ACADEMIC ESSAY:

ON THE HISTORY OF LENT

SUBMITTED BY ALICIA BRITT CHOLE

AUGUST 16, 2013

TOWARD THE FULFILLMENT OF

CHTH 511 AND 512 CHRISTIAN HISTORY AND THEOLOGY

PROFESSOR: LEAH PAYNE

**Introduction**

On Quilts and Threads and Beginnings

The Lenten season begins. It is time to be with you, Lord, in a special way, a time to pray, to fast, and thus to follow you on your way to Jerusalem, to Golgotha, and to the final victory over death.

I am still so divided. I truly want to follow you, but I also want to follow my own desires and lend an ear to the voices that speak about prestige, success, human respect, pleasure, power, and influence. Help me to become deaf to these voices and more attentive to your voice, which calls me to choose the narrow road to life.

I know that Lent is going to be very hard for me. The choice for your way has to be made every moment of my life. I have to choose thoughts that are your thoughts, words that are your words, and actions that are your actions. There are no times or places without choices. And I know how deeply I resist choosing you.

Please, Lord, be with me at every moment and in every place. Give me the strength and the courage to live this season faithfully, so that, when Easter comes, I will be able to taste with joy the new life that you have prepared for me. Amen.[[1]](#footnote-1)

*Henri Nouwen’s prayer for Ash Wednesday*

Before us lies a two-thousand-year-old heirloom quilt. Some portions are missing. They have slipped into the dark chasm of lost history, leaving nothing but space and speculation. Other portions are obviously unoriginal. They bear the loving evidence of being a repatching, a rezoning, an offering of newer fabric sown by less ancient hands.

Much work has been done by many scholars to reconstruct what is now absent, to track the origin of what remains, to trace the source of each worn, faith-sewn thread back to its beginnings. However, beginnings are mysterious things: part breath, part hope, part fumble, part grace.

The weighty beauty of this heirloom rests not in its satisfyingly discernible beginnings, but in the warmth of soul it still offers to communities and individuals today.

Roots are perhaps the most humble of God’s creations on earth. They require neither acknowledgment nor praise. Their reward is reaped when the living stand upon them and reach for the fruit the roots made possible. Such is the story of Lent.

Beginning at the End

“What is your commitment this year, Mommy?” my daughter inquires with discerning eyes. Last year, we both made commitments to honor the poor. Keona did what she loved (baking) to raise funds for children in need. I devoted the year to simplicity, choosing to not spend money on adding anything physical to my personal life—from shampoo to shoes. “This year I am fasting sweets and desserts,” I reply. Then dear Keona offers one word that connects my ten-year-old with the wisest of ancient thinkers. “Why?” she asks simply.

Why, indeed.

My annual fasts, seasonal forty-day fasts, and weekly twelve- to twenty-four hour fasts are more love offerings than disciplines, though it certainly requires discipline to maintain them. In short, I ache. I ache for my Bridegroom. I ache to live every waking moment conscious of His presence. I ache to live aware of His past and present suffering. I ache to live unattached to what man counts and measures. In many ways, my fasts are Lenten experiences, and as with the history of Lent, it is difficult for me to discern which came first: the discipline of fasting or the journey of Lent. Did they grow up together? Did one mature into the other? Are they two distinct experiences that fused over time? These are the questions that, in part, shroud the subject before us in mystery.

The etymology of the word *Lent* enjoys an easy consensus among scholars. In earlier times, the English word *Lent* carried the meaning of “springtime.” As *The Lenten Triodion* poetically states, “Lent signifies not winter but spring, not darkness but light, not death but renewed vitality.”[[2]](#footnote-2) According to Fr. William P. Saunders, professor of catechetics and theology at Christendom’s Notre Dame Graduate School in Alexandria, the Anglo-Saxon word *lectentid* “literally means not only ‘springtide’ but also was the word for ‘March,’ the month in which the majority of Lent falls.”[[3]](#footnote-3) In Greek, *Lent* is *tessarakosti*, and in Latin, *quadragesima*, both of which emphasize the number forty, a number rich in biblical significance.

In origin, however, Lent’s history is far less obvious. Fifty years ago, an essay on the history of Lent could have been penned with greater certainty…and with greater error. Scholars affirm that we simply know less than we used to about Lent. Rev. Dr. Alexander Schmemann of Orthodox faith states that

Great Lent as we know it today is the fruit of a long and extremely complex historical development, not all aspects of which have been adequately studied. Several questions still remain unanswered and much work—and not only in the area of secondary details—remains to be done.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Catholic scholar Nicholas V. Russo explains that “[t]oday the history of Lent’s origins is far less certain because many of the suppositions upon which the standard theory rested have been cast into doubt.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

This essay will be organized in five sections, exclusive of introduction and conclusion. The first section will identify ancient words preceding the 325 AD Council of Nicaea that have been studied over the centuries by scholars in their search for the origins of Lent. The second section will address post-Nicene writings regarding “the forty” that some attribute to the development of Lent. The evolution of Lenten scholarship will be examined in the third section. In the fourth section, several historical Lenten practices will be reviewed. The fifth and final section will seek to paint a picture of modern Lenten meaning through words that have been offered to describe Lent’s purpose.

**Ancient Words**

Several ancient pre-Nicene texts are consistently referenced by Catholic, Orthodox, and Evangelical scholars alike in the search for the origins of Lent. A scholarly review and comparison of these specific texts would be a fascinating and worthy addition to this field of study. In Table 1 I have attempted to list and organize these texts by approximate dates and key phrases.

**Table 1. Pre-Nicene texts referenced in scholarship regarding the origin of Lent**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Approximate dates | Ancient work or author | Key concepts and phrases |
| c. 120–c. 202 | St. Irenaeus of Lyons (Gaul)  | fast, variety, one day or two, forty hours |
| c. 150–c. 212 | Tertullian (North Africa), *Concerning Baptism* 19;*On the Fasts* 2, 13–14 *(Patrologia Latina] ii,* 956, 971–974*.* | one day, forty hours |
| 2nd C | *Didache* | fast, baptism, preparation for the sacrament[[6]](#footnote-6) |
| 2nd C | Justin Martyr in *First Apology*, 61 | fasting, baptismal candidates[[7]](#footnote-7) |
| c. 185–c. 254 | Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 10.2:5–6 | forty days, fasting  |
| c. 215 (if authored by Hippolytus) *Table 1,* *continued* | *Apostolic Tradition* 2, 30, 2-9; 21, 1–5 | Final examination and preparation in the days before Baptism (Ch 20), Fasting (Ch. 23), Fasting at Easter (Ch. 33) |
| Approximate dates | Ancient work or author | Key concepts and phrases |
| 50 years after Origen? | *Canons of Hippolytus* | fast, the forty, God fasted on our behalf |
| d. 264 | Dionysius of Alexander | fast of up to six days |
| c. 313 | *Canon 1 of St. Peter of Alexandria* | other forty days, bewailing their faults |
| 3rd C | *Didascalia Apostolorum* | fast, days of Pascha, from the second day of the week |

Irenaeus’ words come to us through Eusebius’s chronicles of church history*.* Mentored by Polycarp, who sat at the feet of the Apostle John, Irenaeus has for good reason been cited repeatedly on the subject of Lent’s origins:

The dispute is not only about the day, but also about the actual character of the fast. Some think that they ought to fast for one day, some for two, others for still more; some make their ‘day’ last forty hours on end.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Upon reading the surrounding text in Eusebius’ *History of the Church*, it appears that from Eusebius’ perspective—writing over a hundred years after Irenaeus’ death—“the dispute” referred to a serious disagreement between churches in Asia and the church in Rome over when “the paschal fast”[[9]](#footnote-9) should end. An assembly of bishops ruled in favor of what Eusebius described as an apostolic practice:

A question of no small importance arose at that time. For the parishes of all Asia, as from an older tradition, held that the fourteenth day of the moon, on which day the Jews were commanded to sacrifice the lamb, should be observed as the feast of the Savior’s passover. It was therefore necessary to end their fast on that day, whatever day of the week it should happen to be. But it was not the custom of the churches in the rest of the world to end it at this time, as they observed the practice which, *from apostolic tradition*, has prevailed to the present time, of terminating the fast on no other day than on that of the resurrection of our Saviour.[[10]](#footnote-10)

After the assembly’s ruling, Bishop Polycrates wrote a letter defending the Asian church’s continued observance of ending the fast at Passover, based upon the practices of many “great lights”[[11]](#footnote-11) who had served and died in Asia.[[12]](#footnote-12) In context, Irenaeus’ oft-quoted words were written as a response to an escalation in this conflict. His letter was penned to rebuke and correct the actions of Victor I, Bishop of Rome, who dramatically excommunicated the churches of Asia in response to Polycrates’ letter. To what extent Victor’s reaction had to do with exerting the supremacy of the church of Rome, movements away from traditional Jewish customs, or the actual practice of fasting, we are left to wonder. However, Irenaeus’ words of correction are rather clarion: his concern was peace, not practice.

And this variety in its observance has not originated in our time; but long before in that of our ancestors. It is likely that they did not hold to strict accuracy, and thus formed a custom for their posterity according to their own simplicity and peculiar mode. Yet all of these lived none the less in peace, and we also live in peace with one another; and the disagreement in regard to the fast confirms the agreement in the faith.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Of interest (if only to this student) is this difference in tone between Irenaeus’ actual words and the historical context supplied by Eusebius. Irenaeus, writing closer to the day of the Apostles, emphasized a long history of living in peace with varied fasting practices. Eusebius, writing closer to the day of unprecedented favor for Christians, identified two “customs,” and grants one the status of “apostolic tradition.” Perhaps focus on manifest customs flourishes in times of favor. Or, conversely, perhaps focus on faith-fueled unity flourishes in times when the church is regularly reminded that they are aliens and strangers on this earth.

In between the “one day,” “two days,” or “forty hours” seen in the *Apostolic Tradition,*[[14]](#footnote-14) Tertullian,[[15]](#footnote-15) and Irenaeus and the “forty days” of *Canon 1 of St. Peter*,[[16]](#footnote-16) *Canons of Hippolytus*,*[[17]](#footnote-17)* and Origen*,*[[18]](#footnote-18) Dionysius of Alexandria[[19]](#footnote-19) and the *Didascalia Apostolorum* refer to a six-day “fast in the days of Pascha from the second day of the week.” [[20]](#footnote-20)

At first glance, then, ancient pre-Nicene texts speak of a one- to two-day or forty-hour fast immediately preceding Resurrection Sunday; a six-day pre-paschal fast; and fasts of forty days. Fr. William P. Saunder theorizes that “Lent became more regularized after the legalization of Christianity is A.D. 313.”[[21]](#footnote-21) Late nineteenth-century Anglican minister Herman Lilienthal Lonsdale agrees, adding that the “tendency of thought within the Church now led to centralization and some seat of authority. The influence of the State upon the Church became paramount, and it looked to the State for models of its constitutions, division, usages.”[[22]](#footnote-22) In other words, the alliance of church and state created a thirst for uniformity in practice.

Then, in 325 A.D., as described by Nicholas V. Russo of the University of Notre Dame:

[t]he Council of Nicea issued canons intended to bring general alignment on matters of liturgical practice and church organization. Among these was the establishment of a common date for the Easter feast that, up until that time, had been commemorated on different days in a given year depending on the method of calculation.[[23]](#footnote-23)

We can surmise that Lent’s establishment before Easter was part of a broader movement toward alignment and standardization begun at the Council of Nicea and continued throughout the fourth century.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Only following the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. did the length of Lent become fixed at forty days, and then only nominally.[[25]](#footnote-25)

**Post-Nicene Writings**

In Table 2, I have sought to compile the various post-Nicene writings referenced in the research. When considered side by side, Tables 1 and 2 hint visually at the development of both fasting and pre-paschal practices in the fourth- and fifth-century church. References to one-day, two-day, and forty-hourfasts fade, and forty-day fasts become clearly prominent. The six-day fast, spoken of by Dionysius of Alexandria and in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, seems to develop into (or be renamed as) a pre-paschal Holy Week (or Great Week) fast.[[26]](#footnote-26)Further, the post-Nicene forty-dayfast references are associated with Pascha and/or baptism and/or penance. Please note that in Table 2, original document text is identified with quotations and the works that reference the original texts are footnoted.

**Table 2. Post-Nicene texts referenced in scholarship regarding the origin of Lent**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Approximate dates | Ancient work or author | Key words and phrases |
| c. 335 | St. Athanasius in his “Festal Letters” for the years 329-334[[27]](#footnote-27)*Canons of Athanasius* | “holy fast,” forty-day fast prior to Holy Week[[28]](#footnote-28)forty days of penance fasting for readmission to Eucharist[[29]](#footnote-29) |
| 381–384 | Egeria in *Itinerarium* 30.1 or *Egeria’s Travels* [London 1971], pp. 128-139 | forty-day fast,[[30]](#footnote-30) “Great Week” distinct from rest of Lent[[31]](#footnote-31) |
| 385 | Siricius, Bishop of Rome, letter to Himerius of Terragona in Spain | “forty day” reference to a prepaschal program for preparation of baptismal candidates[[32]](#footnote-32) |
| *Table 2,* *continued* |  |  |
| Approximate dates | Ancient work or author | Key words and phrases |
| 387 | St. John Chrysostom in Antioch in *Homilies on Genesis*, 30.1-3 | forty days of fasting[[33]](#footnote-33) |
|  | Epiphanios for Cyprus | forty days of fasting[[34]](#footnote-34) |
| 387 | Augustine is baptized at the Easter Vigil April 24-25, 387[[35]](#footnote-35) |  |
| c. 380–c. 450 | Byzantine historian Socrates in *Historia Ecclesiastica 5.22* | “fasts before Easter,” “three weeks excepting Saturdays and Sundays,” “keeps the fast for six weeks,” “Forty Days,” “fast seven weeks before the feast” [[36]](#footnote-36) |
| d. 444 | St. Cyril of Alexandria in his “Festal Letters” | forty-day period of fasting[[37]](#footnote-37) |
| d. 461 | Pope St. Leo | “fulfill with their fasts the Apostolic institution of the forty days”[[38]](#footnote-38) |
| late 4th C | *Apostolic Constitutions* (V.13.3–4) | fast “of the Holy Week of Pascha” after the forty-day fast[[39]](#footnote-39) |
| 5th C | Sozomen in *Histo.Eccl*, 7, 19 | “the so-called Forty Days before Pascha…some begin at 6 weeks… others at 7 weeks.”[[40]](#footnote-40) |

**On the Evolution of Scholarship regarding Lenten Origins**

“Even now,” declares the Lord,
   “return to me with all your heart,
    with fasting and weeping and mourning.”

Rend your heart
    and not your garments.
Return to the Lord your God,
    for he is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and abounding in love,
    and he relents from sending calamity.

*Joel 2:12–13*

Joel, clearly, was not writing about Lent. I make this obvious point to emphasize that prior to the dawn of the church, fasting served multiple purposes in multiple contexts and, from God’s perspective, was valuable to the extent that it reflected a posture of the heart. As ministers and scholars of the last century sought out the early roots of Lent, an assumption guided some that ancient writings that mentioned fasting were part of a larger discussion on preparation for baptism, and that the season preferred for baptism was Easter. Therefore, writings about fasting in general and forty-day fasts in particular shed light upon the development of Lent.

Further, since the spiritual grandson of the Apostle John (Ireneaus) spoke of fasts in connection to Resurrection Sunday and referred to varying practices dating back to the time of his “ancestors,”[[41]](#footnote-41) it was commonly believed that Lent’s origins were apostolic.

Many of the theology handbooks of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century confidently claimed that Lent was established by the apostles themselves or in the immediate post-apostolic period at the latest. They assumed this season of fasting was closely connected with preparation for Easter baptisms—a practice likewise considered to be of apostolic foundation (cf. Romans 6) and observed everywhere throughout the Church since its earliest days.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Highly respected spiritual leaders and scholars affirmed the apostolic roots of Lent, including Robert Bellarmine[[43]](#footnote-43) (1593), Bishop Lancelot Andrewes[[44]](#footnote-44) (1555–1626), John Cosins[[45]](#footnote-45) (1627 *Collection of Private Devotions*), Herman Lilienthal Lonsdale[[46]](#footnote-46) (1895 *Lent, Past and Present; a Study of the Primitive Origin of Lent, Its Purpose and Usages*), and within the last decade, Fr. William P. Saunder[[47]](#footnote-47) (2006).

Whereas some believed that the forty-day Lenten fast extended back to the time of the apostles, others believed that the forty-day fast grew from the one-day, two-day, or forty-hour fasts spoken of by Irenaeus and Tertullian.[[48]](#footnote-48) These shorter, pre-Easter fasts—coinciding with Jesus’ time in the tomb—then evolved into the pre-Nicene mention of a six-day pre-paschal fast.[[49]](#footnote-49) This in turn evolved into a “three-week fast before baptism…[and a] six-week fast for catechumens that would be baptized on the Feast of the Resurrection”[[50]](#footnote-50) (thirty-six days—six weeks minus Sundays—being considered by some as a “tithe” of the year).[[51]](#footnote-51) Finally, an extra four days were added to arrive at a forty-day lenten fast[[52]](#footnote-52)—forty being a number weighted with biblical significance.

Enter scholars Nicholas V. Russo, John Paul Abdelsayed, and Maxwell Johnson, who reconsidered key premises upon which previous theories had been based. They concluded, in the concise words of Johnson, that “[i]n its origins, therefore, ‘Lent’ has nothing to do with Easter at all but everything to do with the final training of candidates for baptism.”[[53]](#footnote-53) On this emphasis, Schmemann’s words are simply beautiful:

In the early Church, the main purpose of Lent was to prepare the ‘catechumen,’ i.e., the newly converted Christian, for baptism which at that time was performed during the Paschal liturgy. But even when the Church rarely baptized adults and the institution of the catechumenate disappeared, the basic meaning of Lent remained the same. For even though we are baptized, what we constantly lose and betray is precisely that which we received at Baptism. There Easter is our return every year to our own Baptism, whereas Lent is our preparation for that return—the slow and sustained effort to perform, at the end, our own ‘passage’ or ‘pascha’ into the new life in Christ.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Orthodox scholars John Paul Abdelsayed and Moses Sammaan add, “It is now believed that the theory of a single origin of the Great Lent cannot be sustained. It is more likely that the emergence of the pre-Paschal Lent is due to the fusion and confusion of several pre-Nicene patterns of fasting, penitence, and pre-baptismal preparation.”[[55]](#footnote-55)

How did centuries of semi-certainty dissolve? Allow this student to quote at length from the excellent work of Nicholas V. Russo:

First, scholars no longer take for granted the antiquity and ubiquity of Paschal baptism. Tertullian, admittedly, indicates that Easter was a “most solemn day for baptism,” but he is only one of a handful of writers in the pre-Nicene period (that is, before 325 a.d.) who indicates this preference and even he says that Easter was by no means the only favored day for baptisms in his locale. Easter baptism does not become widespread until the mid-fourth century…

Second, the fasts observed before baptism described in many pre-Nicene sources are no longer presumed to be pre-paschal or related in any way to Lent…. Previously, scholars assumed these and other pre-baptismal fasts were pre-paschal and related to, if not identical, with the early Lent. With Easter baptism no longer the ancient and widespread custom once thought, these baptismal fasts too were reexamined. Rather than being part of a proto-Lent, they are now interpreted simply as free-floating periods of fasting undertaken whenever baptisms were administered.

Third, developing research on Holy Week and the Triduum has shown that these periods are not the cores of a gradually lengthening pre-Easter fast, but are actually separate periods to which the forty-day Lent has been joined or overlaps.[[56]](#footnote-56)

In other words, if fasting is not always associated with baptism and baptism is not always associated with Easter, then the bridge is out between ancient mentions of fasts and Resurrection Sunday. What remains? Again, we turn at length to Russo:

The current state of research points to three possible conclusions. Because the evidence is slim and admitting of any number of plausible interpretations, one position has been to view Lent as a *sui generis* phenomenon—completely new and unique—that simply appears after the Council of Nicea. In this view, any attempt to hazard connections or lines of evolution from pre-Nicene fasting practices is too speculative to be of any value.

Another, rather opposite, position has been to accept as historical the alleged Egyptian post-Theophany fast, to identify it as the dominant antecedent to Lent, and that Lent’s rapid dissemination throughout the Christian world is best explained in relation to the program of liturgical and theological alignment begun at Nicea.

A final position, a sort of *via media* or middle road, acknowledges the incomplete and sometimes-contradictory nature of the evidence, but asserts nonetheless that Lent develops as an amalgamation of several early fasting customs and typologies of which the post-Theophany fast (if it existed) may have been but one of many. As with most issues in the study of the early history of the liturgy, certainty is elusive and we must be satisfied with possibilities.[[57]](#footnote-57)

In the research, I found no proponents of Russo’s first option, viewing Lent as something new that inexplicably appeared after 325 AD. Among the scholars who acknowledged the collapse of earlier, simpler, “backward extension”[[58]](#footnote-58) Lenten origin theories, most shared rather strong agreement on the prominent role baptismal preparation played in the origins of what came to be known as Lent. After discussing evidence from Rome, Jerusalem, Spain, North Africa, Naples, and Constantinople, Maxwell Johnson (cited in many of the peer-reviewed articles[[59]](#footnote-59) as a leading source on this issue) concludes the following:

I should like to suggest, therefore, that the three-week period of baptismal preparation indicated in the Lenten portions of various liturgical sources refers originally not to a pre-paschal Lent at all, but to an early and perhaps independent period of final baptismal preparation by itself. Such a hypothesis is admittedly conjectural and speculative but, if correct, would go a long way towards explaining how Lent itself may have developed. When Easter finally became the preferred time for baptism, this independent ‘free-floating-three-week period’ would have naturally become attached to it as the final period of catechetical instruction and preparation now in the pre-paschal context.

And, if this is correct, then the forty days of Lent represent a synthesis of two traditions, both of which are baptismal in their origins and orientation: the forty-day Alexandrian post-Epiphany fast, and a three-week baptismal preparation period elsewhere.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Allow me to repeat the personal musings in the Introduction: *Which came first, the discipline of fasting or the journey of Lent? Did they grow up together? Did one mature into the other? Are they two distinct experiences that fused over time?* From this vantage point, it appears that pre-baptismal preparation fasts preceded Lent and that, though prior, such fasts became and have remained an integral part of Lenten observance even long after their ancient baptismal context lessened in universal emphasis.

**A Review of Historical Lenten Practices**

One of the delightful discoveries in the research was the mosaic of practices associated with Lenten observance. Obviously, not all practices were manifest in all ages by all who honored Lent. Of Lent’s many practices, only a few—most of which were more frequently substantiated in the research[[61]](#footnote-61)—are listed alphabetically below. It is well beyond the scope of this paper to create a timeline for each practice (though such a chronology would be fascinating). In the same way, it is sadly beyond the scope of this project to contrast the practices and liturgy of the Eastern Orthodox[[62]](#footnote-62) and Western Roman Catholic Churches preceding and following the Great Schism of 1042 A.D.[[63]](#footnote-63)

Abstinence from Public Entertainment

Theatres, horse racing, and public games were strongly discouraged during the holy season of Lent.[[64]](#footnote-64) For many spiritual leaders, there was an inherent dissonance between the sobriety of the Lenten season and the temporal glitter of public entertainment. An excellent example of this prohibition is preserved in a Lenten sermon rebuke from Archbishop of Constantinople St. John Chrysostom (347–407 AD):

When I consider, how at one blast of the devil ye have forgotten all my daily admonitions, and continued discourses, and run to that pomp of Satan, the horse race in the Circus; with what heart can I think of preaching to you again who have so soon let slip all that I said before? This is what chiefly raises my grief, yea, my anger and indignation, that together with my admonition ye have cast the reverence of this holy season of Lent out of your souls, and thrown yourselves into the nets of the devil.[[65]](#footnote-65)

As I have informally observed the growing interest in Lent among my colleagues and friends, abstaining from public entertainment is among the most common Lenten commitments. However, this commitment manifests not in avoiding fairs and sporting events as much as it manifests in the realm of fasting social media. Frequently, as Lent begins, posts appear on social media sites alerting “friends” that a forty-day fast from social media is commencing. Whereas St. Chrysostom expresses concern over the “nets of the devil” cast by public entertainment, modern abstinence from public entertainment seems less motivated by avoiding sin and more inspired by both a longing to unplug and a concern that perhaps our souls have become addicted to (but unsatisfied by) online interaction.

*Abstinence from Sexual Relations*

The call to Lenten marital sexual abstinence appeared in three sources, all of which were penned by Orthodox scholars.[[66]](#footnote-66) Then Dean of St. Vladimar’s Seminary, Fr. Thomas Hopko, explained that in the original language, *chastity*

is a combination of the word for wholeness and integrity, and the word for wisdom and understanding. This basically is what chastity is: soundness and wholeness, completeness and sanity. It is not something physical or biological. It is not something negative… It is a spiritual condition…There is an obsession with sexuality in our time. We have come to idolize sexual activity. We virtually enthrone it in the place of God in our lives….The Lord Jesus Christ was chaste. So was His mother Mary. So was His greatest disciple and prophet, the one whom He called the greatest born of woman, the forerunner and baptizer John.[[67]](#footnote-67)

The Lenten Triodion adds:

The abstinence of married couples, then, has as its aim not the suppression but the purification of sexuality. Such abstinence, practiced “with mutual consent for a time.” has always the positive aim, “‘that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer” (1 Cor. 7:5). Self-restraint, so far from indicating a dualist depreciation of the body, serves on the contrary to confer upon the sexual side of marriage a spiritual dimension which might otherwise be absent.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Apart from the residual decrease in the number of December births and perhaps the indirect provision of relief to some women who otherwise suffered from chronic headaches, the intention of this Lenten practice appears to be the encouragement of spiritual intimacy in marriage and sexual self-control in the life of believers.

*Almsgiving*

Considered part of a “triad” along with prayer and fasting,[[69]](#footnote-69) almsgiving and fasting (to be examined below) are from ancient times inextricable. As *The Lenten Triodion* expounds:

The second-century *Shepherd of Hermas* insists that the money saved through fasting is to be given to the widow, the orphan and the poor. (Similitudes, V, iii, 7.) But almsgiving means more than this. It is to give not only our money but our time, not only what we *have* but what we *are*; it is to give a part of ourselves.[[70]](#footnote-70)

In an interview with a local Catholic priest esteemed as a historian, almsgiving was mentioned as one of the primary practices of Lent. Fr. Lewis—in providing an example of how almsgiving works in his church—explained that Lent is

a time of identifying more closely with the poor. That is where the almsgiving comes in. Almsgiving is not tithing…it doesn’t hurt any of us to give something up. Whether it’s giving up our cigarettes—I don’t smoke so that wouldn’t be a hardship—I don’t drink beer except very, very occasionally so that wouldn’t be a hardship. But I love ice-cream. Okay, so if I give up ice-cream, I don’t keep that money but I kind of calculate: “How much do I normally spend a week on ice-cream?” I give that as an alms to the poor…. [For example] yesterday we fed…about 25 families…Well this is a perfect way to do that. It’s a safe way rather than just giving it to someone out on the street that’s holding up a sign. We know these people have apply. We know they’re on food stamps. We know that they need food, they need help. So, we help them… So [this is] a safe way, a good way, to [give] our alms.[[71]](#footnote-71)

*Christian Initiation*

According to Patrician Mann,[[72]](#footnote-72) Christian Initiation—known today as the Rites of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA)—was historically an intense process for the participants (*competentes*). Citing Ambrose (340–397 A.D.), Mann refers to five stages of ancient Christian Initiation:

1) enrollment, 2) Lenten formation, 3) the Rites of Initiation, 4) the celebration of the Easter Eucharist, and 5) a period of mystagogy or daily instruction on the meaning of the sacraments during the week following Easter… To approach the exact elements of the Lenten discipline, the *competentes* embraced a strict regimen. According to Augustine [354–430 AD], they were expected to fast each day until the ninth hour. They also abstained from all meat and wine and kept their diet bland and simple. On Sundays and Holy Thursday, the fast was lifted, while on Holy Saturday, it was tightened so that they, together with all the faithful, would take neither food nor drink. If married, the *competentes* were to fast from sex. They also distributed alms and occasionally spent all night praying. Finally the *competentes* were not allowed to bathe—an ancient tradition alluded to as early as the *Apostolic Tradition.* This involved not only physical discomfort, but breaking with the social life of the public baths. The fast from bathing ended on Holy Thursday.[[73]](#footnote-73)

The purpose, according to Augustine [354–430 A.D.], was to grind the *competentes* as grain into flour for making that bread he called the *corpus mysticum Christi* which he thought of as both church and Eucharist.[[74]](#footnote-74)

Though certainly a world away from the popular evangelical practice of welcoming souls into the church through a 30-second sinners’ prayer, the Catholic Church still practices a paschal Rite of Christian Initiation, as evidenced in the 1988 Vatican-issued circular letter *Paschalis Solemnitatis*. According to Servite Priest Fr. John M. Huels, this letter points out “the centrality of the rite of Christian initiation during the paschal season of Lent/Easter, and this emphasis on initiation recurs repeatedly in the document.”[[75]](#footnote-75)

*Fasting*

A dissertation could easily be devoted to exploring Lenten fasts. The practice of fasting has been politically, socially, and ecclesiastically laden with meaning since early times. Though not the source of dividing lines drawn through the great schisms of the church, fasting certainly has been a matter of heated discussion between the Orthodox East and Roman Catholic West, as well as among the Reformers of the sixteenth century, many of whom equated fasting with yet another works-based deception.[[76]](#footnote-76)

The days and length of the Lenten fast have varied from city to city and tradition to tradition. [[77]](#footnote-77) For example, in early times, believers in Jerusalem fasted over a period of eight weeks, totaling forty days exclusive of Saturday and Sunday. However, in Rome the fast lasted six weeks and included Saturdays.[[78]](#footnote-78) Likewise, permissible foods varied as evidenced by Pope St. Gregory’s late sixth-century ruling that all should “abstain from flesh, meat, and all things that come from flesh, as milk, cheese, and eggs.”[[79]](#footnote-79) Some ate fish on designated days, some ate one meal a day, and the timing of breaking the fast—as well as how strictly the fast was enforced[[80]](#footnote-80)—varied from era to era. The purpose of fasting was understood in many ways, including identification with the poor,[[81]](#footnote-81) an intentional journey into physical and spiritual brokenness,[[82]](#footnote-82) a return to God,[[83]](#footnote-83) “joy-creating sorrow,”[[84]](#footnote-84) and the “withdrawing from sinful practices.”[[85]](#footnote-85)

One unifying theme in fasting is, however, evident across the centuries and throughout all traditions: fasting is vain nonsense if only understood and practiced as abstinence from food. Listed below are a few of the numerous inspirational and quotable passages on fasting:

What then is fasting for us Christians? It is our entrance and participation in that experience of Christ Himself by which He liberates us from the total dependence on food, matter, and the world… All this means that deeply understood, fasting is the only means by which man recovers his true spiritual nature.[[86]](#footnote-86)

(From The Wednesday in the First Week Vespers, Tone Eight) While fasting with the body, brethren, let us also fast in spirit. Let us loose every bond of iniquity; let us undo the knots of every contract made by violence; let us tear up all unjust agreements; let us give bread to the hungry and welcome to our house the poor who have no roof to cover them, that we may receive great mercy from Christ our God.[[87]](#footnote-87)

(Citing Homilies on Fasting, I, 10 P.G. xxxi, 181B) It is useless to fast from food, protests St. Basil, and yet to indulge in cruel criticism and slander: “You do not eat meat, but you devour your brother.”[[88]](#footnote-88)

(Citing St. Augustine, Sermon 263, FCS, vol. 38, 391 – 396) Hence, He fasted for forty days before the death of His Body as if to say, “abstain from the desires of this world." But He ate and drank during the forty days after the Resurrection of His Body, as if to say, “Behold I am with you ... even to the end of the age” (Mt. 28:20).[[89]](#footnote-89)

In a world where people are afraid to fast because it may seem too difficult, inconvenient, and burdensome, the Church reminds us of the meaning of fasting: to hunger and tire to the point of physical exhaustion for the sake of uniting with our heavenly Bridegroom.[[90]](#footnote-90)

God desires that his people cease their unjust practices, and their neglect of the poor and hungry. Depriving oneself of food is not necessarily laudable in God's eyes, but depriving others of food is indeed culpable. Tearing one’s garments as a sign of repentance does not atone for failing to provide clothing to those who need it.[[91]](#footnote-91)

*Visual Thinning*

Lent is a thinning season. The tradition calls us to less, not more; to decrease, not increase; to simplify, not amplify. A beautiful image of this thinning occurs in the Orthodox Church on Cheese-fare Sunday as the cry “…for I am afflicted!” fills the church and “Lent is here! Bright vestments are put aside; lights are extinguished…[and] [w]e will have to wander forty days through the desert of Lent.”[[92]](#footnote-92) In the Catholic tradition, the altar is ungraced by flowers during Lent and even the music simplifies[[93]](#footnote-93) as silence is welcomed. Robin Jensen add that

prior to the revision of the liturgy mandated by Vatican II, Roman Catholic churches typically veiled their crosses and statuary for the last two weeks, only uncovering them during the singing of the Gloria in the Easter Vigil. Other practices in the more liturgical churches, such as “bidding farewell to the Alleluia,” banning floral arrangements, avoiding instrumental music, and limiting festivity at weddings expressed the penitential nature of the season in many Christian traditions.[[94]](#footnote-94)

Like the restrained and unaccompanied music of Lent, the simplifying of our visual environment helps us to settle into a contemplative mood and encourages us to focus. Our thoughts turn inward; our actions are measured, our diet spare.[[95]](#footnote-95)

**Modern Lenten Images**

The Lenten spring has come

the light of repentance!
O brothers, let us cleanse ourselves from all evil,

crying out to the Giver of Light:
Glory to Thee, O Lover of man.[[96]](#footnote-96)

Spring, deserts, schools, journeys, resolve, sacrifice, exercise, honey in a comb, passage, mortification, purification, introspection, reconciliation, pruning, and charity…the diverse images of Lent paint a picture of the many-layered meanings of the Lenten tradition. Table 3 below contains two fifth-century images, one sixth-century image, one late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century image, and a cluster of modern images from 1959 to 2013.

**Table 3. Lenten images**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Date | Quote |
| Early Church Fathers | The Great Lent has oftentimes been likened by the Church Fathers as a spiritual journey of the soul with her Bridegroom through the wilderness of the world to her final resting place in the heavens.[[97]](#footnote-97) |
| 440–461 | Pope Leo the Great in the fifth century (in a homily still used today for breviary lessons on the first Sunday of Lent) : “…yet now is the time when the souls of all men should be urged with greater earnestness towards spiritual progress, and animated with fuller confidence : now when the return of that day on which we were redeemed invites us to every work of piety, so that purified in body and soul we may celebrate that mystery which excels all others, the passion of our Lord.[[98]](#footnote-98) |
| c. 525–606 | In the Lenten season the Christian struggles to put aside all “worldly grief” and to embrace the “godly grief” which St. John Climacus called the “blessed joy-grief of holy compunction,” which inspires “spiritual laughter in the soul,” since “God does not ask or desire that a person should mourn from sorrow of heart, but rather that out of love for Him he should rejoice with spiritual joy…. As I ponder the true nature of compunction, I find myself amazed by the way in which inward joy and gladness mingle with what we call mourning and grief, like honey in a comb. There must be a lesson here and it surely is that compunction is properly a gift from God, so that there is real pleasure in the soul, since God secretly brings consolation to those who in their hearts are repenting.”[[99]](#footnote-99)  |
| 1754–1833 | Once St. Seraphim of Sarov was asked why the miracles of grace, so abundantly manifest in the past, were no longer apparent in his own day, and to this he replied: “Only one thing is lacking—a firm resolve.”[[100]](#footnote-100)  |
| 1974 | Great Lent…is indeed a school of repentance to which every Christian must go every year in order to deepen his faith, to re-evaluate, and, if possible, to change his life. It is a wonderful pilgrimage to the very sources of Orthodox faith—a rediscovery of the Orthodox way of life.[[101]](#footnote-101)… [T]he purpose of Lent is not to force on us a few formal obligations, but to ‘soften’ our heart so that it may open itself to the realities of the spirit, to experience the hidden ‘thirst and hunger’ for communion with God.[[102]](#footnote-102) |
| *Table 3,* *continued* |  |
| Date | Quote |
| 1983 | Salvation history began in a garden and was vitiated by food; the Good News opens in the desert and is accompanied by fasting. This is the antinomy of salvation history posed symbolically by Lent.[[103]](#footnote-103)… Let Lent, then, be a time of healing *(solus,* salvation), and let our fast be the "diet" of this restoration to health. Let us enter into the desert of our hearts where, removed from side issues, we can face what we are, and in compunction, *penthos,* over that reality, let us “do penance”—that is, *metanoia* — dying to self so that we may live for others, as we make vigil before the coming of the Lord.[[104]](#footnote-104) |
| 1992 | But mortification—literally, “making death”—is what life is all about, a slow discovery of the mortality of all that is created so that we can appreciate its beauty without clinging to it as if it were a lasting possession…. In every arrival there is a leave-taking; in every reunion there is a separation; in each one’s growing up there is a growing old; in every smile there is a tear; and in every success there is a loss. All living is dying, and all celebration is mortification too.[[105]](#footnote-105) |
| 2010 | One of the universal Christian themes of Lent is reconciliation. Reconciliation involves self-examination, confessing sin, and seeking forgiveness from God and our neighbors for hurtful or thoughtless behavior and attitudes. Simultaneously we vow to try to live more just, loving, and generous lives. Often this forces us to face things about ourselves that at other times we might avoid.[[106]](#footnote-106) |
| 2011 | The period of Lent is a time for spiritual pruning. When one prunes a vine, it does not destroy the vine, it simply trims it so it may grow more fruitfully. Similarly, Lent is not a time of self-punishment but of preparation.[[107]](#footnote-107) |
| 2012 | Lent is a time for introspection and spiritual candor. Believers are to acknowledge our complicity in the deep brokenness of the world, seek to amend our lives, and wait in hope for the healing grace of our God.[[108]](#footnote-108) |
|  |  |
|  |  |
| *Table 3,**continued* |  |
| Date | Quote |
| 2012 | (Lenten message from Pope Benedict XVI) The Lenten season offers us once again an opportunity to reflect upon the very heart of Christian life: charity. This is a favorable time to renew our journey of faith, both as individuals and as a community, with the help of the word of God and the sacraments. This journey is one marked by prayer and sharing, silence and fasting, in anticipation of the joy of Easter.[[109]](#footnote-109)  |
| 2012 | When most of us think of Lent, we immediately think about giving something up—sugar, TV, radio, you name it… Lent is packed with special services and religious practices to help us focus on the life of Christ—more prayer, more devotional reading, more church services…. Amid all the devotion, however, the last thing we think of adding to our Lenten disciplines is observing the Sabbath. This is surprising, since the Bible seems to teach that rest may be the most significant and transformative activity of all.[[110]](#footnote-110) |
| 2013 | Lent is a beautiful invitation for us to travel with the Lord into Jerusalem, to once against live out our baptism where we have been baptized into Christ's death (Romans 6:3), go with him through that experience and rise with him once again into the new life of the Church.[[111]](#footnote-111) |
| 2013 | What does Lent mean to me personally? It’s a time of soul-searching. Am I doing the best that I can to live up to the teachings of Christ? If not, then I do need the penance, I do need the fasting, I do need to remind myself that I am supposed to be following in the footsteps of Christ. Not just because I’m a priest but because I’m a Catholic Christian. And it’s meant to also be a time of identifying more closely with the poor.[[112]](#footnote-112) |

From the seventh-century embrace of “godly grief” to the twenty-first-century emphasis on personal soul-searching; from the early Church Fathers’ journey through the wilderness to *Christianity Today’s* invitation to rest; even from late-twentieth-century Nouwen’s call to godly mortification to an early twenty-first century Yale divinity professor’s call for introspection and healing, the ancient image of a Lenten season focused upon a communal, purifying, sacrificial fellowship with the Lord’s suffering seems to have given way to something more individualized and less strenuous.

Fr. Taft eloquently summarizes the challenge of Lenten understanding in the current age:

Of course it is hard to die to self when we don't know who we are—a very special modern problem—but this should not deter us, for in opening ourselves to the Christ in others we discover who we are in the deepest sense of the word, far more deeply than by the superficial path of self-affirmation that comes from the insecurity of an undetermined self-image.[[113]](#footnote-113)

The problem is a broad and complicated one. There is, first, the very problematic of penance and asceticism for modern men and women—a problem which, unlike the Protestant rejection of penance, comes from modern psychology, and the quest for meaning and sincerity in an increasingly dehumanized technological world. Modern Christians reject penance and asceticism because they often lead to the distortion or destruction of more important human values. Hard things are not necessarily good things… And anyway, what is the value of self-inflicted pain for modern men and women whose whole drive is to eliminate pain, to develop in freedom the autonomous self?[[114]](#footnote-114)

Perhaps in our day, a rediscovery of Lent may help marry the modern celebration of grace with the mystery of sacrificial love treasured by the ancients.

**In Conclusion**

In 1983 (the year this former atheist came to Christ), Fr. Taft compared Tertullian spirituality to the mood of his age, concluding that

[Tertullian spirituality] is radically different from the incarnational spirituality prevalent for the past thirty years, which tells us that since God became man Christ is in our neighbor, and the real work of Christian spirituality is not to leave the world but to dive in and grab life with both hands. Justice is more important than mortification, love more important than celibacy, and so on. One result of this contemporary spiritual ideology is that it has dealt a death blow to fasting, penance, mortification. Today among contemporary religious one hears more of gourmet cooking than of fasting—a striking counter-symbol to anyone even superficially acquainted with the spiritual literature at the origins of religious life. And yet the season of Lent is still a major part of the liturgical year. Can such a season of penance have any real meaning for us today? [[115]](#footnote-115)

Tertullian (c. 150–c. 212) is often quoted in relation to his conviction that God’s Word was the only safe source of truth on earth. God-followers are citizens not of earth, but of “the city above… [who] have nothing to do with the joys of the world; nay, [who] are called to the very opposite… And I think the Lord affirms, that those who mourn are happy, not those who are crowned.”[[116]](#footnote-116) Roger E. Olson juxtaposes Tertullian with Clement of Alexandria, who though he honored the supremacy of the Scriptures, believed that “all truth is God’s truth wherever it may be found.” [[117]](#footnote-117)

Reflecting on Fr. Taft’s concerns for my generation, and with awareness that my perspective has yet to be seasoned by persecution, I find Fr. Taft’s conclusions accurate in part. Perhaps Tertullian and Clement are both alive and well within me. Yes, this world is not my home. This world and its inhabitants were created by the Life-Giver and, consequently, bear His fingerprints. Seeking to see and celebrate those fingerprints connects me with God’s present presence and, accordingly, causes me to be more fully present to the souls for whom Christ died. Yes, self-denial (“mortification”) is implicit in the call to follow Christ. And self-denial, though strenuous, frees me from sticky stuff of self-consciousness, increases within me the sacred stuff of God-consciousness, and fills me with an unspeakable joy. Yes, fasting detaches me from earthly things as it whispers reminders to me of Jesus’ sacrifice. And, fasting opens space in my soul for the amplification of God’s love song.

Lent, then, for this novice, most certainly is laden with great meaning: Lent is a concentrated opportunity to consciously and corporately fellowship with Christ in His suffering. And fellowship with Jesus—be it near His blood-stained feet on the cross or near His wine-brightened face at wedding feast in Cana—is sweet indeed.

APPENDICES

**Appendix A**

An Orthodox Perspective from Mark Bradshaw[[118]](#footnote-118)

In the Orthodox Tradition, Lent, or the Great Fast, is about expectation and preparation. To fully understand what Lent means for the Orthodox first you have to understand a bit about Orthodox Easter, known as Pascha (Passover), and the liturgical year.  While many traditions have developed in such a way that Christmas becomes the main celebration of the year, for the Orthodox Pascha is always the Feast of Feasts.  The liturgical year is anchored by Pascha and all other movable feasts are measured by it.  Pascha is preceded by a week of preparatory services known as Holy Week, in addition to the forty days of Lent, and three weeks of pre-Lenten services.  All together there are about fifty days of fasting, balanced on the other side with fifty days of feasting until the time of Pentecost.  Almost one third of the year is bound up in the process of the celebration of Pascha for the Orthodox Christian.

The Lenten period actually encompasses a few different fast periods that developed over time.  The most ancient part of the fast began in the second century with a short, total fast in the time period between the Friday crucifixion and the Sunday resurrection.  By the fourth century this had expanded into something more like the current form of holy week, with a set schedule of services and observances, and relaxing the fast to include food for the week.  Separately in the fourth or fifth century another fast period began to be observed before Holy Week that served as a time period of intensive instruction for those about to be baptized and illumined in Holy Week, the traditional time of baptism.  This fast was a forty day period and by the fifth century had been combined with the Paschal fast to make a single Lenten period.  By the seventh century a series of a few preparatory weeks were added before the forty day fast that includes in part some partial fasting.

While baptisms occur outside of Holy Week now, the Lenten period still serves as a yearly recapitulation of an Orthodox Christians’ own baptism and a chance to be recatechized.  Every year we have the opportunity to renew our commitment and re-enter with the catechumens into the mysteries of Christ.  Usually during this time there are additional opportunities to explore the faith than what might be available during the rest of the year.

Of course most people are aware of Lent because of the fast.  The Orthodox fast during Lent is basically a vegan diet.  Almost all animal products are eliminated from the diet, including meat and dairy, as well as olive oil and wine.  On the weekends the fast relaxes a little, and oil and wine are allowed again.  One notable difference between Orthodox and Roman Catholic observances of Lent is the common Catholic practice of choosing something to give up for Lent, rather than having a communal fast.  The Orthodox Church maintains the ancient fasting practices, and does not have a place for individualized fasting.  Fasting, like almost all sacred and ascetic practices in orthodoxy, is communal in nature.  We are saved in community, as the Body of Christ, and so our ascetic endeavors reflect this.  We practice unity among the believers by engaging in the struggle of Lent together, fasting in the same way and at the same time.

Nonetheless, the fasting shouldn't be viewed as an oppressive action of the many against the individual.  While the struggle is something for the entire community, fasting in Orthodoxy is never engaged in as a duty.  Fasting is an ascetic practice, meaning it is viewed as spiritual training, much in the same way that lifting weights or running would be for the body.  Every chance to fast has a multitude of spiritual benefits, but is not a burden against Christ's law of grace.  You do not incur a sin guilt or debt by not fasting, but you miss out on a sweet gift of the Holy Spirit to the church that is meant for your inner health.  A person who skips all the fasts is not judged, but much like a couch potato will find their self an easy target for spiritual attack and eventually can lose sensitivity to God.  There are consequences to not fasting (or praying or almsgiving, which go along with fasting in Lent), but they are natural consequences, not juridical.

When I became Orthodox, the general practice of weekly fasting was not something that I was personally familiar with.  I had on occasion fasted, but I would never have considered it a normal part of my life in Christ.  However, in Orthodoxy you fast most every week, on Wednesday and Friday, as did the ancient church (see the *Didache*).  In fact, fasting is so common that almost half the year could be spent in fasting.  Keep in mind, again, that fasting is not a duty to be obeyed, but an opportunity for growth that shouldn't be wasted.  When I began to engage with the Orthodox Christian life, fasting spawned many questions for me.  My spiritual father (this can be a priest, monastic, or wise layperson) encouraged me to enter in very slowly, and not to take on too heavy of a burden.  This proved to be excellent advice, as you can easily become overly legalistic in your fasting.

Another piece of advice he gave was, “Never look at another person's plate.”  Your fast is your own, and you carry what you can bear.  On Pascha Saturday night there is a beautiful service that begins at midnight, and always includes a spectacular sermon preached in the late fourth century by a champion of faith, saint John Chrysostom.  His word of encouragement was so uniquely powerful that it has been maintained through the centuries, and as far as I know it is the only sermon that is actually included in the rubrics that shape our liturgy.  The relevant part of that sermon goes like this:

If any have labored long in fasting, let him now receive his recompense. If any have wrought from the first hour, let him today receive his just reward. If any have come at the third hour, let him with thankfulness keep the feast. If any have arrived at the sixth hour, let him have no misgivings; because he shall in nowise be deprived therefore. If any have delayed until the ninth hour, let him draw near, fearing nothing. If any have tarried even until the eleventh hour, let him, also, be not alarmed at his tardiness; for the Lord, who is jealous of his honor, will accept the last even as the first; he gives rest unto him who comes at the eleventh hour, even as unto him who has wrought from the first hour…. And he shows mercy upon the last, and cares for the first; and to the one he gives, and upon the other he bestows gifts. And he both accepts the deeds, and welcomes the intention, and honors the acts and praises the offering.[[119]](#footnote-119)

St John consoled everyone that no matter how much of the Lenten burden they were able to carry, God accepts it all, both the deed and the intention, with honors.

I said at the beginning that Lent is about preparation and expectation.  What we prepare for, and what we expect, is the risen Lord “tramping down death, by death.”  Lent is a beautiful invitation for us to travel with the Lord into Jerusalem, to once against live out our baptism where we have been baptized into Christ's death (Romans 6:3), go with him through that experience and rise with him once again into the new life of the Church.  To try to experience the magnificence of Holy Week and the resurrection we go through the fast, purging our body and spirit of distractions, and preparing our heart to go with Christ.  In my experience that preparation makes the celebratory feast so much grander.

I have yet to fulfill an entire Lenten fast.  Like a marathon, it requires some practice, and I don't yet have the stamina for it.  But like St John said, even if I only enter the preparations at the 11th hour, I don’t have to be alarmed.  God will accept the last even as the first.  I look forward to stretching myself spiritually so that every year I can push further into the gift of Lent, and I’m sure Pascha will be a reward that much richer. Thanks for letting me share.

**Appendix B**

Transcript of the Recorded Interview with Father Lewis Hejna of Immaculate Conception, Springfield, Missouri, July 23, 2013

1. Father Lewis, could you please share your journey into the priesthood and also when you were called to Immaculate Conception?

I was ordained in 1981 in Bolivar, Missouri, at Sacred Heart Church. That was following four years of college seminary and four years of graduate studies which gave me my BA in Theology and my Masters of Theology. Thirteen years ago, I came to Immaculate Conception Parish here in Springfield. That was after being at Guardian Angel Parish in Oran for five years. And before that ---------- in St. Joseph and St. Anthony’s which is on the east side of the diocese in the Cape Girardeau, all three of those parishes. Before that I was at Elizabeth Ann Seton here in Springfield for a year and eight months, and before that at St. Mary’s Cathedral in Cape Girardeau for five years. I taught at Notre Dame High school for sixteen years as well as one year here at Springfield Catholic. I’m the pastor of Immaculate Conception, a parish of about 1200 families. And I’m also the chaplain at Springfield Catholic High School and I run the theatre at Springfield Catholic High School, with two musical productions each year and one musical production here at Immaculate Conception.

1. Please describe the early origins of Lent.

You are asking about the early origins of Lent. To take a look at that we have to understand a little bit of the early church. Christ chose the Apostles, those Twelve—they were all of Jewish origin. They were Jews. Christ was a Jew. And so they had a framework of worshiping on the Sabbath, Saturday. But as we celebrate Christ as the Son of God, Christ rose on the first day of the week. We call it Sunday and over a period of two to three hundred years of the early church, worship slipped from Sabbath to Sunday to celebrate the resurrection of Christ, the day Christ rose from the dead.

There is to be, from the earliest days of the Church, no penance, no fasting on that first day of the week, on Sunday. Now the earliest that I can go back—I went back to some of my theology books—to find some history of Lent will be with St. Irenaeus. St Irenaeus, living around 120/130 to 200, in that timeframe, and he wrote about Lent. But as being a period of self-denial, of penance for two or three days before Easter.

The church over the next two to three hundred years expands Lent, looking at different numbers within Old Testament: the Jews wandered in the desert for forty years, Christ wandered in the desert for forty days, you have forty days of rain.

So by the time we get to the Council of Nicea in 325, the church began to look at a period, a longer period of preparation for the celebration of Easter, the resurrection of Christ. They expanded it to match those forty-day periods. How do you get that? You can’t fast or do penance on Sunday so you take six days of the week—Monday through Saturday—then you add in Ash Wednesday, Thursday after, Friday after, Saturday after and you come up with forty days.

So by the time you get to maybe about twenty-five to fifty years after the Council of Nicea, you have the forty-day Lenten season in full swing across the church. Now the question could rise: Is that for everyone, or was that only for those coming into the church at the Holy Saturday vigil? And there’s no clear definition. But we do know that by 500–600, Lent is in full swing, a forty-day period, for everyone.

What did Lent look like? In the 350–600 period, Lent was extremely strict. Prayer, fasting, almsgiving. And by fasting, I mean one meal taken after sundown. By the time 800 rolls around, Lent becomes less strict. Still prayer and fasting. Not much almsgiving because nobody had money; you shared with whoever. That’s a low period of history (we all know that). Meal was moved up to about 3 o’clock in the afternoon.

By the year 1400, again it becomes a little bit less strict: almsgiving comes back into being because you have trade beginning, you have people with some amount of money, and the meal was moved to twelve o’clock. So it was in the middle of the day. No morning, no evening, but you could have a meal.

Meat played into this, fish played into this, at various times, various places, again depending on what people had.

In 1966 with the Second Vatican Council, fasting was reserved to two days: Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Almsgiving, prayer—very important—and we still continue to today with that as our guideline.

So that gives you a little bit of process or a growth time of Lent in the Roman Catholic Church of the West.

1. What customs, traditions, and practices are associated with the current practice of Lent? How have these practices changed over the centuries?

It varied on the location in the Western world. It also varied on the economics of the time. You know, for us today, fasting from meat is nothing. I would much rather eat fish anyway. It’s healthier for you. When I grew up I couldn’t eat fish because I was allergic to it. So when I go out to a restaurant (I went out to a restaurant last night) I order fish. Meat and beef and pork and so forth is good but I’d much rather eat fish. So, that’s not a hardship for us, at least not here in the United States. It might be in other parts of the world.

Why fasting? That might be the better question. In the Church from the earliest time, identified fasting as people of nobility, people of wealth, identify with the poor. The poor didn’t have the money to buy meat. The poor actually didn’t have the money to buy fish. They ate basically cereals, some vegetables if they could grow them, some fruit. And so, for the nobility, the hierarchy of the Church, to observe fasting was to identify with the poor.

Today that is still the same reasoning. We in the United States, if you have any money, we basically we can go to the grocery store and buy whatever we want. That’s not the case in the developing nations. And so for us to say, “Okay, no meat,” perhaps we also ought to say, “no fish,” perhaps we also ought to say, “no milk products.” Eat breads that day, cereals that day, vegetables and fruit. But the Church has not gone that far.

We leave it up to people. We give them guidelines and allow the people to make their own choices.

1. Are there differences within the Catholic Church regarding the observance of Lent?

Again it depends upon the locality. Within the Roman Catholic Church, the Bishop is the head, the spiritual head of each diocese, independent of other diocese around. And answerable to Rome. A Bishop of Little Rock, Arkansas, for example, does not have the right to come up to our diocese in Springfield/Cape Girardeau here in Missouri, and tell us that we’re not doing things the way he wants it done. They don’t have the right to cross boundaries. Only Rome has the right to say, “Wait a minute, Bishop, you’re not doing things quite the way we think it should be done.” So you may find a little bit of differences as you cross diocese boundaries within the world.

1. What differences can be observed in the manner in which Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches observe Lent?

The Eastern Orthodox Church, they are still in the strict observance and in looking at the Eastern Orthodox you’ve also got the Russian Orthodox, the Georgian Orthodox, you’ve got various branches of the Orthodox Church. But they tend to be much more stricter in the sense of fasting and abstinence from meat.

1. Please share what Lent means to you personally.

For myself personally, what does Lent mean? We have Church seasons in the Catholic Church throughout the year. The Church begins with Advent, that’s the first season of the Church year because that’s the preparation time for the birth of Christ. Advent is not a time of fasting and abstinence but it’s a time of preparation, preparing to celebrate that beautiful birthday, of the birth of Christ. Advent flows into Christmas season and we celebrate Christmas from the 24th in the evening of December until the Baptism of the Lord, sometime in January. That’s our Christmas season, the whole birth of Christ birthday. Then we go into a period of just ordinary time before the Lenten season begins. And it depends upon when Lent is, depends upon how long that period of time is.

Lent is a floating season. They just set December 25th as the birth of Christ. Was He born on the 25th of December? Probably not. They picked out a date and there’s all kinds of pros and cons: “Oh, they did it wrong.” Okay. But Easter and Lent has a set time but it flows. In the Roman Catholic Church of the West, Easter is the Sunday following the Paschal full moon. The full moon that falls after the Spring equinox. Why? We have to go back to the Jewish calendar. The Paschal full moon, due to the date of Passover in the Jewish calendar. Why? The Last Supper is celebrated on the Passover. Christ was in Jerusalem with His apostles. Therefore, Last Supper followed by a rest in the Garden, followed by crucifixion on the Friday, followed by death, followed by resurrection. So Easter will float. Thus, Lent will float.

What does Lent mean to me personally? It’s a time of soul-searching. Am I doing the best that I can to live up to the teachings of Christ? If not, then I do need the penance, I do need the fasting, I do need to remind myself that I am supposed to be following in the footsteps of Christ. Not just because I’m a priest but because I’m a Catholic Christian. And it’s meant to also be a time of identifying more closely with the poor. That is where the almsgiving comes in. Almsgiving is not tithing. Almsgiving is taking—okay, it doesn’t hurt any of us to give something up. Whether it’s giving up our cigarettes—I don’t smoke so that wouldn’t be a hardship—I don’t drink beer except very, very occasionally so that wouldn’t be a hardship. But I love ice cream. Okay, so it I give up ice cream I don’t keep that money but I kind of calculate: How much do I normally spend a week on ice cream? I give that as an alms to the poor. And here the best way is to give it to the St. Vincent Paul fund which is an organization within our parish that feeds the poor. Like yesterday we fed, we gave out food, to about 25 families and they’re always looking for donations. Well this is a perfect way to do that. It’s a safe way rather than just giving it to someone out on the street that’s holding up a sign. We know these people have apply. We know they’re on food stamps. We know that they need food, they need help. So, we help them. That St. Vincent Paul of Immaculate Conception is always looking for help, for money. So a safe way, a good way to do with our alms.

Lent is for me a period of prayer, extra prayer, a period of almsgiving, more than what I would normally give to the church. It’s not my tithing. It’s a time of walking more closely in the footsteps of Christ. Then at Easter we truly celebrate His resurrection and the hope of the Church is that we continue what we began during Lent. We continue living out, throughout the Easter season, and into the rest of the year.

1. As a faithful representative of the Catholic Church which has honored Lent from the early beginnings of Church history, what encouragements would you give to those who in our day are discovering or rediscovering the fullness of Lent?

This is what I tell our people and if they think about it they’ve heard it every Lent, every Ash Wednesday: You know, it’s great to come and celebrate Ash Wednesday to kick off the Lenten season. But, don’t forget that Lent then continues. If we wait till Holy Week to do a little bit of penance, to do little bit of almsgiving, to do a little bit of whatever, we’re going to cheat ourselves. Or if we just come to mass on Sunday and don’t do anything for the Lenten season and then we come at Easter, what are we really celebrating? What have we done to get there?

You know, part of the fun of a trip is the preparation. I love to travel and it doesn’t matter if I’m traveling here in the United States, I do my research whether it’s here on the computer or whether it’s through—it used to be AAA and tripticks—or, let’s use our GPS and do our whatever. But that’s part of the fun is the preparation period. And then the rest of the fun is actually going to the places and being with whomever we’re with. I have several families that I enjoy traveling with and so we work throughout months ahead, planning out where we’re going, what we’re doing, what hotels we’re going to stay in. That’s part of the fun. Well, that’s what Lent is. We’re preparing for the celebration of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. And to make that really meaningful, we need to go through the Lenten season actively. Otherwise you’re just coming to Easter Sunday and, okay, so you bought a new tie or you bought a new dress to wear. Big deal.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

**Articles and Online Resources**

Abdelsayed, John Paul, and Moses Samaan. “A History of the Great Lent.” *Coptic Church Review* 31, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 18–32.

Benedict XVI. “Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for Lent 2012.” The Vatican. http://www.vatican.va/holy\_father/benedict\_xvi/messages/lent/documents

/hf\_ben-xvi\_mes\_20111103\_lent-2012\_en.html.

Chrysostom, Saint John. “The Paschal Sermon.” Orthodox Church in America. Accessed July 25, 2013. http://oca.org/fs/sermons/the-paschal-sermon.

Cummings, Owen F. “Bishop Lancelot Andrewes (1555–1626), Liturgist.” *Worship* 85, no. 5 (September 1, 2011): 408–425.

Emmert, Kevin. “Resting in the Work of God: The Forgotten Spiritual Discipline.” *Christianity Today* 56, no. 3 (March 1, 2012): 36–37.

Eusebius. *History of the Church*. Book 5. New Advent. http://www.newadvent.org

/fathers/250105.

Gusmer, Charles W. “The Purpose of the Scrutinies: An Insight from the Ignatian Exercises.” *Worship* 65, no. 2 (March 1, 1991): 125–132.

Hampton, Stephen. “‘Welcome Dear Feast of Lent:’ Rival Understandings of the Forty-Day Fast in Early Stuart England.” *Journal of Theological Studies* 63, no. 2 (October 1, 2012): 608–648.

Hovda, Robert W. Some Reflections on Lent, Initiation and Liturgy.” *Worship* 61, no. 2 (March 1, 1987): 172–176.

Huels, John M. “Chronicle: Preparing and Celebrating the Paschal Feasts.” *Worship* 63, no. 1 (January 1, 1989): 71–79.

Jensen, Robin M. “Ashes, Shadows, and Crosses: Visualizing Lent.” *Interpretation* 64, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 30–42.

Johnson, Maxwell E. “From Three Weeks to Forty Days: Baptismal Preparation and the Origins of Lent.” *Studia Liturgica* 20, no. 2 (January 1, 1990): 185–200.

Kruschwitz, Robert B. “The Early History of Lent.” In *Study Guides for Lent*, edited by Robert B. Kruschwitz. Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2013. http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php

/193431.pdf.

Menzies, Allan, ed*. The Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325.* Vol. 3, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf03.i.html.

Russo, Nicholas V. “A Note on the Role of Secret Mark in the Search for the Origins of Lent.” *Studia Liturgica* 37, no. 2 (January 1, 2007): 181–197.

———. “The Early History of Lent.” In *Lent Library*, Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2013. http://www.baylor.edu/content

/services/document.php/193181.pdf.

Saunder, William P. “The Origins of Lent.” *Catholic Herald*, March 2, 2006. http://www.catholicherald.com/stories/bThe-Origins-of-Lentb,1242

?content\_source=&category\_id=&search\_filter=history+of+lent+Saunders&event\_mode=&event\_ts\_from=&list\_type=&order\_by=&order\_sort=&content\_class=&sub\_type=stories,blogs&town\_id=.

Serra, Dominic E. “New Observations about the Scrutinies of the Elect in Early Roman Practice.” *Worship* 80, no. 6 (November 1, 2006): 511–527.

Sharp, Carolyn J. “Preaching the Prophets for Lent.” *Journal for Preachers* 35, no. 2 (January 1, 2012): 22–29.

Taft, Robert F. “Lent: A Meditation.” *Worship* 57, no. 2 (March 1, 1983): 123–134.

Thompson, Marianne Meye. “Turning and Returning to God: Reflections on the Lectionary Texts for Lent.” *Interpretation* 64, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 5–17.

# United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Divine Worship. *Liturgical Calendar for the Dioceses of the United States of America, 2013*. http://www.gobookee.net/get\_book.php?u=aHR0cDovL3d3dy51c2NjYi5vcmcvYWJvdXQvZGl2aW5lLXdvcnNoaXAvbGl0dXJnaWNhbC1jYWxlbmRhci91cGxvYWQvMjAxM2NhbC5wZGYKRk9SIFRIRSBESU9DRVNFUyBPRiBUSEUgVU5JVEVEIFNUQVRFUyBPRiBBTUVSSUNBIDIwMTM=.

Westhoff, Alphonse E. “Parish Lenten Program.” *Worship* 33, no. 3 (February 1, 1959): 177–183.

Winter, Ernst, and Johanna Winter. “Lent in the Home.” *Worship* 31, no. 4 (March 1, 1957): 178–188.

**Books**

Hopko, Thomas. *The Lenten Spring: Readings for Great Lent*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998.

Irvin, Dale T., and Scott W. Sunquist. *History of the World Christian Movement: Earliest Christianity to 1453*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001.

Lewis, E. G. *In Three Days*. North Bend, OR: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013.

Lindberg, Carter. *The European Reformations*. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Lonsdale, Herman Lilienthal. *Lent, Past and Present: A Study of the Primitive Origin of Lent, Its Purpose and Usages.* Facsimile. New York, NY: Thomas Whittaker, 1895.

Maria, Mother, and Diokleia Kallistos. *Lenten Triodion*. South Canaan, PA: Saint Tikhon’s Seminary Press, US, 2002.

Nouwen, Henri J. M. *Show Me the Way: Readings for Each Day of Lent*. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995.

Olson, Roger E. *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999.

Schaff, Philip, ed. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.* Series 1, Vol. 9, *Early Church Fathers*. Enhanced Version.  Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009.

Schmemann, Alexander. *Great Lent*. Rev. ed. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974.

Talley, Thomas J. *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*. 2nd ed. Collegeville, MN: Pueblo Books Liturgical Press, 1986.

**Dissertations**

Mann, Patricia M. “How Rituals Form and Transform: The Scrutiny Rite from Medieval to Modern Times.” PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2011. http://aladinrc.wrlc.org/bitstream/handle/1961/9309/MANN\_cua\_0043A

\_10153display.pdf?sequence=1.

Russo, Nicholas V. “The Origin of Lent.” PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2009. http://etd.nd.edu/ETD-db/theses/available/etd-12112009-164546/.

1. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Show Me the Way: Readings for Each Day of Lent* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995), 13–14. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mother Maria and Diokleia Kallistos, *The Lenten Triodion* (South Canaan, PA: Saint Tikhon’s Seminary Press), 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. William P. Saunder, “The Origins of Lent,” *Catholic Herald*, March 2, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Alexander Schmemann, *Great Lent*, rev. ed. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Nicholas V. Russo, “The Early History of Lent,” *Lent Library* (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2013):19, http:/www.baylor.edu/content/services

/document.php/193181.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Eusebius, *History of the Church*, vol. 5, chapter 24, no. 12. New Advent. http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250105.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., chapter 23, no. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., chapter 23, no. 1. Emphasis mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid., chapter 24, no. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. As a side note, I found the excerpts from Bishop Polycrates’ letter fascinating and wondered if they reflected second-century foreshadowing of the East/West schism to come, and/or the transition away from Jewish customs. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Eusebius, chapter 24, no. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. John Paul Abdelsayed, “A History of the Great Lent,” *Coptic Church Review* 31, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Russo, 18; Abdelsayed, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Abdelsayed, 22–23. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Nicholas V. Russo, “A Note on the Role of Secret Mark in the Search for the Origins of Lent,” *Studia Liturgica* 37, no. 2 (January 1, 2007): 196; Abdelsayed, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Abdelsayed, 22, quoting Origen: “They fast, therefore, who have lost the bridegroom; we having him with us cannot fast. Nor do we say that we relax the restraints of Christian abstinence; for we have the forty days consecrated to fasting, we have the fourth and sixth days of the week, on which we fast solemnly.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Russo, “Early History,” 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Schmemann, 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Saunder. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Herman Lilienthal Lonsdale, *Lent, Past and Present: A Study of the Primitive Origin of Lent, Its Purpose and Usages* [facsimile](New York, NY: Thomas Whittaker, 1895), 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Russo, “Early History,” 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid., 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid., 18–19. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Maria and Kallistos, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Russo, “Early History,” 19, points out that in Athanasius’ “first five letters (329–333 AD), [he] indicates that the ‘holy fast’ spans only the six days before Pascha, perhaps revealing that Lent had not yet been observed in Egypt. When he introduces the forty-day Lent in his sixth letter (334 A.D), [he] continues to note the beginning of the more ancient six-day fast of ‘the holy days of Pascha,’ even though it is now part of the new six-week fast.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Saunder; Schmemann, 136; Talley, Thomas J., *The Origins of the Liturgical Year,* 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo Books Liturgical Press, 1986), 214; Abdelsayed, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Russo, “Early History,” 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Maria and Kallistos, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Russo, “Early History,” 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Talley, 214; Patricia M. Mann, “How Rituals Form and Transform: The Scrutiny Rite from Medieval to Modern Times” (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2011), 50, http://aladinrc.wrlc.org/bitstream/handle/1961/9309/MANN\_cua\_0043A\_10153display.pdf?sequence=1; Dominic E. Serra, “New Observations about the Scrutinies of the Elect in Early Roman Practice,”*Worship*57, no. 2 (March 1, 1983), 519. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Schmemann, 136; Russo, “Early History,” 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Schmemann, 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Mann, 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Abdelsayed, 20; Schmemann, 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Saunder. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Russo, “Early History,” 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Schmemann, 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Eusebius, chapter 23, no. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Russo, “Early History,” 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Stephen Hampton, “‘Welcome Dear Feast of Lent:’ Rival Understandings of the Forty-Day Fast in Early Stuart England,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 63, no. 2 (October 1, 2012): 623. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid., 632. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid., 623. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Lonsdale, 16, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Saunder, writing for the Catholic Herald, spoke of the weight of Irenaeus’ words: “The importance of the passage, nevertheless, remains that since the time of ‘our forefathers’—always an expression for the apostles—a 40-day period of Lenten preparation existed. However, the actual practices and duration of Lent were still not homogeneous throughout the Church.” [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Russo, “Secret Mark,” 183, summarizes: “It was a long-held assumption among liturgical scholars that the post-Nicene emergence of a forty-day pre-paschal Lent owed its *origins* to the gradual backward extension of the primitive one-or two-day Easter fast of the kind know to Tertullian (*De ieiunio* 13–14).” See also Russo, “Early History,” 19, which states: “Accordingly, it was assumed that the forty-day Lent that we encounter almost everywhere by the mid-fourth century must have been the result of a gradual lengthening of the pre-Easter fast by adding days and weeks to the original one- or two-day observance.” [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Maria and Kallistos, 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Abdelsayed, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Thomas Hopko, *The Lenten Spring: Readings for Great Lent* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998),81; Lonsdale, 18, 33, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. For a modern example of this line of reasoning, consider Mann, 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Maxwell E. Johnson, “From Three Weeks to Forty Days: Baptismal Preparation and the Origins of Lent,” *Studia Liturgica* 20, no. 2 (January 1, 1990): 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Schmemann, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Abdelsayed 18–19. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Russo, “Early History,” 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ibid., 25. For further consideration, please see Talley, 214; Robert B. Kruschwitz, “The Early History of Lent,” in *Study Guides for Lent*, ed. Robert B. Kruschwitz (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2013): 4, http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/193431.pdf; Russo, “Early History,” 20; Abdelsayed, 20–23; Johnson, 195; Schmemann, 135; and Maria and Kallistos, 30–31. Additionally, for Russo’s respectful evaluation of Talley’s conclusions based upon Secret Mark, see Russo “Early History,” 21; and Russo, “Secret Mark,” 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Russo, “Secret Mark,” 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Another frequently mentioned source was Thomas J. Talley. However, Talley’s theory (how a post-theophany fast attached to Pascha to form Lent) was based in part upon Talley’s confidence in the highly controversial Secret Mark. For a strong but respectful critique of that confidence that maintains the contribution of Talley to this subject, please see Nicholas V. Russo, “Secret Mark,” 181–197. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Johnson, 195–196. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. One of the most fascinating practices was, unfortunately, only mentioned in Lonsdale without references through which more research could have been pursued. Lonsdale states that in the Lenten season, civil law “forbade all prosecution of men in criminal actions which might bring them to corporal punishment and torture;” lawsuits were postponed; “bodily punishment such as flogging and branding” were forbidden; and that “imperial indulgences [were] shown especially during this great week by the Emperors to all prisoners—criminals as well as debtors.” Lonsdale, 73–74, 120–121. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. For a readable summary of Orthodox Lenten practice by week and focus, see Schmemann, 17–29. Also of interest is Hopko, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. For more on this contrast, consider Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement: Earliest Christianity to 1453* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), loc. 8085 and 8520; Maria and Kallistos, 15, 17; Schmemann, 137; and Abdelsayed, 31–32. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Spiritual and private celebrations were also discouraged. Lonsdale, 71–73, asserts that during Lent it was forbidden to celebrate the festival of martyrs. Maria and Kallistos, 23, state that “even today weddings are forbidden in the seven weeks of the fast.” Also see Robin M. Jensen, “Ashes, Shadows, and Crosses: Visualizing Lent,” *Interpretation* 64, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. As quoted in Lonsdale, 76–77. The original source was not cited and I was unable to locate it. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. See also Schmemann, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Hopko, 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Maria and Kallistos, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Ibid., 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Ibid., 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. From an interview with Fr. Lewis (Appendix B). [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Mann mentions Christian Initiation as part of a her dissertation on the history of the Scrutinies. Because of space, I have chosen not to address the Scrutinies as a distinct practice in this essay. For more information on the scrutiny of paschal baptismal candidates please see Mann (all); Charles W. Gusmer, “The Purpose of the Scrutinies: An Insight from the Ignatian Exercises, *Worship* 65, no. 2 (October 1, 2012): 125–126; and Serra, 518, 521. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Mann, 116, 123–124. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Mann, 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. John M. Huels, “Chronicle: Preparing and Celebrating the Paschal Feasts,” *Worship* 61, no. 2 (March 1, 1987): 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. For a fascinating discussion of early-reformation response to fasting (inclusive of quotes from Luther and Calvin on the subject of fasting) in Stuart England, see Hampton. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. See Appendix A for interview with Orthodox Christian Mark Bradshaw, giving a concise summary of current Orthodox practice. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Saunder. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Cited in Saunder. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Contrast Lonsdale, 44, on grace extended by St. Chrysostom to those who could not keep the fast with the Sausage Incident during Lent of 1522 in Lindberg, 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. See Appendix B, interview with Fr. Lewis. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Maria and Kallistos, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Ibid., 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. In the words of St. John Climacus from *The Ladder of Paradise*, Step 7, as quoted by Maria and Kallistos, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. St. Chrysostom as quoted in Lonsdale, 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Schmemann, 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Maria and Kallistos, 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Ibid., 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Abdelsayed, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Ibid., 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Marianne Meye Thompson, “Turning and Returning to God: Reflections on the Lectionary Texts for Lent,” *Interpretation* 64, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Schmemann, 29–30. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Huels, 74; see also Jensen, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Jensen, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Ibid., 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Traditional hymn by which Orthodox believers greet Lent on the Wednesday before Cheese-Fare Sunday. Quoted in Schmemann, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Abdelsayed, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Alphonse E. Westhoff, “Parish Lenten Program,” *Worship* 33, no. 3 (February 1, 1959): 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Hopko, 13–14, quoting St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine* *Ascent*, step 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Maria and Kallistos, 16, quoting Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: J. Clarke, 1957), 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Schmemann, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Ibid., 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Robert F. Taft, “Lent: A Meditation” *Worship* 57, no. 2 (March 1, 1983): 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Ibid., 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Nouwen, 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Jensen, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Mann, 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Carolyn J. Sharp, “Preaching the Prophets for Lent,” *Journal for Preachers* 35, no. 2 (January 1, 2012): 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Benedict XVI, “Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for Lent 2012,” the Vatican, http://www.vatican.va/holy\_father/benedict\_xvi/messages/lent/documents/hf\_ben-xvi\_mes20111103\_lent-2012\_en.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Kevin Emmert, “Resting in the Work of God: The Forgotten Spiritual Discipline,” *Christianity Today* 56, no. 3 (March 1, 2012): 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Mark Bradshaw interview, Appendix A. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Fr. Lewis interview, Appendix B. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Taft, 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Ibid., 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Taft, 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Allan Menzies, ed., *The Writings of the Fathers down to AD 32*, vol. 3, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009), 101, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf03.i.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Received via email on August 6, 2013. Mark Bradshaw grew up in a Pentecostal tradition and as an adult joined the Orthodox Church. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Saint John Chrysostom, “The Paschal Sermon,” Orthodox Church in America, accessed July 25, 2013, http://oca.org/fs/sermons/the-paschal-sermon. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)