20
ANSWERS

THE EARLY CHURCH

Catholic Answers

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About a century and a half after Jesus built his Church, against which the gates of hell will never prevail (Matt. 16:18), a man named Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons, took it upon himself to list, in order of succession, all the bishops who had thus far succeeded Peter as bishop of Christ's Church in Rome:

> The blessed apostles, then, having founded and built up the Church, committed into the hands of Linus the office of the episcopate. . . . To him succeeded Anacletus; and after him, in the third place from the apostles, Clement was allotted the bishopric. . . . To this Clement there succeeded Evaristus. Alexander followed Evaristus; then, sixth from the apostles, Sixtus was appointed; after him, Telephorus, who was gloriously martyred; then Hyginus; after him, Pius; then after him, Anicetus. Soter having succeeded Anicetus, Eleutherius does now, in the twelfth place from the apostles, hold the inheritance of the episcopate.[1]

As a bishop in what is now France, why would Irenaeus have such concern with the history of the Church in Rome? He tells us, "For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its preeminent authority."[2] Later he writes of those twelve successors to Peter:

> In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us. And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth.[3]

These few words of Irenaeus are rich with information that should be important to everyone who desires to be a disciple in Christ's Church. First, they attest to the importance of the successor to Peter's office as bishop of Rome. The Church of Rome has "preeminent authority" that "every church should agree with." Historically, we know Peter's successor to be the pope of the Catholic Church and his office to be the papacy.

Second, "by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles" comes down to us. In the Catholic Church, we have come to call this Sacred Tradition, or sometimes, as it comes "from the apostles," apostolic Tradition.

Finally, by Irenaeus's words "one and the same vivifying faith . . . preserved

in the Church," we can know with certainty that, by adhering to Sacred Tradition, we are embracing the one, true, life-giving Christian faith.

In this volume of *20 Answers*, we will explore the early Church—from Christ to Irenaeus and beyond to the early fourth century. Papal and apostolic succession, Sacred Tradition, the Magisterium of the Church, and much more will come to life through early Christian writings, the Church Fathers, and Church councils. We will witness the handing on, as Christ intended, of the authentic deposit of faith in Christ's one, true Church, the Catholic Church.

1. What is the early Church, and why is learning about it important?

The early Church is authentic Christianity as it existed during the earliest period in Church history, spanning from the time Christ founded the Church to the early fourth century. This is a period marked by widespread persecution and martyrdom of Christians that later eased during the reign of Constantine in the fourth century. Pope Benedict XVI notes, "In the history of early Christianity there is a fundamental distinction between the first three centuries and those that followed the Council of Nicaea in 325."[4]

Many Christians today have little or no understanding of the formation and growth of the Church during this period, which set the stage for Christianity as we know it today. Without such an understanding, they fail to realize that the gospel was spread via apostolic succession through Sacred Tradition—the faithful, authoritative handing on of the Christian faith—not by Scripture alone. Indeed, the canon of Scripture (the official list of the Bible's contents) was not settled during the early Church period. That doesn't mean that Scripture played no part, but the Bible did not play quite the same role then as it does today for non-Catholic Christians.

God's plan for his Church is rooted in the Old Testament and brought to life in the New Testament under the authority of Peter and the apostles. They and their apostolic successors, through Sacred Tradition, faithfully safeguard and teach the deposit of faith, from the earliest generations of Christians to us today. These early Christian writers are important witnesses to the *authentic* Christian faith, passed down through the ages. Their writings provide great insight into the doctrine and inner workings of the early Church. Whenever error creeps in, it is the apostles and their successors—the Magisterium of the Church—who condemn heresy, as they teach with authority from Christ.

At Church councils, they come together to consult, deliberate, and make decisions about Church teaching and discipline. Local councils and subsequent ecumenical councils are to be credited for safeguarding and teaching, as well as formulating more articulately, the authentic Christian faith.

Throughout the early Church period and into the present day, it is Peter's successors to his office as head of the apostles who lead the Church. These successors—later known as popes—number 265 to date. Thus, the Catholic Church today is demonstrably connected to the early Church. This is evidenced further in the administration of the seven sacraments instituted by Jesus, which the Catholic Church continues to administer today. Furthermore, the Catholic Church today continues to hold to the doctrine of the early Church—in a more fully developed state.

Christians today owe a great debt of gratitude to the early Church—Peter and the apostles, their successors, early Christian writers, Apostolic Fathers, Church Fathers, and local councils—for maintaining and handing on "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3), and for steadfastly remaining "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15), the Catholic Church.

2. How did the Church begin?

God planned the gathering of his faithful people together into a single community from the beginning of human history (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 759). We see this plan played out over the various stages of humanity in Scripture. For example, God's Old Testament covenant with Abraham leads eventually to the establishment of the kingdom of Israel, a precursor to the Church as it exists today. As God more fully reveals himself to mankind, and human knowledge about God grows, the stage becomes set for God to fully reveal himself in Christ, who finally establishes a single community of believers, God's one true Church.

Jesus prepares his Church by appointing twelve apostles. The *Catechism* (CCC) explains: "Representing the twelve tribes of Israel, they are the foundation stones of the new Jerusalem. The Twelve and the other disciples share in Christ's mission and his power, but also in his lot. By all his actions, Christ prepares and builds his Church" (765).

During his ministry on Earth, Jesus singles out the apostle Simon Bar-Jona to be the head of his new Church, which will exist to the end of time: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18; see also John 1:42). With these words, Jesus changes Simon's name to Peter, which means "rock." In Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, Simon's new name is Kepha (or Cephas), which means a *sizable* rock usable as a building's foundation. *Kepha* is translated into Greek as *Petros*, from which we get *Peter* in English.

Jesus goes on to give Peter special authority over his Church: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19). Peter and the other apostles who hear this proclamation understand these symbolic keys to be Jesus' own authority over his Church in his absence. Such a handing on of kingly authority was known to the Jews and is imaged in the Old Testament foretelling of Eliakim being given authority as King Hezekiah's royal steward over the kingdom of Israel (Isa. 22:20–22).

Just as God gives Eliakim the keys to the kingdom of Israel, Jesus gives Peter the keys to his kingdom. And just as Eliakim "shall be a father" to Israel (Isa. 22:21), Peter (and his successors) leads the Church as a spiritual father—as *papa*, or pope. The authority to "bind and loose" ("open and shut") is given first to Peter and later to the apostles under him as well.

The *Catechism* explains:

> The "power of the keys" designates authority to govern the house of God, which is the Church. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, confirmed this mandate after his Resurrection: "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15–17). The power to "bind and loose" connotes the authority to absolve sins, to pronounce doctrinal judgments, and to make disciplinary decisions in the Church. Jesus entrusted this authority to the Church through the ministry of the apostles and in particular through the ministry of Peter, the only one to whom he specifically entrusted the keys of the kingdom (553).

Having established an authoritative hierarchy for his Church, Jesus demonstrates that he intends the Church to be a community of believers with a continual, visible hierarchy here on Earth. For example, he outlines a procedure involving sinners in the Church:

> If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the Church; and if he refuses to listen even to the Church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector (Matt. 18:15–17).

Clearly, Jesus founded the Church as a tight-knit community of disciples with tangible access to the authority of Peter and the apostles. Shortly after the Ascension, this all became manifest to the world: "When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the Church. Then the Church was openly displayed to the crowds and the spread of the gospel among the nations, through preaching, was begun" (CCC 767).

3. How was the gospel spread in the early Church?

Many non-Catholic Christians today imagine that the gospel was spread during the early Church period in much the same way non-Catholics claim to spread it today: by teaching exclusively from the Bible. They unwittingly commit an error of anachronism. Certainly, Old Testament Scripture played a major role in the early Church, but New Testament Scripture did not. How can the gospel be spread without using the New Testament?

The book of the Acts of the Apostles provides a snapshot of how the apostles and their successors actually went about spreading the gospel in the first century. Luke tells us Paul and Silas were sent to Berea:

> When they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men (17:10–12).

Luke commends the Bereans for being more noble than the Thessalonians because they eagerly received "the word." They also examined the scriptures to see if the word was true. So just who were the Bereans? What was "the word" they received, and what scriptures did they examine?

The Bereans, we're told, were mainly Jews (and some Greeks). The word they received was the teaching about Jesus—that same teaching that Paul sums up in his first letter to the Corinthians: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). The scriptures mentioned here by Paul are the same scriptures the Bereans examined: the Old Testament scriptures. These were the only scriptures of the day, as no New Testament Scripture existed at the time. Most of the New Testament had not yet been written, and what had been written had not yet been canonized so as to attain the status of Scripture (see answer 18). So this is a group of people being taught about Christianity prior to the existence of the New Testament. They eagerly listened while examining the Old Testament scriptures.

This makes sense when we understand this event in its historical context. The event occurred during Paul's second missionary journey. On his journeys, Paul taught the good news of Christianity, as Jesus had commissioned him to do. As a Jewish convert to Christianity himself, he knew the Jewish scriptures well, and he knew that they prophesied about Jesus. He undoubtedly explained these scriptures to enlighten other Jews about the truth of Christianity. These Jews would have to examine their Old Testament scriptures to see if what Paul was saying made sense. It did, and many Jews, including some of the Bereans, became Christians.

This method was the primary way the gospel was first spread. Such oral teaching is an example of what the Catholic Church calls Sacred Tradition. The *Catechism* explains:

> The Tradition here in question comes from the apostles and hands on what they received from Jesus' teaching and example and what they learned from the Holy Spirit. The first generation of Christians did not yet have a written New Testament, and the New Testament itself demonstrates the process of living Tradition (83).

Other examples of spreading the gospel by explaining Old Testament scriptures using Sacred Tradition are plentiful in the Acts of the Apostles. For example, on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descends upon the apostles, Peter, the first pope, teaches accordingly (2:22–36). Stephen, the first Christian martyr, spreads the gospel similarly (6:8–7:53). Paul teaches the

same way at Salamis (13:13–41). The apostle Philip used this method of spreading the gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch after observing him reading from Isaiah: "'Do you understand what you are reading?' And [the eunuch] said, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him[.] . . . Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus" (8:30–35). Many more examples throughout the New Testament could be cited.

Throughout the early Church period (and beyond), the Catholic Church safeguarded and taught the fullness of the Christian faith using Sacred Tradition. This faith is complete only when Sacred Tradition is included. The *Catechism* sums it up well:

> This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it. Through Tradition, the Church, in her doctrine, life, and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes. The sayings of the holy Fathers are a witness to the life-giving presence of this Tradition, showing how its riches are poured out in the practice and life of the Church, in her belief and her prayer (78).

4. How did the early Church grow?

As we saw in answer 2, Jesus founded the Church on Peter as head of the Church's apostolic hierarchy. Christ's early disciples knew they should follow Peter and the apostles because they were sent by Jesus. In fact, the word *apostle* derives from the Greek word *apostolos*, which denotes one who is sent as a messenger with the authority of the sender. Jesus said, "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16).

Jesus prepared the apostles for their roles immediately before his passion, death, and resurrection. At the Last Supper, he promised them that the Father "will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever . . . the Holy Spirit[.] . . . He will guide you into all the truth" (John 14:16, 26; 16:13). Then, just before his ascension, Jesus gave the apostles the "Great Commission," instructing them: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with

you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:19–20).

Thus, the mission to grow the Church—as well as the wherewithal to do so—was entrusted to Peter and the apostles. On the day of Pentecost, just ten days after the Ascension, this was made manifest in a spectacular way:

> When the day of Pentecost had come, they [the apostles] were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1–4).

From Pentecost forward, anyone who wanted to follow Christ needed to follow Peter and the apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit. But those men would not live forever. Even so, they knew that Jesus intended their mission and authority to continue until he comes again (Matt. 16:18; 28:20). How did they get around this apparent conundrum? They appointed others to succeed them. We see the earliest evidence of this in their appointing of Judas's replacement:

> [Peter said,] "So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, "Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two thou hast chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside, to go to his own place." And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles (Acts 1:21–26).

Peter and the apostles also knew that making disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19) would require more than twelve men. (Indeed, Jesus himself appointed Paul in addition to the others—see Acts 9:1–19.) Therefore, they appointed even more successors with authority to join in their missionary work: "And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed" (Acts

14:23).Later evidence of this is found in Paul's first letter to Timothy (one such elder), in which Paul instructs Timothy: "Till I come, attend to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you. Practice these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (4:13–16).

Note that Paul writes of Timothy's duties associated with the gift "given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you." Catholics recognize this "gift" to be the sacrament of holy orders, which introduces men into the episcopate, presbyterate, or diaconate (making bishops, priests, and deacons, respectively) and is necessary for authentic apostolic succession. The *Catechism* explains:

> No one can give himself the mandate and the mission to proclaim the gospel. The one sent by the Lord does not speak and act on his own authority but by virtue of Christ's authority; not as a member of the community but speaking to it in the name of Christ. No one can bestow grace on himself; it must be given and offered. This fact presupposes ministers of grace, authorized and empowered by Christ. From him, bishops and priests receive the mission and faculty ("the sacred power") to act *in persona Christi Capitis*; deacons receive the strength to serve the people of God in the *diaconia* of liturgy, word, and charity, in communion with the bishop and his presbyterate (875).

Finally, Paul's writings provide early evidence that at least some of those appointed by the apostles had authority to go on and appoint still others. To Timothy Paul writes, "What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). And to Titus he writes, "This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you" (Titus 1:5).

Thus, we see that the early Church grew through apostolic succession conferred by the sacrament of holy orders.

5. Who were some of the early successors to the apostles, and why are

they important?

The early successors to the apostles are important because they are witnesses to the carrying on of Sacred Tradition handed down by the apostles. In other words, they are generations of Christian writers—many of whom were bishops—who taught and safeguarded from corruption "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3).

Already in New Testament Scripture, we find apostolic successors being entrusted with the deposit of faith. Titus, appointed by Paul, is one example (Titus 1:5). Here we see Paul, an apostle, directing Titus, a successor, to appoint elders—more successors—in every town. Paul writes similarly to Timothy (2 Tim. 2:2). Four generations of apostolic succession are in view here: first Paul teaching Timothy, then Timothy entrusting that same teaching to other faithful men, and finally those faithful men going on to teach still others.

Apostolic successors filled roles similar to those of the apostles. These successors became known as Fathers of the Church (or Church Fathers) because they carried on the patristic role of the apostles. Indeed, Paul writes (of Timothy and himself), "As a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel" (Phil. 2:22). Just as Paul saw himself as a father figure to Timothy, apostolic successors became seen as fathers to their own generations and beyond.

The Church Fathers of the earliest generation are often called Apostolic Fathers because of their proximity in time to the apostles themselves. Some of their writings are similar to Paul's New Testament letters. It is important to emphasize that their writings do not teach new doctrine of their own. Instead, they teach according to that which has been handed on to them by the apostles and their contemporaries. Looking to their writings, we can see how early Christian doctrine and discipline were understood during the apostolic and post-apostolic era.

Here are a few well-known Apostolic Fathers and some of their contributions to the early Church:

- *Pope St. Clement I* (Clement of Rome) was the fourth pope (after Peter, Linus, and Cletus), reigning from A.D. 88 to 97. He wrote a letter to the church at Corinth (a church that Paul had also written to) probably a decade

or more before becoming pope. It is one of the earliest known Christian writings outside the New Testament. In it, Clement exhorts peace and harmony in this church that has recently seen a forceful leadership takeover. He quotes extensively from the Old Testament as well as from Paul's writings (including, it seems, from 1 Corinthians).

- *St. Ignatius of Antioch* was the third bishop of Antioch (after Peter and Evodius). He was a disciple of the apostle John and was also taught by Paul at Antioch (see answer 9). He wrote letters to six other churches as well as one to his friend Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, as Ignatius was being transported from Antioch to Rome to be executed around A.D. 110. The content of Ignatius's letters is invaluable. In addition to contemplating his own impending martyrdom, he counters false teaching in the Church and exhorts unity, especially regarding one's bishop, and the important role the bishop plays in the Church.
- *St. Polycarp*, bishop of Smyrna, also was a disciple of the apostle John. He wrote a letter to the church at Philippi (a church that Paul had also written to) in response to a letter that the Philippians had written to him. In it, Polycarp draws heavily on Christian writings that would later be canonized as New Testament Scripture (see answer 18). It is clear that Polycarp's intention, though largely pastoral in nature, is to hold fast to the Sacred Tradition that had been handed on to him.

Although not attributed to a specific Church Father, another important writing from the apostolic period (around A.D. 50) is the Didache (also known as *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*). This document teaches Christian doctrine and establishes early disciplines in the Church. It is a wonderful resource to look to for an understanding of the teaching and inner workings of the early Church.

Other Apostolic Fathers include Hermas of Rome and St. Papias of Hierapolis. Additional important writings of unknown or unattributed specific authorship from the period include Second Clement, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Epistle to Diognetus, and the Fragment of Quadratus.

Early Church writings such as the letters of the Apostolic Fathers provide great insight into the doctrine and inner workings of the early Church. They also set the stage for the post-apostolic period and the Church Fathers of that

time.

6. Who were some of the later successors to the apostles, and why are they important?

Many important early Christian writers followed on the heels of the Apostolic Fathers. Their writings give us a window into the faith and practices of the early Church as it continued to grow. Their teachings are built on the deposit of faith as it was handed down to them through Sacred Tradition. As such, they are early witnesses to the authentic Christian faith. As you will see, many of their writings deal with the development of the Faith as the Church came to understand it better. Additionally, their writings deal with errors about the Faith as the Fathers combated heresies that crept into the early Church. Included here are several of the most prominent Church Fathers of the early Church period, along with other prominent Christian writers who were their contemporaries.

- *St. Justin Martyr* lived and wrote during the second century as the Church continued to grow. He converted to Christianity after years of philosophical studies. He then founded a school in Rome. As a philosopher, he was adept at both explaining the Christian faith and defending it against the challenges of second-century paganism and Judaism. His surviving writings include two apologies (that is, two works of apologetics, each titled *Apology*) and *Dialogue with the Hebrew, Tryphon*. He is known as Justin Martyr because he was beheaded during the Christian persecution under Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Justin became known as the greatest apologist of the second century, and he is a patron saint of apologists today.
- *St. Irenaeus of Lyons* studied under the Apostolic Father St. Polycarp of Smyrna. Thus, in his writings, we see Sacred Tradition as it came down to him from

  Polycarp, who was a disciple of the apostle John, who was taught by Jesus himself. Irenaeus, as bishop of Lyons, combated the Gnostic sect of Christians who had gone astray from Sacred Tradition and adhered to the heresy of dualism, which taught that another being—not God—was responsible for matter in the universe, so Gnostics professing dualism often saw matter as something evil. Irenaeus's greatest writing is known as *Against Heresies*.

- *Tertullian of Carthage* was a convert to Christianity who wrote during the late second and early third centuries. Writing to evangelize his culture and to defend Christianity against paganism, Tertullian became an adept apologist of his day, writing his own *Apology*. He is credited with first articulating the Trinity as three persons of one substance. Tragically, Tertullian later fell prey to self-proclaimed prophet Montanus of Pepuza. Since he died as an adherent to the Montanist heresy, he is not honored as a saint, and, technically, he is considered an "ecclesiastical writer," not a Father of the Church.
- *St. Cyprian of Carthage*, bishop of Carthage (in modern-day Tunisia), lived and wrote in the third century. Writing amid Christian persecution, Cyprian dealt with matters concerning lapsed Christians, among other issues. He was martyred in 258.
- *St. Hippolytus of Rome* lived in the late second and early third centuries. A student of Irenaeus of Lyons, he combated heresies and false doctrines in the early Church. He was martyred in 235.
- *Origen of Alexandria* taught and wrote in Alexandria in the third century. He is known for, among other things, teaching exegesis of Scripture in its spiritual sense alongside its literal sense, in light of Sacred Tradition (see CCC 113), as well as the introduction of *Lectio Divina*. Origen wrote works of apologetics, too, including against both Gnosticism and Marcionism, a heretical blend of Gnostic and anti-Semitic teaching. Like Tertullian, Origen is not honored as a saint because his later teaching strayed into theologically unsound territory. As with Tertullian, he is considered an "ecclesiastical writer," not a Father of the Church.
- *Eusebius* was the bishop of Caesarea in the early fourth century, including during the Council of Nicaea in 325, in which he participated. Alongside his efforts at the first ecumenical council, this ecclesiastical writer is remembered for his invaluable ten-volume work on the history of the Church from its beginning to just before the Council of Nicaea, titled *Ecclesiastical History*.

In addition to the writings of these four great Church Fathers and their contemporaries, additional important writings of unknown or unattributed specific authorship come down to us from this period of Church history as well. Included here are two such important documents.

- *The Protoevangelium of James* (also known as Gospel of James, the Book of James, and the Infancy Gospel of James) is a document written in the mid-second century in support of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary. The author, writing as a supposed stepbrother of Jesus (through Joseph), tells the story of how Joseph, an older widower, takes Mary, a consecrated virgin, for his wife. Whether the facts of the story are true or not has never been settled by the Church, but this *protoevangelium* (meaning "first gospel") is testimony to early Church belief in the Perpetual Virginity of Mary.
- *The Muratorian Fragment* is a remaining fragment of a document from the second half of the second century that sheds light on the development of the New Testament canon (the list of books contained in the New Testament). This document includes most, but not all, of the books that would later be authoritatively recognized by the Church. It also includes two books that would not be recognized. The value of this document, in part, is its demonstration of a developing yet unsettled canon of Scripture.

Writings of the Church Fathers and other early Christian writings illuminate the doctrine and practices of the early Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised (Matt. 28:19–20; John 14:16, 26; 16:13). As they deal with doctrinal development and doctrinal dissent (i.e., heresies), they attest to the consistent handing down of the deposit of faith. They give us a glimpse into the authoritative teaching authority—the Magisterium—of the Catholic Church.

7. What did the Magisterium look like in the early Church?

As we have seen, in handing on Sacred Tradition, the Church Fathers found it necessary to counter error and heresy as they crept into the early Church. This was nothing new; false teaching was something the apostles and their successors dealt with from the earliest days. With Peter and his papal successors at their head, the apostles and their successor bishops knew they were the only Christians who taught with apostolic teaching authority from Christ. Their teaching office came to be known as the Magisterium of the Church (from the Latin *magister*, meaning "teacher"). It is the Magisterium's role to teach the deposit of faith authentically in every age, to safeguard it from corruption, and to authoritatively settle disputes about it.

Therefore, Peter, Paul, and others warned Christians to beware of false

teachers. For example, concerning an authentic interpretation of Scripture, Peter wrote, "No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet. 1:20–21). In other words, Scripture was penned by men inspired by the Holy Spirit, so it must be interpreted by men under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised. The *Catechism* explains:

> The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the bishop of Rome (85; cf. *Dei Verbum* ١٠).

Peter went on to warn about those who interpret Scripture apart from the Magisterium: "There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Pet. 2:1).

Similarly, Paul instructed, "Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thess. 2:15), and "if any one refuses to obey what we say in this letter, note that man, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not look on him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother" (3:14–15). Also, he writes, "I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you" (1 Cor. 11:2).

In the letter to the Hebrews, we read, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings; for it is well that the heart be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited their adherents" (Heb. 13:7–9). Moreover: "Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account. Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you" (v. 17).

Furthermore, there came times in the early Church when even those in the

Magisterium needed to consult among themselves, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to settle matters.

For example, when St. Paul evangelized in Antioch, a dispute arose among the disciples there about whether or not Gentile Christians needed to keep the Mosaic Law. Jewish Christians in the community unnecessarily continued to follow Jewish laws, and they expected Gentile converts to do the same. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke relates the story of how Paul went about settling this dispute: he took the matter up with his apostolic brethren in the Magisterium of the Church. Gathered there in Jerusalem, they settled the matter with the declaration, "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (15:28). This was the Magisterium in action!

This meeting in Jerusalem is commonly called the Council of Jerusalem. It provides a scriptural look at the Magisterium coming together in the early Church to settle matters under the guidance of the promised Holy Spirit. It is the first of many such councils.

8. What are Church councils, and what purpose did they serve in the early Church?

A Church council (or synod) is a gathering of bishops who come together to consult, deliberate, and make decisions about Church teaching and discipline. We have already seen that Scripture gives witness to such a gathering at the Council of Jerusalem in the first century (see answer 7). This council set the stage for how doctrinal and disciplinary matters would be settled down through the history of the Church. The sites listed here are where several of the more significant councils were held in the early Church.

- *Arabia (Bostra):* Two councils were held here near the middle of the third century. Origen (an ecclesiastical writer) argued successfully against a heresy that the soul dies when a person dies and is later resurrected with the body.
- *Carthage:* Several councils were held at Carthage in Africa around the middle of the third century with Church Father St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, presiding. As the early Church underwent persecution, many Christians fell away, becoming lapsed, or *lapsi*. The councils at Carthage are most noted for taking up issues concerning how the Church dealt with the lapsi.

- *Iconium:* In yet another council of the mid-third century, bishops convened at Iconium (in modern-day Turkey) to address the issue of rebaptism of converts from the Montanist heresy.
- *Antioch:* At least three councils were held in Antioch between 264 and 269. Of particular concern was the matter of the Paulianist heresy concerning the hypostatic union, or the relationship between Christ's human and divine natures. The *Catechism* says of this council: "In the third century, the Church in a council at Antioch had to affirm against Paul of Samosata that Jesus Christ is Son of God by nature and not by adoption" (465).
- *Elvira:* This was the location in Spain of a council held in the early fourth century. Nineteen bishops attended and dealt with matters of discipline (not doctrine) ranging from certain sacraments to Church relations with non-Christians.
- *Ankara (Ancyra):* In 314, the year following the Edict of Milan, which ended the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire, a council was held in Ankara (modern-day Turkey) to take up the issue of how to deal with lapsed Christians coming back into the Church. As such, this was a disciplinary council.
- *Neo-Caesarea:* Held in 314 shortly after the council of Ankara, Neo-Caesarea (modern-day Turkey) was convened to decide on multiple disciplinary issues, especially regarding priests, deacons, and married Christians.
- *Arles:* Also held in 314, the synod of Arles (modern-day France) met to combat the Donatists, a schismatic sect that taught that clergy must be sinless to exercise their duties validly. Also, disciplinary measures were taken to put a stop to abuses that had crept into the Church.

In addition to these councils, historians mention multiple councils in Rome as well as at least one council in Ephesus during the early Church period. These councils demonstrate that the Magisterium was functioning during the early Church period, often even under severe persecution. The councils mentioned here (and others, undoubtedly) set the stage for—and led to—the first general council held after the end of Christian persecution, the Council of Nicaea, in 325. This council is noted, in part, for combating Arianism, a heresy that denied the divinity of Christ.

The Council of Nicaea was the first "ecumenical council" of the Church. An

ecumenical council is a Church council in which the pope oversees a gathering of bishops from around the world to discuss doctrinal and disciplinary matters. Such councils are among the loftiest exercises of the Church's Magisterium (CCC 891). The *Catechism* explains, "The college of bishops exercises power over the universal Church in a solemn manner in an ecumenical council. But there never is an ecumenical council which is not confirmed or at least recognized as such by Peter's successor" (884).

Whereas countless local councils and synods have continued to be held down through the history of the Church, there have been a total of only twenty-one ecumenical councils, the most recent being the Second Vatican Council. Much of the Christian faith as most Christians profess it today was formulated at these councils. "The *Niceno-Constantinopolitan* or *Nicene Creed* draws its great authority from the fact that it stems from the first two ecumenical councils (in 325 and 381). It remains common to all the great churches of both East and West to this day" (CCC 195). It was on the heels of local councils in the early Church that the first several ecumenical councils developed the trinitarian dogmas that all Christians share today. The *Catechism* states:

> During the first centuries the Church sought to clarify her trinitarian faith, both to deepen her own understanding of the Faith and to defend it against the errors that were deforming it. This clarification was the work of the early councils, aided by the theological work of the Church Fathers and sustained by the Christian people's sense of the Faith (250).

Thus, Christians today owe a great debt of gratitude to the early Church councils and subsequent ecumenical councils for safeguarding and teaching, as well as formulating, the authentic Christian faith.

9. Was the early Church "catholic" or just Christian?

Non-Catholic Christians often claim that the Church Jesus founded was the "Christian Church," not the Catholic Church. The biblical evidence cited for this claim is found in the Acts of the Apostles: "So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church, and taught a large company of people; and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians" (11:25–

26).

Many modern Christians then suppose that the Catholic Church was founded by mere men much later in Christian history.

No doubt, disciples in the early Church became known as Christians. But does this mean that their Church was not the Catholic Church? A little historical study into the church at Antioch reveals that these early Christians' Church was, indeed, the Catholic Church.

One of the things Peter did before he went to Rome was to found the church in Antioch, the third largest city in the Roman Empire at the time. He ordained (see answer 4) a disciple there named Evodius to the episcopacy and appointed him the bishop of Antioch. Evodius is believed by many to have been one of the seventy disciples Jesus appointed to go ahead of him to the towns and places where he taught during his second missionary journey (see Luke 10:1). It was during Evodius's reign as bishop of Antioch that the disciples there were for the first time called Christians. But this isn't the end of the story!

While Paul was teaching the Christians in Antioch during Evodius's reign, another young disciple was moving up through the ranks. His name was Ignatius, and he would later become known as Saint Ignatius of Antioch, an early Christian martyr. Ignatius was a disciple of John. Legend has it that, much earlier in his life, Ignatius was the child whom Jesus took in his arms in a passage recorded by Mark:

> [Jesus] sat down and called the Twelve; and he said to them, "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." And he took a child, and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me" (11:35–37).

This legend demonstrates the great esteem his memory has enjoyed since the early centuries of the Church.

At Antioch, Ignatius was ordained by Paul, and then, at the end of the reign of Evodius, he was appointed bishop of Antioch by Peter. He reigned there for many years before his martyrdom in Rome. On his way to Rome to be martyred, he wrote several letters to fellow Christians in various locations, expounding on Christian theology. He especially emphasized unity among

Christians (see John 17) and became known as an Apostolic Father of the Church.

In one of his letters (to Christians in Smyrna), he wrote, "Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church."[5] This is the earliest known written record of the term "Catholic Church" (written around A.D. 107), but Ignatius seemingly used it with the presumption that the Christians of his day were quite familiar with it. In other words, even though his is the earliest known written record of the term, the term likely had been in use for quite some time by then, dating back to the time of the apostles.

The term "Catholic Church" (Gk. *katholike ekklesia*) broadly means "universal assembly," and Ignatius used it when writing to the Christians of Smyrna as a term of unity. He exhorted these Christians to follow their bishop just as the broader universal assembly of Christians follows Christ. He clearly uses the terms "Christian" and "Catholic Church" distinctly: disciples of Christ are Christians; the universal assembly of Christians is the Catholic Church.

Some might claim that Ignatius intended to use the term "Catholic Church" not as a proper name for the Church, but only as a general reference to the larger assembly of Christians. If so, then the universal assembly had no proper name yet, but "Catholic Church" continued in use until it became the proper name of the one Church that Christ built on Peter and his successors.

Thus, we see that the Christians of Antioch were part of the Catholic Church. They were indeed *Christian* disciples, but they were also *Catholic*. Given the unbroken chain of succession at Antioch—from Peter (sent by Christ) to Evodius to Ignatius—if any Christian today wishes to identify with the biblical Christians of the first century mentioned in Acts 11, it follows quite logically that he must also identify with those same Christians' universal assembly, the Catholic Church.

10. Didn't Jesus condemn Catholic tradition?

Sola scriptura adherents are quick to point out that tradition is condemned in Scripture. Indeed, some forms of tradition are condemned. For example, Jesus denounced a certain tradition when he said, "And why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" (Matt. 15:3; see also Mark 7:8–9). In this passage, Jesus condemned a particular

Jewish practice of seemingly donating money to God while in reality sheltering it from being used to care for one's parents. This was a tradition—but certainly not a sacred one—that broke the commandment to honor one's mother and father. Jesus rightfully condemns it, but his condemnation is not meant to be applied to every tradition.

Another verse *sola scriptura* adherents point out is, "See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8). Certainly, Catholics agree with Paul that such human traditions are to be rejected. But Sacred Tradition is not merely human tradition. It is the teaching of Jesus and the apostles guided by the Holy Spirit. It originated with Christ and is inspired by the Holy Spirit, hardly of human origin.

So if Scripture doesn't explicitly condemn Sacred Tradition, does it explicitly support it? It seems that since the Catholic Church claims that the New Testament came after Sacred Tradition, it makes sense that the New Testament would show ample teaching about Sacred Tradition. In fact, it does.

For example, Jesus' commandment to the apostles at the end of Matthew's Gospel logically assumes the necessity of Sacred Tradition:

> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age (28:19–20).

Jesus didn't tell the apostles to write down everything he had taught them. He simply commanded them to teach it. Much of this teaching later made its way into Sacred Scripture, but every bit of it was and still is considered Sacred Tradition.

In fact, we know that not everything Jesus taught was eventually committed to writing. John tells us as much at the end of his Gospel: "But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (21:25). Some of Jesus' teachings had not yet made it into written form by the date John finished writing his Gospel.

Turning to Luke, we see that the author begins his Gospel by explaining why he is writing it. Luke points out that others have already committed certain things to writing, and he thinks it is a good idea to write down what his reader has already been taught:

> Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed (1:1–4).

Luke then commits to writing what has already been taught. That teaching is Sacred Tradition just as surely as Luke's Gospel will later be recognized as Sacred Scripture.

Paul provides even more explicit evidence of Sacred Tradition in his writings. Here are three examples:

- "I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you" (1 Cor. 11:2).
- "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us" (2 Thess. 3:6).
- "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thess. 2:15).

In the third verse, Paul speaks of Sacred Tradition as being taught both orally and in writing. The written teaching would later be canonized as Sacred Scripture, so this verse suggests that Sacred Tradition preceded Sacred Scripture.

Near the end of Paul's ministry, he instructed Timothy to carry on the Sacred Tradition passed down to him: "Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us" (2 Tim. 1:13–14).

The early Church continued to teach and safeguard Sacred Tradition

throughout the early Church period, and it continues to do so today.

11. Did the early Church have popes?

We have already seen that the early Church grew though *apostolic* succession (answer 4), but non-Catholics often also question Peter's superior authority and *papal* succession—that is, successors to Peter's office as head of the apostles. The successors to his office became known as popes. There have been 265 of them to date.

Non-Catholics ask, "Did Christians in the early Church recognize the authority of St. Peter as head of the apostles? Did they recognize similar authority in his successors?" The Church Fathers and other early Christian writers not only recognized Peter's authority as head of the apostles, but also unanimously recognized his successors to be the authoritative leaders of the one Church founded by Jesus.

For example, Clement of Alexandria calls Peter "the chosen, the preeminent, the first among the disciples."[6]

Tertullian, writing in defense of martyrdom, discusses Peter's role as holder of the keys of the kingdom of heaven: "For though you think that heaven is still shut up, remember that the Lord left the keys of it to Peter here, and through him to the Church, which keys everyone will carry with him if he has been questioned and made a confession [of faith]."[7] Christians carry the keys *through* Peter. Tertullian clearly recognizes Peter as standing in for Jesus on behalf of the Church, willing and able to open the gates of heaven for Christians. Later Tertullian points out that Jesus' words to Peter in Matthew 16:18–19 single Peter out as having unique authority as holder of the keys: "Upon *you*, he says, I will build my Church; and I will give to *you* the keys, not to the Church."[8] Similarly, Origen recognizes that Jesus' words and actions elevate Peter to a role of apostolic primacy:

> If we were to attend carefully to the Gospels, we should also find, in relation to those things which seem to be common to Peter . . . a great difference and a preeminence in the things [Jesus] said to Peter, compared with the second class [of apostles]. For it is no small difference that Peter received the keys not of one heaven but of more, and in order that whatsoever things he binds on earth may be bound not in one heaven but in them all, as compared with

> the many who bind on earth and loose on earth, so that these things are bound and loosed not in [all] the heavens, as in the case of Peter, but in one only; for they do not reach so high a stage with power as Peter to bind and loose in all the heavens.[9]

Cyprian of Carthage agrees: "Although [Jesus] assigns a like power to all the apostles, yet he founded a single chair [*cathedra*], and he established by his own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity."[10]

Here we see one of the reasons for Peter's unique role: unity in the Church. It makes sense that there should be one leader for the sake of the oneness in the Church that Jesus desires (see John 17). Cyprian continues, "Indeed, the others were that also which Peter was [i.e., apostles], but a primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair."

So far, we have seen that the early Church recognized Peter's role as head of the apostles. Next, we will see that the Church also recognized Peter's authority being handed on to his successors.

Writing in the second century, Irenaeus identifies Peter's first successor as bishop of Rome: "The blessed apostles [Peter and Paul], having founded and built up the church [of Rome] . . . handed over the office of the episcopate to Linus."[11] Of particular note here is that Irenaeus is bishop of Lyons, yet he finds succession in Rome to be of particular importance! (For more on this, see the Introduction.)

Cyprian of Carthage, whom we have already seen recognizing Peter's unique role for the sake of unity, exhorts Christians of his day (mid-third century) to remain united to Peter's successor: "If someone [today] does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he [should] desert the Chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church?"[12]

Elsewhere, Cyprian writes against those who rupture the unity Jesus ensured through Peter's office: "With a false bishop appointed for themselves by heretics, they dare even to set sail and carry letters from schismatics and blasphemers to the Chair of Peter and to the principal church [at Rome], in which sacerdotal unity has its source."[13]

Finally, Eusebius of Caesarea attests to the significance of Peter's office in his great work on the history of the Church: "Linus, whom he [Paul]

mentions in the Second Epistle to Timothy [2 Tim. 4:21] as his companion at Rome, was Peter's successor in the episcopate of the church there, as has already been shown. Clement also, who was appointed third [successor] bishop of the church at Rome, was, as Paul testifies, his co-laborer and fellow soldier [Phil. 4:3]."[14]

12. How can it be proven that the early Church hierarchy were successors to the apostles?

Since most non-Catholics cannot trace their spiritual leaders' authority back to Jesus and the apostles through apostolic succession, the claim that Catholics *can* presents a difficulty for them. Thus, they want to see some evidence that the authorities appealed to by the Church Fathers were successors to the apostles.

Writings of the early Church Fathers and others demonstrate that they, indeed, viewed apostolic succession as the mark of authentic authority in the early Church period.

For example, Clement of Alexandria reports the fact that apostolic succession was taking place: "Through countryside and city [the apostles] preached, and they appointed their earliest converts, testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers. Nor was this a novelty, for bishops and deacons had been written about a long time earlier."[15] Clement goes on to explain that the apostles intended apostolic succession to continue: "having received perfect foreknowledge, [the apostles] appointed those who have already been mentioned and afterward added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry."

Irenaeus explains that Christians who wish to know the truth of the Christian faith are to "contemplate the tradition of the apostles which has been made known to us throughout the whole world."[16] And how has that tradition been made known? "[W]e are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the apostles and their successors down to our own times, men who neither knew nor taught anything like what these heretics rave about."

Irenaeus emphasizes the importance of holding to the teaching of the apostolic successors: "It is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the

Church—those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles; those who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received the infallible charism of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father."[17] Going even further, Irenaeus warns of trusting the teaching of those who do *not* succeed the apostles: "But [it is also incumbent] to hold in suspicion others who depart from the primitive succession, and assemble themselves together in any place whatsoever, either as heretics of perverse minds, or as schismatics puffed up and self-pleasing, or again as hypocrites, acting thus for the sake of lucre and vainglory. For all these have fallen from the truth."[18]

By following these instructions, Christians are assured of receiving the one, true deposit of the Faith. They are assured of authentic Christian unity. Tertullian explains it this way:

> [The apostles] founded churches in every city, from which all the other churches, one after another, derived the tradition of the Faith, and the seeds of doctrine, and are every day deriving them, that they may become churches. Indeed, it is on this account only that they will be able to deem themselves apostolic, as being the offspring of apostolic churches. Every sort of thing must necessarily revert to its original for its classification. Therefore the churches, although they are so many and so great, comprise but the one primitive Church, [founded] by the apostles, from which they all [spring]. In this way, all are primitive, and all are apostolic, while they are all proved to be one in unity.[19]

Tertullian explains how to test the authenticity of the faith we hold: "It remains, then, that we demonstrate whether this doctrine of ours, of which we have now given the rule, has its origin in the tradition of the apostles."[20] Similarly, for others, he writes: "Let them produce the original records of their churches; let them unfold the roll of their bishops, running down in due succession from the beginning in such a manner that [their first] bishop shall be able to show for his ordainer and predecessor some one of the apostles or of apostolic men—a man, moreover, who continued steadfast with the apostles."[21]

More writings could be mentioned here, but these few examples clearly demonstrate that Christians of the early Church looked to apostolic

successors for authentic authority and teaching.

13. What did the early Church believe about infant baptism?

The early Church professed the same belief in the efficacy of infant baptism that the Catholic Church continues to profess today. Scripture indicates that infants were baptized from the earliest days of the Church.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him" (Acts ٢:٣٨–39). *Children* seems to include infants.

Luke tells us that a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira was baptized "with her household" (Acts 16:15). Similarly, Paul's jailer was baptized "with all his family" (16:33), and Paul himself baptized "the household of Stephanas" (1 Cor. 1:16). *Households* and *families* seem to include infants.

Furthermore, Paul relates Christian baptism to Jewish circumcision (Col. 2:11–12). Since circumcision was performed on infants, it seems that baptism could be administered to infants as well.

Scripture seems clear enough on the matter, yet most non-Catholics do not believe in the efficacy of infant baptism. The following select quotations from early Church Fathers and others demonstrate that the early Church did, indeed, profess belief in the efficacy of infant baptism.

First, consider Irenaeus's inclusive words: "all, I say, who through him are reborn in God: infants, and children, and youths, and old men. Therefore he passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, sanctifying infants; a child for children, sanctifying those who are of that age . . . [so that] he might be the perfect teacher in all things, perfect not only in respect to the setting forth of truth, perfect also in respect to relative age."[22]

Hippolytus agrees: "Baptize first the children, and if they can speak for themselves let them do so. Otherwise, let their parents or other relatives speak for them."[23]

The reason for this teaching stems from original sin. Although infants are not themselves guilty of *any* sin—including Adam's sin—they nonetheless suffer the consequences of it. The *Catechism* states: "Because of this certainty

of faith, the Church baptizes for the remission of sins even tiny infants who have not committed personal sin" (403). This is what Origen has in mind in the third century when he writes: "In the Church, baptism is given for the remission of sins, and, according to the usage of the Church, baptism is given even to infants. If there were nothing in infants which required the remission of sins and nothing in them pertinent to forgiveness, the grace of baptism would seem superfluous."[24]

Origen further explains, "The Church received from the apostles the tradition of giving baptism even to infants. The apostles, to whom were committed the secrets of the divine sacraments, knew there are in everyone innate strains of [original] sin, which must be washed away through water and the Spirit."[25]

Cyprian of Carthage writes similarly:

> If, in the case of the worst sinners and those who formerly sinned much against God, when afterward they believe, the remission of their sins is granted and no one is held back from baptism and grace, how much more, then, should an infant not be held back, who, having but recently been born, has done no sin, except that, born of the flesh according to Adam, he has contracted the contagion of that old death from his first being born. For this very reason does he [an infant] approach more easily to receive the remission of sins: because the sins forgiven him are not his own but those of another.[26]

Finally, recognizing Christian baptism's relationship to Jewish circumcision, Cyprian defends the early Church's practice of baptizing infants: "As to what pertains to the case of infants: you [Fidus] said that they ought not to be baptized within the second or third day after their birth, that the old law of circumcision must be taken into consideration, and that you did not think that one should be baptized and sanctified within the eighth day after his birth. In our council it seemed to us far otherwise. No one agreed to the course which you thought should be taken. Rather, we all judge that the mercy and grace of God ought to be denied to no man born."[27]

14. Where is evidence for the sacrament of confirmation in the early Church?

The early Church administered the sacrament of confirmation from the earliest days, and the Catholic Church continues to administer it today. Scripture provides the evidence.

Isaiah prophesied that the promised Messiah would be specially anointed with the Holy Spirit (11:1–2). Jesus taught that *he* was that anointed one (Luke 4:14–21), and he promised his followers anointing with the Holy Spirit as well (John 7:38–39).

Thus, on the day of Pentecost, Peter commanded Christians to be both baptized and confirmed: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Peter's words point to three distinct events: repentance, baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit (confirmation).

The distinction between baptism and confirmation as unique events is even clearer in the baptism and confirmation of Samaria (Acts 8:14–17) as well as in Paul's experience at Ephesus (Acts 19:2–6). In regard to the former, Cyprian of Carthage explains that the Samarians were *not* re-baptized, as some supposed, but were confirmed:

> Those in Samaria who had believed had believed in the true faith, and it was by the deacon Philip, whom those same apostles had sent there, that they had been baptized inside—in the Church. . . . Since, then, they had already received a legitimate and ecclesiastical baptism, it was not necessary to baptize them again. Rather, that only which was lacking was done by Peter and John. The prayer having been made over them and hands having been imposed upon them, the Holy Spirit was invoked and was poured out upon them. This is even now the practice among us.[28]

Scripture seems clear enough on the matter, yet most non-Catholics fail to see a distinction between baptism and confirmation, so they do not recognize confirmation as a sacrament at all. The following select quotations from early Church Fathers and others demonstrate that the early Church did, indeed, recognize and administer confirmation as a distinct anointing with the Holy Spirit.

First, Tertullian describes the administration of confirmation right after baptism:

> After coming from the place of washing we are thoroughly anointed with a blessed unction, from the ancient discipline by which [those] in the priesthood . . . were accustomed to be anointed with a horn of oil, ever since Aaron was anointed by Moses. . . . So also with us, the unction runs on the body and profits us spiritually, in the same way that baptism itself is a corporal act by which we are plunged in water, while its effect is spiritual, in that we are freed from sins. After this, the hand is imposed for a blessing, invoking and inviting the Holy Spirit.[29]

Clearly, Tertullian recognizes in confirmation similarity with baptism yet distinction from it. Both profit spiritually: baptism forgives sins through the Holy Spirit; confirmation invokes the Holy Spirit "so that the soul may be illuminated."[30]

Hippolytus describes the administration of confirmation in the early Church as well, also noting its distinction from baptism:

> The bishop, imposing his hand on them, shall make an invocation, saying, "O Lord God, who made them worthy of the remission of sins through the Holy Spirit's washing unto rebirth, send into them your grace so that they may serve you according to your will, for there is glory to you, to the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit, in the holy Church, both now and through the ages of ages. Amen." Then, pouring the consecrated oil into his hand and imposing it on the head of the baptized, he shall say, "I anoint you with holy oil in the Lord, the Father Almighty, and Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit." Signing them on the forehead, he shall kiss them and say, "The Lord be with you." He that has been signed shall say, "And with your spirit." Thus shall he do to each.[31]

Cyprian of Carthage attests to the ordinary necessity of confirmation: "It is necessary for him that has been baptized also to be anointed, so that by his having received chrism, that is, the anointing, he can be the anointed of God and have in him the grace of Christ."[32] Confirmation is "necessary for the completion of baptismal grace" (CCC 1285). The *Catechism* (quoting *Lumen Gentium*) explains: "For by the sacrament of confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly

obliged to spread and defend the Faith by word and deed."

Finally, the Council of Carthage VII in 256 addresses a misinterpretation of Jesus' words, "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5), declaring that people "ought to be born again [initiated] in the Catholic Church by both sacraments [baptism and confirmation]."[33]

15. What did the early Church believe about the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist?

The early Church professed the same belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist that the Catholic Church continues to profess today: Jesus is wholly present—body, blood, soul, and divinity—under the appearance of bread and wine.

Jesus tells his disciples this: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" (John 6:53–55).

This was difficult for the apostles to understand, but they trusted Jesus (John 6:67–69). Understanding came later. Paul calls reception of the Eucharist "a participation in the blood of Christ" and "a participation in the body of Christ" (1 Cor. 10:16–17). He warns his readers, "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. . . . For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself" (11:27–29).

Scripture seems clear enough on the matter, yet most non-Catholics do not believe in the Real Presence. The following select quotations from early Church Fathers and their contemporaries demonstrate that the early Church did, indeed, profess the Real Presence.

Ignatius of Antioch defends the Real Presence against heretics: "They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our savior Jesus Christ."[34]

Justin Martyr explains the Real Presence in these terms: "For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ

our savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the eucharistic prayer set down by him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nurtured, is both the flesh and the blood of that incarnated Jesus."[35]

Similarly, Irenaeus writes that the bread consecrated at Mass "becomes the Eucharist, the body of Christ."[36] He states: "[Jesus] has declared the cup, a part of creation, to be his own blood, from which he causes our blood to flow; and the bread, a part of creation, he has established as his own body, from which he gives increase unto our bodies.[37] In agreement, Tertullian writes, "The flesh feeds [in the Eucharist] on the body and blood of Christ, that the soul likewise may be filled with God."[38]

Finally, Origen relates the Real Presence to manna: "Formerly, in an obscure way, there was manna for food; now, however, in full view, there is the true food, the flesh of the Word of God, as he himself says: 'My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink' [John 6:55]."[39] The Catholic Church continues to teach this today (CCC 1094).

16. Were all seven of the Catholic sacraments present in the early Church?

Non-Catholics sometime claim that the Catholic Church invented some (or all) of the sacraments. In truth, the seven sacraments administered by the Catholic Church today were all instituted by Jesus and have been administered by the Church since the first century. Sacramental terminology has varied over time, but the sacraments have always been there in form. The *Catechism* states:

> Christ instituted the sacraments of the new law. There are seven: baptism, confirmation (or chrismation), the Eucharist, penance, the anointing of the sick, holy orders and matrimony. The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life: they give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Christian's life of faith. There is thus a certain resemblance between the stages of natural life and the stages of the spiritual life (1210).

In previous answers concerning the sacraments of baptism, confirmation,

and the Eucharist, multiple quotations from early Church Fathers provide ample evidence that these three sacraments of initiation were present in the early Church. But what about the sacraments of healing (penance, anointing of the sick) and the sacraments of service (holy orders, matrimony)?

The following select quotations from early Church Fathers and others demonstrate that the sacraments of healing and service were, indeed, present in the early Church.

First, Ignatius of Antioch writes about the sacrament of penance: "For as many as are of God and of Jesus Christ are also with the bishop. And as many as shall, in the exercise of penance, return into the unity of the Church, these, too, shall belong to God, that they may live according to Jesus Christ."[40]

Origen, writing about methods of forgiveness, states, "[A final method], albeit hard and laborious [is] the remission of sins through penance, when the sinner . . . does not shrink from declaring his sin to a priest."[41]

Similarly, Cyprian of Carthage, writing in regard to the lapsi, declares, "Of how much greater faith and salutary fear are they who . . . confess their sins to the priests of God in a straightforward manner and in sorrow, making an open declaration of conscience?"[42] He goes on to exhort Christians regarding the importance of this sacrament: "I beseech you, brethren, let everyone who has sinned confess his sin while he is still in this world, while his confession is still admissible, while the satisfaction and remission made through the priests are still pleasing before the Lord."[43]

Next, Origen attests to not only the sacrament of penance, but also the sacrament of anointing of the sick: "[The penitent Christian] does not shrink from declaring his sin to a priest of the Lord and from seeking medicine . . . [of] which the apostle James says: 'If then there is anyone sick, let him call the presbyters of the Church, and let them impose hands upon him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him.'"[44]

Moving from the sacraments of healing to the sacraments of service, we find Ignatius of Antioch attesting to the sacrament of holy orders through his mention of bishops, priests, and deacons: "Take care to do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God, and with the presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles, and with the deacons, who are most dear to me, entrusted with the business of Jesus

Christ, who was with the Father from the beginning and is at last made manifest."[45]

Clement of Alexandria also recognizes the three orders as well as the holiness they bring to the Church: "Even here in the Church the gradations of bishops, presbyters, and deacons happen to be imitations, in my opinion, of the angelic glory and of that arrangement which, the scriptures say, awaits those who have followed in the footsteps of the apostles and who have lived in complete righteousness according to the gospel."[46]

Finally, we look once again to Clement for early testimony on the sacrament of matrimony. But first, we must acknowledge that marriage existed before Jesus built his Church. Even so, ancient Israel had a corrupt view of marriage (CCC 1610). Jesus turned that around, elevating marriage between Christians to the dignity of a sacrament (CCC 1601). The *Catechism* explains:

> In his preaching Jesus unequivocally taught the original meaning of the union of man and woman as the Creator willed it from the beginning: permission given by Moses to divorce one's wife was a concession to the hardness of hearts. The matrimonial union of man and woman is indissoluble: God himself has determined it "what therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder [Matt. 19:6]" (1614).

Thus, Clement attests to the permanence of the sacrament of matrimony:

> That Scripture counsels marriage, however, and never allows any release from the union, is expressly contained in the law: "You shall not divorce a wife, except for reason of immorality." And it regards as adultery the marriage of a spouse, while the one from whom a separation was made is still alive. "Whoever takes a divorced woman as wife commits adultery," it says; for "if anyone divorce his wife, he debauches her"; that is, he compels her to commit adultery. And not only does he that divorces her become the cause of this, but also he that takes the woman and gives her the opportunity of sinning; for if he did not take her, she would return to her husband.[47]

17. Should today's Church look and function just like the early Church?

Many non-Catholics, in their attempts to embrace authentic Christianity, look to the early Church for a description of what it looked like and acted like.

The idea is to then mimic what they find in order to claim authentic Church status. In the process, they often surmise that the Catholic Church today doesn't look a lot like that, therefore it must not be the true Church that Jesus founded. This is problematic on many levels.

Certainly, the doctrine preached in the early Church must still be adhered to today. But we've already seen many examples that prove that Catholic doctrine does, indeed, consistently adhere to the deposit of faith handed down through Sacred Tradition. The Church Fathers and other early Christian writings demonstrate this.

Even so, although doctrine does not change in the sense that the Church flip-flops on issues, it can and does develop over time as the Church comes to understand it better. As we have seen, Church councils are instrumental in this (see answer 8). Thus, the doctrine of the authentic Church must be consistent with the deposit of faith in its currently developed state. That's what we find in the Catholic Church.

Not everything the Catholic Church does today looks exactly as it did in the time of the apostles. Nearly 2,000 years of development in non-doctrinal areas has changed some things. To understand how this is acceptable, Christians must understand the difference between *doctrine* and *discipline* and be able to distinguish which of the two any particular matter may be.

Discipline is man-made and can be changed as often as the Church desires. This is not to say the authority to enact discipline is man-made. In fact, Scripture itself records the Church's God-given authority to enact discipline: "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18; see also Matt. 16:19). This power to bind and to loose extends beyond discipline, so it certainly includes the authority to enact discipline (see CCC 553).

To illustrate the difference between doctrine and discipline, we need only look at the Council of Jerusalem. This first-century council concluded with the following statement in a letter: "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well" (Acts 15:28–29).

Here we have what appears to be the apostles dictating, at a Church council

under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that Christians are not to eat the meat of animals sacrificed to idols, nor to consume blood, nor to eat the meat of an animal that has been strangled. Yet how many Christians adhere strictly to the latter two dictates today? They have unknowingly subscribed to the idea that the apostles imposed these last two requirements as disciplines that could later be changed.

Having said all this, there is one discipline of the early Church that has remained strikingly unchanged over the history of the Church: the celebration of the Mass. The *Catechism* outlines the order of early liturgies:

> As early as the second century we have the witness of St. Justin Martyr for the basic lines of the order of the eucharistic celebration. They have stayed the same until our own day for all the great liturgical families. St. Justin wrote to the pagan emperor Antoninus Pius (138–161) around the year 155, explaining what Christians did:
>
> On the day we call the day of the sun, all who dwell in the city or country gather in the same place.
>
> The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits.
>
> When the reader has finished, he who presides over those gathered admonishes and challenges them to imitate these beautiful things.
>
> Then we all rise together and offer prayers for ourselves . . . and for all others, wherever they may be, so that we may be found righteous by our life and actions, and faithful to the commandments, so as to obtain eternal salvation.
>
> When the prayers are concluded we exchange the kiss.
>
> Then someone brings bread and a cup of water and wine mixed together to him who presides over the brethren.
>
> He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and for a considerable time he gives thanks (Greek: *eucharistian*) that we have been judged worthy of these gifts.
>
> When he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all present give voice to an acclamation by saying: "Amen."
>
> When he who presides has given thanks and the people have responded, those whom we call deacons give to those present the "eucharisted" bread,

wine and water and take them to those who are absent (1345).

Non-Catholics should see in the Mass that the early Church—the Catholic Church—is still alive and well today.

18. What did the Bible look like in the early Church?

Since Protestants rely solely on Scripture for their faith, when they learn about the early Church and the role of Sacred Tradition, they often ask what was going on with the Bible during that time. The truth is, the canon of Scripture (the official list of the Bible's contents) was not settled during the early Church period. That doesn't mean Scripture played no part, but the Bible did not play the same role then as it does for many non-Catholics today (see answer 3).

As the New Testament books were written, they were not immediately recognized as Scripture by the Magisterium. It took some time for the many various writings of the first century to be sorted out and an official canon of the New Testament to be settled. Ever since that canon was settled, almost all Christians have continued to hold to it.

The Old Testament canon is a bit different. The Septuagint (a Greek version of the Old Testament translated by the Jews in the second and third centuries B.C.) was largely accepted in the early Church. In fact, Jesus and the New Testament authors, when quoting from the Old Testament, quote most often from the Septuagint.

This is important to know because, when the Old Testament canon was finally settled under the authority of Pope Damasus at the Council of Rome in 382, it looked a lot like the Septuagint. The Catholic Church continues to adhere to that same canon today.

However, during the Protestant Revolution, Protestants removed seven books from the Old Testament canon—Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch—as well as parts of two others—Daniel and Esther. They did so primarily for doctrinal reasons. Therefore, their bibles differ from Catholic Bibles today.

Many Protestants are taught that it was not their coevals who removed books from the canon, but Catholics who added books to it. They mistakenly believe that those books were never revered as Scripture by Christians. But select quotations from early Christian writings demonstrate that the early

Church did at least revere books that were removed from the canon by Protestants.

First, the Didache quotes from the book of Sirach: "You shall not waver with regard to your decisions [Sir. 1:28]. Do not be someone who stretches out his hands to receive but withdraws them when it comes to giving [Sir. 4:31]."[48]

Next, Clement of Rome draws from the book of Wisdom: "By the word of his might [God] established all things, and by his word he can overthrow them. 'Who shall say to him, "What have you done?" or who shall resist the power of his strength?' [Wis. 12:12]."[49] Polycarp of Smyrna quotes from the book of Tobit: "When you can do good, defer it not, because 'alms delivers from death' [Tob. 4:10, 12:9]."[50] Irenaeus cites a part of the book of Daniel that was removed from Protestant bibles:

> They shall hear those words to be found in Daniel the prophet: "O you seed of Canaan and not of Judah, beauty has deceived you and lust perverted your heart" [Dan. 13:56]. You that have grown old in wicked days, now your sins which you have committed before have come to light, for you have pronounced false judgments and have been accustomed to condemn the innocent and to let the guilty go free, although the Lord says, "You shall not slay the innocent and the righteous [Dan. 13:52, citing Exod. 23:7]."[51]

In the same work, Irenaeus also quotes from Baruch: "Look around Jerusalem toward the east and behold the joy which comes to you from God himself. Behold, your sons whom you have sent forth shall come: they shall come in a band from the east to the west. . . . God shall go before with you in the light of his splendor, with the mercy and righteousness which proceed from him' [Bar. 4:36–5:9]."[52]

Similar to Irenaeus, Hippolytus quotes from a part of the book of Daniel unique to the Bible as established by the Catholic Church:

> What is narrated here [in the story of Susannah] happened at a later time, although it is placed at the front of the book [of Daniel], for it was a custom with the writers to narrate many things in an inverted order in their writings. . . . We ought to give heed, beloved, fearing lest anyone be overtaken in any transgression and risk the loss of his soul, knowing as we do that God is the judge of all and the Word himself is the eye which

nothing that is done in the world escapes. Therefore, always watchful in heart and pure in life, let us imitate Susannah.[53]

Cyprian of Carthage quotes from several books eliminated from Protestant bibles. He cites the book of Wisdom: "In Genesis [it says], 'And God tested Abraham and said to him, "Take your only son whom you love, Isaac, and go to the high land and offer him there as a burnt offering"' [Gen. 22:1–2]. . . . Of this same thing in the Wisdom of Solomon [it says], 'Although in the sight of men they suffered torments, their hope is full of immortality' [Wis. 3:4]."[54]

Cyprian also quotes from 1 Maccabees: "Of this same thing in the Maccabees [it says], 'Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness'? [1 Macc. 2:52; see Jas. 2:21–23]."[55]

Finally, Cyprian also quotes from Daniel: "So Daniel, too, when he was required to worship the idol Bel, which the people and the king then worshipped, in asserting the honor of his God, broke forth with full faith and freedom, saying, 'I worship nothing but the Lord my God, who created the heaven and the earth' [Dan. 14:5]."[56]

19. Was there a "Great Apostasy" in the early Church?

One of the reasons why learning about the early Church is important is to refute the claim of a "Great Apostasy" sometime during the early Church period after Jesus ascended into heaven. Such a complete falling away is most notably claimed by Mormonism, and many other non-Catholic groups have adopted it. The idea is that no one can claim to have an unbroken line of succession from Jesus and the apostles to the present day.

In order to support such a radical claim, Paul's words are cited:

> Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him, we beg you, brethren, not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thess. 2:1–4; cf. Matt 24:3–12).

The word translated as "rebellion" in this passage is the Greek word *apostasia*, which signifies a state of separation from the true faith (see also Matt. 24:5). Seeing this passage as a prophecy of complete falling away of early Christians, non-Catholics claim that Christianity either went underground or disappeared completely during the early Church period, only to resurface as their group at a later date.

In reality, Paul envisions events—including an apostasy of some size—that will precede the Second Coming of Christ. Catholics recognize that these things will happen. The *Catechism* states, "Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers" (675). That's it. Paul does not envision a complete falling away here, nor does he envision an event unassociated with the end of time. He certainly knew that such an apostasy would be contrary to Christ's promises:

- "I will build my Church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).
- "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:20).
- "The Father . . . will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever" (John 14:16).

Indeed, Paul's own words elsewhere suggest that a "Great Apostasy" was the furthest thing from his mind: "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen" (Eph. 3:20–21). It is quite clear here that Paul envisions glory in the Church for ever and ever!

Thus, not only does Jesus promise that an event such as a "Great Apostasy" will never happen to his Church, but Paul clearly does not envision what non-Catholics imagine he does.

Furthermore, if a "Great Apostasy" supposedly happened in the early Church, where is the evidence for it? The truth is, there is absolutely no evidence for it whatsoever. Non-Catholics themselves are hard-pressed to come up with anything even resembling historical documentation of it. On the contrary, the Church Fathers, early councils, and other Christian writings from the early Church provide irrefutable evidence that a "Great Apostasy" did *not* occur at any time.

From Peter's appointment as first pope (Matt. 16:18) to Pope Francis, his 264th successor, the chain of papal succession leaves no room for a Great Apostasy. Similarly significant, every bishop in the Church today is a successor to an apostle. The Great Apostasy is simply a myth. Indeed, the Second Vatican Council taught:

> That divine mission, entrusted by Christ to the apostles, will last until the end of the world, since the gospel they are to teach is for all time the source of all life for the Church. And for this reason the apostles, appointed as rulers in this society, took care to appoint successors (*Lumen Gentium* 20).

Christians owe a great debt of gratitude, indeed, to the early Church—to Jesus, Peter, the apostles, and beyond—for maintaining and handing on the authentic Christian faith.

20. How do I learn more about the early Church Fathers, Christian writings, and councils?

Given the material presented here, there can be no founded doubt that the early Church evidences the divinely guided beginnings of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church—the Catholic Church—that Jesus founded. This evidence, though, merely scratches the surface of the plethora that exists to this day.

For readers desiring to delve further into the early Church, below are suggestions for getting started.

The Apostolic Fathers:

- *Early Christian Writings*, edited by Maxwell Staniforth and Andrew Louth

The Church Fathers:

- *Church Fathers: From Clement of Rome to Augustine* by Pope Benedict XVI
- *Church Fathers and Teachers: From Saint Leo the Great to Peter Lombard* by Pope Benedict XVI
- *The Fathers Know Best* by Jimmy Akin
- *The Faith of the Early Fathers* (three volumes), edited by William Jurgens
- *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325* (ten volumes), edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson

- *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Series I* (fourteen volumes), edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace
- *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Series II* (fourteen volumes), edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace

The three reference sources just mentioned are commonly referred to as "the thirty-eight volume set of Church Fathers." It was published over a century ago and remains among the most popular and readily available resources available today. It is accessible online at this website: http://www.newadvent.org/fathers.

Church Councils:

- *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (two volumes), edited by Norman P. Tanner, S.J.

Historical Source Texts of Catholic Teaching:

- *Heinrich Denzinger: Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, edited by Peter Hunermann (English edition edited by Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash)

Church History:

- *Ecclesiastical History*, by Eusebius

1 *Against Heresies*, 3:3:3.
2 Ibid., 3:3:2.
3 Ibid., 3:3:3.
4 Pope Benedict XVI: *Church Fathers: From Clement of Rome to Augustine* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), 53.
5 Epistle to the Smyrnaeans, 8:2; see also CCC 830.
6 *Who Is the Rich Man That Is Saved?*, 21:3–5.
7 *Antidote Against the Scorpion*, 10.
8 *Modesty*, 21:9–10.
9 *Commentary on Matthew*, 13:31.
10 *The Unity of the Catholic Church* (first edition), 4.
11 *Against Heresies*, 3:3:3.
12 *The Unity of the Catholic Church* (first edition), 4.

13 *Letters*, 59:14.
14 *Church History*, 3:4:9–10.
15 *Letter to the Corinthians*, 42:4–5, 44:1–3.
16 *Against Heresies*, 3:3:1.
17 Ibid., 4:26:2.
18 Ibid.
19 *Demurrer Against the Heretics*, 20.
20 Ibid., 21.
21 Ibid., 32.
22 *Against Heresies*, 2:22:4.
23 *The Apostolic Tradition*, 21:16.
24 *Homilies on Leviticus*, 8:3.
25 *Commentaries on Romans*, 5:9.
26 *Letters*, 64:2.
27 Ibid., 64:5.
28 Ibid., 73 [72]:9.
29 *Baptism*, 7:1–2, 8:1.
30 *The Resurrection of the Dead*, 8:2–3.
31 *The Apostolic Tradition*, 21–22.
32 *Letters*, 7:2.
33 *Seventh Carthage.*
34 *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, 7:1.
35 *First Apology*, 66.
36 *Against Heresies*, 5:2.
37 Ibid.
38 *The Resurrection of the Dead*, 8.
39 *Homilies on Numbers*, 7:2.
40 *Letter to the Philadelphians*, 3.
41 *Homilies on Leviticus*, 2:4.
42 *The Lapsed*, 15:28.
43 Ibid.
44 *Homilies on Leviticus*, 2:4.
45 *Letter to the Magnesians*, 6:1.
46 *Miscellanies*, 6:13:107:2.
47 Ibid., 2:23:145:3.

48 Didache, 4:5.
49 *Letter to the Corinthians*, 27:5.
50 *Letter to the Philadelphians*, 10.
51 *Against Heresies*, 4:26:3.
52 Ibid., 5:35:1.
53 *Commentary on Daniel.*
54 *Treatises*, 7:3:15.
55 Ibid.
56 *Letters*, 55:5.

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