



GUIDLINES FOR THE STUDY OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Saint Emmelia Ministries Homeschool Curriculum

Orthodox Christian Homeschooling

GUIDELINES FOR THE STUDY OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

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**Being the 6th unit in the
Orthodox Ancient History and Social Studies
Curriculum**

**(previous units cover Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece, Ancient Mesopotamia,
Ancient Israel, and Ancient Rome; information about these units is available
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Guidelines for the Study of Early Christianity

Introduction

In this study we'll be looking at the way of life of the early Christians by using basically the same approach we've followed in looking at the way of life of the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, Mesopotamians, Israelites, and Romans – pursuing the same basic themes of geography, food and drink, clothing, shelter, religion, government, defense, work and occupations, leisure and entertainment, and education.

However, we'll be addressing these themes in quite unique ways, since the Christians did not live very differently from the people in the surrounding society in terms of outward appearance. *It was what was burning in their hearts that made all the difference.* While externally their way of life was not so different from that of their non-Christian neighbors, at the same time their way of life was remarkably different, for they tried to let the light of the Kingdom of Heaven shine in every aspect of their lives, giving even the most mundane tasks an exalted, purified purpose.

In short, the Christians were called – as we are still called – to live *in the world*, but at the same time not to be *of the world*. As Jesus prayed to the Father concerning everyone believing in Him,

I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world (John 17:14-18).

In the *Epistle to Diognetus*, an anonymous letter written probably at some time in the early second century, there is a wonderful description of the Christians living in the midst of their surrounding society, and yet at the same being distinctly different:

The difference between Christians and the rest of mankind is not a matter of nationality, or language, or customs. Christians do not live apart in separate cities of their own,

or speak any special dialect, or practice any eccentric way of life. . . . They pass their lives in whatever township – Greek or foreign – that each man has been allotted. *And they conform to ordinary local usage in their clothing, diet, and other habits.*

Nevertheless, the organization of their community does exhibit some features that are wondrous and confessedly paradoxical. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet they endure all things as if they are foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth is as a land of strangers. Like other men, they marry and beget children; but they do not abandon their infants. Any Christian is free to share at his neighbor's table, but never his marriage-bed.

They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, *but they are citizens of heaven* [cf. Phil. 3:20]. They obey the prescribed laws, *but in the quality of their lives they surpass the laws*" (ch. 5; translation adapted from *Loeb Classical Library*, Apostolic Fathers, vol. II, trans. Kirsopp Lake; and from *Early Christian Writings*, trans. Maxwell Staniforth; our emphasis).

This quotation from the *Epistle to Diognetus* could generate some very good discussion. You could ask the students, "How do you think it can be said that for the Christians 'Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth is as a land of strangers'? And how can it be said that 'in the quality of their lives they surpass the laws'? Why do you think it is specifically stated that 'they do not abandon their infants'?" (This is referring to the relatively common practice in those days of leaving unwanted infants in a public place. Parents who did this thought they could not afford another mouth to feed. Perhaps they hoped that someone would find the child and care for it, but they must also have known that the infant would often die.)

NOTE: While it would not be absolutely necessary to go through the segment in this curriculum series on Ancient Rome with your student(s) before going through this segment, it would be a very good idea to do so. This is because it is mostly within the Roman Empire that Christianity first spreads – at least in the first four or five centuries after Christ. So it is the society and culture of the Roman Empire in which most of the early Christians lived. And as the quotation above indicates, the Christians outwardly lived for the most part according to the cultural patterns of their surrounding society.

Geography

“From the very start, the **Gospel** message – the truly **Good News** about eternal salvation through belief in **Jesus Christ** (‘gospel’ means ‘Good News’ or ‘Glad Tidings’) – was spread very naturally and spontaneously by the new Christians to their friends and relatives. Since nearly all of the first Christians were Jews by birth (we recall that Jesus Himself was a Jew), it was natural that these Jewish Christians would think first about telling their Jewish relatives and friends about the salvation that God the Father had brought into the world through His eternal Son, Jesus Christ.

“At the time of Christ, it is estimated that there were probably several million Jews living in various areas of the Roman Empire beyond their native Palestine. Most of the Jews in this *diaspora* had adopted some or most of the customs of the various peoples among whom they were living. Most of them could speak Greek, the *lingua franca* (meaning a common language; the language most people held in common) of the Empire, which contributed to their being called *Hellenized* Jews (from *Hellas*, an early name for Greece). (Some of the Jews in Jerusalem as well had learned Greek and had adopted certain Greek customs; they are called *Hellenists* in Acts 6:1 and 9:29.)

“On the **Day of Pentecost**, Hellenized Jews from many parts of the Empire (read Acts 2:9-11) had come back to Jerusalem to celebrate this important Jewish feast (see Ex. 23:14-17; Lev. 23:15-22; Deut. 16:9-12; Tobit 2:1; 2 Maccabees 12:32).¹ After they had heard the **Apostle Peter’s** sermon – the first public Christian exhortation – and had been baptized (read Acts 2:37-41), the now-Christian Hellenized Jews from abroad must have returned to their various homelands, taking the Gospel message with them to share with their relatives and friends in their home areas.

“It is interesting to note that the Christians of Jerusalem apparently did not begin to spread the Gospel to neighboring regions until ‘a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem’ (Acts 8:1). This was the persecution in which **St. Stephen the Protodeacon and Protomartyr** (see Acts 6:1 – 7:60) gave his life for Christ as the first Christian martyr (he is commemorated in our Church on Dec. 27). It was on account of this persecution, according to the rest of Acts 8:1, that the Christians ‘were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.’ Within a few more years, the Apostles were spreading the Gospel all across the Roman Empire and beyond. This was the exact geographical order that Jesus Himself had told the Apostles that they would follow (read Acts 1:8).

“An extremely important step in the spread of the Gospel was when St. Peter preached to **Cornelius**, a Roman centurion (army officer), and all his family, in the town of Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast west of Jerusalem. This event is known as the ‘Pentecost of the Gentiles,’ since this is the first recorded instance of non-Jews becoming Christians. Read Acts 10:1 – 11:18 for this exciting

¹ NOTE: All Old Testament references are taken from the new Orthodox Study Bible; any time there is a difference in the numbering in the Hebrew Bible, that will be so noted.

event and for the way Peter described it to the Jewish Christians back in Jerusalem. Some years later, Peter will refer to this event at the first council of the Church, held in Jerusalem in about 49 A.D. (read Acts 15:1-11). (This Cornelius was later made a bishop by St. Peter; he served the Church in the town of Skepsis in northwestern Asia Minor, and died peacefully; he is commemorated on Sept. 13.)

“We know the most about the missionary work of the great **Apostle Paul**. As we know, St. Paul’s three great missionary journeys concentrated on visiting cities across southern Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), and in northern and southern Greece (see Acts 13:1 – 21:17). The fine system of Roman roads helped him greatly in making these long overland journeys (see the part on Transportation in the segment on Ancient Rome in this curriculum series).

“In each city he came to, Paul first went to the Jewish synagogue to preach to his fellow Jews. He tries hard to convince them from their own Scriptures (our Old Testament), and from his own experience with the living Christ on the Damascus Road (read Acts 9:1-18; he recounts this experience in Acts 22:1-16 and 26:1-18), that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed their long-awaited Messiah. And this Jesus is not only the Messiah, the Redeemer, of the Jews, but He is also *the Savior of the whole world*.

“The cities of the Empire would be the centers for the steadily expanding Christian movement in the first three centuries after Christ, and long into the fourth century. This was natural, because the cities were the centers of greatest population density and of the most sophisticated cultural expression (libraries, theaters, schools, temples, etc.).

“Acts 8:26-39 tells the story of **the Ethiopian eunuch** hearing the Gospel from **St. Philip** (one of the first seven deacons) and being baptized by him. This is how the Good News of Christ first gets taken to **Africa**, where **Ethiopia** is located.

“The first great historian of the Church, **Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea** (in Palestine; lived c. 260 – 339), tells the dramatic story about how the Gospel was taken to **Edessa** in northwestern **Mesopotamia**. The king there, named **Abgar**, was suffering from a mortal illness. Upon hearing about Jesus and the miracles of healing He was doing in Palestine, King Abgar sent a letter to Him, asking Him to come and cure him. Jesus answered him with a letter:

Happy are you who believed in Me without having seen Me! For it is written of Me that those who have seen Me will not believe in Me, and that those who have not seen will believe and live. As to your request that I should come to you, I must complete all that I was sent to do here, and on completing it I must at once be taken up to the One who sent Me. When I have been taken up I will send you one of My disciples to cure your disorder and bring life to you and those with you (Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, Book I, part 13).

After Christ's Ascension into Heaven, **St. Thaddeus** (commemorated on Aug. 21), one of the **Seventy Apostles**, is sent to Edessa, where he heals the king of his ailment, and does many other miraculous healings in Christ's name, along with preaching the Gospel.

“The **Twelve Apostles** traveled far and wide to carry the Gospel to various parts of the Empire and beyond. For example:

The **Apostles Philip and Bartholomew** (Nov. 14; June 11), along with Philip's sister **St. Mariamne** (Feb. 17), preached in eastern **Asia Minor**, especially in **Hieropolis** in **Phrygia**.

The **Apostle Andrew** (Nov. 30) it is said, reached the site of present-day **Kiev** and prophesied that a great Christian city would one day be built there. It is also traditionally believed that he preached in early **Byzantium**. The Patriarchate of Constantinople is called the throne of St. Andrew.

The **Apostle Matthew** (Nov. 16) is said to have preached and been martyred in **Africa**, in ‘the land of the cannibals.’

The **Apostle Thomas** (Oct. 6) labored in the province of **Kerala** in southwestern **India**. He was martyred there, near the city of **Mylapore**, and buried at **Madras**.

The **Apostle John the Theologian and Evangelist** (May 8, Sept. 26) ministered in **Ephesus** (in southwestern Asia Minor), and lived there both before and after his exile on the island of **Patmos** in the **Aegean Sea**, near Asia Minor. He was exiled to **Patmos** under **Emperor Domitian** (r. 81-96), after he had emerged unharmed from various tortures. It was during his exile on Patmos that he had the revelation that inspired him to write the Book of Revelation, the last of the books of the New Testament. He was the only one of the Twelve Apostles who did not die as a martyr.

The **Apostles Peter and Paul** both ministered in Rome, and both of them were martyred there under the crazed **Emperor Nero** around 67 A.D. Their graves became a very important pilgrimage site, and greatly enhanced the stature of the Church of Rome in the Christian world. They are honored together in our Church on June 29, the day the **Apostles' Fast** ends.

“Also noteworthy:

St. Mark the Evangelist (Apr. 25) cousin of the **Apostle Barnabas** (June 11) of the Seventy (Col. 4:10), is considered to have been the founder of the Church in **Alexandria, Egypt**. The Patriarchate of Alexandria is known as the throne of St. Mark.

St. James, Brother of the Lord (Oct. 23, and the first Sunday after the Nativity of the Lord) was the first bishop of **Jerusalem** (see Acts 12:17, 15:13-21, and 21:18). He also was writer of the Epistle of St. James. He was martyred at the hands of **Annas**, the Jewish high priest, in Jerusalem in about 62 A.D.

St. Joseph of Arimathea (July 31), according to a Medieval western tradition, traveled to **Britain**, to **Glastonbury**, where his staff took root as a tree that blooms, to this day, around the time of Christmas, as well as in the spring.

St. Timothy (Jan. 22), spiritual son of St. Paul the Apostle, was the first bishop of **Ephesus**. St. Paul wrote two letters to him which are included in the NT.

St. Titus (Aug. 25), who also received a letter from the Apostle Paul that is in the NT, was the first bishop of **Crete**.

“By the end of the second century, the Church was well-established in two other regions – one centered in **Lyons**, in **Gaul** (modern-day **France**); and the other in **Carthage**, in western **North Africa** (modern-day **Tunisia**). The first great **Church Father** (meaning a leading theologian of the Church) was **St. Irenaeus of Lyons** (Aug. 23), who was the bishop there from 177 to about 202. He wrote in Greek, since the Church there was established by Greek-speaking people who had immigrated from Asia Minor.

“In Carthage at this same time, the very important lay theologian named **Tertullian** was writing many major works in Latin (Carthage had been conquered by the Romans in the middle of the second century B.C.). He is known as the ‘Father of Latin theology,’ even though, very sadly, he joined the heretical sect of the **Montanists** later in life and died outside the Church.

“Significant Christian communities were also established by the year 200 in **Cyrene** (modern-day **Libya**), **Syracuse** (in **Sicily**), **Cartagena** and **Tarragona** (in **Spain**), **Arles** (in **Gaul**), **Trier** and **Cologne** (in modern-day **Germany**), **Milan** (in northern **Italy**), and all along the southern shore of the **Black Sea** (you could ask the students to find these places on a globe or in an atlas).

“By the end of the third century, Christianity had grown to such an extent that Christians may have made up as much as ten percent of the population of the Empire – about six million out of about

sixty million people. By then the Church was spread from Britain and Spain in the west all the way to **Armenia** and **Persia** in the east.

“**King Tiridates** of **Armenia** accepted Christianity personally and on behalf of his people in about the year 300 through the missionary work of **St. Gregory the Illuminator** (Sept. 30). This made Armenia the first Christian nation. St. Gregory became the first bishop of the Armenian Church.

“Of immense significance was the conversion of **Constantine the Great**, who became the first Christian emperor (r. 312-337). At first he ruled only the western half of the Empire, while **Licinius** ruled in the East. Together they signed the famous **Edict of Milan** in February of 313. This decree officially ended the long and bloody **Diocletian Persecution** which had begun early in 303 under **Emperor Diocletian** (r. 284-305), and granted toleration and legal status to Christianity. Toleration was also granted to all other forms of religious belief and practice (the text is given in Bainton, *Early Christianity*, pp. 160-162).

“While Christianity was not made the official religion of the Empire at this point, Emperor Constantine did openly favor it in many ways. For example, he sent generous grants of money to Christian communities which had suffered during the previous ten years of persecution; he sponsored many new copies of the Scriptures to be made; he had numerous churches built, he gave the Lateran palace to the Church of Rome to be the residence for the Roman bishop; he allotted a large proportion of provincial tax revenues to the churches to be used for charity work; he made grants of money to poor families to discourage the exposure of unwanted babies; and he honored the traditional day for Christian worship by making every Sunday a public holiday. For all his support for the Church as well as for his personal piety, this first Christian emperor is commemorated in our Church as St. Constantine the Great, Equal-to-the-Apostles (May 21).

“Now no longer a persecuted sect, the Church can flourish openly in the society. Great cathedrals are built; many Church councils are held, some in various regions and some on an Empire-wide scale, attended by scores and even hundreds of bishops; many great theologians write many books about the Faith; monasticism, originating in Egypt, spreads across the Empire; and millions more people convert to Christianity.

“In about 330, the nation of **Iberia**, later called **Georgia**, just north of Armenia in the region of the Caucasus Mountains, which are located east of the Black Sea and west of the Caspian Sea, was brought to the Christian Faith through the prayerful missionary work of a humble former slave-woman. This was **St. Nina, Enlightener of Georgia and Equal-to-the-Apostles** (Jan. 14).

“In the fourth century, the Church in **Ethiopia** is organized into dioceses by **St. Frumentius**

(Nov. 30), known as the **Apostle to the Ethiopians** (or Abyssinians). He was consecrated as the first bishop for Ethiopia by **St. Athanasius the Great** (Jan. 18, May 2), Bishop of Alexandria, Egypt.

“Beginning in 339 the Church in **Persia** (modern-day **Iran**) endured fierce persecution, especially under **King Shapur II** (r. 309 – 379), but also under his successors. Nevertheless, missionary work continued across all of Persia and beyond.

“By the end of the fourth century, well more than half of the population of the Empire had become Christian. Christianity essentially became the official religion of the Empire through a series of edicts issued by **Emperor St. Theodosius the Great** (r. 379-395; commemorated on Jan. 17) in the early 390s which outlawed pagan worship.

“By the middle of the fifth century, the Church was firmly established in Ireland through the work of **St. Patrick of Ireland** (March 17).”

Activities

It would be interesting to make a list of all the cities St. Paul preached in, according to the Acts of the Apostles (the Book of Acts). Which ones did he go to twice – either on the same journey, or on separate journeys? The students could also make a map of his journeys.

The older students might gain deeper insight into St. Paul’s life, especially his missionary journeys, by reading John DeMers’ book, *Journeys in Dust and Light* (listed among the Resources at the end of this unit). It’s an intensely personal, moving account of the author’s journey in Paul’s “footsteps.” A much more scholarly and less personal treatment of St. Paul’s journeys is given in Sherman Johnson’s book, *Paul the Apostle and His Cities* (also given in the list of Resources).

The students could write their own Saints’ Lives about one or more of the great missionary saints mentioned above. The Lives of the Twelve Apostles are given in a book entitled *The Lives of the Holy Apostles*, by Reader Isaac E. Lambertson and Holy Apostles Convent (Buena Vista, Colo.: 1988). These Lives, based on various early traditions, are taken from the Menology of **St. Dimitri of Rostov** (a bishop in Russia who died in 1709; commemorated on Sept. 21 and Oct. 28), and from the **Great Synaxarion** of the Greek Orthodox Church. This *Synaxarion* was gradually compiled over the centuries, beginning with the collection gathered and paraphrased by **St. Simeon Metaphrastes** (Nov. 9) in the tenth century. The lives of St. Gregory the Illuminator of Armenia, St. Nina of Georgia, St. Frumentius of Ethiopia, St. Patrick of Ireland – and also **St. Martin of Tours** (Oct. 12), who organized dioceses in central France in the fourth century – are all very dramatic.

Older students would profit much from reading and discussing the fourth chapter, entitled “Epidemics, Networks, and Conversion,” in Rodney Stark’s excellent book, *The Rise of Christianity* (listed among the resources given at the end of this curriculum). The valiant, self-sacrificial way the Christians ministered to their fellow Christians and to non-Christians alike during the two widespread devastating plagues sweeping the Empire (in about 165 and in about 250) undoubtedly contributed much to the spreading of the Faith. This all says so much about how putting our Christian Faith “in action” can be a very powerful witness to others about the Truth of Christianity.

Food and Drink

“Acts 2:46 says about the first Christians, ‘So continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.’ This gives us a glimpse into the major importance of hospitality and fellowship among the early Christians. It perhaps also gives a glimpse into *the sacramental nature of eating* – especially eating what is received gratefully, giving thanks to the Lord for it. Jesus Himself gave an example of giving thanks to God before partaking of food (see Matt. 14:19 and 15:36), as did St. Paul (Acts 27:33-37).

“Also, the center and climax of every Divine Liturgy in our Church is a kind of meal: the *Eucharist*. The word ‘Eucharist’ comes from a Greek word meaning ‘thankfulness’ or ‘thanksgiving.’ In the Holy Eucharist, Christ offers His own Body and Blood for the spiritual nourishment of the faithful, and we give great thanks for that nourishment. Even eternal life in Heaven is depicted as a meal – ‘the marriage supper of the Lamb’ (Rev. 19:9; see also Luke 14:15-24 and Matt. 22:1-14). All this makes eating, especially communal meals, especially significant for Christians.

“The *Didache*, a manual of various Christian practices and prayers probably compiled some time in the early second century, includes a thanksgiving for food in general:

You, Almighty Master, created everything for Your Name’s sake; You have given food and drink to all people for their pleasure, so that they might give You thanks.

Immediately after this prayer, this document gives a thanksgiving for the food that is most important – the spiritual food which Christ gives to His followers in the Holy Eucharist for the nourishment of their souls:

And to us You have graciously given spiritual food and drink, and life eternal through Jesus Your Servant (Didache 10:3-4).

“Concerning *what* they ate and drank, most likely the Christians ate and drank pretty much the same foods and beverages as their non-Christian neighbors did (see the section on Food in the curriculum for Ancient Rome). St. Paul wrote to St. Timothy warning against certain false teachers who were forbidding Christians from eating certain foods – ‘commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.’ He goes on to declare, ‘For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer’ (1 Tim. 4:1-5). This was one of the practical ways that Christianity superseded Judaism, with its restrictions against eating pork, etc. (this development was foreseen in Acts 10:9-16).”

Food offered to idols

“However, there was the very real issue of pagans offering meat or other foods in sacrifice to their idols and then selling the same food in the marketplace. This apparently was quite a common practice during the first four centuries A.D., before pagan sacrifices were outlawed by **Emperor St. Theodosius the Great** in about 392.

“Was it acceptable for Christians to eat such food? Technically, yes. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 10:23-33) that he has a certain ‘liberty’ in such things, since “‘the earth is the Lord’s and all its fullness’” (quoting Ps. 23:1; 24:1 in the Hebrew Bible). So he gives as a general rule, ‘Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience’s sake.’ He also says, ‘If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience’s sake’ (see also Luke 10:8). ‘But,’ St. Paul adds, ‘if anyone says to you, “This was offered to idols,” do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you’ – thereby making a Christian witness to the unbeliever.

“Two chapters earlier, in 1 Corinthians 8, St. Paul says that really it would not hurt a Christian to eat things offered to idols, since ‘we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one’ (1 Cor. 8:4). However, the Apostle goes on to say that you might have Christian brothers or sisters who are not very strong in their faith, but who might be so emboldened by your example of eating food offered to idols that they might do the same thing, but then they might afterwards be struck by their consciences that they did something wrong. He very strongly asserts that we must not take the risk of something like that happening: ‘And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble’ (1 Cor. 8:11-13). What a great example this is of

sensitively bearing with and accommodating the weakness of others with Christian love and humility! (The Apostle Paul says very similar things to the Roman Christians in Rom. 14:1 – 15:2.)

“At the first council of the Church, held in Jerusalem in about 49 A.D. under the presidency of **St. James, the first Bishop of Jerusalem**, it was decided that Christians basically would not be required to adhere to the various stipulations of the Mosaic Law, in particular those concerning circumcision and the various dietary restrictions. However, this council did specify that all Christians had to abstain from eating ‘things offered to idols, from blood [Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:10-14], from things strangled, and from sexual immorality’ (Acts 15:29). The first three of these abstentions were stipulated partly by way of compromise, to help mollify the Jewish Christians who really believed that Gentile Christians should be made to keep the whole Mosaic Law.

“Perhaps about 75 years later or so, the *Didache* repeated the prohibition against eating meat which had been offered to idols: ‘be sure to refrain completely from meat which has been sacrificed before idols, for it represents the worship of dead gods’ (Didache 6:3). This was not only to protect Christians who might have a weaker faith, as St. Paul explained in his letter just mentioned, but it also came to be realized that when Christians ate meat offered to idols it gave a negative impression to non-Christians – it negatively affected the witness Christians made to their pagan neighbors.

“This problem of food offered to idols was still a very real issue in the middle of the fourth century, as we see in the story of **St. Theodore the Tyro** (meaning the Recruit). This young man had just joined the army in the town of **Amasea** in **Bithynia** (on the southwestern coast of the **Black Sea**) when a fierce persecution of Christians broke out in about the year 306. Not hiding the fact that he was a Christian, he was imprisoned. **St. Nicholai of Zicha and South Canaan**, in his illustrious *Prologue from Ochrid* (for February 17, St. Theodore’s Feastday), writes that ‘the Lord Jesus Himself appeared to Theodore in the prison and encouraged His martyr with these words: “Fear not, Theodore; I am with thee. Take no more earthly food and drink, for thou shalt be, in the other life, eternal and unending, with Me in heaven.” Then a multitude of angels appeared in the prison, and the whole place shone with light.’ Soon thereafter he was martyred.

“About 56 years later, **Emperor Julian the Apostate** (r. 361-363) devised a wicked plan to bring disgrace and confusion upon the Christians. He is called ‘the Apostate’ because as a young man he rejected the Christian Faith in which he was raised, and then he turned violently against the Christians. Julian’s plot was revealed by St. Theodore, who appeared in a dream to **Archbishop Eudoxios of Constantinople**. This is described in a Church hymn addressed to St. Theodore, which is sung in the Vespers service for the first Friday of Great Lent:

Using as his tool the Apostate Emperor, the enemy [i.e., the devil] devised a cruel plot:

with food polluted by unclean sacrifices he sought to defile the people of God as they purified themselves through fasting. But thou hast defeated his design by a more skillful plan: appearing in a dream to the Archbishop, thou hast revealed to him the evil plot. Therefore we offer thee a sacrifice of thanksgiving, honoring thee as our protector and keeping the yearly memorial of what then was done. May we be kept safe, we pray, from the designs of the enemy at thine intercessions, O martyr Theodore (*The Lenten Triodion*, pp. 274-275)."

Besides on February 17, St. Theodore the Tyro is remembered with great praise and thanksgiving on the Friday of the first week of Great Lent every year.

No eating of blood

"Just as the prohibition against eating foods offered to idols, given in Acts 15:29, was generally maintained by the Christians, so also was the next restriction given in that same verse: the prohibition against eating blood. Hence, 'Christians had to give up eating black pudding (*botuli cruore distenti*), which was extraordinarily popular in antiquity. As Tertullian wrote to the non-Christian authorities: "You tempt Christians with sausages of blood, just because you are perfectly aware that the thing, by which you thus try to get them to transgress, they hold to be unlawful"' (Christoph Markshies, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 118 [this book is listed among the resources given at the end of this segment of the curriculum]). Markshies also relates how the mighty **King Shapur II of Persia** (r. 309-379) – who, beginning in 337, waged continuous persecution against the many Christians in his realm – used to say to them, 'Drink blood and I shall let you go free.' This the Christians refused to do (p. 118).

"Today, eating blood sausages, etc., generally has no negative connotations, so this restriction probably has not generally been kept for a long time."

Eating and drinking simply, and with moderation

"Whatever the Christians ate and drank, they were urged by their pastors and teachers to eat and drink with moderation (Eccles. 10:17; 1 Cor. 10:31), to avoid the sins of gluttony (Phil. 3:19) and drunkenness (Prov. 20:1, 23:28-32; Is. 5:11-12; Luke 21:34; Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:18). They were also counseled to eat simple and plain food – not fancy, expensive delicacies – and to not spend too much time, effort, and expense in its preparation. As St. Paul says, 'the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 14:17). Jesus Himself said, "Therefore do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things' (Matt. 6:31-32)

“**Clement of Alexandria** (c. 140 – c. 215) was a very important Christian teacher who wrote a long book called *Christ the Teacher*. In this book he gives very practical guidance for Christians on how to live in Christ and for Christ in every single aspect of their lives. Concerning *what to eat*, and the overall purpose for eating, he states,

Some people live that they may eat – like the irrational creatures, ‘whose life is their belly, and nothing else.’ But the Teacher enjoins us to eat that we may live. For neither is food our business, nor is pleasure our aim; but both are on account of our life here, which the Word is training up for immortality. Therefore it is necessary for discrimination to be employed in reference to food – which is to be simple, truly plain, suitable precisely for simple and innocent children, and ministering to life, not to luxury. And the life which it sustains consists of two things – health and strength, for which plainness of fare is most suitable, being conducive both to good digestion and lightness of body (Book II, chapter 1).

And concerning *how to eat*, he declares,

We must abstain from all excess, and touch what is set before us in a decorous way – keeping your hand and couch [as we remember, in the ancient Roman Empire the general custom was to recline at meals and eat with one’s hands] and chin free from stains, preserving the graceful expression of your countenance undisturbed, committing no indecorum in the act of swallowing, and stretching out your hand at intervals in an orderly manner [when reaching for things on the table]. We must guard against talking while eating, for the voice becomes disagreeable and inarticulate when it is confined by full jaws. And the tongue, pressed by the food and impeded in its natural energy, gives forth a muffled utterance. Nor is it suitable to eat and drink simultaneously (Book II, chapter 1).

“Concerning drinking wine, Clement does not forbid it, as some fundamentalist, rigorist groups like the **Encratites** did in his day. The Psalmist had rejoiced long before that the Lord ‘causes grass to grow for the cattle, and the green plant for the service of man, to bring forth bread from the earth, and *wine gladdens the heart of man*, to brighten his face with oil, and bread strengthens man’s heart’ (Ps. 104:14-15; our emphasis). Jesus Himself drank wine (Matt. 11:19), and even blessed it to become His own Blood at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25). St. Paul advised St. Timothy to drink “a little wine” for health purposes (1 Tim. 5:23). (Today studies have shown that drinking one glass of wine with a meal can help prevent heart disease.)

“However, Clement most vigorously denounces drinking wine in excess (something strongly supported by modern medicine). As he says,

the heart is drowned in much drink. Drunkenness is compared to the danger of the sea, in which when the body has once been sunk like a ship, it descends to the depths of turpitude, overwhelmed in the mighty billows of wine. And the helmsman, the human mind, is tossed about on the surge of drunkenness, which swells aloft, and buried in the trough of the sea, is blinded by the darkness of the tempest, having drifted away from the haven of truth, till, being dashed on the rocks beneath the sea, it perishes, driven by itself into voluptuous indulgences (*Christ the Teacher*, Book II, chapter 2).

In this chapter Clement especially warns against the dangers of teenagers and women becoming drunk with wine.

“In writing these things, Clement surely had in mind the sumptuous banquets held by wealthy pagans which so easily degenerated into wild, drunken revelries. Sometimes the participants would gorge themselves with food, then intentionally regurgitate what they had eaten in order to empty their stomachs so that they could gorge themselves again. Pious Christians shuddered at such utterly disgusting behavior, so unbecoming to human dignity! They also knew that such excessive self-indulgence leads so often to even worse sins – like brawling, thievery, fornication, and even murder.

“In 1 Corinthians 11:20-33, the Apostle Paul scolds the Corinthian Christians for eating at the **agape meal** without proper decorum, and without thoughtful consideration for all those in attendance. The *agape* meal was a communal meal held in connection with their Eucharistic gatherings. The practice of having such a meal apparently lasted until about the middle of the fourth century. (For a brief description of it, see Tertullian’s *Apology*, ch. 39; an excerpt is given by Eberhard Arnold in *The Early Christians*, pp. 220-221). Many of our parishes offer food at a ‘coffee hour’ after the Liturgy, and/or provide a simple Lenten meal after the Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts during Great Lent. These are wonderful customs that promote social as well spiritual unity among the parishioners.”

Fasting

“Regular periods of fasting – either refraining from eating altogether, or abstaining from certain foods for certain periods of time – developed gradually, and in different ways, in different places throughout the Christian world. Jesus said that His followers would fast when they no longer had Him physically present with them on the earth (Matt. 9:15), and He gave some guidance about how to fast discreetly and humbly (Matt. 6:17-18). He also referred to the power of fasting (Matt. 17:21). St. Paul mentions times of ‘fasting and prayer’ in 1 Corinthians 7:5, but he does not specify what such times are. The Book of the Acts of the Apostles indicates that the Christians prayed and fasted in times of special need (Acts 9:8-11, 13:2-3, and 14:23).

“The *Didache*, dating from the late first century or early second century, exhorts Christians to have two days of fasting each week – not every Monday and Thursday as the Jews were doing, but every Wednesday and Friday (*Didache* 8:1), in memory of Christ’s betrayal and crucifixion. It is our Orthodox practice to this day to abstain from meat, fish, eggs, and dairy products every Wednesday and Friday (except for during the three fast-free weeks of the year – do you know what weeks those are? Bright Week, the week after Pentecost, and the week after Christmas – actually, continuing on through Jan. 4).

“A period of fasting before the celebration of Pascha at first apparently only consisted of one or two days, or the exact 40 hours between Christ’s death on the Cross (Friday at 3:00 PM) to His Resurrection (Sunday at 7:00 AM), judging by some words of St. Irenaeus written near the end of the second century (given by Bp. Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Ecclesiastical History*.V.24). By the early decades of the fourth century, this period had reached the current length of 40 days, as seen in Canon 5 of the **First Ecumenical Council**, held in Nicea, in western Asia Minor, in 325. This is the earliest extant written reference to a 40-day **Great Lent**. There is strong precedence in the Scriptures for a 40-day fast; can you think of two important people who fasted for 40 days? Moses (Ex. 34:28) and Christ (Luke 4:1-2) each fasted for 40 days at a crucial time in their lives.

“In both the eastern and western portions of the Empire, in the early centuries, Christians observed Great Lent very strictly. Only one meal per day (or at the least, only one substantial meal) was allowed, which was eaten towards evening. Meat, fish, eggs, and dairy products were forbidden.

“As the Lord declared through the Prophet Isaiah (Is. 58:1-12), the Christians understood that fasting did not just involve abstaining from all food, or from certain foods, but also making an extra effort to do good works, to deepen our spiritual life, and to abstain from any kind of wrongdoing. We see this clearly expressed in many of the hymns of the Church during the season of Great Lent, such as these three from Matins for the First Monday of Lent (*Lenten Triodion*, pp. 190, 193, and 194):

Let us joyfully begin the all-hallowed season of abstinence; and let us shine with the bright radiance of the holy commandments of Christ our God, with the brightness of love and the splendor of prayer, with the purity of holiness and the strength of good courage. So, clothed in raiment of light, let us hasten to the Holy Resurrection on the third day, that shines upon the world with the glory of eternal life.

May this the first day of the Fast be for thee, my soul, a time of abstinence from sin, of turning towards God and drawing near to Him. Do thou flee from all the pits of evil and seek

only the paths that lead to the eternal rest of the Age to come.

The season of the holy Fast is now at hand. Let us begin it with good actions; for it is said, fast not for strife and debate [referring to Is. 58:4]

“It was also suggested early on, as in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, that when one fasts, one should save money by eating cheaper, simpler food, and then give the money saved to those in need. This tied fasting to almsgiving, which was understood to be extremely important for Christians to practice. In one of his homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew, St. John Chrysostom, after saying that a virtuous life is much more to be sought after than the power to work miracles, says:

Do you see how our virtuous practices have more power to do good than working miracles? By our practices, I do not mean your fasting, or even strewing sackcloth and ashes upon yourself, but rather if you despise wealth as it ought to be despised, if you be kindly and loving, if you give your bread to the hungry, if you control your anger, if you cast out vainglory from yourself, if you put away envy. . . .

All this I say, not to depreciate fasting, God forbid, but rather to highly commend it. But I grieve when you neglect other duties and then think that fasting is enough for your salvation, since fasting has the last place in the choir of virtue. For the greatest thing is love, and moderation, and almsgiving, which hits a higher mark even than living a celibate life in virginity (Homily XLVI on Matthew, part 4; p. 291 in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 10).

Activities

Together as a family, discuss the importance of having meals together. There has been a lot of research showing that having meals together as a family and being involved in a religion are two of the best ways to keep children safe from the many evils and temptations in our society (see, for example, an article in *Touchstone* magazine for June, 2007, entitled “Happier Meals,” by Karl Jenson Gold). Ask the children how they might help to make family meals a priority, and talk about how everyone can help make meals more sacramental – a real time of thanksgiving, and sharing one another’s company in love, and even feeling closer to God. Have the students make a list of the suggestions you come up with in the discussion, and post them in the kitchen, so the whole family can be reminded to work on this together.

Have a discussion with the children about how the teachings and guidance of the Church help us to have a healthy attitude towards food. Why do we ask God to bless our food? Why do we give Him thanks for it? Why does the Church have various days and periods of fasting

throughout the year? How do the fasts help us not to be overly concerned about food? Good food does give us pleasure, and it's fine to enjoy the pleasure of tasty food, but real joy doesn't come from food. Real joy comes from our loving relationships with God and with other people.

In the periods of fasting it's very good to emphasize eating more simply and cheaply, so that additional money can be given to the poor or other worthwhile charities during these times. Have your children be more involved with helping to decide whom to give to, or other ways to help others more, than in non-fasting seasons. If the children don't have money to give themselves, or don't want to give their own, they could find ways to give their time – such as visiting the sick, writing letters, etc.

Have a discussion about eating more simply. Here, a list could be made of simple dishes that would be acceptable to the whole family. Have the children participate in preparing various fasting dishes.

It would be very good to talk together about how some money could be saved through buying less expensive food items, and how you could give the saved money to a worthy charity – such as the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC). This would be an excellent “project” for the whole family during Great Lent and Advent, and perhaps to a lesser extent it could be done throughout the year.

Have a discussion about the deeper meaning of fasting – how it helps us in our spiritual life, and how the most important fasting is to fast from sin in all its forms. You and the children could make a list, through brainstorming together, of all the things that you all as a family could profitably fast from during fasting seasons – and always!

Before the next fasting season of the Church, have a family conference about how the whole family will keep the fast. Have the students write up the plan, and post it in the kitchen to remind everyone.

With older children you could discuss some ways that some people today abuse food:

1. By not being thankful; by taking our food for granted. We should never forget how privileged we are in this country. It would be good to talk about how so many people in the world do not have enough to eat, and how they have to try to survive on very little food, and with very little variety in their diet. It would be good to show mail-outs from charities like IOCC and World Vision to the children, so they can get a better understanding of the trauma of undernutrition and starvation.
2. Over-indulging – eating too much. Why is this bad? Or maybe the children don't think it's so bad – maybe they resent not being able to eat whatever and whenever they would like. Discuss

how over-eating leads to so many health problems, how the current obesity epidemic even among children is in the news, etc. Eating moderately promotes good health, and you can have much more fun if you are healthy!

Over-indulging with food also often leads to other kinds of selfishness – such as paying more attention to food than to other people. Orthodox Christians should be more concerned with love than with anything else – with having loving, right relationships with God and with other people. By curbing our appetites, we open ourselves to being more attentive to other people, and thus more loving. Of course, at times we may feel more grouchy and cross when we’re fasting, but we can ask God to give us His strength and patience at such times.

3. Anorexia/bulimia – how is this different from wealthy Romans making themselves throw up so that they could eat more, even though at first it might seem the same? Roman adults only did this occasionally, for pleasure. But anorexia is generally something teenage girls do for long periods of time, usually to try to have control over their lives, especially because they feel unloved and even unlovable. Discuss how Christ reveals that everyone is lovable and infinitely loved by Him (see, for example, an article in *Touchstone* magazine for June, 2007, entitled “Eating Light,” by Emily Stimpson – on different ways of abusing food, including anorexia).

Clothing, Jewelry, and Cosmetics

“As with food and drink, the Christians probably dressed pretty much in the same ways that their non-Christian neighbors did (see the section on Ancient Rome on clothing in this curriculum series). But again, as with food and drink, they would have been urged by their priests, bishops, and lay teachers to dress simply, inexpensively, and especially *modestly*.

“Again, the emphasis is on persons, and loving relationships. You are loved and of value, not because you wear expensive clothes, jewelry, or the latest fashions, etc., but because of who you are. Likewise, no one is superior to anyone else just because they have more money and can afford expensive clothes, etc. God loves you just for who you are, and as Christians we try to love others just for who they are.

QQ “All this doesn’t mean teens shouldn’t be allowed to experiment to some extent with different kinds of clothing and hairstyles, etc. – that’s part of life today and usually a harmless way of exploring who they are. But we always want to emphasize the basic Christian message of unconditional love – God’s unconditional love for every person, and ideally our unconditional love for others. You could have lots of interesting discussion about appearances and judging “a book by its cover,” etc., and

also about how people use the way they dress to communicate certain things about themselves, and about the group they want to identify with, and so on.

“**St. John Chrysostom** was a great preacher in **Antioch** in the last two decades of the fourth century. Then, from 398 to 404, he was **Archbishop of Constantinople**. His sermons were so eloquent that they earned for him the name ‘**Golden-Mouth**,’ which is what ‘Chrysostom’ means in Greek. His preaching not only was eloquent. It was also constantly filled with very practical advice for living the Christian Faith in every aspect of one’s life.

“In his 89th homily on St. Matthew’s Gospel, Chrysostom laments the many problems that result from too much concern about ‘ornaments and luxury.’ For instance, the woman ‘who wears the gold,’ as he puts it, may tempt others to be envious of her. She may well be spending too much attention on her outward adornment, rather than on the inner adornment of her soul. He also mentions in this homily all the anxieties about protecting one’s jewels, with the worry about whether they will get lost or stolen. And he emphasizes that spending too much money on ‘finery’ means that you have less money to give to the poor.

“In another sermon he quotes St. Paul saying that he desires ‘that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but with good works, which is proper for women professing godliness’ (1 Tim. 2:9-10). And as St. Peter says in his first epistle, ‘Do not let your adornment be merely outward – arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel. Rather, let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God’ (1 Peter 3:3-4).

“The Church is not against looking nice, or taking a reasonable amount of care about our appearance. Indeed, we should look our very best when we come to Church to worship the Creator and Master of the Universe, our LORD, GOD, and KING, Jesus Christ! Rather, the Church is warning us against *excessive concern about appearance* – spending excessive amounts of time and money on things intended to try to make you look better. Doing this can come from feeling insecure and unloved – from trying to make people like you because of what you have, how you dress, etc., and not because of who you are. If you really feel loved and secure about who you are, you won’t pay excessive attention to these things.

“Of course, teenagers like to experiment with different ways to look as part of finding their own identity. This is something quite normal and healthy. St. John Chrysostom was not addressing them, but adults, and others only in a general way.”

Activities

This topic can generate a very profitable discussion about how a Christian man, a Christian woman, and Christian teenagers should dress and adorn themselves. Surely the key issue is: do you feel loved *for who you are* – or do you feel like you have to try “buy” people’s love and approval and even admiration by what you wear? What are the dangers of this? If you’re a girl, and you’ve tried so hard to look glamorous and cool by wearing excessive make-up and expensive, stylish clothes, and someone says they like you, how will you know if he really likes you for who you are – or if he really only likes how you look?

What would we say from a Christian perspective about mini-skirts, bare midriffs, body piercing, excessive make-up, wildly colored hair, tattoos, black leather, chains, etc.? Do you think it’s acceptable to wear some jewelry, and to use some make-up, if it’s done tastefully and moderately? Perhaps after such a discussion, the students could write an essay summarizing their thoughts on this crucially important topic.

We know that a lot of teens do wonder if they are loved, and so they wear odd clothing, etc., as a way to be different from their parents, or to feel part of a group. It’s important for parents not to overreact to superficial things like this, but to try to discern what’s at the root of it, and whether or not it’s “just a stage.” There are many good parenting books about teens that discuss these issues in our contemporary context.

Teens could also look into the history of fashion to discover why people have dressed the way they have, and what really harmful fashions there have been (for example, tight corsets, bound feet, spiked high-heels, etc.). Why have these harmful fashions almost always mainly involved women?

Another key topic is advertising: how do advertisers manipulate people and trick them into spending their money for things they don’t really want or need? Look especially at the crass manipulation of children. We all need to recognize how advertisers are targeting children of younger and younger ages. A discussion about this could be very enlightening. And you could have an ongoing game of discussing and “dissecting” various ads you are hit with as a family – on TV, on billboards, etc. In each case, carefully discern together how the advertiser is trying to convince you to buy his product or service, and then assess if their marketing strategy is really convincing to you.

Another interesting and very important topic is modesty. People’s ideas about modesty have been different in different times and places. You could guide a discussion around the question, “Why is it important for us to be modest in how we dress and how we act?” Help the students try to see that the

deepest motivation for being modest is our love, concern, and respect for others – especially, not wanting to provoke lust. People often deliberately dress immodestly and adorn themselves provocatively in order to deliberately try to stir up lust in others, for various reasons: simply wanting to incite “admiration,” feeling “attractive” as a part of wanting to feel loved, or even wanting to tempt others to immoral behavior either for money, or from the mistaken idea that this is a way to get love. But trying to gain people’s love and approval through such manipulation – or manipulation of any kind – never works. Perhaps you could ask the students to describe, orally and/or in writing, a “dress code” that they feel is reasonable for attending church, for going to school, for going to the mall, for going to a restaurant, etc.

The children could try dressing according to certain styles of the past and get some idea of what it would be like to have to wear such clothes today. They could write about whether they think clothes of today are better – or worse – than the clothing in some other eras. What do people today usually value most in clothing? Probably comfort. What are some disadvantages of the way the clothing industry operates today, such as constantly changing the styles that are currently “in fashion”?

Shelter

Private homes

“We can assume that Christians lived in apartments and houses that did not look particularly different from those of their non-Christian neighbors. There were Christians from all social and economic classes, so presumably they lived in all different kinds of housing – from tiny apartments in the cities to spacious villas in the country (see the section on shelter in the segment on Ancient Rome).

“But inside their houses, the Christians’ faith would have been more evident. They would no longer have the household shrine, where images of various gods and goddesses, or lesser deities, would be kept and various sacrifices would be offered. No doubt they would have daily prayers. It’s possible that some families had some images/icons of Christ, and/or of the Saints (almost all the Saints of the early Church were martyrs) by the fourth century.

“**St. John Chrysostom** gives evidence of the pious use of images by the faithful in their homes in Antioch in the latter part of the fourth century, as he talks about the great love the Christians have for their **Bishop Meletios** who had recently died:

Not only do you long to call fervently upon his great name, but also to look upon the image of his bodily form. What you do with his name you also accomplish with his image. *For everyone*

rejoices to put his image everywhere – on rings, goblets, dishes, and on bedroom walls – so they not only can hear his holy discourses, but also can gaze everywhere on his bodily image, thus gaining a double consolation to make up for his departure from us (from his sermon on Meletios of Antioch; quoted by St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, part 2; our emphasis).

“Certainly by the year 400, ‘portrayals of Christ and the saints were widespread’ (Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, p. 281). (See also the section on Christian Art below.)”

Worship at Home and in Daily Life

“According to Henry Chadwick, ‘It is clear that, although attending the service meant risking one’s life or liberty, all Christians regarded it as an absolute obligation to be present each Sunday if it was in their power’ (*The Early Church*, p. 262).

“In addition to attending the weekly Eucharistic liturgy on Sundays (and gradually other days also, especially feast days of saints and martyrs), another important part of the daily life of the early Christians was private prayer. Christ assumes His disciples will pray, as we see in Matt. 6:5 - ‘When you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites . . .’ St. Paul advises all Christians to ‘pray without ceasing’ (1 Thess. 5:17).

“**St. Hippolytus** (died in 235), in his *Apostolic Tradition*, says that Christians should pray seven times a day: ‘on rising, at the lighting of the evening lamp, at bedtime, at midnight, and also if at home, at the third, sixth and ninth hours of the day, being hours associated with Christ’s passion’ (Chadwick, *The Early Church*, p. 272). The prayers at the 3rd, 6th, and 9th hours – which we still have in the full liturgical cycle which today is usually only celebrated completely in monasteries (The Holy Myrrhbearers women’s monastery in Otego, New York, has published a book of these prayers) – are mentioned by numerous 2nd and 3rd century saints and ancient authors, such as **St. Cyprian of Carthage** and **Clement of Alexandria**, so their use must have been widespread.”

Church Buildings

“The first Christians were Jews, so naturally they continued to go to the temple and/or synagogue for worship. They also met together for Christian worship - especially to celebrate the Eucharistic service and to receive holy communion.

“Even when Gentile converts came to be included in the Church, in the early years of the Christian movement the Christians did not have their own church buildings. So they met in private

homes – especially in larger homes owned by Christians who were more well-off. Several such ‘house-churches’ are mentioned in the epistles of St. Paul in the New Testament – in the home of Saints Priscilla and Aquila in Rome (Rom. 16:3-5; and before then in Ephesus – 1 Cor. 16:19); in the home of Saints Philemon and Apphia in Colossae (Philemon 1-2; Col. 4:9); and in the home of Nymphas (or Nympha, a woman; presumably in Laodicea, located about 15 miles from Colossae; Col. 4:15). There is evidence that the owners of a house-church would permanently devote one or two of the rooms of their home for the worship gatherings.

“In times of persecution, Christians usually could meet safely in underground burial places called **catacombs**. The most extensive and famous of these were dug along the major roads leading out of **Rome**; about 40 of these are still in existence. Roman law respected the sanctity of all burial places, so the catacombs were almost always safe havens for the Christians. The drawings and paintings done on the walls of these catacombs are, generally speaking, the first examples of Christian art – precursors to the iconography that would develop in later centuries. Eucharistic celebrations were held at the tombs of the martyrs on the anniversaries of their deaths.

“In the fourth century, St. Constantine the Great becomes the first Christian emperor (r. 312-337). General religious freedom is given, which means that the Christian Church is given legal status and is allowed to live and develop freely. This allows the Christians to build large, elaborate churches for the first time (though there were some house-churches which were dedicated just to worship and which were adorned with frescoes as early as 232, as indicated below in the Art section). St. Constantine paid for a number of such churches to be built, including the famous **Church of the Twelve Apostles** in Constantinople, and the **Church of the Holy Sepulchre** in Jerusalem.

“As we mentioned in the segment in this curriculum on Ancient Rome, sometimes the Christians took over existing Roman **basilicas** – government public buildings that served as town halls and courthouses – and turned them into churches. The typical Roman basilica was rectangular in shape, with a double row of columns in the interior down each side, and a semi-circular apse at the far end. This became the basic style of church building even when a church was built ‘from scratch,’ with the apse naturally becoming the area for the altar.

“In the more rural, western provinces of the Empire, where there were fewer cities and towns, and therefore fewer parish churches, wealthy Christian landowners might well build a separate chapel/church on their land. These chapel/churches often served not only the estate-owner’s family, along with all his servants and farmworkers and their families, but also other families living in the vicinity.”

Activities

Have your students find pictures of Roman basilicas and of early Christian churches, and note the similarities. They might want to plan out and construct a model of a church themselves – or of a house-church of the earlier days.

Religion

Early Christian Preaching

“In Acts 2:14-40, **St. Luke the Evangelist** records the first public Christian exhortation/sermon. It is given by **St. Peter**, the leader of the original Twelve Apostles. Since he is addressing the Jews who are gathered in Jerusalem for the **Festival of Pentecost**, Peter very naturally turns to their own Holy Scriptures (the Old Testament) to show them that certain prophecies about the Holy Spirit and about the long-awaited Messiah (Savior) were being fulfilled at that very moment, or had been fulfilled recently. In fact, as recorded by St. Luke, more than half of Peter’s sermon consists of direct quotations from the OT.

“Peter quotes other OT passages in his second public sermon, as given in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 3:12-26). And he does so again when he leads the defense of the Christians before the **Sanhedrin**, the Jewish council in Jerusalem (Acts 4:8-12).

“The longest Christian sermon as recorded in Acts is given by **St. Stephen the Protodeacon and Protomartyr** (Acts 7:2-53). Also defending the Christians before the Sanhedrin, St. Stephen here summarizes much of the history of the Jewish people (giving several direct quotations from the OT as he does so), leading to, as he says, ‘the coming of the Just One [Christ], of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers’ (v. 52).

“But when St. Peter is preaching to Cornelius and his household, who are not Jews but Gentiles, he does not quote from the Jewish Scriptures. Rather, he starts with a statement about the universality of salvation – how ‘in every nation, whoever fears Him and works righteousness God accepts’ (Acts 10:35). He then immediately mentions things concerning the life of Jesus that these people undoubtedly have at least heard something about.

“St. Paul repeats the same pattern. When preaching to the Jews in their synagogues – and in every city he visits, he always goes first to the synagogue to share the Gospel with his fellow Jews – Paul quotes much from their Scriptures (for a fine example, read Acts 13:16-41). He does so again when he

speaks to Jews who come to visit him while he is under house arrest in Rome (read Acts 28:23-28).

“But when Paul speaks about Christ to the pagan philosophers in **Athens**, he starts with a reference to their own ‘altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.’ He then refers to the true ‘God, who made the world and everything in it,’ who ‘is the Lord of heaven and earth.’ And he quotes from their own poets: ‘as also some of your own poets have said, “For we are also His offspring”’ (read Acts 17:16-34). So here again we see the first Christian preachers adapting their message to their audience – finding points of contact with them, and using those points of contact to lead them towards a full and proper understanding of God and the salvation He freely offers to all people through His Son, Jesus Christ.”

The Apostolic Fathers

“Even before the last of the original Apostles, **St. John the Evangelist and Theologian**, died (in about the year 100), the next generation of Christian leaders was writing letters and essays and other works addressed to Christians – for their instruction in sound doctrine, and for guidance in how to live the Christian life. The first set of such writings is known as the literature of **The Apostolic Fathers**. These writings include:

* **I Clement**, a letter from the Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth, most likely written by **St. Clement**, the third **Bishop of Rome** (r. 92-101; feastday Nov. 25, in about 96 A.D. In this letter he urges – but does not command – the Corinthian Christians, some of whom were rebelling against their elders in the Church, to be reconciled, and to ‘keep God’s commandments in the harmony of love’ (ch. 50:5). He wrote in the previous chapter, ‘The bond of the love of God – who can adequately describe it? The greatness of its beauty – who is capable of putting it into words? The height to which love leads us is beyond description. Love unites us to God . . . Love knows nothing of schism [division], love does not rebel, love does all things in harmony’ (49:2-5).

* **Seven letters** by **St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch** (c. 30 – c. 107 A.D.; feastday Dec. 20 and Jan. 29), written very shortly before his death. By tradition, he was the child who was lifted up by Christ and placed in the midst of His Disciples (see Matt. 18:1-5). Five of these powerful, inspiring letters were written to the churches in **Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Philadelphia**, and **Smyrna** (all cities in western Asia Minor; see Rev. 2:1-11 and 3:7-13). Another one was written to the church in **Rome**, and the last one was a personal letter written to **St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna**. All of them were written as Ignatius was being taken by armed guard from Antioch to Rome, to be cast to the wild beasts in the **Colosseum**.

These letters are filled with sound doctrine about Christ, including two passages that perhaps were early creedal statements (Ephesians 7:2 and Smyrnaeans 1:1-2). The letters emphasize the central importance of the bishop in each city, along with his *presbyters* (meaning ‘elders’; later they would be called ‘priests,’ a word that comes from the word ‘presbyter.’ They are still called *presbyters* in the Greek Church, with the priest’s wife being called *presbytera*) and the deacons. For example, he writes, ‘Therefore it is fitting for you to run your race together with the bishop’s purpose – as you do. For your presbytery [the council of elders] – worthy of fame, worthy of God – is attuned to the bishop like strings to a lyre. Therefore by your unity and harmonious love Jesus Christ is sung. Each of you must be part of this chorus’ (Ephesians 4:1-2; see also Magnesians 6:1 and Trallians 7:1-2). These letters also emphasize the centrality of the **Eucharist** in the worship of the Church (for example, Smyrnaeans, chs. 7 and 8).

We also see in these letters St. Ignatius’s deep love for all the Christians, and his pastoral heart in encouraging them to stay true to Christ. For example, he writes to the Smyrnaeans, ‘May all things, then, be abundant for you in grace, for you are worthy. You have refreshed me in every respect; may Jesus Christ refresh you. You loved me when I was both absent and present. God is your reward, and if you endure everything for Him, you will attain to Him’ (Smyrnaeans 9:2).

* **A letter known as To the Philippians**, written by **St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna** (c. 70 – c. 157; Feb. 23). **St. Irenaeus, Bp. of Lyons** (c. 130 – c. 200; Aug. 23) writes that ‘Polycarp also was not only instructed by Apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia [i.e., the Roman province by this name, in western Asia Minor], appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth’ (*Against Heresies*.III.3.4).

In this letter St. Polycarp quotes much from the epistles of St. Paul, and also from I Clement and the letters of St. Ignatius. He exhorts all to godly living (chs. 2-4 and 10-12), and in chapters 5 and 6 he lists many characteristics that the deacons, the presbyters, and the laity should have.

* **The Account of the Martyrdom of Polycarp**, written by ‘The church of God sojourning at Smyrna [in western Asia Minor] to the church of God sojourning in **Philomelium** [nearby] and to all the communities of the holy and universal Church sojourning in every place’ (Preface). We’ll talk about this work later, under the section about the Government.

* **The Shepherd of Hermas**, written by a married layman named **Hermas**,

living in Rome, probably around the year 150. This fascinating document consists of 5 “Visions,” 12 “Mandates” (exhortations on different themes), and 10 “Parables.”

There is a particularly memorable section describing a vision/revelation that Hermas receives about a tower (representing the Church) being constructed by angels using various stones, which stand for people (see 1 Peter 2:4-5) in various spiritual states. And the tower is built on water, indicating our entrance into the Church – into the realm of salvation – through Holy Baptism (1 Peter 3:20-21). This vision is given in Vision III.

This book is also very important because it describes an Angel of Repentance who states that repentance and forgiveness for even the worst sins is possible (Vision IV and Mandate IV).

For a while this book was so highly thought of that it was accepted as being part of the New Testament in certain parts of the Church.

* **The Didache**, a short manual on morals and various Christian practices, dating from the late first or early second century. It was highly recommended by **St. Athanasius the Great** in the fourth century for new converts to read.

It vividly describes the ‘Way of Life’ and the ‘Way of Death’ (chs. 1-6). It urges fasting on every Wednesday and Friday, and the Lord’s Prayer to be said three times a day (ch. 8) as part of one’s private prayers. It gives instructions for celebrating the Holy Eucharist, providing some set prayers and also allowing ‘the prophets to give thanks as they see fit’ (chs. 9-10). It also gives guidelines for receiving traveling prophets, and how to tell if one is a false prophet: if he stays more than two days, if he asks for money, and if he ‘does not do the things he teaches’ (ch. 11).

And there is a very important passage that shows something of the phasing out of the office of the traveling prophet, due to numerous problems associated with it: ‘Appoint for yourselves, then, bishops and deacons who are worthy of the Lord – men who are unassuming and not greedy, who are honest and have been proved. For *they are also performing for you the task of the prophets* and teachers’ (ch. 15; our emphasis).”

The Christian Apologists

“Beginning around the year 125, some Christians began writing essays, or treatises, in defense of Christianity, which they usually addressed to the Roman Emperor. These writings are called

apologies (this is an older use of this word meaning a defense or justification of something); these writers certainly were not *apologizing* for their Faith!). Unlike the Apostolic Fathers, who addressed their writings to the members of the Church, the Christian **Apologists** addressed their works to the outside world beyond the Church, to explain the Christian Faith to the surrounding society. In particular, they defended their fellow Christians 1), from charges of atheism and treason against the State (because giving worship to the gods and goddesses that the Romans believed in was considered a necessary sign of one's loyalty to the State); 2), from charges of cannibalism (from a misunderstanding of the Eucharist); and 3), from charges of immorality (from a misunderstanding of the agape meal, and of the kiss of peace during the Liturgy). The Apologists explained that, far from being unbelievers or traitors or morally perverted, the Christians were (generally speaking) the most law-abiding and virtuous of all the citizens of the Empire, since they were striving to live according to all the commandments of God.

“The first two Christian apologies we know of were written by **St. Quadratus** (May 26) and **Aristides**. Both of them were written in Athens in about the year 125, and they both were addressed to **Emperor Hadrian** (r. 117-138).

“The most famous Christian Apologist was **St. Justin Martyr** (c. 100 – c. 165; June 1), who was born and raised in **Samaria**. As a young man, he had sought wisdom and truth from various philosophers. For a time he accepted the teachings of **Platonism**, the philosophy based on the teachings of **Plato** (427-347 B.C.). Plato was the greatest of the early Greek philosophers, and the one whose ideas about God were closest in some ways to a Christian understanding. Then, one day, while walking alone in a deserted place near the sea, Justin ‘happened’ to meet, as he says, ‘a certain old man . . . exhibiting meek and venerable manners.’ They struck up a conversation about philosophy and seeking Truth. After a while, the man gently told him about the great Hebrew Prophets, who lived long before the ancient Greek philosophers. He told Justin that these Prophets knew the True God and spoke about the coming to earth of His Son, the Savior of the world.

“St. Justin later wrote about this experience. Concerning this old man, he says,

I have not seen him since. But immediately a flame was kindled in my soul. A love of the Prophets, and of those men who are friends of Christ, possessed me. And while revolving his words in my mind, I found this philosophy alone to be safe and profitable. For this reason, I am a philosopher.

Moreover, I would wish that everyone, making a resolution similar to my own, would not keep themselves away from the words of the Savior. For His words possess a tremendous power in themselves. They are able to inspire with awe those who are not on the right path; and the sweetest rest is gained by those who make a diligent practice of them (*Dialogue with*

Trypho, a Jew, chs. 3-8; in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 1, pp. 195-198).

“St. Justin continued to wear the typical robes of a philosopher, believing as he did that he had found in Christianity the True Philosophy – the completion and fulfillment of every human philosophy. Eventually he moved to Rome and began a school there.

“It was there that he wrote his two apologies in defense of Christianity. In them he tried to convince the Roman world that the ongoing persecution of Christians was extremely unfair and unjust. He begins his **First Apology** with these words:

To the **Emperor Titus Aelius Adrianus Antoninus Pius Augustus Caesar** [r. 138-160], and to his son **Verissimus the Philosopher**, and to **Lucius the Philosopher**, the natural son of Caesar, and the adopted son of Pius, a lover of learning, and to the sacred **Senate** [of Rome], with the whole People of the Romans, I, Justin, the son of **Priscus** and grandson of **Bacchius**, natives of **Flavia Neapolis** [in Samaria] in **Palestine**, present this address and petition on behalf of those of all nations who are unjustly hated and wantonly abused, myself being one of them (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, p. 163).

“Despite his eloquent and well-reasoned plea for an end to the persecution of Christians, sporadic periods of persecution continued for many years, as we will see. St. Justin himself was martyred, along with several companions, in Rome in about the year 165. Ironically, this occurred during the reign of the next emperor, **Marcus Aurelius**, who was a distinguished philosopher himself – of the school of **Stoicism**. An account of his trial before **Rusticus**, the prefect of Rome, comes down to us (in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, pp. 305-306).

“Other important Christian Apologists were **Athenagoras of Athens**; **St. Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch** (Dec. 6); **St. Melito, Bishop of Sardis** (April 1); **Tertullian of Carthage**; **Minucius Felix**, also of western North Africa; and **Clement of Alexandria**. They all were writing in the latter half of the second century, which means that they lived only about 100 years after the time of the original Apostles of Christ.”

The Nicene Creed

“The Creed that we recite, chant, or sing at every Divine Liturgy comes from the first two Ecumenical (meaning worldwide) Councils of the Church. The **First Ecumenical Council** was called by **Emperor St. Constantine the Great** (r. 312-337) to oppose the very dangerous heresy called **Arianism**, which denied the full divinity of Jesus Christ. This Council was held in the city of **Nicea**,

fairly near to Constantinople, in the year 325. Some of the great Saints in attendance there were **St. Athanasius the Great** of Alexandria (Jan. 18 and May 2), **St. Nicholas of Myra** in western Asia Minor (who is the basis for Santa Claus; Dec. 6), and **St. Spyridon of Tremithus** in Cyprus (Dec. 12). The emperor himself was there at least part of the time. He opened the Council with a dramatic speech, in which he said that disputes within the Church caused him more heartache than anything else. The first two paragraphs of the Creed – on God the Father and God the Son – were composed/compiled at this Council.

“The third paragraph of the Creed – on the Holy Spirit – was added to the Creed by the Fathers of the **Second Ecumenical Council**. This great Council was held in **Constantinople** in 381. It was called by **Emperor St. Theodosius the Great** (r. 379-395; Jan. 11) partly in response to the heresy called **Macedonianism**, which denied the full divinity of the Holy Spirit.

“So technically the Creed should be called the **Niceano-Constantinopolitan Creed**, but we know it simply as the Nicene Creed. It remains to this day the single most important creed in all of Christianity. It gives us a precise, eloquent, powerful summary of the central doctrines of the Christian Faith.”

Catechetical Instruction

“To become a Christian, especially during the era of persecution that lasted for almost three centuries after Christ’s Ascension into Heaven, was a bold and courageous act. You literally risked your life, since at any moment you could be arrested for being a Christian, and then you could be subjected to terrible tortures and even death.

“It also was very clearly understood that accepting Christian Baptism meant making a complete change in one’s way of life. You had to stop living for yourself and start living for Christ and your fellow Christians. You had to stop making all your decisions on your own, and start asking God to guide your life, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, in harmony with the guidance of the bishops and priests and other elders. You were required to keep not only the laws of the State, but also the higher laws of God. These laws of God dealt not only with the lawfulness of your actions, but also with the purity of your thoughts (see, for example, Matt. 5:17 – 7:23).

“So the Church was very careful not to hastily baptize anyone who indicated an interest in following Christ. Such people were first given a long and extensive period of instruction to prepare them for baptism and for the responsibilities and commitments that would go along with it. The period of instruction was called the **catechumenate**, and those preparing for baptism were called **catechumens**, as they still are today.

“It was typical in the early Church for the catechumens to last three years. During this time, the catechumens could attend the **Divine Liturgy** up until the beginning of the Eucharistic part of the service, when the deacon would exclaim, “The doors! The doors! Catechumens depart! Let no catechumens remain!” Today we still have these words in the Liturgy, after the prayers for the catechumens. But nowadays usually the catechumens are allowed to attend the rest of the service – though, of course, they can’t receive the Eucharist (Holy Communion) until they have become full members of the Church through being baptized and/or chrismated, and then only when properly prepared through fasting and prayer.

“Several Church Fathers have left us the instructions that they gave their catechumens. The most well-known of these in the Eastern Church are the ***Catechetical Lectures*** of **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** (who was the bishop there in the middle of the fourth century; March 18), the ***Great Catechism*** of **St. Gregory of Nyssa** (bishop of Nyssa, in Asia Minor, in the late fourth century; Jan. 10), and the ***Baptismal Instructions*** of **St. John Chrysostom** (priest in Antioch from 386 to 398, and archbishop of Constantinople from 398 to 404; Nov. 13 and Jan. 27).

“St. Cyril’s lectures are basically a detailed, extensive commentary (or explanation), phrase by phrase, of the Nicene Creed. Also, his last five lectures were given to the newly baptized, in the days immediately following their Baptism. In these lectures, called the ‘**Mystagogical Lectures**,’ he explains to the newly enlightened Christians what actually happened during their Baptism and Chrismation, and their first receiving of the Holy Eucharist. Since they received the illumination of the Holy Spirit in their Baptism and Chrismation, they are now enabled to understand the deeper things of the Faith (see 1 John 2:20 and 27).”

The Formation of the New Testament

“Many people, especially Protestants, seem to think that the New Testament somehow ‘fell from the sky.’ But where did it really come from?

“First of all, who wrote the books of the New Testament? Make a list of the 27 books of the NT, and write the author’s name beside each book. What’s true about each author? They all were either Apostles or closely associated with at least one of the original Twelve Apostles. And these writings all proclaim the same Truth about Jesus Christ and His Holy Church.

“However, there were many other writings circulating among some Christian groups in the early centuries – writings that taught new, different, and strange things about Jesus, about Creation, about the way of salvation, and so on. And many of these writings claimed to be written by Apostles,

although it is generally agreed among historians that they were, in fact, written after all the original Apostles had died. For instance, there was the **Gospel of Thomas**, the **Gospel of Philip**, the **Gospel of Judas**, the **Gospel of Nicodemus**, the **Acts of Andrew and Matthias**, and the **Revelation of Paul**. In the middle of the second century, the **Gnostic** heretic **Valentinus** wrote a book filled with new and strange ideas about Jesus and Creation and the way of salvation; he called it **The Gospel of Truth**.

“At about the same time, another heretic, named **Marcion**, thought that the God of the Hebrew Scriptures was not the same God as the Father whom Jesus preached about. So he declared that Christians should disregard the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) altogether. He also made a list of which books he thought Christians should consider to be Holy Scripture. His list apparently was the first such list for a New Testament ever made. In his list he only included one Gospel – the Gospel of Luke. And he only included ten of St. Paul’s epistles. But also, he deleted from these books all positive references to the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Creator of all things.

“Marcion’s incomplete list, and his altering of the books he did include, helped the true Christians to see that they needed to be more clear about which writings the Church should accept as being at the same level of authority and Divine inspiration as the Hebrew Scriptures. They gradually realized they had to decide which of all the writings in circulation about Christ really contained the Truth about Him, and so could be called the written Word of God – what we call the New Testament, to go along with the Hebrew Scriptures, which came to be called the Old Testament.

“The first step in this process was to agree once and for all that only the **Gospels of Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John** are authentic and trustworthy. Two of these Gospels had been written by two of the original Twelve Apostles (**St. Matthew** and **St. John**), while **St. Mark** was a close associate of **St. Peter**, and **St. Luke** was a disciple and companion of **St. Paul**. And it was only these four Gospels that ever had been in general use by the Churches across the Empire ever since they were written.

So it was natural that **St. Irenaeus**, the famous **Bishop of Lyons** from 177 to about 200, in his very important book called ***Against Heresies***, proclaimed that these and only these four Gospels should ever be used in the Churches. He said that it was fitting that there would be four different Gospel accounts, just as there are four “principal covenants given to the human race: one, prior to the deluge [the Great Flood], under Adam; the second, that after the deluge, under Noah; the third, the giving of the Law, under Moses; the fourth, that which renovates man, and sums up all things in itself by means of the Gospel, raising and bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly kingdom” (*Against Heresies*, Bk. III, ch. 11.8; ANF, vol. 1, p. 429). In this same section of his book, he also linked the 4 Evangelists with the 4 faces of the cherubim described in Ezekiel 1:5-13 and 10:19-21 (Hebrew Bible,

10:20-22), and with the living creatures mentioned in Revelation 4:6-7, who had the appearance of a lion, a calf, a man, and an eagle. In the icons of the 4 Evangelists in our churches, they are usually depicted along with these symbols.

(The children could go and find the icons of the 4 Evangelists in your church, if they don't remember which Evangelist is linked with which symbol. If your church does not have icons of the 4 Evangelists, the students could look in a book or on a website to find examples of their icons. Actually, it was Jerome's slightly different match-up of Evangelists with symbols that prevailed in our iconography, rather than Irenaeus's match-up.)

"In about the year 180 someone in the Church in Rome made a list of the books that the Roman Church considered to be the New Testament. That list, known today as the **Muratorian Canon**, included the four Gospels as we have them today, along with Acts, 13 of St. Paul's epistles, I and II John, Jude, and the Revelation of John. So we see that this list did not include the Epistle to the Hebrews (Paul's 14th epistle), the Epistle of St. James, I and II Peter, and III John. And the list apparently included one book that was eventually rejected by the Church as a whole – the **Apocalypse of Peter**. So we see that the selection process to determine the books of the NT was far from finished by the end of the second century!

"Actually, it took about another 200 years for the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to finally decide upon the exact 27 books which we have in our New Testament today. The first official list of these exact 27 books that comes down to us was compiled by **St. Athanasius the Great** in the year 367. This list reflected the usage of his Church in Alexandria, Egypt. Church councils in **Rome** in 382 and in **Carthage** (in western North Africa) in 397 confirmed St. Athanasius's list.

"We see in this story the tremendously important role of the established, hierarchical Church in determining which books would be accepted as the New Testament. Almost all Protestants never have any questions or doubts about which books are included in the New Testament. So it would be good for our Protestant friends to consider the following:

"Since you put so much trust (whether you've ever realized it or not!) in the established, hierarchical Church of the first four centuries in making the proper decisions concerning which books should be included in the New Testament, why not consider *trusting that same Church* concerning the other aspects of Her life – such as having bishops, priests, and deacons; a rich sacramental and liturgical life; the veneration of the Saints, and icons, and relics; having certain designated fasting periods, and so on – all of which were well-established in the life of the Church by the end of the fourth century?"

The Holy Scriptures at Church and in the Home

“In addition to prayer, very early on – if not almost from the beginning – the reading of the Scriptures, or reciting the Scriptures, especially the Psalms, by heart in the home by the family would have been a common practice.

“Both Hellenism and Judaism promoted literacy, and the use of books was wide-spread during this early period. A significant number of people, especially in the cities, could read, and ‘writing was an essential accompaniment of life at almost all levels to an extent without parallel in living memory’ (*Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, p. 48). There are even indications that during this time ‘a basic level of literacy was probably more widespread than in any period prior to the twentieth century’ (Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* [Hendrickson, 2002], p. 12). Already by 75 B.C. in Judea, elementary education was available for *all* boys – the first public school system, one could say. This general, widespread literacy, in addition to the exceptionally high veneration the Jews had for their Bible, prepared the way for early Christian attitudes toward, and their use of, their own Scriptures.

“This partly explains why the historian of early Biblical interpretation, Manlio Simonetti, can say of Christians in the first few centuries, ‘the whole life of the community was conditioned by the interpretation of Scripture’ (*Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis* [T & T Clark, 1997], p. 1). He also; and, ‘the study of Holy Scripture was the real foundation of Christian culture’ – including doctrine, worship, organization, and discipline (p. 2).

“From almost the beginning, then, ‘Christian culture and education were bookish through and through. . . . This ensured that the specifically Christian preaching would be transmitted in writing at an early date’ (*Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, p. 66). In fact, papyrus fragments have been found of St. Matthew’s Gospel dated by a leading papyrologist, Peter Thiede, to about 70 A.D. – a time when many eyewitnesses of Christ were still alive, perhaps even the Evangelist Matthew himself (Simiakis, *Transmission of the Text of the Holy Bible*, p. 16).

“Indeed, ‘On the rapid circulation of literature among the churches and on its regular and public reading much of the coherence of the early Church must have depended; libraries and archives would have been as essential an element in them as they were in the synagogues’ (*Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, p. 64).

“The public reading of Scripture was always an important part of worship, and enabled even those who couldn’t read to become familiar with the Scriptures. But it also provided a communal context for hearing and interpreting them, emphasizing that the Scriptures belonged to the

Church community. Whether or not any particular book was ‘read in all the churches’ was a key factor in whether or not it was later accepted by the Church into the New Testament canon.

“Copies of Scripture, made by the community for the members of the community (rather than produced privately or for the commercial book trade), gradually became increasingly available. At least by the 4th century in the East, these were mass-produced by groups of up to 100 scribes, who would write down what a reader dictated. One group of such scribes could produce about 1000 copies a month in this way.

“As another indication of the incalculable value early Christians placed on the Scriptures, during times of persecution Christians could and did lose their lives protecting their copies of the Scriptures. For example, in 286, the governor of the Thebaid region of Egypt, named Arrianus, commanded Timothy, a well-known reader in a church in his region, to bring all the sacred books to him. Realizing that Arrianus intended to destroy these books, Timothy replied to him:

Learn, O ruler Arrianus, that the books of the Christians I have as my children, because with these I support my brethren. And as you probably know, no father gives up his children to be thrown into the fire. So neither can I give up my spiritual children to your unclean hands. These holy books support me and the Christians of my village, and because of these the angels of the Lord, who are always near us, guard us (David and Mary Ford, *Marriage as a Path to Holiness: Lives of Married Saints*, St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, pp. 177-180).

Reader Timothy and his new bride Maura were crucified for their valiant faith in Christ only twenty days after their wedding. Holy Martyrs Timothy and Maura are commemorated in our Church on May 3.

“The importance of the Scriptures for the early Christians meant that great care was taken to create accurate copies of it. Thanks to the care in producing good manuscript copies, and the demand for many copies, today we have far more copies of the Christian Bible than any other ancient manuscript, and far more papyrus fragments, and far more of both forms that are far older than copies of any other ancient manuscripts. They are also, along with the Jewish Scriptures, the most reliable. As one Biblical historian writes:

If we arranged all the complete [extant] manuscripts in the world in chronological order, for the first seven centuries (2nd - 8th cent.) we would have only manuscripts of the Bible; then Christian authors would appear (9th -12th cent.), then Arabic and Islamic (from the 12th cent.),

and from the 13th century Indian, Chinese, and others begin to appear.²

This would hardly be the case if Christians in these early centuries had not given an extremely high priority to the reading of Scripture.

“Early Christians not only read and prayed the Scriptures; they also studied them. The Apostolic Fathers and the Apologists quoted the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles very frequently in their works.

“More systematic Biblical studies began in earnest with **Origen** (185-254). He is generally known for his extensive use of allegorical interpretation, but he also did much scholarly work on the literal level of Scripture. He compared different manuscript versions, did word studies, looked at the historical context of each writing, etc. These all are what we would now refer to as techniques of **Biblical criticism**. He even did some Biblical archaeology – he speaks of finding a translation of the book of Psalms in a jar in the desert!

“Origen was the first person to write a lengthy interpretation of many of the books of the Bible. He systematized and built on the work of previous interpreters as well. A wealthy benefactor paid for scribes to take down his works by dictation – so that many copies could be produced, indicating that there were many people who wanted to read such works. To give an example of how prolific Origen was: he wrote 32 books on St. John’s Gospel alone. Altogether it is said that he wrote about 6,000 works, most of which have been lost.

“Many people also heard a great deal of Scripture and its interpretation as they listened to long homilies during services in church. A striking example of this is reported by the famous Spanish pilgrim **Egeria** at the end of the fourth century. She recounts that while she was in the Holy Land during Great Lent, the bishop spent three hours each morning gradually explaining the entire Bible beginning with Genesis, giving first the literal and then the spiritual meaning of the passages.

“In the 4th and 5th centuries there was a great flowering of Biblical studies in both the east and

² Simiakis, *Transmission of the Text of the Holy Bible*, p. 20. He gives more details: “The works of Homer and all other authors before and after Christ exist in manuscripts dating from the 9th century on . . . [with two minor exceptions - one work by Aristotle and one by Menander]. The Bible has 20 complete manuscripts with both Testaments, 80 of only the NT, and another 180 with half of the NT . . . which are older than the 9th century, i.e., older than the manuscript traditions of all ancient Greek authors . . . and indeed of any book, of known or unknown authorship, in the world” (p. 20).

the west. To give a few indications of this: **St. John Chrysostom** (347-407) assumes that all of his parishioners in Antioch except the very poorest will own at least the four gospels,³ and he strongly recommends that they read Scripture at home in the evenings (*On Wealth and Poverty* [St. Vladimir's Seminary Press], p. 27). And even the poor, he says, can hear the Scriptures read in church. As he urged his flock,

Hearken, I entreat you, all who are involved with the things of this life, and procure books that will be medicines for the soul. . . . get at least from the New Testament the Acts and the Gospels to be your constant teachers (Homily 9 on Colossians).

It is characteristic for him to tell his flock:

I always entreat you, and do not cease entreating you, not only to pay attention here to what I say, but also when you are at home, to persevere continually in reading the divine Scriptures. When I have been with each of you in private, I have not stopped giving you the same advice (*On Wealth and Poverty*, p. 58.).

He says in another homily, showing how important he believed it was for his parishioners (not just the clergy) to know the Scriptures: 'This is the cause of all evils – not knowing the Scriptures' (Homily 9 on Colossians). And he says even more dramatically:

The ignorance of Scripture is a great cliff and a deep abyss; to know nothing of the divine laws is a great betrayal of salvation. This has given birth to heresies, this has introduced a corrupt way of life, this has put down the things above. For it is impossible, impossible for anyone to depart without benefit if he reads continually with attention (*On Wealth and Poverty*, p. 60).

"At the bishop of Rome's request, **St. Jerome** (died in 420; feastday, June 15) translated the entire OT from Hebrew into Latin, the vernacular language of the western half of the Roman Empire. He also made a separate translation of the Psalms from the Septuagint Greek. He wrote commentaries on many of the books of the Bible, and had serious Bible studies with pious women – a number of whom were later canonized as Saints. He said, 'Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ' (quoted in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 101). The following complaint of his shows just how widespread reading and interpreting Scripture was for those in the Roman Church:

On the Scriptures, everyone quite indiscriminately undertakes some enterprise on his own

³ The Holy Scriptures were not usually circulated as a complete book in one volume even as late as the 7th century, but the four Gospels, or the Epistles, or the first 8 books of the OT, etc., would be bound and sold separately.

account . . . the old gossip, the old fool, the wordy sophist, all of them take it up and tamper with it, teaching others before they learn themselves (quoted by Simonetti, p. 88).

“During this period, various study helps were produced - from Biblical dictionaries to Greek/Latin interlinear Bibles. **Tyconius**, from western North Africa, in about the year 390, wrote the first Christian treatise on Biblical hermeneutics (meaning principles of proper interpretation of the Bible), called the ***Book of Rules***. Although he was a member of the schismatic **Donatist** movement, much of his exegetical work was correct, so it was appropriated by those in the canonical Church. This also give us an example of how all truth is God’s truth, so it is appropriate for us Orthodox Christians to use the work of non-Orthodox writers in understanding Scripture whenever it is true and edifying.

“The first major Church historian, **Eusebius** (d. 340), Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, wrote a dictionary of all the places names in Palestine (which Jerome later translated). In fact, there was generally in the culture a great interest in history during this time, and Eusebius not only wrote the first major historical account of the Church, but also published a history of ancient Israel. He also described the historical setting of the OT books in his commentaries, as did **St. Cyril of Alexandria** (d. 444). In addition to his translations and commentaries, Jerome created other reference books, including a catalogue of Christian writers up to 393 A.D.

“Thus, by the 4th and 5th centuries, many laypeople, encouraged by the clergy, were reading the Bible in the language they spoke. Even more people were quite familiar with it from hearing it read, and hearing long sermons explaining it, in church. Serious study of the literal level of the Bible, at least in educated circles, was also happening.

“While the Church Fathers used the scholarly methods of their time, they always emphasized first the importance of understanding Scripture for practical spiritual life, since they knew that the Scriptures were of fundamental help in enabling Christians to enter into and live the new life in Christ. As **St. Ephrem the Syrian** (c. 306 – 373) said so beautifully, ‘God clothed Himself in our language, so that He might clothe us in His mode of life’ QQ St. Ephrem the Syrian on Scripture, p.146 quoted in F. Young - so that He could make us ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Peter 1:4).”

Christian Art

“The second of the Ten Commandments states:

Thou shalt not make unto thee any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth (Ex. 20:4).

Many people, especially Protestants, have taken this verse to mean that it's wrong for Christians to have icons and statues of Christ and the Saints and Angels. But we must remember that the context for this commandment was the fact that all the peoples of the lands of Egypt, Palestine, and Mesopotamia worshipped gods and goddesses who often represented various aspects of Creation. And these peoples made carved images of these deities which they may have actually worshipped as if they were filled with the presence of the deity. At the least, these images aided the people in their worship of these false gods. The Psalmist mocks the worship given to such images in Ps. 113:12-16 (115:4-8 in the Hebrew Bible), and in Ps. 134:15-18 (135:15-18 in the Hebrew Bible).

“So the True GOD, the LORD GOD of the people of Israel, gave this commandment because He was intent on having His people worship only Him, the invisible Creator of all things, rather than allowing them to be tempted to worship the sun or the moon, or anything else in Creation. As the first of the Ten Commandment states, ‘Thou shalt have no other gods before Me’ (Ex. 20:3). And the Second Commandment goes on to state, ‘Thou shalt not bow thyself to them, nor serve them; for I, the LORD thy GOD, am a jealous God’ (Ex. 20:5).

“It's also very clear that the LORD never intended for the Second Commandment to be taken absolutely literally, because in that case nearly every form of art except abstract art would have been prohibited. Yet the LORD Himself, in the same Book of Exodus, commanded **Moses** to make images of two cherubim (angels) ‘of gold; of hammered work’ (‘graven in gold’ in the Hebrew Bible) to be placed at each end of the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 25:17-21). And He also commanded that the ten curtains of the Tabernacle be woven with images of cherubim on them (Ex. 26:1), and also the veil (Ex. 26:31).

“It's also very revealing that when **King Solomon** builds the Temple, the huge basin, or ‘Sea,’ is set upon twelve statues of oxen (3 Kingdoms 7:13 and 30; 1 Kings in the Hebrew Bible). And upon the ten bases of the Sea are depicted in relief ‘lions, oxen, and cherubim’ (3 Kingdoms 7:16; 1 Kings in the Hebrew Bible), as well as palm trees (3 Kingdoms 7:22; 1 Kings in the Hebrew Bible). The Lord gives His blessing upon all these artistic representations first by filling the new Temple with His Glory (3 Kingdoms 8:10, 11; 1 Kings in the Hebrew Bible), and then by declaring to Solomon, ‘I consecrated this house you built to place My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there all the days’ (3 Kingdoms 9:3; 1 Kings in the Hebrew Bible).

“Probably the most striking example of an image that God commanded to be made in Old Testament times was the copper (or bronze, in the Hebrew Bible) serpent which He ordered Moses to make and put on a pole in order to protect the Hebrews who were being bitten by the deadly serpents (Num. 21:4-9; see John 3:14-15). Hundreds of years later, when the Israelites were offering incense to this same bronze serpent in a kind of idol-worship, and calling it ‘Nehushtan,’ **King Hezekiah**, who

‘did what was right in the eyes of the Lord,’ had the serpent smashed into pieces (4 Kingdoms 18:3, 4; 2 Kings in the Hebrew Bible).

“So we see very clearly that it’s not images, or any artistic representation of things in Creation, which are faulty or prohibited, but *only their improper use*. The prohibition given in the Second Commandment in Exodus 20:4 cannot be against all artistic representations. Rather, it’s against images, whether in human form or not, which might be worshipped as gods and goddesses – ‘gods of silver, and gods of gold’ (Ex. 20:23) – such as those worshipped by the various peoples surrounding the ancient Hebrews. For the Lord knew that such images would tempt the Hebrews to depart from worshipping Him, the True God.

“Certainly, before the invisible and limitless Lord GOD of Israel became a man as Jesus Christ, it was impossible to make an image of Him. However, after God the Son assumes a visible and tangible human body, it was natural and beneficial for the Church to create artistic representations of Him – and of His holy Mother, and of the Saints and Angels – from the earliest times. According to tradition, **St. Luke the Evangelist** made three icons of the Theotokos, and also of Saints Peter and Paul. So he is considered to be the founder of Christian iconography (see St. Nikolai of Zicha’s *Prologue from Ochrid* for October 18).

“Every image, or icon, of Christ has deep theological meaning, proclaiming once again the real Incarnation of God, Who really ‘became flesh’ for our salvation (John 1:14). And icons of our Savior, carefully and prayerfully made by iconographers in accordance with ancient traditional patterns, provide us with inspired, trustworthy representations of Him.

“The **Seventh Ecumenical Council**, held in Nicea in 787, condemned the heresy of **Iconoclasm** (meaning the rejection, and even destruction, of icons). This Council also made clear the very important distinction between the *worship* to be given only to God, and the *veneration*, or *honor*, or *reverence* that we give to the icons – and also to the Gospel book, and to the relics of the Saints. In addition, this Council declared that ‘the honor given to the image passes on to that which the image represents.’

“Through icons, we Orthodox Christians are drawn closer to Christ and the Saints. A hymn for the **Sunday of Orthodoxy** (the first Sunday in Great Lent, commemorating the final restoration of the icons in 843) declares, ‘the icons that depict Thy flesh lead us to the desire and love of Thee.’ We understand that the icons in all our churches and in our homes become ‘windows into Heaven’ that God uses to help us become more aware of Himself and His Saints and Angels being present with us. This is demonstrated by the fact that through the centuries there have been hundreds of

miracle-working icons which God has used to bring healing to many.⁴

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Christ is called “the express image” of the Person of God the Father” (Heb. 1:3). Christ says of Himself, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Thus Christianity is the revelation of Christ as both the Living Word of God and the Image of God. A theology of the image, therefore, is basic to Christianity, and the Gospel therefore can and should be proclaimed in “word and images.” As two hymns for Matins for the Sunday of Orthodoxy declare, “This our salvation we confess in deed and word, and we depict it in the holy icons” (Lenten Triodion, pp. 306 and 307).

“We don’t have much direct knowledge about Christian art in the earliest centuries, but we do have the line drawings made by Christians on the walls of the Catacombs, especially in Rome, from as early as the latter part of the first century. This art consisted mainly of symbolic representations, such as an anchor for faith, a peacock for immortality, a lamb to represent Christ (John 1:29), and a shepherd (John 10:14). The fish was an especially favorite symbol for the early Christians, because the five letters spelling the Greek word for ‘fish’ (ἰχθῦς; *ichthys*) are also the first letters, in the proper order, of the words in Greek for ‘Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.’ The fish was also used to symbolize the Eucharist.

“There were also drawings depicting, or referring to, certain events described in the Old and New Testaments, such as Daniel in the lion’s den – which would have been very encouraging to the Christians during the era of persecution – and the Samaritan woman who met Christ at the well (in our Church she is known as **St. Photini** [**St. Svetlana** in the Slavic Churches]; feastday March 20). The earliest example still in existence of such scenes painted on the interior walls of a house converted for Christian use are found in the town of **Dura** on the Euphrates River; they date from the year 232.

“There must have also been developing in the first three centuries of the Christian era a tradition of more formal portraits of Christ and the Saints, and perhaps of statues also. This is strongly indicated by Bp. Eusebius of Caesarea in Palestine, the first great Church historian, in his book entitled *Ecclesiastical History*, or *The History of the Church*. In this work, after describing a matching pair of bronze statues depicting Christ with the woman with the flow of blood (Matt. 9:20-22), he states:

This statue, which was said to resemble the features of Jesus, was still there in my own time, so that I saw it with my own eyes when I resided in the city [Caesarea Philippi, in Phoenicia]. It is not at all surprising that Gentiles who long ago received such benefits from our Savior should

⁴ The preceding 8 paragraphs we have been adapted from the one-page article on the icons which we helped to edit for the new Orthodox Study Bible containing the Old Testament (that article appears on p. 92 in the new OSB).

have expressed their gratitude in such a way, for the features of His apostles Paul and Peter, and indeed of Christ Himself, have been preserved in colored portraits which I have examined (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book 7.18).

“Making such portraits would not have been so unusual for that time and place. Portraits were common in the Roman Empire, for example, in the form of small, portable diptychs (with two panels) and triptychs (with three panels). Even in the Judaism of that time, there were some Jews who believed it was appropriate to make images of people, and certainly among pagans it was very common to have portraits made of relatives and important people.

“We have to remember that the Church was persecuted up until the early fourth century, so it’s not surprising that we don’t have a lot of Christian art preserved down to our day. But once the Church gains legal protection in the fourth century, She is free to express Herself artistically, without the threat of persecution. So it was natural that in this century there is a great blossoming of Christian art, which built upon an already well-established, developed tradition for church art.

“Already by the second half of the fourth century, a whole series of Church Fathers, such as **St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. John Chrysostom, St. Ambrose of Milan** and others, refer in their works to images of Christ and the Saints. For example, St. Basil (c. 330 – 379), in a sermon for the feastday of **St. Barlaam**, cries out:

Arise now before me, you iconographers of the saints’ merits . . . Let me be conquered by your pictures of the valiant deeds of the martyr! Let me look at this fighter most vividly depicted in your image. . . . Let also the Instigator of the fight, Christ, be represented in your picture (given by Leonid Ouspensky in *The Meaning of Icons* [St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1983], p. 26, footnote 3).

If you remember, when we talked earlier about icons in private homes, we quoted St. John Chrysostom talking about images of the recently departed **Bp. Meletius of Antioch** which ‘everyone rejoices to put everywhere – on rings, goblets, dishes, and on bedroom walls.’

“From this period we have numerous medals and other souvenir momentos from pilgrimages, and vials decorated with sophisticated feastday iconography. The fact that there was already a developed style indicates that the practice of representing these feastdays in images was much older. As Henry Chadwick says, ‘A considerable body of Christian art of the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries has survived, and illustrates the very high artistic achievement that characterized the age’ (for example, the beautiful mosaics of the churches at Ravenna in Italy). These splendid artistic works ‘witness to an artistic renaissance of the first distinction, devoted to the expression of Christian themes and

unrestrained by any inhibitions about portraying Christ and the saints' (*The Early Church*, p. 283).

Church Music

"Several time the New Testament refers to music in worship (can you find the places?). Singing and chanting were very prevalent in Jewish worship, so it is not surprising that those practices would have been continued by the first Christians, who were nearly all Jews. It is interesting that a pagan named **Celsus**, who wrote a long treatise against Christianity in about the year 170, criticizes the music he heard in Christian worship. He said that the chants were 'so beautiful that he actually resented their emotive effect as an instrument for dulling the critical faculty' (Chadwick, *The Early Church*, p. 274).

"Some of the early Christians wanted there to be no music in worship, because they thought it was too emotional, or sensual, or it obscured the words, thus detracting from the meaning of the hymns. Most, however, were in favor of music in the Church – but only *a capella* singing, with no musical instruments. It is still our understanding today that since man is made in the image and likeness of God, the human voice is itself the perfect instrument for glorifying our Creator and Redeemer.

"For the first four or five centuries, it was mainly the Psalms that were sung in Church services. This was a continuation of the Jewish practice of chanting Psalms in the synagogues. One major exception is the hymn we still sing today in Vespers, 'O gladsome light,' which dates from the second century. Antiphonal singing – voices singing alternately – became wide-spread by the second half of the fourth century. St. Basil the Great was criticized for introducing it in Cappadocia.

"In the first half of the sixth century, a deacon in the Church in Constantinople was magnificently inspired by God to write many long, dramatic, poetic hymns, often with dialogue, that opened up a new era in Church music. No longer would the singing in Church be mostly restricted to chanting the Psalms. This man was **St. Romanos the Melodist** (Oct. 1), and his series of hymns were called *kontakia*. He and **St. John of Damascus** (who died in 749; feastday Dec. 4) were probably the two greatest hymnwriters of the Eastern Church."

QQ (Liturgical dance was not approved for worship, except in Ethiopia.)

Active Social Service

"The early Christians were admired and respected by many in the surrounding society for the care that they gave to one another and to their non-Christian neighbors, beginning in the earliest days

of the Church. In the Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke says that “all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need” (Acts 2:44-45). The office of the **deacon** was first established in order to make sure that all those in need received enough material assistance to meet their needs (read Acts 6:1-6).

“The Christians were reminded of their God-given responsibility to provide for the material needs of their brethren by **St. James, the first bishop of Jerusalem**, who says in his Epistle:

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (James 2:14-17).

St. James also says, ‘Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world’ (James 1:27).

“St. Paul deeply understood the responsibility of the Christians to give assistance to their fellow Christians in time of need. He raised a collection among the Galatians, Corinthians, and Macedonians for the Christians in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 9:1-2). And he eloquently exhorted the Corinthians to be generous: ‘for God loves a cheerful giver’ (2 Cor. 9:7).

“Jesus Himself had taught that at the Last Judgment, the people who will be saved will be the ones who gave food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, who gave hospitality to strangers, who gave clothing to the naked, and who visited the sick and those in prison. And He makes it very clear that to do such things for the poor and needy is to do them for Him (read Matt. 25:31-46). **St. John Chrysostom** emphasizes this theme very eloquently when he says, ‘And if you give to the poor, do not do so disdainfully, for it is not just to the poor that it is given, but to Christ; and who is so wretched as to disdain to stretch out his own hand to Christ?’ (Homily XIV on 1 Timothy). Similarly, he asks the wealthy women of his flock, ‘When Christ is famishing, do you so revel in luxury?’ (Homily VII on Colossians).

“The lengthy work of the Apostolic Fathers called ***The Shepherd of Hermas*** ends with an exhortation about helping the poor, given to Hermas by an angel:

Tell everyone who is able to do good not to cease; to engage in good works is profitable for them. So I say that all men ought to be rescued from misfortune. For he who is needy and suffers misfortune in his daily life is in anguish and want. So the one who rescues

such a person from want acquires great joy for himself. For he who is troubled by such misfortune is tormented by the same anguish as the one who is tortured in chains. . . . Therefore the one who knows the misery of such a man and does not rescue him commits a great sin and is guilty of his own blood (Similitude X.4:2-3).

“In about 125 A.D., as the Apologist **Aristides** writes to **Emperor Hadrian** in defense of Christianity, he can assert that the Christians

do not neglect the widow, and they free the orphan from those who do him violence; and he who has gives to the needy, without complaining; and when they see a stranger, they take him to their houses and rejoice over him as a brother; . . . and when one of their poor dies, if they know of it, they procure a burial for him according to their means; and if they hear that one of them is imprisoned for the name of Christ, they all provide for his needs, and if they can, they free him (ch. XV; quoted by Giordani, *The Social Message of the Early Church*, pp. 304-305).

“In around the year 190, **Tertullian** wrote, concerning the *agape* meal shared by the Christians, ‘with the good things of the feast we benefit the needy’ (*Apology*, ch. 39).

“St. John Chrysostom speaks powerfully about the benefits which come to the one who gives material assistance to those in need:

nothing is so strong and powerful to extinguish the fire of our sins as almsgiving. It is greater than all other virtues. It places those who love it by the side of the King Himself, and rightly so. For the effect of virginity, of fasting, of lying on the ground, is confined to those who practice these things, and no one else is benefited. But almsgiving extends to all, and embraces the members of Christ; and actions that extend their effects to many are far greater than those which are confined to oneself.

For almsgiving is the mother of love – of that love which is characteristic of Christianity, which is greater than all miracles, and by which the disciples of Christ are manifested [John 13:34-35]. It is the medicine for our sins, the cleansing of the staining of our souls, the ladder reaching to heaven (Homily VI on Titus; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. XIII, p. 542).

“Offering hospitality to travelers – especially fellow Christians – was extremely important in those days when travel was difficult, wearying, and dangerous, and most inns were not wholesome, clean places. Giordani writes,

the virtue of hospitality was practiced on a vast scale since every Christian traveling for business, necessity or relaxation immediately sought out the Christian community wherever he arrived; and in it he did not feel a stranger (*The Social Message of the Early Fathers*, p. 310).

“The Christians also showed great concern for the sick, which also was tremendously important in this age when there were no hospitals. We see this concern in a letter written by **St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna** in western Asia Minor (died c. 157) to the Philippians (the same group St. Paul wrote to around a hundred years earlier). In this letter, St. Polycarp exhorts, ‘And the presbyters [i.e., elders/priests] must also be compassionate, merciful to all men, bringing back those who have erred, *looking after the sick*, not neglecting the widow or orphan or poor man, but providing always for what is good before God and men’ (6:1; my emphasis).

“We mentioned earlier (in the Activities section at the end of the part on Geography) how impressive it was that the Christians ministered to the sick – both to their fellow Christians *and to their non-Christian neighbors* – during the two Empire-wide plagues in the second and third centuries. Many of the pagans, when their family members got stricken with disease during these epidemics, fled to the countryside, leaving their relatives to die. But the Christians, at the risk of getting the disease themselves, stayed with the sick, praying for them and giving them basic nursing care – feeding them, bathing them, putting on and changing their bandages. Even such minimal care helped many of the sick to recover – which added to the *wondrousness* of the Christians’ care for the afflicted!

“During the fourth century, in the new era of freedom for Christianity, the Church undertook many endeavors to help the poor and needy. **Emperor St. Constantine the Great** entrusted the Church with significant sums of public tax revenue to use for various charitable causes. The first hospitals were founded by Christians in the eastern part of the Empire in the fourth century. Homes for orphans, the aged, and the indigent poor were also built and run by the Church. **St. Basil the Great** (c. 330 – 379), as Bishop of Neocaesarea in Cappadocia (central Asia Minor), was a leader in this development. The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* says of St. Basil that ‘The vast series of buildings he established on the outskirts of Caesarea, which included, besides the church and episcopal residence, hospitals and hostels for the poor, who were cared for by a carefully planned system of relief, long remained a monument to his memory’ (third edition, p. 167).

“**Emperor Julian the Apostate** (r. 361-363), as he tried to revive the old pagan religion of the Romans, complained:

It is a disgrace that not a single Jew needs to seek [State] support, while the godless Galileans [meaning the Christians, who were rejecting the gods and goddesses], *feed*

our people, who evidently lack help from our side, as well as their own people . . . We should see how godlessness [meaning Christianity] has been able to gain ground only because it is lovingly concerned with strangers or has provided cemeteries for burial, not to mention its strict way of life, regardless of whether this was merely external or not! . . . As often as the poor have the impression that the [State] priests take no notice of them, the godless Galileans immediately see this and use the occasion for beneficence (quoted by Marksches, *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 114-115; our emphasis).

“Julian wrote these things in a letter from Antioch in 362. This was the same city where St. John Chrysostom was such an illustrious preacher from 386 until he became Archbishop of Constantinople in 398. In one of his sermons St. John observed,

When the church has a revenue similar to that of the lowest among the wealthy, and not of the very rich, consider how many widows and virgins it supports every day – for indeed the list of them has already grown to the number of three thousand. Together with these it supports those who are in prison, the sick in the hospitals, the healthy, those who are away from their homes, those who are maimed in their bodies, those who serve at the altar, and the beggars who come every day for food and clothing. And its substance is in no way diminished (Homily LXVI.3 on St. Matthew; NPNF, first series, vol. X, p. 407; quoted by Marksches, p. 115).”

Activities

Have the students do dramatic readings of the various sermons given in the Acts of the Apostles. They could also make a list of all the OT passages that are quoted in these sermons.

It would be very meaningful to read the *Didache* together as a family, and comment on it and have discussion about it as you go. It would be great to do the same with one of the letters by St. Ignatius – perhaps the one to the Smyrnaeans, or the one to the Ephesians. These are readily available in modern English translation in the version of *The Apostolic Fathers* edited by Fr. Jack Sparks, given in the list of Resources at the end of this unit.

The students could make a timeline showing the lifespans of the Apostles, the Apostolic Fathers, and the Apologists to get a sense of how close in time they all were.

Some of the older students could write out the Nicene Creed, phrase by phrase, and then find and write out various Scripture verses that are quoted in, or at least give support to, each phrase. This could be done quite neatly and impressively on a big piece of white posterboard, with the phrases from the Creed

written down the left-hand side, and the matching Scriptural passages written down the right-hand side.

All the students could be encouraged to memorize and recite the Nicene Creed – if they don't have it memorized already! They also could be encouraged to memorize the order of the books of the New Testament. It really helps in looking up passages to know where each book is located in the NT!

QQ omit ?? The older students might also want to do some research into why certain books of the NT were not fully accepted until near the end of the fourth century. The disputed books were Hebrews, James, II Peter, II and III John, Jude, and Revelation.

To get a taste of what the catechetical instruction was like in the Early Church, the older students could consult Anne Field's book, *From Darkness to Light: How One Became a Christian in the Early Church*, listed in the Resources. After a helpful, ten-page introduction, this book gives excerpts of catechetical instructions by **St. Cyril of Jerusalem**, **Theodore of Mopsuestia**, **St. Ambrose of Milan** (died 397; feastday Dec. 7), **St. John Chrysostom**, and **St. Augustine** (died 430; feastday June 15), along with an epilogue giving **St. Cyprian of Carthage's** reflections on his own very powerful experience at his baptism (St. Cyprian was bishop of Carthage from 251 until his martyrdom in 258; feastday, Aug. 31).

If you have two or more students, they could present a short skit depicting a Christian child in Rome in about the year 200 talking to a pagan friend about Christ, and inviting him or her to come to a meeting of the Christians in the catacombs near Rome.

Further study on iconography would be another good topic. If you have an iconographer in your area, he or she might be willing to give a demonstration of the process.

Catacomb art is another very interesting topic to explore. The students might enjoy learning about the symbolism of common images such as peacocks, shepherds, and fish, and discovering which Biblical scenes were most frequently depicted, and why.

Government

The Christians' Attitude toward the Government

“What was the Christians' attitude toward the civil authorities – the local judges, magistrates, tax collectors, and governors, and ultimately the Roman emperor? Did Christ and the Apostles teach their followers to disobey the laws of the Empire, and even to rise up in rebellion against the

government?

“Actually, as we know, Christ taught His followers to live in obedience to the civil authorities as much as possible. This is seen especially when He said, concerning paying taxes to the governing authorities, ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s’ (Matt. 22:21), after reminding his questioners that the money had Caesar’s image engraved on it.

“St. Paul urged the Christians, ‘Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. . . . For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers’ (Romans 13:1-6; it would be good to read and discuss with the students this entire passage – vv. 1-7). And we should remember that at the very time St. Paul was writing these words to the Christians in Rome, the Roman emperor was **Nero** (r. 54-68), who near the end of his life became more and more demented. He it was who unleashed the first terrible persecution against the Christians.

“St. Paul also writes, ‘Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence’ (1 Tim. 2:1-2). In every Divine Liturgy we do this very thing, as we pray in the Great Litany: ‘For the President of the United States and all civil authorities, and for our Armed Forces everywhere, let us pray to the Lord’; ‘Lord, have mercy’; ‘That He will aid them and grant them victory over every enemy and adversary, let us pray to the Lord’; ‘Lord, have mercy.’

“However, in one thing the Christians could not obey the civil authorities. That was when they were commanded to offer sacrifice to the idols, or to honor Caesar as a god, or to deny and repudiate their faith in Christ in any way. Usually the Roman authorities did not seek out the Christians and force them to deny their faith in Christ, but this did happen during periods of persecution, which occurred fairly frequently. And the Christians knew it could happen at any time. There were periods of local persecution under Emperor Nero in Rome (c. 67 A.D.); under **Emperor Antoninus Pius** in Smyrna (c. 157); under **Emperor Marcus Aurelius** in Rome (c. 165) and in Lyons and Vienne, in France (177); and under **Emperor Septimius Severus** in Carthage and Alexandria (201-202). The three periods of intense, Empire-wide persecution were under **Emperor Decius** (250-251), **Emperor Valerian** (257-260), and **Emperor Diocletian** and his immediate successors (303-312). In these periods, thousands of Christians died as martyrs, valiantly refusing to renounce their faith in Christ in the midst of terrible tortures, and welcoming the honor of dying an innocent death for Christ’s sake – as He had done for their sake.

The Government's Attitude towards the Christians

“Why would the government be so hostile, at least at certain times, against the Christians? The biggest reason was that the Christians refused to participate in the State religion. They refused to honor and worship the various gods and goddesses of the Romans. This was considered to be treasonous, since the average Roman believed that the gods and goddesses had to be worshipped so that they would grant their favor to the people and protection to the State. Even though most well-educated Romans no longer actually believed in the literal existence of the Roman gods and goddesses, they still considered participation in the public worship of these deities as a crucial sign of loyalty to the State. And it was popularly considered to be irreligious for people to reject such public worship. So when the Christians refused to take part in the public worship of the gods and goddesses, the Romans called the Christians ‘atheists’ (which literally means ‘without the gods’).

“The Christians were also considered to be *anti-social* since they did not participate in the various religious celebrations of Roman society. They kept to themselves too much, it seemed to the Romans; they stayed too aloof from the surrounding society. This aroused the suspicions of the Romans, who wondered if in their secret meetings they might be plotting revolutionary activities against the government.

“So, the Romans felt justified in their attempts at least to curtail the spread of Christianity, even if they weren’t usually trying to wipe it out completely.

“When Christians were brought to trial for their faith, the magistrates, governors, and emperors usually would try at first to persuade them to offer sacrifice or incense to the gods, and/or to deny Christ. They sometimes even offered the Christians rewards if they would do so. If this didn’t work, then they would threaten them with various kinds of torture.

St. Justin Martyr’s responses, and those of his companions, are typical of how the Christians answered these temptations and threats. According to the account called ***The Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs Justin, Chariton, Charites, Paeon, and Liberianus, Who Suffered at Rome***,

Rusticus the prefect said, ‘Offer sacrifice with one accord to the gods.’ Justin said, ‘No right thinking person falls away from piety to impiety.’ Rusticus the prefect said, ‘Unless you obey, you shall be mercilessly punished.’ Justin said, ‘Through prayer we can be saved on account of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . . because this shall become to us salvation and confidence at the more fearful and universal judgment seat of our Lord and Savior.’ The other martyrs said: ‘Do what you will, for we are Christians, and we do not sacrifice to idols’ (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I, p. 306).

These holy martyrs suffered under Emperor Marcus Aurelius in about the year 165; they are commemorated on June 1.

It's important to be aware that the proceedings of such official trials were often written down and kept in the public records, so the actual words of the martyrs would have been preserved exactly - not only from someone's memory. Their words are often quoted in the Saints' Lives.

The *Account of the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp*, one of the writings we mentioned earlier as being part of the literature of the **Apostolic Fathers**, is a stirring, vivid account of the glorious, miracle-attended death of a kindly, godly man, the bishop of Smyrna in western Asia Minor, venerable with age and saintliness. The text presents the early Christians' understanding of the glory of martyrdom, and their conviction that the deaths of the martyrs occur according to the will of God: 'Blessed, then, and noble are all the martyrdoms *that have taken place by the will of God*; for we must devoutly ascribe to God power over all things' (ch. 2:1; our emphasis).

"This work also gives early witness to the custom of venerating the relics of the martyrs, and of commemorating the martyrs each year on the anniversary of their death:

Accordingly, we later took up his bones, *more precious than costly stones and finer than gold*, and deposited them in a suitable place. And there, insofar as it is possible, the Lord will grant that we come together with joy and gladness and celebrate *the birthday of his martyrdom*, both in memory of those who have contended [i.e., those who have bravely withstood torture and death] in former times, and for the exercise and training of those who will do so in the future (ch. 18:2-3; our emphasis).

The Government Becomes Christian

"In October in the year 312, **Constantine the Great**, ruler of Britain, France, and Spain, marches with his soldiers towards Rome to fight **Maxentius**, the cruel and tyrannical ruler of Italy and western North Africa. On the way, one day he sees a brilliant, gleaming cross in the afternoon sky, with the words "In this sign conquer." He orders that the chi-rho symbol (X + P, the first two letters of 'Christ' in Greek) be put on his soldiers' shields. And sure enough, he wins a miraculous victory over Maxentius at the famous **Battle of the Milvian Bridge** near Rome. We can only wonder how much of this happened through the prayers of Constantine's mother, **St. Helen**.

"One of the very first things he does is end the terrible persecution that the government has waged against the Christians for the previous nine years. A few months later, as we mentioned earlier in

the section on Geography, he meets with the emperor of the eastern part of the Empire, **Licinius**, and together they sign the **Edict of Milan** which grants legal status and protection to Christianity, as well as religious freedom to all religious groups.

“Throughout the rest of his reign Constantine shows much favor to the Church, such as making restitution for properties lost during the preceding nine years of persecution, giving the Church tax money to use for charitable purposes (as we mentioned earlier), honoring the Christians’ main day of weekly worship by making Sunday a weekly holiday, sponsoring the building of many churches, sponsoring the production of many copies of the Scriptures (many of which had been destroyed during the Diocletian Persecution), and putting an end to the gladiator shows (though later they were revived and lingered on into the early fifth century, when they were abolished again by **Emperor Honorius**).

“Gradually during the fourth century the government becomes more and more filled with Christian influence, and in the early 390s **Emperor St. Theodosius the Great**, as we saw earlier, makes Christianity the only legal religion in the Empire. In the next centuries virtually the entire society becomes Christian, and the Emperor comes to be seen as the protector of the Christian Faith.”

Activities

It would be very meaningful for the whole family to read together *The Account of the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp*. In your comments and discussion as you read along, be sure to emphasize Polycarp’s gracious yet firm attitude towards his persecutors. Some children might enjoy dramatizing the martyrdom of St. Polycarp. Perhaps the students would want to do a skit dramatizing the trial of a Christian before a pagan judge – such as the trial of St. Justin Martyr.

It would be good to have a general discussion about martyrdom. What is said in the *Account of the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp* that could help us be prepared in case we are ever persecuted for our Faith in Christ? You could discuss how God sometimes allows such things for the benefit of everyone – bringing His followers closer to Him, and giving so much grace and valor to the martyrs that they inspired others to become Christians. This could lead to a discussion of the original meaning of the word ‘martyr’ = ‘witness.’ Isn’t giving one’s life for Christ the most dramatic witness a Christian can ever make about his or her living faith in Christ and in the hope of resurrection unto eternal life in Him.

You also could talk about why God would allow such things as persecution of innocent people. This doesn’t mean that God wanted people to kill Christians, but since the persecutors were bent on doing so, He used this for good. Discuss martyr as witness? The most dramatic witness a Christian can make.

It would be good to have a discussion about the persecution of Christians in various parts of the world today. How are Christians treated in Islamic lands, for instance? And what about in America and Canada – are there various, more subtle forms of persecution against Christians in our land? What are some of the pressures that our society brings against our giving an open witness for our Faith? What are some of the ways our society would like us to compromise our Faith and our moral standards that are based in our Faith? How should we respond to these pressures? How do you think we should prepare ourselves in case anti-Christian persecution in our land gets more severe?

Another good project would be to collect about ten accounts of Christian martyrs that give some dialogue, and write a report about the various temptations and threats given by the judges, and the responses of the Christians.

Some of the older students might like to study the famous exchange of letters between **Pliny the Younger**, the Roman governor of the province of **Bithynia** in northwestern Asia Minor, and **Emperor Trajan**, in around the year 112. In this exchange, Pliny asks Trajan what he should do when people are brought to him under the accusation of being Christians. The key excerpts from these letters can be found in Henry Bettenson's *Documents of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963 [second edition], pp. 3-4).

The students could read and write a book review of J. M. Neale's *The Exiles of the Cebenna*, or Alikí Kafetzopoulou's *The Purple Mantle* (both are given in the list of resources at the end of this unit). These are both very dramatic novels about Christians enduring intense persecution. The first one is set in the era of the **Decian Persecution** (250-251), and the second is set in the era of the **Diocletian Persecution** (303-312).

It would be good to have a discussion about the conversion of St. Constantine the Great. What did his conversion to Christianity mean for the spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire? What did it mean for the quality of Christian life in the Empire?

It would also be good to talk about Emperor St. Theodosius the Great making Christianity the only legal religion in the Empire. What are some advantages and disadvantages of having Christianity be the only religion legally allowed, or the official state religion? Why didn't the Founding Fathers of the United States make any one Christian denomination the official religion for the country?

Defense

“How did the Christians’ faith affect their attitude towards the defense of the Empire, and serving in the military?”

“When soldiers asked St. John the Baptist, ‘And what shall we do?’ he answered, ‘Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages’ (Luke 3:14). He did not tell them to resign their military positions. Jesus apparently also did not counsel soldiers to leave the military. When a Roman centurion came up to Him asking for healing for his servant, Jesus highly praised him for the strength of his faith (Matt. 8:5-13).

“So, when soldiers in the Roman army converted to Christianity, usually they remained in their positions. However, the early Church wrestled a lot with the issue of military service, as seen in this statement from the *Apostolic Tradition* attributed to **St. Hippolytus of Rome** (Jan. 30), compiled in about 220, concerning people seeking to join the Church: ‘A soldier of the civil authority must be taught not to kill men, and he must refuse to do so if he is commanded to, and he must refuse to take an oath; if he is unwilling to comply, he must be rejected’ (given in Bainton, *Early Christianity*, p. 152). And certainly, whenever the time came for the soldiers to have to offer sacrifice to the idols, the Christians in the army could not do so in good conscience. This is why we have so many military martyrs, such as **St. George the Trophy-Bearer** (April 23), **St. Theodore the Recruit** (Feb. 17), **St. Eustathius** (Sept. 20), **St. Demetrius of Thessalonica** (Oct. 26), **The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste** (March 9), and many others.

“Some soldiers did resign after accepting the Christian Faith, such as **St. Cornelius**, the Roman centurion who became the first Gentile convert to Christianity (Acts 10). He later became a bishop in the Church. **St. Marcellus** (Sept. 4) is another example.

“After **St. Constantine the Great** became the first Christian emperor, gradually more and more of the soldiers converted to Christ, and the Church more and more allowed Christians to become soldiers, until by the end of the fourth century it was a government requirement that every soldier be a Christian! What a tremendous change this was from the beginning of the fourth century, when the **Co-Emperor Galerius** convinced **Emperor Diocletian** to begin the great persecution of the Christians because he thought the relatively few Christians in the army at that time could not be trusted to be truly loyal and valiant warriors.”

Activities

Have the students do a study of the military martyrs. Are there any patterns, any recurring elements, in

these Saints' Lives? The story of **St. Eustathius** (commemorated on September 20) is especially interesting – and very poignant. It is included in our book on the Married Saints (*Marriage as a Path to Holiness: Lives of Married Saints*, St. Tikhon's Seminary Press).

Work/Occupations

“How did the Christians' faith affect their attitude towards labor, and which occupations were considered by the Church to be inappropriate for Christians to pursue?

“Concerning labor in general, Christians were not ashamed of doing manual labor, for they were taught to do everything for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). St. Paul strongly counseled the Thessalonians, ‘if anyone will not work, neither let him eat’ (2 Thess. 3:10). He added, ‘For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread’ (2 Thess. 3:11-12).

“St. Paul himself was a tentmaker by trade (Acts 18:1-3). He reminded the Thessalonians that ‘we were not disorderly among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but we worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you’ (2 Thess. 3:7-8). Jesus Himself was a carpenter, and many of the Twelve Disciples were fishermen by trade. They were used to hard labor, including fishing all night long (see, for example, John 21:3-6).

“In the late second century **Tertullian** wrote that Christians

are accused of being useless in the affairs of life. But how in all the world can that be the case with people who are living among you, eating the same food, wearing the same attire, having the same habits, living under the same necessities of existence? . . . So we sojourn with you in the world, rejecting neither the forum, nor the meat-markets, nor the public baths, nor the workshops, nor the inns, nor the weekly markets, nor any other places of commerce. We sail along with you, and fight along with you, and till the ground along with you. And in a similar manner we unite with you in all your business affairs. And even in the various arts we make our work available for the benefit of the public (*Apology*, ch. 42; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. III, p. 49).

“But there were some occupations that the Christians felt were incompatible with their Christian Faith. Any work connected with the theater was forbidden, because so many theatrical productions in those days were immoral and/or idolatrous. Christians also were forbidden to be

gladiators, for obvious reasons. How could anyone believing that all men are made in God's image, bear to watch, let alone participate in, the fighting to the death of two men for the entertainment of the crowds? For similar reasons, Christians could not be charioteers, for often men lost their lives in these races, and the whole raucous, irreverent atmosphere at these public spectacles was not something conducive to spiritual growth!

"It was also obvious that Christians could have nothing to do with the fashioning of pagan idols, including providing materials for them. As Tertullian states, 'No art, then, no profession, no trade, which administers either to equipping or forming idols, can be free from the name of idolatry itself' (*On Idolatry*, ch. XI; in ANF, vol. III, p. 68).

Concerning the profession of teacher, we find a variety of views about the value of secular education, and thus whether or not a Christian could be a teacher – especially because the standard, classical curriculum included reference to the pagan deities. At one extreme we find a writer like Tertullian; according to the historian Bainton,

Because so much that was taught in the schools of the Empire focused on the immoral mythology of the gods and goddesses, and because the schools were expected to participate in the public celebrations devoted to these deities, Tertullian seriously doubted how a Christian could be a schoolmaster in good conscience (see *On Idolatry*, ch. X).

However, in *The Apostolic Tradition* of **St. Hippolytus**, compiled around the year 220 in Rome, it is stated, with pastoral understanding, concerning those seeking to become Christians: 'A teacher of young children had best desist, but if he has no other occupation, he may be permitted to continue' (Bainton, *Early Christianity*, p. 152).

Activities

You could have a discussion about various trades and occupations today. Are there any that we would think are incompatible with being a devout Christian? Why, or why not?

You could ask the students their opinions concerning actors, soldiers, musicians, artists, professional athletes, lawyers, newspaper reporters and editors, those working in advertising and modeling, those working in weapons factories, etc. Is it possible for the Lord to call strong Christians to be involved in these occupations? How could someone in these fields be a strong witness for Christ and His Holy Church?

Leisure and Entertainment

“How did their faith affect the Christians’ attitude toward the typical forms of public entertainment in ancient Rome? Tertullian states simply, “We do not go to your spectacles’ (*Apology*, ch. 42), meaning the theater, the chariot races, and the gladiator shows in the arena, filled as they were with immorality and violence. They were also closely associated with pagan religious festivals.

“Chariot racing continued to be popular for centuries in the eastern Empire, despite the Christianization of the society. **St. John Chrysostom** in Antioch, and later in Constantinople, many times urged his parishioners not to attend these events – or at least, not very often, and certainly not during Bright Week, when he said they should be shut down. A canon from the very important **Council in Trullo** (also known as the **Quinisext Council**) of 692 states:

From the holy day of the Resurrection of Christ our God until the next Lord’s day, for a whole week, in the holy churches the faithful ought to be free from labor, rejoicing in Christ with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs [Col. 3:16]; and celebrating the feast, and applying their minds to the reading of the Holy Scriptures, and delighting in the Holy Mysteries [the Eucharist]. For thus we shall be exalted with Christ and together with Him be raised up. Therefore, on the aforesaid days there must not be any horse races or any public spectacle (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, second series, vol. XIV, p. 395).

“In the opinion of the late second century Apologist **Athenagoras**, concerning the gladiator shows, watching the murder of a man for pleasure was almost the same as killing him (Giordani, *The Social Message of the Early Fathers*, p. 58).

“Dice-playing, especially when accompanied by gambling, was considered inappropriate for Christians. As an anonymous Christian treatise called ***De Aleatoribus*** (***Concerning Gamblers***) eloquently states,

Do not be a dice-thrower but a Christian: cast your money on the table of the Lord at which Christ presides, and the spectators are the angels, and the martyrs are present. And the patrimony which you are about to squander with that ruinous passion, distribute instead among the poor. Lose your wealth to Christ. . . . ‘Play’ every day with the poor, visit the widows frequently; divert your income and your resources to the good of the Church (ch. VII; quoted by Giordani, p. 67).

Dice-playing (a form of gambling then) was officially forbidden by the **Council of Elvira** in Spain in 306. The prohibition was repeated by the **Council in Trullo** in 692. This council also prohibited

Christians from entering taverns. All these things were forbidden because of the decadent atmosphere and immoral things that went on.

“Instead of going to intemperate banquets filled with ‘disorderly frivolities’ and music that stirs up the passions, **Clement of Alexandria** urges the Christians to meet together ‘in decorous fellowship,’ singing psalms with human voices alone (as we do still in our Orthodox Church services). For he says, ‘the psalm is a melodious and sober blessing’ (*The Instructor*, Book II, ch. IV; in ANF, vol. II, p. 249). But he does also allow for playing the harp or the lyre, if done in a dignified manner.

“Giordani comments on the diligent effort it took average Christians, especially beginning in the fourth century, to abstain from the spectacles that were so much a part of life for the average citizens of the Empire:

To ask Christians not to attend the public games was like forbidding our little boys to take part in any sports at all. It meant the same sacrifice; it meant depriving them of the surest, noisiest and most popular collective entertainment that life in those days afforded. Yet the Church demanded this sacrifice for the twofold reason that the games were usually given to celebrate some idolatrous feast-day, and that they were licentious, degrading, and cruel (*The Social Message of the Early Fathers*, p. 56).”

Activities

In light of the early Christians’ rejection of the theatre, the games, chariot-racing, gladiator shows, and gambling with dice, it would be very profitable for the family to have an extended discussion about modern forms of entertainment: which ones do you think are appropriate and which would be inappropriate for Orthodox Christians, such as different kind of movies, MTV, auto-racing, horse-racing, gambling of various sorts, etc. What guidelines can we use for deciding what to watch and what to participate in? Do these things tend to promote or hinder our spiritual life?

Does all this mean that Christians can’t “have a good time,” or that the Church is against all forms of entertainment and simply enjoying yourself? It would also be good to consider what forms entertainment and leisure activity are harmless, and even beneficial for the spiritual life. Are there any forms of entertainment that are harmless in some contexts but not in others? Is it right to say that we should only do things that are clearly spiritually profitable? Or is it appropriate, let’s say, to read a book, or watch a funny movie, that does not have immorality or violence, but is not really edifying?

Some further considerations: Should children be shielded from all rock music and PG movies? Or should they be allowed to listen to and watch some of these things, so that they will not feel they are

forced to be totally different from their non-Orthodox friends, and so that they can grow in their own powers of discernment concerning what is good to listen to and watch, and what is not? In all these considerations, can we accept and understand that different people – including different Orthodox people – might have different thoughts, needs, and different strengths and weaknesses, in any of these areas?

Education

“For some Christians, there was little or no proper place for secular learning. For example, **Tertullian** exclaimed, ‘What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?’ So he urged Christians to stay away from studying the ancient philosophers and the literary works of the Graeco-Roman heritage, and just study the Holy Scriptures (*Prescription against Heretics*, ch. VII; in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. III, p. 246).

“Thankfully, most educated Christians had a broader view of the value of the good achievements of the Graeco-Roman civilization. They appreciated the generally high ethical standards seen in the works of the ancient Greek philosophers and dramatists. Apologists like **St. Justin Martyr**, and Church Fathers like **St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, and St. John Chrysostom** believed that all truth ultimately flows from Christ Himself (John 14:6; see also Phil. 4:8). So they believed that all the glimmers of truth perceived by those living before Christ came were given by the Lord Himself in preparation of the world for His coming in the flesh.

“These Fathers were grateful for the fine classical education they received, and they urged their fellow Christians to prize sound education. For example, in his funeral speech for his close friend St. Basil the Great (whose father was a teacher of rhetoric), St. Gregory the Theologian declares:

I take it as admitted by men of sense, that the first of our advantages is education – not only our more noble form of it [meaning Christian education], which disregards rhetorical ornaments and glory, and holds to salvation . . .; but even that external culture [meaning secular education] which many Christians ill-judgingly abhor as being treacherous, dangerous, and keeping us far from God. For we should not neglect the study of the heavens, and the earth, and air, and all such things, just because some have wrongly seized upon them, honoring God’s works instead of God. Rather, we should reap what advantage we can from them for our life and enjoyment, while we avoid their dangers . . ., as the divine apostle says, ‘bringing into captivity every thought to Christ’ [2 Cor. 10:5].

And again, as we know that neither fire, nor food, nor iron, nor any other of the elements, is of itself most useful, or most harmful, except according to the will of those who

use it; and as we have compounded healthful drugs from certain of the reptiles; so from secular literature we have received good principles of enquiry and speculations, while we have rejected their idolatry, terror, and pit of destruction. Nay, even these have aided us in our religion, by our perception of the contrast between what is worse and what is better, thus gaining strength for our doctrine from the weakness of theirs.

We must not then dishonor education, just because some men are pleased to do so. Rather, we should suppose such men to be boorish and uneducated, since they desire all men to be as they themselves are, in order to hide themselves ‘in the crowd’ and escape the detection of their lack of culture (.NPNF, second series, vol. VII, pp. 398-399).

“In comparing the sentiments of Tertullian and St. Gregory, it’s worth noting that Tertullian became a heretic (joining the rigorist sect known as the **Montanists** in about the year 205), while St. Gregory is one of only three Saints in our Church to have the title ‘Theologian’!

“Almost two centuries earlier than the Cappadocian Fathers and St. John Chrysostom, **Clement of Alexandria** had such an open view similar to theirs. As head of the famous Christian school in Alexandria from about 190 to 202, he encouraged the study of the classics of pre-Christian Greece and Rome, but from a Christian perspective – appreciating the good and true aspects of these writings, but also recognizing all the ways in which these writings fell short of the full Truth that is revealed only by Christ through the Scriptures and traditions of His Holy Church. This school in Alexandria was begun for the instruction of Christians around the year 180 by **Pantaenus**, a former **Stoic** philosopher who converted to Christianity. Under Clement the school was also opened to those from the outside who were interested in learning about the Christian Faith.

“**Origen** continued this general approach as he guided the school from 202 until about 230. Then, when he moved to **Caesarea in Palestine**, he opened a school there. Intensely inquisitive himself, and a brilliant genius, he believed in the value of studying all realms of learning as a preparation for studying the deep truths about God. He wrote in one of his most famous works, called ***On First Principles***:

as the eye, of its own nature, seeks light and sight, and as the body naturally desires food and drink, just so the mind has its own natural desire to know the truth of God and to seek out the causes of things. And we have received this desire from God (Book II, ch. 11.4; in ANF, vol. IV, p. 298; quoted by Giordani, pp. 46-47).

“**St. Gregory the Wonderworker** (feastday, Nov. 17) was perhaps Origen’s most famous pupil. He was going to study the law at the famous university in **Berytus** (now called Beirut, Lebanon). But he happened to visit Caesarea in Palestine, where he happened to hear Origen speaking.

And he was immediately swept up by the power and beauty of Origen's teaching. Gregory ended up studying under Origen for five years, and was probably baptized by him. When Gregory departed from Origen, to return to his home in **Neo-Caesarea** in Asia Minor, he said he felt the same way Adam must have felt when he was expelled from Paradise!

St. Gregory said this in a long and eloquent oration in praise of Origen, in which he described something of Origen's teaching methodology:

He was also the first and only man who urged me to study the philosophy of the Greeks, and persuaded me by his own moral example both to hear and to hold to the teaching of morals. . . . He deemed it right for us to study philosophy in such a way that we should read with utmost diligence all that has been written, both by the philosophers and the poets of old . . . neither preferring nor repudiating any one kind of writing, whether it be philosophical discourse or not, whether Greek or foreign, but hearing what all of them have to convey (*Oration Addressed to Origen*, ch. XI and XIII; in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VI, pp. 32 and 34).

"Despite the success of the school in Alexandria, apparently throughout the whole period of the Empire the Christians generally did not build schools of their own, but sent their children – especially older children – to the regular schools of the Empire (see the section on Education in the unit in this series on Ancient Rome). Apparently there were a few Christian priests here and there in the early centuries who taught reading and perhaps other elementary subjects to the children of their flocks – using, of course, the Scriptures and not mythological texts! And in the fourth century, some of the monasteries that were developing in that century would bring in young boys and educate them.

"But since there were not many parish or monastery schools, most of the Christian children had to attend the secular schools. Even Tertullian recognized and admitted that without schools of their own, Christian youth would have to attend secular schools and endure the false teachings about the gods and goddesses. But he was confident that if they are properly instructed about God and the Faith at home and at Church, 'they will reject those things, and will not receive them' (*On Idolatry*, ch. X).

"This brings us to the crucial role of the family in the education of children. St. Paul exhorted, 'And you fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord' (Eph. 6:4). Of course, it had been very important for the ancient Israelites to teach the commandments of the Lord to their children. Indeed, the Lord commanded them, 'So these words I command you today shall be in your heart and in your soul. You shall teach them to your sons, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and

when you rise up' (Deut. 6:6-7).

“So we are reminded that as important and as wonderful as a good, well-rounded education is, *it is most important to be spiritually well-educated and well-trained*, knowing the basic teachings of our Holy Orthodox Faith and putting our spiritual knowledge into action by living according to our Lord's commandments, in close and vibrant communion with Him.”

Activities

It would be very interesting and worthwhile for the family to read together, comment on, and discuss J. G. Davies' description of a typical day in the life of Clement of Alexandria (in his *Daily Life of Early Christians*, listed among the resources at the end of this unit.

It would also be very interesting to read together the essay that St. John Chrysostom wrote on how parents should discipline, guide, and instruct their children in godly things. It's called “On Vainglory, and the Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children.” It is printed as an appendix in M. L. W. Laistner's *Christianity and Pagan Culture* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1951).

It could also be good to reflect on and discuss your own educational goals. Can your children correctly identify what they are? If not, it could be good to bring this to their attention. They could be asked to come up with their own educational goals and methods, to be discussed – and perhaps even implemented!

Resources for the Study of Early Christianity

NOTE: Most of the following books are given as resources for parents and teachers, rather than as suggested reading for the children to do on their own. Depending on the students' ages, interests, and abilities, you might want to consider letting them read certain texts, or selected portions of texts, which in your judgment would be meaningful to them. Of course you would probably want to discuss with them the reading they have done, to see what they are gaining from the texts, and to give them guidance for further reading.

Often the best thing would be to read aloud certain selected texts with the children, and have discussion with them about the material as you read through it together.

The books which are probably most suitable for readers as young as 11 or 12 we've marked with an asterisk.

Arnold, Eberhard. *The Early Christians: A Sourcebook on the Witness of the Early Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1970 (vivid excerpts from Christian writers mostly from the first three centuries, presented under themes such as "State, Society, and Martyrs," "Christian Self-Portraits," and "Meetings and Worship"; with a 55-page introduction).

Asch, Sholem. *The Apostle*. N. Y.: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1943 (a magnificent, faith-filled, classic work in novel form on the Apostle Paul by a renowned Jewish writer).

St. Athanasius the Great. *On the Incarnation*, with an introduction by C. S. Lewis. Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982 (an early, classic work by this great Church Father; probably mostly for older children).

_____. *The Life of Antony and The Letter to Marcellinus*, Robert C. Gregg, trans. N. Y.: Paulist Press, 1980 (in the *Classics of Western Spirituality* series; two great classics of the Patristic era – the first almost single-handedly launched monasticism in western Europe, and the second is a devotional guidebook to the Psalms).

_____. *The Resurrection Letters*, Fr. Jack Sparks, ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1979 (gives a brief life of St. Athanasius and 12 Letters; perhaps better for older students, as there is considerable polemic against the Arians, whom he calls "Ario-maniacs").

Bainton, Roland H. *Early Christianity*. New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1960 (covers the rise of Christianity through the first four centuries in about 72 pages, though not always accurately from an Orthodox perspective; then includes about 90 pages of choice excerpts from key documents).

* Barclay, William. *God's Young Church*. Phila.: Westminster Press, 1970
(describes in general the characteristics of the early Christians, and then presents vivid character sketches of six of the leaders in the first generation of Christians).

St. Basil the Great. *On the Holy Spirit*, David Anderson, trans. Crestwood,
N. Y., SVS Press, 1980 (one of the great short classics from the early Greek Church Fathers; probably mostly for older students).

Batson, David. *The Treasure Chest of the Early Christians: Faith, Care and Community from the Apostolic Age to Constantine the Great*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001 (emphasizes the various kinds of social work of the early Christians - caring for their own poor and needy, and reaching out to care for the poor and needy in the surrounding society; very nicely done).

Chrysostom, St. John. *On Marriage and Family Life*, Catharine P. Roth, trans. Crestwood, N. Y.: SVS Press, 1986 (six magnificent homilies conveying his beautiful, exalted vision for Christian marriage – probably mostly for older children).

Chrysostom, St. John. *On Wealth and Poverty*, Catharine P. Roth, trans. Crestwood, N. Y.: SVS Press, 1984 (six sermons on Lazarus and The Rich Man).

Chrysostomos, Archimandrite. *The Ancient Fathers of the Desert: Translated Narratives from the Evergenitos on Passions and on Perfection in Christ*. Brookline, Mass.: Hellenic College Press, 1980 (for older children; a good introduction to the insightful, penetrating, often stern wisdom of the Desert Fathers of the 4th century).

St. Cyril of Jerusalem. *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, F. L. Cross, ed. Crestwood, N. Y.: SVS Press, 1978 (his introductory lecture to the catechumens, and his five famous mystagogical lectures to the newly baptized).

Davies, J. G. *Daily Life of Early Christians*. N. Y.: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1953 (vivid chapters on Clement of Alexandria; Paul of Samosata; St. Victoria, virgin-martyr of Carthage; St. John Chrysostom; St. John Cassian; and a sexton in the Roman Church c. 350).

Deiss, Lucien. *Springtime of the Liturgy: Liturgical Texts of the First Four Centuries*. Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1979 (an excellent collection).

DeMers, John. *Journeys in Dust and Light: A Modern Pilgrimage through the Life and Letters of Paul*. Collegeville, Minn.: Michael Glazier (Liturgical Press), 1993 (brings St. Paul's journeys to life in a remarkable, touching way).

Dowley, Tim, gen. ed. *Eerdmans Handbook to the History of Christianity*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977 (very helpful; nicely illustrated; quite sweeping in scope; shows Protestant influence at times; with children, mostly useful for its pictures).

Edwards, O. C., Jr. *How It All Began – Origins of the Christian Church*. N. Y.: Seabury Press/Crossroad, 1973 (written from an Episcopalian perspective, but still helpful; covers basically the first two centuries).

St. Ephrem the Syrian. *Hymns on Paradise*, Sebastian Brock, trans. Crestwood, N. Y.: SVS Press, 1990 (this Syriac Church Father conveys in beautiful poetry his glorious vision of the Kingdom of Heaven, and his ardent desire to be found worthy to enter there).

Field, Anne. *From Darkness to Light: How One Became a Christian in the Early Church*. Ben Lomond, Calif.: Conciliar Press, 1997 (first published in 1979 by Servant Publications; presents catechetical instructions by St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Theodore of Mopsuestia, St. Ambrose, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Augustine).

Ford, David C. *Wisdom for Today from the Early Church: A Foundational Study* (St. Tikhon's Monastery Press, 2014); presents chapters on ten prominent themes of the first five centuries of Christianity – including an Orthodox interpretation of the Book of Acts; the Apostolic Fathers; the Apologists; St. Irenaeus and the Gnostics; the Canonization Process of the New Testament; Montanism as a precursor to modern-day Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement; Tertullian and the Dangers of the Sectarian Mind-Set; the Rise of Papal Presumption; and the Rise of Monasticism and the Wisdom of the Desert Fathers and Mothers.

Giordani, Igino. *The Social Message of the Early Church Fathers*. Boston: The Daughters of St. Paul, 1977 (reprint of the 1944 classic; documents many aspects of the early Christians' interaction with the surrounding society; covers the first three centuries of the Christian era).

Grant, Robert M. *Early Christianity and Society – Seven Studies*. N. Y.: Harper

and Row, 1977 (quite helpful; on such themes as Christian devotion to the monarchy, taxation and exemption, work and occupations, private property, organized almsgiving, and endowments of churches; covers basically the first four centuries).

Green, Michael. *Evangelism in the Early Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970 (very interesting and helpful; centered on St. Paul and the Book of Acts; for older students).

Harkness, Georgia, ed. *A Devotional Treasury from the Early Church*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1968 (a wonderful collection of especially spiritually edifying passages from the writings of the Apostolic Fathers and the Odes of Solomon; this book makes these reading more accessible for the general reader).

* Hronas, Georgia. *The Life of the Great and Holy Martyr Barbara*. Seattle, Wash.: St. Nectarios Press, 1996 (very nicely done, with iconographic line drawings; written for children as young as 9 or 10).

St. Irenaeus of Lyons. *On the Apostolic Preaching*, John Behr, trans. SVS Press, 1997 (a fine translation, noting all Scriptural references, of this classic exposition/proclamation of salvation history, written by the greatest Christian theologian of the second century; a paradigm of Orthodox interpretation of the Old Testament).

Jaeger, Werner. *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961 (an interesting, well-written summary of the interaction of Christian theology with Greek philosophy; basically covers the first four centuries).

Johnson, Sherman E. *Paul the Apostle and His Cities*. Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1987 (similar to DeMers's book, but the author is not as personally involved).

Kannengiesser, Charles, ed. *Early Christian Spirituality*. Phila.: Fortress Press, 1986 (in the *Sources of Early Christian Thought* series; a very good introduction to Patristic writing on the spiritual life, with modern translations of lengthy excerpts from a number of the great Church Fathers from the second through the fifth centuries).

* Kafetzopoulou, Aliki. *The Purple Mantle*, translated by Efrosyni Zisimou Robinson. Platina, Calif.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2001 (a wonderful historical novel, set in the time of the persecutions under Emperor Diocletian, beginning in 303; the author very nicely weaves in the stories of many of the more famous martyrs of that era).

- * Koulomzin, Sophie. *Heroes for Truth*. N. Y.: Religious Education Dept. of the Russian Orthodox Church of America, 1968 (the first volume of her 2-volume history of the Church written for teen-agers; very nicely done; with suggestions for class work and questions for review after each chapter; also, a teacher's manual and study guides/workbooks for the students are available; this first volume goes through the 9th century).

MacMullen, Ramsay, and Lane, Eugene N., eds. *Paganism and Christianity, 100 – 425 C.E.: A Sourcebook*. Minneapolis: Fortress, Press, 1992 (a remarkable collection of excerpts from key pagan and Christian documents showing the power and appeal of pagan worship and thought, and the conquest of paganism by the far greater power, beauty, and sublimity of Jesus Christ and the Gospel).

Maier, Paul L. *First Christians: Pentecost and the Spread of Christianity*. N. Y.: Harper and Row, 1976 (a lively and illuminating rendition of the great events and themes of the Book of Acts).

- * Manley, Johanna. *Stories of Saints from the Prologue*. Libertyville, IL: Bishop Nikolai Resource Center, St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Monastery, 1998 (adaptations for children, including a number of dramatizations, of many of the Saints' Lives in St. Nikolai of Zicha's *Prologue from Ochrid*; very nicely done; many of the Lives covered are of Saints from the first several centuries of the Christian era; you may contact the publisher at Bishopnikolai@Ameritech.net, or by phone at 847-362-2441).

Markschies, Christoph. *Between Two Worlds: Structures of Early Christianity*, trans. John Bowden. London: SCM Press, 1999 (an excellent resource on the details of everyday life of the early Christians).

Matsagouras, Elias G. *The Early Church Fathers as Educators*. Minneapolis: Light and Life, 1977 (discusses the relationship of Christian education with pagan education, and emphasizes the monastic elders as teachers; centered on fourth century monasticism).

Meeks, Wayne A. *The Moral World of the First Christians*. Phila.: The Westminster Press, 1986 (a ground-breaking look at the social ethos of the early Christian communities).

Neale, J. M. *The Exiles of the Cebenna*. Reprinted by PaideaClassics.org; it can be ordered via their website (this is an excellent source for Orthodox homeschooling resources).

- * Nicozisin, Fr. George. *The Orthodox Church: A Well Kept Secret: A Journey Through Church History*. Brookline, Mass.: Dept. of Religious Education of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, 1989 (a quickly moving summary of Church History in 176 pages; written at a basic, easily understandable level).

- * Payne, Robert. *The Holy Fire: The Story of the Fathers of the Eastern Church*. Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980 (very vivid biographies of the great leaders of the Eastern Church, from the Apostolic Fathers through St. Gregory Palamas).

- * Pollock, John. *The Apostle: A Life of Paul*. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1969 (excellent; written in novel form).

- Ruffin, C. Bernard. *The Twelve: The Lives of the Apostles after Calvary*. Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1984 (quite nicely done, though the chapter on St. Peter shows a definite Roman Catholic orientation).

- Sampley, J. Paul, ed. *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*. Trinity Press International (an outstanding resource; organized by topics, such as marriage/divorce, virtue/vices, household/family; articles written by many different specialists).

- Sider, Robert D. *The Gospel and Its Proclamation*. Wilmington, Del.:**
 Michael Glazier, 1983 (in the *Message of the Fathers of the Church* series; covers the first four centuries A.D.; brings in many excerpts from first-hand sources which exemplify the Church's proclamation of the Gospel to the Jews, the heathen, catechumens, and the faithful).

- Sparks, Fr. Jack, ed. *The Apostolic Fathers*. Minneapolis: Light and Life,**
 1995 (modern translations, with excellent brief introductions, to the fascinating, inspiring literature of the first two or three generations of Christians after the Book of Acts; especially appealing and interesting for children is * "The Martyrdom of Polycarp" in this collection).

- Stark, Rodney. *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997
 (excellent; very highly recommended; vividly describes the spread of Christianity through family relationships, the need for community, the Christians' remarkable care for the sick during times of the plague, and the stirring example of the martyrs).

- * Tarasar, Constance, ed. *Saints for All Ages*. Syosset, N. Y.: Department of Religious Education, Orthodox Church in America, 1986 (eight of the ten books in this excellent series are devoted either entirely or mostly to Lives of Saints from the

early centuries of the Christian era; written at roughly a junior high school reading level; every Orthodox home with children should have this whole set!).

* Walsh, William Thomas. *Saint Peter, the Apostle*. N. Y.: MacMillan, 1948
(written in novel form; very vivid).

* Weerstand, R. *Quintus* (historical fiction; a Roman boy living in the time of Emperor Nero comes in contact with Christians who are suffering terrible persecution under Nero, and his life is dramatically changed; available from Veritas Press, an excellent source for classic literature for children, despite their strong Reformed/Presbyterian leanings: 1-800-922-5082).

Wilken, Robert L. *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1984 (very interesting and nicely done; basically covering the first four centuries; for older students).

Womer, Jan L., ed. *Morality and Ethics in Early Christianity*. Phila.: Fortress Press, 1987 (a volume in the series *Sources of Early Christian Thought*; lengthy excerpts on various ethical themes from the Didache, Aristides of Athens, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, St. Cyprian of Carthage, the Council of Elvira, St. Basil the Great, St. Ambrose of Milan, St. Augustine of Hippo, and Theodoret of Cyrrus; with a very helpful, 28-page introduction).

Zeiller, Jacques. *Christian Beginnings*, P. J. Hepburne-Scott, trans. N. Y.: Hawthorne Books, 1960 (written by a French Roman Catholic, it has some Roman Catholic bias, but basically it is very nicely done and quite readable; includes excerpts, especially prayers, from many first-hand documents; covers the first three centuries of the Christian era).