

and witness. The work of missions comes in another part of our material however, and this leaves the total spiritual picture incomplete. Nevertheless we are able to glean a good bit of information about it.

III.2.a
Character
of the age

Character of Pre-Nicene Christianity

In evaluating spiritual life and/or character, it is possible to take extreme positions one way or the other. TVT has often been guilty of only looking at the good or "romantic" side and is aware that there are negative concepts for matching most of the positives. As mentioned earlier, Paul Johnson's HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY is especially good at noting the negative side.

In any analysis the dominant factor is the essence of oneness..not quite to the fulfillment of the prayer of John 17 but a very real fulfillment just the same as the church saw itself an essentially "one" company. There was no central authority, there was no power structure, no definitive hierarch while there was a sense of oneness with all Christians having the reality and privilege of belonging together. Practically speaking, this was the age of the church more than the time of the churches. Civilization as it was identified at that time favored this approach for this was precisely the way in which citizens of the empire saw themselves...one empire with many provinces and many ethnic cultures but one Rome, one senate, one governmental ideal, etc. The common pledge to the corporate unity did not dissolve individual exercise but it made the corporate unity the body that was served. And the church easily and logically fell into this pattern. During the long years of illegality the church met in many different places as believers congregated in clandestine fashion in many cases. Nevertheless they thought of themselves as being the church in that location even though they may have met in fifty different sites at the same time. There was but one church in the place and it was identified with the spiritual people and not the physical plant. Consequently the leadership in any given place was the leadership of the total community. This contributed a great deal to the development of the office of the bishop and to other church structures as well but it grew out of a commonly accepted background that the message, the organism, and the unity were one. The church has never sensed this same idea to any real approximation in the many years since Nicaea although in given locales and under particular difficulties