

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 147

Everyday life in
the early church



CHRIST THE LORD This lamp (far left) and plaque (left) both display the Chi-Ro, one of the earliest Christian symbols.

the interior of the home as the women's domain, and men generally did not interfere with household management.

HOUSE CHURCH

In the first century, what passed for a formal church service was a home-based affair, centered on a communal meal

offered in the main room or courtyard of a family dwelling. The elders of the community would say prayers before the meal, and sometimes one of the elders would tell stories of the early days. Each community maintained its own isolated island of fellowship and prayer, and occasionally a traveling teacher would visit, telling stories and saying prayers that linked the little island to a wider fellowship.

Did you know?

A SMALL TASTE OF WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE PART OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

LIFE AMONG THE PAGANS

The basic unit of Roman society was the family, and the father, called the *paterfamilias*, was its absolute head. He could even reject his own children from the family or sell them as slaves. Women could not vote, stand for office, or speak in public. As time went on, wealthier women, especially widows, gained the right to own property and manage their own affairs; we catch glimpses in the New Testament of wealthy women supporting Jesus's ministry and the growth of the early church. Roman society considered

A-B-C, 1-2-3

The commonly accepted statistic for the number of fully literate people in the Roman Empire is 5 to 10 percent, although some scholars think there were more. While the New Testament does show people reading and writing, we mostly need to think of the early church as a highly oral culture. In worship we know that Paul's letters (and later the other New Testament books) as well as the Hebrew Scriptures were read aloud to the community; among other motivations, this benefited illiterate believers. Even the literate often used scribes. (Paul commonly did this and remarks about it when he deviates from the practice, such as in Galatians 6:11.)

AGAINST THE GODS

Atheism, one of the leading charges against Christians, means "against gods." Romans recognized it as a refusal to participate in social and civic activities honoring pagan deities. Pagan worship was intimately interwoven with the Roman state. Many different kinds of priests and priestesses populated the empire: *augures*, who studied omens to decide if the gods were pleased; *pontifices*, who helped the emperor in his religious duties; *flamines*, who served individual gods; the *rex sacrorum* and his wife, and the *regina sacrorum*, who spent their lives performing



HOME, SWEET HOME This 1905 painting captures the interior of a Roman home discovered in Pompeii.



WADE IN THE WATER This papyrus found at Oxyrhynchus shows Christ and the apostles on the Sea of Galilee.

sacrifices for the state. In addition to all these religious classes were vestal virgins, who oversaw the Temple of Vesta in Rome. A proper Roman home, called a *domus*, had busts and wax images of ancestors, as well as a family altar for sacrifices to domestic gods and spirits called the *lares* and *penates*.

WORSHIP WARS

Pagan spectacles such as athletic events and theater, which featured lavish choral singing, instrumental music, and dancing, surrounded early Christians. This created controversy over worship music: large choruses, instruments, and elaborate musical settings seemed too much like the old “shows” of the theaters from before their conversions. Instead early Christians either sang in unison or offered extemporaneous solos as their musical forms of worship. They chanted the Psalms as well as singing newly composed hymns and antiphons (refrains). Some of these hymns seem to be quoted in the New Testament (see Philip-
pians 2:5–11).

WHY DID CHRISTIANITY GROW?

Between Jesus’s Resurrection and the legalization of Christianity in 313, the church grew from a small group of faithful disciples—fewer than 100—to almost 60 percent of the population of the Roman Empire. Why? A number of factors influenced church growth.

One was the relatively prominent role and voice the new faith gave to slaves and women compared to traditional Roman society. To take one prominent example, the Onesimus who was bishop of Ephesus in the late first century is traditionally thought to be the same slave Onesimus mentioned in the Epistle to Philemon. Another factor was the way Christians cared for the sick and the poor—not only their own, but pagans as well—during times of plague and famine. Paul and other missionaries spreading the faith through cosmopolitan urban

centers helped as well. People saw in the Way (its earliest name) a dignity and compassion that countered the decadence and callousness of the pagan world. **CH**

“Life among the pagans” and “Against the gods” are adapted from our issue #124 on faith in the city, and “Worship wars” from our guide to the history of worship from Constantine to the Reformation. “House church” is taken from Band of Angels by Kate Cooper (for more, see pp. 34–37).

DRINK THIS CUP This 6th-c. chalice for the Eucharist (*right*) may come from the ancient city of Antioch.



BROTHERS IN CHRIST The apostles Peter and Paul appear on this 4th-c. bowl—you will see more representations of them on the following pages.

Letters to the editor

Readers respond to *Christian History*

THE FULL 2,000 YEARS

Congrats for 40 years of incomparable service to Christ. What a difference you make in our lives and in our faith journey as you unveil the past 2000+ years of Christian History. Here's hoping and praying that you will continue this good work for many, many more years.—Tom Edmunds, Washington, NJ



Thanks for your faithful support and frequent comments, Tom! As a reminder, readers can get all of our past issues, including our 108-page fortieth anniversary issue #144, at our website.

LIVING THE QUESTIONS

I want to thank you for including the questionnaire at the end of each issue. It really does help us to deepen and review our study of each issue. Also, thank you for posting our correspondence. This gives us more of a sense of community and strengthens our fellowship as we continue this journey of study together. Your institute is a blessing, and I always list it in my curriculum as part of my ongoing formation both as a pastor and as a messianic minister.—George Day, London, UK

Thanks for your kind words! We're glad to hear people are finding the study questions useful.

EASY LISTENING

I love your magazine but find it hard to make the time to read it cover to cover. Is there, or will there soon be, an audio version of the magazines available?—Jim Trainor

This is something we've discussed at CHI and have been considering; our main obstacles are the resources and funding needed to adequately undertake the project. It would be good to know if this is something many of our readers would appreciate and use—so if you, like Jim, would like church history read to you, please register your interest.

QUESTIONING ERASMUS (AGAIN)

Can Erasmus truly be claimed to be a “reformer”? In church politics, Erasmus embraced consensus, compromise, and peaceful cooperation with the papacy—ideals he tried to persuade others of in the debate for “Reformation” but with little success. So once again, can we claim him as a true Reformer? He may have indeed laid the egg which Luther hatched but that isn't enough to substantiate his place in that category.—Steve Oroszi, via social media

The word “reformer” in the sixteenth century was not synonymous with “Protestant”; many people tried to reform sixteenth-century Catholicism from within, as we noted in issue #120 a few years ago on the Catholic Reformation. Erasmus was indubitably a reformer in this sense—he would have liked to have seen a lot changed in the Catholicism of his day. Issue #145 never claims he was a Protestant reformer, though, but it does try to explain why some of his Catholic colleagues thought so. As we noted in our Letters to the Editor last time, while agreeing with many Protestant criticisms, Erasmus said, “I hope I would be willing to die for Christ; I am not willing to die for the paradoxes of Luther.”

NORTHERN LIGHTS

I have been a subscriber to *Christian History* almost since the beginning and have thoroughly enjoyed it... Another interest of mine is the church history of Scandinavia since my mother was Danish. There is very little written about its conversion, and it is a neglected topic. I have long had a fascination for the Stave churches of Norway and the reproduction built in Minot, ND... I would love to see *Christian History* do an issue on the Christian history of Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Iceland. Please consider it.—Paula Fredericksen Mann, Moro, IL

This is a great idea! We've added it to our list of potential issues. Meanwhile look at issue #63, A Severe Salvation, which touches on the conversion of Scandinavia.

WHERE WERE THE PROTESTANTS?

Over the years, I've acquired every issue of *Christian History* but one. And I have found nearly all of them to be very informative. Having said that, I have never been so disappointed with an issue as I am with this one, issue #146. Unless I am missing something, the issue makes no mention of the many Protestant believers, primarily Baptist, who endured persecution, often underground, during the Communist regimes. Can you explain?—George Crawford, Santa Clarita, CA

The issue was specifically intended to tell the story of Orthodox actions in Russia over the past several centuries so that readers could better understand how this relates to Russia's attitude toward Ukraine. We have nothing but admiration for the brave Protestant believers who resisted the Soviets, and that's a story we have talked about before from time to time and could focus on in another issue. (In the meantime check out [Today in Christian History](#) on our website for some stories.) However, we've covered Russian

Orthodoxy, and in fact Orthodoxy in general, very rarely in CH, and given current news we thought it was time to do an issue focusing solely on that tradition.

SOME OTHER STUFF WE DO

Thank you Dan for your daily stories and memories of the faithful heroes of our Faith.—*Ron Hoover, via website*

I gave the Torchlighters sets to my grandchildren this last Christmas. I have always been very impressed with the quality and the content of these stories, The message is clear and the stories true. I am glad that my grandchildren have these kind of Christian examples to look up to.—*Debra Niemeyer, via email*

Thank you for all of the work you are doing. I would like to purchase Torchlighters and other material. . . . I don't have a DVD player so I need to stream everything. Is there a option to purchase and stream? —*Stephanie Burke, via email*

I would love to see additional episodes created. The current episodes are great and it would be wonderful to see more!—*Kim Hoover, via email*

You can read Dan Graves's daily stories about Christian history on the [Christian History Institute website](#) and sign up to have them emailed to you. Stream many of our resources, including Torchlighters, for free at [RedeemTV.com](#). Learn more about our Torchlighters series for children at [Torchlighters.org](#). The next Torchlighter video will be about William Carey. Purchase DVDs at [VisionVideo.com](#).

ALL ABOARD

Reading a back issue ordered some time ago, *How the West Was Really Won* (#66), I was rather perplexed that there was no mention of the role of railroad chapel cars. The cars were railroad cars converted to chapels and classrooms, that were primarily run by (but not exclusively) the American Baptists, and moved from location to location at no charge by various railroads.—*Bruce K. Heald, Lancaster PA*

Issue #66 came out 23 years ago in 2000, so the current team is not sure why chapel cars weren't discussed, but we've asked Rev. Heald—who volunteers at the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania—to submit a blog post on the subject, so hopefully we will all learn more soon!



Scan this QR code to get to our donation page (<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/donate>); you can subscribe at <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/subscribe>.

MEET THE TEAM: CHRIS ARMSTRONG

How long have you been at CHI, and what is your role?

My first role at CH came in 2002–2004, when I became managing editor while the magazine was stewarded by Christianity Today International. In 2008 the print magazine went on hiatus and was picked up again by the founding Christian History Institute in 2010. At that point I helped to build a new “virtual team” and acted as managing editor for issues 100–104. Ever since, I’ve served as senior editor, a lighter-duty consulting role.



What is your favorite part of the job?

I love the senior editor role. I explain it to people as “doing the fun parts”: suggesting issue topics, helping to dream up issue plans in consultation with scholar-experts and our editorial team, and occasionally finding organizational and funding partners for issues. It involves my favorite things: working with ideas and stories, working with great people who are smarter than me, and building new things.

What do you most wish readers knew?

I wish they knew that our great-commission vocation to preach Christ and make disciples and our Genesis vocation to cultivate, keep, and have dominion in the world are both part of the One Big Thing God has always been doing among us. They are two facets of the commandment to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

God created the church for the same reason he created the world: for the flourishing of all nations and all people. The gospel, as Lesslie Newbigin said, is “public truth” or “the truth for the whole world.” It addresses us as whole human beings—not “souls on sticks”—and as the whole world—not the “holy huddle.” It is intimately concerned with every dimension of human need, human longing, and human activity. “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:16–17). There is no sacred-secular divide.

This is not just a “nice-to-know.” The longer I live, the more I see the church in the West, having fallen into thinking that there is such a divide, losing purpose, fruitfulness, and (increasingly) members. And though the history of the church has its grim stretches of brokenness, much in church history also shows the dynamism, growth, and flourishing of a church and world influenced by this older, truer vision of the gospel.

What do you do in your spare time?

My what? When I can: I play jazz piano; listen (constantly) to jazz and (during commutes) to epic fantasy audiobooks; swim; travel; and especially enjoy time with my family—including the furry four-legged members. **CH**



Editor's note

I don't remember where we picked up this saying, but in my family, we say that doing everyday things in the normal and expected way is to do them "like people." "Sorry I didn't come in the right door this time—I'll do it the next time like people." "I'm going to go to the football game this Friday after school like people." "I'm going grocery shopping like people."

When the team at *CH* thought over how long it had been since we did an issue focusing solely on the early church (six years ago in 2017 with #124: *Faith in the City*, if you're counting) and wondered what aspect of that large topic to consider, our minds drifted all the way back to issue #49, *Everyday Faith in the Middle Ages*.

That issue was largely not about high-level theological debates or political intrigues—though we've covered such things in *CH* before—but about church and devotional life in the Middle Ages and how they did things "like people." We asked questions such as: How, where, and when did folks pray every day? What did they teach their children? Where did they go on pilgrimage, and why? What did they learn from their worship environment? What did they think about money and marriage and monasteries?

In the same spirit, we decided to do an issue on *Everyday Faith in the Early Church*. Amazingly, we've never looked at that topic head-on in 40 years, though our other early church issues have touched on it (#17 on women, #37 on worship, and the aforementioned #124 on urban faith in particular).

THE ONE AND ONLY GOD

There's one large difference between the first few Christian centuries (we're stopping at roughly 400 AD in this issue) and the Middle Ages—one on which a thousand smaller

differences depend. Christianity in the medieval West (the subject of #49) was the dominant faith. Christianity in the late Roman Empire was not, though it grew with surprising speed year after year. The Christian faith denied a central organizing principle of the Roman state—the emperor's ability to represent the gods and even to *be* a god—and that opened it up to persecution.

Knowing this, though, can give us tunnel vision about persecution. It happened in the early church, and it was brutal when it did. But with several notable exceptions, it was not empirewide for most of the first three Christian centuries. We can profitably ask and answer other questions about everyday early church faith.

The Christians you'll meet in the following pages prayed for the emperor even though they would not call him "Lord." They got married and worried about how to be parents. They had day jobs. They wrote and read books. They helped the poor and tried to steward their money. They prayed and fasted and sang and traveled. They gathered weekly for the Eucharist. Sometimes they even went to dinner parties (see p. 16).

Today many Christians claim similarities between our own lives and the lives of those in the early church, and some argue that the West is in a post-Christian era resembling the pre-Christian Roman Empire. If we are to be persecuted, let us pray to meet it bravely when it comes. In the meantime let us pursue everyday faith like the early followers of the Way: let us pray and sing and fast and travel

and love and teach and serve and steward and work and gather and worship. Like people. **CH**

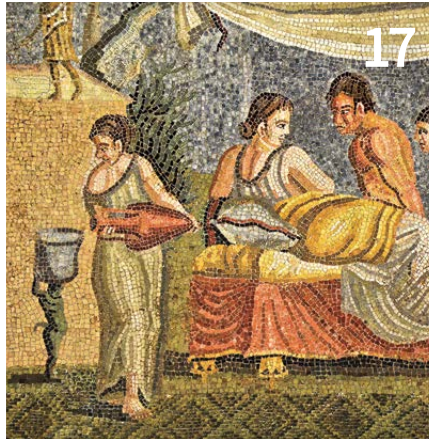
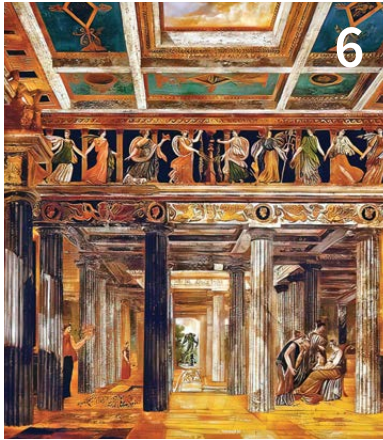


Jennifer Woodruff Tait
Managing editor

Find Christian History on Facebook as ChristianHistoryMagazine, or visit www.christianhistorymagazine.org. Read daily stories at www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/today. For Twitter, use @christiaHistory, and for Instagram, @christianhistorymagazine. Don't miss our next issue on Lilius Trotter and Victorian culture and missions.

We thank the many readers who support this ministry, making it possible for us to provide *Christian History* in print. Please visit www.ChristianHistoryMagazine.org to renew or begin a subscription to *Christian History*.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY



Everyday life in the early church

6 A day in the life

What did it feel like to be a follower of the Way at the very beginning?

James L. Papandrea

12 The “pious poor” and the “wicked rich”

Early Christian discipleship around money, wealth, and charity

Helen Rhee

16 “To life, not to luxury”

Clement of Alexandria

17 “What God has joined together”

Marriage, family, divorce, and adultery in early Christianity

David G. Hunter

21 “Blessings out of number”

John Chrysostom

24 The way of life

Christian formation and the life of prayer in the early church

Paul M. Blowers

28 “According to custom”

Egeria

29 Serving the true Lord and God

Why Christians presented such a huge challenge to the Roman state

George Kalantzis

33 “This superstition”

Pliny and Trajan

34 The emperor and the desert

Christian commitment to asceticism grew in a newly legalized faith

Kate Cooper

38 The Way spreads through the world

Life in early Christian cities

Jennifer Boardman

Also: • Did you know?, inside front cover

- Letters, p. 2 • Editor’s note, p. 4
- Timeline, p. 22
- Reflection questions, p. 43
- Resources, p. 44

Founder
A. K. Curtis

Senior Editor
Chris R. Armstrong

Managing Editor
Jennifer Woodruff Tait

Advisory Editor, CH 147
Paul M. Blowers

Publisher
Christian History Institute

Executive Editor
Bill Curtis

Director of Editorial Staff
Kaylena Radcliff

Contributing Editor
Edwin Woodruff Tait

Design Editor
Doug Johnson

Proofreader
Meg Moss

Layout
Dan Graves

Image Researcher
Max Pointner

Editorial Assistant
Grace Bert

Circulation
Sara Campbell

Print Coordinator
Deb Landis

©2023 Christian History Institute. Cover: Detail from a funerary Christian mosaic with the Christogram. Roman epoch, Sousse Catacombs. Sousse Archaeological Museum, Tunisia—Image courtesy of [RAAFAT MSALMI]

Christian History is published by Christian History Institute, P.O. Box 540, Worcester, PA, 19490 and is indexed in *Christian Periodical Index*, ISSN 0891-9666. Subscriptions are available on a donation basis. Letters to the editor may be sent to editor@ChristianHistoryInstitute.org and permissions requests to info@ChristianHistoryInstitute.org. Credits: We make every effort to obtain proper permission to reproduce images. If you have information about an image source that is not credited, please let us know.

www.ChristianHistoryMagazine.org • 1-800-468-0458



A day in the life

WHAT DID IT FEEL LIKE TO BE A FOLLOWER OF THE WAY AT THE VERY BEGINNING?

James L. Papandrea

This fictionalized account of Christian life in first-century Rome, excerpted from A Week in the Life of Rome, provides a window into the early Christian experience. Read through the rest of the issue to learn more of the historical background behind this tale and others.

Stachys woke up with a start and quickly looked around to see if anyone was there to witness the embarrassing fact that he had nodded off in his patron's atrium. He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that he was alone. A summer breeze blew through the atrium, warm and humid, and the linen awning over the skylight rippled gently. . . .

He looked down at his tanned hands, resting on the folds of the formal toga his patron had given him. . . .

WAY-FOLLOWERS

"Stachys my friend!" Urbanus, the head of the household, entered the atrium and walked quickly over to Stachys, and gripped his arm warmly. . . .

Stachys stood up tall, proud to be greeted so warmly by his patron. . . .

HOME, SWEET HOME This 19th-c. painting faithfully represents the atrium of a wealthy Roman household; you can almost imagine Stachys meeting Urbanus at right.

"Domin-um, Salve. I trust you are well. And your noble wife, Sabina, and your daughters."

"Yes, yes, same as yesterday. Stachys, what are you doing here all by yourself?" Urbanus made a mocking frown. "I thought you had neglected to come pay your respects today. Why didn't you visit me in your turn? It's not like you to be late."

"Well, the truth is, I wasn't late. I've been here all morning, but I let the others go ahead of me."

Urbanus made another face, an exaggerated look of confusion. "What? Why would you humiliate yourself like that, letting my other clients of lower status go ahead of you? And after they probably fought and jockeyed for position among themselves, arguing over petty differences in their net worth just to see who would be first to grovel at my feet?"

ADAPTED FROM A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF ROME BY JAMES L. PAPANDREA. COPYRIGHT © 2019 BY JAMES L. PAPANDREA. USED BY PERMISSION OF INTERVARSITY PRESS, P.O. BOX 1400, DOWNERS GROVE, IL 60515, USA. WWW.IVPRESS.COM
GRANDJEAN DE MONTIGNY, AREA ROMANA, 19TH CENTURY OIL ON WOOD—PHOTO: NATIONAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS COLLECTION, RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL



"I wanted to ask a favor, but one that I didn't want the others to hear." Stachys grew nervous, not really knowing how to say what he had come to say.

"Go on." Urbanus's tone was amiable.

"It's too much to ask, really. It's just that..."

"Spit it out, Stachys, I have to go to court today, and you and the others have to be there to cheer for my lawyer."

"Yes, well, the thing is... and I know this is not my place, but I came to ask if I might be allowed to call you by your name. I mean, instead of calling you *Dominus*."

Urbanus hesitated at first. "Have we come so far? You do remember that you were once my slave?"

"Yes, Dom—"

"Tell me why."

Stachys took a deep breath and scratched his head. "You know that I've joined the school of the Way-followers?"

"Yes, though you still haven't told me what a Way-follower is." Urbanus's tone was shifting from warm to annoyed.

"A Way-follower is no different from any other Roman in many ways. They are not from a particular country, they don't even all speak the same language or have all the same customs in common. They believe much of the religion of the Judeans, but the table is open to anyone who is willing to take up their lifestyle and

HEART OF THE ACTION This lithograph recreates a typical day in the Roman Forum, center of the city's civic and religious life.

be initiated by baptism. They are, however, especially devoted to one particular Judean; his name was Iesua. He said that he is the way, and the truth, and the life."

"Wait, is this that Chrestus who was the cause of all the trouble across the river, that led to the emperor banishing all the Judeans?"

"Well, they call him the *Christos*, but yes. But it wasn't his fault, or the fault of the Way-followers. But you see, for the Way-followers, Iesua the *Christos* is *Dominus*, he is their Lord, and they are not allowed to have any other lord, and if I am initiated and join their table, then I am not supposed to call anyone else *Dominus*."

Now Urbanus was a little angry. "What? But I am your patron! I AM your lord! And after my father died, I gave you your freedom so you could live with your son's mother—may the spirits bless her in Elysium. I took you from managing my olive groves to having your own olive oil business and you owe me a lot of money."

"Yes, and I will always be grateful and you will always be my patron. I would never betray you. Iesua does not ask us to abandon our patrons or dishonor them in any



OPEN FOR BUSINESS At the Temple of Mars Ultor in the Forum of Augustus (now in ruins *above*), 1st-c. Romans might have attended legal proceedings, celebrated military heroes and campaigns, or offered sacrifices (*right*).

way. But my new wife, Maria, is very insistent that I learn the rules of their cult and join their table.”

“YOUR NEW RELIGION”

Urbanus looked Stachys up and down. “You were always a good and loyal slave—and for the last 15 years you’ve been a good and loyal client. I know you mean no dishonor. Hades! You were willing to completely humiliate yourself in front of all my other clients just to save me the embarrassment of having to publicly consider this question of how to address me. Tell me, Stachys, why is it that your honor has increased in my eyes simply because you are willing to be shamed in order to practice your new religion?”

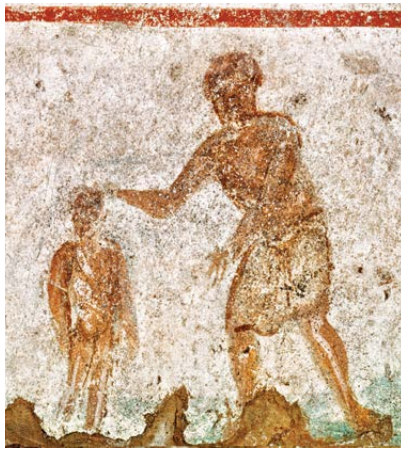
Before Stachys could think of an answer, Urbanus concluded, “All right. From now on, you may call me by my name, and in the mornings you will visit me first, before



all my other clients. . . . Now, we have to get moving because I am due in court. You and the others will meet me on the steps of the new court building, the Basilica Julia. We’re due there at the third hour, so whatever you have to do now, be sure you’re not late. I need all the support I can get. Oh, I almost forgot.”

Urbanus pulled a small leather bag from the fold in his toga and took out a silver *denarius*. “Here you go. So much

SERVING A NEW LORD This image (below) from a catacomb is one of our earliest representations of Christian baptism; at right, Peter and Paul are shown with the martyr Peregrina, who refused to offer sacrifice to Emperor Commodus.



easier than when we used to have to give out food baskets to all the clients.”

“Yes, but I can tell you the clients do miss the days when the daily gift might be an invitation to dinner.”

“Ha! Parasites, the lot of them.” Urbanus put his arm around Stachys again. “But now that we are truly friends, you can look forward to an invitation to dinner in the near future, I promise.”

Stachys left the atrium and exited Urbanus’s house. He loved walking through the wealthy neighborhood that was outside the wall to the east of the city. He loved it because wealthy meant quiet. And since he knew that he had already missed most of the Way-followers’ morning prayer gathering that was going on at his house, there was no need to hurry....

MORNING PRAYER MEETING

The closer he got to the center of the city, the more the streets became clogged with merchants yelling out their wares, prostitutes standing in the doorways and arches, taverns overflowing their thresholds, teachers trying to keep the attention of their students by shouting their lectures, fortune tellers and potion sellers calling out their promises, and barbers shaving and cutting hair. It was as if for a few hours each day, Rome became one big shop. Stachys pushed through the crowd until finally he was able step into a more open space at the Forum of Augustus. He took a right turn at the Temple of Mars....

When he arrived at his house, the morning prayer meeting was just breaking up. He walked through the group of people still milling around and went to his wife, who was alternating between singing a psalm and blowing out candles.... Stachys snuck up behind her, put his hands on her hips and kissed her neck. Maria startled a bit and hunched



her shoulders. “Beloved.” Her long dark hair flipped to the side as she turned around and held out her hand for the denarius.

Stachys put the denarius in her hand. “Apple of my eye.”

Maria’s full lips curved up and a nonsymmetrical smile emerged under her prominent nose. “Oh, you’ve been reading the Scriptures. That makes me so happy.”

“Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon.”

“Don’t overdo it,” she said through a smirk. She handed him two bronze *sestertes* [a sesterte was a quarter of a denarius] for his lunch and shave.

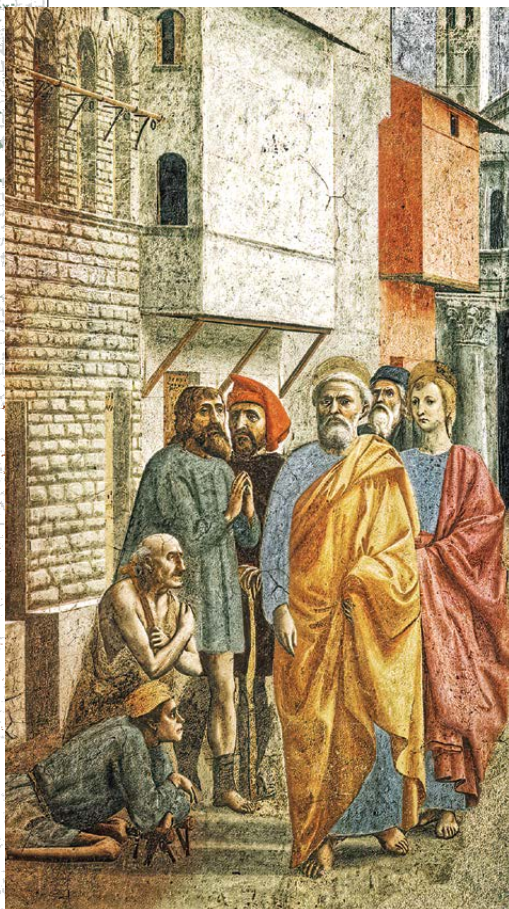
“Stachys, old man!”

Stachys turned to greet his step-son, Marcus.... “*Salve*, Marcus. How was the prayer gathering?”

“It was a blessing, thanks for asking.” Marcus gestured toward a young woman standing nearby. “Stachys, you know Prisca, don’t you? Her parents are Aquila and Priscilla, the awning makers. They left the city with the banishment of the Judeans, but since her mother is Roman, she was able to stay behind to manage their shop.”

Stachys bowed his head in respect toward the young noblewoman, as Maria put her hands on the shoulders of Marcus and Prisca. “Wouldn’t she make a perfect wife for my Johnny?”

“Mother,” Marcus interrupted, then sighed. “I’m 28 years old. Please don’t call me Johnny. And anyway, it’s hard enough for us to keep our heads down here in Babylon without people using our Judean names. You have to call me by my baptism



FEARLESS LEADERS Christians through the ages have continued to depict Peter in art; in a 15th-c. painting (far left) he heals the sick, while this 6th-c. ivory (left) shows him preaching.

“*Va cacá!*” Philologus’s face turned red when the whole group looked at him with dismay over his outburst. His wife, Julia, put her hand on his arm as if to quiet him....

Marcus frowned. “Problem, Philologus?”

Philologus avoided making eye contact with Marcus. “It’s just that sometimes that’s the only meat I get all year. And I really like meat.” A few people laughed.

Marcus tried to suppress a smile, and it turned into a smirk. “Yeah, I get it. We all like meat. But I think the council’s decision is the right one. We have to separate ourselves from idolatry. That’s one way we keep ourselves holy.”

When the others finally filed out of their house, Marcus kissed his mother on the cheek and nodded toward Stachys. “I’m going to walk Prisca home.”

“Wait,” Maria stopped him and grabbed his arm. She could tell there was more on Marcus’s mind. “What else did the letter say?... ”

name, Marcus, like everyone else. And you’re not Miriam, you’re Maria.” He turned to Prisca. “I’m sorry about that.” Prisca just smiled and looked down at the floor, blushing.

Marcus raised his voice to get everyone’s attention. “Now that Stachys is here, I have an announcement.” Everyone got silent. “I’ve received a letter from Peter.” The Way-followers held their breath. “By now he’ll be on his way back to us.” Every held breath was released with a sigh of relief and exclamations of joy.

“He’s coming by ship and should be here within a few days. But because of the banishment of the Judeans, he’s going to have to avoid the main port of Puteoli and come in through Ostia. We have some friends there who will meet him and get him safely off the ship under cover of night. Then we’ll get him into Rome.... I know it’s dangerous to travel at night, but we don’t really have a choice. We have to smuggle him in. But there’s more news. The council in Jerusalem has made a decision about non-Judean believers.... ”

“Non-Judean believers who want to be baptized.... ” He paused for effect, but his smile spoiled the surprise, “... do not have to follow all the laws of our ancestors. They do not have to restrict their diet, and the men do not have to be circumcised.” An audible but restrained cheer rose up from the group. “They do, however, have to refrain from eating meat sacrificed to idols.”

JOINING THE CHRISTIAN TABLE

Marcus sighed. “Reading between the lines, I got the impression that there’s still some disagreement among the apostles. Between Peter and Paul mostly. Do you know they’re starting to call Paul the apostle to the nations? Can you believe that? The nerve of that guy. I mean, Peter converted the first Romans, and to this day he’s converted more non-Judeans than Paul by a long shot. And I know Paul, and I’m just a little concerned that he’s getting too big for himself.”

“And who appointed you judge over the apostles?” It was Rhoda. She had known Marcus since he was a boy, and although she was once a servant in his mother’s household, she had no hesitation about putting him in his place....

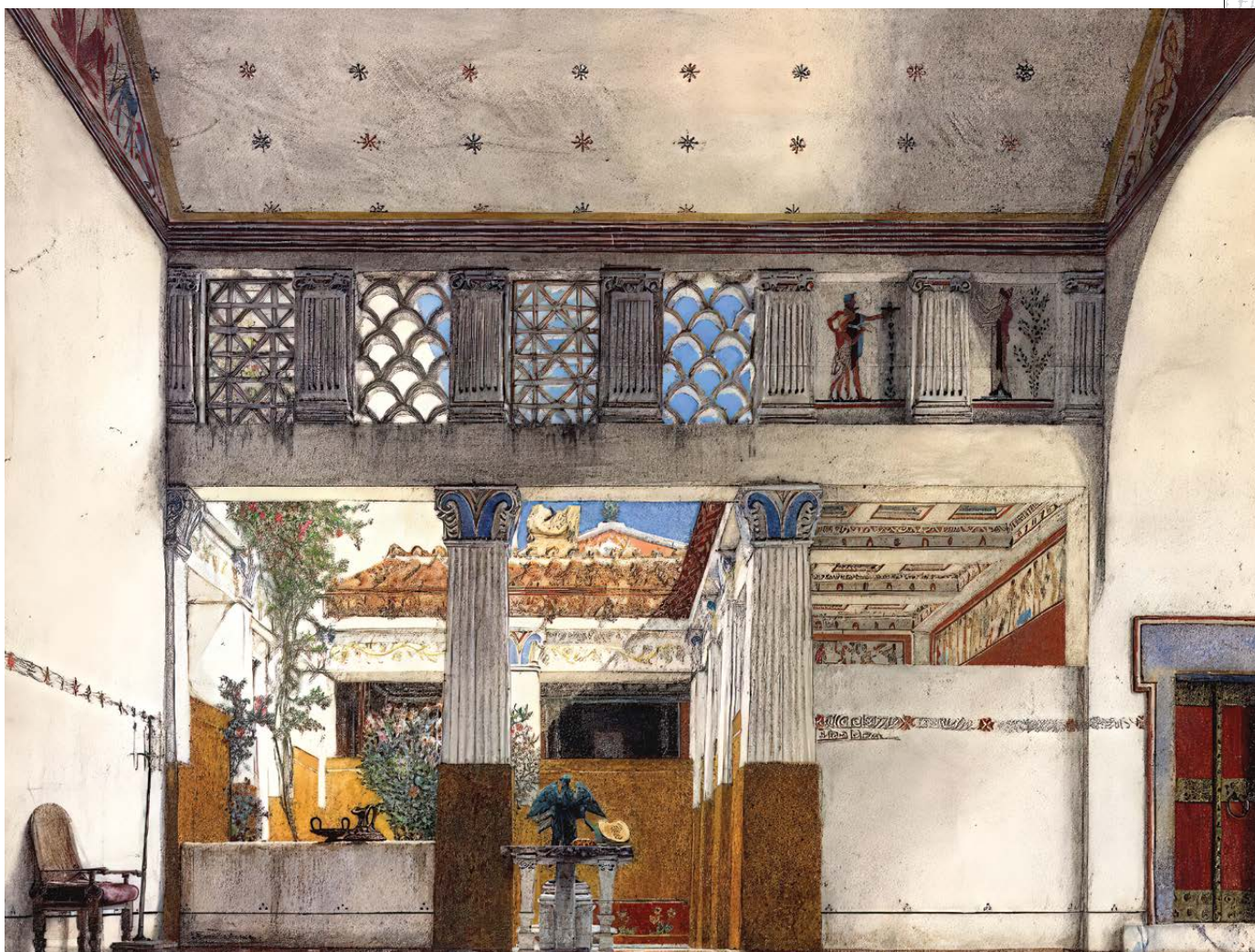
“Anyway,” Marcus tried to get back to the point, “we’ll know more when Peter gets here.”

As soon as they were alone, Maria took Stachys’s hands in hers and looked into his eyes. “Well? Did you ask him?”

Stachys smiled. “Yes, I did. And he said yes.”

Maria smiled even wider. “I’m so anxious for you to join our table. Then when you’re baptized, we can have our union blessed. I would feel so much better if we could, since we couldn’t have a registered marriage.”

“Who cares about that?” Stachys protested. Then he lowered his voice and gestured toward Prisca as she was going



RESTFUL AFTERNOON This 1907 painting imagines the colorful interior of a Roman house.

out the door with Marcus. “Aquila and Priscilla don’t have a registered marriage.” Stachys was immediately self-conscious about his own status, since he was a freedman, just like Aquila. “Same with Philologus and Julia. But it doesn’t seem to matter to them....”

BLESSED BY THE APOSTLES

“But it does matter,” Maria squeezed his hands. “Not what the Romans think, but it matters to the Lord. Aquila and Priscilla had their union blessed by an apostle of the Lord Iesua. When Peter returns, he can do that for us. But first you have to be baptized.”

“Yes, but...”

“Look, if you didn’t want to be with me, you could have done what any other man would have done—you could have taken a much younger wife, a proper Roman girl who wouldn’t have had so many of her own ideas, and her own religion, and who would have had a dowry to give you so you could just have a regular registered marriage.”

Stachys shrugged sheepishly. “The gods gave you to me, who am I to argue with them?”

“The gods!” Maria scoffed. “I was not theirs to give! Did a stone give you life? Did a painted statue give you air to breathe?”

“Well, I never said I was against it. Like I’ve told you before, the dowry thing means nothing to me. I respect the fact that you spent all of your money to get you and your entourage to Rome. That brings honor to your name, Judean or not. We can have this blessing, when the time is right. But now I have to go to court.”

As he walked out the door, Maria was still talking to him. “It wasn’t an entourage. They’re not my followers. Anyway, someone had to get Peter out of Jerusalem.” **CH**

James L. Papandrea is professor of church history and historical theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. He is the author of a number of books including A Week in the Life of Rome (from which this is excerpted with kind permission of InterVarsity Press), The Early Church (33–313), The Earliest Christologies, and Rome: A Pilgrim’s Guide to the Eternal City.

The “pious poor” and the “wicked rich”

EARLY CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP
AROUND MONEY, WEALTH, AND CHARITY

Helen Rhee



For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. (1 Tim. 6:10)



PENNY, PLEASE Two 1st-c. bronze sculptures—a piggy bank depicting a beggar (*far left*) and a statue of a boy from a noble family (*left*)—give us images of poverty and wealth in the Roman Empire.

mainly used for consumption and self-sufficiency.

For ancient Romans any desirable good—such as wealth, health, land, honor, friendship, respect, status, power, or privilege—existed in finite quantities; a person or family could acquire or increase these goods only at the expense of others. One could only acquire wealth justly or innocently through inheritance or self-sufficient production.

Trade was usually associated with pettiness and greed because its goal was making a profit. Most Romans viewed the rich or those getting richer negatively. Philosophers and moralists regarded generosity as the quintessential virtue of a good aristocratic man, and love of wealth (greed)—manifested either in miserliness or prodigality

(luxury)—a classic vice. Following Aristotle they regarded money as sterile and valuable only for its utility as a medium of exchange.

Romans both reinforced class hierarchy and dealt with social and economic inequalities through the patronage system. The patron, the social superior, provided his client, the dependent, with protection and economic and political benefits, such as food, land, housing, recommendations, appointments to office, and even inheritance (see pp. 6–7). The client in return was obliged to return the favor with loyalty, votes, and praise, which enhanced the patron's honor and status. The emperor served as the patron par excellence of the whole empire by providing *plebs* (free-born citizens) with basic urban amenities such as food, water, housing, baths, and entertainment. In addition to personal patronage, aristocrats provided public benefactions for their cities, towns, and countrysides throughout

How to deal with riches formed an important aspect of Christian discipleship from the very beginnings of the Christian movement. Jesus's teachings demanded a kind of discipleship that barred any competing commitment to people or things other than himself, including money and possessions.

Early Christians believed that the Christian attitude toward wealth and its use critically distinguished them from non-Christians. When they thought about riches and poverty, they had to grapple with and respond to the clear call of the social and material responsibilities of the gospel.

DESIRABLE GOODS

Christians lived and operated within the existing social, economic, political, religious, and cultural framework of the Mediterranean world, dominated by the Roman Empire. Rome had an advanced agrarian economy in which agriculture, business, and trade were based on scarcity and



LIFESTYLES OF THE RICH. . . . Wealthy Romans had access to beautiful items such as this bone and wood couch (*above*) and glass jug (*above right*).

the empire: baths, libraries, water, theaters, games, and festivals. They garnered gratitude and honor in return, maintaining and enhancing their power and status.

Patrons, however, did not consider the recipients' actual needs as a factor in distribution. In the system of "Roman Justice," they received proportionally to their status, not their need. Therefore the working poor, though ubiquitous, received gifts as "justice" only if they were part of and participated in the civic community; the destitute and beggars were excluded from the civic community. The poor were ever-present but largely remained invisible.



. . . AND THE FAMOUS This painting (*above*) is a 19th-c. depiction of a Roman festival, but shows the reign of 3rd-c. emperor Elagabalus, which we know to have been marked with excess and scandal.

THE AFFLICTED AND OPPRESSED

Although early Christians engaged with these realities and moral teachings, they primarily inherited Jewish teachings and practices. The Torah reveals Yahweh's absolute ownership of the earth and affirms the goodness of the physical creation and material prosperity as God's blessings to the righteous for their obedience.

The Torah also underscores God's special care for and protection of the poor, widows, orphans, and strangers by establishing social obligations toward them in a covenant community. The wisdom tradition enjoined the rich to do justice, be generous to the poor, and care for them, and it warned them of dishonesty involving wealth.

The prophets fiercely denounced the wealthy and powerful for their idolatry and its by-product—social and economic injustice and oppression of the poor in particular. These prophetic oracles against the oppressive rich are juxtaposed with the psalmists' self-identification with the poor and needy, most frequently in psalms of lament.

Being helpless and needy, the poor cry out and turn to God for help, appealing to God's righteousness and salvation; God is the just defender and protector of the poor and deliverer of the oppressed. The poor are identified as the humble, the afflicted, the oppressed, and the righteous who turn to God for help and enjoy God's special favor.

This emerging notion of "the pious poor and the wicked rich" developed significantly in the postexilic Second Temple period (586 BC–70 AD), envisioning a "great reversal" of the respective earthly fortunes of the pious poor and the wicked rich in the last day.

In first-century Palestine, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small group of pro-Roman landowning aristocracy and the general impoverishment of landless peasants, the majority of the population, fueled a serious



volatility under Roman occupation. Jesus's early followers, believing that the eschatological new age had dawned with him, inherited the tradition of "the pious poor and the oppressive rich."

In the Gospels, while Jesus associates with the wealthy and powerful and is often a recipient of people's hospitality and financial support for his traveling ministry, he speaks to his disciples (and the crowds) about the antithesis between serving wealth (*mamōnas*) and serving God (Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13). He tells a rich man to sell his possessions, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow him to inherit eternal life (Matt. 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22).

Whereas the poor are the recipients of Jesus's good news and beatitudes with a promise of God's kingdom (Matt. 5:3; 11:5; Luke 6:20; 7:22–23), Jesus pronounces woe to the rich (Luke 6:24) and the virtual impossibility of them entering God's kingdom (e.g., Matt. 19:24). As he warns of the lure of wealth (e.g., Mark 4:19), he stresses laying up lasting heavenly treasure rather than perishable earthly treasure by giving alms (Luke 12:33; Matt. 6:19–20).

NO NEEDY AMONG THEM

Although early Christian groups did not formally identify themselves as the "poor," in general they belonged to the lower strata of society. The early Jerusalem assemblies in Acts had special concerns for meeting the needs of the community members: they held all things in common and redistributed possessions to all according to each one's need, to the effect that "there were no needy persons among them" (Acts 2:42–47; 4:32–37).

While members of Paul's urban communities were predominantly free laborers, artisans, slaves, and recent immigrants, moderate wealth existed in house churches. Some could offer their places for assemblies and hospitalities for Paul and his associates and act as "patrons" for the communities (Phoebe in Rom. 16:1–2; Gaius in Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14; Philemon in Philem. 1–2).

In this context Paul taught about charity and hospitality for fellow believers, concerns shared by the rest of

LIVING WATER, NEW BIRTH In the Gospels Jesus speaks to people from diverse social classes, such as the woman at the well (*left*) and Nicodemus (*above*).

the New Testament (Heb. 13:2, 16; 1 Pet. 4:9; 3 John 5–8). His emphases included caring for the poor (Gal. 2:10); working with one's own hands as to avoid idleness and dependence (Eph. 4:28; 1 Thess. 4:11–12; 2 Thess. 3:6–12); warnings against greed (1 Cor. 5:11; 1 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:7); and generosity and hospitality toward others, particularly fellow believers (Rom. 12:8, 13; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8:2; Eph. 4:28), rooted in Christ's own generosity (2 Cor. 8:9). Paul took up a collection for the needy believers in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26, 31; 1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 8:14; cf. Gal. 2:10) as a demonstration of unity between Jewish and Gentile congregations and as a display of legitimacy of his apostolic ministry (to the Gentiles).

His and other New Testament writers' pastoral letters exhort Christians to "do good works/deeds" (i.e., almsgiving/charity for those in need, Titus 2:14, 3:8; Gal. 6:9–10). Rich believers are especially commanded to be humble, put their hope in God rather than in the uncertainty of riches, and practice generosity (1 Tim. 6:17–18), which will result in spiritual blessing in the age to come (1 Tim. 6:19).

Warnings against "love of money" and "pursuing dishonest gain" are prominent in qualifications for church leadership (1 Tim. 3:3, 8; cf. 6:10; Heb. 13:5a; 1 Pet. 5:2). This directly contrasts with descriptions of false teachers and the people in the last days as "lovers of money" and those seeking "dishonest gain" (2 Tim. 3:2, 4; Titus 1:11; cf. 2 Pet. 2:3, 14).

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

In the second and third centuries, the Christian church witnessed significant external and internal growth. It made substantial strides in urban centers of the Greek-speaking world (especially Asia, Egypt, and Greece), Syria, and the Latin West (Italy and North Africa in particular). Some major missionary activities reached the members of the upper strata, especially in Alexandria, Syria, Rome, and North Africa;

SEEKING THE LAMB On a 2nd-c. relief, a freed slave and craftsman processes wool (right). Many such people found Christianity attractive.

but converts to Christianity came from many social classes. Despite pagan critic Celsus's scorn that Christianity attracted only the uneducated, slaves, outcasts, and women, the Christian social makeup actually resembled the typical social pyramid of the Roman Empire: a vast majority in the lower strata, with a growing minority from aristocratic elite and subelite middling groups.

The emergence of refined Christian apologists in the late second century reflected not only the development of Christian literary culture but the beginning of Christian penetration into the educated rank of society.

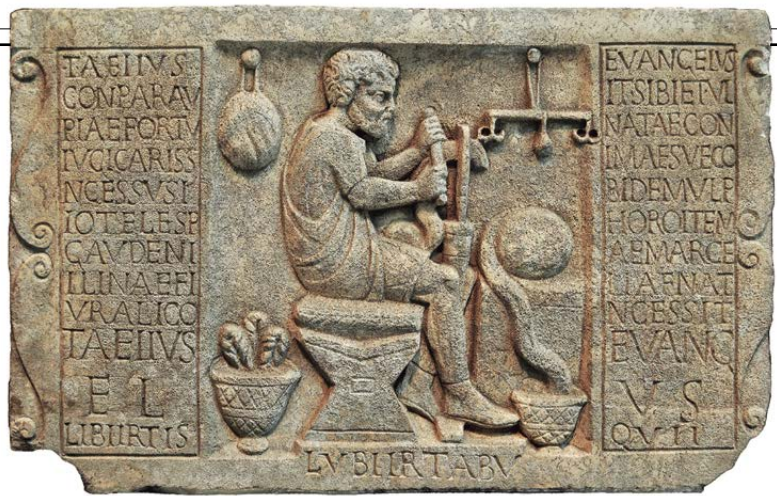
Particularly prominent were conversions of high-status women, the remarkable involvement of Christians in literary texts and activities, and increasing Christian financial and organizational capacity, which indicated a fair number of Christians from the top 10 percent of Roman society. This disturbed and threatened conservative pagan elites. Philosophers such as Celsus and Porphyry targeted Christianity with philosophical and social polemic.

JESUS THE SAVIOR

Christians during this period produced literature interpreting and applying for their community the sayings of the Lord and the letters of the apostles while still “strangers” in the empire. Salvation for these early Christians occurred within a community context and necessarily entailed social responsibility, as well as personal virtues, as a testament to faith in God and Jesus Christ.

The early church proclaimed Jesus Christ as the Savior whose revelation of God and sacrifice on the cross provided his followers the once-for-all atonement for sin that began a life of faith through baptism. In the second century, baptism, which marked a new beginning, increasingly symbolized the “seal of salvation” that brought about remission of sins, rebirth, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This salvation, a lifelong process, would involve and demand a steady progress in “taking off an old self and putting on a new self” and the persistent cultivation of spiritual and ethical virtues in community—both internal and external works attesting to one’s faith in God. Calls for sharing material resources (*koinonia*) and almsgiving took on an increasingly salvific significance, especially in dealing with the problem of sin after baptism. By the mid-third century, as a growing institution, the church centralized its charitable



REMEMBER ME Among the saints depicted in this 6th-c. mosaic in Ravenna (above) is Martin of Tours (first saint on the left), famed for his kindness to a beggar.

ministries under the supervision of the clergy—the bishops in particular.

Early Christians thus bequeathed to later generations a tradition of appealing to people from all sorts of financial backgrounds—from aristocrats of means to slaves who did not even own themselves—along with preserving from their Jewish heritage a special concern for the poor. As the movement as a whole grew wealthier, it still had to grapple with the clear statement of its founder: “You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matt. 6:24b). **CH**

Helen Rhee is professor of the history of Christianity at Westmont College, the author of Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich and Early Christian Literature, and the editor of Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity, from which this article is adapted with the kind permission of 1517 Media. She is an ordained Free Methodist minister.

“To life, not to luxury”

IN THE LATE SECOND-CENTURY WORK *THE INSTRUCTOR*, CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA HAS THOUGHTS ABOUT HOW CHRISTIANS OUGHT TO EAT DINNER



EGGS, ANYONE? This fresco from Pompeii (left) may seem modest to modern eyes, but it displays the indulgent culture of Roman banquets of which Clement (below in a 19th-c. drawing) was suspicious.

agape [i.e., an agape meal or lovefeast] to pitiful suppers, redolent of savor and sauces. [They are] dishonoring the good and saving work of the Word, the consecrated agape, with pots and pouring of sauce. . .

They are deceived in their idea, having expected that the promise of God might be bought with suppers.
—Chapter 1, “On Eating”

LET revelry [i.e., noisy partying] keep away from our rational entertainments, and foolish vigils, too, that revel in intemperance. . . .

And let love, and intoxication, and senseless passions, be removed from our choir. Burlesque singing is the boon companion [i.e., close friend] of drunkenness. A night spent over drink invites drunkenness, rouses lust, and is audacious in deeds of shame.

For if people occupy their time with pipes, and psalteries [i.e., an instrument like a zither], and choirs, and dances, and Egyptian clapping of hands, and such disorderly frivolities, they become quite immodest and intractable, beat on cymbals and drums, and make a noise on instruments of delusion; for plainly such a banquet . . . is a theatre of drunkenness.

—Chapter 4, “How to Conduct Ourselves at Feasts”

FOR the apostle decrees that, putting off the works of darkness, we should put on the armor of light, walking honestly as in the day, not spending our time in rioting and drunkenness, in chambering and wantonness (Rom. 13:12–13).

Let the pipe be resigned to the shepherds, and the flute to the superstitious who are engrossed in idolatry. For, in truth, such instruments are to be banished from the temperate banquet, being

more suitable to beasts than men, and [to] the more irrational portion of mankind.

—Chapter 4, “How to Conduct Ourselves at Feasts”

Translated by William Wilson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2.

Keeping, then, to our aim, and selecting the Scriptures which bear on the usefulness of training for life, we must now compendiously [i.e., completely] describe what the man who is called a Christian ought to be during the whole of his life. We must accordingly begin with ourselves, and how we ought to regulate ourselves . . .
—Chapter 1, “On Eating”

SOME men, in truth, live that they may eat, as the irrational creatures, whose life is their belly, and nothing else. But the Instructor [i.e., the author] 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 to immortality. . . .

[Food] is to be simple, truly plain, suiting precisely simple and artless children—as ministering to life, not to luxury. And the life to which it conduces consists of two things—health and strength.

To this plainness of fare is most suitable, being conducive both to digestion and lightness of body, from which come growth, and health, and right strength—not strength that is wrong or dangerous and wretched, as is that of athletes produced by compulsory feeding. . . .

For “meats are for the belly,” for on them depends this truly carnal and destructive life; whence some, speaking with unbridled tongue, dare to apply the name





“What God has joined together”

MARRIAGE, FAMILY, DIVORCE, AND ADULTERY IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

David G. Hunter

A *pagan convert to Christianity* in its first centuries would have found his or her life changed in significant ways. Abstaining from traditional practices of animal sacrifice offered before images of the gods would have severed social ties with the local community.

Withdrawal from other aspects of civic life—public entertainments, gladiatorial combats, and the theater—would have furthered a new Christian’s sense of estrangement from Roman culture. But the factor that would have had the most dramatic impact was Christianity’s stricter standards of sexual morality within marriage.

THE GOOD OF MARRIAGE

Around the year 400, Augustine of Hippo (354–430) penned a short treatise titled “The Good of Marriage” (*De bono coniugali*). In it he sketched what would become classic Christian teaching, at least in the Western church, on the “goods” found in marriage: procreation, the sexual fidelity of the marital relationship, and the permanence of the marriage bond, which Augustine

THE TWO BECOME ONE This image of Adam and Eve appears on the wall of the Catacombs of San Gennaro in Naples, Italy.

called its “sacrament.” The last of these goods formed the basis of his conviction that neither separation nor divorce could sever a couple’s unity. Only the death of one of the spouses could end the marriage and allow for remarriage. Augustine believed that this strict view was the evident meaning of Ephesians 5:31–32:

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh [Gen. 2:24]. This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

The Greek word for “mystery” (*mysterion*) was rendered in the Latin Bible as *sacramentum*, which to Augustine meant a “symbol.” Christian marriage contains a “sacrament,” Augustine would say, in the sense that it symbolizes something beyond itself, and that



“something” is the union of Christ and the church. In his *Literal Commentary on Genesis*, composed about the same time as “The Good of Marriage,” he summarized the same argument neatly:

This good of marriage is threefold: fidelity, offspring, sacrament. Fidelity means that there are no sexual relations with another person outside of the marriage bond; offspring means that the children are to be received with love, nourished with kindness, educated in the faith; sacrament means that the marriage bond is not to be broken and that the divorced man or divorced woman may not be joined to another, even for the sake of producing children.

Augustine’s influential teaching on the indissolubility of marriage represents the weaving together of texts and traditions that had developed gradually during the earliest Christian centuries.

Marriage, in the perspective of most ancient cultures, was a stubbornly “worldly” institution. Its usual by-products—the production of legitimate children and the establishment of households—seemed to be the natural foundation of a well-ordered city, state, and cosmos. In theory at least, the *paterfamilias* was the undisputed master or *dominus* in a Roman household, whose word was law and whose “fatherly power” (*patria potestas*) extended even to matters of life and death.

Christians adopted some of these structures, but they also transformed them. Colossians 3:18–4:1, for example, forms a clear statement of the Christian appropriation of the structures of the Roman household, even the inherently brutal institution of slavery. Nevertheless, even within Colossians a subtle critique and realignment of familial relationships exists.

The passage outlines mutual responsibilities: wives are told to submit, but husbands are told to love; children are told to obey, but fathers are told not to provoke; slaves are told to obey and serve, but masters are told to



MUTUAL LOVE Christians saw their marriage customs as significantly different from pagans ones; here a Christian marriage scene (above left) is contrasted with a Roman mosaic possibly depicting adultery (above).

treat their slaves justly. While one might question the extent to which Christianity actually altered domestic institutions such as slavery, Paul’s confidence in Philemon may give reason for optimism.

A HIGHER VIEW

From the very beginning, Christian sources departed from the views of marriage and divorce they had inherited from Greco-Roman tradition and the Hebrew Bible, which viewed divorce and remarriage as relatively unproblematic. All three of the synoptic Gospels preserve sayings of Jesus regarding the impermissibility of divorce. In Mark’s version Jesus responds to Pharisees who state that the Mosaic law allows a man to divorce his wife:

Because of your hardness of heart [Moses] wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female [Gen. 1:27]. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh [Gen. 2:24]. So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate [Mark 10:5–9].

Jesus’s teaching on the indissolubility of marriage seems to have been closely linked to his eschatological preaching. Those entering the kingdom of God were expected to manifest the holiness and perfection characteristic of God’s original creation, and this was understood to include monogamous unions.

UNHAPPY UNION This fresco from Pompeii (*below*) depicts the wedding of Zeus and Hera. (The latter was considered the Greek goddess of marriage, as was her Roman counterpart, Juno.)



The Gospel of Matthew gives us an important departure from Mark's version, though. After citing the saying of Jesus in almost the same words as Mark and Luke 16:18, the Gospel writer placed this significant exception on the lips of Jesus: "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality and marries another commits adultery" (Matt. 19:9; see Matt. 5:32). Because of this exception in Matthew's Gospel, some early Christians allowed not only divorce, but also remarriage after divorce, if one of the spouses had committed adultery.

REDEFINING "ADULTERY"

A new convert to Christianity would also have been challenged by a stricter standard of sexual behavior within marriage, especially for men. In the Hebrew Bible and in Roman law, adultery was defined as sexual relations between a married or betrothed woman and a man who was not her husband. In this case both the man and the woman were considered guilty of adultery.

If a married man had sex with an unmarried woman who was not his wife, however, this was not considered adultery; and in Roman culture, a married man's sexual intercourse with prostitutes or slaves (female or male) would not have been adultery in the legal sense. Adultery could only be committed with or by a married woman. It constituted a violation of a husband's right to have sole sexual possession of his wife and presented the risk



A THREEFOLD CORD As in the image on p. 18, this couple (*above*) stands in a traditional Roman marriage pose, but their faith is displayed through Christian symbolism.

STAND BY YOUR MAN? Roman matrons, like this 2nd-c. woman (*right*), were not considered to have been cheated on if their husbands had intercourse with slaves or prostitutes.



of corrupting the family line with illegitimate offspring. Over time, however, Christianity redefined "adultery" to include a man's extramarital activity as well.

Jewish law and Roman law instituted harsh penalties for both parties involved in adultery as they defined it. Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22 prescribed the death penalty for adulterers, although it is unclear how frequently it was imposed. In Roman law a husband could execute his wife and her lover if he found the adulterers in his house.

At the dawn of the early Christian era, Emperor Augustus initiated legislation to suppress adultery as part of a broader initiative to strengthen legitimate marriage. Under the *lex Julia de adulteriis* (18 BC), adultery became a criminal offense punishable by exile and confiscation of property; it also required husbands to divorce their adulterous wives or risk prosecution for pimping.

Against the background of these Jewish and Roman traditions, the teachings of Jesus and Paul preserved in the New Testament created some difficulties for early Christians. One issue was the question of whether a person guilty of adultery could be granted forgiveness and remain a member of the church; another issue was whether marriage after divorce constituted adultery. On both questions we find considerable diversity among early Christians.

The example of Jesus offering forgiveness to the woman caught in adultery—John 8:1–11, missing from many manuscripts and unknown to the Greek Fathers—might have encouraged a generous attitude toward



sinner. But most early Christians took adultery very seriously as a moral failure.

The earliest discussion is found in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, written in Rome early in the second century. According to Hermas if a Christian discovered his wife in adultery, he had to separate from her as long as she refused to repent. But the man was not allowed to marry another woman after the divorce or else he would be guilty of adultery. He had to remain unmarried and be prepared to take back his wife, if she repented; but repentance was allowed only once. Hermas applied this ruling to the wife as well as to the husband.

By the early third century, a more rigorous discipline took place in many churches. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage in the mid-third century, noted that certain of his predecessor bishops in North Africa refused to grant “peace” (i.e., reconciliation) to adulterers, but he clearly supported the practice of allowing penance and reconciliation. Origen (c. 185–c. 253) and Tertullian (c. 155–c. 220) supported a more rigorous position, with Tertullian arguing that adultery was one of the “mortal” sins mentioned in 1 John 5:16. Both Tertullian and Origen acknowledged, however, that some bishops were granting absolution for adultery.

MYSTERY AND SACRAMENT Augustine’s views on marriage would prove to be hugely influential on later Christian thought, especially in the West.

At the same time in Rome, Bishop Callistus (died c. 222 or 223) caused scandal among the rigorists by claiming the authority to remit the sin of adultery. But the rigorist position was slow to die out; around 305 the Spanish council of Elvira decreed lifelong excommunication for a woman who committed adultery. By the end of the fourth century, however, bishops commonly granted absolution to adulterous men and women after a requisite period of penance.

WHO GETS TO REMARRY?

Even greater variation plagued the question of remarriage. Jesus in the New Testament expressly forbade both men and women to divorce and remarry (Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18). But the situation was complicated by Matthew 19:9’s exception in the case of a wife’s adultery.

In 1 Corinthians 7:10–11, Paul repeated as a command of the Lord “that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband) and that the husband should not divorce his wife.” Since Paul did not explicitly forbid a man to remarry after divorcing his wife, as he did a woman, some Christians believed this supported Matthew 19’s exception and allowed a man whose wife was guilty of adultery to remarry.

But this apparent double standard troubled many early Christians, as well as the fact that adultery was customarily defined as a crime committed by or with a married woman and did not necessarily apply to a man’s extramarital affairs. Early in the fourth century, the North African writer Lactantius (c. 250–c. 325) argued that any extramarital activity, even on the part of the husband, constitutes adultery.

By the late fourth century, Western Christians, such as Ambrose (c. 339–397) and Augustine, applied the same principle to remarriage after divorce: even after divorce for a legitimate reason, remarriage was forbidden. Eastern Christian tradition solved the problem of inequality differently by allowing remarriage after divorce for both men and women.

By Augustine’s time, of course, the position of Christians in the culture had changed; the church’s views on marriage were now, at least formally, the views of the ruling state as well. The Middle Ages would continue to work out the tension between marriage as a “worldly” institution necessary for maintaining civil society and marriage as a religious *sacramentum* symbolizing something beyond itself. **CH**

David G. Hunter is the Margaret O’Brien Flatley Professor of Catholic Theology at Boston College and the author or editor of a number of books, including Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity and Marriage and Sexuality in Early Christianity.

“Blessings out of number”

GOOD MARRIAGE AND PARENTING ACCORDING TO JOHN CHRYSOSTOM
IN THE LATE FOURTH CENTURY

If you have a mind to give dinners, and to make entertainments, let there be nothing immodest, nothing disorderly. If you should find any poor saint able to bless your house, able only just by setting his foot in it to bring in the whole blessing of God, invite him....

Let no one of you make it his endeavor to marry a rich woman, but much rather a poor one. When she comes in, she will not bring so great a source of pleasure from her riches, as she will annoyance from her taunts, from her demanding more than she brought, from her insolence, her extravagance, her vexatious [i.e., annoying] language....

For just as with a general, when his troops also are well organized, the enemy has no quarter to attack; so, I say, is it also here: when husband and wife and children and servants are all interested in the same things, great is the harmony of the house....

EXCELLENCE OF SOUL

Let us then be very thoughtful both for our wives, and children, and servants; knowing that we shall thus be establishing for ourselves an easy government, and shall have our accounts with them gentle and lenient, and say, “Behold I, and the children which God has given me” (Isa. 8:18).

If the husband command respect, and the head be honorable, then will the rest of the body sustain no violence. Now what is the wife’s fitting behavior, and what the husband’s, [Paul] states accurately, charging [the wife] to reverence [the husband] as the head, and him to love her as a wife.... [These things] will be so, if we will despise money, if we will look but to one thing only, excellence of soul, if we will keep the fear of God before our eyes....

Show her too, that you set a high value on her company, and that you are more desirous to be at home for her sake, than in the market-place. And esteem her before all your friends, and above the children that are born of her, and let these very children be beloved by you for her sake....

Condemn... all riches and extravagance, and gently point out the ornament [i.e., beauty] that there is in neatness and in modesty; and be continually teaching her the things that are profitable....

Never call [your wife] simply by her name, but with terms of endearment, with honor, with much love. Honor her, and she will not need honor from others; she will not want the glory that comes from others, if she enjoys that which comes from you. Prefer her before



BASED ON THE WORD In this 12th-c. fresco, Chrysostom holds a scroll reading “Nobody of those who are slaves of the wishes and lust for the flesh is worthy.”

all, on every account, both for her beauty and her discernment, and praise her. You will thus persuade her to give heed to none that are outside, but to scorn all the world except yourself.

Teach her the fear of God, and all good things will flow from this as from a fountain, and the house will be full of 10,000 blessings. If we seek the things that are incorruptible, these corruptible things will follow.

For, says He, seek first His kingdom, and all these things shall be added unto you (Matt. 6:33). What sort of persons, think you, must the children of such parents be? What [will] the servants of such masters [be like]? What [will] all others who come near them [be like]? Will not they too eventually be loaded with blessings out of number?

—From “Homily 20 on Ephesians”

Translated by Gross Alexander. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 13.*

EVERYDAY FAITH IN THE EARLY CHURCH

SOME OF THE EVENTS SHAPING THIS ISSUE, IN CONTEXT



Atrium of the House of the Ancient Hunt in Pompeii, Luigi Bazzani, 1886



Bust of Emperor Trajan, c. 98–117

c. 33 The church appoints its first deacons.

c. 35 Stephen, the church's first martyr, is killed.

c. 40 The word "Christians" is first used to describe believers in Antioch.

c. 46–c. 60 Paul makes his missionary journeys.

c. 48 Jerusalem Council meets.

64 The great fire burns Rome. Nero launches persecution of Christians.

c. 65 Peter and Paul are executed.

70 Rome besieges and destroys Jerusalem.

79 Mt. Vesuvius erupts.

c. 90s Roman emperor is given the title of *Dominus et deus* (Lord and god).

c. 100s The *Didache*, earliest church manual, comes into use.

c. 106 Roman Empire reaches its greatest extent.

c. 111 Pliny writes to Emperor Trajan asking how to deal with Christians.

c. 130–200 An unknown author composes the *Epistle to Diognetus*.

140 Justin Martyr founds a school of Christian philosophy at Rome.

c. 156 Polycarp of Smyrna is martyred.

161–180 During the reign of Marcus Aurelius, anti-Christian literature proliferates. Around 170 Celsus writes the first full book opposing Christianity.



Ruins in Corinth adjacent to the temple of Apollo

165 An epidemic spreads through the empire.

177 Roman Senate decrees that criminals must face gladiators in the arena.

c. 190 Clement writes *The Instructor*.

Late 100s The *Shepherd of Hermas* is written.

c. 197 Tertullian writes *To the Martyrs*.

c. 200 Origen writes *On Prayer*.

202 Emperor Septimius Severus forbids conversions to Christianity.

203 Perpetua, Felicity, and their friends are martyred.

212 Roman citizenship is extended to every freeborn person.

c. 215 Hippolytus of Rome compiles the *Apostolic Tradition*, an influential set of guidelines for church practice.

c. 232 The earliest house church for which we have archaeological evidence begins meeting in Dura Europos.

c. 250 Another great epidemic occurs. Emperor Decius begins empirewide persecution of Christians. Egyptian Christians translate the Septuagint into their own language (Coptic).

Greek hymn in praise of the Trinity, Oxyrhynchus papyri, 3rd c.





Early Christian mosaic, Lamta, Tunisia



Marble of Jonah praying, Asia Minor, c. 285

c. 250 Plague of Cyprian breaks out.

252 Cyprian of Carthage writes *On the Lord's Prayer*.

255–256 African bishops insist on rebaptism of heretics and schismatics; Rome disagrees.

c. 270 Monasticism begins to spread in Egypt and Syria.

285 Emperor Diocletian divides the Roman Empire into eastern and western halves. He soon makes other administrative reforms as well as military and economic changes.

303–304 Diocletian implements the Great Persecution. Edicts call for destruction of church buildings, stripping of Christians' civil rights, imprisoning of clergy, and for all people to sacrifice to pagan gods on pain of death.

c. 305 Council of Elvira in Spain sets rules for Christian behavior.

306–337 Constantine the Great rules as emperor. In 312 he converts to Christianity.

c. 311 Eusebius of Pamphilius writes *Ecclesiastical History*.

c. 350 Christians make up half of the empire's population.

372 Basil of Caesarea builds his famous hospital.

380 Theodosius I makes Christianity the official religion of the empire. Around this time Egeria writes about worship in Jerusalem.

381 Council of Constantinople affirms Nicene orthodoxy.



Baptismal font in 5th-c. ruins of a basilica, Ohrid, Macedonia

393 Theodosius I bans all pagan festivals including the Olympics.

Late 300s Gregory of Nyssa preaches homilies on the Lord's Prayer.

c. 396 John Chrysostom preaches homilies on Ephesians.

c. 400 Augustine writes "The Good of Marriage."



Augustine (earliest known portrait), Lateran, Rome, 6th c.

313 Edict of Milan legalizes Christianity; Christians compose about 12 percent of the population of the empire.

318 Athanasius writes *On the Incarnation* to combat Arianism.

324 Constantine defeats Licinius to become sole Roman emperor; he chooses Constantinople (formerly Byzantium) as his new capital.

325 Constantine summons the first Council of Nicaea.

330 Constantinople is dedicated as capital.

336 First evidence exists of December 25 celebration of Christ's birth.

c. 340 Imperial legislation begins to favor Christianity.



Votive relief dedicated to the goddess Vesta, Rome, c. 145



The way of life

CHRISTIAN FORMATION AND THE LIFE OF PRAYER IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Paul M. Blowers

Invariably when we try to imagine, let alone comprehend, the spiritual life of “ordinary Christians” in the early churches, we are faced with few direct or autobiographical accounts of their experience—unlike Christians today who compose personal spiritual journals, “prayer lists,” and the like. Trying to reconstruct early Christians’ spiritual formation and practices of prayer, we are largely forced to read into the foreground of writings that both encouraged their spiritual regimens and held them to standards they might or might not have been living up to.

A FORK IN THE ROAD

In the late first and second centuries, much literature, especially the “Apostolic Fathers” (1 *Clement*, 2 *Clement*, the *Letters* of Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna’s *Letter to the Philippians*, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the *Didache*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Epistle to Diognetus*, and *Fragments of Papias*) built on traditions of *catechesis* (teaching) and *paraenesis* (exhortation) in the New Testament itself when they spoke of the basics and uniqueness of the Christian way of life. Individuals’ personal piety was intrinsically and crucially bound up with that of the full community.

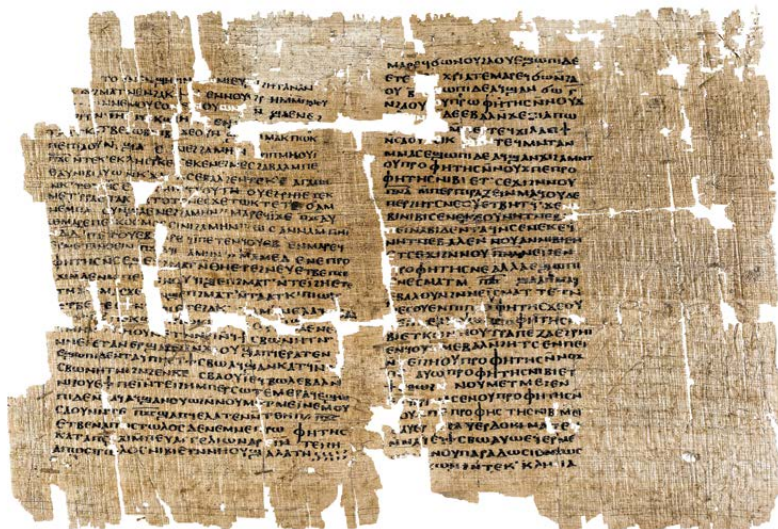
Often these works depict the Christian community as one of broad-based asceticism. The integrity of the church

CROSS-SHAPED LIFE This 4th-c. baptismal font can still be found today at the ruins of the Alahan monastery in modern-day Turkey.

depended on members’ commitments to its distinctive practices, beginning with repentance in all its forms—contrition for sin, submission to baptism, fasting, praying, and resolving to live virtuously. Believers faced an existential fork in the road, having to choose between the “way of life (light)” and the “way of death (darkness)” (as both the *Didache* and the *Epistle of Barnabas*, from late in the first century and early in the second, explain).

Indeed modern Christians are often taken aback by the severity of the demand for penitence observed in primitive churches. There, as the *Shepherd of Hermas* (second century) and other sources tell us, baptism was the pivotal medium of remission of sins, after which believers could be granted only one more chance—a “second repentance”—to enjoy the grace of divine pardon. This severity relaxed over time as realism caught up with church leaders. Increasingly they saw the sacrament of baptism as communicating a grace of forgiveness that believers would need over an entire lifetime, along with an enduring penitence.

While the Apostolic Fathers and other early authors were quite clear that the Christian life entails obedience to specific



OPPOSITE WAYS Both this fragment of the *Didache* (above) and this cameo of the emperor offering sacrifice (right) date from the 4th c.

commandments or mandates, such obedience needed forming and framing, lest it become purely a matter of fulfilling requirements. Already in Judaism observance of the Torah entailed actions designed to reform and renew believers, not just to assure their status as righteous. Framing Christian obedience in terms of the imitation of Christ's own obedience to the Father, or of the radical witness of saints and martyrs, gave repentance and obedience a larger context in holistic Christian character formation.

Christianity emerged in a Roman Empire already having its own public standards of prayer. Invocation, incantation, and *theurgy* (rituals that ask for the presence of a deity) were familiar elements in pagan culture and civic religion; they were considered indispensable for bidding the gods (or the one high God) to secure and ensure the flourishing of society.

While we can find instances in ancient Greece and Rome of prayer being offered to a god along more pious or devotional lines, such as the Stoic philosopher Cleanthes's famous *Hymn to Zeus* (third century BC), this was hardly the public norm. Early Christians viewed pagan prayer as shamefully utilitarian. Authentic prayer entailed personal and communal devotion to a God whose love and mercy could never depend on contrived human mechanisms, religious or otherwise. Private and public prayer, encouraged as both communication and communion with God, thus became a mainstay of early Christian piety at all levels.

DAILY PRAYER AND PRAISE

Earliest Christianity, beginning with the ministry of Jesus himself, took inspiration from Jewish practices of prayer at specific times throughout the day (preferably three as in Daniel 6:10), as well as blessings at meals. While Jews certainly could recite prayers in private, the synagogue became the hub for observing daily times of prayer, and it also hosted the Sabbath liturgy. Acts details how Jewish Christians,

including apostles, continued in daily times of prayer (Acts 3:1; 10:9, 30; 16:25; 22:17) and in gatherings to pray inside and inevitably in other venues (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; 12:12; 16:13, 16). In addition to this, believers lifted prayers up for special needs and occasions (healings, ordinations, etc.).

How much and how often early Christians actually prayed is difficult to track, since we cannot assume that leaders' encouragement automatically translated into large numbers of Christians following through. By the fourth century, even if bishops recommended the "daily office" (from *officium*, "duty") of prayer or "liturgy of the hours" for all Christians, the difficulty of coming together in the church to sustain this discipline proved prohibitive—especially as the daily office of prayer became more, not less, ritualized and liturgical in both East and West, consuming ever more time.

This so-called cathedral office of prayer remained intact as a way of enjoining all Christians to uphold Paul's admonition to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). To this day various church traditions celebrate at least morning prayer (matins) and evening prayer (evensong) with an open invitation for all to participate. But it was monasticism, from the fourth century on, that took the daily office to new heights. Monks made it the liturgical backbone of the Christian day, with some monastic orders expanding the discipline to eight daily times of prayer, distinguished also by the extensive integration of the Psalms.

The cathedral and monastic offices of prayer in turn grew up together and respectively amplified the New Testament's emphasis on daily prayer as pivotal to prepare the faithful for Christ's second coming. The monastic office, in particular, reflected this urgency of Christians living in the shadow of God's imminent judgment.

The *Didache* mandates that Christians should pray the Lord's Prayer three times a day. While we cannot confirm that this became general practice, it does indicate the unique prestige of the Lord's Prayer—eventually recited in private, at baptisms, and in the Eucharistic liturgy. Extemporaneous or spontaneous prayers did occur in the early church, as Tertullian (c. 155–c. 220) mentioned in *On Prayer*, but Christians'



LIKE SWEET-SMELLING INCENSE This 6th-c. censer (*above left*) with scenes from the life of Christ was certainly used in worship; perhaps this 4th-c. bucket with a Chi-Ro (*above*) was as well.

THE WORD IS POWERFUL The Mudil Psalter from the 5th c. (*left*) is the earliest known psalter (a book of Psalms used for worship) in the Coptic language.

private prayers were heavily shaped by biblical precedents and by corporate worship. The Lord's Prayer served as a living link between private and liturgical prayer. As Jesus's own outline of believers' prayer, how could it have been otherwise?

Several early Christian luminaries therefore wrote commentaries or sermons on the Lord's Prayer, including Tertullian, Cyprian (c. 210–c. 259), Origen (c. 185–c. 253), Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395), Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 313–386), Augustine (254–430), and Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662), drawing out the deeper meanings of each clause for the faithful. The prayer also proved a vital component in pre- and postbaptismal catechesis. Expositors tied doctrinal understanding of God to the constant need to invoke and petition God amid the relentless challenges of Christian life in an uncertain and often hostile world.

Ultimately, too, the Lord's Prayer became a virtual sacrament, a verbal means of grace, in its private and corporate recitation. Ministering in third-century Carthage, to a church all too familiar with the specter of imperial persecution, Cyprian eloquently elicited this principle in *On the Lord's Prayer* (252):

Let us then, beloved brothers and sisters, pray as God our Teacher has taught us. . . . Let the Father recognize the words of his own Son when we recite our prayer, and let him who already dwells deep within us also indwell

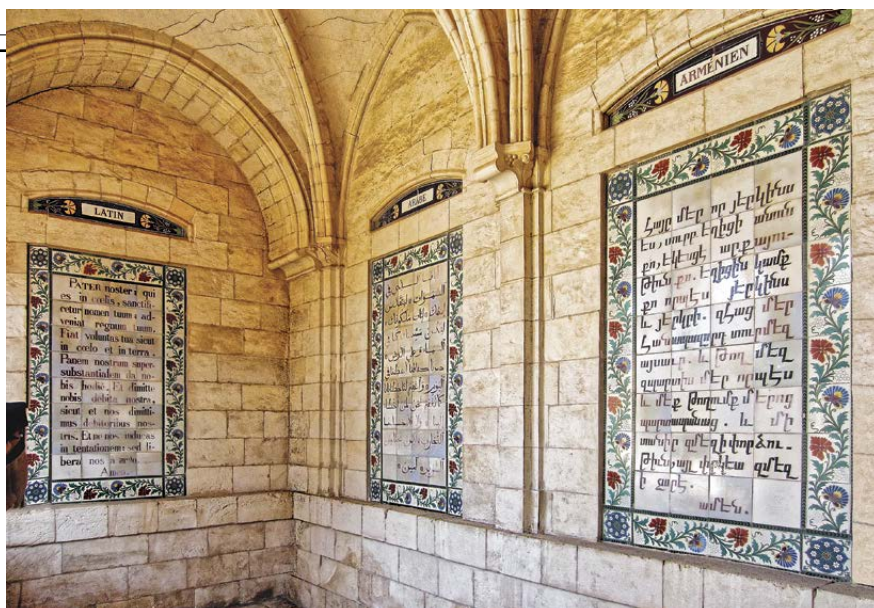
our voice. And seeing as we have [Christ] as Advocate with the Father for our sins (1 John 2:1), let us, when as sinners we entreat God for our sins, utter the words of our Advocate. For since he says, that *whatsoever we shall ask of the Father in his name, he will give us* (John 16:23), how much more effectively do we obtain what we ask in Christ's name if we ask for it with his own prayer?

HOW THEN SHOULD WE PRAY?

Not surprisingly, given that it pervaded all aspects of Christian existence, leaders continued throughout antiquity to provide instruction on the protocols and content of prayer, as various issues arose regarding its appropriate practice.

Tertullian addressed bodily posture (kneeling, sitting, raising hands), whether hands need to be washed for prayer, women's and men's apparel in prayer, places and times of prayer, whether Psalms should be attached to prayers, and more. Origen took up some of the same issues, including the vexing problem of flushing away vain thoughts, distractions, and perturbing passions from one's mental and spiritual focus in prayer—a matter addressed in detail by later monastic theologians such as Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian.

Another perennial challenge was how to fulfill 1 Thessalonians 5:17, and the daily office was long put forward as the reasonable way most Christians could do so. Monks naturally took the precept to pray without ceasing with additional seriousness. In the fifth-century *Sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*, Abba Lucius told some inquirers that he prayed without ceasing while engaged in daily manual labor by sitting down with God and repeating the words, "God, have mercy on me, according to your great goodness



and according to the multitude of mercies, save me from my sins.” And while eating or sleeping, Lucius reported that he simply paid someone outside his cell to pray for him.

Origen, in his rich treatise *On Prayer* (c. 200), dwelled at length on how prayer operates within the economy of God’s providence (the issue of “answered” prayer), and he offered a veritable religious psychology of the subject. For Origen prayer fit into the larger scheme of training the Christian soul’s desires and aspirations through the help of the ever-present divine Logos (Word). As High Priest before the Father (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14, etc.), the Logos mediates and advocates for the faithful: “He prays for those who pray and appeals along with those who appeal.”

For this reason Origen discouraged prayers directly to the Logos (Christ the Word), insisting that believers lift up their prayers to the Father *through* the Logos. Gregory of Nyssa in the late-fourth-century *Homily 1 on the Lord’s Prayer* insisted on avoiding “heathen babble” (*battalogia*, as in Matt. 6:7) and petitions that are frivolous and aim low, rather than aiming to conform the soul to God’s own desire.

A GIFT TO THE CHURCH

Naturally the problem of what makes prayer “effective” did not subside. Already when the writer of James posited that “the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective” (James 5:16), the presumption was not that just the right words were all that was needed to achieve the desired effect.

Prayer is to no avail if “the righteous” are not open to God forming and maturing them through experience of suffering and cultivation of patience. Indeed many an early Christian interpreter of the effectiveness of prayer could have sympathized with the later famous axiom of both Kierkegaard and C. S. Lewis that prayer does not change God but changes the person who does the praying.

Maximus the Confessor commented on James 5:16 in *Questions and Responses to Thalassius*:

The prayers of the righteous are made effective first by combining their supplications with faithfulness to God’s commandments and virtues, and second by

DAY BY DAY The Lord’s Prayer has remained central to Christian devotion (*above left*, you can see it on the Mount of Olives in the 21st c. in Latin, Arabic, and Armenian), as has a rhythm of daily prayer (*above right*, a 6th-c. English sundial shows prayer hours).

praying for the unrighteous and converting them to their own life of prayer and Christian living.

Very early on the church reclaimed the most basic of biblical prayers, repeated by needy petitioners in various situations but finding especially poignant expression in the parable of the publican, when he exclaimed, “God have mercy on me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13). *Kyrie eleison* (Lord, have mercy) was incorporated into regular liturgical usage by the fourth century and became a mainstay of Christian worship East and West. Christian monks took this petition with even greater urgency, as the *Sayings of Macarius* (c. 300–391) shows:

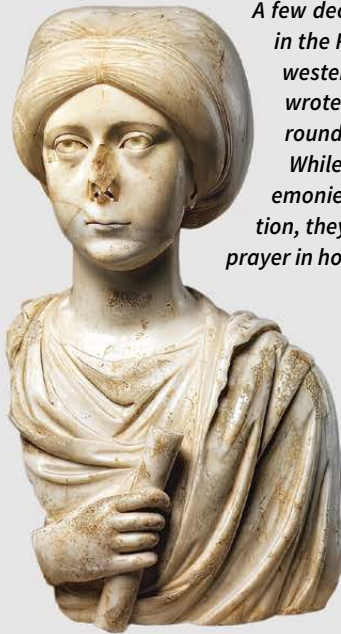
Abba Macarius was asked, “How should one pray?” The old man said, “There is no need at all for long discourses; it is enough to stretch out one’s hands and say, ‘Lord, as you will, and as you know, have mercy.’ And if the conflict grows fiercer say, ‘Lord, help!’”

Over time Byzantine monks in the Hesychast (“stillness” prayer) tradition added a strongly Christocentric focus to the prayer, invoking the name of Jesus himself rather than simply “Lord,” and calling on him deep from within the heart, with rhythmic continuity that brought the body and breathing into play.

Whether it be the familiar *Kyrie eleison*, or the Jesus Prayer promoted in monastic communities, this humble and penitent cry for mercy entered the broader Christian tradition as the believer’s prayer from spiritual ground zero. It was, and is, a gift of the early church to the ecumenical church today, a true anchor of Christian religious life. **CH**

Paul M. Blowers is Dean E. Walker Professor of Church History at Milligan University and has authored, edited, and translated numerous books on the early church.

“According to custom”



A few decades after Christianity was legalized in the Roman Empire, Egeria, a woman from western Europe, traveled to Jerusalem and wrote about what she saw, including the round of public daily prayer.

While the public nature of many of these ceremonies depended on Christianity’s legalization, they grew out of an earlier round of daily prayer in homes and other Christian gatherings.

Every day before cockcrow all the doors of the Anastasis [Church of the Holy Sepulchre or Church of the Resurrection] are opened, and all the monks and virgins . . . descend, and not only these, but also the laity, both men and women, who desire to have an early vigil. From that hour to day-break hymns are sung, and psalms and antiphons sung in response.

And after each hymn prayer is offered.

For two or three priests at a time, and likewise the deacons, have their turns every day along with the monks, to say prayers after each hymn or antiphon.

When day begins to break then they begin to sing the matin [i.e., morning prayer] hymns. Then the bishop arrives with the clergy and forthwith enters the cave [i.e., the actual sepulchre believed to be Christ’s tomb], and from within the [altar] rails he first says a prayer for all; then he commemorates the names of those whom he wishes, and blesses the catechumens [i.e. those preparing for baptism].

Then he says another prayer and blesses the faithful; and next, as the bishop comes out from within the rails, they all approach [to kiss] his hands, and blessing them one by one, he departs, and so the dismissal is given with the dawn.

At the sixth hour they all go down again to the Anastasis, and psalms and antiphons are sung until the bishop is summoned . . . in like manner, he first offers prayer, then blesses the faithful, and then, as he comes out from the rails, they approach [to kiss] his hands as before. And so is it done at the ninth hour as at the sixth.

NIGHT AND DAY

At the tenth hour . . . [comes] the service of lights—in like manner the crowd collects at the Anastasis; all the candles and wax-tapers are lit, and a great light is made. But the light is not brought from outside; it is fetched from the inner cave, where a lamp burns night and day, i.e., from inside the rails; the vesper psalms are sung, and the antiphons for a good while. But lo! the bishop is



SERMONS IN STONE Among the places Egeria visited was the Holy Sepulchre (above, a 5th-c. model of how the tomb would have looked in the 4th c.). This head (left) of a Roman woman dates from Egeria’s time.

summoned, and he comes down and sits on high; also the priests sit in their places; hymns and antiphons are sung.

And when [the hymns and antiphons] have been recited according to custom, the bishop gets up and stands before the chancel [i.e., the front of the church] . . . before the cave, and one of the deacons makes a commemoration of [i.e., prayer for] individuals, as is the custom. And while the deacon recites the names of the individuals, many boys stand responding *Kyrie eleison*, as we say, Lord, have mercy upon us. . . .

And when the deacon has recited all that he has to say, first the bishop says a prayer and prays for all; and then they all pray, the faithful and the catechumens together. And then the deacon calls out for each catechumen to bow his head where he stands; and so the bishop, standing, pronounces a blessing over the catechumens.

Again prayer is offered, and again the deacon lifts his voice and warns the faithful, standing, to bow their heads. And then the bishop blesses the faithful, and so the dismissal is given. . . . And they begin [one by one] to approach [to kiss] the hands of the bishop.

Afterwards the bishop is escorted from the Anastasis to the cross [i.e., Golgotha] with hymns, and all the people go with him. When they have arrived he first offers a prayer, then he blesses the catechumens; then another prayer is offered, then he blesses the faithful.

And after that the bishop and the whole crowd go behind the cross, and there are there again similar ceremonies. . . . All these ceremonies are finished in the dark.

Translated by John Henry Bernard



Serving the true Lord and God

WHY CHRISTIANS PRESENTED SUCH A HUGE CHALLENGE TO THE ROMAN STATE

George Kalantzis

The Roman world was a bloody world. Unforgiving. After two centuries of expansionism and civil strife, the celebrated *Pax Romana* (Peace of Rome) was achieved at the point of the *gladius* (sword) and was protected by Rome's 28 legions and the gods who superintended it. By the time of Constantine in the fourth century, massive military apparatuses greatly surpassed the ideals of the early empire and expanded to over half a million troops and almost an equal number of auxiliaries.

Rome's first emperor had ascended to power at the conclusion of the civil wars of the 40s BC. Throughout his reign Octavius, who embraced the title of Augustus, carefully kept the appearance of coveted republican ideals of virtue and simplicity. He knew full well that the future of the empire rested on the emperor's ability to maintain the delicate balance between the decreasing influence of the Senate and the ever-increasing might of the Roman military he alone commanded.

The family of his adoptive father, Julius Caesar, claimed descent from the goddess Venus, and many thought Caesar himself had ascended to the heavens upon his assassination in 44 BC. Though Augustus declined to be worshiped as a god during his lifetime, he claimed the title of "son of the divine one" and used it often in his imperial iconography.

The Romans turned to Augustus to restore the customs and ideals of their ancestors, believed to have been

CITY HALL, CITY SHRINE The College of Augustales, a civic organization devoted to the cult of the emperor, probably met here in Herculaneum (near Pompeii).

jeopardized during years of civil strife. In 9 BC, the Senate consecrated the Altar of Augustan Peace, and the people of Rome celebrated the peace Augustus had restored, considered to be the "Peace of the Gods." During his rule Rome became the greatest empire the world had ever seen.

BEHAVIOR, NOT BELIEF

Even though ancient Romans had a keen sense of sacred space and sacrifice and built massive temples to the gods, Roman religion was not concerned with distinguishing true from false beliefs: proper *behavior* characterized the life of the Roman citizen. The ubiquity of local shrines and temples, festivals and sacrifices, votive offerings and oracles intertwined the sacred and the secular, the political and the religious.

During the period of Christianity's early existence, the imperial cult became an overarching symbol of everything connected with Roman religion, including the very notion of the state. The people performed sacrifices on behalf of the emperor, not necessarily offering them to him. They focused on the person of the emperor as the vicar of the gods on earth and as the people's representative to the



RULER OF ALL? The Roman Senate commissioned this altar (left) in 13 BC to honor the Pax Romana and Caesar Augustus (coins from his reign are below); it features images of the emperor and his family sacrificing.



gods—called at various times “Revered, Savior, Liberator,” “Father of the State,” “High Priest,” and “Diviner.” But by the end of the first century, Emperor Domitian (81–96) was called not simply “son of the divine one,” but took on the title of a *Dominus et deus* (Lord and god). And by the time of Diocletian (284–305), this transformed into the absolute rule of a *dominus*, a god on earth.

Romans saw the worship of the gods and the sacrifices offered to them as essential for all aspects of life. The secrets of the future could be read in the entrails of slaughtered animals. Romans sealed contracts, decrees, and laws with sacrifice. Marriages would be blessed, and households would become prosperous.

Proper sacrificial libations averted disease and illness and rendered the daily meal safe; a welcomed gift from the gods to whom the libation was offered. Armies never marched without a favorable divine omen and a reading of animal entrails. For the most part, Greeks and Romans understood three reasons for sacrificing to the gods: (1) to honor them, (2) to express gratitude to them, and (3) to obtain some benefit.

A FOREIGN CULT

Historians find the first mention of the Christian movement by a Roman writer in the correspondence of Pliny

the Younger (c. 61–113; see p. 33). Appointed governor of the province of Bithynia, he asked advice from the emperor Trajan on various matters, including how to engage this new group of whom he had never heard before. Pliny identified Christianity as a *superstitio*, a cult—and a foreign one at that.

For almost a century, small Christian communities arose primarily within a few urban centers around the Mediterranean basin and went unnoticed by most of the empire. But the inevitable clash occurred as a result of Christianity’s expansion—and its ideological collision with the claims of Rome. Christians confessed Jesus, not Domitian or any other emperor, as *Dominus et deus*—a public declaration with grave temporal as well as eternal implications.

Until almost the middle of the third century, Romans saw Christians primarily as a schismatic Jewish sect, a corrupt off-shoot without the historical protections extended to the Jews. Christianity’s claims to exclusivity, its rituals of initiation and worship, the borderless character of its community, and its professed disregard for distinctions based on any of the markers that guided Roman social relationships, raised Roman suspicion—and often ire.

When public sacrifices were ordered for the welfare of the emperors or collectively offered to the gods on behalf of the state, the Christian refusal to obey the law, honor the gods, and submit to the orders of the emperors was an act of civic and religious blasphemy.

For the most part, Romans were not in the business of making martyrs. They preferred that accused people recant and profess loyalty to the emperor and the gods. Persecutions directed specifically against Christians as an identifiable

group were sporadic and local before the sustained empire-wide persecutions of the mid-third century under Decius (249–251).

Yet even from the earliest years, Christians felt the power and whims of the mob in multiple and various local instances (Acts 14, 16, 19) and suffered persecutions at the hands of Nero, Domitian, and Trajan. Women and men were brought before Roman magistrates like Pliny to “give an account for the hope that was in them” (1 Pet. 3:15). Accounts of these collisions were called a *martyrium* (report of the martyr’s death) a *passio* (passion narrative), or an *acta* (acts of the martyrs). Martyrologies, as these texts are known collectively, were very popular among the faithful, and some survive today.

Christians inherited their notions of martyrdom from their Jewish heritage, especially the martyrdom accounts of





THE TRUE KING On a 5th-c. ivory (top), Christ stands resurrected among his apostles; on a 2nd-c. marble (bottom), the emperor watches a sacrifice being prepared.

the Maccabees, who defied Antiochus IV and Seleucid domination and suffered death for their unyielding faithfulness to God. Their primary inspiration, however, came from the power and hope of the resurrected Jesus (1 Cor. 15:13–14), whose life and example they were called to emulate.

Jesus had warned them that, in response to his call to discipleship, they would be persecuted at the hands of the status quo (e.g., Matt. 10:16–42, John 15:18–35), and he had called his disciples to see themselves as “blessed” when reviled and persecuted on his account, assuring them of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:10–12; Rev. 21:7).

Early Christians believed that martyrdom was a baptism in blood, a eucharist in which one drank the cup of sufferings of Christ (Matt. 20:22). Paul had spoken of the redemptive role of suffering for the faith in his letter to the church in Philippi (Phil. 3:10). The Holy Spirit filled these martyrs, giving them words to say to the authorities and to each other; visions of heaven; and supernatural strength to endure sufferings.

Instead of the sacrifice of incense and grain demanded by the state as signs of loyalty expected from those

THE BEGINNING AND THE END Trajan (coin at top) was the first emperor who took official notice of Christians; Diocletian (bottom coin) launched the last major persecution of them two centuries later.

living under the protection of the Roman gods, the Christian martyrs offered an alternative sacrifice: themselves, in imitation of Christ.

NOBLE ATHLETES

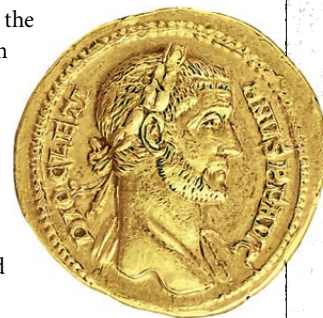
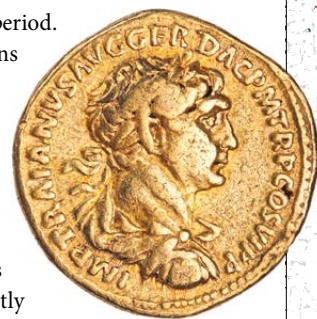
Toward the end of the second century, Christians felt quite keenly Marcus Aurelius’s (160–180) stoic disdain for religion. After a short-lived interim of peace during the reign of Commodus (180–192), Septimius Severus (193–211) carried out the harshest persecutions experienced by the church to that time. Tertullian wrote his treatise *To the Martyrs* during this brutal period. After 177, senatorial decrees consigned Christians to the arena to face gladiators in an attempt to reduce and regulate the costs of gladiatorial games throughout the empire.

Christian martyrs included young and old, educated and uneducated, women and men, slaves, free people, Romans, and foreigners, almost none of whom shared Rome’s classical heroic ideals. They challenged directly the authority of Rome to dictate their conscience.

Trials were theatrical performances, and the audience expected customary responses from the accused; they were expected to blush, to sweat, and to show signs of fear and shame—bowing, scraping, and weeping to proclaim their repentance and to ask for forgiveness. It was not so with the Christians. To magnificent and terrifying displays of state power, Christians in early martyr accounts responded with calm defiance and even joy.

Condemned to face the beasts and the gladiators in Carthage in the spring of 203, Vibia Perpetua, a woman of noble birth and a young mother; Felicity, her slave (who herself had just given birth); and their fellow Christians entered the arena as “noble athletes”:

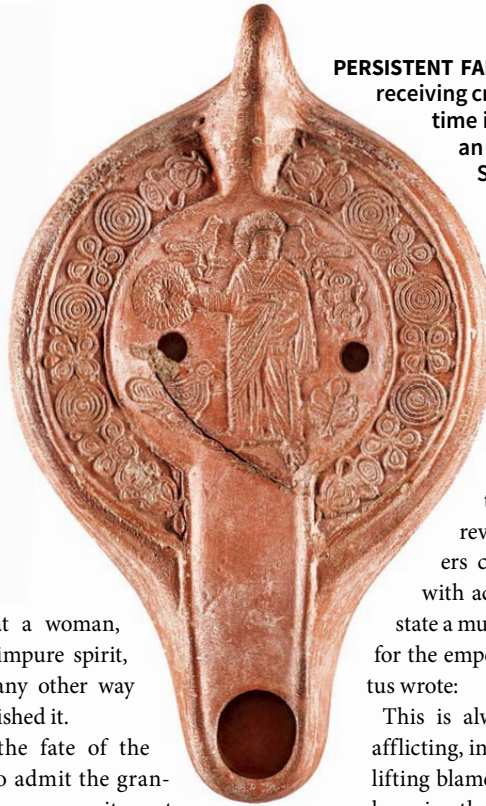
The day of their triumph dawned, and they cheerfully came forth from the prison to the amphitheater, as if to Heaven, with their faces composed; if perchance they trembled, it was not from fear but with joy. Perpetua was following with a bright face and with calm gait . . . by the power of her gaze casting down everyone’s stares. Also Felicity came forth, rejoicing that she had safely borne her child, so that she could fight the beasts, going from blood to blood, from the midwife to the gladiator, about to wash after childbirth in a second baptism. . . . [Perpetua] howled as she was punctured between the bones and herself steered the erring hand of the novice gladiator to her own



SAVING HOPE Following Matthew 12:40, Christians used Jonah's three days in the belly of the whale (represented on an early 4th-c. sculpture from Tarsus, below) as a symbol of the Resurrection.



PERSISTENT FAITH A 4th-c. bowl depicts Peter and Paul receiving crowns from Christ, an oil lamp from sometime in the 4th c. to 6th c. gives us an image of an unknown martyr, and a 5th-c. bowl shows St. Lawrence (clockwise from above).



throat. Perhaps so great a woman, who was feared by the impure spirit, could not be killed in any other way than unless she herself wished it.

Martyrdom was not the fate of the powerless, finally forced to admit the grandeur of the state. Martyrdom was a witness to the state of its subordination to the God of heaven.

CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

This found full expression in the works of apologists of the second and third centuries who wrote especially during times of persecution. They made the point frequently that God appoints kings and dispenses kingdoms, and it is to this God that Christians owed their loyalty and this God in whose kingdom they held citizenship (John 18:36; Phil. 3:20). As for now, as it was said in the "Letter to Diognetus," Christians "live in their own countries, but

only as nonresidents; they participate in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. . . . They live on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven."

Christians insisted they were taught to respect the authorities. They had never rebelled, the apologist Tertullian argued, they were not seditious, nor did they take revenge, or even resist. Christians, he and others claimed, injured no one, countered enmity with acts of kindness and charity, and offered the state a much greater benefit by praying to the true God for the emperor and the welfare of the empire. Hippolytus wrote:

This is always the devil's way in persecuting, in afflicting, in oppressing Christians: to stop them from lifting blameless hands in prayer (1 Tim. 2:8) to God, knowing that the prayer of the saints obtains peace for the world, punishment for wrongdoers.

Christians insisted that their behavior ought to be interpreted as a call to the state to repent and acknowledge its proper place under the authority of God (John 19:11). It was civil disobedience. **CH**

George Kalantzis is professor of theology and director of The Wheaton Center for Early Christian studies at Wheaton College. He is the author of Caesar and the Lamb, from which this is adapted with permission, and the author, editor, or coeditor of a number of other books on early Christianity.

“This superstition”

PLINY, ROMAN GOVERNOR OF BITHYNIA IN THE EARLY SECOND CENTURY, ASKS FOR ADVICE ON HOW TO DEAL WITH THE CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT

PLINY TO THE EMPEROR TRAJAN

I have never before participated in trials of Christians, so I do not know what offenses are to be punished or investigated, or to what extent. . . . Is pardon to be granted for repentance, or if a man has once been a Christian is it irrelevant whether he has ceased to be one? Is the name itself to be punished, even without offenses, or only the offenses perpetrated in connection with the name?

Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have followed the following procedure: I interrogated them as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome. . . .

Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and also cursed Christ—none of which those who are really Christians can, it is said, be forced to do—these I thought should be discharged.

Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as 25 years. They all worshiped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ.

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to do some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food—but ordinary and innocent food.

Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions,

MAN IN MARBLE This composite statue of a Roman magistrate (the body is 2nd c., the head 1st c.) gives us a good idea what Pliny may have looked like.

I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition. I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. . . . Many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. . . .

It is certainly quite clear that the temples, which had been almost deserted, have begun to be frequented, that the established religious rites, long neglected, are being resumed, and that from everywhere sacrificial animals are coming, for which until now very few purchasers could be found. Hence it is easy to imagine what a multitude of people can be reformed if an opportunity for repentance is afforded.

TRAJAN TO PLINY

You observed proper procedure, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those who had been denounced to you as Christians. For it is not possible to lay down any general rule to serve as a kind of fixed standard. They are not to be sought out; if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished, with this reservation, that whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it—that is, by worshiping our gods—even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance. . . .

Translation from [Christian History Institute's study module on the early church](#)





The emperor and the desert

CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT TO ASCETICISM GREW IN A NEWLY LEGALIZED FAITH

Kate Cooper

A half-century after the death of Constantine, a visitor to Oxyrhynchus, a royal city of the pharaohs that had become a regional capital of Egypt in the Roman period, could see how swiftly the new imperial Christianity had changed the landscape of cities and towns. What would have surprised a time-traveler from the pagan years would not, however, have been the city's religious zeal—or even the fact that it was so zealously Christian.

FERTILE SOIL

Egypt had long offered fertile soil for larger-than-life religious developments. It was here that the Red Sea had been parted, here that Emperor Hadrian's favorite courtier had drowned in the Nile and been proclaimed a god. That the Christian God turned out to be more powerful than Isis and Osiris had perhaps come as a surprise to the people of Oxyrhynchus, but surprises of this kind were not unusual.

But no one could have predicted the presence of 10,000 monks and 20,000 virgins in Oxyrhynchus. A heroic few had chosen to strike out on their own in the desert as solitaries, while the majority joined organized communities numbering in the thousands.

If modern estimates of the city's population are accurate, this means that roughly a quarter of the city's population took vows to remain unmarried; among these, women outnumbered men two to one. What could account for so many young women choosing to give up marriage and motherhood, and for so many of their parents failing to insist on grandchildren?

PLACE OF PRAYER These ruins are part of a monastery that has been excavated at Oxyrhynchus.

The ideals of sexual renunciation and retreat from pursuing the pleasures and hopes of this world were not new. The apostle Paul had argued in the first century that by giving up the dream of raising children, people of faith could show how ardently they hoped for the end of time and the coming of the kingdom of heaven. It was an invitation to live each day as if it were the last. As he wrote to the Corinthians: "Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a person to remain as he is. Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife" (1 Cor. 7: 26–27).

Readers often imagine that Paul intended to found a new value system based on ambivalence toward love and sex, but nothing could be further from the truth. Plans for the future were irrelevant, he believed, because the end of time was at hand. The Corinthians must prepare to lose the things they love. But they should not grieve: attachments here on earth are only a dim reflection of a love that is deeper and more permanent.

This profound statement reflected a harsh practical reality. Ancient families living long before the invention of antibiotics faced a daunting mortality rate. A sudden fever could carry off any member of a household within hours. This was all the more true in a harbor city like Corinth, where each new boat brought pathogens against which the

MONKS AND MARTYRS This painting on linen of male monastics (*right*) and this stone carving of St. Thecla with wild beasts (*below*), both from around the 5th c., speak to legalized Christianity's growing fascination with virgins and ascetics.



local population had yet to build up resistance. The bonds of love and family created a constant threat of loss.

But at the same time, most of the New Testament writers assumed that marriage and child-rearing would be the norm for the majority of Christians, as for anyone else (see pp. 17–20). Early Christians participated in a society that revolved around families.

PARADOXES OF CONVERSION

Constantine's conversion changed all of this. For the first three centuries, affiliation with the Christian movement was illegal, even if authorities turned a blind eye. During this period Christian leaders had been comparatively humble individuals who knew it was not in their interest to attract unnecessary attention, but who could be counted on to exhibit fortitude in the face of trials.

Paradoxically Constantine's conversion now presented the most insidious challenge Christian churches had yet faced. What were Christians to make of a situation in which their bishops were now the emperor's favorites?

The end of persecutions and the widespread acceptance of Christianity became, curiously enough, a source of disappointment for many. Increasingly bishops warred with their congregations and with one another, arguing about matters ranging from the mundane to the mystical. Money was often at the root of the problem (see pp. 12–15), and this was distressing. If bishops were quarreling over money, it is not surprising that many of the faithful wanted no part of it.

Ascetic renunciation allowed Christian communities to raise up new heroes of the faith at just the time when they



LEADING THROUGH PRAYER Jerome, Paula, and Paula's daughter Eustochium were among the 4th c.'s most famous desert fathers and mothers. (You can see the desert in this 15th-c. painting of them—which also includes the man who commissioned the painting!)

most sorely needed inspiration. But this new challenge was all the more threatening because of its moral complexity. Was it right for the churches to accept the emperor's favor, knowing that if they did so, they also tacitly accepted his right—so evident in all other aspects of life in the Roman Empire—to call the shots?

To be fair the believers never really had a choice. When Constantine perceived that the God of the Christians could help him gain and govern the empire, the earthly representatives of that God found themselves in a position not very different from that of a slave who catches the eye of his or her master, with the resulting benefits and dangers.



Christians quickly discovered that a bishop or other leader who stood against the will of the emperor would soon be replaced. So the new interest in asceticism came at a time when many Christians were reassessing their relationship to the compromises of the institutional church.

The enthusiastic participation of women was one of the driving forces of this ascetic revolution, and it offered them surprising opportunities—as virgins, widows, and pilgrims, and also as nuns. Even senatorial daughters in Rome and Constantinople who simply never married and quietly transformed their households into living temples of virginity were inspired by, and did what they could to support, the wanderers and cave-dwellers of the Egyptian desert.

THE ECONOMICS OF ASCETICISM

From the late first century, Christian communities had offered economic support and an institutional structure for economically vulnerable unmarried women and widows. In the third century, evidence shows that both men and women began living in organized ascetic communities.

Some have argued that this communalism formed out of an organized Christian response to the threat of famine. The economy stabilized after 284 under Emperor Diocletian, who reorganized the structure of the Roman provinces to establish clearer lines of accountability and restore order. These policies developed further under Constantine.

At least some of the early ascetic communities organized in a way that allowed them to undertake charitable functions. By the early fourth century, they served as orphanages where this was practical, filling a glaring gap in Roman provisions.

Even when one or both parents were living, impoverished families often gratefully placed children with the monks or virgins so that what little they had could be distributed among a smaller number. Evidence suggests that more prosperous families began to send their children to monks or nuns for education. Whether by becoming an ascetic or by showing support for this movement,

SEARCHING FOR A VIRGIN This funeral relief (left) depicts a typical 3rd-c. Roman family; more and more, church leaders encouraged families to hold an ascetic ideal up to their children.

BEAUTY IN THE DESERT The ornament *above* was found at Oxyrhynchus.

ordinary Christians could take a stand against the greed and corruption that threatened to erode the values of the church in its new, privileged circumstances. And the monks and virgins of the fourth century did not disappoint. Their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the kingdom of heaven was just as fierce as that of the martyrs before them.

Egypt became the heartland of this austere ascetic tradition. The desert proved an appropriate place for this life not only because it was empty, but because it was harsh. The unbearable heat in the summer turned to bitter cold on winter nights: even the piercing wail of the desert winds was chilling.

The fathers and mothers of the desert courted these extremes. Thirst, hunger, and sleeplessness challenged them most, but so did the deprivation of family and the constant struggle to give up one's pride. Such a life only made sense if one had chosen it for a reason. Yet for those who had, its hardships offered an incomparable opportunity to test and cultivate the power of the human spirit.

Women faced an additional challenge, managing not only their own spiritual progress but also the constant tension caused by men's anxiety about their presence (male and female communities were often established near each other). Sexual temptation does not figure nearly as strongly in the sayings of the desert mothers as it does in those of the desert fathers. Given the balance of power in ancient society, this makes a certain amount of sense. Women were accustomed to making substantial efforts to please men, while men tried comparatively less hard to please women.



WORK, PRAY, FARM This famous 1420 painting by Fra Angelico shows a variety of stories about, and activities of, the many desert fathers and mothers.

For the men, by contrast, even chaste affection among family members could pose an obstacle to spiritual progress—the innocent company of a mother or a sister could become the source of a craving for emotional intimacy so powerful that it was difficult to suppress. One of the most revered abbots of fourth-century Egypt, Pachomius the Great, refused to see his sister Maria when she came to visit him. He felt an urgent need to avoid someone who might entangle him in the bonds of family feeling and was even praised for his self-control in being able to forgo the pleasure of her visit.

ATHLETES OF CHRIST

Those who did not join ascetic communities respected the choices of those who did. Devout believers remaining in society viewed virgins, both nuns and monks, as having made a worthy and admirable choice to live with their eyes fixed on the world to come. The presence of such individuals in a community, they believed, brought value even to those who did not participate directly.

An anonymous rule book for monks and virgins written in Egypt between 350 and 450 argued that each of the children in every household should be educated in the love of virginity, with careful attention to discover “which among [the] daughters is worthy of holiness.” And the author of the anonymous homily “On Virginity” wrote: “In every house of

Christians it is needful that there be a virgin, for the salvation of the whole house is this one virgin.” Parents were in the best position to instill a love of virginity in their children; at the same time, they could assess whether such aspirations were realistic. It was by no means certain that all Christian parents happily saw this as their responsibility, but at least some bishops wished that they would.

By the late fourth century, asceticism had moved from the fringes to become an ideal acknowledged by almost everyone. When Jovinian, a monk from northern Mesopotamia, argued that marriage and virginity were equally worthy vocations in the sight of God, synods in both Rome and Milan swiftly condemned his argument as heresy. Eminent married Christians defended Jovinian, since his view represented the more traditional strand of Christian thought.

But famed ascetic Jerome warned his protégée Eustochium to avoid the company of married women, even Christian married women. “Learn of me a holy arrogance,” he told her. His memorable phrase called attention to the gap that at least some were beginning to perceive between simple Christian laity—even those of exalted rank—and the set-apart “athletes of Christ.” **CH**

Kate Cooper is professor of history at Royal Holloway, University of London, and author of Queens of a Fallen World: The Lost Women of Augustine's Confessions, The Fall of the Roman Household, and Band of Angels: The Forgotten World of Early Christian Women, from which this article is adapted with the permission of Abrams Press.



The Way spreads through the world

LIFE IN EARLY CHRISTIAN CITIES

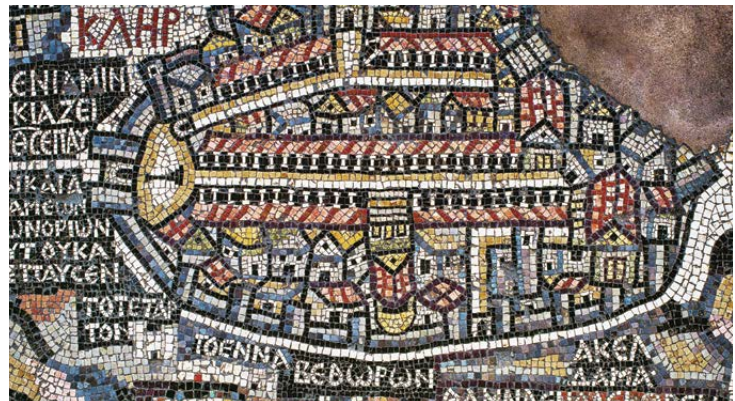
Jennifer A. Boardman

JERUSALEM

The very beginning of the Book of Acts confirms the presence and strength of the early church in Jerusalem—the first center of the church. After Jesus was taken up to heaven, the church in Jerusalem numbered 120 believers (Acts 1:15). Acts 2:5 declares that “there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven,” and they were astounded when Galilean believers could speak their languages after receiving the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

The earliest followers of Jesus in Jerusalem were Jewish; they continued keeping the Sabbath and going to worship at the Temple. In Acts 15 Paul and Barnabas returned to Jerusalem to discuss their ministry to the Gentiles with other church leaders. The leaders agreed that the Gentiles would not have to conform to most of the Mosaic law, including circumcision. James concluded, “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19).

James, who was the brother of Jesus, became the leader of the early church in Jerusalem. As Herod Agrippa ramped up his persecution of Christians, the Jewish high priest had James executed in c. 62. Shortly after, the Jerusalem church fled to Pella in modern-day Jordan.

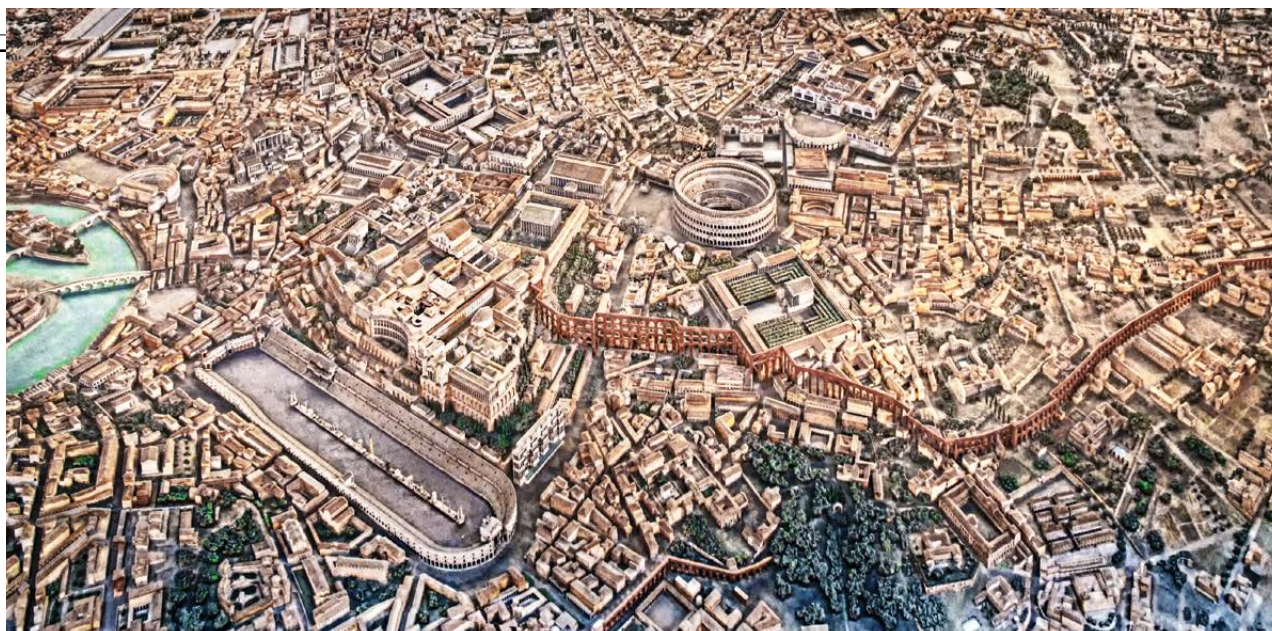


BUILT ON THE ROCK Travel with us through the great cities of antiquity (top), beginning where the church began, in Jerusalem (6th-c. mosaic map above).

The Roman authorities attempted to quash Jewish nationalism, leading to the First Jewish-Roman War, from 66 to 73. The Romans won, devastating the city of Jerusalem and destroying the Second Temple in 70. Of Jerusalem, Josephus wrote that it “was so thoroughly razed to the ground by those that demolished it to its foundations, that nothing was left that could ever persuade visitors that it had once been a place of habitation.”

ROME

Rome was the heart of the vast Roman Empire as well as its largest city. The church was founded in Rome prior to Paul’s



NOT BUILT IN A DAY You may enjoy comparing this model of the entire city of Rome (above) with the painting on p. 7. In a modern reconstruction of Alexandria at left, you can see a bustling city and a busy port.

Rome's dense population made for cramped living quarters within the city. Historian Jérôme Carcopino wrote that in Rome there existed "only one private house for every 26 blocks of apartments." And though many more men than women lived in the Roman Empire—due to a high female mortality rate from female infanticide, childbirth, and abortion—when Paul wrote to the church in Rome in Romans 16, he greeted a fairly equal number of men and women. Women often came as the first converts to the Way.

By 313 the church in Rome and throughout the region had grown so large that the ruling government officially ceased persecutions against Christians. And Constantine—who ruled until 337—was the empire's first Christian emperor.

ministry, and tradition holds that both Paul and Peter were martyred in Rome—Paul in c. 64 and Peter a short time later during Nero's first persecution of Christians in c. 65.

Around the year 100, between 500,000 and 1,000,000 people lived in Rome; the church, though still small, comprised perhaps little more than 7,000 Christians in the whole empire. Yet Roman authorities were wary of this new Christian movement, particularly its attraction not just to Jews but to pagans.

By the middle of the second century, Christians still met in Roman homes, but by the end of that century, around 7,000 Christians lived in Rome alone. Because early Christianity's growth largely concentrated in urban settings, the church in Rome was comparatively strong, so much so that historians know it sent funds to Christians living elsewhere in the empire.

ALEXANDRIA

Alexander the Great, king of the ancient Greek kingdom of Macedonia, founded Alexandria in 331 BC. A city on the Mediterranean coast (in modern-day Egypt), Alexandria was the second largest city in the Roman Empire after Rome. Christianity arrived in Alexandria later than it did in other cities in the Roman world, but when the gospel appeared, it spread rapidly. In the year 239, a negligible number of Christians lived in the city. (In the rest of the Greco-Roman world, the Christian population was about 1.4 percent.) But within 70-some years, 18 percent of the Alexandrian population was Christian (comparable to the rest of the empire).

Two disastrous epidemics, possibly measles or small-pox, inundated the Greco-Roman world in 165 and 250. Dionysius, the bishop of Alexandria, wrote an Easter letter to believers during the second epidemic. In it we see their



bravery during the turmoil: “Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ.”

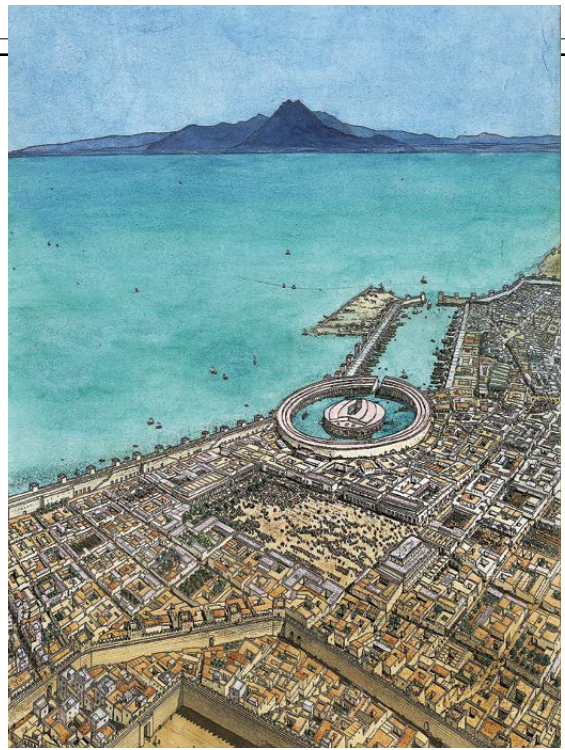
Though Dionysius was surely biased toward his flock’s selfless provision for those ravaged by illness, pagan sources agree that the Christian population cared for the sick (for more, see *CH* #101). Pagan priests of the day failed to deliver to locals any meaning or hope in the misery, and they, along with the wealthy and powerful, often fled the cities.

Hellenistic natural law had no answers for such pain and suffering. Cicero had tried to explain sorrow in the century before Christ: “It depends on fortune or (as we should say) ‘conditions’ whether we are to experience prosperity or adversity. Certain events are, indeed, due to natural causes beyond human control.” Many suffering people, however, found such explanations lacking, and some turned to Christianity for both answers and hope.

Most scholars agree that the Septuagint (the earliest Greek translation of the Old Testament) was translated in Alexandria in the third century BC. In addition Apollos from Acts 18 was a Jewish native of Alexandria who preached in both Ephesus and Corinth. He was “a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. . . . He spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately” (Acts 18:24–25).

ANTIOCH

Located in modern-day Syria and founded as a fortress in 300 BC by Seleucus I, successor of Alexander the Great, Antioch started out as home to both Syrians and Greeks. The Roman Empire seized the city in 64 BC, and eventually 18 different ethnic enclaves existed within the city, including a Jewish neighborhood. This made the city ripe for the conversion of both Jews and Gentiles.



AT THE CENTER OF THINGS These ruins (*above left*) were once the main street of Antioch; as with many other cities where Christianity grew, Carthage was important because it was a major port city (*above*).

Many scholars believe that Matthew’s Gospel was written in Antioch, then one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire. By the end of the first century, Antioch was a city of over 150,000 inhabitants. As a walled city, it was probably more densely crowded than even Rome. Despite the population, Antioch’s main thoroughfare, which the Greco-Roman world lauded, was only 30 feet wide.

Antioch had a difficult history of disasters and tragedies. Over 600 years of sporadic Roman rule, enemy forces overcame the city 11 times and largely burned it four times during the attacks. Antioch also endured hundreds of substantial earthquakes, three epidemics in which 25 percent of the population perished, and five major famines. On average Antioch endured one calamity every 15 years, and the city was only ever rebuilt because of its strategic position against the Persian border.

The book of Acts features Antioch prominently, as it was home to many Jews of the diaspora, some of whom became followers of Jesus. In Acts 6:5 Nicolas of Antioch, a convert to Judaism and then to Christianity, was selected as one of seven Hellenist leaders to be a deacon in Jerusalem. Barnabas also traveled to Antioch, later bringing Paul to teach those hungry for the gospel. As reported by Luke in Acts 11:26, “The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”

In the latter half of the third century, 10 churches assembled in Antioch. The city was considered one of the five original patriarchates—along with Constantinople, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Rome—recognized by the Council of Ephesus in 431.

TURN AROUND, BE BORN ANEW The message of the Way challenged devotion to pagan gods and pagan activities, whether at the Temple of Apollo in Corinth (below) or the Ephesus Odeon theater (right).

CARTHAGE

Carthage, a city in modern-day Tunisia in North Africa, began as a Phoenician settlement and eventually ended up in Roman hands. After generations of destructive wars, Julius Caesar rebuilt Carthage in the middle of the first century before Christ. By the end of the first century after Jesus's birth, it was a major Roman port on the Mediterranean. Carthage is only 160 miles across the sea from the island of Sicily near southern Italy.

Tertullian (c. 155–220) was a famous and devout Carthaginian whom many theologians refer to as the father of Western theology. Scholars credit this Christian apologist and defender against heresies as one of the first authors to refer to the Trinity in his Latin theological writings. An adult convert to Christianity, he asserted that “Christians are made, not born” in his seminal book, *Apologeticus*.

Cyprian (c. 210–258), a third-century bishop of Carthage, wrote in 251 about Christian hope during the second large epidemic that swept through the empire. Born into a pagan family and baptized as a Christian in his thirties, Cyprian knew firsthand pagan thought and Hellenistic philosophy. He argued that although pagans had no answer for the epidemic or hope for the future, for Christians, sufferings “are trying exercises for us, not deaths; they give to the mind the glory of fortitude; by contempt of death they prepare for the crown.”

Though not mentioned specifically in the Bible, Carthage as a city held an important place in the history of both the Scriptures and the early church. Numerous church councils were held in Carthage in the third to fifth centuries; there church fathers determined the biblical canon as well as laid important theological groundwork to prevent heresies from spreading throughout the Roman world.

CORINTH

This ancient city in Greece dates back thousands of years before the birth of Jesus. Trading hands between whichever empire was powerful at the time, Corinth fell to Roman forces in the second century BC. Julius Caesar resurrected the city in 44 BC, and it became home to thousands of Romans, Greeks, and Jews.

The apostle Paul first traveled to Corinth in the middle of the first century. While there he met Aquila and his wife, Priscilla, who had both moved to Corinth to avoid Claudius's expulsion of the Jews from Rome. Paul and his new friends worked as tent makers, and each Sabbath Paul preached in the synagogue about Jesus and his gospel. After getting nowhere with his Jewish colleagues



in Corinth, Paul vowed, “From now on I will go to the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6). He remained in Corinth for a year and half, preaching and teaching.

Even after Paul left Corinth, he ministered to its church. He wrote at least two letters to the Corinthians—the first while in Ephesus, the second while in Macedonia—exhorting them to keep their faith amid a pagan world.

Corinthian Christians were surrounded by Jews who vehemently rejected Jesus as well as pagans who worshiped a bevy of both Greek and Roman gods and goddesses. But Paul urged them to remain faithful: “Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified . . . but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:22–24).

The more eastern and the less western a city was (save for the city of Rome), the faster the gospel seemed to travel. In Corinth, a city of 100,000 people in the year 100, the church was multiplying, particularly among women, a trend throughout the whole Greco-Roman world. Christian women typically married later—unlike pagan girls who were often married before puberty—and their husbands could not divorce them without cause (see pp. 17–20). Christians looked different from their



A NEW ROME Eventually Constantinople took its place among antiquity's great cities. This mosaic from Hagia Sophia dates from the 9th c.

Though many Ephesians were open to Paul's preaching, some even converting to the Way, the book of Acts gives us a glimpse into one group that was unhappy with his ministry. Demetrius, a silversmith who crafted shrines of Artemis, gathered his fellow craftsmen to remind them that they derived their livelihoods from honoring the goddess, and he led them to the grand theater in rage and protest (Acts 19). Though the mob was eventually quelled, Luke described Ephesus as a diverse city wrestling with and threatened by this new Christian faith.

CONSTANTINOPLE

Located in modern-day Turkey where Asia meets Europe, Constantinople (now Istanbul) was founded under that name by Emperor Constantine in 324. Its previous name was Byzantium, and the area had been inhabited since perhaps as early as the thirteenth century BC.

Emperor Constantine consolidated the Roman world and became leader of the entire empire after he defeated Emperor Licinius. He declared Constantinople the new center of the Roman Empire, rejecting Rome because of political and cultural conflicts; this greatly diminished the power of the Roman pagan elite. It was time to start anew, and his *Nova Roma* was consecrated on May 11, 330. From this place he hoped to restore the empire's glory, in part through the elevation of Christianity.

The city of Constantinople needed Roman refurbishment, so Constantine had columns, art, statues, and other ornaments carried from various cities around the empire to decorate the new capital. Some 50 years later, church father Jerome would say that "in clothing Constantinople, the rest of the world was left naked." In addition to accumulating ornamentation, Constantine gave privileges to new residents of the city to increase the population: exemptions from taxes and serving in the military, and free goods (wheat, oil, and wine).

In the earlier church, most Christians had worshiped in private residences, later in cemeteries (such as the Roman catacombs), and even later in some designated church buildings. The oldest church, located in modern-day Syria, is dated to around 250. After Constantine's conversion in 312, however, Christian worship began to change. In Constantinople Christian worship utilized some ornamentation and practices from the pagan world, such as the use of incense, as well as ornate clothing for priests, processions, and choirs.

Constantinople was the cultural and educational center of the Mediterranean region for 1,000 years until the Ottoman Turks conquered it on May 29, 1453. **CH**

Jennifer A. Boardman is a freelance writer and editor. She holds a master of theological studies from Bethel Seminary with a concentration in Christian history.

pagan neighbors, because followers of the Way generally shunned divorce, infidelity, polygamy, and infanticide (particularly of female babies), all of which were rampant and widely accepted within Greco-Roman society.

EPHESUS

Ephesus is located on the western coast of modern-day Turkey, just 50 miles south of ancient Smyrna. Once located on the Aegean Sea, the city ruins now sit some two miles from the shoreline. Often in the hands of various rulers, Ephesus came under Roman rule in 129 BC, which lasted until the third century. During Jesus's lifetime, Ephesus greatly prospered and became a center of trade and culture. Its estimated population in 100 was 200,000.

Ephesus boasted the famous Temple of Artemis (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world), the grand Library of Celsus—2,000 square feet in size and holding some 12,000 scrolls—and a large amphitheater. This multicultural city was home to Greeks, Romans, and Jews.

Paul first traveled to Ephesus in 52 following his time in Corinth. Similar to his Corinthian trip, Paul started by preaching to the Jews in the Ephesian synagogue but quickly moved his daily discussions to the school of Tyrannus. In Acts 19:10 Luke declared that these lectures "went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord."

Everyday life in the early church

Use these questions on your own or in a group to reflect on life among the earliest followers of Christ.

1. What surprised you about the fictionalized “day in the life” of an early Christian community in our lead article (pp. 6–11)? What matched your expectations based on what you know about the early church? What aspects of this community life still survive in your church or denomination?

2. What social classes did early Christians come from (pp. 12–15)? How did their giving differ from Greco-Roman philanthropy? How does it compare with the kinds of giving that Christians do today?

3. What was Clement’s attitude toward early Christians dining out and socializing (p. 16)? Have any of these issues ever occurred to you as you have eaten and practiced hospitality?

4. How did early Christian marriage and family life differ from Roman customs around marriage and parenting (pp. 17–20)? How does the early Christian view of these things compare to your own view and your church’s?

5. What was John Chrysostom’s vision of the Christian family (p. 21)? Do you agree? Why or why not?

6. How did early Christians pray (pp. 24–27)? How does this compare to your prayer life and the prayer life of your church?

7. What patterns of daily and weekly worship and prayer did Egeria observe (p. 28)? How do they resemble devotional practices of Christians today? How are they different?

8. What did you know or assume about the persecution of Christians before you read about it here (pp. 29–32)? Did anything surprise you? What does it mean to confess Christ as Lord in modern society?

9. How did Pliny describe Christians (p. 33)? Do you think he would describe today’s Christians in similar ways? Why or why not?



FACES OF THE PAST These 1st-c. and early-2nd-c. portraits come from pagan Egyptian mummy portraits and shrouds, but they represent different kinds of people to whom the Christian gospel was first preached.

10. Why did Christians grow interested in asceticism after Christianity was legalized (pp. 34–37)? What are some ways to balance contemplation and action today?

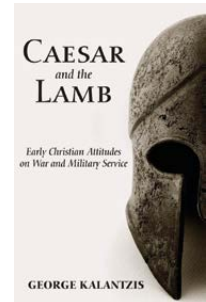
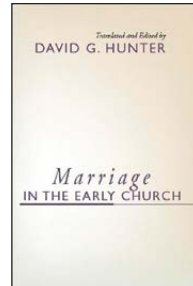
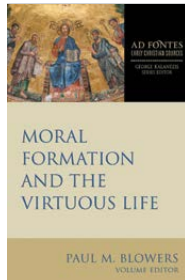
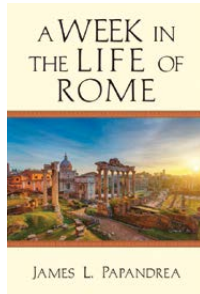
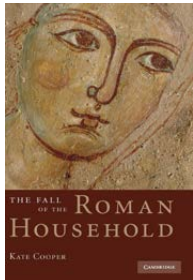
11. Which city mentioned in our gallery would you most like to have lived in (pp. 38–42)? Why?

12. What’s one thing you learned from this issue that surprised you? What’s one thing that confirmed something you already thought?

13. With which of the figures mentioned in this issue do you most identify? If you could ask a historical figure from this issue one question, what would it be and whom would you ask?

Recommended resources

READ MORE ABOUT EVERYDAY FAITH IN THE EARLY CHURCH IN THESE RESOURCES RECOMMENDED BY OUR AUTHORS AND THE CH TEAM.



BOOKS

We excerpted “**A day in the life**” from the *Week in the Life* series on early church faith by InterVarsity Press. You may enjoy reading the whole set: Ben Witherington III, *A Week in the Life of Corinth* (2012) and *A Week in the Life of Jerusalem* (2017); Gary Burge, *A Week in the Life of a Roman Centurion* (2015); Holly Beers, *A Week in the Life of a Greco-Roman Woman* (2019); John Byron, *A Week in the Life of a Slave* (2019); James Papandrea, *A Week in the Life of Rome* (2019); and David deSilva, *A Week in the Life of Ephesus* (2020).

To read nonfiction about **daily life in the Roman Empire** for both Christians and pagans, check out Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity, AD 150–750* (1971) and *Late Antiquity* (1998); Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (revised ed. 1993); Florence Dupont, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* (1993); Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity* (1993) and *Christianity and Roman Society* (2004); Gregory Aldrete, *Daily Life in the Roman City* (2004); James ERMATERING, *Daily Life of Christians in Ancient Rome* (2007); and Kyle Harper, *The Fate of Rome* (2017).

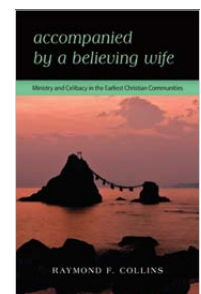
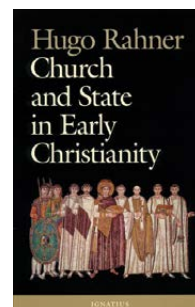
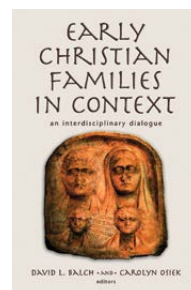
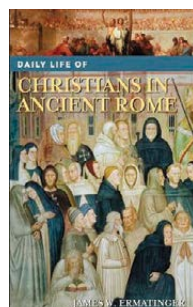
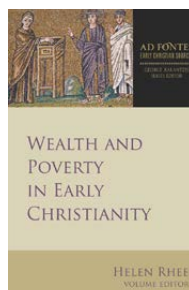
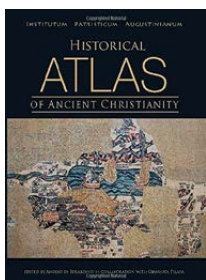
Read more about **social class and wealth** in the early church in L. William Countryman, *The Rich Christian in the Church of the Early Empire* (1980); Peter

Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (2002) and *Through an Eye of a Needle* (2012); and Helen Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich* (2012) and (as editor) *Wealth and Poverty in Early Christianity* (2017).

Understand **marriage and family life** by reading David Hunter, *Marriage in the Early Church* (2001) and (as editor) *Marriage and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (2018); David Balch and Carolyn Osiek, *Early Christian Families in Context* (2003); Kate Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (2007); Raymond Collins, *Accompanied by a Believing Wife* (2013); and Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin* (2013).

Learn more about **formation and prayer** in the early church in Paul Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church* (2008); Lev Gillet, *The Jesus Prayer* (1987); Roy Hammerling, ed., *A History of Prayer* (2008); Maxwell Johnson, *Praying and Believing in Early Christianity* (2013); Paul Blowers, ed. and trans., *Moral Formation and the Virtuous Life* (2019).

Understand how and why Christians were **persecuted** in W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in*

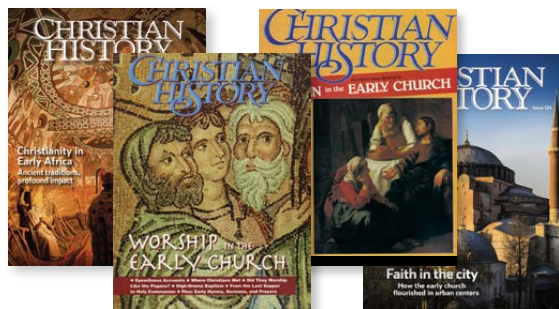


the *Early Church* (1981); Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (1986); J. W. van Henten and Friedrich Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death* (2002); Robert Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (2nd ed., 2003); Hugo Rahner, *Church and State in Early Christianity* (2005); George Kalantzis, *Caesar and the Lamb* (2012); and Wolfram Kinzig, *Christian Persecution in Antiquity* (2021).

Read about **holiness, asceticism, and early monasticism** in Derwas Chitty, *The Desert a City* (1966); Benedicta Ward, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* (1981) and (as translator), *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (1984); Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (1988); Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert* (1993); Susanna Elm, “*Virgins of God*” (1994); and James Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert* (1999).

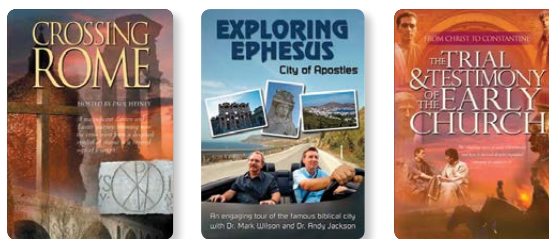
Finally, get more information about the **cities** featured in our gallery and others in the *Historical Atlas of Ancient Christianity* (2014) edited by Angelo Di Berardino.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY MAGAZINES



Read these past issues of *Christian History* related to this issue's theme online; some hard copies are still available for purchase.

- 17: *Women in the Early Church*
- 27: *Persecution in the Early Church*
- 37: *Worship in the Early Church*
- 47: *Paul and His Times*
- 49: *Everyday Faith in the Middle Ages*
- 51: *Heresy in the Early Church*
- 57: *Converting the Empire*
- 64: *St. Antony and the Desert Fathers*
- 80: *First Bible Teachers*
- 85: *Council of Nicaea*
- 96: *The Gnostics*
- 105: *Christianity in Early Africa*
- 110: *Vocation and Calling*
- 124: *Faith in the City*
- 135: *Plagues and Epidemics*
- 144: *Christian History in Images*



VIDEOS FROM VISION VIDEO

Videos on the theme of this issue include *The Apocalypse*; *Apostle Paul and the Earliest Churches*; *Augustine: A Voice for All Generations*; the *Book by Book* study guides to Paul's epistles; *Crossing Rome*; *Exploring Ephesus*; *In the Footsteps of St. Peter*; *History of Christian Worship*; *The Lives of the Apostles Paul and Peter*; *Lost Legacy Reclaimed*; *Paul the Apostle*; *Paul the Emissary*; *Perpetua: Early Church Martyrs*; *Pioneers of the Spirit: Augustine of Hippo*; *Polycarp*; *The Seven Churches of Revelation Rediscovered*; *The Story of the Twelve Apostles*; *To the Ends of the Earth*; *Trial and Testimony of the Early Church*; and *Torchlighters* episodes on Augustine and Perpetua.



WEBSITES

The [Fordham Ancient History Sourcebook](#) and the [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#) are, as always, great sources for primary sources discussed in this issue. [Early Christian Writings](#) focuses on texts from orthodox Christianity and other varieties of belief up to the Council of Nicaea. [The Center for Early African Christianity](#) has timelines, maps, and other resources. Extensive sites devoted specifically to Tertullian and Augustine also exist. **CH**

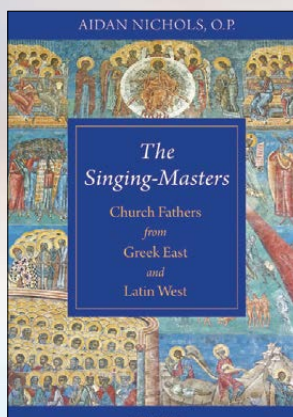




Subscriber #

Source Code

TEACHING OUR SOULS TO SING DIVINE PRAISE



◆ THE SINGING-MASTERS

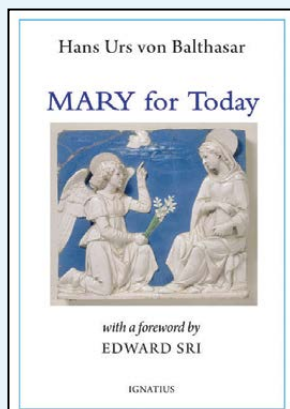
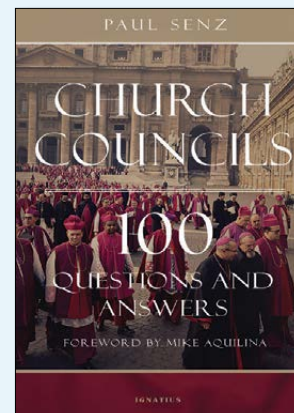
Acclaimed theologian **Fr. Aidan Nichols, O.P.**, presents a passionate, personalized account of the theological achievement of 18 Church Fathers. Ten come from the Greek East: **Irenaeus, Origen, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil the Great, Cyril of Alexandria, Denys the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, and John Damascene.** Eight come from the Latin West: **Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Leo the Great, Gregory the Great, and Bede the Venerable.**

These Fathers have been especially authoritative for Catholic doctrine and influential in Church life. While giving a dramatic, humanized account of patristic thought, with biographical detail, Nichols draws the reader into a serious discussion of the Fathers' profound theological doctrines. He offers a holistic, loving introduction to the figures who most shaped Christian thought, in the East and the West. **SMP . . . Sewn Softcover, \$19.95**

◆ CHURCH COUNCILS: 100 Questions and Answers

From the days of the apostles, the Church's teachers have met to defend and explain the Catholic faith. From the Council of Jerusalem in the Acts of the Apostles, through the Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Trent, and Vatican II, these meetings of the world's bishops are some of the most important events in the life of the Church and the most profound expressions of the Church's teaching authority.

More than a history of the 21 ecumenical councils, this question and answer book by **Paul Senz** provides a practical and theological explanation of them. It presents the historical context for each council, the reasons it was convened, the major events during the council, and the impact of its teachings, then and now. It also explains and defends the teaching authority of the bishops as successors to the apostles, particularly when teaching together as a single, united body, in union with the pope. **CCHQAP . . . Sewn Softcover, \$16.95**



◆ MARY FOR TODAY

This revised edition of **Hans Urs von Balthasar's** work, with a new foreword by **Edward Sri** and new preface by the author, provides a concise spiritual guide for all who desire to know and love the Mother of the Lord. Using Scripture and the Church's rich tradition, the acclaimed theologian draws a portrait of Mary that shows her importance and relevance for Christians today.

Balthasar combines a deep traditional devotion with intellectual precision to reveal the crucial spiritual task of Mary for all Christians: to show us what it means to be close to Jesus. Balthasar captures her singular role when he quotes her words in the Gospel at Cana: "Do whatever He tells you." *Beautifully illustrated by Virginia Broderick.*

MFT2P . . . Sewn Softcover, \$14.95



ignatius press

P.O. Box 1339, Ft. Collins, CO 80522

www.ignatius.com

(800) 651-1531