could suggest the translation in Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise against Praxeas*, p. 130, of "was on the point of recognising", the fact that Tertullian also wrote *iam emissas* about the letters indicates that the bishop had already passed the point of 'being about to' and that the translation would be better as "already recognised".

73 Tertullian, *Adu. Prax.* 1.5 (CCL 2.1159): "*Nam idem tunc episcopum Romanum, agnoscentem iam prophetias Montani, Priscae, Maximillae, et ex ea agnitione pacem ecclesiis Asiae et Phrygiae inferentem, falso de ipsis prophetis et ecclesiis eorum adseuerando et praecessorum eius auctoritates defendendo coegit et litteras pacis reuocare iam emissas et a proposito recipiendorum charismatum concessare.*"

74 Tertullian, *Adu. Prax.* 1.5 (CCL 2.1159–1160): "*Ita duo diaboli Praxeas Romae procurauit: prophetiam expulit et haeresin intulit, Paraclatum fugauit et Patrem crucifixit.*"

75 Handl, "Viktor I.," p. 45; and Handl, "All Roads Lead to Conflict?" p. 125.

76 Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments*, p. 39; Tabbernee, *Prophets and Gravestones*, pp. 52–53; and Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church*, p. 526. Cf. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, p. 394; and Trevett, *Montanism*, p. 58.

77 Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church of the Third Century*, p. 528.

back and reject it. Letters of peace being issued presumes an earlier hostility.⁷⁸ Who had been hostile and who was it who issued the letters of peace but then changed his mind?

In *Aduersus omnes haereses*, a pseudo-Tertullianic work probably of the late third century, which mentions Blastus and the Quartodecimans, and Theodotus and his dynamic Monarchianism,⁷⁹ we find the statement of Praxeas' Patripassianism and that someone named Victorinus corroborated it.⁸⁰ One theory is that Victor was meant, but a scribal emendation attempted to make this Zephyrinus and that Victorinus was the result.⁸¹ Victor generally is accepted in scholarship as the Roman bishop unnamed by Tertullian on this basis.⁸²

I want to consider an argument from Christine Trevett at this point. She states that Eleutherus is assumed to be the hostile predecessor because Victor is taken as being the Roman bishop sympathetic to Praxeas' anti-Montanism and pro-Patripassianism.⁸³ For her, not only is the fact that Victor is unnamed problematic, even more of a problem is that such initial sympathy from Victor would contrast with his hard-line rejection of the Quartodecimans. She thinks Eleutherus was more likely to have been the sympathetic bishop who had issued the letters of peace, given that the Gallic churches had approached Rome probably promoting peace with the Montanists,⁸⁴ and was later confronted by Praxeas (making Victor completely uninvolved) and that the hostile predecessor therefore might have been Soter or, less likely, Anicetus.⁸⁵

78 Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, p. 394, thinks that bonds with the Montanists in Rome had never been broken prior to Victor's action after encountering Praxeas. This would certainly make the chronology of Rome's interaction with Montanism simpler. However, why would letters of peace have needed to be issued if there had not been a break? This is an important point still to be addressed.

79 [Pseudo-Tertullian], *Adu. omn. haer.* 8.1–3 (CCL 2.1410).

80 [Pseudo-Tertullian], *Adu. omn. haer.* 8.4 (CCL 2.1410): "*Sed post hos omnes etiam Praxeas quidam haeresim introduxit, quam Victorinus corroborare curauit.*"

81 A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, rev. A.C. Coxe, *The Ante Nicene Fathers, 3: Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, Buffalo, NY, 1885, pp. 630–631; and Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise against Praxeas*, p. 185.

82 Barnes, *Tertullian*, pp. 82–83, did not identify the bishop; Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise against Praxeas*, pp. 10 and 185; Robeck, *Prophecy in Carthage*, p. 124; Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church*, pp. 526–527; Tabbernee, *Prophets and Gravestones*, pp. 52–55; Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, pp. 349–350; Handl, "Viktor I.," pp. 42–46; and Handl, "All Roads Lead to Conflict?" pp. 123–125.

83 Trevett, *Montanism*, p. 56.

84 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.3.3 (SC 41.26–27). For Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, p. 394, Eleutherus was going to take action against the Montanists until persuaded not to by the Gallic letter.

85 Trevett, *Montanism*, pp. 58–60. It is to be noted that Eusebius did not mention Eleutherus' reaction to the Gallic letter. Tabbernee, *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments*, p. 37,

In response, I would think that simply to suggest that because Victor was opposed to the Quartodecimans and Theodotus and was tough-minded (to use Trevett's word) is enough to make him automatically opposed to Montanism is unsound. We do not have to suppose that Victor was implacably opposed to everything. If Eleutherus, who is as unnamed in Tertullian's account as is Victor, was unmoved by the letter from Gaul, then we must conclude that it was Victor who was Tertullian's unnamed bishop and that he began his episcopate opposed to Montanism, changed his mind and issued the letters of peace, and changed it back after the encounter with Praxeas. If we adopt this line of reasoning, we would have a fair idea as to how Victor operated: when Praxeas presented him with new and convincing information that the beliefs or practices of a Christian group in Rome were unacceptable, he took action against them. A similar thing, but in reverse, must have happened earlier that enabled him to issue the letters of peace: someone had convinced him that Montanism was not the threat the Roman church had believed it to be. Of course, what Tertullian does not tell us is whether the unnamed bishop (Victor) was acting unilaterally or in concert with the other leaders of the Christian communities of Rome, either taking the lead and driving the decision-making process or at least the one responsible for communicating the results more widely. Again, although there is no positive evidence about it, I agree with Handl that there is nothing here to prevent us from understanding that whatever decision was taken was not taken by Victor alone but in consultation with the other leaders in Rome, although I would disagree that it was with a subordinate college of presbyters, but with his fellow bishops in Rome.⁸⁶

That Victor was not hostile towards Patristianism, if indeed the reference in *Adversus omnes haereses* is to him and is to be trusted, could simply mean that he was unaware of the theological dangers it presented. In other words, what we might have is not a Victor hostile to religious pluralism, but a Victor being intolerant of pluralism only when he became aware of any serious problems created by alternatives to his own version of Christianity. In this controversy it seems he was prepared to listen to arguments from both sides. The unanswered question is just how serious a difference had to be before it

raises the problems of the Praedestinatus' evidence about Soter against Montanism being difficult to reconcile with the chronology of Montanism and of Tertullian mentioning more than one predecessor being opposed to Montanism (and we know only of Soter being an opponent). Could it be a simple case of having insufficient evidence to know how many predecessors had voiced concern over Montanism or of Tertullian slightly exaggerating this for rhetorical effect?

86 Handl, "Viktor I.," p. 45.

became unacceptable; that boundary seems to be shifting under Victor and he does seem to have been less tolerant than his predecessors.

6 Victor and Florinus

Eusebius informs us that Florinus, a follower of Valentinus, the Egyptian gnostic who had taught in Rome and had expected to become bishop,⁸⁷ had been expelled from the presbytery of Rome and, like Blastus, formed his own community.⁸⁸ While no doubt Eusebius saw this event and Florinus' position through his later ecclesiological perspective, perhaps he has preserved a piece of evidence that Florinus had been a presbyter (i.e., *episkopos*). Handl reads presbyter here in its later sense of assistant to a bishop rather than as the leader of an independent though linked community.⁸⁹ The association with Blastus would suggest that Florinus was rejected during the time when Victor was a fellow *episkopos* and presbyter in Rome, although this is not explicit. Certainly, Irenaeus, who was a fellow student with Florinus under Polycarp, appears to have objected to Florinus' teaching.⁹⁰ Irenaeus had noted how Florinus had boasted of his connections with 'psychic' (i.e., non-spiritual or gnostic) Christians, which Lampe identifies as being with Victor.⁹¹

The question of what kind of presbyter Florinus was is important to ask. Was he a presbyter in the sense that Eusebius implied (as an assistant to a bishop in the way that the term is now understood) or was he one in the Stewart has suggested (although he does not consider the case of Florinus) as an *episkopos* in his own community but called presbyter when gathered with the other *episkopoi* across the city? It is a question of the independence of Florinus' community prior to a removal of communion.⁹²

87 Tertullian, *Adu. Val.* 4.1 (CCL 2.755). Again, Tertullian seems to accept a monepiscopacy in Rome by this time.

88 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.15 (SC 41.45). E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the 'Valentinians'* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, 60), Leiden – Boston, 2006, p. 500, distrusts the authenticity of the fragment of Irenaeus and notes that Florinus might have been more a follower of Marcion than of Valentinus.

89 Handl, "Viktor I.," p. 16: "Der Presbyter legitimiert seine 'blasphemischen Lehren' laut Irenäus dadurch, dass er sich unter der Lehrautotität des Ortsbischofs verortet und sich in der Gemeinschaft mit den stadtrömischen Christen stehend darstellt.;" and Handl, "All Roads Lead to Conflict?" p. 128.

90 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.20.4 (SC 41.61–62).

91 Irenaeus, *Fragmenta syriaca* 28 (W.W. Harvey, ed., *Sancti Irenaei libros quinque aduersus Haereses*, 2, Cambridge, 1857, p. 457); and Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, p. 389.

92 If Victor were already *monepiskopos*, Florinus was a presbyter in charge of a 'parish' (an old philosophical school community) under Victor's supervision, but if Florinus were

Putting all this together we can surmise that until Victor became aware of how divergent Florinus' version of Christian theology truly was, which he might well have learned from Irenaeus, Florinus had been an acceptable leader of a Christian philosophical school community within Rome, but once Victor became aware of the extent of his unacceptable beliefs he took action to expel him from communion.

Here I agree mostly with Handl's reading of the evidence.⁹³ The evidence in the Irenaeus fragment is that the Gallic bishop was writing not just to Victor but to a number of leaders in Rome, whom he identifies as the presbyters of Rome.⁹⁴ I am suggesting that we have to understand 'presbyter' in a way different from that employed by Handl. However, his main point, that Victor could not act in a monarchical (i.e., dictatorial or unilateral) way, remains valid. But I think it is also obvious that among these presbyters of Rome, among whom Victor was one, he was recognised as being the driving force among them. Whether or not we can blame Victor for his ignorance of what was going on in other Christian communities in Rome, the point is that once he did know he (and his colleagues at his urging) acted.

7 Conclusion

Recent scholarship on the nature of church leadership in Rome in the first two centuries of Christianity helps us appreciate just how anachronistic Eusebius' understanding and presentation of earlier evidence was. Possibly as late as the early decades of the third century it would appear that the church of Rome was in fact a collection of house-based or school-based communities each headed by an *episkopos*, who collectively met as *presbyteroi kata polin* to co-ordinate their communities. This speaks of pluralism as part of the very reality of early Christianity in Rome. When we come to Victor at the end of the second century, we have a situation where we find this local *episkopos* opposed to a number of practices and theologies: Quartodecimans, Theodotus and the Monarchians,

another *episkopos* in Rome, then his community was independent of Victor's but in communion with it (until it was expelled). The latter seems more likely in that it allows Victor not to know too much about what was happening in it until this was brought to his attention. The latter position is adopted by J. Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity* (Christian Theology in Context), Oxford, 2013, p. 54, a position explicitly rejected by Handl, "Viktor I.," p. 18, n. 38. Irenaeus' comment that Florinus was *se unum esse e uobis* could be taken as referring to the church of Rome generally rather than specifically to an individual community within it.

93 Handl, "Viktor I.," pp. 13–21.

94 Handl, "Viktor I.," p. 17.

Montanists, and Valentinians. The easy conclusion to reach would be that Victor was opposed to Christian pluralism and wanted to impose a greater uniformity on the religious life of Christians in Rome. Indeed, Handl writes: "Vermutlich sorgt diese Divergenz für zunehmende Irritation."⁹⁵

However, I doubt that we need conclude necessarily that he was trying to turn himself into a *monepiskopus* or was the decisive turning point in the emergence of Rome having a single bishop as Lampe and Stewart have postulated; he might not have been trying to usurp the role of his colleagues or replace them but, even with a forceful personality, could simply have been urging his colleagues to agree with his perspective. That a single bishop of the Roman community soon emerged might not have been intended directly by Victor at all, but he does seem to represent a further and major step in that direction. If we accept that the process of multiple Christian communities in Rome becoming one under a single leader was a slow process, then the moment when the term *episkopos* was restricted to one individual at a time in Rome is not such a dramatic and momentous step, but the conclusion to an incremental process of change in which Victor certainly played his part and might even have, unintentionally or otherwise, accelerated it.

The qualification I would make to the easy conclusion about Victor and pluralism, and it is a significant one, is that Victor was not opposed to religious pluralism *per se*, as modern scholarship tends to assume. We have no evidence that he was opposed to Patripassianism and in fact Tertullian and pseudo-Tertullian stated that he was a supporter, if he is to be identified with the unnamed bishop. A careful reading of the evidence relating to the other groups suggests that only after Victor was alerted by someone as to the unacceptable dangers posed by any particular divergent belief or practice to his version of Christianity did a relentless and fervent opposition develop. What I have wished to counter in this essay is Handl's view that Victor was, like his predecessors, a tolerant person until forced by external factors to take action. I would argue instead that his tolerance was more likely to have been ignorance of what was happening across Rome in the largely independent church communities but that, as soon as he became aware of issues, he was swift to react against such divergence. The fact that his efforts in conjunction with other leaders of the church in Rome did not result in the complete elimination of divergent practices and beliefs tells us nothing about the emergence of a sole bishop in Rome other than the fact that a typical response to problems is to concentrate more and more power into the hands of a sole leader. Victor's willingness to confront pluralism did hasten this development.

95 Handl, "Viktor I.," p. 31.